The final line of Leo Perutz’s highly successful novel of 1918 Zwischen neun und neun reads: «Stanislaus Dembas Hände waren endlich frei.»¹ The sentence simultaneously summarizes a principal conceptual aspect of the text as well as a fundamental aesthetic device. Written between March and November 1917 when the Czech-born Perutz (1882–1957) was recovering from a serious war wound and a bout with septicemia, the soberly written novel repeatedly expresses an interest in the hero’s freedom.² Indeed, when the novel was serialized in the «Berliner Tageblatt» (1918), the «Deutsche Zeitung Bohemia» (1918), and the «Wiener Arbeiterzeitung» (1921), it bore the title «Freiheit.» But what is the reader to make of the fact that only Demba’s hands are freed? A quintessential, if bewildering aspect of the human condition, freedom is a recurring theme in many of Perutz’s novels. And in a letter written in the 1930s to the Viennese journalist Eugen Gömöri, who had argued that lifetime imprisonment might be more humane than the death penalty, Perutz exclaimed, «Es gibt keine schlimmere Qual als die Aufhebung der persönlichen Freiheit.»³ We recall additionally that Perutz himself fled Austria for Tel Aviv in 1938 to maintain his freedom. But in an age that had cast great doubt on the classical sense of an individual who could freely define him/herself, Perutz too seems to have been skeptical about the attainment of personal freedom: Demba’s bound, isolated hands suggest that a self-determined identity may be only partially, or worse only theoretically achievable.

The complexity of the problem of freedom in Zwischen neun und neun is reflected both in the unresolved thematic vectors of the novel’s plot and in the selected narrative stance. Thematically, the reader can wonder whether Demba’s limited freedom is the result of legitimate societal constraints (and so the transgressive Demba is arrested), of widely held intolerance of immigrants by the German Viennese, or of his own conscious or subconscious, excessive behaviors. Stylistically, while Perutz may be said to extend the realistic tradition of the nineteenth-century novel, he significantly incorporates unreal and fantastic elements into his novels. In Zwischen neun und neun one must speculate whether Demba only imagines the subsequent dream images as he lies dying outside the second-hand dealer’s building from which he has
jumped, or whether he somehow experiences the narrated reality after the fall. (Narrators from the grave frequently do have much to tell us.) Thus the narrative’s stylistic indeterminability parallels the thematic contingency of freedom. Typical for Perutz’s narrative style, such conscious fusion or even confusion on the narrative and thematic levels may finally underscore the author’s acknowledgement of the uncertainty or fragility of a free identity, as it is determined not by the self, nor by society, but by a muddled mixture of inner volition, uncertain memory, vivid dreams, as well as social pressures. Through the inclusion of the unresolved, improbable, or incalculable, this writer of historical and fantastic novels finally confounds the realistic tradition of the nineteenth-century novel and offers a narrated world that is appropriate for the fin-de-siècle, i.e., one that is not intuitively commensurate with the traditional realistic aesthetic.

Apart from the issue of narrative complexity, approaches to Perutz’s literary works are further complicated by the author’s own resistance to speak openly about himself or about the works themselves. In an often quoted remark, the reticent and enigmatic Perutz informs a potential literary scholar of his reluctance to be more informative about his life: «Ich befürchte, mit einer Darstellung meines Lebenwegs weder bei den Lesern meiner Bücher noch bei den Lesern Ihrer Monatsschrift Interesse vorzufinden. Meine innere Entwicklung ergibt sich für jeden, nur nicht für mich, aus der Lektüre meiner Romane» (qtd. in Lüth, «Dämmerlicht» 60). Absent any direction from this at times extraordinarily successful writer, who was born in Prague to an assimilated, largely secular Jewish entrepreneurial family and moved to Vienna in 1899, scholarship has rightly focused on the bedeviling notion of identity in his intricate novels. As they illustrate the author’s predilection for non-evaluative, unreliable narrators, Perutz’s novels reflect a profound concern with the constitution of the individual. Der Schwedische Reiter, for example, explores how two men essentially inhabit one identity: a young nobleman, who has deserted from the Swedish army, and a thief, who steals his identity; St. Petri-Schnee portrays a hero whose identity is shattered by an undetermined period of unconsciousness such that past and future are hardly distinguishable. Jan Christoph Meister offers an insightful reading of identity in Perutz’s early novel Die dritte Kugel, in which it is finally unclear whether the one-eyed Captain Glasäpflein who suffers from a flawed memory is really the Count Grumbach about whom the Spanish rider narrates. Meister argues that the novel is structured «durch eben diese widersprüchliche wechselseitige Bedingtheit von Determinismus und Identität einerseits, Zufall, Willensfreiheit und Identitätslosigkeit andererseits» (87). Hans-Harald Müller, perhaps the pre-eminent Perutz scholar in the world today, observes in general of the
author’s *oeuvre*: «Mit psychischen Diskontinuitätserfahrungen und Identitätskonflikten, die von Problemen des Erinnerns und Vergessens herrühren, haben es die Protagonisten nahezu aller Romane und Erzählungen von Perutz zu tun; sie sind in seinem Werk nicht, wie noch in der Literatur des Jungen Wiens, der pathologische Sonderfall, sondern nahezu der Regelfall» (Leo Perutz 114). Identity, he concludes, comes at the cost of a deterministic worldview; one can be free if one forgoes an identity. It may be that Stanislaus Demba achieves neither freedom nor identity in *Zwischen neun und neun*. Similarly affirming the prominence of identity in Perutz’s novels, Marina Rauchenbacher notes, «In den Texten Perutz’ ist Identität das zentrale Thema, Erinnerung wird zum poetischen Programm» (64)10 This essay, besides bringing Perutz to the attention of the American Germanist community and perhaps the English-speaking world, 11 aims to examine the author’s depiction of identity in his less studied novel *Zwischen neun und neun*.

Uncertain identity or even an identity crisis marks not only many of Perutz’s novels, but it is also a hallmark of fin-de-siècle cultural life: one thinks of the psychoanalytical cases of Sigmund Freud, the volatile, subjectivistic ego («Das Ich ist unrettbar») of Ernst Mach, and the controversial, transcendentally grounded ego of Otto Weininger, among others. Peter Lauener summarizes the situation of the «Ich» at the turn of the century as follows:

Das Ich als klar umgrenzte oder gar metaphysisch verbürgte, ganzheitliche, konstante Entität ist um die Wende zum 20. Jahrhundert nach einem jahrhundertlangen Zerfallsprozess problematisch geworden. Die Entwicklung wird sowohl als Befreiung und nötig für eine differenzierte Realitätswahrnehmung erfahren als auch als Gefährdung und Verlust. (145)

Perutz appears less interested in rescuing the sense of self from its detractors and in joining the celebration of its liberation/destruction than in simply portraying its destabilization. This elusive sense of self finds expression in *Zwischen neun und neun* in the judicious use of the motif of the (bound) hand as it suggests the impossibility of self-definition through volition, resistance to an imposed identity, and personal fragmentation. The repeated references to hands in the discrete but interconnected vignettes that make up this perplexing yet playful novel underscore Perutz’s artistic self-understanding. A self-averred aestheticist, Perutz left little to chance and would not have haphazardly included the plethora of such references.12 Not surprisingly, the hand occurs in other key passages in Perutz’s novels as well.13 Perutz’s choice of the hand should also be seen in the long tradition of the hand motif in literary texts even as it emphasizes the physicality (not the intellectuality) of the depicted Vienna. While the hand by virtue of its essential universality may be suggestive of a common humanity, scholars have examined the unique role of
an oppressive hand, of bloodstained hands, of an iron hand, of collaborating hands, of a liberating hand, and of invisible, mysterious hands or comforting godly hands. They have discussed gentle hands, female hands, trembling hands and generative hands. That is to say, associated with the accumulation of power and wealth, the hand has been linked to acts of the will that display domination, aggression, revenge, and disregard for social order, but also care and affection. According to the Daemmrichs, «the imagery of the hand (gestures of friendship, raised fist, seizing of persons, wielding weapons) [...] implies that hand and mind work together.» They conclude that the motif of the hand can «create visions of disorder that are antithetical to ideas of historical progress, human intellectual growth, and the civilizing influence of enlightened thinking» (129). It is precisely these fixed, liberal, largely bourgeois values that are called into question by Demba’s bound hands, as they were questioned by Perutz’s contemporaries as well. In contrast to his restless striving and palpable suffering in pursuit of his self or identity, the bourgeois identity remains intact, unchanged, immutable, indeed actually oblivious of the stated intellectual values and impending social and philosophical crisis.

If there is identity, it will need to be a highly malleable concept, not unlike that proposed by Rosi Braidotti, which will be engaged at the end of this essay. I will read the identity of Perutz’s Demba as designating particularistic, nonuniversalistic interests that reveal an unstable and fragmented self even as he is representative, consciously or not, of a class of immigrants or outcasts in Vienna. In Demba’s bound hands one observes an identity whose potential for social disruption and for the upheaval of civilization is held in check, however precariously. His bound hands are both the result of his transgressions (theft) and the vehicle of his further attack on proper society, which he, as a kind of Zwischending, in part despises and in part wants to join.

Through the repeated employment of the hand in various social contexts, Perutz expresses his interest in the identity or self-understanding of the individual characters within a broad social panorama. The opening chapters present a series of misidentifications and introduce the notion that Demba, by virtue of his bound hands, is nowhere able to be himself. In the first chapter, Demba meets the neighborhood shopkeeper Frau Püchl of the Wiesergasse (9th district), who, because she has «alle Hände voll zu tun,» (5) can be said to be fully engaged or fully human. Believing that Demba failed to pay for his Butterbrot, Frau Püchl initially considers the student Demba a thief until she notices that he did in fact leave behind money for his sandwich. Through his inability to use his hands, due to the as yet unexplained handcuffs, the large, broad-shouldered, bespectacled Demba with his reddish mustache is
Leo Perutz’s Zwischen neun und neun

held to be an outlaw. By and large, Perutz offers a physical and moral portrait of his hero that is not very endearing, even as he, Perutz, was known for his empathy both for the downtrodden and unfortunate as well as for those with whom he disagreed. Demba is not particularly handsome, dresses poorly, and exudes a distinct lack of warmth. The hand that should bind him to humanity and secure his identity causes him to shun others. He can neither give nor take money, the primary mode of human intercourse in Perutz’s modern Vienna. In the second chapter, set in nearby Liechtenstein park, again in the 9th district, the author illuminates the academic class of Vienna through a conversation between Hofrat Klementi and Professor Ritter von Truxa. Demba is erroneously thought to be a hashish user as a result of his agitated response to Cyrus, Professor Ritter’s dog of uncertain breed, who takes Demba’s food from him without resistance. In this middle-class setting, which in its humorous pseudo-intellectual musings is oblivious to the world around it, the acerbic and resourceful Demba is again an outcast, perhaps seen as something beneath the dog, who in contrast to Demba does at least offer his paw but who in turn is then punished by Demba with a powerful kick. Similarly, the young Alice Leitner flirtatiously mistakes Demba for a member of the bohème element of society when he refuses to pick up her intentionally dropped umbrella, the polite thing to do. Having failed in her aim to attract Demba’s attention and afraid that he will want to show her his affected arm stubs, the babysitter leads the children off «an der Hand» (34), which signifies her entwinement with the family and her economic stability. Demba, lacking hands, is excluded from such personal connections, which form the heart of identity. Indeed, the reader hears nothing of Demba’s own family in the novel aside from the fact that he is of peasant descent. He is often among people, but remains nevertheless alone as he claims «mit diesen Handschellen bin ich abseits der Welt. Ganz allein steh’ ich gegen die Millionen anderer Menschen» (117).

Once Perutz has illuminated the impression that Demba makes on his fellow Viennese, he introduces Sonja Hartmann, a rather superficial office worker and the object of Demba’s desire. Demba wants to reclaim her from the tennis-playing, fashion-conscious, and financially secure law student Georg Weiner, who, because he has passed a university test, was rewarded with 300 crowns by his father, a wealthy leather dealer in Leopoldstadt. The «chinless» Weiners may represent the assimilated Jewish perspective that embraced the Enlightenment ethic of bourgeois self-determination, rationalism, and individualism. Emancipation, culture, education and identity as a German Viennese form Weiner’s natural habitus. Upon his entry, the employees in Sonja’s office on the Franz Josef Kai (1st and 2nd districts), particularly
Klara whose «reizende Hände» (46) Demba praises, all want to shake Demba’s hand, i.e., to welcome him into the office community, yet he cannot accept their invitation without revealing his liability. Given Demba’s volatile passions, authoritarian commands [«Du wirst nicht fahren» (50)] and predilection for violence, he also does not fit in the prescribed commercial world. Indeed, in his conversation with Sonja, Demba’s hand turns to a fist, suggesting a potential violent outcome, before he convinces her to give him time to get the needed money for a trip to Venice.

In order to reflect on his problem of how to raise the money for the trip and to acquire a new coat, Demba returns to his room, likely in the 9th district, where his roommate Oskar Miksch observes him nourishing himself with his two hands in the dark. Ignorant of Demba’s real dilemma, i.e., the handcuffs and his interest in (but not really affection for) Sonja, Miksch, who in contrast to Demba has steady employment as a railway worker, argues that Sonja is free – «frei» and «ungebunden» (61) – and not beholden in the least to Demba. Miksch seems to uphold a sense of identity that rests on individual volition. The scene also presents a failed opportunity for Demba to acquire the money for his translation of a colportage novel into Polish from German. When the postman brings the money in a letter for Demba, he refuses to sign for it, claiming absurdly but from his perspective necessarily that a required signature is beneath his dignity. Again, Demba’s lack of hands prevents his participation in society’s economic intercourse. His bound hands mark him as a nonparticipant. A second possibility to raise the needed funds lies with Willy Eisner, an employee at a bank on Kolingasse in the 9th district near the University, whose desire to shake Demba’s hand meets with a vituperative rebuff. But he too will not help Demba because, as he repeatedly says, his hands are tied – «gebundene Hände» (69, 70, 71). In contrast to Demba, Willy appears to be able to pursue if not yet achieve a middle-class, more carefree identity. In effect, he does not see his hands tied.

The artist Perutz freezes Demba’s accelerating freneticism for a moment as he humorously places his hero in the Café Hibernia (near the stock exchange in the first district) where he enjoys a meal safely ensconced behind a large stack of books, which unfortunately cannot include the requested «Handbuch für Ingenieure» (75; emphasis mine). Demba next visits the sixteen-year-old Steffi Prokop, who is both a parallel and a contrast figure to Demba. Harboring unrequited, even ignored feelings of affection for Demba, Steffi, like Demba, is marked by her scarred face as an outsider, but she is also the picture of order and morality. Before explaining his crime to her at her apartment in the Kolingasse (9th district), Demba as tutor improves Steffi’s attempt to cite from the Horatian ode 1.2 «Integer vitae sclerisque purus» and continues the
line, one that is not without relevance to the plot. While often only the first line is quoted, the Horatian lines reads:

Integer uitae scelerisque purus
non eget Mauris iaculis neque arcu
nec uenenatis grauida sagittis,
Fusce, pharetra,

Or in English:

The man who is upright in life and free of sin
has no need of Moorish spears or a bow
or a quiver heavy with poisoned
arrows, Fuscus,

By virtue of his theft, Demba is of course not upright and blameless, and he defends himself by his intentional deceitfulness, which functions as a kind of poisoned arrow, since nearly all who come into contact with him misunderstand him or denigrate him. But the lines also confirm that the student Demba is one of the few characters in the novel who has a clear interest in intellectual matters despite the many instances of his eating in the novel. He knows Latin, has written a dissertation, translated a Diensbotenroman into Polish, and he can tutor in the areas of geography, mathematics, and physics. At one point, he even denigrates Horvath for his lack of university education (182).\footnote{In relating his crime to Steffi, Demba explains to her that he first tried to sell the stolen books in the Johannesgasse and Weihburggasse in the first district before eventually finding a buyer in sordid tenements in Heiligenstadt in the 19th district. The conversation with Steffi is further illuminating because it raises explicitly the question about the narrative levels of consciousness when Demba wonders out loud, «Vielleicht träume ich ... Sicher ist alles nur ein Traum» (83). The reader is thrown off balance – how can the dreamer narrate his own uncertainty about the dream?\footnote{There is simply no firm ground in Perutz’s writing: if other writers employ multiple perspectives to unsettle the reader, Perutz typically makes use of shifting levels of consciousness. It may be that the fantastic in this novel is aimed more at the reader’s reflection on his own sense of freedom than at Demba’s struggle toward freedom. But Demba does not follow up on this query, as dreams even in the dream world are fleeting. In assessing his day, the language-sensitive Demba congratulates himself despite the fact that everything he attempted – «angepackt» (84) – has gone awry. He then observes, «Manchmal ist die Sprache geradezu witzig. «Angepackt» ist nämlich wirklich nicht das richtige Wort. Also sagen wir: Angerührt –, nein, in die Hand genommen – auch nicht!» (84). This is precisely Demba’s problem (and Perutz’s artistry): since his escape from the police, Demba has}
not been able to take his destiny into his hands at all. In contrast to many others presented in the novel, Demba is not able to define himself. Others define him, as thief, hashish smoker, misfit, etc. He has rather had to conceal that which would enable him to become a free self. Despite his efforts he simply cannot translate his ideas into reality, e.g., get a sandwich, take the letter from the mailman, etc. To Steffi, he finally confesses, without shame, that he has sold two of the stolen library books to a dealer in antiques – a study of the idylls of Calpurnius Siculus, allegedly an unoriginal poet whose pastoral style has been characterized as devoid of genuine feeling (perhaps like Demba), and his *Hapax legomena*, itself reflective of the uniqueness of the character of Demba. When he attempted to sell the third of the stolen books, a valuable, bejeweled book, he encountered difficulties with the police. The prospective buyer of the book is apparently a Galician Jew, who lives near the foul-smelling brewery and whom, Perutz makes clear, Demba detests. When Demba initially senses that the dealer may have tricked him, he attacks him with his weapon, his not yet bound hands: «Ich fuhr ihm mit beiden Händen in den Bart» (97). Aggression and a volatile temperament are certainly fundamental to Demba’s identity as we have seen him earlier physically mistreat Sonja. After Demba is placed in handcuffs by the police, he attacked the officers «mit beiden Händen» (97), securing his escape to freedom: «Mir schwindelte, es gellte mir in die Ohren: Freiheit! Freiheit! Freiheit!» (99). By leaping from an attic window, he indeed eludes the police and secures his freedom, «Bis auf die Handschellen» (102), a phrase used by Perutz to conclude chapter eight and begin chapter nine, essentially the midpoint in the novel.

As already noted, the hand in this novel exaggerates the physicality of humanity. Demba gradually approaches this view when he tells Steffi in chapter nine: «Ich habe nie vorher gewußt, daß man so oft im Tage seine Hände braucht. Viel öfter als das Gehirn, das kannst du mir glauben, Steffi» (106). Rationality and intellectuality are subordinate to physicality and determinism in Demba’s Vienna, as hands are deemed more necessary than ideas. Through his subsequent characterization of his hands as «Hände, die wie zwei Lastpferde, wie zwei Maulesel aneinandergespannt waren» (113), the notion of a spiritual or intellectual humanity is again called into question. Demba may begin to see himself as the settled middle class sees/treats him: more subservient animal than self-determining human. But the failure of integration lies not only with an exclusionary and exaggerated self-perception of the bourgeoisie; Demba’s solipsistic self-understanding also contributes mightily: «Ich erkenne nur mich selbst als Richter über mich an» (107). Demba’s egotism and self-absorption, which he equates with freedom, are thus seen as the reasons for his dilemma.21 His rejection of prison – «die schlimmsten aller Folterstrafen»
In Demba’s opposition of the capacity to punish – «Daß die Menschheit die Macht hat, zu strafen, das ist die Ursache jeder geistigen Rückständigkeit» (109) – one hears not only his self-centered fear for his freedom but also perhaps a critique of distorted bourgeois authoritarianism. He thus does not want to put his fate in the hands of such judges.

Despite the growing realization that his attempts to secure the money may be futile, some new alternatives are presented, but all lead to the same result: without hands he is unable to take the money. Frau Dr. Hirsch, wife of the affluent and condescending lawyer, whose children Demba tutors, cannot understand why Demba does not pick up the envelope containing his wages, nor his dropped cigar that burns a hole in the carpet at their apartment on Esslinggasse in the first district. Demba’s self-exculpatory lies demonstrate once again his inclination for dissimulation or self-fragmentation. Mendacity may preclude a unified identity, but it may be the only option available to him.22

In the subsequent episode involving Herr von Gegenbauer of Praterstraße, Demba clearly demonstrates his ability to manipulate others, as he successfully cons his former student into giving him the money he is owed for having tutored him, albeit unsuccessfully. As Gegenbauer places the envelope for the cost of replacing Demba’s lost notebooks into his coat pocket, Demba concludes that one can indeed get money «ohne eine Hand zu rühren» (130–31), without lifting a finger, even without shaking hands.

But Demba’s luck is shortlived as a policeman attempts to return to him his dropped envelope. Demba cannot reclaim the envelope from the policeman lest he reveal the cuffed hands. In perhaps the most enigmatic of the chapters, Demba is seen following Herr Kallisthenes Skuludis in the Graben;23 he believes that the elegantly attired Skuludis has taken the envelope from the policeman. Skuludis, apparently an experienced high society thief himself, is wary of Demba and acts, not unlike Demba, to conceal his true identity. Humorously the mutual misunderstandings result in a total lack of communication. As the ultimately outwitted Demba pursues the fleeing Skuludis across from the Opera House, Demba reaches for the rail of the departing streetcar and his bound hands are exposed to Skuludis, which causes the latter to acknowledge, with some sympathy, a fellow professional in Demba, whom he might have helped. Demba elicits understanding only from those similar outcasts – Skuludis and Steffi, and perhaps a generous reader. Having failed to recoup his missing funds, Demba next goes to Dr. Becker at the Kohlmarkt in the first district, whose children he had tutored in geography, math and physics. As a precaution, he wraps his arm to feign an injury allegedly the result of a house fire. When the uniquely charitable and compassionate Frau Dr.
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Becker arrives home, she insists that Demba go immediately to her husband’s practice since she does not have her «Portemonnaie bei der Hand» (158). This, of course, he cannot do, and thus he leaves the household once again without the desired eighty crowns.

Before he entered the Beckers’ apartment, Demba had read the headline of the newspaper lying in the stairwell: «Rücktritt des ungarischen Ministerpräsidenten» (149). This incident provides a hint concerning the time of the novel’s action, for even as Perutz wants to offer a panoramic background for his hero, he does not explicitly tell the reader the time of the action.²⁴ It is likely that the resignation in question is that on 23 May 1917 of Count Stephan Tisza, the Hungarian Prime Minister, who had initially discouraged the ultimatum given to Serbia in July 1914, following the assassination of the Archduke Ferdinand and his wife Sophie in June 1914. Hoping for an alternate means to respond to Serbian nationalism since he feared war would harm Hungary’s influence in the dual monarchy, he is also said to have opposed the use of unrestricted submarine warfare in 1917 fearing that the United States might see this as an opportunity to enter the war to aid England and present insurmountable difficulties for the Central Powers.²⁵ Count Tisza served from 1913 to his resignation in 1917 and was assassinated on October 31, 1918.²⁶ If this is the case, then Perutz’s oblique tip to the reader reinforces the sense that the portrayed Vienna did not take the war seriously. Within the novel, the reader learns only that the son of Demba’s landlady is away on military service. At the time of the writing of the novel in 1917, the carefree portrayed Viennese way of life had all but vanished. The grim economic condition following the deaths of Kaiser Franz Josef (1830–1916) and the unpopular, assassinated Prime Minister Karl Graf von Stürgkh (1859–1916) had already contributed to mass hunger and to an acute sense of disorientation in many quarters of the Viennese population. Maureen Healy observes, «1917 was the turning point. The Viennese faced a marked increase in hunger, social discord and low-level violence, and their rampant law-breaking became a protracted civilian mutiny against ineffective government» (25).²⁷ It is remarkable that Perutz does not in 1917 offer greater detail about war-torn Vienna. Siebauer writes of Perutz’s position with respect to the war, «Perutz’ Einstellung zum Krieg zeigt Skepsis und Distanz. Er stellte sich der grausamen Realität. […] Perutz war nicht begeistert, aber auch seine Anteilnahme war denkbar gering» (80). Faced with the imminent end of the monarchy, Perutz, himself reasonably well-off at the time and a strong believer in transnational monarchism,²⁸ wishes perhaps to focus on the elements that had prepared the way for the social and cultural crisis, which included questions about social and ethnic identity. We remember that Demba jumps from the window to the folksong recalling the cap-
ture of Belgrade from the Turks two hundred years earlier in 1717 by Prince Eugen.

Demba then seeks out his friend Herr Doktor Hübel in the reserved room of the Café Turf near the Praterstern, from whom he hopes to receive some forty crowns owed to him. He quickly finds himself engaged in an unfamiliar buki domino game (an expression of the author’s own fascination with randomness of games of chance). Demba wins repeatedly and disinterestedly – «ohne einen Finger zu rühren» (164), each time betting the whole winnings as he cannot pick up the money. It is significant that, as he plays at the table, he imagines what the other players must be wondering. Of particular interest is the fact that he does not have his own visions, e.g., «Arm im Arm mit Sonja» (169). One may see this musing as another expression of Demba’s lack of his own sense of self or identity. In contrast to the other players, he of the bound hands lacks an identity that can even create realizable dreams. When shortly thereafter Dr Rübsam accuses Demba of stealing his watch and asks him to take off his coat, Demba panics because he fears he will have to forfeit his jackpot, now in Dr Rübsam’s hands. Enraged, he attempts to break his handcuffs: «Und mit einer gewaltigen Anstrengung rebellierte er gegen seine Ketten, die Muskeln dehnten sich, die Adern schwollen, in höchster Not wurden seine Hände zu zwei Giganten, die sich empörten, die Kette knirschte – Das Eisen hielt» (174). The rebellion fails. Despite his best physical efforts Demba cannot reclaim the money that Dr Rübsam puts in his own pocket «mit nicht ganz reinem Gewissen» (174).

Perhaps belying his conscious intention to withdraw from the contest, a dejected Demba is next seen in front of Georg Weiner’s apartment house, where his pained hands – «seine Hände schmerzten» (175) – remind us again of his tormented existence: «[Demba] hatte sich seinen gefesselten Händen zum Trotz um des Geldes willen in den Wirbel des Alltags gewagt» (175). The outsider Demba cannot succeed in his bold attempt to integrate himself into society, in part because he has come to believe that «eine straffe Organization tückischer Zufälle stand gegen mich» (175) and that the «zwingende Natur der Umstände» (176) must prevail. The novel’s depiction of a dance with determinism seems to enter its final stages. From his apartment Weiner steps onto the Liechtensteiner Strasse and Demba intends to accompany him to the Residenzkeller. Reluctant to order food at the restaurant since he cannot show his hands, Demba concocts a story about how in Baghdad one drinks beer through a straw, but he is ridiculed for his ignorance (and for his slovenly appearance). Departing from his affected congeniality, a drunk and stumbling Demba breaks a mirror and intends to strangle his ridiculers «alle drei mit bloßen Händen» (194). Amidst the ensuing confusion, Sonja, who has arrived
late on the scene, screams that Demba is concealing a revolver «in der Hand» (195). The mistaken revelers, now «in seiner Hand» (198), believe they see the revolver under his coat, and Weiner even claims to feel the muzzle of the revolver in his body. Sonja’s subsequent rejection of the cowardly Weiner and her throwing of the ticket onto the ground give Demba an opportunity to reclaim her affection. No longer does he have to live «mit leeren Händen» (201). But even as he feels a weight lifted from him, for he has achieved what he wanted – «ohne Mühe, ohne Kampf hatte er es erreicht, nur weil er seine Hände unter dem Mantel versteckt hatte» (201) – Demba abandons his desire for Sonja. She was his, but «er fühlte nichts» (201). Incapable of identity-building compassion, he will have his rebellion; he will offer his disruption of the order. But the chance for a successful rebellion (and for a happy end) are quickly foreclosed. Demba’s actions in the Residenzkeller, in which he splits himself into two characters as he imagines himself killing the guests with his lethal nonweapon, punctuate his disunified, disjunctive identity. Before he can «shoot,» however, he is attacked by Dr Fuhrmann and others, who exclaim «die Hände! Packen Sie die Hände!» Demba’s hands, the fundamental expression of his being, that with which he might secure his happiness or cause the desired disruption, are the objects of their attack. The scene is rife with humor as Weiner even claims to have been shot. Once Demba is subdued, Horvath triumphantly pulls «Dembas Hände unter dem Mantel hervor, zwei unselige, hilflose, jammervolle Hände, mit Ketten kläglich aneinandergesellt» (205). Not only his hands, but his very existence has been miserable, pitiful, and wretched.

Still, one final move is required before the suffering can end. Demba escapes in the concluding chapter to his apartment. Awaiting him is a letter from Dr. Rübsam whose watch has been found and who has returned to Demba the 270 crowns, but this brings no joy. Worse yet, Steffi’s key cannot open the handcuffs to fulfill his wish: «Die Hände muß ich frei haben» (208). As Demba observes, «Wer aus dem Kerker kommt, der muß seine Hände vestecken, denn sie sind für immer geschändet. Er kann keinem Menschen mehr frei und offen die Hand reichen» (210). The hand, as vehicle for self-determination and resistance, is linked again with freedom. Imprisonment, be it real or psychological, leaves a permanent mark that prevents entry into bourgeois society and the formation of a self. The handcuffs capture his life as unassimilated burgher. At the sound of knocking on the door, the reader feels transported back to chapter eight when Demba had explained his leap from the window to the tune of the anonymous «Prinz Eugenius, der edle Ritter,» which details the taking of Belgrade by Prince Eugen von Savoyen in 1717. If only Demba could be such a successful liberator! As Steffi vanishes, the «Malzgeruch» and
the «Grammophon in der Ferne» reappear (211). The narrator subsequently informs us that just outside the «Hof des Trödlerhauses in der Klettengasse» (211) the not yet lifeless body of Demba was found: «Nur seine Augen wanderten. Seine Augen lebten. Seine Augen irrten ruhelos ... . tauchten unter in der brausenden Wirrnis des Daseins ... wurden sehr müde und fielen zu» (211–12). Once again, a partial Demba lives, his eyes wandering aimlessly, ceaselessly, desperately. Demba’s frenetic, near Woyzeck-like agitation (we recall Perutz reference to his model’s «Erregung») continues in the restless eyes and again contrasts with the utter fixity of the bourgeois identity, which has largely remained unmoved by Demba’s appeals. The compulsively displaced Demba has been constantly in transition, even if he has not fully abandoned the quest for an essential unity, which consists metaphorically in the acquisition of funds to take Sonja on vacation and thereby enter bourgeois society. But that is not to be. His death brings his freedom, we are told:

Die Handschellen waren durch die Gewalt des Sturzes zerbrochen. Und Dembas Hände, die Hände, die sich in Angst versteckt, in Groll empört, im Zorn zu Fäusten geballt, in Klage aufgebäumt, die in ihrem Versteck stumm in Leidenschaft gezittert, in Verzweiflung mit dem Schicksal gehadert, in Trotz gegen die Ketten rebelliert hatten – Stanislaus Dembas Hände waren endlich frei. (212)

But what does this freedom mean? What kind of identity has Demba achieved? The mere cessation of physical suffering? Certainly Demba is freed of his obsession, but he obviously does not enjoy a sense of autonomous self-determination. He experiences no epiphany of being. Perhaps Rosi Braidotti can offer a clue to assessing Demba’s identity. In her opposition to «metaphysically fixed, steady identities» (5) Braidotti speaks of a nomadic self: «The nomad’s identity is a map of where s/he has already been; s/he can always reconstruct it a posteriori, as a set of steps in an itinerary. But there is no triumphant cogito supervising the contingency of the self; the nomad stands for movable diversity, the nomad’s identity is an inventory of traces» (14). Demba’s displacements, his tracing through Vienna as it were, reflect an essential aspect to the nomadic subject. In his encounters with the diverse social groups in Viennese society, Demba creates a reconstructable history of his person, of his identity. The reader can follow his dream-like recreation of where he has been, of his itinerary through Vienna. Braidotti’s emphasis on the transitioning of the self between experiences is indeed descriptive of Demba’s trajectory; it even accounts for the nearly imperceptible and highly confusing interaction between the real and the dream that marks the narrative’s plot. In his narration of Demba’s quest for self-understanding or identity, Perutz does not suggest a point at which an identity is achieved. There is no cogito that drives the self or supervises the self; there is only contingency
and eventuality. Even Demba’s continuous consciousness, the foundation of individuality and identity, is interrupted or questioned in the mixed narration, thereby undercutting a fixed identity; only the obsessive quest seems to provide some consistency of individuality. Materially bound, Demba shows no wholeness, only eyes and hands; he is truly a different kind of subject. As a translator, he is between languages; as immigrant, he is between cultures; and as an educated member of an immigrant class, he is between classes.

Perutz, a nonnationalistic thinker, may have welcomed a nomadic, transnational subject. He may even have lived it, as a resident of Austria and Tel Aviv. Besides the trudging through the city, Demba’s nomadicity is further accentuated by his desire both to join the bourgeois world and to be critical of it. Critical, even caustic of bourgeois order, Demba nevertheless wants to be a part of it. Moreover, his leap from the window could instantiate Braidotti’s nomadism as it demonstrates a «vertiginous progression toward deconstructing identity; molecularisation of the self» (16). In his fall, Demba is physically molecularized. The question of a reconstruction remains unanswered despite Müller’s suggestion «daß der Held aus der Begegnung mit dem Tod nichts gelernt hätte, selbst wenn ihm ein zweites Leben geschenkt worden wäre» (Zwischen 218). While Demba may or may not have acted differently the second time around, this does not mean that he could not have acted differently. There are occasional signs of remorse in his character that suggest the possibility of a different chosen path. It is finally the reader that Perutz has in his sights. Perutz’s variation in the repetition of Demba’s seemingly futile attempts to secure the needed money does not lead to tedium and stagnation; it rather conveys an imaginative attempt to free the reader, if not Demba, from dogmatism and fixity. The text’s humor fulfills the same liberating function. It may be helpful to recall Tzvetan Todorov’s definition of the fantastic (in this case the curious dream vision) as a hesitation or «Unschlüssigkeit.» According to Todorov, «The fantastic is that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event» (25). He further writes, «the fantastic is based essentially on a hesitation of the reader – a reader who identifies with the chief character – as to the nature of the uncanny event» (157). The modern reader is committed to the laws of nature. Even as we may not want to identify fully with the ill-tempered Demba, we can be sufficiently sympathetic to his plight. The hesitation that the reader experiences with respect to the reality of the narrative levels and again at the conclusion of the novel may provide a hope that he or she can have a more clearly defined sense of freedom than could Demba. In other words, the humor and imagination of the text enable the reader’s critical awareness and facilitate his or her (perhaps nomadic) self-definition. Our
hands are not bound. They can implement our ideas as they derive from our reading. We can appreciate a non-fixed identity.

Demba’s nomadic becoming, however, must fail in part because it lacks an «intensive interconnectedness» (5). His near maniacal self-absorption prevents him from making attachments, thereby creating an identity that links him to society and to time. His relationships are not reciprocal but self-serving, and his penchant for excess enslaves him. He remains apart from the culture even as he is of the culture. He is thus finally unable to create his self in Vienna, and he remains more homeless (cultureless) than nomadic. Moreover, as has perhaps become clear, Demba’s resistance to the sacred culture of a fixed bourgeois identity lacks a «critical consciousness that resists settling into socially coded modes of thought and behavior» (5). Even if he does articulate his opposition to the static Viennese social configuration, the provocative Demba does not sustain such a position. Situated in the interstices of Viennese society, Demba ought to be able to deconstruct the fixed identities, but his obsessive pursuit of the money renders him, like the similarly obsessive Vittorio in *Wohin rollst du … Äpfelchen*, less capable of a thoroughly critical consciousness. Demba’s hands want both to particularize the universal, i.e., to rebel against the dominant Viennese order, and to allow the universal, i.e., to accept, even enter, the order. Demba may remain too attached to the quest through money for fixity and integration into bourgeois society. Perhaps in that sense it is proper to say that only his hands were freed: «Stanislaus Dembas Hände waren endlich frei.» (212)

Disembodied and disconnected, the hands suggest an expression of a modern, fragmented, perhaps anonymous identity in a bourgeois Vienna. Demba’s hands cannot act in coordination with the mind. He cannot realize his wishes or identity. Nor does he connect in an intimate human relationship or have the capacity to offer a thoroughgoing resistance to the order. Seeking imagined wholeness and authenticity, Demba finds only fragmentation and artifice. From a philosophical perspective, the subject Demba remains an alienated and unstable self (perhaps with multiple identities) who is unable to integrate himself into Viennese society. While we as readers may find some hope in *Zwischen neun und neun* for a greater sense of freedom and identity through an identification with Demba, Demba himself may need to take solace in a remark uttered by Dr. Amberg in *St. Petri-Schnee*. Clinging to the questionable reality of his love for Babiche, he says, «Was man im Traum besitzt, kann einem keine Welt von Feinden nehmen» (70).

Perutz’s novel may additionally tell us something about the particular immigrant quest for identity in Vienna within the long fin-de-siècle. Between
1880 and 1910 the population of Vienna nearly doubled, due in large part to immigration. Around the turn of the century, about a quarter of the population of Vienna had been born in Bohemia or Moravia alone. Vienna was thus either an uneasy melting pot or a mosaic. As Rüdiger Wischenbart notes, immigrants came to a Vienna that «not only promised work and wages, but also – equally tempting for some – education, training, a new culture, in short, a new identity» (39). Demba’s hands may be the hands of the rising underclass (or working class) or of the not yet fully assimilated immigrant. The well-documented problems of assimilation by the huge influx of immigrants in the later decades of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century find expression in Demba’s interaction with the Viennese. Of course, the immigrant class performed the manual and menial labor for Vienna (we can point to the many nannies who came from Bohemia, as well as to those in Perutz’s parent’s house in Prague), and Demba exhibits some characteristics that suggest his immigrant status. Perutz, himself an immigrant to Vienna in 1899, thematizes the immigrant identity in the novel as it challenges the perception of (and desire for) a German-dominated Vienna at the turn of the century.

Demba stands out first by his name. Perutz makes no definitive comments about Demba’s heritage. But Stanislaus is a common, Latinized form of Stanislav, a Slavic name that in recent generations may have had greater association with the working class than with the bourgeoisie. Demba, which likely derives from the Slavic word for oak, is also not an uncommon peasant name in Poland even if his oaken strength is sorely tested, perhaps broken, in this novel. It has also been suggested that Demba may be a «Czechicized» Polish name corresponding to a common Czech surname Duba. Demba himself tells the reader how his peasant origin had actually been of use to his dissertation argument. That he has translated a novel into Polish lends additional credence to the suspicion that he immigrated to Vienna from Poland. Demba also seems to have had no problem translating the novel (he is to be well paid), and only once in the novel is there reference to his German language skills when Dr. Rübsam tells him at the Buki table, «Sprechen Sie gefälligst deutsch» (168). One can easily imagine an excited Demba speaking his mother tongue. We might conclude that he is not a first-generation immigrant. We don’t see him associate with other immigrants, whom he might choose to avoid in his quest to enter bourgeois society. He does see himself as different from the antiquarian in outlying and disreputable Heiligenstadt. By virtue of his education, Demba differs from the newly arrived immigrants who would have faced much greater hardship, for example, in the proletarian suburb of Ottakring. His life is not characterized by the extreme poverty of the industrial neighborhoods. He is not a Betgheber, nor is he subject to the exploitative
Leo Perutz’s Zwischen neun und neun

rationalization of the developing capitalism that was taking hold of the city, and he does not experience the prostitution, criminality, homelessness, social unrest and the developing political mass movements that prevailed in Vienna at the turn of the century. He does not become a «Massenmensch,» but he does seem to bear a similar kind of cultural stigmatization. He can venture into the first district but is more often found outside the center of the city even if only occasionally in the farthest corners of the city. We see very few instances where he exhibits a sense of power, which may be expected of an as yet not fully assimilated immigrant. Power for Demba is force, not influential wealth, political connection, or social grace. But like the new immigrants, he similarly has no freedom to determine his existence despite his educational training. Demba’s housing in the ninth district provides further evidence that he is to be situated closer to those at the periphery of Viennese society. His apartment is not well defined (in contrast to the many others that have street locations). Maderthaner and Musner have made explicit the virtual in-humanity of the housing, employment, and environmental conditions in the industrial regions on the periphery of the Viennese ring. In their research of the ninth district at the turn of the century, they conclude that the Lichtental area, for example, was «heruntergekommenes, gefährliches Slumgebiet» and a «höchst sanierungsbedürftiges Konglomerat von engen, dumpfen Gassen mit niederen, geduckten Vorstadthäusern» (Anarchie 141). Moreover, Demba does not explicitly long for a transfigured Heimat of an immigrant’s village even if he does express anxiety about the restrictiveness of the city. By and large, nature, as a respite from oppressive city life for many immigrants, finds little expression in the novel. Further, Demba clearly experiences the resentment of the Viennese. The historian Maureen Healy speaks of the disdain that many immigrants faced: «Residents of Vienna spoke and wrote of a state (Staat), a fatherland (Vaterland) and of constituting half of an empire (Reichshälfte), but they did not consider refugees from the eastern part of this half to be Austrians (Österreicher)» (15). It is clear that Demba, from an unspecified elsewhere and living outside the desirable first district, was estranged from the prevailing bourgeois-elite society as it sought to emulate the values of the antiquated nobility, delight in fashion, and maintain an Enlightenment sense of self-realization and economic well-being.

Perutz, who was from the upper bourgeoisie even if he occasionally fell on hard times, may characterize Demba from the perspective of a haughty bourgeoisie, which generalizes about the lower classes. Thus Demba becomes a representative of the lower classes, albeit with some tongue in cheek. Demba shares character traits with the Kleinbürgertum of the xenophobic Christian Social Party. Besides some crudeness, a penchant for violence, even brutal-
ity, sweatiness, and deviance, Demba also expressly makes misogynistic slurs, suggesting that Hedda Gabler is a poor role model for women and that Sonja should not go to the coffeehouses. Revealing a strong anti-Semitic streak, he especially wonders about the possibility of a Jewish «Geheimbund aller dieser Kinnlosen» (94). Interestingly, he does this even as he imagines himself (again one sees a split in him) in the upper classes as when he describes himself after his successful meeting with Gegenbauer «anscheinend den besseren Ständen angehörend» (134).

Hands. Everyone has them, nearly. Perutz takes pains in *Zwischen neun und neun* to draw attention to the hands of the Viennese with whom Stanislaus Demba interacts. While their hands exude purposefulness and even a confident, smug attitude as they construct and embrace their identities and pursue their pleasures, Demba’s hands, bound, suggest the impossibility of self-definition, resistance to the prevailing social order, and personal fragmentation. Their boundness points to an outsidership (immigrant status) and a lack of identity. Perutz’s novel thus captures fundamental aspects of turn-of-the-century Vienna. The threatened sense of self that so permeated the intellectual class of Vienna is demonstrated not in the oblivious bourgeoisie but in peasant immigrant Demba. The perilous tendency toward excessive subjectivity, a principal aspect of the identity crisis, can also be read in Demba’s character. It may not be an exaggeration to say that Demba epitomizes the rising individualistic values of the turn of the century and of concomitant «desocialisaton of the individual» (Le Rider 4), which instantiates the existing personal isolation and permanent anxiety.42 But one must also accept that Demba’s isolation is equally the result of the behavior of the bourgeois classes with whom he interacts. His bound hands are an expression of the exclusionary practices and beliefs of the established middle class toward those not like themselves. That Perutz sees the question of individual self-determination in the larger social context can be seen in his introduction to the novel in the *Wiener Arbeiterzeitung* in 1921 where he writes that the novel does not present the «Schicksal eines einzelnen, sondern daß mir als das Symbol der in Schlingen verstrickten und in Ketten geschlagenen Menschheit erscheint» (*Zwischen neun und neun* 219). The sometimes seemingly disinterested Perutz has captured in his novel the potential loss of freedom and identity of both the individual and of humanity.
Notes

1 Leo Perutz, *Zwischen neun und neun* (212). All references to this volume will be cited by page number in the body of the paper. The successful book found suitors among the film moguls, e.g., Metro Goldwyn Mayer Pictures Corporation purchased the rights in April 1922 but never made the film, and Alfred Hitchcock observes that his film *The Lodger* was likely prompted by Perutz’s novel. Hans Sturm wrote a successful theatrical version of the novel for the Hamburg stage in 1923.

2 Perutz makes reference to *Zwischen neun und neun* in a comment of 19 February 1915 when he writes in his notebook, «Eine Idee zu einer Novelle; ‹Der Mann mit den Handschellen›» (qtd. in Müller, *Leo Perutz* 38). In her biography of Perutz, Siebauer cites the following commentary by Perutz, which appeared as an introduction to the novel in the *Arbeiterzeitung* in May 1921:


3 The letter continues «Die Natur ist milder als der Mensch, sie verhängt über die Lebewesen sehr oft einen frühzeitigen Tod, niemals aber irgend eine Art Kerkerstrafe» (qtd. in Siebauer 101).

4 *Zwischen neun und neun* reveals close proximity to Ambrose Bierce’s «An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge» in which the hero Peyton Farquhar, condemned to death by hanging, envisions his escape from the bridge and his return to his beloved wife only to realize, as the final sentences make clear and as the narrator explicitly confirms, that the release had only been a reverie: «Peyton Farquhar was dead; his body, with a broken neck, swung gently from side to side beneath the timbers of the Owl Creek bridge» (98). But the reader of *Zwischen neun und neun*, in contrast to that of «An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge,» wonders repeatedly if he has understood Perutz’s tale adequately, for the author is far more mischievous in his telling of the story.

5 Dietrich Neuhaus uses the term «Indizienroman» (60). Müller speaks of the incongruity of the various narratives – «die Unvereinigkeit der erzählten Geschichten» (Leo Perutz 38).

6 One is compelled to mention Perutz’s near incomparable novel *Nachts unter der steinernen Brücke*, originally published in 1953, in which the fourteen *Novellen*, seemingly self-enclosed and unchronologically narrated, only reveal their coherence in the final story.

7 One must also consider Perutz’s comment to a young Germanist: «Ich bin der Meinung, daß es für junge wissenschaftliche Arbeiter wichtigere Themen gibt als die sogenannten germanistischen. Meine Bücher wollen gelesen werden und gefallen, haben aber nicht den Ehrgeiz, Objekte wissenschaftlicher Betrachtung zu sein» (Müller, *Leo Perutz* 98).

8 Meister (338) cites Hans-Harald Müller who quotes Friedrich Torberg as saying that Perutz was one of the «most widely read narrators in German.» One should also note
that Perutz was highly respected as an author by such writers as Ian Fleming, Italo Calvino, Graham Greene, Jorge Luis Borges, Bertolt Brecht, Carl von Ossietzky, Hermann Broch, Kurt Tucholsky, Theodor Adorno, Egon Erwin Kisch, and Siegfried Kracauer. One would think that the praise of such illustrious intellects would have ensured that Perutz would not be a «forgotten writer,» as he characterized himself in a letter from Tel Aviv to his friend Gerty Hanemann in 1946 (qtd. in Müller, Leo Perutz 85). Perutz was trained as an actuary and worked for many years at an insurance company (he actually began to work for the same company that Kafka worked for in the same month), and it was not until 1923 that he was able to achieve his goal to become an independent writer. While he was able to live from his writing and from income from the family company, he experienced financial hardships in the later twenties.

On the other hand, Siebauer maintains that «die Identitätsverwirrung wird nicht thematisiert, Hauptmann Glasäpfelein durchlebt sie und mit ihm der Leser» (69). I agree that the reader is key; it is the reader who must finally sort out the question of identity.

Writing mostly on Der schwedische Reiter, Rauchenbacher observes, «Aus diesen Problemen entsteht bei Perutz und Lernet-Holenia die Idée fixe der gefährdeten Identität – das heimatlose Subjekt, das nicht mehr in der Lage ist, sich über Zeit und Raum als Individuum in einem sozialen Geflecht zu definieren, ist auch nicht fähig, sich selbst zu kennen. Identität ist austauschbar, sie kann gestohlen werden und ist somit eminent gefährdet» (112).

Among the first to introduce Perutz to the North American Germanist community was Hans Eichner.

Müller quotes Perutz who characterized himself as an author «der an jedem seiner Romane und jeder seiner Erzählungen jahrelang sehr mühevoll gearbeitet» (Leo Perutz 46). An avid music listener, Perutz went to great lengths to ensure that his sentences had an appropriate sound. Siebauer quotes from a letter by Perutz to Berman: «Jeden Satz, den ich schreibe, denke ich mir – schon rein automatisch – laut gelesen und pflege jede Forderung meines sehr verwöhnten Ohrs … oftmals auf Kosten des Sinns und des Satzgedankens zu erfüllen» (65).

In the highly successful novel Wohin rollst du, Äpfelchen … (1928) Perutz depicts in Georg Vittorin a figure who is as seemingly one-track-minded as Demba. Vittorin quests obsessively for his former torturer, the commandant Michael Michajlowitsch Suljevkow, only to find him making model toys in Vienna. In the final paragraph Perutz writes of the frequently misunderstood Vittorin, «Und mit einer Handbewegung strich Vittorin zwei Jahre, in denen er Abenteurer, Mörder, Held, Kohlentrimmer, Spieler, Zuhälter und Landstreicher gewesen war, aus seinem Leben – mit einer gleichgültigen Handbewegung, die einem verlorenen Vormittag und einem durchnähten Mantel galt und nichts verriet» (246). One gesture of the hand suffices to undo the sole purpose of his existence for several years.

One might also recall how we can take something into our own hands as when Tita in the film Como agua para chocolate (1992) quite consciously observes the power of her hands and determines to construct herself – as chef – to attain a sense of self apart from being her mother’s captive caretaker.

Arguing for the broader term identification over an ambiguous identity in part because it insists on noting the identifiers, Brubaker and Cooper present a useful survey of the various and sundry meanings of identity. They note that the individual or the collective identity «may be governed by particularistic self-understandings rather than by putatively universal self-interest.» Or identity can «denote a fundamental or consequential
sameness among members of a group or category.» As a kind of «selfhood» it can «point to something allegedly deep, basic, abiding, or foundational.» It can further «highlight the processual, interactive development of the kind of collective self-understanding, solidarity, or «groupness» that can make collective action possible.» Finally, it may underscore «the unstable, multiple, fluctuating, and fragmented nature of the contemporary «self»» (6–8). While I am sympathetic to their theoretical concerns about the usefulness of the concept, identity may still be an appropriate notion if one specifies at the outset how one intends to use it.

16 Siebauer correctly notes that the novel reveals «die Blindheit, die Mitleidslosigkeit, die Bereitschaft zur üblen Nachrede, die Phrasenhaftigkeit und das Prahlertum der Wiener Gesellschaft» (95).

17 It may be interesting to note that Perutz, whose motto was contra torrentem – against the flow – had among his friends some who were members of the Nazi party.

18 According to Siebauer, Perutz was himself a user of hashish for a while (56).

19 If one were to see Demba as the representative of intellectual concerns, one might agree with Mandelartz’ assessment of Perutz’s oeuvre that «im immer schlechtmöglichsten Ausgang der Geschichte in der Kollision von materiellen und ideellen Interessen äußert sich die tiefgehende Skepsis des Autors gegenüber der Wirksamkeit humanistischer Ideen und dem Versuch ihrer Durchsetzung» (Poetik und Historik 194). The conclusion makes clear that Demba does not succeed; ideas do not have effectiveness in humanizing society. But, given Demba’s behavior, we might not want to label him as a defender of humane ideas even if he is a representative of intellectual matters.

20 In his very short analysis of Zwischen neun und neun, Lauener notes that even in the imaginary dream world Demba’s ego experiences «zwei fiktive Erzählebenen» (173).

21 One is reminded of the equally solipsistic and iconoclastic Vittorin in Perutz’s novel Wohin rollst du, Äpfelchen … who claims, «Ich will nicht in die Tretmühle zurück, ich habe einen Abscheu vor diesem Wort ‹gesicherte Lebensstellung›. Ich will frei sein, unabhängig sein, ich will für mich selbst arbeiten und nicht für anderer Leute Tasche» (236).

22 Mandelartz believes that Perutz’s characters can only succeed in their essentially hopeless worlds through deception: «So erscheint in den Romanen ein Weltentwurf, demzufolge der Mensch dem Schicksal erbarmungslos ausgeliefert ist. Seine Würde erhält er aber nicht etwa in dessen Anerkennung, sondern in der (letztlich erfolglosen) Revolte. Gegen die nach unerbittlichen Gesetzen der Ökonomie ablaufende Geschichte können sich Liebe, Gnade und Menschlichkeit nur temporär und nur auf dem Umweg über Lüge und Schein behaupten» («Leo Perutz» 1149).

23 One wonders whether Perutz had in mind the devious figure of Stephanos Skuludis (1838–1928), the Greek international diplomat, banker, and arms dealer who became the Prime Minister of Greece but was forced to step down in 1916 (perhaps because he would not accede to the Allies’ demands) and was later imprisoned. Perhaps this is further indication that the time of the action of the plot is 1916.

24 Wendelin Schmidt-Dengler observes, «Daß Perutz in seinen Texten leicht erkennbare Zeitbezüge ausklammert, ist kein Beweis dafür, daß er seine Epoche nicht wahrgenommen hätte; ebensowenig läßt sich aber daraus folgern, daß in diesem Werk nicht auch die historischen Vorgänge in eigentümlicher Transformation erkennbar sind» (16). I had initially assumed the «Rücktritt» referred to the controversial Count Badeni’s dismissal in 1897, which would have placed the action of the novel twenty years earlier; Badeni, however, was not Hungarian, but Polish.
With respect to the prospects of political action, Perutz remained skeptical. Thus Müller: «Als Skeptiker und Wahrscheinlichkeitstheoretiker faßte Perutz Politik als ein weitgehend anomisches Geschehen auf, das den einzelnen zwar nicht von verantwortungsbewußtem Handeln dispensiert, ihn jedoch daran hindert, allzu große Hoffnungen in den Erfolg politischen Handelns zu investieren» (Leo Perutz 68).

Of interest is also her finding: «On a typical day in 1917, shoppers had formed 783 lines outside of shops or market stalls around Vienna» (82). Yet in Zwischen neun und neun Perutz does not reflect these widespread concerns. Nor are they found in Perutz’s diary apparently, as Siebauer notes, «Doch die Sorge um die tägliche Nahrung bestimmte das Leben von Leo Perutz keineswegs. In seinem Tagebuch liest man meist nur, mit wem und in welchem Restaurant er «genachtmahlt habe»» (97).

In 1939 Perutz writes from Tel Aviv to Richard A. Berman, «[…] so ist und bleibt es meine Überzeugung, daß nur durch ihn [Bund der Legitimistischen Jüdischen Frontsoldaten] übernationale Staaten möglich werden. Nationalstaaten in diesem Europa bedeuten immer den Krieg. Übernationale monarchistische Staaten sind die einzige wirkliche Friedensgarantie» (qtd. in Müller, Leo Perutz 62).

Perutz’s description of the booky-domino, allegedly derived from a bookmaker game, has found its way into the wikipedia.de website: http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buki-domino:


Vor jeder Spielrunde können neben den beteiligten Spielern auch die Zuschauer, die Galeristen, auf einen der vier aktiven Spieler setzen (Zitat: «wie auf Rennpferde»). Diese Wetten werden beim Spielleiter, dem Buki, abgeschlossen.


Siebauer (129–30) tells us that Perutz too could on occasion engage in fisticuffs: Perutz was involved in one physical argument in the Café Herrenhof when he insulted a young woman who had come to express her high regard for his writing. An acquaintance by the name of Opaltek took offense and a «Handgemenge» ensued. Similarly, he offended the writer Otto Soyka by saying that everyone had an animal that looks like him and that his own animal was Soyka.

Lüth sees the influence of Arthur Schnitzler, whom Perutz in fact esteemed, in Zwischen neun und neun: «Die psychische Verfassung Dembas, seine extremen Bewußtseinsvorgänge, die ihn als gesellschaftlichen Außenseiter, der das Leben in seinen Konventionen als Gefängnis schlechtin empfindet, charakterisieren, werden durch diesen mo-
mentanen Einsatz von Erlebter Rede und Inneren Monolog dem Leser intensiv und unmittelbar nachvollziehbar gemacht. Vor allem an solchen Stellen wird der erzähltechnisch-stilistische Einfluß von Arthur Schnitzler auf Perutz greifbar» (Fin de siècle 45).

Surely Jan Christoph Meister is correct to challenge the reader of Perutz to discern some meaning in the novels (even if the author does not) when he observes, «… [Perutz’s] œuvre as such should rather be read and appreciated as an investigation into the possibilities of reinstating the category of «meaning» in the modern world, apparently governed by blind coincidence» (Leo Perutz 328).

Müller says something similar, i.e., his identity is what he produces: «Im Mittelpunkt seiner Romane steht nicht das sich selbst deutende oder vom Autor analysierte, sondern das wollende und handelnde Ich, das, erfolgreich oder scheiternd, seine Identität und seine Lebensgeschichte, wie brüchig auch immer, selbst produziert» (Leo Perutz 123).

In «Structure narrative» Müller extends this interpretation – that the individual would not learn if he were given a second chance at life – to the larger political scale, namely that after World War I Perutz saw a similarly ineducable humanity: «L’interprétation que j’esquisse est compatible avec celle que Perutz lui-même donne de son texte. Si Perutz, en 1917, avait modelé le destin d’un individu incapable de tirer profit de sa rencontre avec la mort pour une seconde vie, il pouvait, après la fin de la Première Guerre mondiale, avoir le sentiment que les peoples dan leur ensemble n’avaient tiré aucune leçon de la guerre et de la rencontre ave la mort» (89).

Additionally, Braidotti’s nomadism is developed with respect to female subjectivity and may be perhaps only marginally applicable to Demba.

Dr. Friebe tells Dr. Amberg, «Der Traum gibt uns mit verschwenderischen Händen, was uns das karge Leben schuldig bleibt.»

37 See John 21 and 32.

38 Information is based on an email from Professor Chris Harwood, a lecturer at Columbia University. He observes that Demba may be an offshoot of Dembo, a more typically Jewish name in Eastern Europe.

39 I am indebted to Professors Aleksa Fleszar and Stephen Trzaskoma of the University of New Hampshire for their assistance in understanding the etymological origin and the Slavicness of the names.

40 I am grateful to Professor Jirí Rejzek of the Karl’s University in Prague for this information and to former student Renata Horakova who served as contact to Professor Rejzek.

41 John references Norbert Elias’ and John Scotson’s theory of the established and the outsiders, according to which «locals who had been themselves immigrants and could be categorized as belonging to the same social class assumed a higher position in the social hierarchy vis-à-vis the new arrivals» (41).

42 Le Rider draws on Georg Simmel’s understanding of the crisis of the individual as a crisis of identity that results in the desocialisation of the individual. He includes a quote from Simmel’s analysis of Rodin: «Denn das Wesen der Moderne überhaupt ist Psychologismus, das Erleben und Deuten der Welt gemäß den Reaktionen unsres Inneren und eigentlhel als einer Innenwelt, die Auflösung der festen Inhalte in das flüssige Element der Seele, aus der alle Substanz herausgelautert ist, und deren Formen nur Formen von Bewegungen sind» (Simmel 184). Demba is nothing if not «Formen der Bewegung.»


Leo Perutz’s Zwischen neun und neun


Schmidt-Dengler, Wendelin. «Der Autor Leo Perutz im Kontext der Zwischenkriegszeit.» Forster and Müller, eds. 9–22.


