Spring 2014

Kafka's Identity Crisis: Examining The Metamorphosis as a Response to Anti-Semitism and Assimilation in Turn-of-the-Century Europe

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Kafka's Identity Crisis: Examining *The Metamorphosis as a Response to Anti-Semitism and Assimilation in Turn-of-the-Century Europe*

A Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Liberal Studies

by

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December, 2013

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The spirit becomes free only when it ceases to be a support.[1]
Franz Kafka, Blue Octavo Notebooks p.93

Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* chronicles the bizarre tale of Gregor Samsa's transformation into an insect and the despairing isolation and personal quest for a meaningful existence that follows. A masterpiece of modern literature, it explores the universal concerns and struggles of Modernity, but also offers insight into the lives of assimilated Jews living in Prague at the turn-of-the-century. European countries emancipated their Jewish populations throughout the nineteenth century. The acquisition of basic civil rights afforded European Jews opportunities in education, employment, and housing. Integration into Western society presented new challenges for the Jews as they carved out their new position in European society. The Jews' difficult task of adapting to Western culture met further challenges from the ambivalent European society still unsure of integration. Jewish emancipation resulted from the political motivations in European countries, specifically, the needs of emerging industrial economies; not as the culmination of concentrated efforts from a civil right movement. The new place for Jews as free citizens in Western society made them vulnerable to the pressures of assimilation. Western, most often interpreted as German, culture assisted as protection from anti-Semitism for the obtainment of European culture, in theory would serve as proof of the Jews' loyalty to state culture. As the nineteenth century came to a close, nationalism and political anti-Semitism rose throughout Europe, especially in Bohemia. The literature of this time reflects both the anti-Semitic attitudes in politics and in the media and the Jews' response to assimilation's effects on their identity. Franz Kafka's literature transcends the historical context in which it was written

1. Franz Kafka, *The Blue Octavo Notebooks,* ed. Max Brod trans. Ernst Kaiser and Eithne Wilkins (Cambridge, MA: Exact Change, 1991), 93.

but *The Metamorphosis* reflects the anxiety that pervaded the psyche of assimilated Jews in turn-of-the-century Prague.

Chapter One

Anti-Semitism in Turn-of-the-Century Europe

Europe faced great uncertainty and underwent exhaustive change during the nineteenth century. France experienced a revolution, German states united and expanded their power, England became an industrial powerhouse, and the states of Eastern Europe found themselves in a struggle for independence from the competing powers that had absorbed them. Faith no longer united European powers; the Roman Catholic Church's once absolute authority now possessed little political sway. The Modern Age replaced the authority of God with the absolutes of science. The Enlightenment brought forth new ideas and granted intellectual freedom from the constraints of religious rule. This freedom came at a price. Without the unification Christian faith provided, individual states became isolated and eventually paranoid. European powers sought out allies that shared their political ideologies. The governmental system formerly "in concert" with each other, European states viewed each other with suspicion during the Nineteenth Century.[2] The Industrial Revolution drastically altered the economies and social hierarchies of Europe. Coupled with the residual challenges left over from the Enlightenment, government leaders were faced with the difficult task of governing a modern society; and modern European society struggled to identify and accept their new roles. The Enlightenment may have exalted reason and the laws of "nature," but it also removed or at least diluted Europeans' common cultural ground: the absolute authority of Christianity. Men were no longer

2. In his book, *Antisemitism in Modern France,* Byrnes signifies the shift from a "federative polity" to a system of nationalistic states, the development of the industry and the dissolution of European values of reason and rationality as the key agents for change at the turn of the century. Robert F. Byrnes, *Antisemitism in Modern France* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1969), 3-4.

united by faith but instead separated by their individual natures. Rousseau, Voltaire, and Locke explored the nature of man exhaustibly; but as is the nature of rational inquiry, no clear answer was agreed upon. Post-Enlightenment society navigated the challenges of the Industrial Revolution and a modern society without the guidance of an absolute authority. A nation of free thinkers creates a precarious population to govern and a potentially paranoid society in which to live. Power-hungry politicians in nineteenth century Europe often sealed up the vacuum of authority and instruction left from the church's absence with nationalistic movements and the exploits. Governing a modern society while modern European citizens struggled to identify and accept their new roles presented new and complex challenges for government leaders. Heads of state alleviated the fears of their constituents by appealing to their common cultural alliances. States focused their efforts to create a distinct identity as a nation, and citizens who did not conform to the prescribed identity were looked upon as distrustful, even threatening. The social and political conditions of the increasingly nationalistic societies in Europe fostered a growth of anti-Semitism so powerful and dangerous it would eventually lead to an unimaginable horror for the Jews and minorities of Europe. The newly emancipated Jews of Europe occupied a precarious place in society at the turn-of-the-century. Expected to participate in society but denied acceptance, the Jews adapted to their hostile environment through assimilation. They held steadfast to the hope their cooperation and low profile would protect them. Instead, anti-Semitism spread and intensified throughout Europe as the Jews tried harder and harder to hide their Jewishness.

France

In 1791, France became the first of the European states to emancipate the Jews.[3] Forty to a hundred years before their neighbors, France's views toward individual rights and freedom come across as progressive. Although the Jews of France were afforded citizenship, France became a breeding ground for anti-Semitic thought and propaganda. The powerful and far reaching influence of the French media contributed to acceleration of paranoia and animosity toward the Jews of Europe. Lacking the military muscle of powerhouses like Germany or Russia, France used the written word and public scandal to bully its Jewish citizens. The second half of the nineteenth century generated more turbulence for France. Still recovering from a series of revolutions and two wars, the French identity as a nation was fragmented at best.

The popularity of Eduoard Drumont and his lengthy literary attack on the Jews in his *La France Juive (Jewish France)* indicates the breakdown of rationality in French literature and media. An ambitious endeavor, the twelve hundred pages of revisionist history titled, *La France Juive,* claimed Jews were the root of French tribulation.[4] A collection of his biased views on French history, Drumont also included his theories for the Jews' control over the current French economy and a call for the establishment of "The Office of Confiscated Jewish Wealth":[3]

> ...The Jews possess half of the capital in the world. Now the wealth of France, with a national budget of close to four million francs, is possibly worth one hundred and fifty billion francs, of which the Jews possess at least eighty billion. In my estimation, however, because one must proceed with circumspection and because of the ease with which finances can be juggled, [the expropriation of Jewish wealth] would produce immediately no more than ten to fifteen billion.[5]

3. Ibid., 77.

4. Ibid., 138.

5. Edouard-Adolphe Drumont, *La France Juive (Jewish France),* from Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, eds., *The Jew in the Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 339.

Published in 1886, and a bestseller throughout Paris and all of France, *La France Juive* carried significant influence with it.[6] Drumont fueled the nationalistic movement of the French people with his sentimentality for pre-Republic France and a return to "true French values."[7] He found support in the ideas and writings of Voltaire[8] and added to the anti-intellectual legacy of French historians, Ernest Renan and Hippolyte Taine.[9] In midst of the dramatic social and economic change of the late Nineteenth century, French conservatives accepted and admired Drumont's appeal to tradition and "the way things were." Anti-clerical laws and further restrictions of Catholic power in the Republican government infuriated conservative subscribers and lead to the condemnation of Jews for the breakdown of tradition and morality in France.[10] Jews, regardless of their legal status as citizens, still lacked the capability of truly being French. The French identity remained, for the most part associated with Christian belief. Whether that belief sided with Catholic or Protestant mattered little in comparison with the Jewish faith. Protestants and Christians, despite their differences, at least trusted the other with recognizing Jesus as the Messiah. The Jews' faith and customs separated them from the Christian majority and made them vulnerable scapegoats for the country's misfortunes. Jews worked and lived alongside their fellow countrymen and even served in the military, but were regarded as denizens. The events of the Dreyfus Affair famously illuminated the inherent distrust for the Jewish citizens of France.

6. Byrnes, *Antisemitism in Modern France*, 153.

7. Ibid. For further discussion of Edouard Drumont's political views and his sentimental writing style see Robert F. Byrnes, *Antisemitism in Modern France* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1969), 137-155.

8. Ibid., 141.

9. Ibid., 48-49.

10. Ibid., 28-30.

Drumont's influence later inflamed (and possibly ignited) the controversy surrounding the Dreyfus Affair as French public opinion as represented in the media, departed further and further away from reason. In 1894, the French government accused and tried military captain, Alfred Dreyfus for treason.[11] The court charged the Jewish officer with selling military intelligence to the German government; and although no real evidence supported the allegations, Dreyfus ultimately received a conviction for the alleged treason.[12] The trial became an "affair" from the public frenzy sparked by Drumont's contentious coverage of the scandal and his prejudicial characterization of Alfred Dreyfus in his newspaper.[13] Drumont expanded on the anti-Semitic stereotypes promoted in *La France Juive* to support his suspicion of Captain Dreyfus. Stripped of his military rank, Dreyfus received the punishment of life in exile.[14] Angry citizens and ruthless journalists demonstrated their irrational hatred while Dreyfus professed his innocence:

> A huge crowd had gathered outside the gates of the academy. When they heard Dreyfus shouting, they responded by chanting, "Death to Dreyfus! Death to the Jew!" During the trial , neither the prosecutors not the judges had referred to Dreyfus as a Jew. yet the mob clearly considered his religion, or perhaps his "race", relevant. So did the press. One reporter wrote, " I need no one to tell me why Dreyfus committed treason... That Dreyfus was capable of treason, I conclude from his race.[15]

Clearly, the Jews were not emancipated from the racist stereotypes applied to them in the Middle Ages. The divisive controversy surrounding the Dreyfus Affair only intensified after his

11. Phyllis Goldstein, *A Convenient Hatred: The History of Anti-Semitism* (Brookline: Facing History and Ourselves, 2012), 209.

12. Ibid., 210-211.

13. Ibid.

14. Ibid.

15. Ibid.

sentencing. Following Dreyfus's exile, the newly appointed head of military intelligence, Colonel Picquart found and brought forth evidence of Dreyfus's innocence and identified the true traitor, Waslin Esterhazy.[16] His investigative findings were received, however, with suspicion. French officials attempted to suppress Picquart's discoveries but were unsuccessful.[17] Esterhazy was eventually tried and found not guilty.[18] The public doubted Dreyfus's allegiance because of his religious identity and therefore thought Picquart's allegations against Esterhazy as false. Such blatant disregard for objectivity and rational inquiry ignited public debate and inspired Emile Zola to take action. The novelist's letter to the French president, published in the newspapers January 13, 1898 criticized the case and the government's behavior. A triumphant call for restored rationality, Zola's "*J'Accuse!*" lamented the injustices in Dreyfus's case and outlined the military's conspiracy against Captain Dreyfus:

> It is only today that the affair is commencing, since today the position is clear-on the one hand, the guilty parties who are unwilling that light should penetrate; on the other hand, agents of justice who will give their lives in order that it may shine forth. When truth is shut underground, its force becomes concentrated; it assumes there such an explosive power that on the day it breaks out it will blow up everything in it.[19]

Subsequently charged and convicted of libel, Zola and his letter sparked even more debate over the controversy.[20] Anti-Jewish riots spread throughout the country and were met with demonstrations from "Dreyfusards" whom in agreement with Zola, demanded a new trial.[21] Zola

16. Ibid., 212.

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid.

19. Emile Zola, *J'accuse,* from Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, eds., *The Jew in the Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 353.

20. Goldstein, *A Convenient Hatred*, 213.

21. Ibid.

and his plea for reason rallied defenders of reason who recognized French society's dangerous turn toward fanaticism. The court eventually granted Dreyfus a new trial and once again he received a guilty verdict. Dreyfus was quickly pardoned the same day.[22] He was officially declared innocent in 1906 and allowed back into the military.[23]

The Dreyfus Affair is emblematic of the shift in French values and identification with nationalistic ideas. The French were at odds with each other in regards to defining themselves as a nation in the Modern Era. While some embraced the promise of change and accepted the challenge of forging a new society comprised of industry, different peoples and faiths and scientific discovery; others were threatened by the uncertainties the Modern Age brought with it. For conservatives, the fear of the unknown gave way to finding comfort in the solace of traditions and policies of pre-revolutionary France. Unfortunately, the Jews were caught up in the middle of this volatile period of French history. Such is the situation for the Jews in nineteenth Century Europe. The strains of modernizing societies and economies to the industrial age found relief in nationalism and scapegoating minorities. The Jewish Emancipation in France included limitations. The powerfully influential French press and its influence over the public opinion of the Jews perpetuated their status as the "other." This influence extended as different or as a threat because of their Jewish culture despite their allegiance to the country in which they worked and lived.

22. Ibid., 214-215.

23. Ibid.

England

While English Jews did not face the level of violent anti-Semitism experienced in Eastern Europe or the hostile media attacks common in France and Germany, anti-Semitism nonetheless existed. English Jews benefited from participation in English business and government, a stark contrast to the restricted rights of Polish and Russian Jews whom were relegated to segregated territories and subjected to the horrors of religious pogroms. The anti-semitism of nineteenth and early twentieth century England was more subtle. English literature preserved negative stereotypes and general distrust for Jews. Popular literary villains were often characterized by their"Jewishness"; it not only set them apart religiously, but as an inferior and morally corrupt race. The Jew in English literature were traditionally portrayed as physically, psychologically, and ethically inferior to their Christian counterparts. The characterization of Jews in English literature as subversive deceivers reflected English society's beliefs and opinions of their Jewish citizens. Britain emancipated the Jews in 1826 and thirty years later, the first Jewish citizen was elected to Parliament.[24] For the most part, Jews were accepted into British society. The irregular Jewish population that resulted from the "Expulsion Period" limited British anti-Semitism.[25] The relatively small Jewish population in England compared to the larger Jewish populations in Eastern Europe and England's conflicts with the Roman Catholic Church served as a distraction from anti-Semitic antagonism.[26] While the rest of Europe embraced the spirit of nationalism, the efforts and successes of its Industrial Revolution occupied England. The Jews did not face persecution but were still subject to negative characterizations. The typecasting of Jews as

24. Yehuda Bauer, *A History of the Holocaust* (New York: Franklin Watts, 2001), 37.

25. Julius Anthony, *Trials of the Diaspora: A History of Anti-Semitism in England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 243-245.

26. Ibid.

deceitful and conniving remained popular in British literature in the nineteenth century and it reinforced damaging stereotypes in England and throughout Europe.

Charles Dickens' character Fagin in *Oliver Twist* exemplifies the use of conventional images to create a character. Fagin, a corruptor of youth and a thief, is not Jewish by coincidence. His religion serves as an explanation for his depraved nature. Oliver Twist is an affirmation of English values, and therefore the novel's villain cannot be truly English.[27] Dickens' vocabulary and cast is comprised of absolutes; everyone can be clearly identified as good or evil.[28] Fagin is not developed as a villain; he is immediately recognized as one. Dickens introduction of Fagin as "The Jew" conjured up more than enough imagery and characteristics for English readers to understand him as a deceitful and filthy criminal.

> The walls and ceiling of the room were perfectly black with age and dirt. There was a deal table before the fire: upon which were a candle, stuck in a ginger-beer bottle, two or three pewter pots, a loaf and butter, and a plate. In a frying-pan, which was on the fire, and which was secured to the mantel-shelf by a string, some sausages were cooking; and standing over them, with a toasting-fork in his hand, was a very old shrivelled Jew, whose villainous-looking repulsive face was obscured by a quantity of matted red hair. He was dressed in a greasy flannel gown, with his throat bare; and seemed to be dividing his attention between the frying pan and a clothes-horse, over which a great number of silk handkerchiefs were hanging.[29]

Under the guise of "realism," Dickens' Fagin is a repulsive embodiment of everything Victorian society is not. Fagin lives and operates in darkness. He is unclean and even carries a devilish fork when he first appears in the story. Fagin's Jewishness qualifies him to be a corruptor of English youth. Dickens' adherence to conventional stereotypes of Jewish people limits his understanding and interpretation of criminal personalities. *Oliver Twist* may be categorized as

27. Ibid., 200-201.

28. Ibid.

29. Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist* (New York: Bantam Dell, 1982), 60-61.

"realism" but it does not provide an exploration of real characters. The cast of *Oliver Twist* already existed in English culture, long before Charles Dickens named them. Dickens drew upon older traditional representations that identified Jews as child predators.[30] Although drawing upon ancient cultural stereotypes served as efficient justification for Fagin's criminal nature, it does not construct a character with depth or individuality. Fagin's Jewishness predisposes him to dishonesty and trickery, thus reducing him to his inescapable criminal persona. Dickens, like many successful authors of his time, employed and perpetuated these anti-Semitic stereotypes throughout England and Europe through their novels.

Dickens' Fagin and Svengali from George du Maurier's *Trilby* are similar characters. Both men are monstrous predators on morality, and their deceitful essence is due to their Jewishness. du Maurier's Svengali reinforces English values by juxtaposing them against the stereotypical characteristics of corruption and deceit identified with Jewishness. Svengali, like, Fagin, is a seducer. He is physically displeasing, almost monstrous and he is a threat to Trilby's innocence and morality. *Oliver Twist* and *Trilby* were commercially successful novels and were widely read throughout Europe and the United States. Although the anti-Semitic depictions of Dickens' and du Maurier's villains were most likely not motivated by personal anti-Semitic beliefs, they were convenient literary connections with established cultural identities. The popular use of stock anti-Semitic characterizations supported and perpetuated said stereotypes in English literature and society. These characters came alive during the time of Social Darwinism and other perversions of post-Enlightenment "scientific theory."[31] In light of the social theories

30. Julius Anthony, *Trials of the Diaspora: A History of Anti-Semitism in England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 203.

31. Juliet Steyn, *Charles Dickens'Oliver Twist: Fagin as Sign.* from *The Jew in the Text: Modernity and the Construction of Identity,* ed. Linda Nochlin and Tamar Garb (London: Thames & Hudson, 1995), 43.

at this time, classification of the Jews moved from a religious identity to an ethnic one.[32] Anti-Semitism found new accreditation in science and thus retained integrity for its employment in literature. Fagin and Svengali are not criminals simply out of convenient coincidence that Jews are often associated with deceitful behavior; they are criminals because they are biologically predisposed to do so. Svengali is a familiar threat to English morality because he is an infusion of long accepted cultural stereotypes and the traditional miscreant synonymous with the "Jew" in English literature.

> In *Trilby*, as well as in plays and poems which followed, Svengali is represented as dirty, ill-mannered and gross; moreover these attributes are seen as linked to-his Jewishness. Filthy Svengali is contrasted with the clean Englishmen.[33]

Svengali is an encapsulation of everything not English. His deceitful nature and physical differences identify him as something not only apart from true English society but place him as a serious criminal threat to traditional Victorian values. Just as Fagin's Jewishness explained his lust for money and thievery, Svengali represents the persuasive powers of the Jewish people as perceived by Gentiles. Svengali's ability to psychologically invade the minds and hearts of those he encounters echoes the fears of "Jewification" that spread throughout European media in the Nineteenth century.

The political successes of England's prime minister, Benjamin Disraeli, fueled the rumors and supported the mythology for the "Jewification" of Europe. Although an assimilated and English educated-baptized Jew, world leaders were distrustful of him and his political motives.[34] Controversy and anti-Semitic slander engulfed Disraeli after he circumvented Parliament

32. Ibid.

33. Daniel Pick, "Powers of Suggestion: Svengali and the *Fin de Siècle,*" in *Modernity, Culture and the "Jew,*" eds. Bryan Cheyette and Laura Marcus (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 106.

34. Edgar Feuchtwanger, *Disraeli* (London: Arnold, 2000), 3.

approval to purchase a substantial amount of shares of the Suez Canal.[35] Funded by the financial powerhouse, the Rothschild family.[36] A stake in the Suez Canal brought England one step closer to controlling Egypt, thus expanding their political and financial power. The financial muscle of the Rothschilds and the political power of Disraeli, both of Jewish origin, were more than enough to arouse suspicion among political and religious leaders throughout Europe.

Three years later, Disraeli would ignite more contention with his diplomatic victories in the 1878 Congress of Berlin. Essentially, Disraeli negotiated Russia's secession of Bulgaria back to Turkey and acquired Cyprus from Turkey to be used as a defensive alliance.[37] Disraeli's substantial success of obtaining and expanding British territories and limiting Russia's access to the Mediterranean made him a target of anti-Semitic criticism. The Orthodox Christians of Russia viewed Disraeli's acquisitions as evidence for his true agenda: the "Jewification" of Europe. Disraeli's productive political career threatened European leaders and provided material for the paranoid theories of popular European writers. Drumont's *Jewish France* and Wilhelm Marr's *Victory Over Germandom* both touted the belief Jews were in constant effort to take over state, economic and cultural power as evidenced by Disraeli's career.

35. Ibid., 180.

36. Ibid.

37. Ibid., 191.

Germany

> I do indeed consider modern Jewry a great danger to German national life. By this I mean neither the religion of the orthodox Judaism, the ossification of the Law, the Old Testament without a temple, without priests, without sacrifice, without a Messiah, is neither attractive nor dangerous to the children of the nineteenth century. It is a form of religion which is dead at its very core, a low form of revelation, an outlived spirit, still venerable but set at nought by Christ and no longer holding any truth for the present. Reformed Judaism is of even less religious significance. It is neither Judaism nor Christianity, but a pitiful remnant of the Age of Enlightenment.[38]

Adolf Stoecker worked as an instrumental politician in transforming the Jews' identity from a religious group to a specific ethnic threat in German political propaganda. Stoecker, along with other popular anti-Semitic leaders, went on to request for the Jews of Germany to display more modesty and warned against the dangerous prospect of a "Judaized" Germany.[39] Stoecker's fear for the "enemy within" surfaced as a common theme in political propaganda in nineteenth century Germany. Bismarck's nationalistic politics built and focused the German identity, and that identity did not allow Jewish attributes.

Jews were granted conditional citizenship, the condition being conversion to Christianity. Assimilation appeared the best chance for newly emancipated Jews to gain access to German society. The Jews made great efforts to assimilate to German society by learning and speaking the German language. European Jews' access to the German language and German culture developed from the Jewish Enlightenment and its architect, Moses Mendelssohn. Mendelssohn, at the age of 14, traveled to Berlin in 1742 with hopes of pursuing a secular education.[40]

38. Adolf Stoecker, *What We Demand of Modern Jewry,* from Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, eds., *The Jew in the Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 341.

39. Ibid., 341-342.

40. Goldstein, *A Convenient Hatred*, 158.

Mendelssohn earned the respect of political leaders and was subsequently afforded particular freedoms in exchange for his intellectual contributions.[41] By 1783, Mendelssohn achieved fluency in several languages and had amassed a network of academic colleagues and published a translation of Hebrew Scriptures.[42] His translation opened the door to secular education for Jews and consequently increased their participation in German society. Germany still restricted Jewish integration to those deemed "useful." The Jews obtained and conformed to German culture but perpetually lacked political rights or representation. Jews who were unable to purchase residency permits or prove their worth were expelled and forced to wander.[43] The "Wandering Jew" stereotype persisted in German culture and Jews were scrutinized with suspicion. This dichotomy of acceptance and prejudice toward the Jews sparked intellectual debate over the possibility of Jewish emancipation. German scholar, Christian Wilhelm Von Dohm, called for equal rights for Jews in his essay, "Concerning the Amelioration of the Civil Status of the Jews."[44]

> Everything the Jews are blamed for is caused by the political conditions under which they now live, and any other group of men, under such conditions, would be guilty of identical errors... If , therefore, those prejudices today prevent the Jew from being a good citizen, a social human being, if he feels antipathy and hatred against the Christian, if he feels himself in his dealings with him not so much bound by his moral code, then all this is our own doing. His religion does not commend him to commit these dishonesties, but the prejudices which we have instilled and which are still nourished by us in him are stronger than his religion.[45]

41. Ibid., 160.

42. Ibid.

43. Goldstein, *A Convenient Hatred*, 163.

44. Christian Wilhelm Von Dohm, *Concerning the Amelioration of the Civil Status of the Jews,* from Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, *The Jew in the Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 28-36.

45. Ibid., 31.

Finally, in 1812 the Jews of Germany were legally emancipated.[46] The Jewish population in Germany experienced a rapid rise in social and economic mobility in the Nineteenth Century.[47] Cities had an influx of Jewish residents; and by 1870, a majority of the once impoverished Jewish population in Germany qualified as middle class.[48] Following in the footsteps of Mendelsohhn, emancipated Jews made serious attempts at assimilating to German culture, including learning the German language and converting to Christianity. German-Jewish poet Heinrich Heine, in hopes of advancing his academic and literary career, was baptized Lutheran in 1825.[49] Like many Jews in nineteenth century Prussia, Heine considered baptism a step toward acceptance into Western society. He discussed his complicated and somewhat divided justification for his baptism in his essay, *A Ticket of Admission to European Culture.*[50] Aside from his ambiguous religious identity, Heine admired German culture above all and communicated his desire to be German in his poetry.

> Life in this world is a muddled existence-
> Our German professor will give me assistance.
> He knows how to whip the whole thing into order;
> He'll make a neat system and keep it in line.
> With scraps from his night cap and dressing-gown's border
> He'd fill all the gaps in Creation's design.[51]

46. Goldstein, *A Convenient Hatred*, 165.

47. David Feldman, "Was Modernity Good for the Jews?" in *Modernity, Culture and the "Jew,"* eds. Bryan Cheyette and Laura Marcus (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 173.

48. Ibid.

49. Heinrich Heine, *A Ticket of Admission to European Culture,* from Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, *The Jew in the Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995) 259.

50. Ibid., 258-259.

51. Max Brod, *Heinrich Heine: The Artist in Revolt,* translated by Joseph Witriol, (New York: New York University Press, 1957), 57.

Heine's genuine allegiance to the German state coupled with his hope for the Jews' eventual acceptance into German society, "All men and women, ennobled by birth, are one noble race."[52] The financial and social advances following emancipation encouraged the Jews to westernize but the Germans viewed their gains with suspicion and jealousy. The elevated social status of the Jews coincided with the rise in European capitalism and thus the two phenomena were often connected to each other in political propaganda.[53]

The Jews' participation in and efforts to integrate into German society failed to grant them acceptance. Journalists and politicians alike continued to blame the Jews for Germany's difficulties. Nationalism rose throughout the late nineteenth century and the accepted identity of a "true German" narrowed. Perpetually a people apart, the Jews were attacked in newspapers and political speeches. Wilhelm Marr established the term, "anti-Semitism" in 1879 and used it as the cornerstone of his political agenda.[54] According to Marr, the Jews worked to weaken the German state and ultimately take control of it.

> Yes, through the Jewish nation, Germany will become a world power, a western New Palestine. And this will happen, not through violent revolutions, but through the compliance of the people.... We should not reproach the Jewish nation. It fought against the western world for 1800 years, and finally conquered and subjugated it. We were vanquished and it is entirely proper that the victor shouts "Vae Victis!."[55]

Wilhelm Marr, like other anti-Semitic Germans, were uneasy about the integration of Jews into their society. Anti-Semites correlated the financial prosperity of the newly emancipated Jews

52. Brod, preface to *Heinrich Heine: The Artist in Revolt,* translated by Joseph Witriol, (New York: New York University Press, 1957), x.

53. Ibid.

54. Wilhelm Marr, *The Victory of Judaism over Germandom,* from Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, *The Jew in the Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 259.

55. Ibid 331

with Germany's economic and social growing pains in the Modern Age. The popular political parties of the time, specifically the Christian Social Party supported anti-Semitism and employed anti-Semitic characterizations and slander in their propaganda. Adolf Stoecker founded the party in 1878 originally under the name of the Christian Social Workers' Party.[56] Stoecker ignited a powerful camp of aggrieved middle class business owners to support his anti-Semitic political and religious agenda.[57] Through his speeches and sermons he warned Germany against what he believed to be the inevitable "Jewification" of Germany, similar to the views of Wilhelm Marr.

> If modern Jewry continues to use the power of capital and the power of the press to bring misfortune to the nation, a final catastrophe is unavoidable. Israel must renounce its ambition to become the master of Germany. It should renounce its arrogant claim that Judaism is the religion of the future, when it is so clearly that of the past. Let not the foolish Christians continue to strengthen the self conceit of this people. Jewish orthodoxy with its circumcision is decrepit, while reformed Judaism is not a Jewish religion at all. Once Israel has realized this, it will quietly forget its alleged mission and stop trying to rob their Christianity people who offer it hospitality and civil rights. The Jewish press must become more tolerant-that is the first prerequisite for improving the situation.[58]

Wilhelm Marr, Adolf Stoecker, and other anti-semitic politicians alike all called for Jewish citizens to display "modesty" in regards to their Jewishness and expected Jews to conceal their differences altogether. Anti-Semitic leaders portrayed Jews as powerful capitalists whose motives included the obliteration of Christian society. Although the emancipated Jews of Germany enjoyed a period of upward mobility in regards to the economy, they still lacked any political power or influence. Despite their efforts to assimilate and prove their loyalty to the

56. Adolf Stoecker, *What We Demand of Modern Jewry,* from Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, *The Jew in the Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 342.

57. Ibid.

58. Ibid.

German state and culture, anti-Semitic politicians countered with accusations of betrayal and subversion.

Richard Wagner gave the anti-Semitic rhetoric of German leaders artistic expression in his music and in his essay, *Jewry in Music.* Just as Marr and Stoecker associated the challenges of industrialization and capitalism with the financial success of the Jews in the new economy, Wagner projected his artistic frustrations on the Jews. Amongst his disapproval of Jewish art and music, Wagner criticizes Heine's poetry, and discusses his perceived societal problems resulting from the Jews' emancipation.

> Since it is here merely in respect of art, and specially of music, that we want to explain to ourselves the popular dislike of the Jewish nature, even at the present day, we may completely pass over any dealing with this same phenomenon in the field of religion and politics... When we strove for emancipation of the Jews, however, we virtually were more the champions of an abstract principle, than of a concrete case: just as all our Liberalism was a not very lucid mental sport-since we went for freedom of the Folk without knowledge of that Folk itself, nay, with a dislike of any genuine contact with it-so our eagerness to level up the rights of the Jews was far rather stimulated by a general idea, than by any real sympathy; for, with all our speaking and writing in favour of the Jews' emancipation, we always felt instinctively repelled by any actual, operative contact with them.[59]

Wagner's anti-Semitic views culminated from his contemporary political environment as well as from his personal relationships. He associated failures in his early career, particularly the poor reception of his *Tannhauser* (from which he drew upon Heinrich Heine's poetry) with Jewish influence.[60] Wagner considered Jewish art more of a commodity than artistic expression, citing his previous working relationships with the successful composers, Mendelssohhn and

59. Richard Wagner, *Jewry in Music,* from Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, *The Jew in the Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 327.

60. Jacob Katz, *The Darker Side of Genius: Richard Wagner's Anti-Semitism* (Hanover: Brandeis University Press by University Press of New England, 1986), 26, 56.

Meyerbeer, as examples of the "Judaization of Modern Art."[61] Mendelssohn and Wagner competed for artistic accolades but Mendelssohn enjoyed early success.[62] Mendelssohn's celebrity coupled with the rumor Mendelssohn lost one of Wagner's symphonies suggests Wagner's anti-Semitism developed from his personal projections of blame and insecurity on one individual, who conveniently fit into existing negative stereotypes.[63] Wagner used his failed relationship with Meyerbeer to support his anti-Semitic propaganda as well. Wagner sought support and favor from Meyerbeer while working in Paris and Meyerbeer did use his influence to promote Wagner's work.[64] Meyerbeer failed to attract the attention and acclaim Wagner desired but he continued to financially support Wagner and introduced him to another significant patron, Maurice Schlesinger.[65] Instead of accepting their assistance with gratitude, Wagner interpreted Meyerbeer and Schlesinger's financial support as a way to control and influence his music. Wagner carefully moderated his anti-Semitic slander of his financier so that he could justify continued payment. In a letter to a friend he calls Meyerbeer an "intentionally cunning deceiver" but subsequently urges "that you do not, however, abuse him! He is my protector-and-joking apart-a lovable man."[66] Both Mendelssohn and Meyerbeer failed to give Wagner the recognition or support he desired for the compositions he developed in Paris.[67] Wagner's personal disappointments combined with the already popular anti-Semitic propaganda of nineteenth

61. Ibid., 33-34, 49.

62. Ibid., 27.

63. Ibid.

64. Katz, The Darker Side, 29.

65. Ibid.

66. Ibid., 30.

67. Ibid., 29.

century Germany to solidify his prejudices against the Jews. Wagner's anti-Semitic position of blaming the Jews for his personal misfortunes mirrored the political trends of displacing blame for Germany's national frustrations on its Jewish citizens.

Russia and Poland

The anti-Semitic traditions of Europe during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century were largely limited to literary and social bigotry. Anti-Semitism in Russia surpassed the malicious rants synonymous with the French press or Germany's social pressures of assimilation. Russian anti-Semitism manifested in violence. The state sponsored anti-Semitic policies of Russia were the most complex, extensive, and abusive of its time. Russia inherited a large population of Jews, approximately one million, when it acquired Poland.[68] This substantial population shift led Russian leadership to both dilute and contain Jewish participation in Russian society, which was strictly Eastern Orthodox. The success of Germany's policies for Jewish assimilation inspired Russia to adopt a similar system. Failing to recognize the incentives for German Jews to assimilate; increased participation in society, finance, and politics, Russia enacted a system of coerced assimilation. Russian Jews received little in the way of reward for assimilating to Russian culture. Instead they were subjected to a systematic brainwashing attempt comprised of state propaganda, Eastern Orthodox ideology and geographic limitations.

Russian Jews were not permitted to live amongst the general population. Instead they were assigned to the Pale Settlement, a territory largely comprised of former Poland as well as part of Western Russia:[69]

68. Goldstein, *A Convenient Hatred*, 215.

69. Nicholas I, *Delineation of the Pale of Settlement*, from Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, *The Jew in the Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 379. Map from the same page.

The establishment and maintenance of the Pale Settlement did not just designate property for Jewish settlement but it included travel restrictions and as well.

> Jews who have gone abroad without a legal exit-permit are deprived of Russian citizenship and not permitted to return to Russia...Every Jew must be registered according to law in one of the legal estates of the realm. Any Jew not complying with his regulation will be treated as a vagrant.[70]

Almost five million Jews populated the Pale of Settlement by 1897[71] and the Russian government strictly enforced its complex policies of coerced assimilation to maintain control and segregation of the Jewish people. The Russian government used the Pale of Settlement to isolate the Jews from the Russian population until they were successfully converted into the Russian Orthodox church.[72] Once Russian Jews were assigned to the Pale, they were subjected to the systematic efforts of "Russification."

70. Ibid.

71. Ibid.

72. Goldstein, *A Convenient Hatred*, 216.

Assimilation efforts included military service for Jewish men, a requisite term of twenty-five years beginning at the age of eighteen.[73] This requirement not only isolated young Jewish men from their families and community, but it provided Russia with the opportunity to indoctrinate them with state propaganda. Nicholas I did make allowances in his 1827 Statute for active duty Jews to practice their religion in "their spare time";[74] otherwise Jewish soldiers were expected to attend and participate in Christian classes as part of their military training.[75] Each province in the Pale of Settlement was required to fill its quota of soldiers. Certain exceptions applied, such as proof of apprenticeship to a Gentile or ability to buy one's way out of required service.[76] The financial exemptions left the poor without options and therefore most of the Jewish soldiers were from impoverished families. Servicemen were often selected by each province's rabbi, another political strategy to undermine Jewish authority.[77] Rabbis working with the state undermined the public's trust and esteem for religious leaders. Rabbis working with the Russian government comprised part of the *haskalah,* the Russian answer to the Jewish Enlightenment brought forth by Mendlesohhn in Germany. Hebrew educator and proponent for *haskalah,* Samuel Joseph Fuenn called for the secular education of Russian Jews and influenced Tsar Nicholas I's policies for Jewish education.[78] Fuenn believed a secular education would

73. Ibid.

74. Nicholas I, *Statutes Regarding the Military Service of Jews* from Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, *The Jew in the Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 378.

75. Ibid.

76. Ibid., 377.

77. Ibid., 378.

78. S. J. Fuenn, *The Need for Enlightenment,* from Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, *The Jew in the Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 383.

open doors of opportunity to Russian Jews and that a degree of assimilation to Russian culture was necessary and beneficial for the Jews' quality of life.

> It is apparent to whoever has eyes that the foremost cause of distance and enmity between the children of Israel and the Christians in our state is the difference of dress. Since the Jew is unwilling to change his dress and is recognizable wherever he goes, the distance will be increased in the heart both of the Jew and the Christian. Before the government takes one step for our welfare it is fitting we call its attention to having this obstacle removed.[79]

Both the Russian government and Jewish leaders promoted assimilation as the Jews' ticket of admission to Russian society; however assimilation remained an effort of futility for the Jews were still physically separated from the rest of Russia. Russian Hebrew poet, Judah Leib Gordon, originally agreed with Fuenn and the need for Jews' to end their isolation from Western culture through the enlightenment of education:

> Awake, my people! How ling will you slumber?
> The night has passed, the sun shines bright.
> Awake, lift up your eyes, look around you-
> Acknowledge, I pray you, your time and your place...
>
> The land in which now we live and are born-
> Is it not thought to be part of Europe?
> Europe-the smallest of Earth's regions,
> Yet the greatest of all in wisdom and reason.
>
> This land of Eden [Russia] now opens its gates to you,
> Her sons now call you "brother"!
> How long will you dwell among them as a guest,
> And why do you now affront them?
>
> Already they have removed the weight of suffering from your shoulder,
> They have lifted off the yoke from your neck,
> They have erased from their hearts gratuitous hatred and folly,
> They give you their hand, they greet you with peace.

79. Ibid., 382.

> Raise your head high, straighten your back,
> And gaze with loving eyes upon them,
> Open your heart to wisdom and knowledge,
> Become an enlightened people, and speak their language.
>
> Every man of understanding should try to gain knowledge;
> Let others learn all manners of arts and crafts;
> Those who are brave should serve in the army;
> The farmers should buy ploughs and fields.
>
> To the treasury of the state bring your strength,
> Take your share of its possessions, its bounty.
> Be a man abroad and a Jew in your tent,
> A brother to your countrymen and a servant to your king...[80]

While the *haskalah* movement gained momentum amongst the Jews of the Pale, the Russian government countered with anti-Semitic tactics to prevent the Jews' integration into Russian society. Under Russian law, Jews were required to attend special schools, separated from the Gentile population, and to be educated in Russian culture.[81] Restrictions were placed on public Jewish dress and rabbis were required to create and instruct from textbooks alternative to the Talmud;

> In order to thwart the harmful influence of the Talmud, without, at this stage, destroying the book which the Jews regard as the Word of God, the rabbis should be empowered to prepare a short religious textbook, to be approved by the director of the General School System.[82]

The Jews' inability to participate in Russian society outside of the Pale hindered their ability to acquire Russian culture. The Jews in the Pale of Settlement through their attempts to assimilate to a society they would never really be part of succeeded only in that it weakened their own

80. Judah Leib Gordon, *Awake My People!,* from Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, *The Jew in the Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 384.

81. *Maskilim to Governors of the Pale: A Jewish Program for Russification,* from Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, *The Jew in the Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 385.

82. Ibid.

cultural and religious identity as Jews. The "Russification" of the Jews was artificial insomuch that it was limited to the receiving of Russian ideals from education and edicts instead of authentic involvement in and contribution to national culture. The Jews' soon realized the futility of their assimilationist efforts and eventually criticized the *haskalah* movement for diffusing the one veritable identity they could claim. The former advocate for the Jewish enlightenment, Judah Leib Gordon, conveyed his dispiritedness in *For Whom Do I Toil?*

> My enlightened brothers have acquired worldly wisdom,
> And are but loosely bound to the language of their people;
> They scorn the aged mother holding her spindle.
> "Abandon that language whose hour has passed;
> Abandon its literature, so tasteless, so bland;
> Leave it, and let each one use the language of the land."
> And our sons? The generation to follow us?
> From their youth on they will be strangers to us.
> -My heart bleeds for them-
> They make progress, year by year they forge ahead:
> Who knows where they will reach, how far they will go?
> Perhaps to that place when they shall never return...
> Still the Muse visits by night,
> Still the heart listens, the hand writes-
> Fashioning songs in a tongue forsaken.
> What will I, what hope? To what end travail?
> For whom do I toil? To what avail?
> The good years wasted...
> Oh, who can foresee the future, who can foretell?
> Perhaps I am the last of Zion's poets;
> And you, the last readers?[83]

The physical isolation and required acculturation training were not the only anti-Semitic tactics used on the Jews of Russia. Between 1881 and 1921, violence toward Jews erupted in riots or "pogroms."[84] *Pogroms* usually occurred on or near Christian holidays and resulted in the

83. Judah Leib Gordon, *For Whom Do I Toil?* from Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, The Jew in the Modern World (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 386.

84. *Awaiting a Pogrom,* from Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, *The Jew in the Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 408.

murder of Jewish men, women and children as well as destruction of Jewish homes and businesses.[85] Russian Jews were offered little, if any government protection and were essentially helpless to defend themselves. N. Tchaykovsky described the horrors of the Kishinev Massacre of 1903 and the defenselessness of the Jewish people:

> And still, when the actual massacres began, the Governor-it is said now-failed for two days to obtain orders from the Ministry and the Tsar at St. Petersburg to use military force against the housebreakers and murderers. Moreover, he refused in the course of those two days any communication with the suffering Jewish population, never left his private quarters, closed all the telephones in the town to the public, and prohibited [the sending of] any private telegraphs from Kishinev to St. Petersburg.[86]

By the beginning of the twentieth century, anti-Semitism grew increasingly violent in Russia. Assimilation and segregation were not answering the "Jewish Question" for Russian leadership and therefore they turned a blind eye to the violent results of the *pogroms.*

Turn-of-the-century Europe remained a precarious environment for the Jews. Newly emancipated and integrated, they faced the challenges of living the life of freedom under the scrutiny of their new neighbors. Their participation in society made them vulnerable to blame for state and economic problems. The Jews were no longer protected by the suppressed status that exempted them from any real influence over state affairs. Emancipation allowed them to keep their "Jewishness" and access the rights afforded to citizens. Initially this must have seemed like progress for European Jews, however it only presented new challenges. Jews made significant efforts to assimilate to Western society, often at the expense of their spiritual identity. As Jews labored to fit in, Anti-Semitic leaders and journalists made every effort to set them apart. Assimilation would not award the Jews acceptance. Anti-Semitic stereotypes flourished

85. Ibid.

86. N. Tchaykovsky, *The Massacre of Jews at Kishinev,* from Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, *The Jew in the Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 409.

in the media and politics of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. European Jews endured a social and political tension that left them with an ambiguous identity and even more ambiguous future as European citizens. This uncertainty enveloped Europe and the pressures of assimilation were particularly palpable in turn-of-the-century Bohemia as demonstrated in its politics and literature.

Chapter Two

Anti-Semitism in Turn-of-the-Century Austria

The Austro-Hungarian Empire at the turn-of-the-century presented many complex social and political challenges for its Jewish population. The multi-ethnic empire's lack of a cohesive national culture left it vulnerable to political and social unrest of its varied ethnic groups. Before the revolutions of 1848, Austria and Hungary were primarily governed by the Habsburg Monarchy, under the approval of the Holy Roman Empire.[87] Liberalism swept through Austria in the 1840s, leaving Emperor Ferdinand V little choice but to abdicate the throne, placing his nephew Franz Joseph in power.[88] Franz Joseph, with the Compromise Agreement of 1867, became the emperor of the dual monarchy of Austro-Hungary.[89] The monarchy maintained a shared military as well as authority over foreign policy and trade but left the government of internal affairs to Austria and Hungary.[90] Franz Joseph emancipated the Jews in 1848 before the official sanction of the Dual Monarchy. New laws afforded the Jews with rights to own land, obtain employment, and live outside of the ghettoes.[91] Prior to emancipation, the regulations subjected Bohemian Jews to harsh taxation, restricted areas of residency and population control decrees.[92] Franz Joseph, like other political leaders of his time throughout Europe, recognized

87. Carl E. Schorske, *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1980), 5.

88. Ibid.

89. Marsha L. Rozenblit, *The Jews of Vienna 1867-1914: Assimilation and Identity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983), 14.

90. Ibid.

91. Christoph Stölzl, *Kafka: Jew, Anti-Semite, Zionist,* from Mark Anderson, *Reading Kafka: Prague, Politics, and the Fin de Siècle* (New York: Schocken Books, 1989), 53.

92. Walter H. Sokel, "Kafka as a Jew." *New Literary History* 30, no. 4 (Autumn 1999): 838.

Jewish industriousness and ingenuity as a national asset and therefore set for to utilize it by emancipating the population. Franz Joseph was not a friend to or sympathizer to the Jewish people.[93] He limited his interests to the political and financial assistance they could contribute to the new industrial era. Despite Joseph's personal ambivalence to their place in society and state, the Jewish people celebrated him for he brought them freedom and thus retained some level of allegiance to the Habsburg monarchy. Now living amongst Gentiles as free citizens, the Jews sought a place in society. The Austro-Hungary Empire consisted of many ethnicities but the largest groups were the Germans, Magyars, and Czechs (see map Appendix 2).[94] The Jewish population in Hungary identified with and strongly supported the Magyars. The Jews' loyalty to the dominant ethnic group in the Hungarian state afforded them considerable integration into society as well as tolerance from nationalist movements.[95] The Jews residing in the Austrian states found more difficulty achieving hegemony within the greater population, particularly in Vienna and in the Bohemian capital of Prague. The Jewish identity in these two cities underwent profound change and a variety of reconstructions in response to the political and social anti-Semitism unique to *Fin-de-Siècle* Austria.

Vienna drew in a large number of Jewish immigrants following emancipation for reasons similar to Jewish immigration to other European cities. Cities offered academic and professional opportunities that provincial towns could not provide. By the mid-nineteenth century, Vienna was not only a center of political power and wealth for the Austro-Hungary Empire, but a major

93. Ibid.

94. *Jews, Anti-Semitism, and Culture in Vienna.* Edited by Ivar Oxaal, Michael Pollak, and Gerhard Botz. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987), 14.

95. Robert S. Wistrich, "Austrian Legacies: Jews and the questions of national identity." *Partisan Review*, 69, no. 3: 366.

cultural and commercial center for all of Europe.[96] The industrialization of Central Europe brought economic opportunity and fostered cultural innovations in Vienna, thus drawing in a large number of Jewish immigrants. Jews escaping the dangers of pogroms in eastern provinces flocked to Vienna to seek safety and employment. By the start of World War I, Vienna would have the largest population of Jews in all of Europe.[97] This population boom resulted from many characteristics unique to Vienna. First, compared to non-Jews, Jewish immigrants acclimated to urban life more easily. Jews found employment in the areas of finance and business, a sector to which they previously restricted.[98] Farmers and peasants lacked the professional skills required in an industrial society. Secondly, a large population of Jewish immigrants spoke German, the language of commerce in nineteenth century Europe. The Jewish Enlightenment valued German culture, and thus many Jews were German speakers. Immigrants from other ethnic groups in Austria and Hungary held onto their native languages and resisted adopting German. Lastly, Vienna attracted Jews because of its liberal politics.[99] Liberalism briefly flourished from the 1860s to 1890 in Vienna. Following the defeat of the Austro Prussian War, the liberals took political control from the weakened aristocracy.[100] Comprised mostly of middle class Germans and German Jews, the liberals of Austria established the new bourgeois class in Vienna.[101]

96. Rosenblitz, *The Jews of Vienna*, 5.

97. Ibid.

98. Ibid., 19.

99. Ibid., 34.

100. Schorske, *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna*, 5.

101. Ibid.

Bourgeois Vienna afforded Jews opportunities to "Westernize." German culture represented Western ideology in nineteenth Century Europe.[102] Viennese Jews succeeded in acquiring German culture through tradition *gymnasium* schooling and attending German universities. Jewish parents viewed *gymnasium* education as a valuable asset to ensure their sons' professional and social success.[103] Jewish students comprised forty percent of Viennese *gymnasium* student population in 1910 even though Jews only accounted for twenty percent of the city's overall population.[104] Other ethnic groups, particularly the Czechs, were opposed to what they perceived as indoctrination of German culture and did not send their children to *gymnasium.*[105] Gentiles favored trade schools and apprenticeships in efforts to preserve their individual nationalities. Although middle-class Jews were educated alongside German students, they were in no way socially integrated. Western education and the acquisition of basic civil rights altered Jewish behavior and customs. Being Jewish had a different criteria in the late nineteenth century, including the increasing absorption of Western culture along with the continued separation from larger society. Jews continued to socialize with other Jews; *gymnasium* provided an arena for Viennese Jews to encounter and procure German culture within the comfort and familiarity of their own people.[106] Jews also formed secular groups aimed at promoting and protecting Jewish businesses and communities. The bourgeois Jew's existence was guaranteed only in so much as liberalism in effect. The values and ideals of liberalism were synonymous with the values and ideals of the modern Viennese Jew. By all

102. Rosenblitz, *The Jews of Vienna*, 33.

103. Ibid., 10.

104. Ibid., 99.

105. Ibid., 116.

106. Ibid., 125.

outward appearances, the Jews of Vienna were assimilated to Western Society but the illusory conformity did not integrate them with non-Jews.[107] Most Viennese Jews were still socially limited to their own people and merely tolerated by Germans and other non Jews. They remained a people apart and their place in Viennese society would soon be threatened by anti-Semitism with the breakdown of liberalism in the 1890s.

The Jewish identity became a secular one as education's value increased and religious rituals and customs faded away. Jews profoundly influenced Viennese culture throughout the second half of the Nineteenth Century with academic, political, and artistic contributions. Jews rose as prominent members of the intelligentsia of Vienna and secured leadership and influence in the universities. The impact of this new "secular Judaism" typified not only the changing identity of the Jewish population but it exemplified the changing focus of liberal culture as well. The short-lived power of liberalism in Vienna lasted only a couple of decades before nationalist political movements took control of public opinion. Liberalism and appreciation for the rational in Vienna buckled under the pressures of nationalist campaigns. The Viennese Bourgeois lacked the solidarity typified by the bourgeois of England or France.[108] Liberalism in Vienna and Austria never truly integrated with the former aristocracy and yet the aristocracy remained a significant influence.[109] The Austrian bourgeois still looked to the emperor for support and guidance and remained dependent on the aristocracy to some extent.[110] Their continued dependence and inability to blend aristocratic and liberal agendas weakened the political power

107. *Jews, Anti-Semitism, and Culture in Vienna.* Edited by Ivar Oxaal, Michael Pollak, and Gerhard Botz. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987), 25.

108. Schorske, *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna*, 7.

109. Ibid.

110. Ibid.

of the bourgeois.[111] Under the protection of liberalism, middle-class Jews and Germans Vienna thrived in the increasingly capitalist economy. Subsequently, the prosperity of the bourgeois sparked criticism from the Slavic peoples, peasants, and members of the lower classes.[112] Parties such as the Christian Socialist party, Pan Germans, Socialists, and Slavic Nationalists organized to oppose the liberal policies.[113] Karl Lueger's mayoral win in 1895 indicated that the Jews' liberal safe haven of Vienna lay in danger of anti-Semitic politics.[114]

The political efforts of Georg Von Schonerer demonstrated the breakdown of rationality in Viennese government. In 1882 he organized pan-Germans into a party of German nationalists, calling for limitations on Jewish involvement in and profit from corporate endeavors and restrictions on Jewish immigration.[115] Schonerer's political objectives included unification with the Bismarkian monarchy and severing Austria's ties to the pro-Slav Habsburg monarchy.[116] He viewed the Austro-Hungarian emperor and the idea of a multi-national state as weak.[117] Schonerer's vision for Austria, unification with Germany, depended on the identification and cultivation of a national ideal. Without a cohesive national identity, Austria would continue as a fragmented state, vulnerable to the varied motives of its ethnically diverse population. Schonerer used anti-Semitism to unite his German nationalist party.[118] Comprised of mostly working and

111. Ibid.

112. Ibid., 5.

113. Ibid.

114. Ibid.

115. Ibid., 127-129.

116. Ibid.

117. Ibid., 129.

118. Ibid., 130.

lower class citizens, German nationalists were all too eager to identify the Jews as a common enemy, and they used this commonality to further delineate their nationality. Anti-Semitism united Schonerer not only with his German nationals but with other political groups as well. Anti-socialists, anti-liberals, anti-capitalists, anti-Catholics, and anti-Habsburgs all found common ground with Schonerer when it came to their views on the Jews.[119] Schonerer achieved no real position of political power in Vienna but his angry accusations against the Jews influenced and mobilized frustrated members of the lower class. Karl Lueger exhibited more restraint than the often fanatical, Schonerer. Lueger, like Schonerer, appealed to working class artisans, hot headed youths, and the disenfranchised with his anti-Semitic spin on Austria's affairs.[120] Lueger won the position of Vienna's mayor by uniting the lower class, the aristocracy, and democrats against the Jews.[121] Governmental conduct increasingly centered around emotional appeals and less on the rule of law and reason. Rationality's rule in Vienna waned under the heated political anti-Semitism.

The Jewish response to increased anti-Semitism in Viennese and Austrian politics varied from the retreat to artistic expression to the creation of Zionism. As the bourgeois lost more and more of its political influence, Austrian liberals sought out alternative avenues to promote their values. The performing arts flourished in 1890s Vienna with the patronage of the bourgeois.[122] The bourgeois promoted a more German aesthetic, celebrating reason and law, departing from the traditional taste associated with the aristocracy.[123] Liberal influence waned in the government

119. Ibid.

120. Ibid., 133.

121. Ibid., 146.

122. Ibid., 8.

123. Ibid., 7.

but boomed in popular culture. Just as the Jews had sought opportunity and expression through Western education in the previous decades, they turned to the arts with religious fervor to obtain meaning and comfort.[124] The once revered Western values of rationality diminished under the pressures of nationalist and anti-Semitic politics in turn-of-the-century Vienna, causing the Bourgeois' attention to shift. The defeat of liberalism generated an anxiety amongst the Bourgeois and the uncertainty of their place in Vienna's future reflected in the inward focus of their new aesthetic.[125] Both the intelligentsia and the artistic community of the Bourgeois explored the cultivation of the "self" and the individual's distinctive properties.[126] The cosmopolitan city of Vienna's Bourgeois Jews grew increasingly insular, shrinking away from other European countries and their ever more nationalistic campaigns.

The literature from Vienna at the turn-of-the-century exemplified the isolated focus of the politically impotent Bourgeois Jews. Writers limited their perspective to the immediate and familiar and thus departed from objective analysis into the world of "feeling."[127] Writers moved from universal themes to the specific, categorized as *"feuilleton"* or "artists in vignettes."[128] Theodor Herzl, who would found the Zionist movement, commented on the narcissistic nature of literature at this time, warning against the dangers of "falling in love with his own spirit, and thus of losing any standard of judging himself or others."[129] The *feuilleton* writers' subjective response to their personal experiences ironically paralleled the lack of objectivity exhibited by

124. Ibid., 8-9.

125. Ibid., 9.

126. Ibid.

127. Ibid.

128. Ibid.

129. Ibid.

the political parties that suppressed them. Clearly, the breakdown of rationality did not exclusively apply to nationalists and anti-Semitic groups. Reason and law had failed to secure any significant permanence in Viennese society for the Jews or the bourgeois, therefore, they began to seek meaning in the subjective too. Jewish sociologist and author, Arthur Schnitzler examined the tension between the social reality for the Jews and their nostalgia and loyalty to liberal values in his novel, *The Road Into the Open*.[130] His novel investigated anti-Semitism's destruction of liberalism in Austrian society and its effects on the Jews' pursuit of a place in society.[131] Schnitzler, who had studied psychology with Freud's teacher, used his novel, *The Green Cockatoo*, to communicate his perceived connection between the psyche and politics.[132] Schnitzler asserted the "psyche was manifested in politics": political expression as the outward communication of an individual or society's inner self.[133] This personalization of civic behavior and interaction reflected Modern Society's coming to terms with the complexities of social living in the Twentieth Century.

Arguably the most significant examinations of self in nineteenth century Vienna was Sigmund Freud's development of psychoanalytic theories and investigation of the subconscious. Freud infused the classical concepts of self and the unconscious obtained through his *gymnasium* education with his scientific observations to create an understanding of the individual self and subconscious.[134] Freud's work explored the conflicts of man's psyche as well as the incongruous

130. Ibid., 11-12.

131. Ibid.

132. Ibid.

133. Ibid.

134. Alfred Pfabigan, "Freud's 'Vienna Middle'." in *Rethinking Vienna 1900*. Edited by Steven Beller, 154-170. (New York: Berghahn Books, 2001), 157.

identity of Austrians and exponentially assimilated Jews. Austrian Jews, like assimilated Jews throughout Europe, experienced an identity crisis in the face of liberalism's collapse and the rise of anti-Semitism. Having lost much of their religious traditions and customs for the pursuit of Westernization, Austrian Jews found themselves without community or political support when the Liberalism eroded away in the rise of nationalism. Now, without their secular roles in society, the bourgeois Jews of Vienna were without the religious community that gave strength to previous generations in times of turmoil. Freud, however, weathered the political and civic failures of Viennese liberalism and held onto a sense of purpose through his objectivity in politics (and general refrain from participation in political discussion) and his allegiance to the concepts of *Bildung*.[135] The *gymnasium* curriculum taught and celebrated *Bildung* or the tenets of European, mostly German culture.[136] Freud, along with many Austrian Jews, assimilated to the German culture instead of Austrian culture because of their schooling.[137] While Viennese artists developed narcissistic tendencies in response to heated politics, Freud and other *Bildung* adherents maintained a perspective of rationality and distance.[138] Freud seamlessly integrated his innovative scientific observations synonymous with the innovative spirit of Modernity with the Classical concepts explored by Aristotle, Plato, Rousseau, and Goethe.[139] His theories exemplified the gradual nature of traditional progress in the sciences as well as the modern notion of innovation.[140] Alfred Pfabigan refers to Freud's combination of *Bildung* loyalty and

135. Ibid., 157-159.

136. Ibid.

137. Ibid., 157.

138. Ibid.

139. Ibid.

140. Ibid.

innovative effort as Freud's "Middle."[141] Freud's "Middle" reflects turn-of-the-century Vienna's identity, torn between German high culture and that of the Habsburg Monarchy traditions, the lack of defined identity for the Austrian Jew, and his personal strategy for determining purpose in the face of liberalism's decline. Freud expressed his complex identification as a Jew and an Austrian in Vienna in his address to the Society of Bnai Brith in 1926:

> What bound me to Jewry was (I am ashamed to admit) neither faith nor national pride, for I have always been an unbeliever and was brought up without any religion though not without a respect for what are called the "ethical" standards of human civilization. Whenever I felt an inclination to national enthusiasm I strove to suppress it as being harmful and wrong, alarmed by the warning examples of peoples among whom we Jews live.[142]

Later, in his *Civilization and Its Discontents,* Freud explored the fundamentals of human society and its future. *Civilization and Its Discontents* offers insight into Freud's understanding of anti-Semitism and its roots:

> God has made them in the image of His own perfection; nobody wants to be reminded how hard it is to reconcile the undeniable existence of evil-despite the protestations of Christian Science-with His all-powerfulness or His all-goodness. The Devil would be the best way out as an excuse for God; in that way he would be playing the same part as an agent of economic discharge as the Jew does in the world of the Aryan ideal.[143]

The literature, art, and sciences from turn-of-the-century Vienna reflect the cost of assimilation and entered the collective consciousness.

While some bourgeois Jews withdrew into the arena of the self and others like Freud navigated the middle ground, Theodor Herzl proposed the creation of a Jewish State as the

141. Ibid.

142. Sigmund Freud, *Address to the Society of Bnai Brith,* from Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, *The Jew in the Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 278.

143. Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*. trans. and ed. by James Strachey. (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2010), 108.

solution to the Jewish Question. Educated in the traditions of Nineteenth Century *gymnasium* education, Herzl began his career in Paris as a correspondent for *Neue Freie Presse* of Vienna,[144] a proponent for assimilation and western values. Herzl worked in Paris from 1890-1895[145] and witnessed the intense anti-Semitic campaigns of nationalist groups and the French media. He was particularly affected by Drumont's *Le France Juive.*[146] Herzl realized the futility and danger of assimilation while working in Paris. The rapidly increasing level of anti-Semitism in French society indicated the impotence of assimilation and the unstable future for the Jews' place in French or European society. Herzl observed the impossibility of successful integration into Western Society in his *A Solution to the Jewish Question* in 1896:

> Only an ignorant man would mistake modern antisemitism for an exact repetition of the Jew-baiting of the past. The two may have a few points of resemblance, but the main current of the movement has now changed. In the principal countries where antisemitism prevails, it does so as a result of the emancipation of the Jews. When civilized nations awoke to inhumanity of exclusive legislation, and enfranchised us-our enfranshisement came too late. For we had, curiously enough, developed while in the Ghetto into bourgeois people, and we stepped out of it only to enter fierce competition with the middle classes...[147]

Herzl directed the Jews' attention to the futility of their efforts to assimilate to Western Society and proposed the development of a Jewish state as the only viable answer to "The Jewish Question":

> We are one people- One People. We have honestly striven everywhere to merge ourselves in the social life of surrounding communities, and to preserve only the faith of our fathers, It has not been permitted to us. In vain we are loyal patriots, in some places

144. Theodor Herzl, *A Solution of the Jewish Question,* from Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, *The Jew in the Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 537.

145. Ibid.

146. Schorske, *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna*, 157-159.

147. Theodor Herzl, *A Solution of the Jewish Question,* from Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, *The Jew in the Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 534.

> our loyalty running to extremes; in vain do we make sacrifices of life and property as our fellow-citizens; in vain do we strive to increase the fame of our native land in science and art, or her wealth by trade and commerce. In countries where we have lived for centuries we are still cried down as strangers; and often by those whose ancestors were not yet domiciled in the land where the Jews has already made experience of suffering. Yet, in spite of it all, we are loyal subjects, loyal as the Huguenots, who were forced to emigrate. If only we could be left in peace...[148]

The Vienna election of Karl Lueger as mayor only solidified Herzl's belief in the need for a Jewish state.[149] Herzl expressed his awareness that the Jews' survival and success were a contingency of a liberal society. Herzl's desire for a Jewish state not only served as a safe haven for the Jews but also for Liberalism, the assimilated Jew's defining ideology.[150] The politicalization of anti-Semitism, once limited to the fringe movements of nationalist parties and right wing media had taken hold of the bastion of reason and law, Vienna.

Prague

Second only to Vienna, Prague developed into an industrial powerhouse and became a cultural center in the Nineteenth Century; attracting large numbers of Jewish immigrants following their emancipation in 1859.[151] The Jewish population in Bohemia increased by 26% during the second half of the century and by 1921, 40% of Bohemian Jews lived in Prague.[152] Many of the Prague's Jews immigrated from rural Czech areas and identified themselves as Jewish Czechs;[153] in fact a majority of Bohemian and Moravian Jews identified themselves not

148. Ibid.

149. Schorske, *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna*, 162-163.

150. Ibid., 147.

151. Hillel J. Kieval, "Nationalism and Antisemitism: The Czech-Jewish Response." in *Living with Antisemitism: Modern Jewish Responses*, 210-233. (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 1987), 210.

152. Ibid., 211-212.

153. Ibid., 214.

as German, but as Czech.[154] While Viennese Jews eagerly aligned themselves with the German culture that dominated Western ideology at the turn-of-the-century, Bohemian Jews were torn between their Czech roots and the allure of assimilation through German enlightenment. Although most Bohemian Jews considered themselves as Czechs, successful adjustment to urban life and an industrial economy depended largely on the acquisition of the German language and a Western education. The dramatic population increase of Jews in Bohemia generated competition with the Gentile Czech population for jobs, housing, and educational opportunities.[155] The emancipation of the Jews in Bohemia, like elsewhere in Europe, brought about the secularization of the Jews through the implementation of Western or German education.[156] Bohemian Jews also maintained a degree of loyalty to German culture because of their gratitude for Franz Joseph, their emancipator and member of the Habsburg Monarchy.[157] The emancipation in Austria also brought forth state sponsored schools for Jews and the traditional *gymnasium* curriculum.[158] Jews were now permitted to attend secondary schools and universities.[159] Czech nationalists, in the hopes of preserving their culture, refused the concept of universal schooling and distanced themselves from the Westernization from state schools.[160] Gentiles were not the only Czechs to oppose the German influence of state schools or the implementation of the German language as a state language.. The Czech-Jewish population in rural areas of Bohemia

154. Robert S. Wistrich, "Austrian Legacies: Jews and the questions of national identity." *Partisan Review*, 69, no. 3: 355-366.

155. Kieval, *Living with Antisemitism,* 211-212.

156. Ibid.

157. Ibid., 213.

158. Ibid.

159. Ibid.

160. Ibid., 214-215.

joined Czech National efforts to rid the countryside of state schools and they were eventually successful.[161] The efforts of both the Young Czech/National Liberal party and Jewish Czechs reduced the number of state-sponsored primary schools for Jews from over one hundred in 1885 to only five in 1910.[162] Assimilation to German culture was a necessity of city life, but the rural areas of Bohemia demanded an understanding of and adherence to Czech sentiment. The Jews of Bohemia could not align themselves to either side of the nationality debate in Austria. They were not considered German for they were Jews and yet they could not be real Czechs because they spoke German and largely identified with the political principles of Liberalism and the Western tradition.

The German population of Prague consisted mostly of Jews, making them vulnerable to both anti-German sentiment and anti-Semitism from Czech nationals.[163]

> What had they done, the little Jews of Prague, the honest merchants of the middle class, the most peaceful of all peaceful citizens?... In Prague, people suggested they weren't Czechs, in Saaz and Eger [the Bohemian provinces], that they weren't Germans...What should they hold on to then? Is some wanted to be Germans, the Czechs jumped on them- and the Germans too... If one considers the entirely skewed attitude of the Bohemian Jews, one understands why they are rewarded for their service with physical punishment. Both of the conflicting nationalities found a strange new variant to the old coachman's joke. Tow coaches meet each other on a narrow path. Neither of the two coachmen wants to make way and in each car sits a Jew. Each coachman snaps his whip at the other's passenger: "You beat my Jew, and I'll beat yours." But in bohemia, they ass, "And mine too," so that for one ride the Bohemian Jew received a double thrashing. One can understand why they tried to keep a low profile in the nationality dispute.[164]

161. Ibid.

162. Ibid.

163. Klaus Wagenbach, *Prague at the Turn of the Century,* from Mark Anderson, *Reading Kafka: Prague, Politics, and the Fin de Siècle* (New York: Schocken Books, 1989), 33.

164. Ibid.

The threat of pan-Germanism only intensified anti-Semitic politics and campaigns from Czech nationals.[165] The Jews of Prague suffered little discrimination from the Germans during the era of Liberalism in the Nineteenth Century.[166] The financial success of the Jews in Prague coupled with the struggles for rural Gentile immigrants to acclimate to an urban society added to the Czechs' distrust for the Jews and their affiliation with the Germans.[167] Instead of attributing their financial struggles to their lack of education or training (which they refused on the principle of cultural preservation), Czechs targeted the Jews as the source of their economic stress.[168] Czech nationals in the 1890s attempted to neutralize foreign competition and safeguard their economy by boycotting Jewish businesses.[169] Jewish businesses were believed to be German businesses and therefore were perceived as an " Austrian-German intrusion into Czech affairs."[170] Jewish businesses inside the city of Prague survived with the support of its large Jewish and German population but the boycotts yielded devastating effects to rural businesses.[171] The boycotts, also known as the "Each to his Own" program, inflicted financial anguish on the Jews and reflected the psychological, social and financial stresses of the Czechs and their inability to navigate a new economy and society.[172] The Czechs projected their fears and failures onto the Jews just as the burgeoning industrial societies of France, Germany, and Russia.

165. Kieval, *Living with Antisemitism,* 214.

166. Ibid.

167. Ibid., 216.

168. Ibid.

169. Ibid.

170. Ibid.

171. Ibid.

172. Ibid.

The Czech nationalist sponsored boycotts were only one expression of anti-Semitism in turn-of-the-century Prague. The politicalization of anti-Semitism breathed new life into medieval anti-Semitic myths and stereotypes. The late Nineteenth Century witnessed a re-emergence of ritual murder accusations or *blood libel*. Blood libel stemmed from the belief Jews killed Gentiles to acquire blood for secret Passover rituals.[173] Accusations and rumors of ritual murder spread throughout Europe in the Nineteenth Century. The Damascus Affair in 1840 involved the mysterious disappearance of a friar during the Passover holiday.[174] Seeking political support from local Christians and Muslims in the area, the French consul supported the monks' allegations against the Jews and accepted their claims of ritual murder as explanation for the friar's disappearance.[175] Local Jews were questioned, tortured, and charged with ritual murder despite the lack of any credible evidence of guilt.[176] The Beilis Trial in 1913 in Kiev charged Menahem Mendel Beilis, a Jew, with the murder of a twelve-year-old Gentile boy.[177] According to the prosecution, Beilis killed Andre Yustschinsky in March of 1911 to obtain blood for private Passover ceremonies.[178] No physical or circumstantial evidence supported the charge yet the district attorney of Kiev charged Beilis with the crime.[179] The Beilis trial ended with an acquittal[180] and those charged in the Damascus Affair were eventually released, however the

173. *The Damascus Affair,* from Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, *The Jew in the Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 315.

174. Ibid.

175. Ibid.

176. Ibid.

177. *The Beilis Trial,* from Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, *The Jew in the Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 413.

178. Ibid.

179. Ibid.

180. Ibid.

resurgence of blood libel signaled alarm for European Jews.[181] Legal emancipation and integration into Western Society had not eliminated the anti-Semitic threats typical of Medieval times. European society still harbored suspicion and hatred for the Jews despite the Jews' efforts to assimilate. The Hilsner Affair reflected the precarious social position of the Austrian Jews and their vulnerability to anti-Semitic attacks.

Leopold Hilsner was accused and found guilty of 1899 ritual murder of Agnes Hruza in Polna, Bohemia.[182] Sentenced to die in 1900, Hilsner's death penalty was later commuted to a life sentence in 1901, and he eventually received a full pardon from the emperor in 1918.[183] Hilsner's case, unlike blood libel cases elsewhere in Europe, ended with a guilty verdict.[184] The initial guilty verdict does not only signify the rise of anti-Semitism in Bohemia, but also indicates the political manipulation of anti-Semitism in Austrian government. The Damascus Affair and the Beilis trial originated from anti-Semitic accusations of blood libel but were eventually struck down by the court's ability to uphold the liberal principles of reason and law. The state substantiated the medieval mythology of ritual murder, as evidenced by Hilsner's verdict.[185] In addition to the political endorsement of blood libel, the case sparked public debate and contributed to social unrest in Bohemia. Politicians from the Christian Socialist party in Vienna were able to expand their influence into Bohemia and rural areas of Austria by strengthening the Czech identity through the exclusion of the Jewish minority. Karel Baxa, the

181. *The Damascus Affair,* from Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, *The Jew in the Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 315.

182. Larissa Douglass, " "Years of Blood and Darkness": Czech Extra-Parliamentary Representation and Austrian Democratization during the Hilsner Affair, 1899-1900" *Canadian Journal of History*, 43, Issue 1: 4.

183. Ibid.

184. Ibid.

185. Ibid.

lawyer for Agnes Hurza's mother and a Czech politician, used ritual murder in his case against Leopold Hilsner and employed anti-Semitic stereotypes in his political efforts to isolate a true Czech identity.[186] The conflict between Germans and Czechs for a national identity subsided as the common, viable minority group, the Jews, were identified as a subversive threat to Czech national culture. The Hilsner Case brought attention to anti-Semitism's ever expanding reach, from the fringes of society to the sphere of radical politics and finally into the supposed haven for reason, the courts. Lacking political support and judicial protection, Bohemian Jews questioned their identity as Westerners, Austrians, Czechs, Germans, and Jews.

As the nineteenth century came to a close, the Jews of Prague faced the real identity crisis resulting from Liberalism's collapse, the conflict between German and Czech nationalities, and the absence of an authentic religious support system that resulted from the bourgeois efforts to assimilate to a culture forever closed to them. Some Jews sought out the spiritual connection abandoned by the previous generations for the promises of Westernization. Zionism offered political options, even if only as a fantasy at the time, but Hasidism appealed to Jews seeking connection, purpose, comfort, and community. Hasidism originated from Poland and the Ukraine in the 1800s and eventually gained momentum in Western provinces like Bohemia.[187] Those frustrated with the limited acceptance into Western society and longing for a meaningful connection to the mystical interpretations of Judaism found satisfaction and purpose in the practice of Hasidism. An affluent, middle class Jew in Prague, Jeri Langer, detailed his spiritual experiences and discoveries in his novel, *The Nine Gates to Chassidic Mysteries:*

186. Ibid., 6.

187. Jeri Langer, *From Prague to Belz,* from Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, *The Jew in the Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 286.

> One summer's day in 1913, a nineteen year-old youth, brought up like all the youth of his time in the dying traditions of the pre-war generation, left Prague inspired by a secret longing which even now after the passage of so many years he still cannot explain to himself, and set out for the east, for strange countries.
> Had he a foreboding of what he was losing on that day?
> European civilization with its comforts and achievements, its living successes called careers? Had he a foreboding that his soul would no longer be capable of feeling poetry which up to that time he had been so fond of quoting, that, from the first moment when he heard the rhythms of the Haisidic songs, all the magic charms of music would be swamped once and for all, and all beautiful things which his eye had ever conceived would in the future be half hidden by the mystic veil of the knowledge of good and evil.[188]

Langer's spiritual transformation starkly contrasted his bourgeois upbringing in Prague. Jeri Langer's brother reflects on his family's reaction to his brother's changed identity:

> The attitude of our family to Jiri seemed to us at the time to resemble the situation in Kafka's novel, *Die Verwandlung* [*The Metamorphosis*], in which an entire family finds its way of life completely upset when the son of the house is suddenly changed into an enormous cockroach, and consequently has to be hidden from the rest of the world, while the family strive in vain to find some place for him in their affections.[189]

The term,"Metamorphosis" not only describes Langer's spiritual awakening, it encapsulates the Jewish experience in turn-of-the-century Prague and throughout Europe. Lacking security and tolerance from the nations in which they lived, the Jewish identity transformed and acculturated to the demands of the political majority at the moment. Transformation through the process of assimilation became the primary survival tool for Jews in Austria, however, it had negative effects on the Jewish psyche. The emptiness of "Bourgeois Judaism" in the face of liberalism's defeat left Jews searching for meaning without the direction or support of a coherent religious community.

188. Ibid., 284.

189. Frantisek Langer, Foreword to *Nine Gates* by Jiri Langer. Translated by Stephen Jolly (London: James Clarke and Co., LTD., 1961), xvii.

The Jews of Austria, especially in Prague at the turn-of-the-century, maneuvered a labyrinth of assimilation challenges. Czechs and Germans competed for the national identity of Austria while the dual monarchy of Austro-Hungary retained domestic autonomy but shared a common emperor and foreign policy. The multi-ethnic provinces of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, torn between Habsburg tradition and Liberalism struggled to integrate local culture with the German High culture that defined Western Europe. The newly emancipated Jews of Austria attempted to assimilate to the German culture that granted their freedom while supporting the efforts to preserve their local culture, only to receive discrimination and scorn from the communities for which they worked. Assimilation failed to secure the Jews a place in the Austrian nation because it was unclear to which culture they should identify and the rise of anti-Semitism destroyed any political advances they had gained.

Chapter Three

Kafka's *Metamorphosis* as a Response to Assimilation and Anti-Semitism

Franz Kafka lived and wrote in the midst of this conflict, despair, and hope. The powerful influence of the historical context in which he worked cannot be separated from his literature despite his incredible ability to transcend all of the cultural limitations personal experience presents. The rise of anti-Semitism in nineteenth Century Europe, along with the distinctive intermediary existence of Jews in Prague at the turn-of the-century did not merely influence his *Metamorphosis*; it created it. Kafka's *Metamorphosis* embodies the Jews' isolation and struggle for identity that resulted from their efforts to assimilate to Western culture in the face of rising political anti-Semitism. The transformation of Gregor Samsa gives insight to both the personal life of Franz Kafka and to that of an assimilated Jew living in Prague. *Metamorphosis* and Kafka's other novels voice the universal themes of isolation and despair associated with the Modern Era and its literature. His universality, however, grew from the unique perspective of a gifted mind and from his experience of living as an assimilated Jew in *fin-de-siècle* Prague. The historical reality of Kafka's Jewish Prague shines through and past his fantastic characters and stripped-down language. The insights into Kafka's personal history, relationships, career, and thoughts on Judaism found in the *Metamorphosis* communicate the effects of anti-Semitism and assimilation on the Jewish identity in turn-of-the-century Prague.

> I don't want to send you anything to read. I want to read it to you. Yes, that would be lovely, to read this story to you, while I would have to hold your hand, for the story is a little frightening. It is called *Metamorphosis,* and it would thoroughly scare you, you might not want to hear a word of it, for alas! I scare you enough every day with my letters.[190]

190. Franz Kafka to Felice Bauer, Prague, November 23, 1912, in *Letters to Felice,* edited by Max Brod (New York: Schocken Books, 1973), 98.

Franz Kafka wrote *Metamorphosis* during a particularly anxious period of his life as well as a particularly anxious period in history. He started and completed the novella during November and December of 1912, shortly after his quick production of "The Judgment."[191] The anxiety that pervades the Samsa apartment following Gregor's mutation reflects Kafka's personal nervousness at the time. Working as an insurance clerk, Kafka could only write in the evenings, and he found the distraction of a "career" very distressing. In addition to the stresses of his job and writing endeavors, he wrestled philosophically with the responsibilities of marriage and his engagement to Felice Bauer. Engaged twice, but never married, Kafka and Felice corresponded with each other by letters from 1912-1917.[192] In his letters, Kafka details his feelings of inadequacy, self-doubt, nervousness for his writing career and lamentations for his mundane desk job.[193] This period of anxiety in Kafka's personal life paralleled the palpable anxiety on a national level experienced by Jews throughout Europe, especially in Prague at this time. Kakfa lived with if not lived *under* anxiety his entire life.

Born in Prague in 1883, Franz Kafka grew up in an upper middle class Jewish family.[194] His father, Hermann Kafka, owned and operated a wholesale warehouse that sold clothing and other retail apparel items to smaller stores in towns throughout Bohemia.[195] Franz's mother, Julie assisted her husband in the store, and the children of the family were cared for by hired

191. Richard H. Lawson, *Franz Kafka* (New York: Ungar, 1987), 27.

192. "Kafka's True Will: An Introductory Essay, Erich Heller, Franz Kafka, *Letters to Felice,* vii.

193. Ibid., vii-xxi.

194. Max Brod, *Franz Kafka: A Biography*, 3.

195. Ibid., 8.

governesses, a common situation for middle class Jews in Prague.[196] Franz was the eldest and only son to survive infancy, and he had three younger sisters.[197] Franz Kafka, despite his Czech name[198] attended German schools and obtained the German values and ideas that dominated European high culture. Both Kafka and his close friend Max Brod described Kafka's childhood as lonely and isolated.[199] Kafka attributed his loneliness to many factors including the dynamics of his family relationships. His relationship with his father was strained at best. Kafka wrestled with feelings of fear, inadequacy, and guilt over his inability to gain his father's acceptance and approval. Kafka's father often criticized him as weak and his mother described him as fragile.[200] Kafka's diaries, letters, and novels reveal the strong and overbearing presence Hermann Kafka maintained in his son's life and the strained relationship between the two. Hermann Kafka wished for his son to take up an interest in the family business and found disappointment with his son's general disinterest for anything other than his personal writing. Franz grew up with a constant sense of guilt for not living up to his father's expectations for a strong and robust son. He lived almost his entire life in the same house as his mother and father and in 1919, at the age of thirty-six Franz Kafka composed a cathartic analysis of the breakdown of his relationship with his father:

196. Ibid.

197. Ibid., 9.

198. Ibid., 3.

199. Ibid., 9.

200. Ibid., 14.

> You were such a giant in every respect. What could you care for our pity or even our help? Our help, indeed, you could not but despise, as you so often despised us ourselves.[201]

Kafka's father never read the letter; his mother returned it, not wishing to upset her husband.[202] The letter systematically details Kafka's childhood and tumultuous relationship with his father, offering exclusive insight into Kafka's mind set and background as well as criticism of bourgeois Judaism. The letter ends with Kafka's predicted response from his father, written in the voice of Hermann Kafka and echoing the themes and vocabulary of *Metamorphosis:*

> So now by your dishonesty you have already achieved enough, for you have proved three things; firstly, that you are innocent; secondly, that I am guilty; and thirdly, that out of sheer greatness of heart you are prepared not only to forgive me, but what is much more, and much less, even to go further and prove, and try and convince yourself, that I- contrary to the truth of course-am also innocent. That ought to be enough for you, but it isn't. You have in fact made up your mind that you want to live on me altogether. I admit we fight each other, but there are two kinds of fight. There is the chivalrous fight, where two independent opponents test their strength against each other, each stands on his own, loses for himself, wins for himself. And there is the fight of the vermin, which not only bite, but at the same time suck the blood on which they live. They are really the professional soldier, and that is what you are. You cannot stand up to life, but in order to set yourself up in it comfortably, free from care, and without self-reproach, you prove that I robbed you of your capacity to stand up to life, and shoved it in my pocket.[203]

The family hostilities in Kafka's life are similar to those of Gregor Samsa in *Metamorphosis.* Gregor's father is a powerful, threatening presence and ultimately the destructive force in his son's life. Gregor, who once saw his father as weak, someone who needed his care is now a figure of control.

> But now he stood firm and erect; dressed in a tight blue uniform with gold buttons, of the sort worn by the servants of a bank; his powerful double chin unrolled above the stiff

201. Franz Kafka, *Letter to His Father,* trans. by Ernst Kaiser and Eithne Wilkins (New York: Schocken Books, 1974), 41.

202. Max Brod, *Franz Kafka: A Biography*, 16.

203. Ibid., 18.

> high collar of his coat; his black eyes looked out clear and sharp from beneath his bushy eyebrows; his white hair, once disheveled, was combed down in a shining, meticulously straight parting. He threw his cap with its gold monogram, probably a bank's, in a curve right across the whole room onto the sofa, and walked, the tails of his long uniform coat pushed back, his hands in his pockets, his face grim, towards Gregor.[204]

Kafka, through his letter to his father and in the *Metamorphosis* exposes the shortcomings of assimilated life. An identity built around secular principles is only as good as it is functional or needed by the current economy. These functional or commercial identities make even weaker families. Families were once centered on age-old values of truth and spirituality that transcend the fickle politics of daily life and the Jewish families of the post-emancipation era lacked any meaningful connection to bind them to each other. The Jews may have assimilated in efforts to integrate into Western society but the surge of anti-Semitism witnessed in the nineteenth century made it clear the Jews would always retain their denizen status. Kafka, like many Jews at the turn-of-the-century, realized the real loss suffered from assimilation to be that of their identity. Through assimilation Jews and non-Jews alike conditioned themselves to associate the idea of Jewish selfhood with their participation in secular society and the economy. Kafka discusses his feelings of estrangement from his family in his letters and diaries.

> 'So no one understands you,' my mother said, 'I suppose I am a stranger to you too, and your father as well. So we all want only what is bad for you.'
> 'Certainly, you are all strangers to me, we are related only by blood, but that never shows itself. Of course you don't want what is bad for me.'[205]

Kafka was able to recognize the intentions of his family as good, but they were nonetheless ill-fated. Just as Gregor's parents were powerless to help him because of their inability to see and accept his true self, Kafka would never receive the recognition he felt he deserved and nor pure

204. Franz Kafka, *The Metamorphosis* trans. by Joyce Crick (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 58.

205. Franz Kafka, *Diaries, 1910-1923.* ed. by Max Brod (New York: Schocken Books, 1976), 229.

love because of his parents' expectations for him. Emancipated Jews suffered the same crisis with assimilation. Jews and non-Jews in Europe regarded emancipation as an extraordinary gain for Jewish civil rights, yet the Jews were not integrated into society as Jews but instead expected to conform to Western Society (and often convert to Christianity). This conditional integration did not afford the Jews opportunity to be understood or even heard. The Jews, even within their own families, like Kafka in his bourgeois family or Samsa in his middle class family, were not genuinely accepted, for they were expected to conceal their real being and acquiesce to the pressures of assimilation.

Franz Kafka's biographer and trusted friend, Max Brod, defied his friend's wishes and did not destroy Kafka's remaining works when he died in 1924.[206] Instead he kept, edited, and published his friend's novels, letters, and diaries, recognizing them as literary masterpieces needed to be shared with the world. Brod used Kafka's letter and diaries along with his personal relationship with Kafka to write the definitive biography of Franz Kafka. It is through Brod's preservation of Kafka's correspondence that we have insight into Kafka's thoughts on his secular education, his bourgeois Judaism as well as his writing process. Max and Franz met during their first year of university.[207] Brod describes Kafka as magnetic, and Brod instantly admired him.[208] Kafka's father, despite Franz's persistent interest in literature, insisted he attend university and out of indecision he chose to pursue law, begrudgingly:

206. Franz Kafka, Introduction to *The Metamorphosis*, xlvii.

207. Max Brod, *Franz Kafka: A Biography*, 40.

208. Ibid.

> So I studied law. This meant that in the few months before exams, and in a way that told severely on my nerves, I was positively living, in an intellectual sense, on sawdust, which had moreover, already been chewed for me in thousands of other people's mouths.[209]

Kafka's interpretation of German schools and the University system as "soulless" exemplify the bourgeois lifestyle for Jews in nineteenth/early twentieth century Prague. Kafka viewed his education not as an exploration of ideas, but as a systematic training to obtain Western culture to better fit with European society. Kafka's disappointment and frustration with the lack of substance found in his education carried over into his career as an insurance clerk. He communicates the unsatisfying drudgery of his personal workplace observations in the coldly pragmatic association between Gregor and his office as represented by the chief clerk. Gregor's supervisor threatens the compliant and dutiful employee who has yet to miss a day of work, within minutes of waking to his changing form:

> I'm amazed, amazed. I thought I knew you to be a quiet, sensible person, and now all of a sudden you seem to want to start showing off with these strange whims of yours. Indeed, the boss hinted this morning at a possible explanation for your absence-it concerned the job of cash collecting recently entrusted to you-but truly, I almost pledged my word of honour that this explanation couldn't be the right one. But now I see your incomprehensible obstinacy, I lose all wish to put in the least word for you, utterly. And your position is by no means the most secure. I had originally intended to tell you this between ourselves, but as you have me waste my time to no purpose, I do not see why your parents should not hear it as well. For your performance recently has been unsatisfactory; true, it is not the season for doing particularly good business, we acknowledge that; but a season for not doing business at all, Herr Samsa, there is no such thing.[210]

Gregor's trials reflect the idiosyncratic heterogeneity of languages in Prague during Kafka's lifetime and during the time in which he wrote *The Metamorphosis*. Kafka observed and

209. Franz Kafka, *Letter to His Father*, 95.

210. Franz Kafka, *The Metamorphosis,* 36.

found fascination in language's ability to both assert one's individuality and also obliterate it.[211] We are unable to express ourselves without language; but language is shared and learned from others. Shared language, however, was a point of contention in nineteenth and early twentieth-century-Prague. Kafka lived in the middle of the tension between the Germans (and German speaking Jews) and the native Czechs. Despite his family's Czech origin, Kafka spoke German at home, attended German schools, and subscribed mostly to German culture. He did understand and speak Czech and later pursued a relationship with a Czech woman.

> Certainly I understand Czech. I've meant to ask you several times why you don't ever write me in Czech. I'm not suggesting that you don't master German. Most of the time you master it surprisingly well and if once in a while you don't, it bows before you of its own accord, and this is particularly pleasing, for this something a German doesn't dare to expect from his language, he doesn't dare to write so personally. But I wanted to read you in Czech because it is part of you, because only there is the whole Milena (the translation confirms it), whereas here is just the one from Vienna or the one preparing herself for Vienna. So Czech, please.[212]

Kafka also pursued Hebrew instruction as an adult in efforts to reclaim some of his Jewish identity.[213] *The Metamorphosis* communicates the idea of language and how it contributes to one's autonomy and conformity which became a hot political issue in Prague.

> Gregor was startled when he heard his own voice in reply; no doubt, it was unmistakably his previous voice, but merging into it as though from low down came an uncontrollable, painful squealing which allowed his words to remain articulate literally for only a moment, then stifled them so much as they died away that you couldn't tell if you'd heard them properly.[214]

Kafka expresses helplessness similar to Gregor's in his *Letter to His Father:*

211. Gerhard Neumann, *"The Judgement," "Letter to His Father," and the Bourgeois Family,* from Mark Anderson, *Reading Kafka: Prague, Politics, and the Fin de Siècle* (New York: Schocken Books, 1989), 216.

212. Franz Kafka to Milena Jesenská, *Letters to Milena* from November 23, 1912*,* ed. Willi Haas trans. Tania and James Stern, (New York: Schocken Books, 1953), 24.

213. Max Brod, *Franz Kafka: A Biography*, 168.

214. Kafka, *The Metamorphosis,* 31.

> The impossibility of getting on calmly together had one more result, actually a very natural one: I lost the capacity to talk. I dare say I would not have become a very eloquent person in any case, but I would, after all, have acquired the usual fluency of human language. But at a very early age you forbade me to speak. Your threat, "Not a word of contradiction!" and the raised hand that accompanied it have been with me ever since.[215]

Gregor quickly learns to remain silent just as Kafka did as a child. Silence is the only viable response to an aggressive authority that possesses the power and will to destroy those who contradict their command. Again, the circumstances of Gregor Samsa and Franz Kafka are analogous to the assimilation efforts of Jews in turn-of-the-century Prague. *The Metamorphosis* and Kafka's account of his childhood serve as a warning to assimilated Jews the cost of giving up their voice, relinquishing their voice in fear of the response from the bigger authority. Kafka may have been a sickly, weak child and Gregor Samsa a monstrous vermin, but they are no less beings. They still have a voice worthy of being heard. Their voice goes unheard, however, because they are not understood. They do not speak the language of the world around them and the world around them shows no interest in learning how to communicate with them. Instead Gregor and Kafka, like the emancipated Jews, live with the expectation to conform to the others at the expense of their self expression. Kafka goes further to expose the futility of assimilation in his *Letter to His Father.* Franz admits he cannot divorce his father's controlling influence from his writing because he has been conditioned over the period of a lifetime to seek the approval of his father. This perpetual denial of acceptance parallels the continued outsider status of the Jews in Western society despite their attempts to assimilate. The fruitlessness of such labor is often not apparent until it is too late.

215. Kafka, *Letter to His Father,* 33.

> My vanity, my ambition did suffer under your soon proverbial way of hailing the arrival of my books: "Put it on my bedside table!" (usually you were playing cards when a book came), but I was really quite glad of it, not only out of rebellious malice, not only out of delight at a new confirmation of my view of our relationship, but quite spontaneously like: "Now you are free!" Of course it was a delusion; I was not, or, to put it most optimistically, was not yet, free. My writing was all about you; all I did there, after all, was to bemoan what I could not bemoan upon your breast.[216]

Kafka recognized his denied acceptance into Western society and longed for unidentified belonging. He witnessed the sense of community and closeness amongst non-Jews in his community and attributed it to their common religious heritage.

> Day before yesterday with Weiss, author of *Die Galeere.* Jewish physician, Jew of the kind that is closest to the type of the Western European Jew and to whom one therefore immediately feels close. The tremendous advantage of Christians who always have and enjoy such feelings of closeness in general intercourse, for instance a Christian Czech among Christian Czechs.[217]

Gregor observes the same "belonging" while working to open the door for his parents and the chief clerk. He had awoken a monstrous bug and felt alienated from humanity, trying to gain an understanding of his new body and its functions. He has a moment, realizing his family and communities' concern for him, that he once again feels connected to the people in his life:

> He felt drawn back into humanity, and had high hopes of impressive and surprising achievements from both, from the doctor and the locksmith, without really distinguishing very clearly between them.[218]

Gregor's moment in humanity's embrace is short-lived, of course; and he quickly returned to the despair of isolation and must work out the meaning of his transformed existence on his own.

216. Kafka, *Letter to His* Father*,* 87.

217. Kafka, *Diaries*, 222.

218. Kafka, *The Metamorphosis*, 38.

Gregor is perpetually in "the middle." He vacillates between hope and despair until the end. He is even caught in the middle of his family with his sister serving as his intermediary.

> Besides, his mother wanted to visit Gregor relatively soon, but father and sister restrained her at first with rational arguments, which Gregor listened to very attentively and approved of entirely. But later they had to hold her back by force, and when she cried out; "Let me go to Gregor! He is my unhappy son, after all! Don't you understand, I must go to him?"[219]

Gregor cannot connect directly with his mother or father. He is unable to connect with his sister because of his overwhelming shame. His contact is limited to his courteous efforts to conceal himself. He is separated from his family by a number of obstacles including his physical appearance, his closed door, and his undecipherable voice. He wants to communicate but his efforts fall short and so he remains in limbo.

> Gregor was now cut off from his mother, perhaps through his fault she was close to death; he oughtn't to open the door, not unless he wanted to drive his sister away, and she had to stay with their mother; all he could do was wait, and, weighed down by self-reproach and anxiety, he started to crawl. He crawled over everything, wall, furniture, ceiling, and finally, as the entire room began to whirl around him, in his desperation he fell down onto the big table, right in the middle.[220]

Gregor's fleeting optimism is more than Kafka expressed for his personal situation, but it exemplifies the Jewish optimism following emancipation in the nineteenth century. The perseverance of the Jews that had sustained them throughout history coupled with encouragement from liberal politics inspired hope and posited assimilation as a practical path to integrated Western society.

The temporary safe haven liberal politics and assimilation provided ended abruptly as the century came to a close and political anti-Semitism rapidly spread throughout Europe. The

219. Ibid., 52.

220. Ibid., 56-57.

benevolent society of emancipators turned their backs on the Jews. The Jews, despite their continued loyalty to the state, remained under suspicion. The theme of betrayal at the hands of the father is a prominent topic of discussion for Kafka and it is certainly prevalent in *Metamorphosis.*

> Gregor's wound was serious and gave him pain for over a month-the apple remained, since no one dared remove it, as a visible memorial in his flesh-but it seemed to have reminded even his father that, despite his present sad and repulsive form, Gregor was a member of the family who was not to be treated as an enemy; instead, family duty towards him commanded that they should swallow their disgust, and put up with him in patience, just put up with him.[221]

The wound inflicted by Gregor's father serves as a visual reminder of the betrayal of the one person whom he should trust the most, his father. The apple lodged in his back reinforces Gregor's terrifying yet liberating reality; he is alone. No one is looking out for him. No one has his interests at heart. It is up to Gregor to determine his fate or at the very least accept his fate and derive some meaning from it. Just as the state failed to protect the Jews or honor the fundamental social contract in which the Jews and Prague (Austria, Europe) were involved, Gregor is left without the guidance or supporting structure of his family unit. Gregor's isolation and the Jews' political abandonment and persecution are intimidating but Kafka does indicate reason for hope.

In midst of the horror of his situation, Gregor discovers it feels good when he succumbs to his mutated nature. No one else can tolerate watching his insect verminous activities. He is much easier to take when he is putting forth an effort to hide or walk upright. His family becomes unhinged when Gregor gives into walking or hissing like an insect. It is those

221. Ibid., 59.

moments, however, that Gregor is relieved of physical pain and experiences small amounts of pleasure.

> But as he was looking for support, Gregor promptly fell down onto his many legs, giving a little cry. No sooner had this happened than he felt at ease with his body for the first time this morning; his little legs had firm ground beneath them; they obeyed perfectly, as he observed with pleasure; they even did their best to carry him where he wanted to go; he already believed that his final recovery from suffering was about to take place there and then.[222]

Gregor fully expresses his isolation in his response to Grete's violin performance for the lodgers-

> Gregor crawled forward a little more, keeping his head close to the floor so that he could, if possible, meet her glance. Was he a beast, that music should move him like this? He felt as if the way to the unknown nourishment he longed for was being revealed. He resolved to advance right up to his sister, pluck her by the skirt to intimate that he was asking her to come with her violin into his room, for no one here was rewarding her playing as he would reward it. He wouldn't let her out of his room ever again, at least not while he was alive; his terrifying figure should be useful to him for the first time; he would post himself by all the doors of his room at once and go hissing to meet his attackers; but of her own free will; she should sit next to him on the sofa, incline her ear down to him, and he would confide to her his firm intention of sending her to the conservatoire...[223]

Gregor's family immediately perceives him as a dangerous threat when Gregor behaves like an insect or leaves his room. No one attempts to decode Gregor's behavior in a rational manner. No one even attempts to think of Gregor as *Gregor.* The more the family sees of Gregor in his mutated form the more removed their son's identity becomes as well. They interpret Gregor's behavior as ridiculous, and yet they react absurdly when he appears.

> Of course, in his father's present state of mind it didn't even remotely occur to him to do something like opening the other wing of the door, for instance, so as to create sufficient passage for Gregor. His fixed idea was merely that Gregor had to get into his room as

222. Ibid., 41.

223. Ibid., 66-67.

> quickly as possible. Rather, he drove Gregor on, as if there were no obstacles, making a particular commotion as he did so.[224]

Kafka may have transformed Gregor into the grotesque by making him into a giant bug, but it is the Samsa family that mutates into the laughable. Could Kafka be ridiculing the anti-Semitic campaigns and myths that were rampant in Prague and Bohemia during his lifetime? Kafka's use of metaphor is unlike that of most authors in that his metaphors are *real.* Gregor's transformation into a bug is not symbolic; Kafka wrote Gregor to awake a physical bug. The fact that Gregor awakes to vermin form, a common anti-Semitic slur, is reason enough to examine *The Metamorphosis* under the lens of Jewish history in Europe in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century. Gregor does suffer miserably in his story but ultimately he embraces his true form, that of vermin and is able to live authentically, something his family cannot comprehend. Kafka himself repeatedly professed his frustrations with living an authentic existence and being true to himself, a struggle that crippled many of his personal relationships.

> The tremendous world I have in my head. But how free myself and free it without being torn to pieces. And a thousand times rather be torn to pieces than retain it in me or bury it. That, indeed, is why I am here, that is quite clear to me.[225]

Kafka's upbringing and fear of his judgmental father, contributed to Franz's difficulty expressing himself honestly but a great deal of it can be attributed to the collective psyche of assimilated Jews living in Prague whom were conditioned to believe veritable self expression impossible. Through Gregor's mutation, Kafka glimpses the beginnings of living authentically. Basically, Kafka rather crudely points out to the Jews that no matter how they change, they will continue to be seen as vermin in these anti-Semitic times. May as well enjoy being a bug.

224. Ibid., 43.

225. Kafka, *Diaries*, 222.

Gregor, despite his handicapped abilities, works furiously to prove his worth and loyalty to his family and employer. He suspects the consequences of revealing his changed appearance could be disastrous, but he cannot bear the alternative, disobeying and disappointing those he loves. Moreover, the mutation he has undergone is frightening, and he needs to be seen. He needs to be understood so that he can begin to understand himself. He abandons all concern for any physical discomfort and labors to his own detriment to open the door.

> He really did want to open the door, really did want to show himself and speak with the chief clerk; he was eager to learn what the others, who were asking for him now so much, would say at the sight of him.[226]

> Then he set about using his mouth to turn the key in the lock. Unfortunately, it seemed that he didn't have any proper teeth-what was he to grip the key with?- but to make up for that, his jaws were very strong, certainly, and with their aid he really did get the key moving, not caring that he was undoubtedly doing himself some sort of harm, for a brown liquid ran from his mouth, trickled over the key, and dripped on to the ground.[227]

Gregor's family and the chief clerk encourage Gregor to continue his efforts to reveal himself. Excited with his success, Gregor furiously works to unlock the door; soon displaying his transformation for all to see. The chief clerk is horrified, his mother collapses in despair, and his father responds with disgust and hostile disappointment. Gregor's labors to reveal himself to his family and boss are in vain. The verminous Gregor has no place or purpose for the family or chief clerk. How could he? Gregor is a dutiful son and employee. He provides for his family and performs for his firm. The new Gregor is not capable of fulfilling the obligations he formerly satisfied, therefore he cannot be Gregor. Not only the shock of Gregor's insect appearance prevents the family from accepting his new form; clearly, on some level they understand the large bug to be their son because Gregor can no longer contribute to the family

226. Kafka, *The Metamorphosis*, 37.

227. Kafka, *The Metamorphosis,* 38.

and community in the commercial and social ways that he did before, he becomes virtually unrecognizable to them. Over the course of the story, Gregor realizes how superficial his existence is and how little he understands of himself and how even less is understood by his family.

Gregor's sister continues to struggle with accepting her brother's new form, even after a month of caring for him everyday. Gregor continues to hide when she enters the room and goes to greater lengths to conceal his grotesque body. In the beginning of the story he simply retreats to the corner of the room, then he withdraws under his sofa and eventually covers himself completely with a bed sheet out of shame. Gregor's attempts to hide his new form only reinforce Grete's fear of him and her belief that he should remain hidden away from the rest of the family. He is contributing to his own isolation by confirming what the others' believe; he is not to be seen.

> He understood form this that the sight of him was still intolerable to her and was bound to remain intolerable for the future, and that she probably had to force herself not to run away from the sight of just the small part of his body that stuck out from under the sofa. To spare her even this sight, one day he carried the sheet onto the sofa on his back-he needed four hours to do it- and arranged it in such a way that he was now completely covered, and his sister, even if she bent down, couldn't see him. If she considered this sheet unnecessary, then of course she could have removed it, for it was clear enough that there was no pleasure for Gregor in cutting himself off so completely; but she left the sheet as it was, and Gregor believed he caught a grateful glance when on one occasion he cautiously lifted the sheet with his head to see how his sister was taking the new arrangement.[228]

This inability to reveal one's true self, to be authentic encapsulates the Jewish experience for Jews living in Prague at the turn-of-the-century. Assimilation diluted the Jewish identity so

228. Kafka, *The Metamorphosis*, 51-52.

much that it was difficult to recognize anymore and often when some small part of Jewish culture persevered it was criticized or feared.

> He was hardly surprised that he had shown so little consideration for the others of late; in the past this consideration had been his pride. And besides, right now he would have had even greater reason to hide, for, because of the dust on everything in his room, which rose at the slightest movement, he too was quite covered in it; he dragged threads, hairs, bits of left-over food about on his back; his indifference towards it all was far too great for him to do what he had previously done several times a day, lie on his back and scrub it against the carpet.[229]

The Metamorphosis illustrates the consequences of assimilation for the Jewish identity and human sense of self through Gregor's struggles to communicate, the betrayal of his father, his loss of civic identity when he can no longer work, and the isolation that accompanies the bourgeois lifestyle. Kafka drew from his personal experiences as well as contemporary politics to frame the anxiety of the Samsa household. The most prevalent theme throughout the novella in regard to assimilation and the Jewish identity, is Kafka's criticism and prediction for what he calls his father's generation's Jewishness, "Bourgeois Judaism." The Judaism passed onto Franz Kafka from his father left him longing for something more, something Gregor hungers for as well in *The Metamorphosis.*

Isolation and despair fill the pages of Gregor Samsa's tale but it is the hunger Gregor can not satisfy. He eventually copes with his loneliness and finds hope beyond his despair, but the hunger is more problematic. His new form has him ravenous but he cannot tolerate the foods he once loved. He has no idea how to nourish his new body. Gregor's physical nourishment once met by garbage and leftovers delivered from his sister now gives way to the spiritual and

229. Kafka, *The Metamorphosis*, 66.

emotional hunger he feels. When he does pinpoint his physical appetite for garbage he is still left with a hunger for something which he can not name.

> 'I do have an appetite,' said Gregor sorrowfully to himself, 'but not for these things. How thee gentlemen feed themselves, and I perish.'[230]

Kafka's use of hunger to intensify Gregor's isolation mirrors the variety of yearnings experienced by Kafka himself. Max Brod explains his friend's nutritional and spiritual diet to Kafka's fiancee, Felice Bauer, in a letter from November of 1912:

> As for that letter, there is not much I need say: Franz's mother loves him very much, but she has not the faintest idea who her son is and *what his needs are*. Literature is a "pastime"! My God! As though it did not tear our hearts out, willing victims though we are.--Frau Kafka and I have often had words over this. All the love in the world is useless when there is a total lack of understanding. That letter proves this yet again.--After years of trial and error Franz has at last found the only diet that suits him, the vegetarian one. For years he suffered from his stomach; now he is as healthy and as fit as I have ever known him. Then along come his parents, of course, and in the name of love try to force him back into eating meat and being ill...His parents just will not see than an *exceptional man* like Franz needs *exceptional conditions* to prevent his sensitive spirit from withering...His whole disposition cries out for a peaceful, trouble-free existence dedicated to writing. In the present circumstances his life is a kind of vegetating, with a few bright moments.-You will now more readily understand his nervousness.[231]

Max goes on to tell Felice about Kafka's exciting new book that is soon to be finished, *The Metamorphosis.*

Kafka speaks of this unnamed spiritual hunger in his criticism of his father's Judaism in his *Letter to His Father.* As an adult, Kafka showed intense interest in Jewish studies, pursuing Hebrew, attending Zionist and Hasidic meetings and enjoying Yiddish theatre. Kafka's father did not encourage his son's enthusiastic pursuit of Jewish education.

230. Kafka, *The Metamorphosis*, 65.

231. Kafka, *Letters to Felice*, Nov. 22, 1912, 57.

> Through my intervention Judaism became abhorrent to you, Jewish writings unreadable; they "nauseated" you.- This may have meant you insisted that only that Judaism which you had shown me in my childhood was the right one, and beyond it there was nothing.[232]

Hermann Kafka and the bourgeois generation of Jews in Prague, associated Westernization and German education with success and financial wealth. Franz Kafka came to resent his father's superficial interpretation of the faith and criticized his father's failure to impart any significant spiritual values onto his children.[233]

> I found as little escape from you in Judaism. Here some measure of escape would have been thinkable in principle, moreover, it would have been thinkable that we might both have found each other in Judaism or that we even might have begun from there in harmony. But what sort of Judaism was it that I got from you?...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.[234]

> You really had brought some traces of Judaism with you from the ghetto-like village community; it was not much and it dwindled a little more in the city and during your military service; but still, the impressions and memories of your youth did just about suffice for some sort of Jewish life, especially since you did not need much help of that kind, but came of robust stock and could scarcely be shaken by religious scruples unless they were strongly mixed with social scruples. At bottom the faith that ruled your life consisted in your believing in the unconditional rightness of opinions of a certain class of Jewish society, and hence actually, since these opinions were part and parcel of your own nature, in believing in yourself.[235]

Kafka's scathing recrimination of his father's Judaism echoes the hollow morality sustaining the Samsa family and captures the family dynamic of bourgeois Jews in Prague. The Jews, aided by their own assimilative efforts reduced themselves to a social class, vulnerable to whims of

232. Kafka, *Letter to His Father*, 85.

233. Kafka, *Letter to His Father*, 85.

234. Ibid., 75-77.

235. Ibid., 80-81.

politics and trends of society. Kafka admits his father's bourgeois Judaism is not unique, it is an epidemic of his generation.[236]

> The whole thing is, of course, no isolated phenomenon. It was much the same with a large section of this transitional generation of Jews, which had migrated from the still comparatively devout countryside to the cities. It happened automatically; only, it added to our relationship, which certainly did not lack in acrimony, one more, sufficiently painful source for it.[237]

Kafka warns against the dangers of complacency and assimilation through the objectification of Gregor. When Gregor's mutation strips him of his assimilated cover and his true verminous identity is revealed for all to see, his family cannot accept him as their son and brother. Gregor is no longer safe because he provides no perceived benefit to the family anymore. What will happen when greater society no longer deems the Jews useful? Grete, once Gregor's beloved sister and trusted ally, evolves throughout the story to eventually see her brother as nothing more than the large insect he appears to be, forgetting the many kindnesses he bestowed on her in his former body. Her rant of disgust for Gregor eerily echoes the anti-Semitic politics surrounding the "Jewish Question" in the nineteenth and twentieth century.

> 'Parents dear,' said his sister, striking the table with her hand by way of introduction, 'it can't go on like this. I will not utter my brother's name in front of this monster, so I will simply say: we must try to get rid of it. We have tried everything humanly possible, looking after it and putting up with it; I don't think anyone can reproach us in the slightest for that.'[238]
> 'It has to go,' cried the sister, 'that is the only way, father. You must try to get rid of the thought that it is Gregor. Our real misfortune is that we have believed it for so long. But how can it be Gregor? If it were Gregor, he would have understood long ago that it's not possible for human beings to live with a beast like that, and he would have left of his own free will. We wouldn't have a brother then, but we would be able to go on living, and

236. Ibid., 82-83.

237. Kafka, *Letter to His Father*, 82-83.

238. Kafka, *The Metamorphosis*, 68.

> honor his memory. But as it is, this beast is pursuing us and driving away our lodgers; it obviously wants to take over the entire apartment and put us out to sleep on the street.'[239]

There is no question the vermin is not Gregor. He cannot communicate with the family or indicate any sign of understanding from their biased observation.

> "If he understood us," said the father, half questioningly, but the sister waved her hand vehemently in the midst of her tears, indicating that this was inconceivable.[240]

Gregor ultimately loses his will to live and finally dies or maybe he wills himself to die as a courtesy to his father. As Gregor drifts into death, light enters his window, the window from which he drew so much hope. Max Brod interprets Kafka's use of light to indicate Kafka's personal belief in "eschatological hope."[241] The illumination of Gregor's death is also interpreted as ironic.[242] Whether Gregor's last light is representative of hope or it is a cynical end to a tragic hero, Kafka struggled with Gregor's ultimate fate. He expresses disappointment with his ending of *Metamorphosis* in a letter to his fiancee, Felice Bauer upon the story's completion on December 6-7, 1912:

> Dearest, now listen, my little story is finished, but today's ending does not please me at all, it really could have been better, there is no doubt about this.[243]

Kafka's displeasure with his story's end is most likely an example of his unforgiving self criticism but it could also be interpreted as a sadness for Gregor and the recognition of himself and the plight of assimilated Jews as represented by his visionary character.

239. Ibid., 69.

240. Ibid.

241. Richard H. Lawson, *Franz Kafka*, 35.

242. Ibid.

243. Kafka, *Letters to Felice*, 91.

The Samsa family may not be devout in prayer or rich in compassion for Gregor's condition, but they display their limited piety by going through the motions of rote religious behavior. They express sorrow and relief only for themselves with Gregor's miserable passing.

> 'Well,' said Herr Samsa, 'now we can thank God.' He crossed himself, and the three women followed his example.[244]

The Samsa faith is worth about as much as Kafka valued his father's Judaism and that of his father's generation. Kafka strongly influenced Felice Bauer's decision to work for a Jewish home in Berlin that aided Eastern European Jews.[245] Her experiences at the Jewish Home provided rich opportunity for discussion topics such as Zionism, assimilation, and the bourgeois Jewish identity and discloses another perception of Kafka's Judaism received from his father.

> Prague- September 16, 1916
> ...I wouldn't think of going to the synagogue. The synagogue is not a place one can sneak up to. One can do this today no more than one could as a child; I still remember how as a boy I almost suffocated from the terrible boredom and pointlessness of the hours in synagogue; these were the rehearsals staged by hell for my later office life. Those who throng to the synagogue simply because they are Zionists seem to me like people trying to force their way into the synagogue under cover of the Ark of the Covenant, rather than entering calmly through the main door. But as far as I can see, it is quite different for you than it is for me. While I should have to tell the children (it is unwise, of course, to encourage such conversations, and on their own they would arise but rarely, for town-bred children have sufficient experience in the world and, if they are East European Jews, know how to protect themselves and at the same time to accept the other person) that owing to my origin, my education, disposition, and environment I have nothing tangible in common with their faith (keeping the Commandments is not an outward thing; on the contrary, it is the very essence of Jewish faith)- thus while I would somehow have to admit it to them (and I would do so candidly, for without candor everything would be quite pointless in this case), you on the other hand may not be altogether lacking in tangible connections with the faith. They may of course be merely half forgotten memories buried beneath the clamor of the city, of business life, and of the tangled mass of discussions and ideas assimilated over the years. I don't mean to say you are still standing on the threshold of the door, but perhaps somewhere in the distance you

244. Kafka, *The Metamorphosis*, 71-72.

245. Ibid., xxi.

> can just see the gleam of the door handle. I mean that in reply to their questions you might be able to give the children at least a sad answer; I could not even do that.[246]

While Franz Kafka's *Letter to His Father* displays a more inflammatory analysis of his received Judaism, his letter to Felice shows the basic belief system resulting from his bourgeois Judaism. It is little more than an academic understanding of the tenets of Judaism and far short of a mystical connection. This loose association with Judaism typifies the religious identity of assimilated Jews in Prague especially those of the upper middle class. They were Jewish in the sense they did business with and lived alongside other Jews but any real religious fellowship was non-existent beyond the obligatory holiday services. Kafka alludes to this casual religious association with Gregor's mention of Grete's Christmas gift and the Samsas' momentary expressions of gratitude for Gregor's passing and for the realization of their good fortune of a beautiful daughter.

Kafka hints at the toll of assimilation as the objectification of Jews and the subsequent loss of man's sense of self. This is no more evident than with the discarding of Gregor's body and the family's reaction to it.

> 'Well,' answered the charwoman, who was unable to continue speaking at first for sheer good-natured laughter, 'about how to get rid of that stuff in the next room, you don't have to worry about it. I've seen to it.' Frau Samsa and Grete bent over their letters, as if they wanted to go on writing, Herr Samsa, who observed that the charwoman was about to describe everything in detail, dismissed this firmly with outstretched hand.[247]

Not only do Gregor's loved ones deny him a proper burial, his disposal is comical to the charwoman who seeks the opportunity to explain the event to the family. The Samsa family regard themselves as nothing if not dignified, which prevented them from recognizing Gregor as

246. Kafka, *Letters to Felice*, 502-503.

247. Kafka, *The Metamorphosis*, 71.

their son and brother even in his transformed state, and cannot listen to such filth. The Samsas' refusal to listen to the charwoman's morbid anecdote infuriates her and she storms out of the apartment.[248] The Samsas make the decision to fire the crude woman and subsequently make plans for a picnic, without giving another thought to the recently departed.[249] The entire scene bears sinister prophetic similarity to the indifference of European society for the Jews during the Nazi invasion.

The Metamorphosis does not end with Gregor's death but continues to follow the Samsas on a much-needed break from their troubles as they picnic on the countryside. Mother and Father observe their daughter and take stock of their good fortune, and it becomes clear Gregor is not the only family member to have undergone a transformation in the final scene of the story.

> While they were talking like this together, it occurred to Herr and Frau Samsa at almost the same time, as they looked at their daughter becoming more and more full of life, how, in spite of all the distress that had made her cheeks so pale, she had blossomed of late into a handsome, full-figured girl. Growing quieter and coming almost unconsciously to an understanding as they exchanged glances, they reflected that it was also getting to be time to look for a good husband for her. And they felt it was like a confirmation of their new dreams and good intentions when, as they cam to the end of their journey, their daughter was the first to rise from her seat, and she stretched her young body.[250]

Another ironic twist, Grete exercises her new body just as her brother tested his strange anatomy in the beginning of the story. While Gregor mutated into the hideous, Grete has grown into the beautifully ordinary. She now embodies the pride and hope of her parents just as Gregor had before his transfiguration. The success and future of the family now rests on the shoulders of Grete, indicated by her parents' contemplation of finding a husband for her. It is a bittersweet

248. Kafka, *The Metamorphosis*, 73.

249. Ibid.

250. Ibid., 74.

position for Grete. She can enjoy the current admiration and approval of her parents but as evidenced by the betrayal of her brother. Their loyalty is only as strong as their children's ability to provide the social and economic securities they consider useful, much like the conditional loyalty of the state to the Jews of Prague.

Anxiety permeates throughout the tale of Gregor Samsa's transformation. Anxiety prevails over isolation and despair. Gregor's loneliness and hopelessness is all the more terrifying because of the tension and nervousness he experiences. Gregor's place in the family, home, community, and world is unclear and Kafka transmits that uneasiness effortlessly. Kafka incorporated personal, ethnic, and national anxieties into the neurotic environment of *The Metamorphosis.* The agitation and apprehension in *Metamorphosis* illustrates the devastating effects of assimilation on the Jewish identity for Franz Kafka and for all Jews living in turn-of-the-century Europe.

Conclusion

Metamorphosis explores the uncertain foundation of bourgeois, family values and the inevitable isolation that accompanies man's existence in the Modern Era. The novella also alludes to autobiographical material, especially the strained relationship between father and son. *The Metamorphosis* is rich in universal appeal, timeless relevance, and is open to a variety of interpretations. The ambiguity of Kafka's literature, his vivid imagery, and attention to the smallest detail define his often maddening, ambiguous "Kafka-esque" style. His stories combine the grotesque, the fantastic, the beautiful, and the heartbreaking, transmitting a vibrant reality in writing. Kafka's unique literary perspective resulted from his discipline and almost religious devotion to his pursuit of writing. He displayed a predisposition for reading and writing as a young child and spent most of his short life perfecting what he saw as his only purpose. His work is very much a testament to his natural ability and his dedication to the art. However, his signature neutrality that has aligned him so clearly with the voice of modern literature was deeply influenced by his Jewishness and the pressures of assimilation in Prague. Kafka presents the destructive effects of assimilation not just on the Jewish identity, but on man's sense of self, and ultimately their basic physical safety in *The Metamorphosis.* Gregor Samsa cannot live authentically as a middle class traveling salesman. He had fulfilled his responsibilities to his family, employer, and community; but his life lacked any amount of tangible meaning. The inability of Gregor's family to recognize or appreciate him after his transformation unveils the hollow identity his former compliant breadwinner role provided. It is with his acceptance of his grotesque physical mutation that he achieves bittersweet freedom. Yes, the world around him fails to see beyond the physical appearance but who is to blame? For so long the real Gregor

Samsa was hidden and only his dutiful works were shown. His obedience and servitude became his identity and so of course his new independence and ambiguous purpose were difficult to ascertain and embrace. Gregor realizes the weaknesses of his personal identity and family bond during the mutation crisis. The security of family and community support was merely an illusion for now that he is unable to provide financially and blend in physically, he is unwanted, even abhorred. His civic and familial endeavors were all in vain. Gregor must find some peace and meaningful existence within the limitations of his isolated existence of an insect imprisoned in his empty bedroom. The outlook is bleak at best and despair encircles Gregor but he manages to discover small happinesses in his unique situation. Simple activities like gazing out his window and crawling the walls with his insect legs distract Gregor from his misery. No longer a servant to the needs and desires of others' demands and expectations, Gregor is left to observe and reflect on the very basic and immediate of the life experience: the walls around him, the smells wafting from neighboring rooms, the silence of being alone, and the sheen of glimmering buttons on his father's military uniform. Gregor's recreations appear minor compared to the activity of humanity outside his bedroom door but they are nonetheless valuable, perhaps even more so. Gregor fully engages in reality, which is an amazing ironic twist, given his fantastic corporeal shape. His family, the supposed "normal/lucky" ones, continue living in ignorance and the artificial constructs of modern society. Their original pity and fear of Gregor evolves into hatred and eventually ambivalence. Gregor's perspective allows him to maintain some level of objectivity in the bizarre situation. He is able to feel empathy for his family's situation and even feel sorry for them, despite their abusive behavior.

Metamorphosis mirrors the Jewish identity crisis resulting from assimilation in turn-of-the-century Prague. The European Jews, like Gregor Samsa, built an identity around the secular values of labor, education, and duty to state in efforts to gain acceptance into society. Jews lost touch with their religious roots and the spiritual community that had sustained them for thousands of years while non-Jews identified them less as a religious group and more as an ethnic one. Non Jews in Europe viewed emancipated Jews with suspicion. What was the Jewish identity if it were not a religious one? Assimilation may have intended to integrate Jews into Western society, but instead it only weakened the Jewish community and culture and raised suspicions among Gentiles. Assimilated Jews were not living an authentic existence, for they were never to gain full acceptance from Western society. On some level, they would always be regarded at best as second class citizens but most likely believed to be deceitful vermin, possessing the ability and desire to feed off of and destroy Christian society. The consequences of assimilation and the accompanying identity crisis were discussed at length in the literature and politics of Prague in the late nineteenth Century and Early twentieth Century. Kafka's diaries and letters reveal his own struggles with the bourgeois Jewish identity and the anti-Semitism throughout Europe at his time. His sense of isolation pervades his personal writings as well as his novels and it reflects not only the disconnect he felt from the tense relationship with his father but the emptiness that resulted from a precarious position in Prague society as an assimilated Jew.

Metamorphosis is a masterful achievement in literature in that it captures not only the isolation and despair of a single time and place but of the entire Modern Era. When reading Kafka, it is easy to interpret his signature neutrality as an appeal to universality but his neutrality

is born of the very personal and specific experience— that of an assimilated Bohemian Jew. Even though Kafka's masterful writing elevates his material to an enduring status that surpassed his personal and historical context, he valued the political and historical context in which he lived and wrote. Kafka did not view politics and affairs of state as something he needed to purposely suppress in his work.

> Since people lack a sense of context, their literary activities are out of context too. They depreciate something in order to be able to look down upon it from above, or they praise it to the skies in order to have a place up there beside it. (Wrong.) Even though something is often thought through calmly, one still does not reach the boundary where it connects with similar things, one reaches this boundary soonest in politics, indeed, one even strives to see it before it is there, and often sees this limiting boundary everywhere. The narrowness of the field, the concern too for simplicity and uniformity, and, finally, the consideration that the inner independence of the literature makes the external connexion with politics harmless, result in the dissemination of literature without a country on the basis of political slogans.[251] Dec. 25, 1911

Kafka's *Metamorphosis* communicates the themes of isolation and despair, themes that have become synonymous with the Modern Era. Gregor Samsa's struggle to connect with those around him and gain true acceptance from his family is a struggle common to all of humanity. *Metamorphosis* explores and artfully expresses the universal themes that unite humanity, but also Kafka's personal history and political environment. Franz Kafka translates the anxiety that pervaded the psyche of assimilated Jews in turn-of-the-century Prague and Europe through the transformation and trials of Gregor Samsa.

Gregor Samsa embodies the consequences of assimilation to Western culture for the Jews in nineteenth and twentieth century Europe. Kafka, through the character of Gregor, not only points out the true cost of assimilation, but also offers an approach to an authentic existence. *Metamorphosis* is a stark contrast to the literature of its time, and it is a blistering response to the

251. Kafka, *Diaries*, 150.

anti-Semitic themes popular in turn-of-the-century European literature, media, and politics. Kafka departed from the stock characterizations and sentimentality found in Dickens:

> It was my intention, as I now see, to write a Dickens novel, but enhanced by the sharper lights I should have taken from the times and the duller ones I should have got from myself. Dickens's opulence and great, careless prodigality, but in consequence passages of awful insipidity in which he wearily works over effects he has already achieved. Gives one a barbaric impression because the whole does not make sense, a barbarism that I, it is true, thanks to my weakness and wiser for my epigonism, have been able to avoid. There is a heartlessness behind his sentimentally overflowing style. These rude characterizations which are artificially stamped on everyone and without which Dickens would not be able to get on with his story even for a moment.[252]

Characterizations damage literature in the same manner as anti-Semitic stereotypes jeopardize Jews. Kafka criticizes Dickens' style as "sentimental" and "overflowing" and therefore his literature has a sense of "barbarism."[253] Kafka's perspective, as an assimilated Jew afforded him the ability, or at least the desire to view people and himself without the conventional images received from society. The sentimentality he criticizes in his diary was typical not only of Dickens but was customary of Drumont, Lueger, Wagner, du Maurier, Stoecker, Marr, Mendelssohhn, Heine, and Schonerer as well. Anti-Semites and Jews alike departed from liberalism and rationality, and resorted to sentimental expression in art and politics throughout the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. While the writers, politicians, and artists of Kafka's time appealed to nostalgic ideals and to the nationalistic hopes of what could be; Kafka presented what was. His interest was in reality, not the manipulation of it.

Kafka's attention to detail and dedication to purity in his literature presents an invaluable view of the Jewish experience in *fin-de-siècle* Europe. *Metamorphosis,* along with his personal

252. Kafka, *Diaries* October 8, 1917, 388.

253. Ibid.

correspondence and journals indicate Kafka's fearful outlook for the European Jews' future. Gregor Samsa, like the assimilated Jews of Prague and the rest of Europe, dutifully worked to serve their families and communities with little or no regard to their personal or spiritual needs. Kafka observed the futility of assimilation in his own life and nation, and he longed for a spiritual connection to strengthen his family relationships. Kafka warns against the disintegration of self that results from assimilating to Western culture in *The Metamorphosis.* Gregor Samsa, like the Jews of Europe, built an identity on his use and worth to others. Gregor and the emancipated Jews receive acknowledgement only when they can serve a specific economic purpose.

Kafka does not leave Gregor in complete despair. Bourgeois Judaism and the sacrifices of assimilation may have failed to provide spiritual nourishment and secure social acceptance from non-Jews but there is a path to meaning. Kafka's approach to finding purpose and authenticity is as clear as it is absurd. Gregor Samsa's horror and panic begin when he awakes and finds that he has mutated into a bug; however, it is the grotesque transformation that sets him free. Kafka deliberately selected the verminous and disgusting insect for Gregor's new identity. Anti-Semitic propaganda described Jews as infectious vermin throughout the Middle Ages and the racial slurs gained popularity again in the late nineteenth century. Kafka's Gregor awakes a giant cockroach, his true form. Gregor Samsa is finally the true self no one wants to see, but he is *real.* Kafka proposes that Jews embrace their Jewishness. Assimilation failed to integrate the Jews fully into society and anti-Semitism intensified. Why continue the fruitless efforts to acculturate into an unwelcoming society when the perception of Jews is that of deceitful vermin? For Kafka, the absurdity is not the transformation of Gregor but his family's

inability to recognize their own son— just as it is absurd for the Jews to continue living as something they are not. Gregor finds humble but genuine joys when he succumbs to his legitimate self, insinuating the Jews can regain a veritable existence by reclaiming their religious and cultural identity.

It is impossible to separate Gregor's story from the social and political climate for Europe's Jews at the turn-of-the-century. Kafka's ambiguous settings and his universal appeal is in part due to his omission of distinct cultural markers and specific locations. Gregor could live anywhere and represent the isolation and despair often experienced in modern society, however, *The Metamorphosis* is a clear representation of the Jewish experience in Franz Kafka's Prague and *fin-de-siècle* Europe. Gregor Samsa embodies the spiritual and social toll assimilation took on the Jewish culture and psyche. Kafka uses his effective method of making the metaphor real to express the hopelessness of Jewish efforts to fit into Western society and suggests Jews accept their cultural identity to live an authentic life. Anti-Semitism in nineteenth century Europe and the Jews' assimilative response to this hatred in light of their emancipation influenced Franz Kafka's complicated family dynamic and his complex personal spiritual identity. *The Metamorphosis* is Franz Kafka's literary response to the pressures of assimilation on Jews living in turn-of-the-century Europe and his warning of future consequences for continued acculturation.

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“On my honor, I have not given, nor received, nor witnessed any unauthorized assistance on this work.”

Sarah Classon