

BOOKENDS OF BOHEMIAN JEWISH IDENTITY: LEOPOLD KOMPERT AND FRITZ MAUTHNER

By Bradley F. Abrams

The Jewish experience in nineteenth-century Bohemia is a fruitful area for research that, perhaps due to the paucity of statistical data, has been largely neglected by historians. That ancient kingdom has long been a center of Jewish activity, and from 1650 until into the nineteenth century the Jewish quarter of its capital city, Prague, was the largest Jewish settlement in the world. Moreover, the Jewish population of surrounding Bohemia more than doubled between 1785 and 1869. Between these years Bohemian Jews experienced an increasing number of significant changes in their objective circumstance, gaining legal rights and reaching economic and social positions essential to active participation in the modern state.

Between the 1830s and the 1870s, the Jews in and around Prague also underwent a less concrete but perhaps more important evolution, one of self-conception; a shift in self-identity which influenced their descendants politically and intellectually until well after the turn of the century. In the 1830s Jewish communities sought to maintain a particularly Jewish self-identity. By the 1870s, however, their psychological construction of the world had changed. They had chosen largely to identify with and assimilate into the German ethnic minority group as opposed to the politically ambitious Czech population. Economically, this step had allowed them to become a small upper-class ethnic group within the larger upper-class ethnic minority of German-language Bohemians. Furthermore, their choice of identification with the Germans out of the swirling matrix of ethnic possibilities in Prague had resulted in an change in their conception of themselves and their sociological surroundings. In the 1830s it had been "we" Jews in an environment of "those" Gentiles, but by the 1870s it had become "we" Germans in "those" Czechs' world.

This is not to say that Jews shifted loyalties and identities either instantly or completely. They still continued to think of themselves as Jews, but more likely represented themselves as "Germans of the Mosaic faith," "Jewish Germans," or "German Jews." This allowed them to reap the historical and cultural benefits of their position within the German linguistic and political ranks, yet also permitted them to maintain a sense of Jewish identity¹.

¹ As Gary Cohen rightly points out in his insightful consideration of the struggle of Prague's Jewish community, "The usual notions of assimilation [i. e. the acquisition of the values, attitudes, and habits of one group by another] have also worked to limit understandings of situations in which individuals simultaneously share values and relationships with several ethnic groups. So long as scholars conceive of assimilation as a linear process whereby individuals simply move from one group membership to another, we will tend to dismiss dual

Because of the political ramifications of this change in Jewish self-identity, Prague and its surroundings provide an interesting laboratory for the study of the evolution of minority identification patterns. However, the scanty and often inaccurate statistical data on the Jewish population in the earlier years, and that "hard" data's inability to reveal the intellectual processes of changing identity construction, devalue a systematic study of that sort. To document these changes, it is necessary to portray how Jews *conceived* of themselves, their environment, and their place in that environment. For this reason, this short introduction to the problem will concentrate on the reminiscences and literary output of two Bohemian Jewish intellectuals in the 1800s. Through these examples of self-expression and self-representation, one can gain insight into the Jewish community's mental evolution in an era in which it was struggling to come to grips with both the implications of its emancipation and its increasing economic success.

An ideal study would be lengthy enough to consider the dozens of important Jewish writers between the Napoleonic Wars and the end of the Czechoslovak Republic, and the corresponding shift in their self-identity from "Jewish" to a qualified "German" and ultimately "Czech," but this brief paper will only examine two writers bracketing 1848, the crucial revolutionary year lying in the middle of the shift in Jewish identity from "Jewish" to "German-Jewish" – Leopold Kompert and Fritz Mauthner.

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Leopold Kompert was raised in Münchengrätz, a small town east of Prague, in an environment of incipient industrialization and Jewish attempts to involve themselves in the political and social life of their land. Born in 1822, Leopold grew up under the strong influence of his mother who, as was common for enlightened Jews of those decades, "worshipped to German classics over hard bread-crusts²." While at Gymnasium in Jungbunzlau Kompert continued his study of the German classics, but also learned much of the history of Bohemia and competed with the poet Moritz Hartmann in composing elegies on Bohemian history.

His mature literary activity was driven by the desire to depict common people in everyday situations, with their actual problems and fears, and the need to write from personal experience. These led him to write about his early days in the *Gasse* in Münchengrätz in the 1830s and his experiences with the residents "von dessen Blut und Nerven selber war," and make him an excellent source for information on Jewish self-conception³.

affiliations as merely transitory and inherently unstable." See Cohen, Gary: *Jews in German Society. Prague 1860–1914*. *Central European History* 10 (1977) 29. – Also, for an interesting examination of the difficulties contemporary German Jews faced in developing both a sense of non-Jewish belonging while maintaining Jewish identity, see Tal, Uriel: *Christians and Jews in Germany. Religion, Politics, and Ideology in the Second Reich, 1870–1914*. Ithaca 1971.

² Grünfeld, Max: *Der Prediger*. Brandeis *Volkskalender* (1899). Cited in Kestenbergl-Gladstein, Ruth: *The Jews Between Czechs and Germans in the Historic Lands, 1848–1918*. In: *The Jews of Czechoslovakia*. Edited by the Jewish Publication Society of America. Vol. I. Philadelphia 1968, 55.

³ Amann, Paul: *Leopold Komperts Literarische Anfänge*. Prag 1927, 8 (Prager deutsche Studien 5).

In addition to the general experience of having grown up in the *Gasse*, there were two other experiences from Kompert's childhood that influenced his literary direction. The first was his contact with the *Schnorrer*, itinerant Jewish beggars for whom each Jewish community provided a bedroom and meals on the sabbath. Their stories provide much of the background for, and often constitute the factual bases of, Kompert's tales about ghetto travellers and the experiences of Jews in other lands. The other important early influence on the direction of Kompert's literary production was his grandfather, the kosher ritual slaughterer for the territories surrounding the family's home. Leopold travelled the district with him regularly, giving him insight into the lives of the *Randare* and *Dorfjuden* who lived in the outlying areas⁴. From observing these people, "denen der stete Verkehr mit den Bauern und die Entfernung von ihren Glaubensgenossen manche Eigenheit bäurischen und christlichen Wesens erworben hatten," he developed his belief in the possibility of Jewish assimilation and unity with the community's Christian residents, as well as his desire that Jews take up the traditionally Christian occupation of farming⁵.

The tales of the small-town Jewish communities of Kompert's youth served two didactic purposes as well as providing him with a vehicle for expression. First, he wrote them to provide Christians with a view into the lives and customs of their Jewish countrymen. Second, and more important given the scope of this paper, he wrote them to urge Jews like those he describes to reconsider their views on the value of assimilation with their Christian neighbors. He set himself to this task only after the first volume of his stories, *Aus dem Getto*, had achieved a high level of popularity among Christians and Jews alike. With these two purposes in mind, he described the residents of the *Gasse* through the device of a series of problems the residents had to confront in coming to terms with their position as Jews in the Austrian Empire and often posed by their increasing contact with their Christian countrymen, whether Czech or German. Within this context, the problems he explores most often are Jewish-Christian intermarriage and the choice of some Jews to enter into traditionally Christian occupations.

The institution of marriage occupies a central position in Kompert's works. It has threefold importance for him, as it allows him to point out both the human costs of the *Familientengesetz* and Jewish attitudes on intermarriage to Christians, as well as permitting him to make an argument in favor of intermarriage to Jews⁶. The problems

⁴ *Dorfjuden* were small-town Jews often engaged in peddling or general retail trade. A *Randar*, in the jargon of the *Gasse* were "Pächter einer herrschaftlichen Dorfschenke oder Branntweinerie. Denn bei uns zulande haben die ‚Herrschaften‘ das Recht, den Geist, den sie selbst brauen und brennen, dem Volk auszuschneiden, und da sie das natürlich nicht in eigener Person tun können, haben sie den Randar erfunden, gleichsam ein Mittelsperson, die für einen beträchtlichen Pachtzins die Mühe auf sich nimmt." Kompert, Leopold: Leopold Komperts sämtliche Werke in zehn Bänden. Bd. I. Leipzig 1906, 76–77.

⁵ Kompert: Bd. I, ix.

⁶ The *Familientengesetz* (1726) restricted Jewish marriages, and placed limits on the number of Jewish families allowed to live in Bohemia. It allowed only the eldest son to marry, and only after the death of his father. Joseph II amended parts of the law, but added other requirements for permission to marry. The story "Ohne Bewilligung" depicts Jews' hardships graphically,

associated with marriage very vividly portray the Jews' relationship to their environment when a Jew and a Christian fall in love. This is a central theme of many of Kompert's stories, for opposition to intermarriage was a bastion of the religiously conservative communities' ethnic defense that Kompert wished to break down on the road to full assimilation. In the early stories, then, it is not surprising to find a warning against relationships with Christians shrouded with dire spiritual implications, as in *Alt Babele*. In this story a grandmother scares her granddaughter into ending an ambiguous relationship with a Christian gentleman by telling her a tale of a Jewish girl who had become pregnant with a Christian man as the baby's father. The girl is visited by witchlike ghosts who bring about the baby's death and the mother's resulting insanity⁷.

A more valuable description of the 1830s Jewish feelings toward inter-religious relationships is the novella *Die Kinder des Randars*. The story obviously is taken directly from his childhood experiences, as it takes place in his hometown of Münchengrätz, and incorporates the *Randaren* (Rebb Schmul and his family) he visited with his grandfather and *Schnorrer*. Rebb Schmul's daughter, Hannele, and Honza, a local Christian youth, fall in love as children. Late in the story, Hannele has to choose between her family and the man she loves, who has since become a Priest. Hannele leaves her family clandestinely on the most holy day of the Jewish religious calendar, Yom Kippur, takes money from her father's desk and flees to Honza. She has a change of heart about her flirtation with Christianity, and decides to return home, to which Honza exclaims bitterly "Geh', du verfluchte Jüdin⁸!" The consequences of her near conversion are quickly felt in the Schmul household. The betrayed father falls ill, dying shortly thereafter, no prospective husbands come to visit Hannele, although they had flocked to her in the past, and "sie wird ehelos bleiben. Sie, dieschon, auf 'fremden Wegen' gewandelt, kann sie vergessen, wer einst ihr Jugendgefährte gewesen⁹?"

Kompert's own views on intermarriage, however, reveal themselves in his later stories, where his purpose is to point the direction he wished his coreligionists to follow. In these stories a different formula is followed. The Jewish families come to recognize that expelling the child from the family and sitting *shive* (spending a week sitting on low stools praying for the soul of a dead relative, a practice commonly initiated when a Jew intermarried) is wrong, and they eventually reaccept the errant child, as well as his or her Christian spouse.

One such story is *Eine Verlorene*, which concerns a family composed of an elderly woman, Marjim, and her son Jossef. Ten years before the story begins, Marjim's other child, her daughter Dinah, had married a local Czech farmer, Pawel Smetana, converted to Catholicism and changed her name to Madlena. Throughout the story Marjim wishes for her two children to be reunited against Jossef's opposition. His conception of the meaning of the marriage, and his reasons for denying any *rapprochement*

and their practice of having weddings without government approval. Kompert: Bd. I, 221-263.

⁷ Kompert: Bd. I, 26-46.

⁸ Kompert: Bd. I, 220.

⁹ Kompert: Bd. I, 221.

provide further insight into the power that religion had within Bohemian Jewish communities. In a remarkable section, the effect of Dinah-Madlena's decision to leave her family and her religion is described – "Der Vater war vor Gram gestorben, aber die Mutter setzte sich hin auf einen niederen Fußschemel und weinte sieben Tage und sieben Nächte" – and Jossef describes Dinah's departure symbolically as her "death"¹⁰. In this context, it is not surprising that Jossef relies on Biblical text as support for his rejection of his sister. He claims that with her marriage and conversion, she violated a biblical command, as one "wer zu seinem Bruder und zu seiner Schwester sagt, ich kenne dich nicht, ich weiß nichts von dir," and that he was thereby freed from any obligation to justify his actions, for "Was der Mensch tun sollte, wo Gott selbst so deutlich spreche"¹¹?

At this point, all is in keeping with Kompert's earlier stories, but this soon changes, as the author negates the religious argument in an interesting and instructive way. Jossef had hired a tutor to instruct his son, but had dismissed him because he was too "aufgeklärt;" speaking "immer in hochdeutschem Dialekt von den 'Reformen,'" and using the words "'Emanzipation' und 'Glaubensfreiheit' – zwei Worte, die er [Jossef] nur dunkel begriff"¹². However, it is to this man that Jossef turns for interpretation when Marjim falls ill and calls for a few sheets of paper that her grandfather, who has been mythologized as a figure of great education throughout the story, had written. The tutor recognizes them as a transcription of the Sermon on the Mount, proves it to Jossef by having him read from the "verbotenen Bücher," and explains to Jossef that Jesus and Matthew were themselves Jews¹³. Through this, Kompert vindicates the enlightened teacher, showing the value of education and open-mindedness, and also, through the high regard the great-great-grandfather is accorded, indicates the worth of the Christian teachings in and of themselves, resulting in a softening of Jossef's views on the unacceptability of intermarriage.

Jossef's religious prejudice is eroded by this lesson, and after a chance conversation with Pawel's father, who tells how his hatred for Dinah-Madlena evaporated after he saw how intelligent and caring a wife she was, it finally disappears and the family reunification can take place. When Marjim falls ill, and believes she will soon die (a prescient thought that becomes true in all Kompert's stories), Jossef goes to Dinah-Madlena, and calls her home to be blessed one last time by her dying mother. During Jossef's visit Dinah-Madlena explains her decision to convert, explaining that for the children's sake a wife should not have a different religion than her husband: "Es kommen nur Streitigkeiten zwischen beiden heraus, was nicht gut ist, und was soll erst mit den Kindern geschehen"¹⁴? She also reveals a dream of Jewish-Christian unity, which seems to mirror Kompert's hope "in ferner Zukunft auf eine Kirchenunion zwischen Christen und Juden"¹⁵. She desires that

¹⁰ Kompert: Bd. II, 67ff.

¹¹ Kompert: Bd. II, 179.

¹² Kompert: Bd. II, 124.

¹³ Kompert: Bd. II, 190.

¹⁴ Kompert: Bd. II, 198.

¹⁵ Kompert: Bd. I, lviii.

es soll Länder geben, wo Christen und Juden sich nehmen dürfen, und braucht keines von beiden seine Religion zu wechseln. Schön ist das, das muß man schon sagen, wenn weder der Mann noch das Weib den Ihrigen das Herzleid anzutun und sie zu kränken braucht¹⁶.

It is important to note, however, that the other major objection that Jossef has to his sister's union with Pawel is that through it she has become a *Bäuerin*, which he believes is unacceptable for Jews who, he believes, are not created to work the fields. This is one of the prejudices to which Kompert most strongly objected, perhaps as a result of his travels through the countryside with his grandfather and his conversations with the *Randaren* and other rural Jews who had absorbed elements of Christian culture. In his earlier stories, he had his characters express an understanding of the beauty of farming, while at the same time recognizing it is an occupation they would never pursue. In *Eine Verlorene*, however, after the family reconciliation Jossef "hat die 'gemischte Warenhandlung' aufgegeben und is Bauer geworden¹⁷."

Kompert carries integration into the farming environment to its ultimate happy conclusion in his novel *Am Pflug*, in which Rebb Schlome Hahn takes his family and moves into the countryside, abandoning his *Schnittwarenhandlung*, saying

Sagen sie nicht immer, daß der Jud' nicht hinaus aufs Feld will und lieber mit dem Hausiersack sich schleppt, als hinter dem Pflug die Ochsen antreibt? Leider Gottes! ist es denn nicht wahr, was sie uns vorwerfen? Jetzt geben sie's einem an die Hand und alles schreit: 'Versündig dich nicht an Gott!' ... Auf's Dorf müsse man hinaus, die Schnittwarenhandlung von sich werfen, wie einen wurmigen Apfel, und Bauer werden¹⁸.

Several of the other occupations are also considered to be work fitting for "them," (Christians) as opposed to "us" (Jews), and Kompert describes intricately the obstacles small-town Jewish social and religious life raises to any Jew who desires to enter such trades. An example of this, and of Jew who successfully overcomes it, is his short story *Trenderl*, about a Jew who surmounts his community's resistance and becomes a locksmith¹⁹.

Kompert rarely discusses politics directly, and religion is therefore of primary importance for his description of the Jewish community at the beginning of period of transition, as the secular forces of the Enlightenment are beginning to make inroads in Bohemian small towns. However, the story *Die Kinder des Randars* contains much on the national debate in Bohemia, as Honza and the Randar's son Moritz discuss the issue openly. Honza is a nationalistic youth, who complains when forced to learn German in Gymnasium:

¹⁶ Kompert: Bd. II, 199.

¹⁷ Kompert: Bd. II, 207.

¹⁸ Kompert: Bd. III, 18–20. It is interesting to note that this ideal view of Jewish assimilative ability becomes devalued in East-Central Europe by the first third of the twentieth century, as the volume of Hungarian short stories collected by Andrew Handler describes. These subtly make the argument that successful assimilation is only possible when Jews strongly *maintain* their Jewish identity. For an example analogous to *Eine Verlorene*, see Galosi, Soma. Vendel Szegeti. In: Ararát. A Collection of Hungarian-Jewish Short Stories. Edited by Andrew Handler. Rutherford 1977, 143–150. – F e h e r, Ferenc. István Bibó and the Jewish Question in Hungary. Notes in the Margin of Classical Essay. New German Critique 21 (1980) 3–46, is a insightful article on the question.

¹⁹ This story is reproduced in Kompert: Bd. II, 208–264.

In diesem [Honza] wuchs mit der Zeit ein tiefer Groll gegen alles ‚Deutsche‘ auf ... ‚Sag’s selbst, Moritz,‘ sprach er einst, als sie gerade deutsche Jamben einrichten mußten, ‚ist’s nicht das größte Unrecht, daß man lernen muß, wozu man keine Lust hat? Unser Professor ist ein Deutscher, was wir studieren müssen, ist deutsch oder lateinisch – böhmisch nichts. Mir ist’s immer, als wär’ ich gar nicht in Böhmen geboren, oder als hätte mich eine Zigeunerin in meiner Kindheit gestohlen. Ist’s dir nicht auch so?‘

‚Mir ist alles einerlei,‘ sagte Moritz unbedachtsam.

‚So bist du auch kein rechter Böhme!‘ schrie Honza und lief grimmig fort.

‚Was bin ich denn?‘ rief es in Moritz, dessen innerstes Gefühl sich gegen diesen Ausspruch aufbäumte²⁰.

Moritz’s “Was bin ich denn?” exposes the heart of the point I am trying to make. His conception of the world was one in which people were divided into two groups, Jews (“us”) and Christians (“them.”) Honza as the representation of rapidly spreading Czech national feeling, has changed the rules of Moritz’s game, substituting the primacy of national identity for the primacy of religious identity. Moritz, as the representation of the Bohemian Jewish community, cannot fully understand the implications of this way of assessing the world. Honza forces Moritz to confront the question directly by presenting him with a Czech (as opposed to German) history book, which contains very different interpretations of Jan Hus, the Battle of the White Mountain, and other events in Bohemia’s history than those given in their German-Bohemian Gymnasium. Kompert, by having Moritz attempt to draw nearer to his friend (and his friend’s view of Bohemian history) and, more importantly, the way in which Kompert has Moritz go about this, shows Kompert’s deep feeling for the Czech people, his openness to Jewish assimilation into the Czech national group, and the state of flux in which Bohemia’s Jewish community found itself during the period of Czech national revival²¹.

As a Jew, Moritz was oblivious to the religious significance of the quarrels between the Hussites and the Catholic Church described in Honza’s history book, but he was struck by the political aspects of the struggle – “Hier sah er einen Kampf um Gut und Freiheit und Selbstständigkeit²².” The conflict gains further emotional weight for him when he conceives of a relationship between Jerusalem and Bohemia, both states having a glorious past and existing no longer – “hier sprachen seine eigenen Gefühle ein Wort mit. Jerusalem und Böhmen! Derselbe Nachtgeist unhüllte die zwei Riesenlichen mit dem Schweigen des Grabes.” He then presents this analogy to Honza:

‚Soll ich dir’s sagen, Honza,‘ sprach Moritz einige Tage darauf, ‚mit wem die Geschichte Böhmens große Ähnlichkeit hat?‘

²⁰ Kompert: Bd. I, 140.

²¹ The exact periodization of the Czech national movement’s development is, and will remain, debatable. Throughout this paper, I will be generally following Hroch, Miroslav: *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe. A Comparative Analysis of the Social Composition of Patriotic Groups Among the Smaller European Nations*. Cambridge 1985, 44–61. – However, Hroch’s contention that Czech nationalism became a later suspended mass movement in 1848/9 seems more contentious than John Bradley’s argument for intellectual consolidation 1860–1880 and mass development thereafter. See Bradley, John: *Czech Nationalism in the Nineteenth Century*. New York, 1974 (East European Monographs 157).

²² Kompert: Bd. I, 141–142.

„Mit keiner anderen,“ entgegnete Honza stolz.
 „Und ich sage dir, sie hat viele Ähnlichkeit mit der jüdischen.“ – Honza lachte unbändig.
 „Habt ihr Zizka,“ rief er, „habt ihr Hussiten?“
 „O ja,“ sagte Moritz, „wir haben die Makkabäer.“
 „Die kenne ich nicht,“ meinte Honza, „die sind auch schon längst tot. Aber die Hussiten –“
 „Sind denn die nicht tot?“
 „O nein!“ sagte Honza geheimnisvoll, „die Hussiten leben noch.“
 Erst später erklärte er seinem Mitschüler, daß er jeden, der es mit Böhmen gut meine, für einen Hussiten erkläre. Derjenige meine es aber gut mit dem Vaterlande, der – gern böhmisch spreche²³.

Here Honza follows the path that the Czech nationalists were beginning to follow at the time, using language choice as a political litmus test. Moritz wished Honza to consider him a Hussite, as many reformist Jews like Kompert wished to be considered fully Czech, and the two spent that afternoon carousing at a peasant festival celebrating a Žižka victory. The cost of this for Moritz was high, for he both violated his dietary restrictions and became very drunk, sinning against his religious beliefs. Through this Kompert links assimilation to religious devotion, intimating that the path to assimilation may involve discarding some centuries-old religious restrictions.

The national question arises only in one other work, the two-volume novel *Zwischen Ruinen*. Here the hero, Jonathan, a German-speaking manufacturer, is asked to support a Czech in a local election against a German, and when he refuses the local Priest, followed by a small band of Czech radicals, burns one of his buildings. Kompert still does not directly concern himself with the political ramifications of the linguistic/national component of the assimilation he desires. Rather than developing the political aspects of the situation he creates, he returns to the theme of intermarriage, as if throwing his hands up in disgust at the situation, saying: “Warum muß es so sein? Tschechen gegen Deutsche und Deutsche gegen Tschechen, und wenn Leute aus Jonathans Volk zwischen sie kommen, werden sie von beiden erdrückt²⁴!”

Kompert could avoid discussing the political confrontation then arising in Bohemia between the German minority and the Czech majority because the period he described lay before the birth of mass Czech nationalism, and many of the stories were themselves composed before the Jews were required to make a political stand. The Czech resurgence began as a cultural brand of nationalism predicated, as Honza indicates, on language choice, and it determined political orientation by the active use of Czech – true nationalists spoke Czech, not German. Kompert was somewhat blind to the political aspects of language choice, as “die tschechische Sprache, die Sprache seiner frühen Kindheit, hatte den Grundstein seiner Liebe zu den Tschechen gelegt und er glaubte auch ein halbes Jahrhundert später noch, daß dies mit seinem Gefühl der Zugehörigkeit zu den Deutschen völlig vereinbar sei²⁵.”

²³ Kompert: Bd. I, 142.

²⁴ Kompert: Bd. VII, 55.

²⁵ Pazi, Margarita: Jüdisch-deutsche Schriftsteller in Böhmen. In: Gegenseitige Einflüsse deutscher und jüdischer Kultur. Hrsg. v. Walter Grab. Jahrbuch des Instituts für deutsche Geschichte. Beihefte 4. Tel-Aviv 1982, 230–231.

Kompert's Bohemian Jewish community of the 1830s was a fairly closed world, content with the Jewish traditions that had been passed down from generation to generation. It was a community bound together by a common sense of identity, of being Jews in a Christian world, and determined either by fear or devotion to maintain this distinction. Jews were not to marry Christians, to pursue trades that "they" pursued, or live on the land as "they" did. Kompert, and other assimilationist reformers (such as his Gymnasium colleagues Moritz Hartmann and Isidor Heller) attempted to break down the walls of the ghetto that lay between small-town Bohemian Jews and their Christian counterparts through inexpensive, straight-forward novels and stories such as these, which appeared in the wake of the Prague Jewish Enlightenment of the end of the eighteenth century. The message they carried, and the descriptions of the problems Jews were beginning to face made Bohemian Jews more aware of their position in Bohemian life and confronted them with the ultimate question of Moritz's self-examination: If assimilation is valuable and desirable, into which national group should Jews assimilate, Czech or German?

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Jews, however, were not to be allowed the luxury of resolving the question of national assimilation over a long expanse of peaceful years. The revolution of 1848 placed the question of Jewish identity in stark relief, as Jews were called upon to take a political stand by a tide of Czech nationalism that rose as the revolution followed its turbulent course. There is, of course, not space here to dissect the political development of Bohemia's Jewish community during the revolution, and the present author has discussed the question elsewhere²⁶. However, the social and cultural context and practical results of the events of 1848 and the ensuing years as they affected Jewish social and cultural patterns, are important for any assessment of the position of Jewish intellectuals like Fritz Mauthner, who wrote at the end of the nineteenth century, so a brief overview is necessary.

Czechs' ability to gain the Jews' support had been severely damaged by Czech anti-Semitic rioting during 1848. In fact, the writer Oskar Donath places the anti-Semitic violence of 1848 and the preceding years at the center of the Jewish estrangement from the Czech national cause²⁷. The Czech rioting was particularly important as Jews could compare their treatment at the hands of the Czechs to the new Jewish policy the Austrian government pursued after the Revolution's defeat.

In 1849 Jews were granted complete freedom of movement and the hated *Familien-tengesetz* was repealed, and the next ten years saw the removal of the final restrictions on Jewish occupation and residence. The lifting of these barriers had a profound impact on Bohemian Jews, both socially and intellectually. The importance of the removal of the marriage restrictions can be seen in increases both in the number of families and in a general population increase from 70,578 to 89,933 in the twenty-

²⁶ Abrams, Bradley F.: The Austro-Czech Jewish Intelligentsia of 1848's *Österreichisches Central-Organ*. *BohZ* 31/1 (1990) 1-20.

²⁷ Donath, Oskar: Siegfried Kappers Leben und Wirken. *Archiv für slavische Philologie* 30 (1909) 434.

three years between 1846 and 1869 can be directly attributed to these reforms. The granting of *Freizügigkeit* (freedom of movement and settlement) had the most profound effect on the *Dorfjuden* that Kompert described, however. Many of them, after wandering for a short time, made their way to Prague, resulting in a near doubling of the city's Jewish population, which rose from 7706 in 1857 to 14,928 in 1869.

The Jews who took advantage of the *Freizügigkeit* moved to Prague to escape the poverty and restrictions of ghetto life, and once there many Jews attempted to assimilate and acquire the economic and social status of secular, liberal, middle-class society, whether Czech or German. The political tensions in the city increased the pressure on Jews to choose between the two national groups and, in the 1850s and 1860s, they found little to attract them to the Czechs and much encouragement for a union with German society. This was reinforced by Czech nationalist political maneuverings. The conservative Old Czechs' clericalism (especially in the field of education) made Jews wary, and the young Czechs' radicalism raised the specter in the minds of many Jews of the rioting of 1848, which had stamped radical Czechs with a decidedly anti-Semitic cast. As well, the Jews were on one hand in direct economic competition with the rising Czech middle class, and on the other were factory owners employing large numbers of Czech workers. Jews' position as the competitors of the Czech petty bourgeoisie and enslavers of the toiling Czech masses led to recurrent outbreaks of anti-Semitic rioting throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century.

Identification with the German minority of Prague was far less problematic in these decades. Jews had been forced to learn German in order to conduct business, as opposed to the Czech language, of which many Jews had only a limited understanding. More importantly, Jews conceived of German society as having much more wealth, power and prestige. While this was indeed true during the crucial decades just after mid-century, Jews continued to hold this belief long after a significant Czech bourgeoisie had been created. The German Liberal Party was the center of German political activity in these years, and, unlike either the Old or Young Czechs, they welcomed Jewish support, opposed clerical influence in the schools, and championed Jewish equality. Most of these Jews, then, became active in the German political, social and cultural groups in Prague because those groups welcomed them. In fact, several of the presidents of the German *Casino*, in the most important of the German organizations, were Jews. The continuing prosperity of German community life was seen as resting on two pillars: "no flirtation with Slavs and no hostility to Jews²⁸."

The Jewish intelligentsia faced additional constraints on their identity choice, beyond the general ones described above. It was both courted and rejected by both the German and Czech communities throughout the late 1840s, but by the 1870s they, too, had largely chosen to attempt to assimilate into the German ethnic group. As the number of explanations for this would likely equal the number of scholars attempting the task, I would like here only to make a few observations, all of which are tied to the importance of language in the political dispute. The first concerns the nexus between education and success in liberal society. Jewish intellectuals were encouraged to join

²⁸ Cited in Cohen: *Jews in German Society* 41.

German circles in 1848 because they felt that the emancipation they would gain through revolution would open the doors of education to them and their children. At that time higher education was synonymous with German education, and the vast majority of intellectual traffic was carried on in the German language (one need only consider Palacky's *Geschichte Böhmens*). The works of Goethe and Schiller became juxtaposed to the less prominent ones of the Czech authors, as exemplified by the collections of fairy tales and legends collected by Božena Němcová (whose very name is emblematic of the ironic and problematic nature of Czech history.)

Second, the stress on rural aspects of Czech life created another obstacle to Jewish intellectuals becoming assimilated into the Czech population. The majority of the Jewish intellectuals were widely read and travelled and had become through this largely cosmopolitan. The importance placed on the folk songs and dances of rural Czechs was difficult for these Jews, and Bohemian Jews in general, to grasp. They were unconvinced of the value of rural life and had little experience with it, as Kompert's stories pointed out and tried to remedy. The cultural foundation of the mass Czech movement was its peasantry, and the glorification of the national symbolism it embodied. Jews who did desire to associate themselves with the Czech movement came to the realization that this aspect of it would be alien to many of their coreligionists, particularly as within the pattern of assimilation the assimilating group tried to associate itself with higher culture as opposed to manifestations of folk life.

Third, Jewish intellectuals could not understand the necessity of learning the Czech language and literature when there existed little practical application for the skill in the everyday life of the business world, which was primarily German. Jewish literary figures, in addition to the political baggage associated with writing in Czech, understood that its possible audience was very small, since it was limited by the number of those who read the language. Although the Czech world was filled with potential themes and symbols of great artistic merit, the language was as yet incapable of expressing the problems of modern life as adequately as German.

Fourth, through the emphasis on the Czech language many Jewish intellectuals were faced with a confrontation between their sympathies and their manner of expressing them. Most had difficulty understanding the importance the Czechs placed upon their national language, believing that sympathy for their nation should be evidence enough of attachment and solidarity regardless of the language in which these feelings were expressed. Jewish writers' support for the Czech written in the German language, however, was misunderstood by the Czech nationalists for the easily understandable reason that it asserted the bilingual nature of Bohemia and the existing power relations; the Czech language being a lowly creature and fit only for internal use, and the German language being valued as the universal language of great culture. This consideration certainly does not mean that no Jewish writers attempted to express their love of their homeland. In fact, at the time of the revolution, there were several literary figures writing in the Czech language, or writing poetry, fiction and drama in German but choosing Czech historical or national-symbolic themes as their topics.

Even Jews writing on Czech themes and in the Czech language ran into difficulties. An instructive case is that of Siegfried Kapper, who wrote primarily in Czech. His collection of poems, *České listy* (1846), was received with much acclaim in many circles, and seemed as if they provided the beginning of fruitful relations between Jewish intellectuals and Czech nationalist intellectuals, but they were given harsh treatment by Karel Havlíček. Havlíček attacked the poetic merit of Kappers's poems, but more importantly also accused him with the traditional claim that Kapper, as a Jew, had divided loyalties, of writing with one eye toward Jerusalem and the other toward Bohemia. His review of *České listy*, published in the political newspaper *Česká včela*, lingered long in the minds of Slavic-oriented assimilationist Jewish intellectuals and had an immediate and profound effect on Kapper, who reportedly burned the manuscripts of a completed Czech tragedy and an unfinished Czech comedy, as well as withdrawing from Czech-language activities for several years, although professing to the end of his days his love for the Czech people and land²⁹. It is interesting to note the shift in Havlíček's opinion after the events of 1848, when he came to realize that the emancipation of the Jews, undertaken by the monarchical government was a necessary development.

* * *

An interesting example of distance and direction of Jewish assimilation is provided by the case of Fritz Mauthner, who was born in the crucial revolutionary year of 1848 in Horzitz (Hořice). His family moved into Prague after the granting of *Freizügigkeit* to take advantage of the economic climate and to provide better education for their children. While the family enjoyed the anticipated economic prosperity, Fritz later described his education as a "Höllenfahrt"³⁰. In fact, it often seems that he composed his memoirs primarily to show the effect a poor education can have on a gifted child.

His experiences in these early years are the primary reason for his choice to attempt to become fully Germanized. Born in a linguistic border area in an era of rising Czech national consciousness, Mauthner was forced to ponder his own identity and choose how he would conceive of himself – as a Jew, a Czech, or a German. The family's move to Prague only heightened his self-awareness, as he saw the city in a German light as "das erste für mich, daß ich die Straßentafeln, Geschäftsfirmer und Wirtshaus-schilder, die damals noch fast ohne Ausnahme deutsch waren, als geeignete Lesebücher entdeckte," but was at the same time struck that Prague was "schon damals eine sehr slawische Stadt"³¹.

Mauthner, whose parents were formally members of synagogues but areligious, rejected Jewishness as an identity. Perhaps because of the little knowledge he gained of the Jewish faith and culture, he saw the religion as merely empty ritual and "tote Symbole", the same verdict he eventually reached for Roman Catholicism after a brief

²⁹ *Česká včela*. 6, 17, and 20 November 1846. Reprinted with the Czech originals in Kisch, Guido: *In Search of Freedom. A History of American Jews from Czechoslovakia*. London 1949, 36–38, 213–214.

³⁰ Mauthner, Fritz: *Erinnerungen*. München 1918, 10.

³¹ Mauthner: *Erinnerungen* 11, 17.

"dilletantischen" flirtation with that faith³². He eventually called upon all Jews to become *konfessionslos*, and after his move to Berlin called for the German government to close the eastern borders in order to deny the *Ostjuden* entrance, as he felt they hurt the chances of the "good, German Jews" to become fully integrated³³. This strong stand may have been the result of his own feeling that he was not really a German, in spite of his massive assimilative effort, as he hints in a private letter: "Ja, wenn ich in meiner Jugend all die schönen Sachen hätte lernen dürfen! Wenn ich nicht aus einem anderen Milieu stammte als aus der Horzitzer Judengasse³⁴!" An anti-Jewish attitude was by no means uncommon for Jewish intellectuals of the time, however, as Max Brod affirms: "Natürlich hatte Mauthner vor allem Jüdischen den entschiedensten Horror. Das war eben die Denkweise jener um 1850 Geborenen, völlig dem Judentum Entfremdeten, den ‚emanzipierten‘ Aufklärern."³⁵

His school experiences, as well as his disposition towards linguistic study kept him from desiring to assimilate into the Czech population and conceive of himself as a Czech. He attended the *Piaristengymnasium* in Prague and came into contact with a large number of Czech students there, to whom he took an immediate dislike. He requested that his parents transfer him to the German *Kleinseitner* Gymnasium, which they did in 1866. In spite of his negative encounters with Czechs and the Jewish faith, he recognized their importance for his later studies of language, saying that "ich als Jude im zweisprachigen Böhmen war wie ‚prädestiniert‘, der Sprache meine Aufmerksamkeit zuzuwenden."³⁶ He wonders,

wenn ein Jude, der in einer slawischen Gegend Österreichs geboren ist, zur Sprachforschung nicht gedrängt wird. Er lernte damals genau genommen drei Sprachen zugleich verstehen: Deutsch als die Sprache der Beamten, der Bildung, der Dichtung und seines Umgangs; Tschechisch als die Sprache der Bauern und der Dienstmädchen, als die historische Sprache des glorreichen Königreichs Böhmen; ein bißchen Hebräisch als die heilige Sprache des Alten Testaments... Ich weiß aus späteren Erzählungen meiner Mutter, daß ich schon als Kind die törichten Fragen einer veralteten Sprachphilosophie zu stellen liebte: warum heißt das und das Ding so und so? Im Böhmischeso, und im Deutschen so³⁷?

Of the three languages, however, German was the only one that he ever mastered. His Hebrew instruction was limited to the unpleasant religion classes of the *Gymnasium*, and he shunned his little knowledge of Czech after his childhood.

Although Mauthner is best remembered today for his philosophical and linguistic studies *Kritik der Sprache* and the three-volume *Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, he also composed novels and occasional short stories. These early novelistic works showed his near-fanatical pro-German attitude, his conception of their Czech rivals, and the relationship between them. His first two published novels, *Der letzte Deutsche von Blatna* and *Die böhmischen Handschrift*, were written while he was still in Prague

³² Mauthner: *Erinnerungen* 53, 119.

³³ Liptzin, Saloman: *Germany's Stepchildren*. Philadelphia 1948, 223.

³⁴ From an unpublished letter cited in Weiler, Gershon: Fritz Mauthner. A Study in Jewish Self-Rejection. Leo Baeck Institute Year Book 8 (1963) 223.

³⁵ Brod, Max: *Der Prager Kreis*. Stuttgart 1966, 41.

³⁶ Mauthner: *Erinnerungen* 50.

³⁷ Mauthner: *Erinnerungen* 32–33.

attending university, but not published until he had moved to Berlin in 1874. Both of these early political novels drew heavily on his childhood experiences, but for the sake of brevity, I will only discuss the action of one at length. *Der letzte Deutsche von Blatna* is the story of Anton Gegenbauer, a patriotic German-speaker in the small town of Blatna that lies on the Czech-German linguistic border (as did Mauthner's Horzitz). Anton's childhood friends, Zabož and Katschenka Prokop, are Czechs whose father Svatopluk is an ardent nationalist. In the early part of the novel, Anton is portrayed sympathetically, truly wishing to live in peace with his Czech neighbors, as opposed to Zabož who, indoctrinated by his father, has become inflamed by the political struggle as a youth.

As in Kompert's work, a love relationship forms the background for Mauthner's exposition, but unlike Kompert he also addresses politics directly. Anton and Katschenka fell in love as children, and express their love for one another before Anton goes away to school in Prague. When Anton returns, he finds that the political and romantic situations in Blatna have changed in his absence. Politically, the German majority has withered away and the Czech nationalist forces, with Zabož as their head from his position as district secretary, have increased tensions by rallying in the local tavern. The tavern had traditionally been a German meeting place, but has symbolically shifted allegiances by changing the language of its sign from German to Czech and printing its menus bilingually. Moreover, Anton discovers that Katschenka is engaged to a man named Petr, who is one of the leaders of the Czech group.

The ensuing weeks see in the further decline of the German community and a resulting rise in the power of the Czechs. Anton's friends, the Priest and doctor, emigrate from the town, and he arrives at his reserved chair in the tavern only to find a note attached to it that reads: "†Hier ruht der letzte Deutsche von Blatna³⁸." The romantic aspect of the novel takes an interesting twist here, as Zabož goes to Anton and confides to him that his sister still loves him although she is engaged. Zabož hopes that Anton will have lost his love for his sister, but instead he confirms his love for her.

The father, sensing that Katschenka will betray him and all Czechs through her love for Anton, tells her the story of his brother Joseph. Joseph had assimilated with the Germans and fallen in love with a German woman. During the revolution of 1848 it became apparent that either Joseph or Anton's father was spying on a group of Czech nationalist revolutionaries. Eventually troops came and took Joseph away, tried him, and on the basis of letters in his possession found him guilty and killed him. His betrayal of the Czech cause broke his father's heart and caused him to die shortly thereafter. Svatopluk, however, believes that Joseph's German fiancée had planted the letters on him, and the unjust deaths of his brother and father are the reasons for his hatred of the Germans. Of all the Germans, he despises Anton particularly because the German fiancée later became Frau Gegenbauer, Anton's mother³⁹.

When Anton returns to Blatna from Vienna, where he has been drumming up public and newspaper support for the small town's threatened German community, he

³⁸ Mauthner, Fritz: *Ausgewählte Schriften*. 6 Bde. Stuttgart 1919. Hier Bd. IV, 61.

³⁹ Mauthner: Bd. IV, 83-96.

brings with him news that throws the Czech population into rage and despair. He has declared himself bankrupt and turned over his factory to a Vienna bank, who in turn ordered its closure. This development destroys the town's economy, and many of the Czech residents decide to leave, even though it is only a few days before the crucial election for district representative, which is sure to be closely contended.

Svatopluk, intensely distraught over these developments, decides there is only one solution: to destroy the factory the Czechs cannot regain and the Gegenbauer's adjoining house, killing Anton. He proceeds to the factory, where he sees Katschenka going into the house, and decides to destroy the factory in spite of the fact that his daughter will be killed along with Anton, saying: "Sie verrät uns! Sie verrät ihr Vaterland! Sie verrät auch ihren Vater! Und ihren Bruder"⁴⁰! Katschenka has come to warn Anton, however, and the two escape before the explosion, finding shelter in the town's church. Svatoopluk comes in, and the two lovers overhear him praying for the "dead" Katschenka's soul. She comes out of the shadows, and crying repeatedly "mein Vater hat mich töten wollen" she runs out of the church with Anton following her⁴¹. He catches up to her outside a cloister, proclaims his love for her, and asks her to marry him. She refuses, citing two reasons; his commitment to the German cause and her upbringing:

,Vergiß deinen Schwur nicht, Anton! Du hast ein Gelübde getan! Ich weiß es! In jener Stunde! Du willst ja dein Leben dem Kampfe opfern! ... Der Kaplan [hat gesagt]: Wenn du dich deinem tschechischen Volk opferst, so wird die Kirche dir alles vergeben ... [Mein Bruder] rief mir immer zu: Wenn du böhmisch denken kannst und wie eine böhmische Patriotin handeln, so ist das besser als alle Kenntnisse. Das war mein Jugendunterricht ... Wenn ich dein Weib wäre, du hättest keinen Tag Ruh vor meinen Bekehrungsplänen. Wenn ich Kinder hätte, ich würde sie für jedes deutsche Wort hassen! ... Reiß mir erst das Gift aus dem Leibe, das sie mir eingepflanzt haben"⁴²!

With these words, she enters the cloister, determined to become a nun. The election results in a German victory and the novel ends.

Briefly, Mauthner's second novel, *Die Böhmisches Handschrift*, is a counterpart to *Der letzte Deutsche von Blatna* in many ways. Libussa Weißmann, daughter of a prosperous German businessman, finds herself between her German fiancé, the good and amiable Doktorpeppi, and the fanatical Czech nationalist poet, her tutor Mikulasch Laska. In this respect the triangle mirrors that composed of Zabo, Katschenka, and Anton in the previous work. The political aspect is developed when oil is thought to have been discovered in Obertal, the setting for the work and Blatna's neighboring town. Obertal's leaders plan on rapid growth and fantastic prosperity as a result of the windfall, and hope for it to become a center of Czech culture as well. Laska comes to the foreground of the Czech movement in the area by "discovering" a planted collection of Czech national poems, supposedly dating from the middle ages (an obvious reference to the Hanka "Manuscript Battle" raging as the novel was being composed). It turns out that the oil that had been found was merely a leak from a smuggler's

⁴⁰ Mauthner: Bd. IV, 171.

⁴¹ Mauthner: Bd. IV, 175.

⁴² Mauthner: Bd. IV, 179-180.

caché, the forgery of the poems is discovered, and Laska is ruined. At the end of the novel, he loses Libussa's love as a result of his deception⁴³.

* * *

Although Mauthner's works seem much different than Kompert's, they actually have much in common, given the ethnic enclaves within which the authors worked and attempted to describe, and their historical position in the development of Bohemian Jewish history. Given this consideration, one can see Mauthner's expression of German identity in constant and unmediated opposition to integration into the Czech community as parallel to Kompert's early stories, which portray the Jewish *Gassen* as closing themselves to the outside world, although being drawn into it by the pressures of reform. As they both use romantic settings either as the foci of their tales or as backdrops for the primary action, this issue provides the most fertile ground for comparison. Within this group, given that the primary concern is to determine conceptions of identity and attitudes towards identity change, the theme of intermarriage comes to the fore. Although Kompert's intermarriages were inter-religious and Mauthner's were inter-nationality, they pinpoint Jew's self-conception and their relationship to an environment that had undergone radical changes in the period between the composition of their respective stories.

The attitudes of the Jewish community in Kompert's early stories mirrors that of Mauthner's novels, with betrayal of one's people as the key to their relationship. However, because of the change in self-identification, the definition of "one's people" for the authors has changed from "Jewish" to "German," although admittedly Mauthner was more vociferous in his assimilation to the Germans and rejection of Judaism than were most Bohemian Jews. When Hannele, the Radar's daughter, runs away with the Christian Honza, the Radar falls ill, saying "Tot will ich sie schlagen, den Bankert. Sie bringt mich so ins Grab⁴⁴." Although she returns to her family, she has brought her father to his death. Similarly, Joseph (Svatopluk's brother) is killed for betraying his people by informing on them, and in this case also the father dies from remorse over his son's traitorous acts. Svatopluk, in turn, justifies his decision to kill his daughter she has betrayed her people by going to Anton.

It is also interesting to note that in Mauthner's novels, a differentiation is made between the genders. The German man Anton may love and desire to marry the Czech Katschenka, but the German woman Libussa may not marry the Czech Laska. This can be explained by the relationship between the sexes in the nineteenth century. Women were much more likely to follow the identification patterns established by their husbands than vice-versa. Hence, for the more rabid Mauthner, Katschenka can go to Anton and perhaps bring another woman into Mauthner's German fold (and Svatopluk can accept her death as necessary), but Libussa can not be stolen from the German people and so must reject Laska. Mauthner's views in this respect demonstrate the same variety of prejudice that Kompert described and attempted to remove

⁴³ The novella is reproduced in Mauthner: Bd. IV, 187-366.

⁴⁴ Kompert: Bd. I, 216.

with Dinah-Madlena in *Eine Verlorene*, although the topic was religious. As Dinah-Madlena described, she must follow the religious choice of her husband and does so admirably, being baptized, attending church and so on. Mauthner has Katschenka base her explanation of how poor of a wife she would be primarily on the reason of her inability to abandon her national consciousness. Dinah-Madlena is willing, and is allowed by Kompert, to be a traitor and undergo an identity change, an act for which she is ultimately reaccepted by the family she betrayed, while Libussa, on the other hand, is not.

Mauthner also maintains an occupational prejudice much like the one that Kompert strives to remove. In the world of the *Gasse* Jews are restricted socially to being salesman and shopkeepers. The occupations of laborer and farmer are limited to Christians, although Kompert works to overcome this dichotomy in works such as *Trennderl* and *Am Pflug*. In Mauthner's post-industrialization world, the split is somewhat different. German, such as Anton Gegenbauer (whose very name is significant in this respect) and Herr Wießmann, Libussa's father, are industrial businessmen whose wives do not work. The other Germans – Anton's associates, and those in the Weißmann's social world – occupy professional occupations: doctors, teachers, clergymen, and so on. Czechs, however, are still farmers and common laborers, and their wives follow much the same occupational patterns.

As this brief study indicates, Jewish self-identity underwent an important shift in the thirty-five years between the *Ghettogeschichten* of Leopold Kompert and Fritz Mauthner's political novels. A more extensive survey, one which can integrate the works of many authors, is necessary to fully understand the precise mechanisms through which this shift occurred and to detail the multifaceted expressions of the Jews' changing relationship to their world, however.