The Shameless Little Man: Narrative Obstruction in Feridun Zaimoğlu’s Liebesbrand

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The inscription of desire into a narrative is paradigmatic of narration itself: the narrator acts together with the reader in an exchange of wants—the desire to tell and the desire to witness—toward the formation of an ordered series of events. The narrator of Feridun Zaimoğlu’s 2008 novel *Liebesbrand* desperately seeks a certain person, who may stand for that person herself or, more prosaically, for the narrator’s own personal fulfillment. The reader is invited to link the novel to the German Romantic tradition due to the protagonist’s exotic quest, the neologistic title, and the author’s own declaration: “[I]ch selbst fühle mich der deutschen Romantik zugehörig” (“Schriftsteller”). Contemporary German literature scholars Margaret Littler and Frauke Matthes both convincingly relate the work to German Romanticism in order to read Zaimoğlu’s novel as part of German-language literary history. However, looking at the various forms the search for a partner takes in *Liebesbrand*, how this theme is represented, and the dynamic it generates, I do not find a quest befitting the label of Romanticism alone. David, the novel’s first-person narrator and protagonist, is not sentimental or sensitive in the Romantic tradition. For examples, he has no interest in nature or scenery, and his story has no magic or humor. He is, however, neurotic in the Victorian sense, keen on objectifying women and habitually concerned with his position relative to them. The protagonist’s disdain of the everyday and ordinary, as well as his ability to disregard the concerns of women, verges on a posture whose expressions of disillusionment with life are suited to the malaise found at the turn of the century on the Viennese stage. In order to place Zaimoğlu’s work within the genealogy of German-language literary history, it need not only be rooted in German Romanticism. From its neurotic narrator to its melodramatic title and much in between, *Liebesbrand* should also be considered a natural continuation of the tradition of Viennese Modernism.

Zaimoğlu relies on an invented compound word for the title *Liebesbrand*; he combines *die Liebe* and *der Brand* to introduce the novel’s theme of burning passion straightaway. Accordingly, I will assemble the compound term “partner-seek” narration to stand in for the lengthy pursuit, relentless desire, and related devices with which the narrator thematizes his search. Whether the story is really about the protagonist’s obsession with the woman he chases is something I want to problematize, because a narratological focus reveals that his real true love is the intensity of his own libido. The first-person narrator’s constant search in *Liebesbrand*, his partner-seek, is a narrative theme worth investigating because it reveals an obstruction of the narrator’s object of desire. The narrator elevates the person he desires to the level of an impossibly unachievable ideal: in Friedrich Schlegel’s terms, she is a true “Priesterin der Nacht” (79), or in Gilbert and Gubar’s terms, a one-dimensional “angel” (17). The narrator in *Liebesbrand* takes on a search of enormous improbability in a manner that pretends to address no one, a posture that is widespread among narrators in contemporary novels (Genette 258). At the end of the novel, David describes how Tyra, the woman he pursues, has changed, addressing the reader for the first time with second-person pronouns: “[I]ch habe dir verschwiegen, daß ich mit einer Heiligen dieser Tage sprach, sie war unantastbar” (366). The degree of distance that this statement highlights not only shows how little the protagonist has learned about the woman he has intensely sought, but likewise how little the reader knows about her. Although the chronicler in this love story has focused obsessively on Tyra, the subjective nature of first-person narrating proves inadequate and obstructive in revealing the object of desire’s development as a character.

The novel relates a quest which begins with David’s first brief encounter with Tyra in rural Turkey, leads him through Schleswig-Holstein, Lower Saxony, and the Czech Republic, and ends with his last encounter with Tyra in Vienna. David experiences a horrible bus crash
during a visit to Turkey while reuniting with extended family. Tyra, a German tourist who pulls over at the scene of the crash, treats David’s wounds but departs when medical workers arrive. Upon returning to his home in Kiel, David begins his search for the tourist who aided him in Turkey. The protagonist explores various types of intimacy, including lonely visits with nighttime sex workers (284) which contrast with the more innocent hospital scenes where ward-mates discuss the different kinds of idealized partnership they seek (20). During his recovery in the Turkish hospital, David is surrounded by men who call each other by one-word nicknames, such as Messer or Leber. “Such dir lieber selber einen Namen aus” (20), implores his roommate. David decides on Rippe, a reference to one of his many injuries sustained in the bus crash and a brief allusion to one of the original partnership narratives in Abrahamic religions, the story of Eve’s creation from Adam’s rib. David makes the connection between his nickname in the hospital and his search for a partner explicit when he walks through the streets of Nienburg, Tyra’s hometown, for the first time. Still hampered by numerous injuries, he complains about waning rib pains: “Die Rippenschmerzen ließen langsam nach. Wo bist du, Nienburgerin?” (79).

The statue of the little girl from Nienburg, which is the town’s municipal centerpiece, attests to the author’s plan. The folksong to which the statue pays homage, “Die kleine Nienburgerin,” consists of eight alternating stanzas sung in duet by a bejeweled and garlanded little girl and an untidy and tattered little boy (von Blanckenburg 132). Presaging narrative events, a disheveled and visibly wounded David will continually encounter the trim, smart, and put-together Nienburgerin Tyra. Several attacks on David occur when the narrative is at its most ordinary. In a vivid application of narrative disruption, attacks by random strangers interrupt lackluster dialog and violently wound the narrator’s face. Two unexpected attacks hit the protagonist while he is seated at a restaurant in conversation with other characters as he tries to mollify prior misunderstandings. He is ripped from his chair and beaten by a crazed man in Kiel (82), and days later he is brutally attacked with a vacuum cleaner by a disturbed woman in Prague (190). Both of these assailants are strangers. The attacks result in physical scars that remain and play a role throughout the novel. They recall the deadly bus wreck in Turkey which David survives at the beginning of the novel, as well as the deadly bus wreck Zaimoğlu himself barely survived a few years prior to writing Liebesbrand (Meller 36).

A consideration of gender arises from examining the manner in which the protagonist’s quest for fulfillment is narrated. David narrates his quest to find her, Tyra, the woman who briefly treated his wounds at the site of the bus crash (9). It is a quest in which a specific woman is the coveted reward in a narrative generated by heterosexual male desire. Narratologist Teresa De Lauretis sees this type of male-generated quest at the heart of the multifarious versions of narrative plot (110). In her book Alice Doesn’t: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema, she contends that desire should be analyzed structurally, not thematically (199–207). The narrator of Liebesbrand describes his search in terms of the metaphor of two narrative streams that ought to combine, in order for Tyra’s narrative to piggyback on his, without changing direction. To cope with the improbability of finding Tyra again, he proclaims “es muß doch mal klappen” and describes how he once observed a flea riding on top of an ant (156–57). Gabriel, a close friend, entreats David to be mindful that Tyra is not a flea (157). It is simple, unadorned council of a type which is absent at every other stage of the narrator’s obsessive quest.

The description of a statue in Brno, one of the stops on David’s long journey, exemplifies the type of partnership David seeks in Liebesbrand. High up, just above a window of Jacob’s
Church, stands the figure of “das schamlose Männchen” (222). If one takes a second or third look at the statue, as David’s tour guide Jarmila points out, one discovers that a small woman is hidden behind the man’s entire body depicted in the middle of a sexual act (223). The figure of the shameless little man can be found at the actual Church of Saint Jacob in Brno, Czech Republic, where for centuries it was known colloquially as “ein Engel der Begierde.” As if looking at the statue, the reader must likewise look carefully to better see the object of desire hidden behind the imposing first-person narrator in the partner-seek narrative of *Liebesbrand*. Even though the biggest transformation actually takes place in Tyra, the novel focuses from beginning to end on David. David is on a quest, but only because Tyra has blazed the trail. She is present at the scene of the bus crash in Turkey, and her externally focalized narrative starts in the middle-class milieu of Nienburg. She leaves her spouse for a doctoral endeavor in Prague, a religious pilgrimage in Naples, a religious conversion in Vienna, and ultimately abandonment to an ascetic life due to her obsession with the Middle Ages. Yes, David is on a quest, at times reluctantly as demonstrated by his statement “Ich war nicht darauf vorbereitet, ich hatte Angst” (5). However the randomness and speed of events that befall Tyra are the substance of a real Romantic Kunstmärchen.

A flashback during the narrator’s departure from the hospital offers an explanation for his inability, or unwillingness, to consider the narrative direction and desires of Tyra. He recalls his break-up with his live-in girlfriend of two years. In response to her desire to end the relationship, he describes himself as “ein entmannter Romantiker” who is at the mercy of her aspiration, stating “jetzt finde ich mich in deiner Szene wieder” (54). He is set on rejecting the narrative mood of the desired woman, in other words her point of view, in any future search for a partner because he has already chastised himself for having been attentive to the mood of a previous partner. In his view, to subject his narrative to hers is to be emasculated. He describes a meticulous routine with the bedside lamp that soothes his girlfriend to sleep, which exhibits the extent to which he once contemplated his partner’s desires but also lies in direct contrast to the end of the break-up scene in which the narrator drinks a cup of coffee in the early hours and proclaims he is liberated (55). This flashback forms a tidy parallel to the fabula, since the freedom he enjoys upon his discharge from hospital relates to the sense of freedom upon ending his once attentive and responsive attitude toward his romantic partnership.

Thanks to David’s memory of the abbreviation “NI” for Nienburg on Tyra’s license plate at the scene of the accident in Turkey, he successfully tracks her to her German hometown (63). She is understandably caught off-guard by his presence. He, in contrast, is wrapped up in his longing for her and becomes discernibly frustrated, saying “sie sollte es leicht haben, es sollte so leicht wie Wassertrinken sein, mir ein zweites Mal zu begegnen” (93). The narrator’s desire to stay on course for his own fulfillment and to avoid any internal deliberation that might prevent him from acquiring Tyra’s partnership is expressed that night as he lies in bed. He fears sleep due to an awareness “daß ein Traum das Elend übersetzt, aber nicht wirklich zersetzt” (117). Acquiescently the narrator’s amorous desires push ever forward with an incongruous combination of outright subjectivity and a total lack of self-reflection. Despite his active wandering across the continent in search of her, he pathologically describes his role in passive terms, “Ich verfolge dich nicht, ich bin dir gefolgt” (234). This semantic shift plays down the aggressive factor in his pursuit and exposes his self-deception. The process of narrative desire upholds both active and passive aims: desire for the other and desire to be desired by the other. De Lauretis calls this the operation by which narrative and cinema solicit the spectators’ consent.
and seduce women in the audience into femininity (207). The narrator in *Liebesbrand* acknowledges the very same cinematic operation in his own chauvinistic terms: “Ihr Frauen sitzt im Kinosaal, blickt wie gebannt auf den gutaussehenden Liebhaber auf der Leinwand” (95). He then continues with a tirade on how urgently women want a man to covet them, to humor them, and to behave precisely in real life the way they have seen on the silver screen.

The question of possession and narrative desire points to a connection between *Liebesbrand* and the psychoanalytic processes that dominated public and artistic discourses in Viennese Modernism. For example, Sigmund Freud saw the function of the hero and of point-of-view as fantasies of power and desire ("Creative" 25), conceiving the entire process of the development of the self as narratively structured. Literary critic Linda Hutcheon likewise delves into narrative desire and concerns herself with the essentially erotic relationship between text and reader. She calls the act of reading both literally sensual and metaphorically sexual in its process of uniting all the polarities (30). In *Liebesbrand*, however, the narrator is more concerned with maintaining dualism than uniting polarities. The novel relates the tale of a man who desires partnership with one particular individual at the expense of her other partnerships, namely her marriage, small-town social sphere, and her own narrative drive. It is partner-seek narration that relies on persistent dualities; thus it is not a tale about two characters who achieve partnership or are even capable of achieving it with each other.

In her analysis of *Liebesbrand*, Matthes connects David’s desire with Zaimoğlu's understanding of Romanticism. She ties the portrayal of David to German Romanticism using Wolfgang Beutin’s definition of the Romantic as “das Wunderbare, Exotische, Abenteuerliche, Sinnliche, Schaurige, die Abwendung von der modernen Zivilisation und die Hinwendung zur inneren und äußeren Natur des Menschen und zu vergangenen Gesellschaftsformen und Zeiten” (Beutin 179; qtd. in Matthes 89). She also stresses the author’s admiration for Meister Eckhart, particularly his admiration for the medieval mystic’s grappling with gender roles, as an important influence on the creation of David in *Liebesbrand* (Matthes 88). However, apart from wishing “traditional” gender roles restored, the narrator does not grapple with gender roles or sexuality in any contemplative sense. Twice he makes homophobic observations through immediate speech and acknowledges his idiocy as an aside to the reader. In one he asserts that queer rights are just a claim to the kind of happiness that homosexuals could only learn from watching men together with women (104). In another he finds it repugnant that his friend Gabriel would have set up a gay friend with a gay male acquaintance (352).

In my view, however, it is more suitable to compare David to the bored, archetypal parvenu of Viennese Modernism. After sleeping with Tyra and continuing to pursue her across the continent, he will nonetheless have sex with an unnamed prostitute and an ancillary character, Jarmila, thus behaving much more like the philanderer Gustav Heink in the play *Das Konzert* by Viennese dramatist Hermann Bahr, a man able to discard his primary love for a brief dalliance with other women. Moreover, David expresses neurotic thoughts and insecurities in the manner of the protagonist Anatol in Viennese dramatist Arthur Schnitzler’s cycle of dramas. On the character level of Romantic literary precedents, David does measure up to the ceaseless longing of Novalis’s *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* and the infatuated, border-crossing quest of Eichendorff’s *Aus dem Leben eines Taugenichts*. However, the narrator in *Liebesbrand* is more disposed to a provisional longing than the absolute longing of Heinrich. Taugenichts as well could at least be defined by his musical talent, mathematical skill, and employment. David
cannot lay claim to any of those roles; he is rich from a windfall in stock-market investments (254) and does not work. Despite the parallels and constant identification with Romantics, David has more in common with the infatuated, independently wealthy, and utterly modern romantic hero embodied in *Anatol*, who is defined more by his possessions than by his societal role.

Again and again, the story of *Liebesbrand* is interspersed with monetary transactions. When the interactions are at their most feverish between Tyra and David in Vienna, the narrator, reacting to a verbal spat that sends Tyra away from him, inexplicably begins to shop. He stares at the display window of a wallet store, saying, “[I]ch mußte mich ablenken, ich wollte mich ablenken, doch die Läden hatten geschlossen” (361). This theme continues throughout the novel, and the reader becomes expertly aware of the narrator’s preferred drink, the price of hotel rooms, and the gratuity he leaves. At home in Kiel David admits to his inability to cook for himself and his penchant for expensive restaurants (77). As he ruminates on whether his stay in Prague to seek out Tyra would be worth the effort, he falls back on market terminology and blatantly objectifies his object of desire: “wichtig war nur, wichtig war der Lohn” (190). This emphasis on money makes it much easier to picture Zaimoğlu’s David on the Viennese stage than in a Romantic novella.

The novel does, however, contain the Romanticist quest motif. Frequent use of the noun and verb *Sehnen* and *sehen*, essential terms in Romantic texts, corresponds with frequent use of *Puder*, a noun used in German to describe the saccharine outlook romantic sorts are said to have.¹ Such wording points to a diametrical system at work in *Liebesbrand*, that of the modern versus the romantic. The narrator persists with blind determination to realize his longing. Twice Tyra leaves behind a note insisting that David leave her alone (108, 345) and twice he scours the note for clues as to her new whereabouts, metaphorically transforming them into a lady’s scented handkerchief and converting them to signposts that further the narrative drive. The objective from the narrator’s position is to complete his quest and thus be complete himself. From his point of view, the only way to achieve completion is to fulfill his constant longing for Tyra. His desire replicates the homograph of “consummate” as adjective and “consummate” as verb, for the only way the narrator can achieve completion is to effectuate a partnership with Tyra. After his first sexual encounter with Tyra, David declares, “Ich war infiziert” (110).

We can read such incidents as evidence of Romanticism in *Liebesbrand*, but they also suggest an additional connection with the medical discourses of Viennese Modernism. In Schnitzler’s *Anatol*, the titular protagonist identifies himself in medical terms as mentally afflicted: “Ich bin stets ein Hypochonder der Liebe gewesen” (82). Earlier in the cycle, Anatol explains to his friend Max the importance of Bianca, one of his trysts, saying, “Während ich den warmen Hauch ihres Mundes auf meiner Hand fühlte, erlebte ich das Ganze schon in der Erinnerung” (56). In this representational strategy for putting Anatol’s neurotic symptom of self-preservation on display, Schnitzler allows his lamentable hero to delude himself about the significance of the encounter. Near the end of the act, Bianca informs Max that she barely remembers Anatol and has confused him with another dalliance in Saint Petersburg. Likewise, the first encounter in *Liebesbrand* between David and Tyra is much more significant to David than to Tyra. Gabriel underpins the improbability of her returning David’s affection by listing the ways in which Tyra already has a life of fulfillment. According to Gabriel, she has everything a

¹ The words *Sehnen* and *sehen* occurs on pages 43, 63, 79, 80, 85, 86, 93, 292, and 371. The term *Puder* occurs on pages 34, 43, 91, 202, 334.
modern-day heterosexual woman needs: an unhappy marriage, motherhood, intellectual pursuits, and a dissertation adviser who has taken her on a research trip. In contrast, says Gabriel, “Wenn du vor ihr stehst, wird sie dich für einen Stalker halten” (150). Early on, the narrator sets in motion the theme of fortune over a realistic outcome by making an analogous recollection of the lottery ticket sellers seen at European street fairs: “mit der Schuhspitze die Lottonieten in den Boden zu treten, man kommt gegen den Drang, sein Glück trotzdem zu versuchen, nicht an” (38).

David and Tyra’s first sexually intimate encounter in a motel outside Nienburg belies erotica with its complete lack of explicit details or suggestive writing. The narrator takes no pleasure in Tyra’s awkward biting and expresses doubt about whether she herself takes gratification from biting him (105). In her analysis of Liebesbrand, Margaret Littler connects Tyra’s bite to German Romanticism via the ambiguity of the bite in Kleist’s Penthesilea, “Viewed in terms of the clashing forces of Kleist’s drama, it is less surprising that Tyra’s lovemaking with David is a series of assaults, in which there is as much pain as pleasure” (231). However, pain and pleasure as two sides of the same coin can likewise be related to the Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality by Freud, whose subjects are from the same social spheres that the characters of Viennese Modernism inhabit. David relates his first intimate encounter with Tyra as a series of wounds, saying “Sie biß mich fest in die Schulter, in den Hals, sie biß mich in die Brust und in die Oberlippe, die wieder zu bluten anfing” (105). In his discussion of the role of erogenous zones in sexual behavior, Freud claims, “In the case of those components which involve pain and cruelty the same role is assumed by the skin – the skin, which in particular parts of the body has become differentiated into sense organs or modified into mucous membrane, and is thus the erogenous zone par excellence” (“Three Essays” 257). While Littler uses the lingo of infection and the scene of sexual biting in Liebesbrand to make a connection to Kleist and thus to Romanticism, such language can also be linked to the psychoanalytical awakening in German-language discourse during Viennese Modernism. The biting scene further connects to Freudian discourse when it becomes internalized in David’s psyche. It contrasts with a bite he receives in a later scene from a different woman, Jarmila, which he welcomes in part because it reminds him of Tyra (215).

Repeatedly the narration makes use of sudden shifts in pace, most commonly through the many instances of awakening. In one such instance, the narrator uses the verb auffahren to describe being awoken as ascending up out of sleep or starting up (164). This might lead cautious readers to slow their progress to take notice of ensuing events. At the same time, there are many other instances of flat recitation of events from a fixed point of view; the narrator is prone to telling rather than showing. One representative illustration is the interaction between the men in the hospital, “Dann sprachen wir weiter, über Gott und Politik, über kratzende Herrenunterwäsche, über Frauen, über die Techniken der Nasenhaarentfernung, über ein neues deutsches Wunderprodukt” (37), which continues for thirty-five lines about dozens of topics in lieu of actual conversational discourse. In late-Barthean terms, Liebesbrand is a readerly work as opposed to a writerly one (S/Z 4), meaning the narrator never self-consciously calls attention to the various rhetorical techniques that comprise the novel. However, this does not mean Liebesbrand is light reading, given its dearth of humor throughout and relatively unhappy ending. Narratologist Robert Alter suggests a difference between self-conscious novels and novels that contain self-conscious moments (ix), which can be usefully applied to Liebesbrand. The novel’s first-person narrator is self-conscious, at times even ill at ease, within the narrative.
realm. However, Alter defines the self-conscious novel as “a novel which systematically flaunts its own condition of artifice” (x). The narrator of *Liebesbrand* makes use of temporal functions, changes in distance, perspective, and focalization, but the novel does not pose overt questions about the function of the narrator or the veracity of narrated events. It is not a self-conscious novel, but it does have a self-conscious narrator, constantly concerned with how others view him. At times he is even concerned with how the reader views him. For example, through immediate speech, he grows envious of fish because fish feel no pain, but he then realizes this is incorrect and thoughtfully interjects “Ich geriet langsam zum Idioten” (213). Such contemplations point to a narrator capable of self-reflection.

When David buys a ticket to a tourist attraction, his first museum visit throughout the entire journey, the reader takes notice of this unusual behavior. At the Volkskundemuseum in Vienna he stares at the regalia of Eastern monarchs on display (349). Here we see the East translated via the Western disciplinary regime of collecting and archiving, and the reader cannot help but recall the many occurrences in which other characters taxonomically place David, a Turkish German, into an ethnic category for him. One such example is the abrupt interaction with the cemetery gardener in the second chapter, which contains two descriptions of mosaic postcards that the perplexed gardener has received in the mail. The images are vaguely pornographic mosaics that upbraid the recipient for being impotent. David, unwilling to decipher the images, is met with the statement: “Du bist der Orientale, sagte er, du mußt es wissen” (74). David does know what the postcards mean, but he does not want to share their meaning with his German neighbor. The images are deciphered by someone who is fluent in two languages and obviously bicultural, but who prefers not to be pigeonholed to one identity or the other. There are times when David is rudely reminded of his otherness, along with a few times he adheres to his otherness—his bicultural otherness—out of a sense of superiority over monocultural characters. He lets loose a vitriolic outburst in front of a jeweler in Nienburg, to whom he turns during his search for Tyra, having spotted the same ring in the jeweler’s display window that Tyra wore the night of the bus crash. Politely he begins, “Ich habe vor einiger Zeit eine Frau kennengelernt, die genau denselben Ring trug,” to which the jeweler replies, “Sie trug ganz sicher nicht denselben, aber den gleichen Ring” (91). In spite of the jeweler’s critique of David’s speech, the novel clearly presents him as a fluent speaker of German. Jarmila, David’s translator in Prague, has deceitfully told him that she is a native German speaker, but the narrator can tell she rarely speaks German, particularly because she distorts idioms and translates them verbatim from another language (179). The imprecise language at the jewelry store in Nienburg is uncharacteristic of David, who always relies on wit and verbal cunning to get himself out of many situations. What is the narrator’s purpose for including a rare occasion in which David’s German is corrected grammatically? For the most part, it emphasizes David’s outsider status to the reader.

The narrator is comprehensively bicultural in many instances. In attendance at the celebration for the circumcision of his teenage nephew in Kiel, he ponders the different meanings of his nephew’s name Orkan, which means “townsman” in Turkish and “hurricane” in German (120). Meanwhile a fierce storm, dubbed “ein Orkan” by the local media, is bombarding the city. David thinks it is funny, even irresponsible, for the parents to not take the German meaning of Orkan’s name into consideration when naming him. The scene illustrates his meticulous awareness of different networks of social significance and also represents a veiled criticism of socially insulated ethnic enclaves. Also exemplified are two very different ways of
coming of age. Two rites of passage are set in stark contrast to each other: the ritual of the East, which entails circumcision and familial attachment, against the individual fulfillment of the West, which entails personal quest and setting out. It is a narrative that continuously insists upon bicultural identity as an autonomous classification, despite a narrative realm of characters who self-identify as one culture over another. It is also at times lonely. Partner-seek is a common theme in the narration of both quest and initiation. It sometimes appears with different designations, including *Minnesang, orientalische Frauenanbetung*, novel of sensibility, or love story. The traditions of East and West have partner-seek as a narrative theme and the multifarious uses of narrative desire in common.

Like its bicultural narrator, the narration concludes a quest without enrollment in one ideology or identification over another, with neither an exclusive partnership nor contentment at being single. This essay has prolonged the outcome of David’s endeavor for partnership with Tyra until the end in a surface attempt to imitate one of the standard structural elements of narrative partner-seek. “Das war’s, sagte sie, hier hört es auf. […] Deine Liebe, sie endet hier” (372). It appears to be yet another of Tyra’s dismissive statements to David, which he will duly ignore as he has throughout the novel. In this final instance, however, he complies with her wish. There are few clues as to why he does this. The two characters are standing at the side entrance to the Belvedere-Prunkgarten, where a large group of tourists exits and hampers their conversation. The tourist horde is unavoidably juxtaposed with Tyra’s rejection as a reminder to David that no one goes on a quest in the modern world. This scene is their final goodbye. The narrative ends because the protagonist no longer follows his desire for Tyra. He does not attain her in partnership, and he is not completed by her in partnership. The passive voice in this latter observation is intentional because of the extremely limited narrative point of view given to Tyra; to describe the story’s outcome as well as possible, we can only position David grammatically in the nominative case. In other words, by saying that he does not attain her and he is not completed by her, the narrator remains the subject in his active and passive aims. The subject here is, as Genette says, not only the person who carries out the action, but also the person who reports it (216). Paradoxically, that is easily the case in a first-person novel whose narrator’s stated goal is partnership. The novel closes with an ambivalent stance that shapes the book into a partner-seek narrative rather than a tale of partnership attainment, despite the fact that attainment is presented as its relentless aim.

Immediately after the final goodbye with Tyra, David reaches for his telephone and makes a call, upon which “natürlich meldete sich Jarmila nach dem ersten Klingeln” (345). He is on his way to begin another affair. Therefore, much like a narrative by Viennese Modernist Peter Altenberg, the reader has witnessed a long tale about adoration and the libidinal drive itself, as opposed to a love story about partnership. The burning fire stipulated by the root word in the title *Liebesbrand* is not merely the yearning expressed in Romanticist fashion, but more consistent with the inner stirrings and infatuations that made life worthwhile to the fictional playboys penned in the cafes of Vienna. Thus Zaimoğlu’s narrator might align himself more with Altenberg’s declaration at the turn of the century: “Yes, indeed, to live in inner ecstasies, to get yourself all hot and bothered, piping hot, to let yourself be set on fire by the beauties of this world, that was all we ever wanted” (4). Though calling Jarmila suggests a possible union with her beyond the narrated world of the novel, the reader knows even less about her than about Tyra. Much like the statue in Brno, we have to look very closely to see the narrator’s intended partner. Our view of the object of desire is obstructed by the shameless little man who has as
much in common with the neurotic philanderers of Viennese Modernism as with the questers of German Romanticism.
Works Cited


