



# An Outline of the History of German-Written Jewish Literature from Bohemia and Moravia

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## SYNOPSIS

In my contribution, I provide an enumeration of nodal points for the theme of 'Jewish literature' from Bohemia and Moravia, and in rough, basic contours sketch out a developmental line of this literature and place it within a Central European (German language) cultural-historical framework. In my chapter (the propositions of which are mostly familiar to experts in the field) I attempt to provide a kind of literary-historical outline for further, what we might call 'point contributions' of this monograph, focusing on individual authors, works, and themes. The fact that I shall mention predominantly works written in German will also perhaps expand the viewpoint on this theme from the perspective of Czech studies, and prospectively provide material for comparison.

## KEYWORDS

German Jewish literature; German literature from Bohemia and Moravia; Prague German literature.

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In a recent anthology compiled by the German and Czech Studies team at the Czech Academy of Sciences entitled *Jak psát transkulturní literární dějiny?* (How to Write Transcultural Literary History, Prague 2019), one of the authors, Ladislav Futtera, reflects upon the periodisation of the transculturally conceived works of literature in preparation, and among other factors proposes a model of 'cross-sections', concentrating on 'nodal points, from which a subsequent discourse is developed in the direction of capturing general phenomena of the time' (Futtera 2019, p. 149). In my contribution, I intend to provide an enumeration of such nodal points for the theme of 'Jewish literature' from Bohemia and Moravia, and in rough, basic outlines to sketch out a developmental line of this literature and to place it within a Central European cultural-historical framework. The following reflections will be mostly familiar and will unfortunately appear rather superficial to experts in the field; nonetheless I hope that my chapter may provide a kind of literary-historical outline for further, what we might call 'point contributions' of this monograph, focusing on individual authors, works, and themes. The fact that I shall mention predominantly works written in Ger-

man will also perhaps broaden the otherwise Czech perspective on this theme, and prospectively provide material for comparison.

The same applies to Jews in the Czech lands in the Middle Ages as applies to the entire region of (Central and Western) Europe:<sup>1</sup> The medieval history<sup>2</sup> of the Jewish people is briefly stated a history of segregation, repression, pogroms and brutal violence committed against Jews in the name of the Christian religion, a history of anti-Judaism which was manifested on a (metaphorical) scale that ranged from the burning of Hebrew books to the burning of people. The existence of Jews in medieval Europe was later (from the 19<sup>th</sup> century) a theme dealt with in several literary works penned by Jewish authors, the majority of which fall within the genre of martyrology.

A fundamental watershed in the life of European Jews was brought about by the Enlightenment,<sup>3</sup> which placed emphasis on rationality, natural human rights, tolerance, humanity and egalitarianism. It spoke of a complementary religious truth and thereby weakened the position of churches, and thus after centuries of brutal repression and segregation enabled the emancipation and assimilation of European Jews.

At the beginning of the Haskalah, the wave of emancipation otherwise known as the Jewish Enlightenment, stood the figure of Moses Mendelssohn, a thinker, philosopher, philologist and aesthete who started out from the fundamental conviction that Jews — like all other people — belong to the human family/*Menschheitsfamilie*, and that for Jews the path to this family leads through secular education and an attachment to German culture. Mendelssohn began to fulfil his ‘philological-cultural’ emancipatory ideal first of all through a translation of parts of the Old Testament, on which he worked from 1778 to 1783. The translation — according to some contemporary linguists one of the most accurate ever, distinguished by its masterful and pure German — was published with an accompanying Hebrew commentary (*Bi’ur*) and printed in Hebrew script so that, for the first generation of Jews in the process of emancipating themselves, it could become a ‘textbook of German language, a gateway through which Jews could enter the German-speaking realm’ (Benjamin by Hartung 2006, p. 26).<sup>4</sup> Mendelssohn considered proficiency in standard German (and not merely an idiom of the pejoratively named ‘*Judendeutsch*’)<sup>5</sup> to be a primary condition, the first step on the path to the adoption of German culture.

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1 The Development in Eastern Europe was entirely different, although in this article I do not have space to focus on this.

2 Unlike in general history, the ‘Middle Ages’ in Judaeo-Christian relations is a very long period, lasting practically up to the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, since up to this time it is necessary to speak of the ‘medieval’ treatment of the Jews by the host nations.

3 Many historians reflect on whether a certain watershed or at least a certain change was brought about by the Lutheran Reformation and the subsequent advance of humanism, as well as by the changes in economic relations after the Thirty Years’ War.

4 The text contains quotations from German originals, which were first of all translated by the author of the article into Czech, and subsequently translated into English.

5 Western Yiddish was referred to as ‘*Judendeutsch*’, and was considered by the educated to be an inferior dialect — which is an unjust designation from today’s perspective, since Western Yiddish at that time met all the parameters of an independent language, not only a mere dialect or sociolect. However, this disdain on the part of the *maskils* practically led to the extinction of Western Yiddish as a living language.



In 1783 Mendelssohn wrote his pivotal religious and philological work *Jerusalem oder über die religiöse Macht und Judentum* (Jerusalem, or On Religious Power and Judaism), in which he attempted to align the rational religious stances of the devotees of the Enlightenment (Vernunftreligion) with the Jewish religious tradition, and in which he expressed the conviction that the emancipation of German Jews launched by such an alignment in a direction towards German culture and learning, and towards Enlightenment rational religiosity, need not necessarily mean their acculturation, thus the loss of their own Jewish roots, traditions, religion and identity. However, Mendelssohn's own children proved his conviction to be false: all of them (with the exception of one of his sons) converted to Christianity.

An important role was played in the initial stages of the Haskalah by Mendelssohn's friend Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, who was not himself Jewish, but who wrote two theatre plays which belong to the essential history of German Jewish literature: in 1749 the early one-act comedy *Die Juden* (The Jews), and in 1779 a mature work, the dramatic legend *Nathan der Weise* (Nathan the Wise), which in typical Enlightenment manner places on an equal footing all three monotheistic world religions. By means of the exaggeratedly positive Jewish characters of both of his plays he was undoubtedly attempting to counterbalance Shakespeare's Shylock and hundreds of other stereotypically negative Jewish characters as presented in literature of all genres.

The ideas of Mendelssohn's Haskalah spread rapidly throughout Germany and Austria (even if they had to battle against sharp orthodox objections within the Jewish communities), and the first generation of maskils focused especially on schooling: this led to the establishment of the 'Normalschulen' (secular schools for Jewish boys and later also girls, with Hebrew and German as the languages of instruction and with the teaching of profane content) — in Prague Herz Homberg and Peter Beer built up a system of Jewish secular schooling, and the principles of the Haskalah in Prague were also promoted by the enlightened doctors Marcus Herz and Jonas Jaitteles, the patriarch of a distinguished family, who influenced culture and education in the Czech lands throughout the course of the entire 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Naturally, the ideas of the Haskalah also needed a reaction 'from the other camp', thus a willingness on the part of the majority society to eliminate the prevailing legal and social discrimination against Jews: from the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards a whole series of legal documents were compiled supporting the assimilation of Jews, so that they could become regular citizens (and also soldiers) of the given state. In the Austrian lands an external legal framework for a change to the existential conditions of the Jewish population had already been provided by the Patents of Toleration issued by emperor Joseph II (especially the second of these, from 1782), which, though they stopped far short of granting Austrian Jews full civil rights (this did not take place in Austria until 1867), nevertheless set in motion a development which regulated relations between Jews and the majority society, as well as relations within the Jewish community for the whole of the following century.

In connection with the Patents of Toleration it is worth mentioning the participation of Josef von Sonnenfels, who was a distinguished promoter of civil-legal amendments relating to the Austrian Jews: He himself was of Jewish origin, a native of the Mikulov ghetto and the grandson of Michael Chosid, the chief rabbi of Brandenburg, who had been a renowned scholar in his day. Sonnenfels — having been Christened at

around the age of three in Vienna, under the patronage of his godfather Karl, Count of Dietrichstein — became one of the highest ranking officials at the court of Joseph II, contributing to several of Joseph's reforms (for example, as the chief of police he abolished torture as a legitimate part of interrogation, and laid the foundations of the Austrian state financing) and also — though evidently as a linguistic expert and not as an author<sup>6</sup> — to the formulation of the Patent of Toleration. Also interesting for literary historians is the fact that Sonnenfels, following the model of the German Enlightenment scholars, endeavoured to bring about a renewal of the classical Austrian 'high' court theatre, as well as the suppression of the influence of the folk theatre (Volkstheater); fortunately he did not succeed in this.

At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the situation was such that within the Jewish community the Haskalah/assimilation current was gathering strength, and the majority society (though it was still full of 'medieval' prejudices), full of curiosity stimulated by Enlightenment ideas, was opening up to the assimilating Jews. In precisely this manner it is possible to characterise the phenomenon that gave its name to one entire (albeit brief) period of German Romanticism: in literary history this third phase of Romanticism is referred to either as Berlin Romanticism or 'Salon Romanticism'. The salons, above all the three best known, those of the Jewesses Rahel Varnhagen, Henrietta Herz and Sarah Meyer (as well as the Viennese salon of Cecilia Eskeles, renowned especially among those who attended the Vienna Congress), were in one regard the descendants of Enlightenment ideas: they were meeting places for intellectuals, artists, people of letters regardless of their status, in competition with courtly, strictly status-defined societies. On the other hand, the salons were also a manifestation of a new, typically romantic mood, which was characterised by association, emotional, intimate friendships, artistic partnerships and also affectionate relationships in collectives of more than two members. To the question of how it happened that it was Jewish women who became the most celebrated hostesses of the entire Romantic generation, historians of the Jewish emancipation answer unanimously: Jewish women were the vanguard of the Jewish emancipation and assimilation, they were predestined for this social movement and far better situated for this purpose than Jewish men: there was no place for them in the traditional system of Jewish education, they lived in a spiritual and educational vacuum, and thus all the more enthusiastically welcomed stimuli from the surrounding cultural environment that had all of a sudden opened up to them (and also thanks to the finances of their husbands or fathers). This kind of figurative spiritual and educational virginity, in combination with an enthusiastic reception to all stimuli and the certain measure of exoticism with regard to their Jewish origin must have fascinated all the young romantics — furthermore, reportedly at least two of the celebrated Berlin Jewesses were very beautiful. Jewish women, having broken free of the walls of the ghetto thanks to the new legislation, usually had no scruples about casting off their Jewish identity — about which many were in any case unaware, since they had not been educated in it — like worn out clothes. Christian visitors to their salons therefore — unless they wished to — did not especially need to ponder the fact that they were 'on Jewish territory': Rahel Varnhagen's salon was visited without prejudice for example by Fichte, Brentano and Arnim, who

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6 However, even this eventuality is not ruled out.



usually figure rather in the list of ‘Romantic anti-Semites’. Historians of the Jewish emancipation and assimilation view these first assimilated Jewish women as a harbinger of the entire further development of the emancipation and assimilation of the German Jewish community: some of these historians judge them negatively (‘With regard to Jewishness these admired and fascinating ladies of the Berlin literary salons behaved — like stupid geese’; Brod 1934, p. 91), while others by contrast attempt to find in their life histories evidence of the fact that they ‘cast off’ their Jewishness only for the sake of appearances and out of social necessity, while deep down they were fatefully bound by their Jewish roots.<sup>7</sup> However, whichever way we look upon this historical phenomenon — either as a positive first step on the path to the convergence of German and Jewish culture, thus as an emancipatory step, or by contrast (or complementarily) as a step of acculturation, as a loss of Jewish identity in the name of easier assimilation — it applies that the Jewish hostesses of the romantic salons were pioneers of both currents and emotions, which after that moment would be welded together in a single Jewish spirit — up to Zionism and the Holocaust.<sup>8</sup>

Of course, the spirit of the Romantic era (in addition to inflamed Catholic religiosity with an accent on mystique, and a generally anti-rational tendency) was infused above all with the idea of nation. German Romanticism established a particularly aggressive strain of nationalism, in which the original building blocks of nation, as they were understood by Johann Gottfried Herder, namely language, the spirit of the nation and self-cultivation/*Bildung* (as manifested in art, culture, common history, education, in a specific type of religiosity, as well as in the ‘physiognomy of the body and spirit’) were joined by a further two: state (as an organism) and blood. From the idea that the state/nation is not merely an organisational unit, a mechanical system guaranteeing the distribution of power, but a living body with its own will, it is only a small step to the notion that there exist ‘diseases/parasites’ which harm this body and sap its will. Similarly, it is only one small step to the notion that if the members of one nation are united by the same blood which flows in their veins, inherited from their ancestors, then foreign blood (for example Jewish) has no place within the organism of the nation, and the purer its blood, the stronger the organism is: from this perspective the Romantic era is also the period of the birth of modern racism. Under the pressure of these new ideas, the surrounding (German/Aryan) world began to view Jews not primarily as a religious group, but rather as a separate nation, a race — and with the contribution of the aforementioned purist tendencies of organic thought, the popular hypothesis about the Jews as a dangerous ‘state within a state’ is formulated within Romanticism.

7 An often-quoted sentence is the following, which — according to the memoirs of her husband — was reportedly declared by Rahel Varnhagen a few days before her death: ‘What for a long time was my greatest disgrace and bitterest song: to be a Jewess — is now something that I would not give up for anything’ (Brod 1934, p. 166). Similar statements — with a similar purpose — can be found also in Heinrich Heine (see Heine 2006).

8 The theme of the salons and the fates of Jewish women in the Romantic era was the subject of investigation by two distinguished Jewish female authors of the 20th century — Margarete Susman, *Frauen der Romantik* (1929) and Hannah Arendt, *Rahel Varnhagen. Lebensgeschichte einer deutschen Jüdin aus der Romantik* (1959).



At the very beginning of the Haskalah, in the second generation of the Jewish emancipation and assimilation, the foundations had therefore already been laid for so-called modern anti-Semitism, the aim of which was to employ various mechanisms in order to counter the effect of the legal norms that were granting Jews ever more civil rights and incorporating them into the majority society.

Around the year 1830, 'the epoch of the Haskalah ends and the Age of Metternich begins, and Jewish authors cease to address only the Jewish public alone, and turn to the German public' (Kestenberg 1969, p. VIII). This applies also to the lands of the Bohemian crown, where a whole range of Jewish authors writing in German appeared, whom we may (with a very relative degree of precision) divide into two groups: authors who were glad to have broken free of the walls of the ghetto (both physical and metaphorical) thanks to the wave of assimilation, who wished to be simply German/Austrian authors and did not wish to recall their Jewish roots, as a result of which they generally did not write about Jewishness whatsoever (we do not find any Jewish motifs, themes or characters in their works), and authors who focused in one way or another on Jewish themes.

In regard to the subsequent shaping of relations between the (resurgent) Czechs, the local 'Czech' Germans/Austrians and the assimilating Jews, a figure worthy of special mention (among authors such as Andreas Ludwig Jeitteles, Hieronymus Lorm, Ludwig August Frankel, David Kuh, Moritz Hartmann, Leopold Kopert, Salomon Kohn, Josef Samuel Tauber, Eduard Kulke etc.) is Siegfried Kapper, who was a promoter of the 'Czech-Jewish' movement, which — with reference to the similar political and social submissiveness and subordination of both ethnic groups/nations, Czechs and Jews — attempted to achieve a mutual approximation and interconnection of the emancipatory aspirations of both groups. In the services of this idea, Kapper translated Czech folk songs and the work of Karel Hynek Mácha — Kapper was the first translator of Mácha's *Máj* into German. Kapper also devoted an educational study to Mácha and Czech national revivalist literature entitled *Karel Hynek Mácha und die neuböhmische Literatur* (Karel Hynek Mácha and the New Bohemian Literature, 1842). However, in the services of Czech-Jewish mutual relations, Kapper also wrote his own poetry: his first collection *Slavische Melodien* (Slavic Melodies, 1844) indeed contains echoes of Czech folk poetry, and he even wrote his second collection in Czech and published it in 1846 under the title *České listy* (Czech Letters). In his third collection from the revolutionary year of 1848, *Befreite Lieder* (Liberated Songs), he emphasises the patriotism of Czech Jews. Although there was no lack of supporters for a Czech-Jewish movement on the Czech side (Nebeský, Sabina), his endeavours very soon foundered as a result of the inability and unwillingness — itself the result of a German idea of nation — of the young, newly revived Czech nation to accept a 'foreign element' into its very heart. The fiercest opponent of the Czech-Jewish movement was Karel Havlíček Borovský (against whose diatribes Siegfried Kapper was defended even by Jan Neruda, who himself did not always refrain from striking anti-Semitic tones elsewhere). The failure of the Czech-Jewish movement also culminated in a situation in which the great majority of Jews from Bohemia and Moravia during the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century assimilated into German rather than Czech culture (although there were other compelling reasons for this development).





In the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, this ‘Germanness’ of Czech Jews then became a target for anti-Semitic attacks from Czech patriots, since according to the anti-Semitic demagogy Jews in Bohemia were immediately held to be enemies of the Czech nation in three respects: First of all they were Germans (it was of no consequence that the majority of Jews within the Czech territories — even if only for economic reasons — spoke Czech just as well as they did German), secondly they were loyal Austrians, resisting Czech aspirations for independence, and thirdly — since it was indeed the Jews who were at the vanguard of economic progress in the Czech lands — they were viewed as capitalist exploiters and parasites upon the ‘healthy body of the Czech working people’. Few Czech politicians, journalists or literary figures from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century refrained from anti-Semitic pronouncements.

Anti-Semitic sentiments erupted most passionately in Czech society in 1897, following the declaration and subsequent withdrawal of the Badeni Language Ordinances, and in 1899 during the ‘Hilsner Affair’, the shameful blood libel trial against a purported Jewish murderer of a Christian girl. The trial surrounding the murder in Polná in Bohemia was an analogy of the ‘witch trial’ held in the Hungarian village of Tisza-Eszlar in 1883, as well as the French Dreyfuss Affair. Similarly as in France, where Émile Zola was a brave and lone voice against the wave of blind, anti-Semitic hatred, a relatively isolated figure on the Czech scene opposing the promoters of the trial and the entire Czech public was Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk.

The relatively calm 19<sup>th</sup> century, also referred to as the ‘century of liberalism’ in the historiography of European Jews, was a century in which, even if conflicts, anti-Semitic invectives and sentiments did not disappear, the fundamental tendency towards assimilation into German culture did not appear to be threatened, and Jews — finally admitted to sources of education and culture — became a significant element in all branches of German/Austrian culture (writing, theatre, journalism, all branches of science). However, at the end of the century a new wave of anti-Semitism erupted (evidently provoked by the crash of the Berlin stock market, the so-called ‘Gründerkrach’ of 1873), in which the arguments of ‘classical’ anti-Judaism from the medieval and Romantic era were augmented also with new ‘arguments’ of an economic, political and racist type. This new wave was promoted by means of propagandistic journalism addressing a mass audience, in which the most popular motif was to depict Jews (who in Central Europe never made up more than 1 % of the population) as representing a sinister, diabolical power, aspiring to world domination.<sup>9</sup> Racial anti-Semitism then clothed itself in the garb of science (besides the French aristocrats Boulainvilliers and Gobineau and the best known exponent Huston Stewart Chamberlain, its promoters also included the Germans Bernhard Foerster, Wilhelm Marr, Eugen Duehring and Paul de la Garde), and presented the Jew as the ideal contrasting figure to the Germanic type. Immanently contained within the very foundation of the racial argument is the final goal of the anti-Semites: the driving of the Jews out of Europe, or their physical liquidation.

German, Austrian and Czech Jews had to respond somehow to this new situation. A whole range of different stances, thus the entire diverse phenomenon of the Jewish culture of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century up to the Holocaust, can be viewed as

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<sup>9</sup> The ‘famous’ *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* were first published in 1903.

various reactions to the new situation following the birth of modern anti-Semitism. Below I shall enumerate and comment upon a number of points, without any need for exhaustiveness:

Emancipated, assimilated Jews began to organise themselves: In 1893 the Centralverein deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens was established in Germany with approximately four thousand members at the time of its origin, increasing to 40 thousand by 1914, and published the journal *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* (Monthly for the History and Science of Judaism, later CV-Zeitung). This largest association of Jewish liberals had an analogy in several organisations and associations within the territory of Austria-Hungary and the Czech lands.

The most typical expression of defence against anti-Semitic attacks was found in endeavours to educate the hostile non-Jewish public, who remained captive to anti-Semitic superstitions and myths: the late 19<sup>th</sup> century is marked by large synthetic studies on the history of the Jews and of the Jewish religion. Often multi-volume opuses were written at that time by Simon Dubnow, Heinrich Graetz, Raphael Hirsch, Salomon Rappoport, Zacharias Frankel and others, and these works from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century can be considered to represent the cornerstone of a new discipline: Jewish studies. At the same time a flood of historical literature (fiction, novels, plays) emerged on biblical themes or on the medieval history of the Jews, presenting the Jews as a nation of great ethical character, a nation of suffering, which precisely through its suffering fulfils its role as a chosen people and shows the way to God.

The apex of the literary processing of the Old Testament history of the Jews in the 20<sup>th</sup> century could certainly be considered to be represented by the four-part novel by Thomas Mann (1875–1955), *Josef und seine Brüder* (Joseph and his Brothers) — alongside a number of novels, short stories and plays inspired by the Old Testament penned by German-speaking authors from Prague or Moravia: the novel *Jeremias, höret die Stimme* (Jeremiah) by Franz Werfel, 1937, Max Brod's play *Eine Königin Esther* (Queen Esther, 1918), Rudolf Fuchs's collection of poetry *Die Karawane* (The Caravan, 1919), Ernst Weiss's short story *Daniel*, Ernst Sommer's novel *Antinous oder Die Reise eines Kaisers* (Antinous, or The Emperor's Voyage, 1955), Max Zweig's play *Elimelech und die Jünger* (Elimelech and his Disciples, 1929), and *Saul* (1944) etc.

A similarly long list could be compiled also for historical novels (short stories, plays, poems) presenting the fates of Jews in the Middle Ages, in which the domain of the Prague German literature is the golden era of the Prague ghetto during the reign of emperor Rudolf II, and during the times of the (reportedly) Kabbalist rabbi Löw: Gustav Meyrink's novels *Golem* (The Golem, 1915) and *Walpurgisnacht* (Walpurgis Night, 1917), as well as some short stories from his collection *Des deutschen Spiessers Wunderhorn* (The German Philistine's Horn, 1913), which recall this time only as a remote and obscure backdrop for contemporary events, while Auguste Hauschner's short story *Der Tod des Löwen* (Death of the Lions, 1916), Max Brod's novels *Tycho Brahes Weg zu Gott* (Tycho Brahe's Path to God, 1916) and *Reubeni* (1925) are historical literature in the true sense of the word. Later heirs of this theme are Leo Perutz in his novel *Nachts unter der steinernen Brücke* (By Night under the Stone Bridge, 1953), and Johannes Urzidil, for example in his short story *Zu den neun Teufeln* (House of the Nine Devils, 1962). Out of the atmosphere of mystery there also came the decadent novels of Paul Leppin: *Severins Gang in die Finsternis* (Severin's Journey in the







Dark, 1914) and *Daniel Jesus* (1905), and some of Kisch's reportages, for example *Golem Wiederfinden* (In Search of the Golem, 1934). These Jewish historical stories (which frequently draw upon collections acquired by Samuel Kohn and Josef Tauber, *Sippurim* from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century) established the renown of Prague German literature (naturally together with the works of Franz Kafka) and built up the 'Prague myth', which tourists in Prague seek out to this day.

Historical literature with this central theme alternates to a certain degree with a popular domain of Jewish authors of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, namely the genre of Ghettoesgeschichte, in which — often with a strong tendency towards idealisation — they recount everyday contemporary stories of Jews from towns and villages (Landjuden). The most prolific authors of tales from the ghetto were Leopold Kopert in Bohemia, and Eduard Kulke in Moravia.

The old genre of Ghettoesgeschichte was continued upon in the 20<sup>th</sup> century for example by E.E. Kisch in his collection of reportages *Aus sieben Ghettos* (Tales from Seven Ghettos, 1934), and by Friedrich Torberg in his collection of anecdotes from old Austria entitled *Die Tante Jolesch* (Aunt Jolesch or the Decline of the West in Anecdotes, 1975), but here I would like to recall Auguste Hauschner, a relatively forgotten Prague author, who at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century wrote two lengthy, historically loosely connected coming-of-age novels (Bildungsromane) *Familie Lowositz* (The Lowositz Family, 1908) and *Richard und Camilla* (Richard and Camilla, 1910). The first volume especially is of immense interest for Prague German Jewish literature, since the main hero Richard Lowositz, a young man from a well-to-do Prague Jewish family, is in fact a contemporary of Kafka, Brod and Werfel, whose literary fate (the loss of his psychologically unstable mother, clashes with his Aryan fellow pupils, doubts regarding the archaic Jewish cult, the first paroxysms of free thinking, his first loves, conflicts and first encounters with the world of the Czechs, contacts with philosophical systems and the art of his time etc.) is played out in Prague at the turn of the century, thus providing the reader/scholar with a wonderful insight into the social-historical background and source of inspiration of Prague German literature (see Fialová-Fürstová 1996, pp. 11–30).

Of course, the most conspicuous reaction to the new situation was the birth of Zionism. I will not present a discourse on all the activities of the Zionists (from bargaining on the highest political level, the organisation of aliyahs and the purchase of land in Palestine, through the establishment of Zionist organisations and associations in Europe, to the flood of texts of all types and genres), but I shall merely state that the relationship of the Prague Jews to Zionism was — generally speaking — very similar as in other European metropolises: Herzl's ideas met with a considerable reception, but found few genuinely committed adherents (for example those who were willing to move to Palestine).<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, the situation in Prague appeared to be especially conducive to a Zionist solution (the Jews here were situated between two national camps as if between two millstones), and Herzl himself looked with great hopes to Bohemia, in his weekly *Die Welt* calling upon Jews from the Czech lands to remain impartial in the conflict of nations, and to join the movement for his — Zionist —

10 Before 1939 few people left Prague for Palestine, and exile in Palestine was experienced only by Max Brod, Louis Fürnberg, Leo Perutz and Max Zweig.

solution. In 1899 the first two Zionist organisations were founded in Prague, namely Jüdischer Volksverein Zion and the student association Bar Kochba, which beginning in 1907 published the Zionist magazine *Selbstwehr* (Self-Defence), with distinguished Prague intellectuals alternating on its editorial board.<sup>11</sup> However, the Prague German authors, if they sympathised with Zionism whatsoever (and by no means all of them did), inclined rather towards the variant of ‘cultural Zionism’, whose representatives (e.g. Martin Buber, who influenced many a Prague Jewish intellectual in his Prague lectures from the years of 1909–1911) were dissatisfied with the fact that Herzl had somewhat neglected spiritual aspects, and as a result endeavoured for a revival, regeneration and renaissance of Jewish culture, language, art, thought, religiosity and traditions. The genuinely fervent and active Prague Zionists are relatively forgotten today, let us at least recall them by name: The editorial board of *Selbstwehr* or the leadership of the Bar Kochba association featured Hugo Bergmann (who in the 1920s founded the Jewish National Library in Jerusalem, and in the years 1936–1938 was the chancellor of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem), Leo Hermann (later a member of the Zionist executive in Berlin), Sigmund Kaznelson (later the publisher of excellent anthologies of German-Jewish poetry), Felix Weltsch (a close friend of Franz Kafka and Max Brod, who wrote philosophical tracts together with Brod), Hans Kohn (later a distinguished philosopher), Erich von Kahler (an essayist and penetrating intellect focusing on Jewish questions) etc. Several Zionists were also active in Moravia: Marcel Meir Faerber, Hermann Ungar, Paul Engelmann and many more. However, the best known Zionist from Bohemia still remains Max Brod, evidently because literary history has traced and publicised his efforts to win over Franz Kafka to the cause of Zionism, in which he was both successful and unsuccessful towards the end of Kafka’s life (although while he was residing in Berlin Kafka had planned to depart for Palestine, together with his last lover, the Zionist Dora Diamant, he already knew by this time that he did not have long to live). Brod is also the author of the interesting Zionist novel *Reubeni, Fürst der Juden* (Reubeni, Prince of the Jews, 1925), which despite being set in the time of the Renaissance recounts the endeavours of the book’s hero to lead the European Jews from an environment of anti-Semitic oppression to a free land outside of Europe.

For authors of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Zionism and especially cultural Zionism was a powerful impulse for contemplating questions of their own (Jewish) identity, reflections on the results/consequences of the path of assimilation, on the content of the ‘Jewish idea’, or of a ‘return to Jewish roots’. An essential component of these considerations (which in German and Austrian literature were embodied in celebrated texts e.g. by Arthur Schnitzler, Jakob Wassermann, Else Lasker-Schüler and others) was a critique of the previous status quo (a phenomenon accompanying every modern or avant-garde movement), thus the generation of their fathers. The central expressionist motif of conflict between fathers and sons provided Jewish sons with a special opportunity to criticise the generation of their fathers (besides everything else)

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11 The somewhat forlorn situation which predominated within the Vienna Zionist student associations, and which was not dissimilar to the situation in Prague, was captured by Ernst Sommer, a native of Jihlava and colleague of Martin Buber, in his novel *Gideons Auszug* (Gideon Leaves, 1913).



for their lukewarm, assimilationist stance regarding their Jewishness. The most celebrated literary expression of this critical stance is of course Kafka's *Brief an den Vater* (Letter to his Father, 1919), from which the following sentences are often quoted:

*Later, as a young man, I could not understand how, with the insignificant scrap of Judaism you yourself possessed, you could reproach me for not making an effort (for the sake of piety at least, as you put it) to cling to a similar, insignificant scrap. It was indeed, so far as I could see, a mere nothing, a joke — not even a joke* (Kafka 1983, p. 598).

Jewish heroes seeking their identity then fill the texts of Prague German literature, from the early prose works of Max Brod (from the period of 'indifferentism') to the novels written by Hans Natonek in exile or the short stories of Johannes Urzidil, and here I would like to mention that at the birth of this thematic series there stood the Moravian author Ferdinand von Saar, with his fulminating short story *Seligmann Hirsch* (see Fialová-Fürstová 2017, p. 179).

A substantial source of inspiration for assimilated Western Jewish authors was the traditional, unassimilated Eastern Jewish world, unspoiled by Western civilisation, which was opened up to them for example by the work of Martin Buber, as well as the fact that German translations of authors writing in Yiddish (Schalom Asch, Scholem Alejchem, Josef Samuel Agnon) were being published, and theatre groups playing folk theatre in Yiddish were touring European metropolises. One such group, appearing in the Savoy hotel in Prague in 1911, headed by Yitzhak Loew, fired the enthusiasm of Franz Kafka (as we can read in his diaries), and the world of Eastern Judaism also changed the life stance of Jiří Langer, who dwelt for some time in the courts of the Galician Wunderrabbis, and after his return to Prague dressed — to the horror of his (Czech) assimilated industrialist family — in a kaftan. The gateway to the world of Eastern Judaism was then flung wide open by the First World War, the battle lines of which in the east impinged upon traditional Jewish territories, and which caused a flood of refugees into Western Europe (to the displeasure of the settled, assimilated Jews in the region).

However, it is necessary to view this interest in the world of the Eastern Jews within the broader contexts: assimilated Jews, numbed by Western civilisation, evidently saw in Eastern Judaism a certain type of exoticism, the possibility of a return to a pre-civilisation 'paradise', to a pre-civilised state of the spirit and of religiosity.

By contrast, orthodox, traditional Jewish piety did not meet with such an enthusiastic reception, which is entirely understandable: at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the second great wave of religious syncretism was flooding into Western Europe, in which interest was again peaking in all kinds of non-Christian types of religion (Buddhism, Taoism, Hinduism, Islam), and especially all forms of irrational, non-dogmatic and non-institutionalised spirituality, occultism, spiritualism, mysticism, gnosis, the fantastic, the Kabbalah, Hasidism, Messianism, theosophy, anthroposophy, alchemy etc. Within this context, it is again necessary to recall the celebrated works of Prague German literature inspired by the mystical atmosphere of Renaissance Prague, which was home to both the legendary Kabbalist Rabbi Löw and the eccentric emperor Rudolph II, a patron of all occult sciences.

A peculiar variant of seeking identity in German literature is 'Jüdischer Selbsthass' / 'Jewish Self-hatred', in which Jewish authors seek the roots of their personal failures and defeats in their own Jewishness. Theodor Lessing (the philosopher, psychologist and journalist, murdered by the Nazis in Mariánské Lázně in 1933), in a book bearing the above title, gathered together five portraits of such self-hating Jews, in which evidently the most renowned of these, the Viennese philosopher Otto Weininger, is presented side by side with the Prague philosopher Max Steiner, who similarly to Otto Weininger in his aphorisms and scientific-philosophical treatises consequently sought reasons for all the failures of the modern age, finding them in Jewishness. At the age of 27 years he took his own life (similarly to Weininger), and his friends (above all the Berlin based Kurt Hiller, the first great promoter of the expressionist movement) constructed a literary monument to him, stylising him into the role of a martyr of his age and generation (see Krappmann 2009).

'Jüdischer Selbsthass' is a central motif also in Ludwig Winder's excellent expressionist novel *Die jüdische Orgel* (The Jewish Organ, 1922). From the time of his childhood, the main protagonist Albert Wolf is forced, indeed by means of violence, by his orthodox rabbi, to observe a strict Jewish rite (which appears to the boy like an 'Ungeheuer mit Drachenzähnen' / 'Phantom with Dragon's Teeth'). Albert Wolf then regards this initiatory violation and his Jewish predestination as the reason for all his failures:

*All that I detest is within me, I am imprisoned in my skin from the ghetto, and even if I strip the skin from my body nothing is won, since beneath it there beats the heart of my ancestors, and my mind is the mind of my ancestors* (Winder 1983, p. 49).

In this novel also, the central theme is an uprising against a Jewish father, with the difference that unlike the fathers of the Prague German authors (either real or literary), this father, Wolf is not lax and lukewarm in his religion, but on the contrary highly orthodox. This is due to the fact that Ludwig Winder was from Moravia, where the progress of Jewish assimilation was somewhat slower than in Bohemia (as a result of other historical factors).

However, perhaps the largest group among the Jewish authors writing in German comprised those who continued to believe that assimilation was the one true path, which after various vicissitudes would once again be smoothed, or fully assimilated authors in whose works no 'Jewish substance' or Jewish theme appeared, authors who sometimes even belonged to German national or anti-Semitic groups.

In the historiography of Prague German literature, a lukewarm/assimilationist approach to one's own Jewishness was presently considered a defining criterion, differentiating the older (pre-Kafka) from the younger (Kafka's) generation: members of the older Prague generation, authors born approximately between the years of 1850 and 1875, are often indiscriminately classified within this group, thus the group of those who considered their Jewishness an element of lesser importance in their personal identity, and were not gratified to be reminded of it. This does not apply absolutely (just as no literary typology applies absolutely), but it is true that authors such as Fritz Mauthner, Heinrich Teweles, Friedrich Adler, Hugo Salus, Oskar Wiener and others may be named as examples of a radically assimilationist approach to





Jewishness, which they balanced against an all the more fervent relationship towards German nationalism, and an all the more disdainful relationship towards the Czechs.

They were reminded of their Jewish roots in the harshest possible manner by German Nazism. Oskar Wiener expressed the horror of all the assimilated Western Jews, who had regarded assimilation as the one possible path to success, a few days before his transport to Terezín: 'It is unbelievable. I have always ardently loved Germany and now I must perish in abjection like this' (Wiener in Krolop 1967, p. 56).

With the advent of Nazism, the formulation of the Nuremberg laws, the Anschluss of Austria, the detachment of the Sudetenland, the occupation of Czechoslovakia, the outbreak of war, the invasion of the German armies into Poland, Lithuania and Ukraine (thus the territory settled in by the Eastern Jews), the building of the concentration camps, the formulation of the 'final solution' — the Holocaust/Shoah, the situation of Jews in Europe was fundamentally transformed — and literature reacted to this change in many more ways. I shall not summarise these here, but in conclusion I shall state the following: by 'purifying' German culture of Jewish influences, the Nazi ideologists (physically) destroyed not only the European Jewish culture, but also irrevocably damaged German, Austrian and Czech culture, which since that time, without any Jewish contribution, has been merely a conventional and provincial literature and culture.

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