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Robert Dassanowsky

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*Reading Leo Perutz's Novel Fragment
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Robert Dassanowsky

Fictional texts dealing with the Austrian Anschluss written as it was occurring or within the space of the first years of its occurrence are extremely rare. Joseph Roth's *Die Kapuzinergruft* (1938) only hints at the coming catastrophe; Friedrich Torberg's *Auch das war Wien* was written during his early exile and published posthumously in 1984; the almost unknown novel by Rudolf Frank of Germans in exile in Vienna ultimately facing annexation, *Fair Play, oder Es kommt nicht zum Krieg: Roman einer Emigration in Wien*, was based on the author's experiences and written in his second exile in Zürich in 1938 but was not published until sixty years later.

Perhaps the most intriguing attempt at fictionalizing the immediate atmosphere of Nazi Vienna, Leo Perutz's *Mainacht in Wien*, is a novel fragment of three chapters written in 1938 and abandoned when the author and his family managed to secure exile in Palestine. The unfinished novel is a unique work for Perutz in other ways. The author is mostly known for intricately detailed historical novels.¹ His novel, *Die dritte Kugel* (1915), and novella, *St. Petri-Schnee* (1933), the latter of which influenced *Der Baron Bagge* (1936), Alexander Lernet-Holenia's novella on war, memory and an alternate dream life, and these two works are now considered the origin of Austrian literary magical realism (Lüth). Common to both is an isolated "verschwommener Schauplatz" and the passivity of the central character, who remains an observer in both reality and dream worlds (Dassanowsky, *Phantom Empires* 62–63).

Despite the time of its origin, *Mainacht in Wien* avoids direct political commentary and conveys a disaster in its visual literary style that approxima-

tes cinematic language, as we shall trace here. The work can be said to feature *mise-en-scène*, repetition of visual motifs, and a frame story (at least for the three existing chapters) with successful and detailed flashback sequences. But most of all, it made use of characters written in the tradition of cinematic types that were not only influenced by the Austrian film of the 1920s and 1930s but also call to mind actual performers who would be cast as Perutz's characters in the novel-as-film. Even with only three chapters written, the crossover into the two film genres—the Viennese film and the nascent Hollywood noir thriller—shows that for Perutz, Nazism was to become part of the palimpsest of Vienna.

Tracing Perutz's attempted transformation into a writer of film scenarios will allow us a glimpse into the politics and logistics of film production on the eve of Europe's Nazi cataclysm.

Perutz between Vienna and Hollywood

Working on his novel *Der schwedischer Reiter* in 1933 and in dire financial straits resulting from the expense of a second marriage and the ban of his work in Germany, Perutz began coauthoring boulevard plays with Hans Adler and Paul Frank. These plays were financially successful but did not lead to a continued relationship. An unexpected interest in bringing Perutz's 1928 novel *Der Kossak und die Nachtigall* (written with Paul Frank) to the Austrian screen in 1934 as a vehicle for opera star Jarmila Novotna resulted in payment for film rights and gave Perutz the idea of a following a new, possibly more lucrative career direction—writing for film (Müller, *Biographie* 262).

This option may not have been immediately evident at the time. Austria's cinema under Austrofascism in the 1930s was divided into two camps following the Aryanization laws in Germany, its most significant market. The first was mainstream production featuring significant Austrian and German stars working for major companies that would have to prove that its cast and crew consisted of "Aryans," which would allow the film to be imported and marketed in Germany. This was not the case for either Hungarian or Italian film, and so the legislation was obviously meant to add pressure to the fragile Austrian economy and infiltrate its film industry in a move toward its ultimate annexation. At first, any migrant or Austrian Jewish talent that remained to work on the Aryanized film projects bound for German release would have to do so under assumed names or without credit—as in the case of Max Ophüls's pro-

duction of Arthur Schnitzler's *Liebelei* (Germany 1933), which was allowed release in the new National Socialist state to avoid losses for the German production investment but with no credit for the film's director.

The other industry for Austrian film has become known as the independent or *Emigrantenfilm*. This sector featured German Jewish and anti-Nazi exile talent that had chosen Vienna instead of Hollywood upon Hitler's rise in 1933, alongside Austrian Jewish talent and a mix of performers from Hungary and Czechoslovakia. The latter comprised the coproduction venues for this transnational Austrian film, which was popular in Austria and exported throughout Europe and beyond but was forbidden in Germany.

Neither industry, however, was completely defined by that German audience. One of Austria's highly regarded productions of the era was *Nur ein Komödiant/Only a Comedian* (Austria 1935), a period melodrama with satirical aspects set in the eighteenth century that attacked the capricious and corrupt politics of absolute monarchy and court intrigue. The film was made as an Aryanized production and was thus curiously welcomed for German distribution, even though it clearly attacked a veiled representation of fascist tyranny. What "saved" it for the German market was that it could also be interpreted as a narrative that celebrated the heroic qualities of the German *Volk* against aristocratic self-interest.

In this space between two parts of the Austrian film industry, Perutz entered the picture, with experience that he clearly hoped would pay off. Directed by the often politically critical Weimar German director Erich Engel, who was not welcome in the Nazi film industry in Berlin, *Nur ein Komödiant* had a script that was credited to Wolfgang von Herter, but it had been in fact written by Josef Than with assistance from Perutz (Müller, *Biographie* 262). Perutz was also buoyed from his near-continuous depression during this period by payment in dollars for the American rights to his 1930 play *Die Reise nach Preßburg* from an Austrian actor in Hollywood, Josef Schildkraut, who also suggested that the Perutz-Adler play *Morgen ist Feiertag* might be bought for a Hollywood production. This gave Perutz brief hope for a Hollywood writing career, but Schildkraut's direction of *Die Reise nach Preßburg* was unsuccessful, and a film version of *Feiertag* was shelved (Müller, *Biographie* 263).

This was not Perutz's first experience with a promising Hollywood connection. That had come over a decade earlier, with his first great success in writing, the novel *Zwischen neun und neun*, published in 1918, which is a text that in no way predicted the narrative complexity and period settings of his la-

ter novels. It was wholly contemporary in inspiration and so suggested to the film establishment his ability to write contemporary thriller scenarios that might find their way onto the screens of the era. Retitled *Freiheit* for its serialization in Vienna, Berlin, and Prague and translated into eight languages, this atmospheric chase scenario was built around the first of his antiheroes, Stanislaus Demba, a pessimistic petit-bourgeois man of unstable qualities and a strong survivor instinct in a world that is becoming increasingly irrational. Just as he finds the courage to break from convention and openly confess his love to an office employee, Sonja, who has no feelings for him, he finds himself in handcuffs, wrongly under arrest for thievery and suspected of being a hashish addict. The novel follows his escape from the police and his subsequent dark misadventures to free himself from his shackles and to attain the near-impossible goal of locating the money he needs to escape the city with Sonja. The pessimistic ending reveals that the chase and Dumba's hope, in a world of corruption and illusion, could only be a fantasy.

The novel was so popular that a stage adaptation found success, which prompted MGM in Hollywood to purchase the film rights for a silent production in 1922, with a contract that was later renewed for sound. Although the film was never made, MGM refused to release the rights to this property and apparently still holds them today. Alfred Hitchcock's admiration of the novel also had a lasting effect on the filmmaker (Müller, "Nachwort" 215). Perutz's text apparently provided Hitchcock with an idea that became one of the director's strongest tropes: an everyman thrown into a crisis beyond his understanding or control, which leads to his self-discovery and determination in survival. The novel's image of an untraditional and self-aware female character also helped Hitchcock meld the *femme fatale* and *femme fragile* of the turn of the century into a more human female construction in early British cinema.

Freiheit most potently influenced Hitchcock's 1927 silent film *The Lodger: A Story of the London Fog* (UK), based on a novel and play by Marie Belloc Lowndes about a man wrongly accused of murder. The chase aspect involving the police tracing the escaping victim/hero in handcuffs across an unfriendly urban landscape in an almost hopeless attempt to free himself was pure Perutz, rather than its ostensible source. The trope also appears in his first breakthrough and more mature sound film, *The 39 Steps* from 1935. Moreover, British screenwriter and producer Eric Ambler claims to have been so taken by Perutz's *Freiheit* that he wrote an early one-act play mirroring much

of Perutz's story (Müller, "Nachwort" 215). As Perutz's biographer Hans Harald Müller posits, the collision of dream or illusion and a careless world are to be found throughout the author's *oeuvre*. The particular theme that man does not necessarily grow wise due to a near-death experience is a strong theme in literature beginning at the end of the nineteenth century, ranging from Dostoyevsky's *The Idiot* to Schnitzler's *Leutnant Gustl* (Müller, "Nachwort" 218). This receives a most poignant allegorical application in the author's reflection of a postimperial Austria so politically and philosophically at odds with the near-death of its culture and identity in *Freiheit* as well. The seemingly non-threatening urban landscape in *Freiheit*, which reveals itself to be a sinister, faceless minefield of shadowy personalities and illusory hope, is an early synthesis of the Kafkaesque with Expressionism and the Freudian symbolism that would inform Surrealism.

More significantly for Perutz's subsequent work with film, the struggle of an innocent man alienated from society and yet morally determined to free himself and right a wrong in a cynical world foreshadows the concept of the Hollywood film noir. It does so without moving through the specific literary phase of the *roman noir*, the American crime novels dealing with anti-heroic emotion triggered by crime and violence of the kind written by Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, and James M. Cain in the 1920s through the 1940s. It was these and other "hardboiled" writers who later provided the material for screen adaptations by the Austrian and German emigrant filmmakers in Hollywood who had fled genocidal National Socialism in Europe. These experiences found expression in films that positioned the victim as the protagonist rather than siding with a society of ambiguous values or ineffectual representatives of law.

Noir coming from hard-boiled detective novels was not the only source for the genre. While Austrian cinema never managed to sustain expressionism or the "street film" of Weimar Germany (for instance, in the movies of Lang and Pabst) or the film noir style that emerged from Hollywood's collision with the émigrés from fascist oppression who melded their abusive experiences in Europe and a psychological approach to visual language from Expressionism with American crime drama, it did give birth to one of the unique moments of proto-noir in Western film. It was initiated by the very thing that eventually inspired noir in Hollywood, the exile of talent from Nazi Germany, while facilitating a nearly unknown transition into the soon-to-be iconic Hollywood versions of the genre.

Again, a clear historical link exists. Fleeing Nazi Germany in 1933, Austrian-born filmmaker Rudolf Katscher (also known as Rudolph Cartier) arrived in Vienna, literally carrying the script to what was to have been his next German-made film (Moritz, Moser, and Leidinger 339). It was to be a thriller that embodied the expressionistic and psychological qualities of Fritz Lang's *M* (Germany 1931) and the more advanced crime commentaries of Lang's *Das Testament des Dr. Mabuse/The Testament of Dr. Mabuse* (Germany 1933), made before the Austrian-born Lang fled to Hollywood. The script would become Austria's only proto-noir film, *Unsichtbare Gegner* a.k.a. *Öl ins Feuer/Invisible Adversaries* (Austria 1933), a film that is both stylistically and narratively as satisfying as any in the later Hollywood genre. Fleeing Berlin along with Katscher was the producer of the film, the Austro-Hungarian born Sam Spiegel, and actors Oskar Homolka and Peter Lorre. All would participate in Katscher's Vienna production.

The film's narrative follows a Brazilian engineer, Peter Ugron, who aims to thwart a conspiracy to fake geological surveys regarding a dry Brazilian oil field so that it may be sold in Europe. Although only Ugron (and the audience) is aware of the fraud from the start of the film, a trail of deceit, espionage, and murder reaches from South America to Europe in an attempt by various parties to attain the dream of success in the "großen weiten und reichen Welt." Not unimportantly, the film's thriller narrative can be read as a political commentary on the hopeless and destructive desire to recapture a mythic greatness at any cost, a critical commentary on the seduction and deceit of European fascism. Vienna is hardly recognizable in this film, in which it functions rather as a stand-in for urban Europe as a whole, with the film's *mise-en-scène* creating a labyrinth of faceless modern interiors and alienating corporate exteriors. Not just noir's compulsory conspiratorial atmosphere, but also the ambiguous *femme fatale* character that would become a requirement for Hollywood noir is fully developed here in the character of Sybil, a double agent who ultimately saves Ugron from being murdered.

Perutz's hopes of utilizing his specific literary-cinematic talents thus grew out of the real evolution of Austrian filmmaking at the start of the German Nazi era. He had demonstrated his command of the requisite stories and character types with his early *Freiheit* success, and he might have been able to translate this to actual Austrian film now that Katscher's film had es-

tablished the assumption that the public indeed had a taste for the anti-hero psychological-crime genre. Yet his hopes of continuing work with Joseph Than did not materialize.

Instead, Perutz managed to complete his complex period novel *Der schwedischer Reiter* and publish it to praiseworthy Austrian reviews in 1936. It was of course banned in Nazi Germany, and he failed to market the novel as a film property to Warner Brothers in Hollywood on the basis of his earlier sale of *Freiheit's* rights to MGM and his more recent efforts in Austrian film. This property also presented a clear problem as an expensive project for a major Vienna studio, which would ensure box office success by "Aryanizing" the production for the lucrative German import market. Perutz would receive no credit for the original text or a possible screen treatment, and the novel had simply become too well known to present it under a pseudonym. The independent *Emigrantenfilm*, which did produce screenplays by Jewish authors and included a Jewish cast, production, and crew members, could simply not afford the level of investment required for credible production of such a script, given its spotty distribution. Late baroque Silesian setting of the novel was also problematic in other ways: The independent films that were most successful in a home market increasingly dominated by large-budget German and aryanized Austrian productions were contemporary comedies or Viennese Film, which also continued to have box office potential in Europe and Latin America. Moreover, Silesia would have found little identification abroad, beyond being an area known for territorial conflict between Germany and Poland.

Severe financial need and the lack of any forthcoming work in cinema thus turned Perutz back to writing novels. The three chapters of what would be, in many ways, the most Austrian of all his novels, *Mainacht in Wien*, were written following his and his family's legal departure from Vienna in July 1938, during their stop at Forte dei Marmi in Italy, as they awaited passage by ship to Palestine (Müller, *Biographie* 283–90). The text fragment clearly harks back to his first success, *Freiheit*, the embryonic and undeveloped possibility of the Austrian *roman noir*, and makes use of the cinematic language he had learned during his brief work in Austrian film. Indeed, the fragment seems to be written wholly with the film medium in mind, and using a specific cinematic/visual descriptive style and narrator/camera point of view.

From *Roman Noir* to Literary “Film Noir”

Reading *Mainacht in Wien* today, even as a fragment, immediately reveals its filmic potential. One can envision it in adaptation as a Hollywood anti-Nazi romantic melodrama, populated in its character roles with the very émigrés that had fled the *Anschluss*.² It also demonstrates a curious proto-film noir consistency of everyman-conspiracy rather than the essentialist *roman noir* “hard-boiled” formula, and without springing directly from the Hollywood/Central European synthesis that generated the Hollywood film noir. Instead, Perutz’s early novel *Freiheit* (which, as noted above, is at the root of early Hitchcock), his work in film, and his very possible knowledge of Austria’s proto-film noir, *Unsichtbare Gegner*, contributes to make the *Mainacht* fragment a unique crossover of film style into literature. His particular achievement is an unusual fusion, obliterating the construct of the sentimental and reactionary “topos Vienna” in the Viennese Film and simultaneously establishing a literary imitation of *film noir* that equates Nazism with gangsterism. Katscher’s *Unsichtbare Gegner* film, which had moved beyond Weimar psychological/crime film novels in its actual adaptation and production in Vienna, and Perutz’s unfinished novelization of what might have been a full-blown Hollywood-style film noir about Vienna suggest that the cinema’s noir genre had significant Austrian-German antecedents before the exile work of Lang, Ulmer, and Wilder in Hollywood in the 1940s. Unfortunately, Perutz lost interest in the novel as he distanced himself from the *Anschluss* and Europe, and so that second alternate film noir from Austria (and necessarily produced outside of the annexed country) did not come into being as a film.

Mainacht in Wien nonetheless carries significant weight of the moment as a document of the transition between Austria and the *Ostmark* (Hitler’s Austrian “province”). Hans Harald Müller, for instance, considers the fragment to be among

den dokumentarisch genausten und literarisch gelungenen Darstellungen der Ereignisse und Atmosphäre in Wien nach dem Anschluss; es schilderte die Zerstörung der Welt, in der Perutz gelebt und sich eine literarische Existenz geschaffen hatte. . . . Die Wirkung des Fragments beruht sicher nicht zuletzt darauf, dass Perutz nicht die politische Anklage, sondern scharfe Ironie und Sarkasmus als distanzierende Erzählhaltung wählte. (Müller, “Nachwort” 234)

Perutz's work also documents the aesthetics and sensibilities that are at stake in creating between the genres. Catriona Firth states in her recent study on literary to film adaptations that "film studies have long imported concepts from literary theory. Traffic in the other direction has been remarkably sparse" (Firth 22). Her discussion of the translation of traditional boundaries that separate literary point of view and the literary work's more "literal" treatment in film draws out a definition of the spectatorial gaze and the illusion of perception that can be aligned with a literary "gaze" through utilizing both psychoanalytic film theory or narrative perspective. The process of classical suturing, which masks the invisible gaze of the filmmaker and inserts the viewer into a signifying chain as it establishes a point of view "mimics the subject's inauguration into language and her entry into the Symbolic order, as she assumes her place in relation to the fictional narrative" (Firth 22).

Despite its fragmentary state, Perutz's *Mainacht in Wien* is an almost perfect subject for this suggested cinematic reading of literature, as it in fact suggests what would later be known as film novelization. Although without an original film to novelize, Perutz's novel is instead "cinematized"—blocked out in ways that draw the written text closer to a cinematic treatment (and a mimicry of visual elements) that is true to its genre. The three chapters set up a fascinating thriller narrative against the backdrop of what is the genre's typical corruption of society and its lawmakers specifically, as they are set from March 22 to May 30, 1938, during the first months of the new order of Austrian annexation. Just as National Socialist ideology was infiltrating itself into all levels of life, the film shows how its historical backdrop slowly overwhelms the central story, until the atmosphere is suffocating.

Mainacht's central Jewish antihero character, Dr. Georg Schwarz, a Vienna newspaper editor, is dismissed from his position shortly after the German invasion on March 12, 1938, and his two male friends attempt to arrange for a legal emigration by visa, but their hopes are shattered by the acts of the new regime. They decide to flee illegally across the border to Czechoslovakia, but having trusted a swindler, this also fails. They return to Vienna, with little hope to escape from what is daily becoming an ever more precarious situation. Suddenly, one member of the group surprises the rest by introducing a mysterious but well-considered new plan, the details of which are obviously meant to unfold in the unwritten continuation of the novel. The fragment unfortunately reveals nothing of its nature.

At the same time, *Lizzi*, an attractive and self-aware young woman from Schwarz's past, suddenly appears. The daughter of a wealthy Jewish family forced out of their villa and into difficult financial and living circumstances, she has secured most of her foreign visa requirements for emigration to England, except for those that have to come directly from Nazi officials. Instead of completing her successful university education to become a chemist, she will now have to work as a maid in Manchester. Schwarz indicates that he will continue to work in the newspaper business once he relocates to France. Suggestions of their attraction, their unrequited love, and her plans for marriage to another, now apparently called off by the non-Jewish suitor himself, emerge in brief references in what is an oddly short-circuited farewell. As she disappears into the distance, Schwarz ruminates on the possible reason of having seen her just before his plans for escape would take place. The narrator, in the knowledgeable but suspenseful manner of the *noir* film, suggests that Schwarz's reasoning is wrong and that there will be yet a second young woman who may play a particular role in this story ("... eine überragende Rolle geradezu, und dennoch keine," 88).³ The fragment ends there.

An examination of the text's narrative *topoi*, imagery, and point of view easily displays the strong cinematic style Perutz uses, which already anticipates the *noir* film and darkly satirizes and obliterates the Viennese Film, making a transition between the fragile, nostalgic, and romantic elements of its narrative "topos Vienna" style and their ultimate failure in the National Socialist setting. The very title of the novel, *Mainacht in Wien*, might have suited an operetta or a romantic comedy in any 1930s Austrian- or even German-produced Viennese Film setting, but the shifting of this genre's conventions due to the Nazi annexation is what here creates much of the ironic style. Perutz's Vienna is no less a romantic setting in this fragment, even as it gains aspects of a police state. A reignited love affair between the sophisticated characters of Georg Schwarz and *Lizzi* seems logical as the extension of the narrative past of the fragment, given the tease of *Lizzi*'s appearance and brief flirtation and Georg's barely stifled desire for her, but we know that they are both Jewish and that the year is 1938.

The fragment-as-film is also given a cinematic "voiceover" narration by an omniscient speaker who continuously creates tension by judging characters and their actions and ironically suggesting what may yet happen and what it may well mean, but without full disclosure of causalities to the reader. This narrator is also functional in framing the significant flashback scenes. As

it could have been in the cinematic form of the day, the POV of this cinematic novel is sutured to the narrator who also at times suggests the gaze of the camera and who could be seen as the camera's surrogate, mimicking the spectatorial gaze for the reader. As in both noir film and Viennese Film, the city functions as a major character, and so the novel mimics the establishing shot of both genres by opening with a panoramic description of location. This also serves to overlay (and thus deconstruct) the romantic image of the city from the canonical Viennese Film of the 1930s to introduce the transition into the "crime city" (Nazi Vienna) in the film noir.

The opening "shot" of the first chapter, subtitled, in an ironic reference to Perutz's historic-epic novels, "Rückkehr aus dem Tartarus," focuses on Dr. Schwarz taking a morning stroll in the landscape of the city's semi-rural Heiligenstadt district, specifically observing the *Beethovenstätten* (memorials at sites where Beethoven lived) and the family villa of his former romantic interest Lizzi. It is filled with *mise-en-scène* details of the romantic/nostalgic "topos Vienna" from 1930s Viennese Film: a fresh early spring morning in Vienna, a cultured *flâneur*, indications of Biedermeier architecture, and other elements associated with great Viennese culture. Allusions to Beethoven and the romantic suggestion of the main character's longing for the Viennese beauty no longer waiting for him behind the walls of the elegant haute bourgeois family villa conjure the tropes of the film genre and its history (which included several composer biopics). As in most of the early Willi Forst/Walter Reisch core Viennese Films of the early 1930s, there also seems to be the suggestion of a central conflict regarding the choice of living a life for art or love (Dassanowsky, "Cinema Baroque").

To this point in the chapter, the spectator/reader familiar with the film genre would surmise that this moment might perhaps bring the couple together and that the choice that separated them would be romantically reexamined—at a *Heurigen* or a ball or both. However, this formula and the very genre of the Viennese Film at this time and this place are completely deflated by Schwarz's thought—one telegraphed to us by the narrator, as we "gaze" on the codified setting: "dieser Spaziergang ist sinnlos wie alles, was ich in der letzten Wochen getrieben habe" (57). Had a director committed this to film, the next establishing or rather re-establishing shot might have been the famous Vienna skyline, but now with a swastika flag draped across the Stephansdom. Instead, Perutz moves into a flashback. Ten days after the official "Umbruch," the "break" of regimes, Schwarz was promptly dismissed

from his position as editor of a large Vienna newspaper without any reason given. To help the reader/spectator follow the camera gaze and to imagine the event, the narrator informs them that he had suddenly been forbidden to enter the premises again (“Man hatte ihm nur eines Abend verwehrt, die Redaktionsräume zu betreten,” 57). His longtime role would be assumed by “Kollegen aus dem Reich.” This and nothing else allowed him to embark on his seemingly romantic or nostalgic Viennese *Spaziergang*, and any choice of creative life or love he might hold to is no longer of any consequence.

Most compellingly, the novel fragment’s frames what would be the introductory narrative as a flashback and suggests that there would be more convoluted storytelling throughout the planned novel. Both are standard aspects of mature noir films. In Georg Schwarz’s recollection, the Gestapo invades his apartment during breakfast, where he had been subsequently placed under house arrest, and he manages to answer only one of their many questions with an affirmative—that he is a non-Aryan. But here again, there is a moment of cinematic fusion: the scene in which they rifle through his stacks of newspapers and writings is one found in any image of a bureaucrat in Viennese film comedy, with every laughable cliché applied to officials trying to cover up their lack of skills. Schwarz’s time in jail following this event is a rather tolerable one, with decent food and only the denial of a shave and a cigarette to bother him. Here, not as the viewer would expect from the Gestapo, he is given a modicum of deference and an actual bed in his cell, being the “Zimmerältester,” the senior prisoner (a title satirizing Austria’s stereotypical love of titles, which is also a comedic point in Austrian film of the 1930s). These fatigued Vienna police officials do not seem to have managed the *Gleichschaltung* that would have turned Viennese into Nazis, and so they treat him instead with Kafkaesque confusion and distance—the only question asked of him is “Warum sind Sie hier?” (60). Given Perutz’s filmic/theatrical bent in this narrative, one can imagine a cameo by one of Vienna’s comic character actors softening the blow of the pointless examination by hinting at the third act of Johann Strauss’s operetta *Die Fledermaus* and the jailer’s interrogation after the Slivovitz has taken its effect. Without any charges to press against him, he is dismissed but not officially freed. Schwarz returns to his apartment, now shared by a housemate, Dr. Viktor Holzmann, “der geborene Pechvogel” (58)—another Viennese Film comic stereotype, the “Nörgler,” who now has the duty of announcing to Schwarz that the maid has just quit because she did not want to work for Jews. The dialogue between Holzmann and Schwarz

having to learn household tasks recalls the Viennese comedy film set pieces and the absurdist-tinged banter of Paul Hörbiger, Rudolf Carl, or Fritz Imhoff, especially as it turns to shaving, eating, drinking, and the ultimate plans for the evening, Their friend Richard would join them, and sometimes their neighbor, “der Oberstleutnant . . . es dürfte natürlich niemand sehen wenn er die Türe klopfte. ‘Verkehr mit Nichtariern!’ Es gibt in jedem Haus Denunzianten. Hat er sich aber doch nicht abhalten lassen. Ein anständiger Mensch, ein altösterreichischer Offizier” (61).

The mysterious character of the officer suggests the other targets of the Nazi regime beyond the Jews, particularly those who supported Catholic Austrofascism. Described as a former imperial officer, which suggests a lingering loyalty to the lost monarchy, if not actually to monarchism, he never actually appears in the fragment, and thus he represents the rapidly fading phantom of a more tolerant and cosmopolitan prewar Vienna.⁴ Richard, who apparently continues to value his rank in bourgeois society and insures that all are aware of his importance, is removed from his job in no less a brutal manner than his friends: “Richard läßt wieder einmal auf sich warten. Zu tun hat er gar nichts, er könnte pünktlich sein, den er ist natürlich auch nicht mehr bei seiner Bank, man hat ihn einfach auf die Straße geworfen nach fünfzehn Dienstjahren, aber er läßt deswegen den Kopf nicht hängen” (64). Perutz allows Richard only brief remarks in the fragment text, giving him a somewhat alienated presence, as if he does not fully accept the apparent threat. He later moves into the apartment of his two friends and brings along his skiing equipment and bust of Mozart—representing postimperial Austria as both Alpine and a site of high culture. Richard, who represents a male bourgeois type that was a standard in romantic comedy films of the 1930s, establishes the difference the Austrian and the German. Here, the character is directly defined by his symbolic attachments, and given his athletic/sporty nature but also his “Austrian” sensitivity (as opposed to the machismo of German leading men in Nazi German cinema), which is indicated by his love of classical music, the character suggests the leading men of the 1930s Austrian film, such as Wolf Albach-Redty, Hans Holt, or the matinee idol of the *Emigrantenfilm*, Hans Jaray. The roles played by these actors are linked to films with sport and ski settings or are found in period Viennese Film or romantic comedies in Vienna.

Conversation turns to Dr. Holzmann’s disgust at the students leaving the Gymnasium as a result of the anti-intellectualism of the new order, which is related to another from 1930s Viennese comedy professors or mentors versus

students. He rationalizes this in a rage of fantasy liberation; he might well become a “Schiffsteward,” given his knowledge of languages, which would ultimately be better than years of effort required to become a worthy academic and pedagogue. Holzmann infers his respect for the written “law,” but, as there is none to insist he continue as an unappreciated teacher, he dismisses the convention of duty. Yet this is highly problematic now that the written “law” he would purport to follow ironically has become a Nazi proscription that banishes him from his profession and society. One wonders what “laws” aimed against him Perutz may have planned for this intellectual character to follow out of respect for authority:

Ich habe immer schon den Tag verflucht, an dem mir eingefallen ist, Germanistik und alte Sprachen zu studieren. Kostbare Jahre habe ich verloren, aber noch ist es nicht zu spät. Wo, zum Teufel, steht geschrieben, daß ich mein Leben lang idiotische Manuskripte für stupide Verleger bearbeiten, Bürstenabzüge korrigieren und daneben noch denkfaulen Gymnasiasten ihre Lektionen eintrichtern muß? Nirgends steht das geschrieben. Zwei Schüler habe ich übrigens noch, fragt sich nur, wie lange ich sie behalte. (63)

Holzmann also transforms the actual political situation into a metafilmic metaphor: “Was jetzt die Auslandspresse über Wien schreibt, das liest sich wie der Nachruf auf einen gefeierten Filmstar, dem die Welt viele Stunden künstlerischen Genusses zu danken hat, und jetzt ist er uns entrissen, aber die grossen Filmproduzenten werden auch ohne ihn auskommen” (63–64). Holzmann and Richard have written letters to friends and supposed relatives around the world, desperately searching for visa sponsors. There is something akin to a momentary hope.

The second chapter’s title, “Ringsrum Stacheldraht,” is itself an ominous play on the many Austrian films that used the word *Ring* (referring to Vienna’s grand Ringstrasse) in their titles and were set on the Ringstrasse during the era. The title suggests that barbed wire now forms a ring around the city, turning Vienna into a concentration camp. Perutz may be referring to the camp at Dachau, the destination of many government officials and prominent society leaders of the Schuschnigg clerico-authoritarian Austrofascist regime arrested after the German invasion and the official government takeover by the Austrian National Socialist Party. We move a few weeks into the future, and the plans, which we now learn had been made following the last scene, have

all collapsed. Letters remain largely unanswered; the trio has pooled their savings in a communal fund to help one another; and Schwarz and Holzmann must soon vacate the premises. Just surviving the red tape of the new regime is time- and energy-consuming to the point of exhaustion, and they make no progress in leaving Vienna. Jews are being beaten and arrested in the streets and pulled out of their homes. Foreigners with no proper identification are taken to the camps.

With no possibility of legal exit, the idea of secret escape becomes central to the trio. The Czechoslovakian border becomes their target, and Jozsi, an amiable, middle-aged, polyglot waiter in an obscure café, is to provide the arrangements. The escape plan is discussed in exact detail, money for Jozsi and his helpers who are sworn to silence is exchanged, and, with a tip of a hat, he walks out the night before the planned escape and is never heard from again. The double-cross betrayal is pure film noir and recalls the deceptions of the swindlers in *Unsichtbare Gegner* who sell a nonexistent oil field to trusting investors. Nevertheless, following the days of depression and lethargy resulting from this swindle, Dr. Holzmann announces his mysterious and purportedly well-thought-out new plan.

The scenes of the third chapter are to be read as a cinematic parody of romantic cinematic themes from Austrian film of the 1930s—“Ein Stubenmädchen und ein Zeitungsverkäufer nehmen Abschied voneinander.” They bring us to the present, connecting with the opening scene of Dr. Schwarz in Heiligenstadt as he makes it to the Ringstrasse later the same day. This chapter is perhaps the most parodic of the Viennese Film. Given all that has occurred, Schwarz is now only concerned with delicacies, “Feinschmeckerei”—cigarettes for all, special coffee for Dr. Holzmann, and a bottle of Curaçao for Richard. As Georg Schwarz passes a bookstore, he recalls an outstanding bill and decides to correct his oversight. Having frequented the store for a decade, he is unprepared for the difference he discovers. Bookshelves with large bare spaces, the result of banned authors and titles, now feature Party literature, *Blut und Boden* novels about young farm lads who happily return to the countryside after corrosive experiences in the city, race-based fantasies based on ancient Germanic sagas, and thrillers about death rays and the forces of evil that desire to use them against Germany. Authors not explicitly forbidden or that have no importance to the new order are hidden in an alcove along with titles by Tolstoy, Stendahl, Flaubert, and Verlaine. Georg discovers “der blonde Riese” who owns the store to be Dutch; the proprietor

now displays his passport to reassure customers of his nationality and “Aryan” status. He confides to Georg his disgust with the regime, which has taken half of his inventory, and intimates that he intends to return to the Netherlands to open a lending library with books that he likes. He explains the absurdity of race-based censorship: “Nur Juden dürfen Heines Werke kaufen, es ist ihnen also geradezu ein Privileg eingeräumt. Gorki wiederum darf weder Jud noch Christ lesen. Warum? ‘Keine Ahnung’” (81).

The Anschluss has subverted the impressionistic sights and sounds of the cinematically “romantic” city into a sinister parody of the “normal” and expected. This destabilization of representations, a significant aspect of the film noir, indicates the demolition of traditional values of ethnicity, culture, and religion:

Die Blumenverkäuferinnen boten den Passanten ohne auf deren Rassenzugehörigkeit zu achten, ihre Ware an, und es erschien beinahe sonderbar, daß Flieder, Maiglökchen und Narzissen auch für Juden und Mischlinge ersten, zweiten oder dritten Grades dufteten und blühten. Arbeitslose hielten den Vorbeihastenden Ansichtskarten . . . und schrie dazu ‘Lachender Führer mit Sonderstämpäl!’ Und von den Kirchtürmen kam das Ave Maria-Läuten, das den Bewohnern der Großstadt nichts anders mehr bedeutet als ein leises, melodisches Klingen. . . . (78)

Vienna appears as part vandalized film set and part *terra incognita*, as posters cover architectural landmarks giving thanks to the Führer, papering over imperial “Hoflieferanten” signs at shops, along with absurd indications of “Reinblutiges Geschäft” or “Deutsch-arisich seit 1879” (77). Letters spelling “JUDE” are smeared in yellow paint across store windows, and a response intended to neutralize the “Ausgrenzung” of the Jewish owners is provided on a note attached to a door: “Frontsoldat, Kriegsinvaliden, Besitzer beider silberner Tapferkeitsmedaillen und des Signum Laudis” (77). Further: “Reichsdeutscher Besucher die meist in Gruppen auftraten fragten die Ihnen Entgegenkommenden nach dem Weg zum Stephansdom, zur Hofburg, oder zur Bierklinik. . . . Propagandaautos luden zum Betrug des *Stürmer* ein” (77). After years of National Socialist requirements that inhibited German citizens from visiting Austria,⁵ they now arrive *en masse* as tourists, to see a German Vienna that overnight has become a collection of what has been transformed into recognizable but slightly out-of-focus facades that they, too, had original-

ly seen in films. The notorious anti-Semitic Nazi German propaganda tabloid, *Der Stürmer*, accompanies them, seeming urgently to blot out any previous Viennese newsprint. The iconography could not be clearer.

Allusions to the Viennese Film thus not only celebrate its cultural imaginary with recognizable tropes but also equate the regime with *noir* gangsterism and deep social duplicity. Schwarz's experiences in Vienna's historic First District typify this overlay. As he passes an elegant café where he used to play chess and read foreign papers—"wo er wohl ein Jahr seines Lebens verbracht hatte" (81)—the ancient white-jacketed and -gloved waiter (the *Herr Ober* character so familiar to comic film palaver) recognizes Schwarz immediately and bows to greet him. The narrator describes the ultimate qualities of these worldly café waiters who know their guests, their titles, and their desires and remain perhaps the last bastion of the imperial Vienna—having once served Gustav Mahler, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Peter Altenberg, and Sigmund Freud.

In a blistering send-up of the type of dialogue often assigned to an actor like Szöke Szakáll with his grandfatherly bluster, or to Hans Moser and his self-conscious mumbling, either of whom might have made it believable, this ultimate deferential and genial Viennese cinema waiter type addresses Schwarz pointedly as "Herr Doktor" and inquires about his health.⁶ He also reveals, in an exasperated "Raunzen," his startling new circumstances: "ein Nazi bin ich halt," after which he adds bitter sarcasm to the genial exchange that often is the followup in such tropes: "Alle Tag geht's mir besser. Gar nicht mehr auszuhalten ist's vor lauter Freude. Den ganzen Tag könne ich Juchhe schreien . . ." (83). Under this cover, however, he manages to slip Schwarz the fraternal socialist handshake as he graciously bids him farewell.⁷

As Vienna falls into evening and Schwarz passes the darkened opera house on a side street on the way to his apartment, he hears Lizzi's voice calling him. His object of his desire appears seemingly out of nowhere to alter the course of his life, as is a common trope for the female lead character in noir novels and film. She has seemingly come to bid farewell and to explain her planned emigration from Nazi Vienna. Lizzi's blue silk dress and bolero jacket, which is pointedly observed and described, disconcertingly calls undue attention to her and both attracts and disturbs Schwarz. Lizzi's flirty nature contrasts with her sharp retorts in conversation, which also give her a quality of self-assuredness and a hint of aggressive sexuality, a duality that would have made her character suitable for a Viennese screwball comedy of

the era but also for the rare sophisticated melodrama in which an intelligent female character anchors the plot. Given the traces of personality that Perutz supplies, it is obvious that even if the character were not Jewish, her independent spirit would endanger her in the shadowy and corrupted noir Vienna of the *Ostmark*. Lizzi might well have been influenced by actresses such as Christl Mardayn, Hortense Raky, or even Nora Gregor,⁸ who played characters with a similar temperament in Austrian film and stage during the 1930s. This intelligent and carefree ingénue might later be revealed to be either a troubled but resilient noir heroine or even a *femme fatale*.

Mainacht: The Change of Political Seasons

For Perutz, Nazism revealed itself through the many-layered palimpsest of Vienna, through which other identities would display themselves, be blocked, or even be pulled forth. His literary *mise-en-scène* thus explicitly tracks the Viennese Film and the prefiguration of the noir film as they collide and as the latter subverts, distorts, and makes ineffective the aspects of the Viennese Film, as the Anschluss and Nazism absorbs all levels of Viennese life and culture. In only three chapters, Perutz manages to turn both the readers' memory of Vienna as real city, its Viennese Film topos, and romantic clichés into an ever more daunting labyrinth, a pattern he already perfected in his novel *Zwischen neun und neun/Freiheit* in 1918. The author uses the stereotypes of the Viennese Film to comment indirectly on this political change, while summoning up a distinctly darker fate for typical Viennese everymen and -women.

Although he had already noted "Finis Austriae" in his notebook on March 3, 1938, ten days before the German invasion and three months prior to his departure from Vienna en route to Palestine (Müller, *Biographie* 277–78), this novel fragment suggests that the event was not an end for Perutz but rather signaled the transformation of the known into a perversion of its former self. Translating the Anschluss and the *Judenverfolgung* by introducing scenes echoing contemporaneous entertainment film genres with their recognizable features, character types, and constellations would ultimately show that the cultural mythology of the National Socialist new order was indeed a theatrical/cinematic facade and that its power was nothing more than the thuggery and corruption of a film noir antagonist. The character population and the topoi that stem from the poetic realism of the Viennese Film disin-

tegrate in the collision with the brutality of Nazism-as-noir genre, but in this way, Perutz also points to the naïve and gullible Viennese Film types that cannot fathom the dislocation from their world into one of darkness and cruelty.

Ultimately, Perutz's narrative follows patterns that would become film noir formula and are already clearly displayed in *Freiheit*, which focuses on people caught in an undesired situation and who attempt to escape or battle hopelessness and even doom. Often this genre suggests that while the victims are not responsible for the situation, they may have allowed it to gain strength. Perutz does not take on Austrofascism per se but suggests that at least in general, his corrupted Vienna in the novel fragment was not as resisted as it might have been, nor was it expected to be as brutal as it is depicted. Particularly the madness behind the absurdities indicates Expressionism at the root of noir. As is the hallmark of noir, there seems to be no return from a world that is inherently corrupt (Ballinger and Graydon 4). Perutz's novel fragment, like the singular *Unsichtbare Gegner* film, supports the more recent belief in film scholarship that noir began far earlier than the canonical films of the late 1940s and 1950s; the synthesis of socio-political commentary, pessimism, and expressionist-influenced style occurred before the classic Hollywood genre in Germany and Austria.

This fragment in the early stages of its narrative also leads to speculation as to how Perutz would have resolved the plot and the growing subplots. Would its allusions to Viennese Film return or even intensify to provide an ironic or perhaps magical realist resolution (given Perutz's expertise in that style as well), or would the novel have grown darker, ultimately standing as a monument to inhumanity? Surely, Perutz would not have wanted to predict something akin to the Holocaust with this text, despite the escalating madness that surrounds the characters and their growing noir "existential bitterness" (Silver and Ward 6). The final mood of the unfinished and sophisticated stylistic experiment of *Mainacht in Wien* seems mysteriously promising. Perhaps the realization of the ineradicable doom that Perutz and his family managed to avoid caused him to put down pen and forestall the cinematic delusions of his characters.

Robert Dassanowsky is professor of German and Film Studies and director of the Film Studies program at the University of Colorado–Colorado Springs. He is co-founder of the International Alexander Lernet-Holenia Society and Fellow of the Royal Historical Society and serves on several festival, editorial,

and advisory boards. He is also active as an independent film producer. His books include *Phantom Empires: The Novels of Alexander Lernet-Holenia and the Question of Postimperial Austrian Identity* (Ariadne 1996); *Austrian Cinema: A History* (McFarland 2005); *New Austrian Film* (with Oliver Speck, Berghahn 2011); *The Nameable and the Unnameable: Hofmannsthal's Der Schwierige Revisited* (with Martin Liebscher, Iudicium 2011); *Tarantino's Inglourious Basterds: A Manipulation of Metacinema* (ed., Continuum 2012); *World Film Locations: Vienna* (ed., Intellect 2012); and *Screening Transcendence: Film under Austrofascism and the Hollywood Hope, 1933–1938* (Indiana UP 2018). He is a past president of the Austrian Studies Association.

Notes

1. They range from Mexico under Cortez, Renaissance Italy, the court of the Holy Roman Empire in Prague, and France in the sixteenth century to Sweden in the eighteenth century and Spain in the Napoleonic era, all with strong meditative qualities and metaphysical underpinnings regarding the collisions of independent will and fate. Titles include *Der Marques de Bolibar* (1920), *Die Geburt des Antichrist* (1921), *Der Meister des Jüngsten Tages* (1923), *Turlupin* (1924), *Der schwedische Reiter* (1936), *Nachts unter der steinernen Brücke* (1953), *Der Judas des Leonardo* (posthumously published in 1959).

2. Frank Borzag's *The Mortal Storm* (USA 1940), James Whale's *They Dare Not Love* (USA 1941), Michael Curtiz's *Casablanca* (USA 1942), Herman Shumlin's *Watch on the Rhine* (USA 1943), are noir examples of Hollywood's blending of romance and adventure with anti-Nazi propaganda. Only one such anti-Nazi film would attempt to be quite as trans-genre as Perutz seems to have intended for his unfinished novel *Mainacht in Wien*: Leo McCarey's *Once upon a Honeymoon* (USA 1942). Also beginning in Vienna at the *Anschluss*, it attempted to mix screwball comedy and the star qualities of Cary Grant and Ginger Rogers into a romantic film that ranged from broad physical humor to censorship skirting dialogue about sterilization of Jews, and to ostensibly the first concentration camp set piece in Hollywood film. The result was a nothing less than a muddled and unsuccessful film bordering on the tasteless, in part because the different styles and genres were not successfully blended in Sheridan Gibney's screenplay and remained unbalanced and isolated under the director's unsubtle hand. Perhaps only the satire of Ernst Lubitsch and later Billy Wilder could carry such serious topics and underscore the inhumanity with absurdity. Perutz's unfinished novel is indeed subtle in its humor and in what sparse romance there is. Its noir quality, while far more threatening than the tone of MacCarey's film, also allows for human characterizations rather than caricature.

3. All quotes from the novel fragment originate in Perutz, *Mainacht in Wien*, and are noted parenthetically in the text.

4. Perutz avoids dealing with any division of a pre-Anschluss "Red" (Socialist) and "Black" (Christian Social and Conservative) Vienna that also created real or imagined "Je-

wish space” in the city as the author did with the Leopoldstadt district in his “Skizzen aus der Ukraine,” which “mocks the ‘dream’ of Vienna held by many emigrant Eastern European Jews” (Silverman 119). By placing a gentile “Old-Austrian” officer as neighbor to the Jewish Dr. Schwarz, he symbolically (on a bourgeois level) maintains victimization of all the non-pan-German or non-Nazi Viennese population in what suggests ghettoization, as Schwarz’s apartment grows from one to three Jewish inhabitants.

5. Under the “Tausend Mark Sperre” instituted by the Third Reich in 1933, Germans desiring to visit Austria would be required to pay one thousand Reichsmarks for a visa. The law was intended to inhibit tourism and independent business in Austria and damage its economy. Germans had made up the highest proportion of all foreign visitors to Austria before the creation of the National Socialist state.

6. Traditionally, waiters in such cafés would know or assume everyone’s title and often inflate them, calling an intellectual “Herr Professor,” a wealthy-looking man “Herr Baron,” and an actual baron “Herr Graf,” etc. Austrian film from its silent days to the end of commercial cinema in the early 1960s underscored this as a popular and expected comedy trope in any situation dealing with waiters and eating establishments.

7. See note 4. Here Perutz intimates that “Red Vienna” continued to exist under Catholic Austrofascism (1933–38) before the Anschluss in the population of Jewish and non-Jewish intellectual and working class.

8. Gregor would play just that sort of mysterious and self-aware character in Jean Renoir’s *La règle du jeu/The Rules of the Game* (France 1939) following her flight from the Anschluss with her husband, the former Austrofascist vice chancellor and *Heimwehr* militia leader, Prince Ernst Rüdiger von Starhemberg.

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