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# Impossible Communities in Prague's German Gothic: Nationalism, Degeneration, and the Monstrous Feminine in Gustav Meyrink's *Der Golem* (1915)

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Impossible Communities in Prague's German Gothic: Nationalism, Degeneration, and the  
Monstrous Feminine in Gustav Meyrink's *Der Golem* (1915)

by

Amy M. Braun

A dissertation presented to  
The Graduate School  
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*Amy M. Braun*

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*May 2019*

To my father, for his unceasing love, support, and encouragement.

To Lynne Tatlock and Megan Garza,  
for your unwavering faith in me  
and for helping me find my voice.

## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Impossible Communities in Prague's German Gothic: Nationalism, Degeneration, and the  
Monstrous Feminine in Gustav Meyrink's *Der Golem* (1915)

by

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Doctor of Philosophy in German and Comparative Literature

Washington University in St. Louis, 2019

Professor Lynne Tatlock, Chair

My dissertation investigates the contribution of Gustav Meyrink's best-selling novel *The Golem/Der Golem* (1915) to the second revival of the international Gothic. While previous scholarship suggests that this genre disappeared from the German literary landscape in the 1830s, I interpret *The Golem* as a Gothic contribution to the "Prague Novel," a trend in Prague-based, turn-of-the-twentieth-century German-language literature that found inspiration in the heated sociocultural and political tensions that characterized the milieu.

Structured around the demolition of Prague's former Jewish ghetto under the auspices of the *Finis Ghetto* plan, a historic Czech-led urban renewal project that leveled the district of *Josefov/Josephstadt* between 1895 and 1917, *The Golem* portrays a German-speaker's perspective on ghetto clearance and its impact on the city's ethnic minority groups. Not only does Meyrink's novel aestheticize the pessimism felt by many of Prague's middle class and aristocratic German speakers living in a city governed by Czech nationalists; it also exemplifies a trend in Prague-based German-language literature to use the Gothic mode to translate experiences of ethnic marginalization, the rise of nationalism, and fears of social degeneracy. Like Max Brod's *A Czech*



*Servant Girl/Ein tschechisches Dienstmädchen* (1909) and Paul Leppin's "The Ghost of the Jewish Town"/"Das Gespenst der Judenstadt" (1914), *The Golem* opens a window onto the cultural controversies and debates at the *Jahrhundertwende* that coalesced in radical municipal action targeting Prague's German-speaking Christian and Jewish communities.

Drawing upon theories of the Gothic highlighting cultural despondency, trauma, and human monstrosity, this dissertation argues that *The Golem* recreated the *Finis Ghetto* as an analog to the homogenization and expulsion of Prague's all of German-speaking communities under Czech political leadership. *The Golem* addresses the radical social, linguistic, and economic reform enacted by Czech nationalist movements in three ways: 1) by portraying the "German experience" in turn-of-the-twentieth-century Prague after the entanglements of cultural privilege have dissipated; 2) by providing a representation of the social depravities in the ghetto that Czech nationalists cited as reasons to demolish *Josefov/Josephstadt* and disperse the city's German-speaking non-Jewish and Jewish communities; and 3) by challenging the effectiveness of the *Finis Ghetto* in purging the city of its "monsters"—particularly its degenerate, promiscuous women. *The Golem* ultimately suggests, as I outline, that without social reform to accompany physical renovation of the city, these "monsters" will continue to plague Prague society.

## Introduction: Prague's Impossible Communities: History, the Gothic, and *Der Golem*

In Gustav Meyrink's best-selling crime novel *The Golem/Der Golem* (1915), a forty-year-old, German-speaking gem dealer (Athanasius Pernath) ponders the dangers he encounters as a resident in Prague's historic "red light" district circa 1885. As the novel unfolds, he contemplates the sources of these dangers, their effects on Prague's community, and strategies for their eradication. The novel's fourth chapter, "Prague"/"Prag," brings these reflections into focus. Using anthropomorphism, Pernath describes the physical and psychological threats that many citizens believed characterized *Josefov/Josephstadt*, a district colloquially known as Prague's Jewish ghetto, Jewish town, or the Jewish quarter.<sup>1</sup> As Pernath observes "the rain... pouring down the houses' faces like a stream of tears" ("Die Wasserschauer... liefen an den Gesichtern der Häuser herunter wie ein Tränenstrom"), he recalls his dreams in which the same structures come alive and hold "mysterious deliberations" ("geheimnisvolle Beratung") without the knowledge of their inhabitants:

In the time in which I now live, I have formed the impression of which I cannot rid myself. It is as if there were certain hours of the night or at the break of dawn when [the houses] conspire together in soundless, mysterious communion.... Often I dreamt I had overheard these houses in their haunting activity, and I learned, with fearful amazement, that they were the secret lords of the streets—they can divest themselves of their life and their feelings and suck it back in again, lending it to the inhabitants during the day and reclaiming it with usurious interest the following night.

In dem Menschenalter, das ich nun hier wohne, hat sich der Eindruck in mir festgesetzt, den ich nicht loswerden kann, als ob es gewisse Stunden des Nachts und im frühesten Morgengrauen für sie gäbe, wo [die Häuser] erregt eine lautlose, geheimnisvolle Beratung pflegen.... Oft träumte mir, ich hätte diese Häuser

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<sup>1</sup> In the years that Meyrink wrote *Der Golem*, many street names and city districts in Prague had two names—one in Czech, and one in German. Starting in 1850, Prague's Jewish Town was referred to as *Josefov/Josephstadt*, as name that honored Habsburg Emperor Joseph II (1741-1790) for the many edicts during his reign (1764-1790) that provided civil and religious liberties to Prague's Jews. See T. C. Blanning, *Joseph II* (New York and London: Routledge, 1994), 67-70. The use of the Czech and German name of the city district in this dissertation reflects the bilingualism of the region which often stirred nationalist tensions.

belauscht in ihrem spukhaften Treiben und mit angstvollem Staunen erfahren, daß sie die heimlichen, eigentlichen Herren der Gasse seien, sich ihres Lebens und Fühlens entäußern und es wieder an sich ziehen können, — es tagsüber den Bewohnern, die hier hausen, borgen, um es in kommender Nacht mit Wucherzinsen wieder zurückzufordern.<sup>2</sup>

In this scene, Pernath becomes convinced that these buildings, their gutters, and the streets below are filled with a “treacherous, hostile life” (“tückische[s], feindselige[s] Leben”) that manifests itself at night and influences the thoughts and behaviors of ghetto residents during its “ghostly wanderings” (“spukhaften Treiben”). Occasionally, he claims, he senses “a faint quiver running through the buildings’ walls” as noises that cannot be explained “run over their roofs and fall down in the gutters” (“[M]anchmal fährt da ein schwaches Beben durch ihre Mauern, das sich nicht erklären läßt, Geräusche laufen über ihre Dächer und fallen in den Regenrinnen nieder”). Although Pernath cannot identify the source and meaning of these disturbing visions, he suspects that their content was inspired by his day-to-day experiences in the ghetto: “so I am more inclined than ever to believe that such dreams contain in themselves dark truths, which, as I grow, are only shimmering like impressions of colored fairy tales in the soul” (“so bin ich mehr denn je geneigt zu glauben, daß solche Träume in sich dunkle Wahrheiten bergen, die mir im Wachsen nur noch wie Eindrücke von farbigen Märchen in der Seele fortglimmen”).

Pernath’s dreams and observations of *Josefov/Josephstadt* tacitly imply that this hostile, inescapable energy influences the minds, bodies, and social interactions of the ghetto residents. Now awake, Pernath sees a connection between the malevolent entity he believes inhabits the ghetto, the pollution in the district, and the criminals, vagrants, prostitutes, and adulterous visitors he encounters there. Whereas wealthy citizens living outside the district can leave the “red light” district once they have sated their degenerate desires, the ghetto’s impoverished (Jewish) residents cannot escape the strange, “treacherous life” residing there. This invisible

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<sup>2</sup> Gustav Meyrink, *Der Golem* (Leipzig: Kurt Wolff Verlag, 1915), 27-28. All quotes in this paragraph appear on these pages.

energy influences their thoughts, encourages criminal behavior, and makes itself visible in their misshapen bodies, which Pernath claims are so grotesque and unappealing that they appear as if they were “not born of mothers” (“nicht von Müttern geboren”).<sup>3</sup> A closer look at Pernath’s reflections, however, suggests that the malevolent entity of which he speaks is not limited to the ghetto alone; it exists in districts outside of the ghetto, as well, as seen in the immoral behaviors of those who frequent *Josefov/Josephstadt*. It also seems, according to the perspective provided in the novel, that destroying this hostile energy at its source is the only way to prevent the degenerative influences it spreads from contaminating the entire city; thus, the only way to protect the Prague community is to destroy the ghetto and disperse all of Prague’s decadent and degenerate individuals from the city.

This dissertation examines the monstrous human behaviors and social systems that, in *Der Golem*, are portrayed as characteristic of turn-of-the-twentieth-century Prague. I show how Gustav Meyrink’s novel combines fiction and history to portray the Jewish ghetto as a microcosm for culture and politics in the Bohemian capital, a city that Meyrink characterizes as shaped by racism, socioeconomic stratification, and misogyny. Meyrink’s ghetto was modeled after Prague’s historic, most impoverished city district, *Josefov/Josephstadt*, a traditionally Jewish space that, during Meyrink’s time, became a source of public controversy among Prague’s municipal leadership. The final decades of the nineteenth century marked the transformation of the district from a ghetto to which Prague’s Jewish population was confined to a slum inhabited by Prague’s most impoverished working class citizens (primarily Czech and Jewish), as well as orthodox Jews who wished to stay in the district for reasons of communal history. Despite the mixed ethnic populations in the historic district, *Josefov/Josephstadt* was nevertheless characterized in municipal records (as well as in literature) as a Jewish space.

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<sup>3</sup> *Der Golem*, 28.

As we shall see, the entropic imagery that repeatedly appears throughout Pernath's retelling of his experiences in *Josefov/Josephstadt* runs as a parallel narrative to a story of communal redemption in the face of decadence and social degeneracy. Nineteenth-century European cultural commentators presumed that decadence and degeneracy stemmed from devolutionary processes that inspired criminality, prostitution, and immoral behavior. Both of these "afflictions" are featured in *Der Golem*. In Meyrink's haunting Gothic tale set in Prague's underworld at the *Jahrhundertwende*, the protagonist of the embedded narrative (Athanasius Pernath) becomes embroiled in multiple subplots featuring homicide, infidelity, stolen identity, and wrongful persecution. In the first chapter, an unnamed first-person narrator falls asleep reading Buddhist teachings. As he loses consciousness, he slips into a dream set several decades prior in Prague's former Jewish ghetto. The dream is told from the perspective of a forty-year-old gem dealer named Athanasius Pernath—a man who once lived in the ghetto and with whom the narrator accidentally swapped hats at Catholic mass earlier that day. Without warning or explanation, the reader is placed in Pernath's first-person perspective as he suddenly awakens in the ghetto. This district is populated with strange characters, including a redheaded prostitute, a Jewish junk dealer, the junk dealer's criminal sons, and a deaf-mute silhouette artist who is key to solving one of the murders in the novel.

Over the course of the embedded narrative, Pernath falls victim to sexual temptation and is beleaguered by an unseen bureaucracy and occult forces that shape his destiny. He moves from one nightmarish experience to another. The novel's second through sixth chapters, for instance, catalogue his reactions to the unsanitary ghetto, the people living there, and the unwholesome social systems that govern the district. Pernath eschews advances by a promiscuous Jewish girl named Rosina, encounters a man who resembles the golem of legend, witnesses a local pedophile soliciting Rosina, falls into a trance while learning about the golem legend, and

experiences an epileptic seizure in Salon Loisitschek after seeing a disturbing scene unfold involving Rosina, a Habsburg prince, and a military officer. Through its opening chapters, the novel presents the corrupt and unjust social systems governing *Josefov/Josephstadt* as a microcosm for Prague as a whole. Thus, the novel suggests that prior to the complete social restructuration that accompanied the city's physical renovation at the turn of the twentieth century, Prague society was immoral, decadent, irredeemable, and self-destructive.

The remainder of the novel focuses on Pernath's love interests, spiritual recovery, and response to the rapidly changing urban environment. His spiritual restoration is prompted by conversations with a Jewish archivist (Shemajah Hillel) and a tubercular student (Charousek), who help him better understand the burdens of poverty and the possibility of a higher existence through self-exploration. Meanwhile, Pernath falls in love with Hillel's daughter (Mirjam) while pursuing a sexual relationship with a married German noblewoman (Angelina). Later, he has sex with Rosina to soothe his heartbreak over Angelina. Shortly thereafter, Pernath is framed for the murder of the local pedophile and thrown in prison. He is held there for several months alongside Czech-speaking inmates as well as his last spiritual guide, a misunderstood rapist-murder named Amadeus Laponder with whom he shares a prison cell. Pernath's incarceration allows him to reflect on his experiences with Angelina, Rosina, and Mirjam as well as the advice that Hillel, Charousek, and Laponder have given him. These reflections pave the way for his spiritual salvation at the end of the novel, which only comes to fruition through the destruction of the ghetto in the novel's penultimate chapter, as well as his fatal fall from a burning building on Christmas Eve.

Key to this narrative is the renovation of *Josefov/Josephstadt*, which is described in the novel's final two chapters. Upon Pernath's exoneration and release from prison, he discovers that his entire street has been demolished in a district-wide project of which he had been completely

unaware would take place. The unnamed narrator, who abruptly awakens immediately after Pernath's fall, describes the clean, luxury district that stands in place of the former Jewish ghetto years after its renovation. Over the course of the novel, these accounts of the ghetto retell the stories of those silenced through its destruction, as well as express the novel's criticism of the Czech bureaucracy that was responsible for leveling the district and dispersing its residents from the city.

Whereas most scholars have read this story in terms of the protagonist's journey toward spiritual salvation (Qasim, Boyd, Schmidt) or the author's representation of the Golem legend and Jewish culture (Barzalai, Baer, Gelbin), I will focus on Meyrink's depiction of the Prague community at the *Jahrhundertwende* as riven by nationalist turmoil, sexual decadence, and social degeneration.<sup>4</sup> This research was not possible before Cathleen Guistino's comprehensive examination of the history of Prague's Jewish ghetto, particularly the *Finis Ghetto* urban renewal project as described in *Tearing Down Prague's Jewish Town: Ghetto Clearance and the Legacy of Middle-Class Ethnic Politics around 1900* (2015). Reading *Der Golem* alongside Guistino's and other historical and literary studies of nationalism, culture, and identity in *Jahrhundertwende* Prague allows me to offer a new intervention into understanding the experiences of the city's marginalized communities. The impoverished former ghetto residents, for example, left few traces of evidence behind that would help us understand their day-to-day experiences in *Josefov* and their perceptions of the district's demolition under Czech leadership. My study of *Der Golem* examines one of a number of German-language texts that feature daily life in the ghetto, allowing us to better understand the experience of those who were most deeply affected by the clearance project. I will show how the unnamed German-speaking narrator's awakening in

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<sup>4</sup> My definition of decadence follows that of Matei Calinescu, who asserts that the term is associated with notions of "decline, twilight, autumn, senescence, and exhaustion, and, in its more advanced stages, organic decay and putrescence." Matei Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987), 155-56.

Prague at the end of the novel coincides with the awakening of Czech nationalism, which, in the novel, has come into full bloom after the destruction of the Jewish ghetto. Its demolition, which occurs alongside the traumatic dispersal of decadent German-speaking and degenerate Jewish communities from the city, appears in the novel as a necessary step for “social progress.” Thus, *Der Golem* gives voice to those who were powerless against social changes that accompanied a culture of crisis in a Bohemian capital city torn by nationalist strife. The final pages of *Der Golem*, however, criticize the effectiveness of the attempt of the Czech municipal authorities to eradicate the immoral behaviors in Prague, suggesting that despite the radical transformation of the district at the heart of the city and the social changes its demolition represents, degeneracy still remains.

As we shall see, in the novel as well as in historical discourse surrounding identity politics in Prague, ethnic identity is made visible through language preference, spoken dialect, and cultural affiliation re-inscribed by social class. Meyrink’s ghetto is predominantly populated by impoverished German-speaking Jews or Jews with Czech names who speak German. The fictional residents’ responses to the district’s demolition reflect the dramatic restructuring of the Prague community that accompanied the historic rise of Czech nationalism. As Czech nationalistic agendas increasingly began to dominate political discourse and municipal elections, many in Prague’s German-speaking Christian and Jewish community found themselves excluded from developments in local politics, culture, and urban planning. In the novel’s conclusion, the disappearance of German speakers and German-speaking Jews coincides with an increased Czech-speaking presence in the district. As we shall see, these plot developments allude to the historic Czech take-over of all sectors of Prague’s local governing bodies, economic sectors, business establishments, and former German and German Jewish city districts, as well as the resulting exodus of German speakers and German-speaking Jews from Prague. As I will show,



*Der Golem* conflates the German and Jewish experience by equating ghetto clearance with the vanishing of these two ethnic minority groups from Prague at the same time of the implementation of the *Finis Ghetto*, which disperses the ghetto residents from the city.

Through a story penned to paper by a German-speaker who lived in Prague at the *fin de siècle*, and whose German-speaking narrator encounters similar struggles with ethnicity, battles about nationality, and scandals, the reader is provided with a German perspective on the traumatic experiences that many in Prague's marginalized communities faced as a result of the rise of Czech nationalism in turn-of-the-twentieth-century, Habsburg-controlled Prague. As seen in other Gothic-inspired German-language texts set in Prague's Jewish Town, *Der Golem* calls into question the ability of the Czech-driven *Finis Ghetto* plan to reform Prague society by ridding Prague's social landscape of decadence and degeneracy through xenophobic legislation.

The Czech-led urban and social reforms depicted in *Der Golem* developed alongside the rise of nationalism in Prague. As Tara Zahra has shown in her studies of nationalists' battles to claim "children's souls" to build a strong future for their community, the practices of national ascription in Bohemia and Moravia during the years in which Meyrink wrote *Der Golem* exemplify a "larger trend toward identity ascription in modern European societies, as states attempted to render populations legible with censuses, passports, identity papers, and other forms of surveillance."<sup>5</sup> The driving force behind the movement in the multinational Habsburg Empire to categorize individuals and communities based on "national" affiliation did not, however, come from the state itself, which remained ambivalent about national ascription. Instead, leaders of popular Czech nationalist movements (and similar German movements that developed in response) were free to inscribe collective claims on individuals, families, and children through

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<sup>5</sup> Tara Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls: National Indifference and the Battle for Children in Bohemian Lands, 1900-1948* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2008), 45.

the law.<sup>6</sup> Using municipal legislation, nationalist movements sought with radical efficiency to eradicate national indifference by forcing each citizen into a single national category, which often caused tensions between the city's Czech- and German-speaking groups.<sup>7</sup> As I shall remark repeatedly throughout this dissertation, similar cultural conflicts rooted in nationalism occurred in social circles, town hall meetings, and urban planning. On numerous occasions, national tensions coalesced into violence between national camps in Prague's city streets.

*Der Golem* is structured around the demolition of Prague's former Jewish ghetto under the auspices of the *Finis Ghetto* plan, a historic Czech-led urban renewal project that leveled the district between 1895 and 1917. Through scenes depicting the narrator's encounters with social degeneracy, *Der Golem* portrays one German-speaker's experience with ethnic marginalization, displacement, and the loss of his home, community, and loved ones through the *Finis Ghetto*. The novel takes up the emotional effects of xenophobic discourses turned into antisemitic and anti-German legislation. Using a series of frame and embedded narratives told from the perspective of multiple narrators who are connected through dreams, *Der Golem* not only draws attention to Jewish suffering in the ghetto, as many scholars have claimed; it also provides a literary representation of how national tensions, cultural controversies concerning public health, and debates about the role and status of Jews, women, and criminals coalesced in turn-of-the-

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<sup>6</sup> National ascription, which had been practiced in social realms but was legalized in Prague in 1912, often resulted in conflicts when one's ethnic affiliation was unclear. Local governing bodies and institutions assigned those who were bilingual or who claimed to be "culturally indifferent" national identities based on one's ancestry ("blood"), responses on censuses about language use in the home, performance in language exams, and memberships in Czech or German associations or educational institutions. Forced ascription had social, legal, and professional ramifications, as individuals were increasingly included or excluded from professions, social circles, or educational opportunities based on national allegiance. As see in one legal case, a self-professed "German" father and member of multiple German-language organizations contested local authorities' claims of that his daughter's "Czechness" mandated her attendance in a Czech language school, where she would uncover the "innate" personality traits and "moral characteristics" of their people. Knowing that forced ascription would hinder her ability to participate in German culture later in life, the father wrote a letter to a local court insisting that his daughter had been wrongly classified and belonged to "the German nation" based on his family lineage, or "blood." Because his daughter could not pass a German language exam, however, the court denied his claim, ruling that she would complete her state-mandated education at a Czech language school. Zahra, 48.

<sup>7</sup> Zahra, 45; 59.

twentieth-century Prague into antisemitic municipal action that leveled Prague's former Jewish town.

As historians have explained, the enactment of this plan reflected the dual aims of Czech nationalist initiatives: 1) to disperse the city's most impoverished Jews and "degenerate" citizens to the suburbs, and 2) to usurp centuries of German cultural, economic, and political authority in the region. Local controversies surrounding the sources of and cures for high rates of "disease" in the Jewish Town (infectious and those presumed to stem from "inferior races") fueled cultural debates that resulted in xenophobic municipal legislation. As one of Europe's largest urban renewal projects—one that almost completely leveled the Jewish Quarter—the project was designed to "sanitize" *Josefov's/Josephstadt's* "contaminated" social, ethnic, and urban terrain and rid the city of its "degenerate" Jewish population.<sup>8</sup> As Cathleen Guistino has shown, it was carried out by antisemitic Czech municipal authorities aiming to "clean up" the heart of the city by leveling the Jewish quarter.<sup>9</sup> Only through radical reconstruction of this "red light" district, medical professionals and city planners claimed, could Prague curb rising crime rates and improve the overall health of Prague's citizens.

By portraying the decades immediately preceding and following the completion of the *Finis Ghetto*, *Der Golem* comments on the effectiveness of the Czech-led municipality in achieving these goals. Although the novel never mentions the urban renewal project by name, the author's portrayal of the destruction gestures toward the historic political developments taking place outside of the ghetto that dramatically reshaped *Josefov/Josephstadt* as well as Prague's demographic communities. Embedded in a complex crime narrative are allusions to social tensions between Prague's (upper) middle-class German speakers, working-class Czech

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<sup>8</sup> See Zahra, 15-23.

<sup>9</sup> For a detailed historical discussion of the political motivations that led to the implementation of the *Finis Ghetto*, see Cathleen Guistino, *Tearing Down Prague's Jewish Town: Ghetto Clearance and the Legacy of Middle Class Ethnic Politics around 1900* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

speakers, and impoverished Jews who affiliated with both ethnic and linguistic groups. Ghetto clearance, which comes as a surprise to the novel's German-speaking and Jewish inhabitants, is deeply traumatizing. Nevertheless, the novel suggests that despite lingering issues surrounding gender in the city after the *Finis Ghetto*, radical urban reform in the ghetto minimizes visible aspects of class difference alongside a project that homogenizes Czech-speaking society. The result is a more peaceful, egalitarian society free of national(ist) strife.

As we shall see, *Der Golem* exemplifies a trend among Prague-based German-language authors to use the Gothic mode to translate the German and German Jewish experience into local and international contexts. To date, this novel has not been read through a Gothic lens. More information about the German Gothic tradition will be provided in Chapter Three, but for now, it is worthwhile to note that Meyrink's novel belongs to what Punter labels "an indecent and politically suspect class of fictions that were dangerously popular" and often mimicked by authors of other national literatures.<sup>10</sup> Drawing upon an international genre known for depicting—to quote Andrew Cusack and Barry Murnane—"the more obvious and gory threat of corporeal violence, supernatural activities, and visceral disgust,"<sup>11</sup> *Der Golem* features themes, plot developments, and ominous, foreboding environments that are trademarks of Gothic texts and combine unreliable narration, and themes of madness and violence against women. Like canonical tales such as E.T.A. Hoffmann's *Der Sandmann* (1816), Edgar Allen Poe's "Ligeia" (1838), or Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), *Der Golem* employs unreliable narration by structuring its plot as a series of dreams within dreams relayed to the reader through multiple narrators.<sup>12</sup> Frequent references to Pernath's insanity accompany descriptions of pedophilia and

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<sup>10</sup> Andrew Cusack and Barry Murnane, "Introduction," in *Popular Revenants: The German Gothic and its International Reception, 1800–2000* (Cambridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2013), 2.

<sup>11</sup> Cusack and Murnane, "Introduction," 2; 22.

<sup>12</sup> E.T.A. Hoffmann's novella *Der Sandmann* (1816) is assembled as a series of letters between the protagonist, his fiancée, and an unnamed narrator describing the thoughts and experiences of a student (Nathanael) who falls in love with an automaton (Olympia). Nathanael (the protagonist) believes that he is followed by the dreaded Italian

rape, signaling a generic connection to the novel's predecessors.

Meyrink's Gothic tale describes Pernath's heartbreaks and involvement in murder investigations, his day-to-day interactions with criminals alongside overcrowding, disease, and pollution in the Prague's Jewish Town. Dodging swindlers, murderers, crooked police officers, and advances by *femmes fatales*, Pernath and his German-speaking neighbors are depicted as powerless victims in an inescapable, threatening environment. In the middle of the novel, Pernath becomes involved in a love triangle that embroils him in multiple interconnected murder plots carried out in the ghetto. One of these plots lands him in prison. In the days leading up to his imprisonment, he recovers memories of his former life outside of the ghetto. His time in prison for a murder he did not commit gives him a deeper understanding of himself, his past, and spirituality. His release from prison, however, reveals that the world surrounding him—a crumbling district now inhabited by Czech speakers—is more like a nightmare than reality. During his incarceration, a ghetto clearance project destroys his home and neighborhood; all but one of his neighbors in the ghetto have vanished. Confused about his new social situation post-ghetto clearance, Pernath makes plans to leave the city but falls, presumably to his death, from his apartment window before his departure. Reading these developments through Gothic frameworks makes visible the author's take on traumatic social upheavals taking place in Prague and the novel's tacit message about the successes and failures of the *Finis Ghetto*: only by

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"Sandmann" who is responsible for his father's death. His fiancée, Clara, falls victim to his mental instability and odd behaviors, including his attempt to strangle her in a tower before jumping to his suicide. See E.T.A. (Ernst Theodor Amadeus) Hoffmann, *Der Sandmann* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1991). The unnamed narrator of Edgar Allan Poe's story "Ligeia" recalls for the reader the strange circumstances in which he was reunited with his late first wife the night the morning after his second wife's death. He claims that while by his second wife's deathbed, the corpse transformed into Ligeia (his first wife), stood up, and walked into the middle of the room. The reader, however, questions his account, as he admits that he was under the influence of opium when the event occurred. See Edgar Allan Poe, *Edgar Allan Poe: Selected Poetry, Tales, and Essays, Authoritative Texts with Essays on Three Critical Controversies*, eds. Jared Gardner, Elizabeth Hewitt (Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, 2016). Relayed to the reader as a ghost story by an anonymous narrator, Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* describes a young governess's strange experiences while caring for two children (Flora and Miles) at the English country estate, Bly. When one of her charges dies unexpectedly under her watch, it is unclear whether she murdered him or his death was the result of an encounter with the supernatural. See Henry James, *The Turn of the Screw* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2009).

reshaping the city's oppressive social structures could Prague rid itself of its decadent and "degenerate" populations and become a progressive city, one that historic Czech-speaking cultural commentators hoped would compete with urban centers such as Paris, Berlin, and Vienna. Nevertheless, as Chapters Two and Three will suggest, the changes not only come with a social price but are also only partially effective.

This dissertation will analyze and contextualize the "hostile energies" that Pernath encounters in turn-of-the-twentieth-century Prague by comparing the novel's plot developments to historical debates about national identity (e.g., language use, ethnicity, and German identity in Prague after *Ausgleich* and during the First World War) as well as contemporary discussions of gender and criminality. This comparison offers a window into exploring the Czech-speaking community's justifications for xenophobic urban planning that leveled the ghetto. According to the novel, hostile "energies" are present throughout Prague but, because of centuries of isolation, are exaggerated in the city's Jewish town. Jewish characters in *Der Golem* account for the evil in their district through the golem legend, a tale about the cyclical reappearance of a clay figure whose presence they believe marks a period of inescapable violence and extreme social duress. Every thirty-three years, Jewish characters claim, an animated "artificial man" ("ein[sic] künstliche[r] Mensch[sic]") created by Rabbi Loew in the seventeenth century comes to life as "a dull, semi-conscious vegetable existence" ("ein dumpfes, halbbewußtes Vegetieren").<sup>13</sup> After a mysterious man with "almond-shaped eyes" ("mandelförmigen Augen") visits Pernath's apartment, Jewish characters throughout the ghetto, now energized by Pernath's strange encounter, claim that they, too, have witnessed the Golem's reappearance and must prepare themselves for the inevitable violence and suffering soon to come.<sup>14</sup> Pernath is confused about the identity of the strange man. As a German Catholic, however, he is skeptical of the rumors

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<sup>13</sup> *Der Golem*, 49.

<sup>14</sup> *Der Golem*, 295.

about the Golem and questions whether other factors may be to blame for the rise in crime and sexual violence in the ghetto. His skepticism encourages the reader to look beyond Jewish legend to identify this danger.

Contrary to previous readings of this novel that focus on Meyrink's occult beliefs and incorporation of Jewish themes in his writing—particularly the golem figure as an embodiment of Jewish suffering in *Josefov/Josephstadt*—I will show how *Der Golem* draws upon the Gothic literary tradition to emphasize the break-down of community in Prague at the *Jahrhundertwende*. Using an overwrought means of storytelling that emphasizes haunting, dread, and passion in order to provoke the reader's unease, Meyrink prompts his readers to contemplate prominent cultural themes of his day ranging from ethnic stereotyping, misogyny, and the dangers of interacting with the ethnic or female "Other."<sup>15</sup> Class struggle also becomes visible in the novel through conflicts between Prague's "decadent" German-speaking middle-class, "primitive" working-class Czech speakers, and "degenerate" Jews. As history has shown, tensions between these three ethnic, linguistic, and religious groups coalesced in the leveling of the city's Jewish Town. The long-term effects of the historic *Finis Ghetto* as depicted in *Der Golem* eradicate class conflict and ethnic diversity, but despite this effort to "cleanse" the city, degeneracy continues to haunt it.

By highlighting themes of monstrosity to describe figures in the novel, character interactions, and the city itself, Meyrink examines "otherness" through multiple lenses, including national affiliation, ethnic difference, human degeneracy, and dangers of the "monstrous feminine" representations of human monstrosity through physical violence, antisemitism, and

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<sup>15</sup> Angela Carter states that the "Gothic mode" is "not a high literary one" but is "a sub-literary form" often visible in "pulp fiction, confession, magazines, and pornography, although always likely to surface unexpectedly in writers with a tendency to hysteria (Dickens, Dostoevsky)." It is known for its stereotypical characterizations, ghosts, and rhetorical prose style that focuses on the inner life of the individual. See Angela Carter, "Notes on the Gothic Mode," *The Iowa Review* 6, no. 3 (Summer-Fall 1975): 133.

criminality abound within *Der Golem*, particularly in descriptions of rape, murder attempts, throat-cutting, and suicide. In Chapter Three, I turn to monstrosity as a culmination and a final step in analyzing the novel as belonging to the Gothic tradition.

For the purposes of this discussion, I define the “monster” as any sentient being whose actions and behaviors pose a physical or psychological threat to those around it and whose thoughts and appearance deviate from the established moral, social, or physical norm. Keeping an eye on the tale’s historical context, I will show that Meyrink’s novel takes up late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century discourses surrounding degeneracy to portray the racialized and criminal “Other” as “monstrous.” I follow Jeffrey Cohen’s claim that the monstrous body is a “cultural body” representing “a time, a feeling, a place,” treating the monstrous figures that populate *Der Golem* as indicators of their cultural moment.<sup>16</sup> I will show that Meyrink adopts the Gothic mode to emphasize the effects of xenophobic and gendered discourses surrounding the city’s Czech-speaking majority and German-speaking Christian and Jewish minority populations. As we will see, the location of this tale, Meyrink’s handling of Jewish stereotypes, and the portrayal of the hostile multilingual and multiethnic social terrain in Prague set *Der Golem* apart from its international Gothic counterparts.

The novel’s construction of monstrosity, as I shall explore most fully in in Chapter Three, relies on nineteenth-century theories of social degeneration and criminology by Bénédict Morel and criminologist Cesare Lombroso, as well as antisemitic discourses that indicate a certain historical moment in the late Habsburg Empire. Because I will call on the term “degeneration” and its relationship to criminality and human monstrosity throughout this dissertation, I will briefly outline readings that have informed my understanding of this term. Historian Scott Spector suggests that questions surrounding urban crime and degeneracy in German-speaking

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<sup>16</sup> Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 4-5.



lands were linked to spatial metaphors: “*where* was criminality to be found? Was it to be located in the body of the born criminal? Or was the city itself, especially the conditions of its depraved districts, actually producing crime?”<sup>17</sup> By reproducing xenophobic and misogynic nineteenth-century rhetoric concerning “degenerate” Jewish prostitutes, Meyrink’s text provides answers to Spector’s questions. Arguments by Morel and Lombroso will be investigated more deeply in a discussion of the Jewish character Rosina in Chapter Three, but for now, it suffices here to mention that my study and use of the term “degeneracy” throughout this dissertation is informed by historical documentation of turn-of-the-century fears of the “Other” found in ethnic stereotyping in Meyrink’s day, rising criminality in Prague, and diagnoses of the alleged “disease” throughout Europe that asserted the existence of human atavism and human devolution.

The exaggerated monstrous human behaviors described in *Der Golem* flag the reader’s attention to other social ills in the district. The novel’s foregrounding of these social ills justify the ghetto’s clearance at the story’s conclusion, which depicts a new, clean, and crime-free district free of the German and German Jewish presence. As Marga-Eveline Thierfelder has argued in relation to esoteric and occult philosophy in Meyrink’s other novels, the author’s writing is constructed to “arouse the complacent and self-content from their deceptive dreams,” thus leading them to “a higher form of existence.”<sup>18</sup> As she points out, Meyrink’s depictions of how study of the occult broadens the protagonist’s perspectives and allows for his spiritual growth were intended to “awaken” readers from a state of complacent, spiritual slumber.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Scott Spector, *Violent Sensations: Sex, Crime, and Utopia in Vienna and Berlin, 1860-1914* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 50.

<sup>18</sup> See Marga-Eveline Thierfelder, “Das Weltbild in der Dichtung Gustav Meyrinks,” (PhD diss., University of Munich, 1952), 25. See also Christine J. Rosner, “Grotesque Elements in Selected Prose Works of Gustav Meyrink,” (PhD diss., University of Connecticut, 1974), 9.

<sup>19</sup> Although Meyrink never traveled to India, he was an avid reader of Eastern philosophy and often spoke with close friends about Jewish Cabbala (though he was not a practitioner of Jewish mysticism). Pinthus's essay on Meyrink's interest in the occult and esoteric practices claims that the author's occultism is atheistic, offering a guide to life and one's inner-self. He sees Meyrink's works as a breviary of the secret teachings that are applicable to all epochs and

Thierfelder and other scholars, however, fail to point out that plot developments in *Der Golem* also allude to the possible return of monstrous behavior. I will show how in the novel, this behavior is carried out by the city's degenerate female population, implying that the Czech urban rejuvenation project may be incomplete, only effective across linguistic terrains dividing the city. As we shall see, *Der Golem* draws attention to the need for city-wide social reform to accompany the physical renovations enacted through the *Finis Ghetto* project.

This dissertation explores Meyrink as a voice in international Gothic literature by examining *Der Golem* in the light of the revival of Gothic literature worldwide. While previous scholarship asserts that German iterations of the genre disappeared from the literary landscape in the 1830s, *Der Golem* testifies to a trend among Prague-based German-language authors such as Paul Leppin and—as Barry Murnane has shown—Franz Kafka, who drew upon the Gothic mode to reflect the ethnic and linguistic turmoil in turn-of-the-twentieth-century Prague. Drawing upon degeneration theory and theories of the Gothic highlighting cultural despondency, trauma, and monstrosity, I will show that Meyrink, like other Prague-based, German-language authors of the “Prague Novel” such as Max Brod and Egon Erwin Kisch, wrote a Gothic-inspired tale fueled by cultural tensions and historical developments in the city.

Meyrink used the *Finis Ghetto* as an analog to the near-eradication of Prague's German-speaking minorities under Czech political leadership, as well as the cultural legacy they left behind after their departure. As I will show, *Der Golem* addresses these themes in three ways: 1) by portraying the “German experience” in turn-of-the-twentieth-century Prague after the

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all peoples. Meyrink's focus on these teachings, Pinthus claims, stems from a searching for a deep and serene philosophy shared by communities in the East and West (351; 364). Frank claims that Meyrink's works describe three stages on the way to God (49). According to Frank, Meyrink's writing was inspired by the completion of his own inner development. *Der Golem* and Meyrink's other writings reflect a literary and “historical concern” (“historische Angelegenheit”) that preceded studies by psychologists and parapsychologist (76-77). For a complete summary of scholars who have studied Meyrink's occult teachings in his writing, see Rosner, 8-14 and Amanda Boyd, “Demonizing Esotericism: The treatment of Spirituality and Popular Culture in the Works of Gustav Meyrink,” (PhD diss., University of Massachusetts Amherst, 2005), 56-119.

trappings of cultural privilege have dissipated; 2) by providing a representation of the social depravities in the ghetto that Czech nationalists cited as reasons to demolish the district and disperse the city's German and German Jewish communities; and 3) by challenging the effectiveness of the *Finis Ghetto* in purging the city of its "monsters"—namely, its decadent and degenerate German and German Jewish populations who spread sexual degeneracy throughout the city. *Der Golem* ultimately suggests, as I assert, that without social reform to accompany physical renovation of the city, these monsters will continue to plague Prague society.

### **Impossible Communities**

The concept of "community" plays a significant role in this novel and in my examination of interactions in *Der Golem* between Czech speakers, German speakers, and Jews who affiliated themselves in one of these linguistic and ethnic groups. In order to understand the novel's characterization of these three groups, it is important to review historical developments in Prague that led to ethnicity-based social and political tensions that found their way into Meyrink's writing. Detailed analyses of the Czech and German experience with these tensions will be provided in Chapters One and Two, but a few introductory words about the breakdown of the Bohemian community into nationalist sects are necessary here.

*Der Golem* draws upon the Gothic literary genre to combine themes of "monstrosity" and "impossible community" in turn-of-the-twentieth-century Prague. My use of "impossible community" stems from Paul Buchholz's discussion of this theme in German Experimental fiction. Buchholz claims that Franz Kafka, Gustav Landauer, Thomas Bernhard, and Wolfgang Hilbig "redefine the problem of alienation and emptiness." By celebrating unwanted solitude, their writing contributes to a "modern, transnational tradition that accompanies grand narrative

of industrialization, secularization, rationalization, disenchantment, and mechanization.”<sup>20</sup> Using a genre that, as Barry Murnane has demonstrated, focuses on “areas of social life and individual motivation”<sup>21</sup>; abject “political intrigues”<sup>22</sup>; that which is “extraordinary, forbidden, execrated,” Meyrink’s novel uses the concept of monstrosity and “Otherness” to depict the eradication of “all that is considered Other” and its replacement with a “reasonable, enlightened... social order.”<sup>23</sup> Despite the unflattering depictions of the “primitive” and “childlike” Czech speakers who populate the district after ghetto clearance, the overwhelming presence of this ethnic group in the novel’s final pages suggests that the new social order in Prague has cleaned up the overcrowded district, limited prostitution, and disenfranchised its decadent and degenerate citizens. On the surface, the new Czech-led Prague society—made visible in the ghetto—appears to be guided by reason, having provided structure and order to a chaotic city district gone awry under the auspices of the German authority in Prague.

Until the turn of the final decades of the nineteenth century, Prague had been governed by a culturally dominant German-speaking minority who, often at the expense of the Slavic demographic majority, controlled political and economic affairs throughout the city. These demographics and social structures changed with the rise of Czech nationalism at the turn of the twentieth century. Regardless of language use or cultural affiliation, the city’s Jewish population was often portrayed as scapegoats in the cultural battles that emerged between German- and Czech-speaking groups. As Chapter One will further examine, in turn-of-the-twentieth-century Prague, language had become a marker of one’s ethnic identity; those who spoke primarily the

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<sup>20</sup> Paul Buchholz, *Private Anarchy: Impossible Community and the Outsider’s Monologue in German Experimental Fiction* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2018) 22; 4.

<sup>21</sup> Barry Murnane, “Haunting (Literary) History: An Introduction to German Gothic,” in *Popular Revenants: The German Gothic and Its International Reception, 1800-2000*, eds. Andrew Cusak and Barry Murnane (Rochester, New York: Camden House Press, 2012), 12.

<sup>22</sup> Murnane, “Haunting (Literary) History,” 13.

<sup>23</sup> Murnane, “Haunting (Literary) History,” 14.

German language in their homes, in school, and at work were considered German, while those who spoke Czech were considered ethnic Czechs.

An explanation of my terminology for referencing Prague's ethnic, religious, and linguistic communities in my textual analyses is necessary to situate my handling of these groups. While Tara Zahra's research has shown that many in Prague were culturally indifferent to nationality, Gary Cohen has demonstrated that affiliation with a specific ethnic, linguistic, or national group frequently fell in line with class, religious, and linguistic divisions.<sup>24</sup> The situation was in any case complex. In the following pages, my use of the term "German speakers" refers to those living in Prague who affiliated themselves with German culture, heritage, traditions, and ancestry and who prominently used German in work and day-to-day setting. Often German speakers who were not Jewish were middle-class to upper-middle class Catholics and defined themselves as Catholic. Growing occultist practice in Prague at the turn of the twentieth century, however, attracted many German-speaking social elites (Meyrink included) to spiritualist explorations that were independent of organized Christian practice. In short "German speakers" includes those harboring a range of religious and spiritual beliefs. Jews constitute an important subgroup of "German speakers." Analysis of Meyrink's novel requires further distinction.

I use "German-speaking Jews" to refer to those who affiliate themselves with Jewish traditions and ancestry and who most often speak the German language. My use of "German Jewish" describes not ethnicity, but instead the sense of community that German-speaking Jews felt in their attachment to Prague's non-Jewish German-speaking middle- and upper-classes. Although most Jews in turn-of-the-twentieth-century Prague who defined themselves as "German" were upper-middle class (e.g., Max Brod, Franz Kafka), the majority of these

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<sup>24</sup> See Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls*, 1-13.

characters in Meyrink's novel are poor and live in the former Jewish ghetto. At times I will use the phrase "German Jewish" to refer Jews who adopted the German language, customs, and traditions. As we will see throughout this dissertation, some of these Jews saw affiliation with German culture and the German language as advantageous in terms of career and social opportunities.

My use of the term "Czech speakers" refers to those who spoke Czech and identified themselves with Czech linguistic, nationalist, and cultural movements in Bohemia at the time. Historically, those who spoke Czech in Prague in the mid- to late-nineteenth century were working class or lower-middle class. Many in this linguistic group, though not all, also affiliated themselves with a growing movement to revive Czech folk traditions to the status enjoyed by the culture of the city's German-speaking elites. While most Czech speakers registered in censuses as Catholic, many did not practice any faith, as is demonstrated by the breakdown of the Catholic stronghold in Prague following the collapse of the Habsburg monarchy in 1918.

*Der Golem* was written in the German language and demarcates those who are Czech either by stating their ethnicity outright or by commenting on their spoken language. For example, the narrator describes Dr. Savioli, as "a young German doctor" ("ein junger deutscher Arzt"), while the ethnicity of a man Pernath meets in prison—a "Czech Viennese" ("tschechischen Wiener")—is clearly identifiable through the narrator's comments and reinforced by the character's broken German tinged with a Czech accent.<sup>25</sup> Likewise, the Jewish girl Mirjam speaks of other girls in her culture in reference to their Germanness, referring to her own linguistic community as "the Germans" ("die Deutschen").<sup>26</sup> The novel, however, alludes to antisemitic beliefs in a fundamental Jewish "difference" based on this group's inability to master

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<sup>25</sup> *Der Golem*, 39, 266.

<sup>26</sup> *Der Golem*, 172.

the Czech or German languages, as well as criminal behaviors that is carried through Jewish “blood.” For example, the Jewish Aaron Wassertrum—a man with unsettling, asymmetrical physical features who commits rape and orchestrates other crimes in the ghetto—struggles to produce “High German,” the standard spoken dialect of Prague’s German middle-class and aristocracy. In the middle of the novel, when Pernath catches Wassertrum spying on him through the keyhole of Pernath’s apartment door, Pernath thinks to himself, “One could clearly hear the effort [Wassertrum] put in to speaking High German” (“Man konnte ihm deutlich anhören, welche Mühe er sich gab, hochdeutsch zu reden”).<sup>27</sup> In this novel, his grotesque facial features suggest an immoral spirit that makes him “Other.” Unable to speak German or Czech, Wassertrum and his offspring are the novel’s unredeemable “Others” that can neither be assimilated into nor allowed to remain in the new city’s social order.

Demographic changes marked the shifting social and cultural tides in Prague. Between 1880-1910, the city’s German-speaking population began to lose cultural and political dominance. Immigration from other districts in Bohemia and Moravia, German emigration from Prague to other German-language centers (particularly Berlin and Vienna), as well as shifts in fertility and mortality rates brought a dramatic decline in the city’s German-speaking population, particularly in comparison with other ethnic groups. In 1900, for example, ninety-two percent of those who emigrated to Prague from other parts of Bohemia and Moravia (or eight-five percent of all non-native residents of the city and the inner suburbs) had come from regions of Bohemia with Czech-speaking majorities. A special study of Prague I-VII in 1900 by the Austrian Central Statistical Commission found that only 9,313 residents of Prague (eight percent of all residents native to other parts of Bohemia) originated from districts with German-speaking majorities,

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<sup>27</sup> *Der Golem*, 196.

compared to 105,922 from Czech-speaking districts.<sup>28</sup> With this boom in population, Czech nationalist leaders recognized the opportunity for the revival of the Czech language and the creation of a Czech national culture.<sup>29</sup> Traces of these demographic changes are visible in Meyrink's novel, particularly in his characterization of the Czech "awakening," which will be the subject of Chapter Two.

Despite the creation of these and other organizations and institutions to buffer Prague's German-speaking population against Czech nationalists' social and political mobilization, many ethnic Germans still underestimated the effectiveness of the Czech political machine. Over the course of the nineteenth century, working-class Czech speakers took on the project of "nation-building" that included the "complete" restructuring of Prague's politics, society, and economy.<sup>30</sup> As Václav Houžvicka points out, the "growth of Czech national consciousness ... was based on the expanding economic power of the Czech entrepreneurial class, the emerging intelligentsia and the established middle stratum of the bourgeoisie, which increasingly wanted a corresponding share in political power in Austria-Hungary."<sup>31</sup> As we shall see in Chapters One and Two, Czech speakers dominated Prague politics and economics by the 1880s, gaining control of municipal legislation during the time of the historic *Finis Ghetto*.

Chapter One, which explores the emotional effects of the German protagonist's adjustment to new social dynamics in Prague, treats Pernath as the embodiment of the many German speakers in turn-of-the-century Prague who experienced growing limitations on

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<sup>28</sup> See Gary Cohen, *The Politics of Ethnic Survival: Germans in Prague, 1861-1914, Second Revised Edition* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2006), 72.

<sup>29</sup> Cohen, *The Politics of Ethnic Survival*, 22

<sup>30</sup> See Václav Houžvicka, *Czechs and Germans 1848-2004: The Sudeten Question and the Transformation of Central Europe* (Prague: Karolinum Press, 2015), 22.

<sup>31</sup> Following the exhaustion of treasury funds after the Austrian defeat at the Battle of Solferino (1859), Emperor Franz Josef I declared that all important financial decisions be approved by the elected assembly of Imperial Council. February 1861 marked a new era in Czech history through a constitution that granted "dualism, bureaucratic centralism, retention of the decisive influence of the aristocracy and imperial court, and preference given to the German bourgeoisie, in fact set that coordinates of the entire subsequent political fate of Austria." Houžvicka, 14.



professional, political, and economic opportunities due to xenophobic municipal legislation. The city's German-speaking aristocracy and middle-class non-Jewish German social elites were reluctant to relinquish centuries of political and cultural authority to a growing Czech nationalist movement to meet Czech speakers' demands for increasing autonomy in the handling local affairs. Václav Houžvička points out that "[i]t was clear that the strength of the Bohemian German opposition increased in direct proportion to the pressure that Czechs exerted on the centralist powers of Vienna, and that Germans saw themselves as having a vital interest in the maintenance of the constitutional arrangement that ensured their relative privilege."<sup>32</sup> Since the mid-eighteenth century, the German language had been a key to social advancement. In order to create a literate citizenry who would be loyal to and serve the state, Joseph II (1741-1790) made elementary education compulsory for all boys and girls through a reform drafted by the monarchy's *Studienhofkommission* (department of education). His 1784 declaration ordered that the official language of instruction in schools be changed from Latin to German—a highly controversial step in a multilingual empire that was thereby being “Germanized.”

In addition to awarding talented students from poor backgrounds scholarships for education, Joseph also allowed Jews and other religious minorities to establish their own schools. Prague's German-speaking Jews began to share (to a limited extent) a place of social privilege with Prague's non-Jewish German-speaking community. While his *Toleranzpatent* (or Patent of Toleration) of October 13<sup>th</sup>, 1781, initially granted religious freedom only to the Empire's non-Catholic Christians (Lutherans, Calvinists, and Eastern Orthodox), Joseph II's 1782 edict provided educational reforms and allowed Jews in Prague to practice their faith openly and pursue branches of commerce previously closed off to them in exchange for aligning themselves with German culture and supporting the Monarchy's political agendas.<sup>33</sup> The new accessibility of

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<sup>32</sup> Houžvička, 31.

<sup>33</sup> Blanning, 67-70.

schooling for Jews, along with further emancipation edicts enacted in 1867 by Emperor Franz Joseph, forged Jewish allegiance to the German-speaking monarchy.<sup>34</sup> As my findings in Chapter One will show, Meyrink conflates the German and Jewish perspectives by portraying a German protagonist who shares in Jewish struggles in the district to reflect this alliance as well as the effects of the Czech speakers' take-over of the local positions of authority, the economic sector, and houses and businesses in *Josefov/Josephstadt*.

The alliance between German-affiliated groups and Jews later became problematic in national wars between German and Czech speakers. Conflicts between these three ethnic groups at the turn of the century had a long history fueled by violent battles over religion, cultural dominance, and language use. After the Battle of White Mountain in 1526, Bohemia lost its independence and fell under Habsburg dominion. In 1620, the region became part of the Catholic Holy Roman Empire. The Counter-Reformation in the sixteenth century brought a wave of religious persecution, as well as hostilities between German

and Czech speakers. The banning of the Czech language and all non-Catholic faiths (Protestantism and in particular as practiced by the Hussites) accompanied the execution of Czech noblemen in Prague's Old Town Square. Their lands, properties, businesses, and valuables were confiscated, and the Protestant clergy were ordered to leave the country. Judaism was the only religion outside of Catholicism allowed by the Monarchy to be practiced in the

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<sup>34</sup>Although regulations of religion remained, the *Toleranzpatent* extended religious freedom to non-Catholic Christians living within Habsburg Empire, including Lutherans, Calvinists, and the Eastern Orthodox. For Jews, the *Toleranzpatent* allowed this group to pursue all branches of commerce, as long as they adhered to state requirements, such as the attendance German-language primary schools and state schools. Jewish schools in Prague had been dedicated to teaching children to read and write Hebrew in addition to mathematics. Following the Patent, a series of laws also abolished the autonomy in Prague's Jewish communities. Before the edict, Jews ran their own court, charity programs, taxation systems, and schools; afterwards, they were required to adopt German family names and could be conscripted by the military. For more information about Joseph II's edicts pertaining to education reform. Blanning, 67-70.

region. Habsburg absolutism predominated into the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in a chapter known in Czech historical consciousness as “the time of darkness (*Temno*).”<sup>35</sup>

In the nineteenth century, and because neither the Czech- nor the German speakers wanted their children to be influenced by the opposing culture in Prague, heated debates arose concerning the use of German or Czech language in school systems and universities, resulting in the construction of separate schools and universities that taught exclusively in Czech and German.<sup>36</sup> Religious differences created problems where nationalist divisions did not. Religion affected residential patterns and family life within the Prague German-speaking community at the turn of the century more strongly than did the simple Czech-German national and linguistic divide. Replacing centuries of Protestant dominance, Roman Catholicism became the dominant religion in Prague in 1620, and remained so until late twentieth century.<sup>37</sup> German Catholics and Protestants, for example, often resided with predominantly Czech-speaking Catholic neighbors and seldom lived in the same building with Jews. When the craft associations were organized in 1860 and 1861, Christian members of the old tailors’, shoemakers’, and cobblers’ guilds of the inner city opposed merger with their Jewish counterparts in *Josefov/Josephstadt*, keeping divisions based on religious affiliation alive.<sup>38</sup>

As German cultural privilege began to erode, the glory of the German-speaking presence in Prague also began to fade. As the German-speaking urban elite throughout the Habsburg Empire diminished under rising Czech, Polish, Magyar, Croat, or Slovene nationalist movements, Prague’s German-speaking communities were faced with increasing pressures and

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<sup>35</sup> Livia Rothkirchen, *The Jews of Bohemia And Moravia: Facing The Holocaust* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 10.

<sup>36</sup> See Hillel Kieval, *The Making of Czech Jewry: National Conflict and Jewish Society in Bohemia, 1870-1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 40-63.

<sup>37</sup> Peter Demetz, *Prague in Black and Gold: Scenes in the Life of a European City* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1997), 171-200.

<sup>38</sup> Cohen, *The Politics of Ethnic Survival*, 33

hostilities from Czech nationals and left the Bohemian capital. Censuses from 1880 to 1910 mark the demographic shift: while the Czech-speaking population in Prague and inner suburbs grew from 213,000 to 405,000, the number of German speakers—Catholics, Jews, and Protestants—declined absolutely from nearly 39,000 to 33,000.<sup>39</sup> In Prague disconnection from the monarchy in Vienna as well as growing pressures from Czech nationals to leave the city led many resident Germans to experience a sense of isolation. After ghetto clearance, the city’s wealthiest remaining Jewish population reintegrated themselves into the very district from which Czech nationals had historically tried to expel the Jewish presence, as we shall see in the final pages of this dissertation.

In the nineteenth century, Prague’s German-speaking community often claimed loyalties to the Monarchy that safeguarded their cultural dominance. Because the group was generally more stable financially than working-class Czech speakers and could support cultural movements in Prague, self-identified “Germans” often dealt with Czech speakers from a position of economic and educational advantage.<sup>40</sup> German had long been the official language of Habsburg bureaucracy and, until the decades leading into the First World War and the collapse of the Habsburg Empire, that of high culture. The idea of Germans as “elite” remained intact, and there were almost no members of the working-class among the German-speaking population. In the cultural realm, German dominance is visible in the number of prominent German-language authors and artists who emerged at the *Jahrhundertwende*, including Rainer Maria Rilke (1875–1926), Franz Kafka (1883-1924), and Max Brod (1884-1968), as well as music composer Lothar Wallerstein (1882-1949) and symbolist and expressionist painter and author Alfred Kubin (1877-1959).<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Cohen, *The Politics of Ethnic Survival*, 65

<sup>40</sup> Cohen, *The Politics of Ethnic Survival*, 101-3.

<sup>41</sup> Meyrink had personal connections with many of these authors and artists. Max Brod, for instance, was a close friend and edited early drafts of *Der Golem*. Alfred Kubin, born Leitmeritz (now Litoměřice) in Bohemia, provided

The concept of nationhood in Bohemia was rooted in beliefs that Czech- and German-speaking communities were “ancient” and “natural” ethnic groups. As Zdeněk Kárník explains, “in varying intensity, the Bohemian lands were the settlement area for at least seven centuries of three ethnic groups: the dominant Czech one, a strong German minority, and the less numerous but nonetheless influential Jewish minority.... Only the nineteenth and twentieth centuries elevated these relations—with variations in timing and in intensity—to a relationship among modern nations.”<sup>42</sup> Industrialization not only led to exponential population growth; it also intensified pre-existing national and class-based tensions in Prague’s Czech, German, and Jewish communities. In Bohemia, the “awakening” of individual and cultural consciousness of ethnicity in the nineteenth century brought a struggle between ethnic groups who vied for authority over the region. The year 1848, Livia Rothkirchen explains, “became a political landmark in the life of the ethnic groups of Bohemia, the beginning of conflicts and hostility between Germans and Czechs that had long been smoldering beneath the surface.”<sup>43</sup> The Frankfurt Convention (*Frankfurter Nationalversammlung*) that convened between May 1848 and June 1849, for example, marked the growing distrust of the monarchy and an intensification of ruptures between German and Czech society. Members of each ethnic group began arguing that local nationalist municipal organizations ruled by popular sovereignty could best meet local demands for linguistically segregated schools, social welfare programs, and cultural organizations.

The sociocultural developments that accompanied the rise of nationalism in Prague influenced Meyrink’s recasting of Gothic themes in *Der Golem*, a novel that dramatized tensions between Prague’s most prominent ethnic and linguistic groups. Meyrink’s depictions of language

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images for *Der Golem*. Kubin’s work, which is recognizable by its dark, spectral, symbolic fantasies, earned him a reputation as an important representative of Symbolism and Expressionism. See Annegret Hoberg, *Alfred Kubin: Drawings 1897-1909* (East Windsor, NJ; London: Prestel, 2008).

<sup>42</sup> Qtd. in Jeremy King, *Budweisers into Czechs and Germans: A Local History of Bohemian Politics, 1848-1948* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 6.

<sup>43</sup> Rothkirchen, 12.

use in Prague in particular gestures toward social and political developments in the nineteenth century that changed long-standing practices and hierarchies. Historians Tara Zahra, Hillel Kieval, Gary Cohen, Scott Spector, and Jeremy King have shown that over the course of the century, nationalism became a potent force in Central Europe—one that escalated in the decades leading into the First World War. Throughout the Austro-Hungarian Empire, national variants challenged the Habsburg system of governance by divine right. Citizens throughout the empire gradually began to identify themselves as Germans, Czechs, Poles, Ruthenes, Romanians, Slovaks, Hungarians, Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Italians or other national groups, and a new, national form of politics emerged. Jews were also included in these movements, forming a national group through spoken Yiddish, particularly in Poland. Each of these nationalities was largely defined by “tongue,” or language of preference. The monarchy had to attend to these multinational groups, making concessions to national demands in order to maintain control over the region. To quote author Josef Roth, late imperial Austria was “a great mansion with many doors and many chambers, for every condition of man” and “a powerful force with the ability... to unite what seems to be trying to fly apart.”<sup>44</sup> Roth refers to the many “local patriotisms” brought together through disparate allegiances into a loose, overarching one—the house of Habsburg seated in Vienna. As nationalist movements began dictating political developments, municipal planning in urban centers, and day-to-day encounters between ethnic and linguistic communities, incompatibilities between ethnic and linguistic groups became common as a result of the attempts of nationalist forces to forge political cultures that emerged from a national collective.

In the decades surrounding the turn of the twentieth century, the escalation of nationalist sentiments culminated in a series of demonstrations, street violence, and eventually a declaration

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<sup>44</sup> Qtd. in King, 5.

of a state of emergency in the city by Prague's governor. The highly politicized commemorations for the anniversary of John Hus's martyrdom—a celebration that stirred centuries of social and religious hostilities in the region—brought the first outbreaks of vandalism and violence throughout Prague. Beginning on July 6, 1892, minor disturbances occurred throughout the city and continued until August-September 1893, when tensions escalated into window smashing and destruction of German signs and imperial emblems. The intensification of public disorder prompted Prague's municipal officials to declare a state of emergency that remained in effect from September 1893 until October 1895. During these twenty-six months, and as ethnicity-based street violence plagued German businesses and German churches and Jewish synagogues, the Habsburg monarchy made attempts to quell outright rebellion. The Emperor supported restrictive measures implemented by Prague's German-speaking authorities. The heated nationalist motivations behind restrictive measures implemented by Bohemian Governor Count Franz Thun were made visible in his 1895 decrees requiring all schools to ban the display of Czech colors and insignia, which should immediately be replaced with imperial colors. When teachers complained, Thun responded, "If you do not obey orders, I shall break your necks."<sup>45</sup> In addition, Thun implemented civil repercussions for those who rebelled against German authority and the monarchy, such as the restriction of assembly and trials by jury, strict censorship of newspapers, and the disbanding of political associations (including the Young Czechs). Over the course of the demonstrations, the German-led court system prosecuted 179 persons. Despite Czech pressures, some Germans who remained in Prague clung to their national identity and to loyalties with the Monarchy that safeguarded their cultural dominance.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> See Robert J. Goldstein, *Political Repression in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Europe* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 329. Original quote found in Bruce M. Garver, *The Young Czech Party, 1874-1901* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), 24. Neither Czechs nor Germans wanted their children to be influenced by Prague's counterculture, which triggered heated debates concerning the use of German or Czech language in school systems. See also Kieval, *The Making of the Czech Jewry*, 40-63.

<sup>46</sup> Cohen, *The Politics of Ethnic Survival*, 34-5.

The momentum from the Czech language movement, which will be explored in Chapter Two, culminated in Casimir Count Badeni's proclamation of Czech as the official language of Bohemia in 1897. Meant to appease rebelling Czechs, Badeni's decree instead triggered violent nationalistic fanaticism, as it applied to wholly German regions, as well. Once again, violent riots erupted throughout Prague. Mark Twain, then a journalist for *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* in Vienna, wrote an article in 1897 describing responses to the declaration: "The Badeni government came down with a crash; there was a popular outbreak or two in Vienna; there were three or four days of furious rioting in Prague, followed by the establishing there of martial law."<sup>47</sup> The violent upsurge of nationalist protests in Prague affected not only citizens who identified themselves as German and Czech by ethnicity and language use, but also the city's German- and Czech-speaking Jewish populations, which was caught in the crossfire between hostile Czech and German sanctions. While the impact of this violence on Jews will be the subject of the following chapter, for now, it is important to note that these tensions resulted in the splitting of Prague into two societies: that of the Czechs, and that of the Germans. In the view of many Young Czechs—a radical, antisemitic political group that took control of municipal offices in the last decades of the nineteenth century—Prague's German-speaking community included the Jews. Indeed, after Franz Joseph's 1867 Edict allowed Jews greater social mobility in Prague's society, educated, wealthy Jews could participate in cultural events and contribute to local newspapers and journals, and in response, many middle-to-upper class Jews tended to align their beliefs with German political ideologies and the monarchy that had granted them new civil liberties and professional mobility. In the decades surrounding the century's turn, however, Jews of working-class backgrounds increasingly tended to align themselves with Czech movements focused on class issues and overturning a German-dominated political and social system that

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<sup>47</sup> Cf. Mark Twain, "Stirring Times in Austria," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, no 96 (March 1898): 530-40 doi: <https://ecommons.cornell.edu/handle/1813/2170>.



contributed to economic and cultural repression. The split between the city's Czech- and German-speaking communities became increasingly pronounced in the years leading up to the dissolution of the Habsburg monarchy in 1918, when Czech nationalist leaders at long last formed the first Czechoslovak First Republic.

Relying on Buchholz's discussion of "impossible communities" in German Experimental fiction, I will show how Meyrink uses the Gothic mode to create a world characterized by alienation and emptiness, extreme and unwanted isolation, and an absence of community and communication as a result of ethnic and national divides. By portraying fragmented realities with disjointed communication between characters, the novel analyzes, celebrates, and critiques unwanted isolation within Prague's minority German-speaking population. The German-speaking protagonist experiences extreme alienation as he confronts the impossibility of inclusive social relations among the city's German, Czech, and Jewish communities.<sup>48</sup> As I will show, alienation becomes a recurring theme. Reflecting minorities' experiences in a city that historically no longer welcomed the non-Jewish German and German Jewish presence in cultural sectors, economic affairs, and municipal politics, the novel portrays Prague's German-speaking and Jewish minority groups as "voided communities" that experience the "epitome of loneliness and isolation" after being caught in a traumatic or "*preposterous* social situation" of shifting social dynamics.<sup>49</sup> By creating a story that emphasizes a lack of productive communication between characters that are coded according to contemporary regional ethnic stereotypes, the novel provides an imaginative space to examine the effects of a weakening German cultural,

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<sup>48</sup> Meyrink often depicts impossible communities in apocalyptic settings. Character experience spiritual rejuvenation through the physical destruction of urban terrains and the annihilation of morally corrupt communities and institutions. Amanda Boyd's examination of Meyrink's second novel, *The Green Face/Das grüne Gesicht* (1916), for example, explores the novel's portrayal of a man's journey to Amsterdam to find spiritual salvation in a war-torn Europe. Boyd claims that Meyrink's "monstrous aristocracy," "rebellious proletariat," and oppressive Catholic monarchy in this novel represent "historical stagnation" that must be overcome in the name of individual spiritual progress. This progress is only possible through the decimation of each of these corrupt institutions. Boyd, 272.

<sup>49</sup> Buchholz, 3. Emphasis in original.

political, and economic authority in Prague. The novel also envisions the reluctance of Prague's Czech leadership to negotiate with the German-speaking community during the urban renewal process, as well as the newly homogenized Czech community's unwillingness to acknowledge memories of a former German and German Jewish cultural presence in Prague following the *Finis Ghetto*. Thus, the novel encapsulates the experiences of a shrinking minority group that, through literature, frequently expressed as sense of powerlessness through characters who experience alienation in a city in which "community" was impossible.

My analyses of *Der Golem* focus on the impossibility of a multiethnic coexistence with the rise of Czech nationalism. It will show that the destruction of Prague's Jewish ghetto materializes the historic breakdown of Habsburg authority over the region, which in this novel (and later, in historic record) resulted in the nearly complete expulsion of Prague's German-speaking citizens. The aftermath of the Czech-led social and urban renewal project is visualized at the novel's conclusion.

## Literature Review

Most critical scholarship on Meyrink's writing and celebrity status focuses on his biography (Lube, Qasim, Smit, Harmsen, Binder, Mitchell), his handling of occult themes and esoteric traditions in his narrator's path toward spiritual salvation (Thierfelder, Pinthus, Frank, Boyd), his antisemitic depictions of Jewish culture through the golem legend (Gelbin, Baer, Schmidt, Barzalia), or generic categorizations of his works (Rosner, Buskirk, Boyd).<sup>50</sup> Research

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<sup>50</sup> Secondary materials related to Meyrink's biography, his oeuvre, and the literary genres to which he contributes provide insight on his take on these cultural, historical, and political developments in Prague. A series of dissertations appearing in the 1970s and 1980s, in turn, provide genre- or theme-based literary criticism of his novels, essays, and satirical works in the literary journals *Simplicissimus*, *Die weissen Blätter*, and *Der Liebe Augustin*. See Thierfelder, Rosner, and Christine Margaret Krolick, "The Esoteric Traditions in the Novels of Gustav Meyrink," (PhD diss., The State University of New York, 1983; Florian E. Marzin, *Okkultismus und Phantastik in den Romanen Gustav Meyrinks* (Essen: Blaue Eule, 1986). Several recently published biographies shed light on Meyrink's upbringing, his nearly two decades spent in Prague, and the impact of these experiences on his writing. See Manfred Lube, "Gustav Meyrink als Literat in Prag, Wien und München." *Phaicon 3. Almanach der*

by each of these scholars is helpful in giving readers an idea of the man behind the works, his unique literary style, and the cultural themes that influenced the content of his satirical writing in *Simplicissimus*. Findings by these scholars will be cited when relevant throughout this dissertation and will inform my understanding of Meyrink's experiences in Prague, as well as his perceptions of personal and historical developments that took place during his time in Prague, which he then recasts in *Der Golem*.

Previous scholarship has not examined in detail the traces of contemporary nationalist discourse that are visible in the novel and reflect the local historical context. Cathy Gelbin, Mohammad Qasim, Elizabeth Baer, and Eva Christina Schmidt have addressed the roles of Jewish stereotyping in *Der Golem*, but stereotypes of non-Jewish German and Czech speakers as well as representations of Czech nationalism in the novel have been overlooked.<sup>51</sup> Gelbin and Qasim have argued that Meyrink avoids portrayals of individual characters and instead works with common archetypes.<sup>52</sup> Gelbin claims that *Der Golem* underscores "types with extreme patterns of behavior, no matter whether they are criminals or mystics."<sup>53</sup> Qasim also observes that "as with many other German writers from Prague, Meyrink tries to objectivize the particularity of the local into the general and symbolic" ("Vielmehr versucht Meyrink genauso wie manche anderen deutschen Schriftsteller aus Prag die Besonderheit des Lokalen ins

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*fantastischen Literatur*. Phantastische Bibliothek Band 3. Ed. Rein A. Zondergeld (Frankfurt/M: Insel Verlag, 1978); Mohammad Qasim, *Gustav Meyrink. Eine Monographische Untersuchung*, ed. Ulrich Muller et al. (Stuttgart: Akademischer Verlag Hans-Dieter Heinz, 1981); Frans Smit, *Gustav Meyrink. Auf der Suche nach dem Übersinnlichen* (Munich: Albert Langen, 1988); Eduard Frank, "Einleitung," *Das Haus zur Letzten Latern. Nachgelassenes und Verstreutes*, ed. Eduard Frank (Munich: Langen-Muller Verlag, 1973), 7-38; Theodor Harmsen, *Der magische Schriftsteller Gustav Meyrink, seine Freunde und sein Werk* (Leiden: Brill, 2009).

<sup>51</sup> As will be discussed in Chapter Three, Cathy Gelbin and Elizabeth Baer in particular limit their focus on Meyrink's generalized caricatures in *Der Golem* to the ways in which Jewish characters correspond to common nineteenth-century stereotypes of the degenerate Jew. See Cathy Gelbin, *The Golem Returns: From German Romantic Literature to Global Jewish Culture, 1808-2008* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 100, and Elizabeth Baer, *The Golem Redux: From Prague to Post-Holocaust Fiction* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2012).

<sup>52</sup> See Baer, Smit, Lube, Boyd, Harmsen.

<sup>53</sup> Qasim, 120, qtd. in Gelbin, 101.

Allgemeine und Symbolische zu objektivieren”).<sup>54</sup> For Qasim, Meyrink’s characters are designed to address the “universally human” (“Allgemein-Menschliche”) in Prague and in Europe.<sup>55</sup> I will revisit and offer a different take on Meyrink’s reliance on stereotypes in his novel. Although Qasim claims that “[i]n every case, Meyrink's novels do not have anything to do with provincialism or local patriotism” (“Auf jeden Fall hat das Lokale in Meyrinks Romanen nicht im geringsten mit Provinzialismus oder Lokalpatriotismus zu tun”),<sup>56</sup> I will show how Meyrink’s novel takes up nationalist issues in his portrayals of tensions among Prague’s middle-class- and aristocratic German population (the “Prager Deutsche”), the city’s working-class Czechs (“Slawischen”), and its impoverished Jews (“Juden”).

The most helpful secondary literature addressing Meyrink’s relationship to German and Czech nationalism is provided by Amanda Boyd. She explores perceptions of Meyrink’s ethnic identity and antisemitic accusations in her 2005 dissertation “Demonizing Esotericism: The Treatment of Spirituality and Popular Culture in the Works of Gustav Meyrink” and her 2013 article “Nationalist Voices Against Gustav Meyrink’s Wartime Publications: Adolf Bartels, Albert Zimmermann, and the *Hetze* of 1917-1918.” Her reading of Meyrink’s three novels *Der Golem* (1915), *Das grüne Gesicht* (1916), and *Walpurgisnacht* (1917) explores the author’s use of the fantastic genre to underscore themes of mass destruction that echoed the experience of the First World War. Her handling of the “Meyrink-Hetze,” which will be explored in Chapter One, expands this discussion by focusing on the reception of Meyrink’s novels and wartime publications, which, as she points out, antisemitic German nationalists judged to be dangerous to a German readership.

My research sets itself apart from previous scholarship by analyzing the complexities of

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<sup>54</sup> Mohammad Qasim, *Gustav Meyrink, Eine monographische Untersuchung* (Stuttgart: Heinz, 1981), 120.

<sup>55</sup> Qasim, 114.

<sup>56</sup> Qasim, 120.

nationalist perspectives that play in the background of the novel's love story and crime narrative. Little scholarly attention has been paid to the ways in *Der Golem* participates in turn-of-the-century discussions about Prague's ethnicity-based social dynamics; nor has scholarship attended to the significance of the author's employment of Gothic conventions to reimagine the *Finis Ghetto* and the people within it. Through the close readings provided in this dissertation, I hope to address these gaps.

I analyze how *Der Golem* handles nationality in turn-of-the-twentieth-century Prague through his exaggerated ethnic stereotyping of middle-class- and aristocratic Germans as decadent, working-class Czechs as "uncivilized" yet motivated and industrious, and Jews as morally flawed and degenerate. German speakers, who will be studied in Chapter One, are affiliated with a pompous aristocracy unaware of growing limitations to their cultural dominance. The novel's crafty and conniving Czech-speaking characters, whom I will examine in Chapter Two, are relentless in overturning German authority, as demonstrated by the Czech police officer who imprisons Pernath and the Czech workers who refuse to help Pernath finds his friends after ghetto clearance without a monetary exchange. With the exception of the Jewish archivist (Hillel) and his daughter (Mirjam), the novel's Jews are depicted as degenerate, neurotic, and sexually charged, as seen in the figure Rosina, who will be examined in Chapter Three. This young girl, who, the novel suggests, is a prostitute, provides a clear example of the depraved behaviors that are most prominent in *Josefov/Josephstadt*, but also visible outside of the city district before and after ghetto clearance. While the novel praises the Czech-led urban renewal project in reshaping the city district, it implies that true social reform is never fully achievable, as demonstrated by the "monstrous" behaviors that threaten to reappear again at the novel's conclusion.

A few final preparatory comments are necessary to a discussion of Prague's nationalism

and ethnicity-based stereotyping in *Der Golem*. It is important to note that debates surrounding Prague's tense social demographics were, for many, highly charged politically and emotionally. They remain so today.<sup>57</sup> The close readings in this dissertation explore the literary and cultural history of a culturally dominant minority group whose presence was despised and feared by the demographic majority in Prague. My research has made me aware of the limits of neutrality when studying a novel that aspires to reproduce the sociopolitical terrains that divided the region in Meyrink's time. Working with primary texts that are saturated with national biases challenges the literary scholar and cultural historian to cultivate temporal, geographical, and emotional distance from the significant historical events and social situations in question. It is my goal to maintain this distance.

I recognize, nevertheless, that my treatment of cultural conflicts in this region is informed by my specialization in German language and literary and cultural history. Because I cannot speak Czech, my knowledge of the German language, literature, and culture exceeds my understanding of the Czech perspectives on turn-of-the-century institutions and culture. What information I have gleaned of the latter perspectives comes from works of multilingual scholars such as Tara Zahra, Cathleen Guistino, and Dale Askey. The aforementioned authors have shown that for Germans who were witnessing the systematic expulsion of approximately 90% of their language community, writing and publishing literature was a political act, in some ways tantamount to a provocation.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Dale Askey's recent dissertation, for instance, has shown how this group of Germans—particularly the few who remained in Prague following violent expulsions after 1945—were “often tied to broader questions of Cold War politics, German guilt, deep-rooted ethnic conflict, and Czech national aspirations.” See Dale Askey, “Writing Poems for the Paper: Documenting the Cultural Life of the German Minority in Czechoslovakia after 1945,” (PhD diss., Humboldt University Berlin, 2018), 32.

<sup>58</sup> Askey, 27.

## Publication History of *Der Golem*

The significance of this novel resides not only in its ability to open a window onto Prague society at the turn of the twentieth century, but also in its popularity with Meyrink's readers during his lifetime. At the time of the novel's publication, Meyrink's writing was as popular as (and in some cases, more popular in international contexts than) that of Franz Kafka, Max Brod, Oskar Wiener, Franz Werfel, and other Prague-based, German-language authors whose works survived the test of time.<sup>59</sup> During Meyrink's lifetime, the quality of his writing made him a role model for a number of aspiring writers who published in the German language, including Brod, Paul Leppin, and Thomas Mann. The popularity of his writings waned as a result of the Nazi era, when a ban of his works and book burnings removed his works from public circulation, presumably due to his frequent handling of Jewish culture and "decadent" themes. Furthermore, with the Czech speakers' removal of works written in German from literary archives after World War Two, Meyrink's oeuvre nearly vanished from public consciousness in Prague. *Der Golem*, however, continues to find readers.

While living in Prague, Meyrink had expressed the intention of writing a novel, though it is unclear whether he had conceptualized the plot or characters. The first mention of the novel appears in a letter to Alfred Kubin on January 1, 1907, in which Meyrink agrees to send Kubin twenty-six pages of a "novella" in exchange for a few pictures to accompany his writing. Kubin's essay "How I Illustrate" ("Wie ich illustriere") makes clear that the work to which Meyrink was referring was an initial version of what was to become *Der Golem*.<sup>60</sup> Meyrink often exaggerated his progress on the novel: in a letter to Alfred Kubin dated January 19, 1907,

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<sup>59</sup> A generation older than what became known as the "Prague Circle," Meyrink was part of the *Jung Prag* literary movement, which included authors Paul Leppin, Richard Teschner, and Oskar Wiener. See Boyd, 32 and Scott Spector, *Prague Territories: National Conflict and Cultural Innovation in Franz Kafka's Fin de Siècle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 174-184.

<sup>60</sup> See Mike Mitchell, *Vivo: The Life of Gustav Meyrink* (Cambridgeshire: Dedalus, 2008), 133-4

Meyrink stated that he had “the first 26 pages of the novella typed out” and ready for illustration, with additional writing to come. When no further materials arrived, Kubin used the illustrations intended for Meyrink’s novella for his own novel, *Die andere Seite* (*The Other Side*, 1909). Over a year later, Meyrink claimed in a letter to Langen on November 18, 1908, that the initial twenty-six pages of *Der Golem* were part of a larger work that was in the final stages of completion: “I beg you to allow me another week.—I am just *finishing off* my novel and cannot break off at the moment—even were I to be granted eternal salvation. I’d lose the thread, probably for good. Ill submit the novel to you straight away.”<sup>61</sup>

In 1908, Meyrink started drafting his tale about the golem, the Jewish ghetto, and the people terrorized by the creature in the physical space of the ghetto. Originally conceptualizing his work as a short story for the Munich-based periodical *Simplicissimus*, Meyrink eventually transformed his writing into a full-fledged novel, which he did not complete until 1913. His early versions of the *Der Golem* consisted of a tangled maze of subplots and characters that quickly spiraled out of his control. After he destroyed several early drafts, Meyrink eventually agreed to let Max Brod help him edit his writing. The novel that eventually became *Der Golem* took shape as a tale focusing on violent crime, deviant sexuality, supernatural encounters, occult practice, and Jewish mysticism.<sup>62</sup> In 1913-1914, *Der Golem* appeared in serialized form in *Die weissen Blätter*, a monthly journal (*Monatschrift*) that published experimental literature from 1913 until 1920.<sup>63</sup> Meyrink’s tale was published alongside poems and short stories by well-known German-

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<sup>61</sup> Mitchell, 135.

<sup>62</sup> Gelbin, 99.

<sup>63</sup> *Die weissen Blätter* underwent a series of changes in terms of publishing housing during its brief period of existence. From 1913 to 1915, the Leipzig-based publishing house *Verlag der weissen Bücher* printed *Die weissen Blätter* under Erik-Ernst-Schwabach’s supervision. René Shickele took over leadership in 1915. From 1916 to 1917, the journal was printed in the Zurich-based publishing house, *Verlag Rascher* until being moved to *Verlag der Weissen Blätter* in Bern in 1918. In the final years of publication (1919 to 1920), Paul Cassirer published the magazine in Berlin. For further publication history, see Sven Arnold: *Das Spektrum des literarischen Expressionismus in den Zeitschriften „Der Sturm“ und „Die Weissen Blätter,”* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1998).



speaking writers, including Max Brod, Martin Buber, Robert Musil, Otto Pick, and Franz Werfel, among others. Shortly after the last segment of *Der Golem* appeared in *Die weissen Blätter*, Kurt Wolff purchased the novel for a lump sum and published it as a book.<sup>64</sup> The novel was an instant bestseller; after its publication in 1915, it sold 200,000 copies, was translated into Russian and English, and received glowing book reviews in England and the United States.<sup>65</sup> The high volume of books sales and translations of the novel that followed testifies to the immense international popularity of the *Der Golem*.

The novel's immediate success on European and American literary markets can be attributed to Meyrink's uncanny ability to use literature to feed a growing contemporary fascination with human monstrosity rooted in theories of degeneracy and racial otherness. The publication of *Der Golem* belonged to a wave of Gothic-inspired texts that appeared throughout Europe between 1880 and 1914 and underscored the dangers that degeneration posed to society. Like such stories as Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), Guy de Maupassant's *Le Horla* (1887), and Gaston Leroux's *Le Fantôme de l'Opéra* (1910), *Der Golem* depicted violent crime carried out in an eerie urban setting by physically disfigured, mentally deranged individuals. In each of these tales, animalistic or deformed humans interact with urban settings and exhibit deviant behavior that stems from mental illness, dubious engagements with scientific experiments, or participation in occult studies and practice. After Stevenson's Dr. Jekyll concocts and imbibes an alchemical potion, for instance, he transforms into his demonic double, Mr. Hyde—a homicidal maniac who tramples children and clubs a pedestrian to death in the London streets. Maupassant's neurotic unnamed narrator returns from a

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<sup>64</sup> In 1908, Kurt Wolff (1887-1963) partnered with Ernst Rowohlt (1887-1960) in Leipzig to support and publish unknown but talented German-speaking (particularly Prague-based) authors. Wolff is most well-known as the first editor to promote and publish works by figures such as Franz Kafka and Max Brod. See Kurt Wolff, *Autoren, Bucher, Abenteuer. Betrachtungen und Erinnerungen eines Verlegers* (Berlin: Klaus Wagenback, 1965), 18.

<sup>65</sup> For more on *Der Golem*'s publication history, see Robert Irwin, "Gustav Meyrink and His Golem," *The Golem*, ed. Mike Mitchell (Gardina, CA: Dedalus, 2013), 20; Gelbin, 100.

séance in the city and burns down his house with his servants locked inside. In Leroux's text, a birth defect has left the face of the text's antagonist so grotesquely disfigured that he flees his home, joins a freak show, and becomes known as "*mort vivant*" ("dead made living").<sup>66</sup> His playground-like alterations of the Parisian Opera House, equipped with trap doors and countless secret passageways, allows him to topple chandeliers onto opera-goers at his will and secretly kidnap his beloved, Christine. As an avid reader of the Gothic, Meyrink was undoubtedly familiar with these tales, either in their original form or in translation. His intimate knowledge of Gothic-inspired French, English, US-American, Russian, and Japanese texts in addition to German *Schauerliteratur* left him aptly situated to create fiction that translated the international Gothic into the German-speaking context.

During the years in which he conceptualized and composed *Der Golem* (1908-1913), Meyrink played a prominent role in the international mediation of Gothic writing as a translator and writer. Evidence of Meyrink's mediation of the international Gothic is clear in his translation of Japanese tales rooted in ghost-story tradition through US-American translator Lafcadio Hearn, who published a collection of Japanese ghost stories in English. Meyrink translated them from English into German in *Japanische Geistergeschichten* (1925).<sup>67</sup> Meyrink also wrote the Foreword ("Vorwort") for an anthology of international ghost stories in *Das Gespensterbuch* (*The Ghostbook*, 1913), a work that was released shortly before Meyrink's serialized editions of *Der Golem* appeared in *Die weissen Blätter[n]*. Because Meyrink introduced and contributed his own original works to the collection of international tales in *Das Gespensterbuch*, it is highly likely that he read the entire volume, which would have exposed him to canonical Gothic works by world-renowned German, US-American, French, and Russian authors such as E.T.A. Hoffmann,

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<sup>66</sup> Gaston Leroux, *Le Fantôme de l'Opéra* (Scotts Valley, CA: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform 2004), 172. doi: [https://www.ebooksgratuits.com/pdf/leroux\\_fantome\\_opera.pdf](https://www.ebooksgratuits.com/pdf/leroux_fantome_opera.pdf).

<sup>67</sup> See Lafcadio Hearn, *Japanische Geistergeschichten*, trans. Gustav Meyrink (Hamburg: Severus Verlag, 1925).

Edgar Allan Poe, Maupassant, and Nikolaus Gogol. In addition to his contributions to this Gothic-inspired volume, Meyrink was also commissioned to translate entire complete works of Charles Dickens during the years in which he conceptualized and composed *Der Golem* (1908-1913). Even today, his translation of Dickens is the authoritative German translation. Through these translations, Meyrink had intimate contact with Dickens's heightened sentiment and grotesque characterization of physical deformity, dark urban settings, class striation, and life in London's slums—themes that reappear in *Der Golem*. Meyrink's role as an editor and translator of the Gothic without a doubt shaped his approach to the genre as well as his conceptualization and creative recapitulation of its frameworks in his internationally best-selling novel.<sup>68</sup>

### **Structure of Dissertation**

*Der Golem* belongs to a trend in late-nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Prague-based German-language literature that drew upon Gothic frameworks to explore personal tragedy, class struggle, xenophobia, and political and ethnic tensions in turn-of-the-twentieth-century Prague. These stories address the following questions: To what extent should national communities have autonomy in local policy-making in cosmopolitan centers in the Habsburg Empire? What role do minority and underrepresented communities play in the cultural, economic, and political spheres of these centers? How should the Prague community respond to continent-wide questions concerning the social and political status of women and Jews? What threats does interacting with underrepresented social groups (e.g., women and Jews) pose to the (Czech) ruling majority? And last, how can Prague demonstrate its ability to “keep up with the

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<sup>68</sup> Meyrink wrote the chapters that eventually became *Der Golem* during the years in which he was commissioned to translate Charles Dickens' oeuvre from English to German. It is likely that financial difficulties led him to engage with Dickens' texts in a professional capacity between 1909 and 1914. Between 1908 and 1914, he published two fragments from *Der Golem* in the literary and art journal *Pan* in 1910 and 1911. Eventually his publisher (Albert Langen) tired of pushing the author for further progress on the novel and thus commissioned Meyrink to pursue the lengthy translation project of Dickens' works. Even today, Meyrink's translations are considered the best offered in the German language. See Mitchell, 122.

West” by defining itself against other urban centers throughout Europe? None of the stories cited in this dissertation offers definitive answers or solutions to these questions, but their plots leave room for the reader’s interpretation or speculation about what progress may look like. *Der Golem* in particular offers a vision of the future.

The complex handling of turn-of-the-century Prague, its social systems, and the changes to these social systems that radically reshaped the face of the city in *Der Golem* requires extended scholarly re-consideration. The first chapter of this dissertation examines the historical context of the novel, focusing on traces of Meyrink’s biography in *Der Golem* and other writings, alongside the novel’s reception within the context of local nationalist debates and literary trends of his milieu. Drawing upon theories of the literary Gothic, I show how, through his best-selling Gothic-inspired crime novel, Meyrink participated in a trend of Prague-based, German-language authors who wrote stories of forbidden love, cultural transgressions, and the loss of German cultural memory in Prague that were informed by local political tensions and controversies. By incorporating nationalist themes and elements of his own biography, Meyrink constructs a protagonist with a conflicted relationship to the German language and culture in Prague, as evidenced by his relationship with the German-speaking noblewoman, Angelina. While scholars such as Cathy Gelbin and Eva Christina Schmidt have examined that narrator’s relationship to Mirjam, the narrator’s second love interest, his relationship with Angelina has been underexplored. *Der Golem*, I will argue, conflates German and Jewish perspectives to reflect the experience of ethnic marginalization in a Czech-dominated city that no longer welcomed the German and German Jewish presence.

Chapter Two explores the novel’s recasting of Czech-speaker’s responses to the changing political scene in turn-of-the-twentieth-century Prague. I focus on the novel’s characterization of the two German-speaking narrators’ interactions with Czech-speaking laborers, pub owners,

local authorities, and former ghetto residents post-clearance. Examining four scenes that highlight class and ethnic conflict highlighted by national tensions, I show how the accounts provided by Pernath and the sleeping narrator of the frame narrative provide critical reflections on the municipal government's exploitation of public health concerns to leverage the *Finis Ghetto* project. By examining accounts of those most deeply affected by the plan—namely, German-affiliated non-Jewish and German Jewish citizens who, after clearance, are traumatized, silenced, and “othered” in the new community, I will show how these characters' accounts reveal the lack of communication between the residents and the Czech-speaking authorities who implemented the plan, as well as the municipality's lack of concern for these residents following demolitions. Building upon Paul Buchholz's discussion of the “collective isolation” that characterizes “impossible communities” in German fiction, my research shows how *Der Golem* features a narrator who struggles to adapt to Czech nationalist aspirations to reshape the lived experience in turn-of-the-twentieth-century Prague in order to emphasize the sense of powerlessness and alienation often expressed by German-language authors at the time.

Chapter Three examines Meyrink's intervention in contemporary debates about the effects of contaminated environments such as slums or ghettos on pre-existing biological predilections. I analyze Meyrink's depiction of two sexually deviant women in *Der Golem*: the adulterous, decadent German-speaking noblewoman Angelina and her promiscuous Jewish double, Rosina, as Meyrink's mustering of over-the-top antisemitic characterizations in the Gothic mode. The novel draws attention to and calls into question wide-spread nineteenth-century stereotypes surrounding the neurotic, criminal, and sexualized Jew. Drawing upon theories of “monstrous femininity” rooted in the Gothic literary tradition, I examine the novel's implication that degenerate bodies and minds emerge after prolonged exposure to filth in the ghetto streets. In taking up beliefs of degeneration theorists such as Cesare Lombroso

(particularly his theory of the female “born criminal”), *Der Golem* combines critical reflections on the role of the “New Woman” in Prague society with antisemitic projections of Jewish women as leverage for *Finis Ghetto* project.

## Chapter One: Reflections on the German Experience: Meyrink's Biography, Nationalist Reception, and Reflections in *Der Golem*

A non-Jewish, ethnic German novelist and satirist born in Vienna (but who identified himself as Bavarian), Gustav Meyrink was seen by many of his contemporaries as a mediator of cultural modernism in turn-of-the-twentieth-century Prague.<sup>69</sup> Not only was he admired in elite German-speaking circles as the “house author of *Simplicissimus*” (“Hausautor des *Simplicissimus*”<sup>70</sup>) and an esteemed writer of “master satire” (“Meistersatire”<sup>71</sup>), but, as German-language author Franz Werfel points out, Meyrink was also revered as an expert observer of Prague culture. In a letter published in the *Prager Tageblatt* on June 3, 1922, for example, Werfel describes how Meyrink used writing to capture the tense relationship between Prague's declining and decadent German-speaking minority and the city's demographic Czech-speaking majority at the turn of the twentieth century:

It seems to me that [Prague] has no reality for the non-Czech; it is a daydream for him that offers no experience, a paralyzing ghetto without the relationships of the ghetto, a hollow world that produces no activity or only ‘false activity.’ .... The Prague German who left at the time became an expatriate quickly and radically, and yet he loves his home city whose life appears to him like a distant illusion; he loves it with a curious love. For the healthy, hale and hearty race now master in the country, Prague means life, capital, culture, and culmination—the secret of the city is better understood by those who have no home. Just such a person—Gustav Meyrink—has touched its deepest nerve, its second face, fashioned the confused

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<sup>69</sup> I follow Matei Calinescu's definition of modernism as “a major cultural shift from a time-honored aesthetics of permanence, based on a belief in an unchanging and transcendent ideal of beauty, to an aesthetics of transitoriness and immanence, whose central values are change and novelty.” See Matei Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987), 3.

<sup>70</sup> From 1901 to 1908, then occasionally through 1916, Meyrink was a regular contributor to the satirical journal *Simplicissimus* (1896-1944). This journal, affectionately coined *Simpli* by its fans, was named after Grimmelhausen's famous Early Modern novel by the same name. Both the novel and the journal were associated with satire. The devil and the bulldog frequently featured on its cover were designed to represent the argumentative and dissenting nature of the magazine's content: “*Simplicissimus* was the pestering dog tugging at your pant leg and the devil sitting on your shoulder whispering in your ear.” For further information about Meyrink's contributions to *Simplicissimus*, see Boyd, 138-46.

<sup>71</sup> Hermann Sinsheimer, *Gelebt im Parodies. Erinnerungen und Begegnungen* (Munich: Richard Pflaum Verlag, 1953), 155. Sinsheimer, along with Albert Langen, was the editor of *Simplicissimus*.

dream of ancient nature.

Für den Nichttschechen, so scheint es mir, hat diese Stadt keine Wirklichkeit, sie ist ihm ein Tagtraum, der kein Erlebnis gibt, ein lähmendes Getto, ohne auch nur die armen Lebensbeziehungen des Getto zu haben, eine dumpfe Welt, aus der keine oder falsche Aktivität herkommt. .... Der deutsche Prager, der zur Zeit fortging, ist schnell und radikal expatriert, und doch liebt er seine Heimat, deren Leben ihm wie ein ferner Wahn vorkommt; er liebt sie mit einer mysteriösen Liebe. Für die gesunde, einfach-kräftige Rasse, die jetzt Herr im Land ist, bedeutet Prag Leben, Hauptstadt, Kultur, Kulmination, — das Geheimnis der Stadt versteht der Heimatlose daheim und in der Fremde besser. Denn ein Heimatloser gerade —Gustav Meyrink — hat an ihren tiefsten Nerv gerührt, ihr zweites Gesicht, den verworrenen Traum ihres uralten Wesens gebildet.<sup>72</sup>

This letter ponders the effect that Prague’s social dynamics had on German-language artists and writers who lived there at the time, drawing attention to the loss of “life, capital, culture, and culmination” for Prague’s German-speaking community under increasing Czech authority. Many of Prague’s German speakers during Meyrink’s day felt their community was being enclosed by Czech governmental leadership and political mobilization. For these German speakers, Prague had limited career options and hopes for the expansion of the German community under the demographically and politically dominant Czech population. As Werfel’s quotation shows, the result of this social circumscription created an experience for many German speakers that resembled “a crippling ghetto” (“ein lähmendes Getto“) with “no activity” (“keine Wirklichkeit”). Those who remained in Prague at the turn of the twentieth century expressed feeling isolated in their own community and disconnected from broader German cultural contexts outside of Prague. Unlike the city’s Jewish community, whose survival of multiple pogroms, persecution, and forced containment to Prague’s most impoverished city district strengthened the community, the city’s German-speaking middle class and nobility found themselves socially, economically, and politically castrated for the first time. Through fiction writing, German-language authors such as Meyrink described feeling claustrophobic in the

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<sup>72</sup> Franz Werfel, “Prag als Literaturstadt,” *Prager Tageblatt* 47, no 128 (June 3 1922): 6.



Czech-dominated city, as well as lacking “the relationships of the ghetto” that had provided pious Jews a sense of community despite ethnic marginalization. Werfel draws attention to Meyrink’s ability to identify these social changes and put them on paper in his fiction writing.

The following pages will show how the cultural themes and ethnic stereotypes presented in Meyrink’s best-selling novel *Der Golem* (1915) demonstrate Werfel’s claim that Meyrink was an expert observer of Prague culture, society, and politics. This crime novel and love story, I suggest, exemplifies how Meyrink “touches the deepest nerve” (“hat an ihren tiefsten Nerv gerührt”) of social hostilities during his lifetime that existed between Prague’s middle-class and elite German-speaking community, Czech-speaking working-class citizens, and Jews who, according to antisemitic stereotypes of the day, were degenerate. By writing a novel that participates in international debates about decadence, Czech-led anti-German movements in Bohemia, and antisemitism in Prague,<sup>73</sup> Meyrink provides his readers with an outsider’s perspective on the “lack of reality” (“keine Wirklichkeit”) for the non-Czech in late-Habsburg Prague. Because Meyrink spent nearly two decades during his adolescence and early adulthood in Prague before scandals forced his departure, he was aptly situated to comment on the impossibility of a homogenous community in the city that—because of heated nationality conflicts and antisemitism—prohibited the coexistence of those who identified themselves as Germans, Czechs, or Jews.<sup>74</sup>

Pernath, a middle-class German gem dealer whose body is inhabited by the unnamed

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<sup>73</sup> This chapter’s understanding of “nationalism” follows that of Gary Cohen and Roger Brusker, who use the term as an inherent link between identity and interest, or a way of seeing the world, a way of *identifying interests*. Cohen, *The Politics of Ethnic Survival*, 7.

<sup>74</sup> Meyrink experienced three scandals that disturbed his personal and professional life. In early 1901, a dispute arose between Meyrink and certain members of the officer corps including the Polizeirat Olič—a man who was interested in Meyrink’s fiancée. An exchange of insults resulted in Meyrink challenging a reservist (probably Hermann Bauer) to a duel. The reservist, however, refused the challenge because Meyrink, as an illegitimate child, was not *satisfaktionsfähig*. In 1902, Meyrink was charged with dubious business practices. His attempts to rescue the bank he had founded were to no avail and, after finding himself temporarily incarcerated on false charges, he had spent most of his acquired wealth through an inheritance from his illegitimate father on his legal battles. For more information on these scandals, see Boyd, 29-32.

sleeping narrator of the frame narrative, embarks on a quest to recover from amnesia. In the middle of the novel, he discovers that his unhappy love for a German noblewoman (Angelina) drove him mad and led medical professionals to hypnotize him, blocking all of his memories of her. As part of his treatment, these same medical professionals ordered his confinement to the impoverished, crime-ridden ghetto to prevent any memories of her from resurfacing. Only after reconnecting with Angelina and interacting with a strange man whom he later learns is the legendary Golem figure does Pernath begin to recover his forgotten past and begin his path toward spiritual recovery. His confusion about the meaning behind the Golem's mysterious visit to his apartment, which initiates his spiritual journey, accompanies his struggle to integrate memories of Angelina into his perilous day-to-day experiences in the ghetto.

In this chapter, I first contextualize the novel within nationalist discourse of Meyrink's milieu to show that Pernath's nostalgia for his own German past—particularly his relationship with Angelina—aestheticizes the experience of many Germans in Prague who were faced with limited opportunities in the new Czech-dominated city. While Eva Christina Schmidt and others have pointed out that the novel's many characters serve as “springboard[s] for the protagonist's moral and spiritual development,”<sup>75</sup> I maintain that Pernath's interactions with the German aristocrat Angelina also suggest the social changes Meyrink believed were necessary in Prague in order to generate new moral codes in the community and combat social degeneration. In the novel, Pernath's love-interest, Angelina, as well as the Habsburg Prince Ferri Athenstädt—both of whom live in Prague's castle (a historic site that had been occupied by German speakers since 1620)—embody the decadence of Prague's German nobility.

As we shall see, Meyrink himself suffered the negative consequences of nationalism and ethnic stereotyping. These experiences not only influenced his construction of negative ethnic

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<sup>75</sup> Eva Christina Schmidt, “The Breaking of the Vessels: Identity and the Traditions of Jewish Mysticism in Gustav Meyrink's *Der Golem*,” (Master's thesis, West Virginia University, 2004), 9. See also Qasim, Lube, and Boyd.

stereotypes in *Der Golem* but also affected the reception of his novel during the war-years. Negative reception of this novel often varied based on the nationalist leanings of its reader. Czech-speaking critics, for example, argued that Meyrink's (and other German author's) writings portrayed the Czech community in a negative light. German nationalists, on the other hand, objected to the anti-Monarchist tendencies of his writing, as well as his decadent writing style and frequent depiction of characters who, as some critics claimed, revel in decadent behaviors. Meyrink does, indeed, focus on decadence in his treatment of the prince and other German nobles, which we will see later in this chapter. *Der Golem* proposes radical themes and social solutions; not only does it anticipate a loosening of German authority in Prague, but it also asserts the need for radical social reform. This reform, the novel suggests, was only possible through a dramatic transformation of its ethnic communities, namely the removal from the city of degenerate German Jews as well as the decadent non-Jewish German-speaking middle class and nobility, who hindered the salutary development of Czech nationalist local politics.

The following pages provide an overview of the historical social landscape in Prague that Meyrink reflects in the *Der Golem*. First, I return to the ways in which language debates factored in the tense (often violent) social situation in which Meyrink and his German-speaking and German Jewish contemporaries often found themselves at the turn of the twentieth century. Of particular interest are accounts by middle-class, Prague-based German-language authors and cultural commentators whose works are still read today.<sup>76</sup> I follow this account with an examination of the reception of *Der Golem* and how nationalist debates affected Meyrink's biography. As we shall see, contemporary discussions of the author's own national and ethnic identity found their way into his construction of his non-Jewish German-speaking protagonist in *Der Golem* (Athanasius Pernath), his literary account of the Czech take-over of Prague (made

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<sup>76</sup> Because of the unique historic position of Jews in Prague society, a detailed discussion of this social group (as embodied by the novel's characters Aaron Wassertrum and his offspring) will be the focus of Chapter Three.

visible through his representation of the *Finis Ghetto*), and his later characterizations of his protagonists as outsiders, outcasts, and lonely dandies. Next, I examine *Der Golem* as a contribution to what Egon Erwin Kisch labeled the “true Prague novel,” or German-language texts that set fiction writing focused in ethnic, linguistic, and class difference in Prague’s tense political scene.<sup>77</sup> By comparing depictions of impossible coexistence between Prague’s ethnic and linguistic communities in *Der Golem* to works with similar themes by Max Brod, Egon Erwin Kisch, and Rainer Maria Rilke, we see the pessimism commonly expressed by the *Prager Deutsch* of Meyrink’s day.

### **The German Experience: Historic Problems of Language, Ethnicity, and Identity**

A few short words about many German speakers’ experiences within the changing social landscape situate my reading of *Der Golem* as contributing to the “true Prague novel.” Gary Cohen’s groundbreaking study, *The Politics of Ethnic Survival: Germans in Prague, 1861-1914*, has shown that the Prague’s German-speaking community at the turn of the twentieth century primarily consisted of middle-class to wealthy German speakers. For this reason, my use of the term “Germans” throughout this chapter (and the dissertation) refers to non-Jewish, middle-class German speakers and the Catholic German-speaking nobility in Prague.

Spector claims that many Prague citizens who identified themselves as “German” felt themselves to be living on a shrinking “linguistic island” within a sea of Slavic speakers. The German “island,” according to Spector, “belonged no longer to the past, and could find no place for [themselves] in the future.” In *Der Golem*, we also see that the characters cannot find their footing and do not experience the social, professional, or economic “alternatives available to [their] neighbors.”<sup>78</sup> This metaphorical island reflects historical developments described by

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<sup>77</sup> Spector, *Prague Territories*, 176.

<sup>78</sup> Spector, *Prague Territories*, 20.

Spector. Using spatial metaphors, Spector refers to the social processes whereby the Habsburg Empire's German-speaking urban elite diminished under rising Czech, Polish, Magyar, Croat, and Slovene nationalist movements. In Prague, Germans went to great lengths to develop their own national consciousness in hopes of defending themselves against the Czech challenge. The Christian and Jewish German-speaking middle and upper strata, for instance, transformed themselves from Bohemians to Germans by forming societies, schools, and theaters "with German as [their] sole official language."<sup>79</sup> Despite the formation of social groups, societies, and organizations such as German Merchant's Club (*Deutscher Kaufmännischer Verein*, 1867), the Constitutional Society of Germans in Bohemia (*Verfassungsverein der Deutschen in Böhmen*, 1869), and the German *Turnverein*—each of which were created to build or reinforce solidarity in the German community, the German nationalist movement could not compete with its Czech counterpart.<sup>80</sup> Spector has shown that "an integral image of a continuous landscape, peopled with a national family, and sharing a common history—the intersection of *Volk*, language, and territory... was not accessible" to younger generations of German speakers such as Meyrink, Kisch, Brod, and prominent cultural elites.<sup>81</sup> As a result, Prague's German-speaking and German Jewish writers "floated" between the banks of eroding German hegemony and rising Czech power. Publishing short stories, reports, and novels became a political act, a means of "grasp[ing] at the air" in a social climate that was becoming increasingly hostile and suffocating

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<sup>79</sup> Cohen, *The Politics of Ethnic Survival*, 49; 23.

<sup>80</sup> Responding to growing Czech influence in local elections, town hall meetings, and community organizations and societies, Germans began to form separate clubs and societies. Whereas lower-middle-class German speakers began to align themselves with the growing Czech movement, wealthy German-speaking citizens joined social groups, societies, and organizations for Prague's "elites." The German Merchant's Club (*Deutsche Kaufmännischer Verein*), for example, included a group of German liberal elites and assembled in response to Czech success in municipal elections. Through the 1860s, local retailers worked together based on business concerns to conduct commercial dealings regardless of ethnic loyalties among customers, employees, and competitors. By 1876, as Czech representative began to gain popularity in local elections, German commercial employees "led by a local officer of the *Kreditanstalt* withdrew in protest." Cohen, *The Politics of Ethnic Survival*, 49-50; 105.

<sup>81</sup> Spector's use of a metaphorical island developed from his reading of Egon Erwin Kisch's poem "Futile Remedy," and the poet's description of being encapsulated by natural forces dictating human interaction: "The Moldau's water flows / Slipping in a circle surrounding Prague / Just like a dampened and dripping / Cool headache compress or rag / To soothe the Prague creature's mania or this symptom of their disease." Spector, *Prague Territories*, 9.

for those who affiliated with German language, culture, and politics.<sup>82</sup>

The hostile social climate developed alongside a breakdown of the German-speaking community's control over Prague's legislative, business, and social sectors. Despite the growing popularity of German-nationalist clubs and organizations, many Germans failed to recognize the political weight that economic factors would play in local elections. An excerpt from a period press features common opinions of the day:

The arrogance with which some Prague Germans look down on the artisan class is pushing it into the Czech circle and so today, as well informed individuals emphasize, there is not a single German tailor here... The Prague Germans lack the broad and firm base of an artisan middle class. They must therefore rely on the German towns and village districts or they will be lost.<sup>83</sup>

Seeing themselves as the reigning cultural authority, "Prague Germans" did not anticipate the creativity and effectiveness of Czech responses to rapid industrialization, agrarian depressions, and the mechanization of manufacturers in the Bohemian capital. Because they failed to adapt to new economic trends, Prague's German-speaking middle and upper classes experienced a marked slowdown in economic development, as demonstrated by their stubborn attachment to a shrinking textile industry. This loss of dynamism in economic sectors brought immediate results in the social sphere. Whereas Czech speakers, who had developed "a complete social structure through economic and cultural progress," fully embraced any methods that could garner support for national agendas, the slowing economy in German sectors influenced the political choices of Bohemian German speakers and their political leaders. Continuing advances of Czech society in the close of the nineteenth century resulted in Czech councilors increasingly being elected to the Prague city council, those posing a threat to German cultural, political, and economic dominance in the city. In response, the German "linguistic island" began to shrink exponentially, as more

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<sup>82</sup> Spector, *Prague Territories*, 2.

<sup>83</sup> Qtd. in *Politik* (30 October 1883). Qtd in Gary Cohen, *Němci v Praze 1861-1914* (Prague: Karolinum, 2004), 116-8. Translation taken from Houžvicka, 19.

and more German voters began emigrating from Prague in search of jobs and a more-welcoming community in German-speaking cosmopolitan centers such as Vienna and Berlin.

By the late 1870s, hopes for a shared German, German-Jewish, and Czech cultural existence free of class conflict and battles over ethnicity entrenched in linguistic debates became impossible.<sup>84</sup> Jews in particular became the target of national conflicts. In the struggle to oppose centuries of so-called God-given authority, a new wave of proletarian revolution, nationalist rebellion, and right-wing Czech radicalism functioned as both allies and antagonists to Jewish struggles. Poorer Jews, who often felt ignored by the German middle-class because of their economic status or lack of social status, began to align themselves with Czech culture insofar as they could identify with the economic plights of poorer Czech shopkeepers, peddlers, and the working class in general. Because of over a century of affiliation with German culture, however, radical Czech nationalists were often wary of these Jews. The antisemitic Young Czech party, which gained control of the *Reichrat* seats in March 1897, won municipal elections with a general platform calling for the strengthening of the Czech nation “in its struggle against Germans and for lower-middle-class relief from economic hardship.”<sup>85</sup> Additionally, media outlets such as the Young Czech daily newspaper, *The National Pages*, argued that the Social Democratic Party was a tool of the Jews, who were trying to subjugate the Czech nation. The economic plights of the working class, individuals such as Vaclav Březnovský and the antisemitic newspaper *The New Pages* claimed, were the direct result of Jews’ infiltration of Prague’s work force.<sup>86</sup> These antisemitic factions claimed that the Czech middle class “was being pulled into ever-deepening economic misery by Jews, who were profit-seeking capitalists

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<sup>84</sup> Cohen, *The Politics of Ethnic Survival*, 34.

<sup>85</sup> Guistino, 239. Qtd. from in “Klerikální antisemitismus,” NVL 5 (18 August 1900, nr. 21), 1-2.

<sup>86</sup> Guistino, 234.

by nature and inherently incapable of being assimilated into the Czech nation.”<sup>87</sup> The representative’s successful candidacy (he won again in 1900) marks the continued strength of antipathy towards Jews among working-class Czechs in Prague. In a celebration of Březnovský’s first election to the *Reichsrat*, for instance, Edvard Grégr announced that “following the events of the last few days, from today onward all of Prague is anti-Semitic.”<sup>88</sup>

As outlined in the introduction, hostilities from national debates coalesced into race-based violence in Prague’s streets in 1897 and 1898. Prime Minister Kasimir Felix Count von Badeni’s declaration of Czech as the official language of the Habsburg Empire’s Czech-speaking territories brought plundering and destruction of German and German-Jewish homes and businesses throughout Prague.<sup>89</sup> In 1898, Mark Twain, then a journalist in Vienna, noted the precarious position of the city’s Jews: “[I]n... Bohemian towns there was rioting—in some cases the Germans being the rioters, in others the Czechs—and in all cases the Jew had to roast, no matter which side he was on.”<sup>90</sup> These political movements had a direct effect on the city’s non-Jewish German-speaking and German-speaking Jewish populations. Census records show that the number of Prague’s citizens who spoke German, for example, decreased by nearly 6,000 residents between 1880 and 1910.<sup>91</sup> In 1900, about twenty-five-thousand Jewish residents (about seven percent of the city’s total population) also became a target of continued antisemitic attacks on homes and businesses. *Der Golem* is a testimony to the German experience within Czech-

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<sup>87</sup> Guistino, 239. After winning the seat in the Reichsrat in 1897, Březnovský told his listeners that he was “the cleanest of all representatives, because not a single Jew had voted for him.” Qtd in Guistino, 236.

<sup>88</sup> Qtd. in Guistino, 235-236. Similar comments are found in Kieval, *The Making of Czech Jewry*, 68.

<sup>89</sup> These attacks included the New German Theater, Jewish shops, and synagogues. Although Mayor Podlipný denounced antisemitic hostility immediately following riots in December 1897, claiming, “To me a nice honest Jew is better than a bad Christian,” many Czechs conflated Jews with German speakers, considering them “foreigners” in a nation within an oppressive enemy nation. Those who continued to support Jewish efforts to assimilate became targets of the Young Czech nationalists, who claimed that Jewish sympathizers were tools of Jewish capital and guarantors of Czech servitude to “foreigners.” Guistino, 237; 239. Qtd. from “Starosta měst pražský p Dr. Podlipný o posledních násilnostech proti židů,” *ČŽL* 3 (15 December 1897, nr. 31): 6.

<sup>90</sup> Cf. Mark Twain, “Stirring Times in Austria,” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* 96 (March 1898): 530-40 doi:<https://ecommons.cornell.edu/handle/1813/2170>.

<sup>91</sup> Cohen, *The Politics of Ethnic Survival*, 65.



dominated culture and the previously dominant society's loosening of control over municipal politics. Meyrink's novel alludes to many Germans' feelings of isolation in turn-of-the-century Prague as a result of being politically crippled by the Czech nationalist movement, as well as linguistically isolated within the sea of Czech speakers who eschewed the German language.

Prague's German-speaking and German-Jewish citizens felt that the city's geographic distance from the Habsburg seat in Vienna posed difficulties to communication with other German speakers. In an Empire in which language use was a marker of one's ethnic identity, centuries of German and Czech coexistence in Prague caused many German speakers living there to speak a dialect called "Prague German," or *Prager Deutsch*—a linguistic fusion of Czech and German that German speakers outside of Prague often found difficult to understand or even incomprehensible. Thus, the *Prager Deutsche* (Prague Germans) not only felt marginalized under the growing Czech political and cultural majority, but the linguistic idiosyncrasies of their spoken dialect also led to feelings of separation from the larger German Fatherland ("Deutschen Vaterland").

In a city in which language created and defined ethnic identity, German-language writers such as Kisch, Fritz Mauer, and Oskar Wiener gave voice to Prague-based, middle class German speakers who felt that identifying themselves as "Germans" impeded their social and political mobility.<sup>92</sup> Discussions of the audible influence of the Czech language on the German spoken language in Prague by these authors illustrate the challenges faced by Prague's German speakers. In a news report assembled in the volume *Adventures in Prague (Abenteuer in Prag, 1920)*, for example, Kisch alludes to Ernst Moritz Arndt's patriotic song "What is the German Fatherland"/"Was ist des Deutschen Vaterland" (1813), connecting questions of national identity formed through language use in German-speaking Prague to larger questions about the

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<sup>92</sup> Spector, *Prague Territories*, 4.

unification of all German-speaking territories in Europe. In the report, Kisch comments on the particularities of the “Prague German” dialect, claiming that “Prague Germans took on sentence formations and terminology from their Czech neighbors, and thus they created localisms that are not understood everywhere where German is spoken” (“Formen der Satzbildung und Begriffsbezeichnungen habe die Prager Deutschen von ihren tschechischen Anrainern übernommen, und die so entstanden hier Lokalismen, die nicht überall verstanden werden, wo die deutsche Zunge klingt”).<sup>93</sup> Here, Kisch quotes a passage in Arndt’s patriotic song, which demanded a Greater German nation state comprising all German-speaking areas in Europe:

What is the German’s fatherland?  
 So name the great land to me, finally!  
 As far as the German tongue sounds  
 And God sings songs in heaven:  
 That shall it be, shall it be!  
 That, brave German, call that yours!

Was ist des Deutschen Vaterland?  
 So nenne endlich mir das Land!  
 So weit die deutsche Zunge klingt  
 Und Gott im Himmel Lieder singt:  
 Das soll es sein! Das soll es sein!  
 Das, wackrer Deutscher, nenne dein!<sup>94</sup>

Evoking Arndt’s song—particularly concerning the sound of the “German tongue” (“die deutsche Zunge klingt”), Kisch draws attention to the complex role that language played in debates about national identity in Prague. Although questions concerning the unification of German-speaking lands were resolved with the 1871 “Lesser German Solution”/*Kleindeutsche Lösung*,<sup>95</sup> Kisch’s evocation of “Was ist des Deutschen Vaterland” shows the difficulty many

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<sup>93</sup> Egon Erwin Kisch, “Vom Kleinseitner Deutsch und vom Prager Schmock,” *Jüdisches Städtebild Prag*, ed. Ingeborg Fiala-Fürst, 205. Qtd. from Egon Erwin Kisch, “Vom Kleinseitner Deutsch und vom Prager Schmock,” *Die Abenteuer in Prag* (Vienna, Prague, Leipzig, 1920): 276 ff, reprinted in *Gesammelte Werke Band II/1* (Berlin – Weimar: 1968), 469-477.

<sup>94</sup> Lisa Feurzeig, ed., *Deutsche Lieder für Jung und Alt* (Middleton, WI: A-R Editions, 2002), 69-70.

<sup>95</sup> “The German Question” referred to debates following the 1848 revolutions concerning the best way to unify predominantly German-speaking territories in Europe. Between 1815 to 1866, the German Confederation included roughly 37 independent German-speaking states. According to the “Greater German Solution” (*Großdeutsche Lösung*), which was promoted by the Habsburg Monarchy as well as many supporters of its Empire, all German-

Prague-based German speakers faced in situating themselves in the Prague community as well as the Empire: if language was a major determinant of one's Czechness or Germanness, how could citizens whose spoken language incorporated both languages define themselves in their local community, as well as in Europe?

For other German-language authors in Prague, the sense of disconnect these *Prager Deutsche* felt from the German community in the Empire and throughout Europe was less a question of spoken dialect and more a problem of geographic and cultural separation from predominately German cosmopolitan centers. Whereas Kisch pointed out challenges surrounding national affiliation caused by linguistic influence, author Fritz Mauer believed the geographic distance between German-speaking Prague and more densely populated German-dominated city centers was to blame. Recounting Mauer's autobiographical writings in his own writing on "German authors from Prague" ("Deutsche Dichter aus Prag"), Weiner quotes Mauer: "Without a dialect, one does not have a proper native language ... in Prague there is no German dialect; here we speak only the German written in books" ("Ohne Mundart sei man nicht im Besitze einer eigentümlichen Muttersprache... in Prag gibt es keine deutsche Mundart, hier spricht man nur ein papierenes Buchdeutsch").<sup>96</sup> As Mauer's comment illustrates, in the absence of a large German-speaking community in Prague, the city's German-language writers relied on written German to feel connected to the broader German community throughout the Empire and elsewhere. Because of his seclusion in a Czech-dominated city, Mauer claims that his upbringing in Prague was filled with the "painful memories of a German writer" ("schmerzliche[n] Erinnerungen eines deutschen Dichters") who felt cut off from a native linguistic context.

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speaking peoples should be unified under one state. The "Lesser German solution" (*Kleindeutsche Lösung*), on the other hand, opted to unify only the northern German states, excluding modern-day Austria and many of the territories that were under the auspices of the Habsburg control. The Kingdom of Prussia favored the latter proposal. For further information on these proposals, see Robert D. Billinger, *Metternich and the German Question: States' Rights and Federal Duties, 1820-1834* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1991).

<sup>96</sup> Oskar Wiener, "Deutsche Dichter aus Prag," qtd. in Fiala-Fürst, *Jüdisches Städtebild Prag*, 95.

Regardless of the sources of this isolation, many authors agreed that Prague at the turn of the twentieth century had become so hostile that those who identified themselves with German culture felt compelled to leave the city. Author Hermann Bahr (1863-1934), for example, claims that dangers for Germans and German Jews lingered “on every street corner” (“an jeder Ecke zu sehen”): “[Prague] makes no compromise; the city forces its monstrous being onto each person with threatening authority so his only choices are to retreat inward from it and to wall himself up in his inherited nature, or to blow his stack” (“[Prag] läßt kein Kompromiß zu, sie drängt ihr ungeheures Wesen jedem mit bedrohender Gewalt auf und so hat er nur die Wahl, entweder vor ihr ganz in sein Inneres zu flüchten und sich in seiner ererbten Eigenart einzumauern oder aber aus der Haut zu fahren”).<sup>97</sup> These threats were compounded for German-language authors with Jewish parents. Barr goes on to say that because one’s fate in Prague was deeply rooted in ethnicity and language, members of marginalized groups were faced with limited options: to join the exodus of Germans and German Jews emigrating from Prague to Berlin or Vienna, or to succumb to one’s frustrations under growing ethnicity-based restrictions in Prague’s political and cultural scene.<sup>98</sup>

German-Jewish author Franz Kafka (1883-1924) best articulates common feelings of suffocation, isolation, and loss experienced by many Prague-based German-language authors at the *Jahrhundertwende*. Kafka’s fiction illuminates a lack of communication and community between Prague’s multiethnic, multi-religious, and multilingual citizenry in the first decades of the twentieth century. The blind creature of his short story “The Burrow”/“Der Bau” (1928), for

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<sup>97</sup> Hermann Bahr, “Ewige Stadt,” qtd. in Fiala-Fürst, *Jüdisches Städtebild Prag*, 33.

<sup>98</sup> These ethnic divisions intensified during the war years and culminated into Germans feeling unwelcome in the new Czech state after the conclusion of the Great War. After 1918 and the creation of Czechoslovakia, many Germans such as Franz Werfel and Rainer Maria Rilke no longer identified themselves with the new country: “They must have considered many things in the new country as hostile, the anti-German sentiments, sometimes even anti-Semitism... the old world no longer existed, and they had to adapt to the new situation.” Jan Richter quoting an interview with Dr. Veronika Tuckerová in Jan Richter, “Egon Erwin Kisch – The Raging Reporter,” *Czech History*, Radio Praha, Prague, Czech Republic: April 28, 2010, doi: <http://www.radio.cz/en/section/czechs/egon-erwin-kisch-the-raging-reporter>.

example, expresses animosity toward a “dangerous” (“gefährlich[e]”) world around him that is dominated by irrational forces.<sup>99</sup> The creature in the burrow feels pressured by the risks of life (“das Risiko des Lebens”) and fears “an uncertain fate” (“ein ungewisses Schicksal”) in a place defined by hostility.<sup>100</sup> Peaceful coexistence and meaningful communication are impossible: “when we see each other—more, at the moment when we merely suspect each other’s presence... we shall both blindly bare our claws and teeth” (“wenn wir einander sehen, ja wenn wir einander nur in der Nähe ahnen... [werden wir] Krallen und Zähne gegeneinander auftun”).<sup>101</sup> Resembling his contemporaries’ characterizations of their experiences in a Czech-dominated Prague, this creature’s life is defined by anxiety, pessimism, and physical threat.

Kafka’s short stories depict a similar cultural mood as well as social situations to what we see in *Der Golem*, illustrating the sort of problems that Meyrink and his contemporaries frequently took up at the time. Kafka’s fiction frequently emphasizes the futility of resistance against the inevitable disappearance of cultural traditions and practices along with the people who kept them alive. In “The Hunger Artist”/“Ein Hungerkünstler” (1922), an artist whose profession of fasting in a cage was once celebrated experiences a severe decrease in public interest (“[Interesse] ist... sehr zurückgegangen”) and diminishing of “visible glory” (“scheinbarem Glanz”) surrounding his craft.<sup>102</sup> No longer respected by his community, the hunger artist dies alone, nearly forgotten in his cage and eventually replaced by a lively young panther. His story features parallel themes found in Meyrink’s writing about the downfall of the German aristocracy in Prague. Kafka’s foregrounding of lost traditions also occurs in his depiction of a mouse village in “Josephine, the Singer or the Mouse Folk”/“Josefine, die

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<sup>99</sup> Franz Kafka, “Der Bau,” *Gesammelte Werke* (Cologne: Anaconda Verlag GmbH, 2012), 430. The unfinished short story “Der Bau” was published posthumously by Kafka’s friend Max Brod, appearing in the journal *Witiko*.

<sup>100</sup> Kafka, “Der Bau,” 427; 449.

<sup>101</sup> Kafka, “Der Bau,” 457.

<sup>102</sup> Kafka, “Ein Hungerkünstler,” 190, 194.

Sängerin oder das Volk der Mäuse” (1924). The singing of a young mouse named Josefina helps other mice endure their “terrible political or economic situation” (“schlimmer politischer oder wirtschaftlicher Lage”<sup>103</sup>) and “restless” (“unruhig[e]”) lives in which “every day brings surprises, fears, hopes, and horrors that the individual could not possibly endure” (“jeder Tag bringt Überraschungen, Beängstigungen, Hoffnungen und Schrecken, daß der Einzelne unmöglich dies alles ertragen könnte”).<sup>104</sup> After her final strained yet powerful performance, Josefina disappears without a trace, marking the end of cultural memory and traditions in the mouse community: “soon, because we do not make history, we must be forgotten... like all of her brothers” (“bald, da wir keine Geschichte treiben... vergessen sein wie alle ihre Brüder”).<sup>105</sup>

The tragic fates of the hunger artist and Josefina parallel Meyrink’s representation of the breakdown of status and prestige of German speakers in Prague, and are analogous to the impossibility of German and German Jewish self-expression and community in the new Czech state. Both tales allude to powerlessness, self-injury, and despair that accompanies the loss of communal traditions through a lack of appreciation for and protection of artistic and cultural difference. The situations in which these characters find themselves emphasize disenfranchisement, the disintegration of privilege, and loss of communal memory. Meyrink, a man who found himself in the crosshairs of cultural debates rooted in ethnicity and language use, takes up similar themes of loss in *Der Golem*. Sensing the peril for Prague’s German-speaking community, he placed the tense political situation at the center of his novel. While reading *Der Golem*, the reader shares in the German narrator’s isolation, insecurities, and uncertainties about his future in the capital city, his fears of the loss of the German language and culture in the face of Czech speakers’ new-found cultural, political, and economic authority. These fears, as we

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<sup>103</sup> Kafka, “Josefine, die Sängerin oder das Volk der Mäuse,” 205.

<sup>104</sup> Kafka, “Josefine, die Sängerin oder das Volk der Mäuse,” 202.

<sup>105</sup> Kafka, “Josefine, die Sängerin oder das Volk der Mäuse,” 214.

shall see, were largely inspired by Meyrink's own experiences in Prague and being targeted by antisemitic communities elsewhere in Europe.

### **The Outsider, Dandy, and Celebrity**

The popularity of *Der Golem* sparked public controversies in nationalist circles. As the following sections will demonstrate, Meyrink's novel reflects the author's experience with social ostracism in the wake of public scandals, debates, and personal attacks. Indeed, Meyrink's experience as an outsider in Prague played a role in his creation of a German protagonist who often finds himself isolated in the Jewish ghetto, unable to connect with his contemporaries and unable to communicate in a Czech-speaking environment. Elements of his biography, at least according to his own exaggerated descriptions, could themselves be the subject of Gothic novels; indeed, he often used his life experiences as inspiration for his writing.

Meyrink was born in Vienna in 1868 as the illegitimate son of Baron Friedrich Karl Gottlieb Varnbüler von und zu Hemmingen and the actress Maria Meyer.<sup>106</sup> Recent biographers are unanimous in their opinion that Meyrink's childhood was unhappy (Mitchell, Harmsen, Lube, Smit, Boyd). As the son of a working mother whose engagements at different theaters caused him to change schools frequently, the young Meyrink followed his mother's acting career from Vienna to Munich, where they lived from 1875-1880 before moving to Hamburg in 1881.<sup>107</sup> In 1883 and at age fifteen, Meyrink and his mother moved to Prague, where he resided until 1902. Once there, he attended *Gymnasium*, earned the *Abitur*, and then attended a *Handelsakademie* where he completed a business internship and mastered the English

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<sup>106</sup> Uncertainty about the identity of Meyrink's parents led some critics to claim that he was the son of King Ludwig II. Baer, 46.

<sup>107</sup> For a summary of scholars who have commented on Meyrink's solitary childhood, see Mitchell, 16-7.

language.<sup>108</sup> Little else is known about these years, except that the young boy—then known as Gustav Meyer—was considered one of the brightest students in his class.<sup>109</sup>

After concluding his studies, he opened the Meyer and Morgenstern Bank, where he served as director until a scandal ended his career and led him to writing full-time.<sup>110</sup> Though he was a respected banker, athlete, writer, and translator, he was keenly aware of his precarious position in Prague society due to his illegitimacy.<sup>111</sup> In the years directly preceding his departure for Prague, bitter disagreements with his soon-to-be brother-in-law embroiled Meyrink in a series of duels with officers of a Prague regiment, who, Meyrink claimed, insulted him and whom he challenged to a duel to defend his honor. Knowing that Meyrink was a medaled fencer, the officers used his illegitimacy to avoid the challenge, claiming publicly that the duel would not be honorable because of the circumstances surrounding Meyrink's birth.

Meyrink's close friend and fellow German-language author, Paul Leppin, noted the author's propensity for keeping his personal life private and living in self-isolation, which is made visible in the somewhat peculiar location of Meyrink's Prague apartment: a room in a tower at the edge of the Vltava/Moldau River.<sup>112</sup> As an adult, Meyrink was adamant about shaping public perceptions of himself—so much so that he demanded that his first and second wives burn any letters, documents, or mail addressed to him after he had read them, presumably so that no written record of his personal life would exist.

During his years as a bank director, Meyrink crafted his public persona, making himself

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<sup>108</sup> These skills became crucial when translating Dickens oeuvre after his banking career had ended. William R. von Buskirk, "The Bases of Satire in Gustav Meyrink's Work," (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1957), 13.

<sup>109</sup> Boyd, 21; Qasim, 42; Baer, 43.

<sup>110</sup> The bank was officially named "Das erste christliche Bankhaus" in Prague. Because the name was not well-received by the public, the enterprise became known as Meyer and Morgenstern. See Buskirk, 13; Boyd, 22-24. See also Frans Smit, *Gustav Meyrink. Auf der Suche nach dem Übersinnlichen* (Munich: Langen Mueller Verlag, 1988), 21. It is possible that his illegitimate father provided funding for the enterprise. Qasim, 42.

<sup>111</sup> Baer, 43-4.

<sup>112</sup> Meyrink later recreated this apartment in his essay "Das Haus mit dem letzten Latern" after moving to Sternberg. Boyd, 29.



into a local celebrity with an extravagant reputation as a *bon vivant*.<sup>113</sup> He caused a stir in Prague with his eccentric personality, flamboyant clothing, and defiance of cultural norms. Friends and close acquaintances noted his frequent participation in fencing matches until two or three in the morning as well as his attendance of countless exclusive parties. As a medaled fencer, accomplished rower, avid chess-player, and self-proclaimed “Desert Dog” (“Wüstenhund”) who expressed no interest in following contemporary trends, Meyrink embraced individualism. He became well-known for his unconventional behavior, such as his studies of the occult and experimentation with hashish.<sup>114</sup> Karl Wolfskehl, for example, described Meyrink as having “a completely modern appearance” as “a yogi soigné” (“eine völlig neuzeitliche Erscheinung, ein soignierter Yogi”).<sup>115</sup> Roda Roda, a close friend of Meyrink, not only noted the author’s affinity for exotic pets (especially two African mice and overbred dogs, or “überzüchtete Hunde”),<sup>116</sup> but also described the man’s tendency to buy “flashy ties, fancy suits, the most hypermodern footwear available in Prague in the 1890s” (“grelle Krawatten, ausgefallene Anzüge, das hypermodernste Schuhwerk, das im Prag der neunziger Jahre erhältlich war”).<sup>117</sup> Furthermore, Paul Leppin claimed that Meyrink’s apartment overlooking the Vltava/Moldau river contained items that had no place in the private apartment of a respectable banker (“was in eine Privatwohnung eines Bankiers nicht hineingehört”). Items Leppin mentioned include a painting of a ghost moving through a wall, a portrait of H.P. Blavatsky, and a confessional.<sup>118</sup>

Meyrink’s celebrity status made him the subject of controversy and public scrutiny in nationalist debates. His nomadic upbringing made it difficult for his contemporaries to identify

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<sup>113</sup> Qasim, 42. For conflicting accounts regarding the funding for the bank, see Lube, Buskirk, and Smit.

<sup>114</sup> Boyd, 19; Smit, 29.

<sup>115</sup> Karl Wolfskehl, “Meyrink aus meiner Erinnerung,” *Münchener neueste Nachrichten* (28 December 1932): 1.

<sup>116</sup> Boyd, 28-9.

<sup>117</sup> Roda Roda qtd. in Smit 22. The original article is supposed to be located in an “Unterhaltungsbeilage” of the *Vossische Zeitung* from 1933, but Amanda Boyd has pointed out that without an exact date, it remains all but impossible to find this source.

<sup>118</sup> Paul Leppin, “Der Okkultist Meyrink: Eine Unterredung mit Paul Leppin,” *Deutsche Zeitung Bohemia* 6 (December 1932): 3. Qtd. in Boyd, 40.

his allegiances to a national community, fueling their hostile nationalist readings of his works. Newspaper and journal articles by Meyrink's contemporaries discussing the author's German or Austrianness reveal how extreme tensions and hostilities surrounding national and ethnic affiliation could be used to leverage or destroy one's literary career.<sup>119</sup> Josef Hofmiller's 1908 newspaper article "Is Gustav Meyrink an Austrian?" ("Ist Gustav Meyrink Oesterreicher?") asks whether Meyrink considered himself German or Austrian. Wolfskehl, who knew Meyrink personally, describes the author as "truly an Austrian" ("echt Oesterreicher"<sup>120</sup>), whereas a 1928 publication written by Meyrink's close friend Friedrich Alfred Schmid-Noerr states that the author was a native German. *Simplicissimus* editor Hermann Sinsheimer reiterated Schmid-Noerr's claim in *Gelebt im Paradies. Erinnerungen und Begegnungen* (1953).<sup>121</sup> Meyrink himself insisted that he was Bavarian, thus not a subject of the Habsburg Empire. Indeed, Viennese records from December 22, 1904, confirm that Meyrink was a German citizen of Bavaria. Meyrink was so adamant that publications refer to him as German that Hans von Weber published a retraction at Meyrink's request after erroneously referring to him as an Austrian.<sup>122</sup> These debates suggest Meyrink's desire to distance himself from the monarchy and maintain his status as a critical "outside" observer of Habsburg proceeding and politics. Nevertheless, questions about Meyrink's family, ethnicity, and political allegiances followed him and, as we will see, negatively affected the reception of his work and career as a writer later in life.

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<sup>119</sup> In Josef Hofmiller's 1908 article "Ist Gustav Meyrink Oesterreicher?," which explores controversies over which country could claim the best-selling author as its own, we see that Hoffmiller's inability to answer his own question posed in the title draws attention to the slipperiness of identity at the turn of the century in German-speaking territories. Josef Hofmiller, "Oesterreicher I," *Süddeutsche Monatshefte* 5.2. (1908): 345.

<sup>120</sup> Wolfskehl, 1.

<sup>121</sup> Friedrich Alfred Schmid-Noerr, "Im 'Haus zur letzten Latern': Zu Gustav Meyrinks sechzigsten Geburtstag 19. Januar," *Münchner Neueste Nachrichten* (17 January 1928): 2. Hermann Sinsheimer, *Gelebt im Paradies. Erinnerungen und Begegnungen* (München: Richard Pflaum Verlag, 1953), 156.

<sup>122</sup> Weber's retraction appeared immediately after the publication of Sinsheimer's article "Gustav Meyrinks Weltanschauung: Einleitende Worte zur Feier von Meyrinks 50. Geburtstag im Münchner Schauspielhause." See Boyd, 19-20.

## Nationalist Reception of *Der Golem*

Notable literary critics and authors such as Hermann Hesse, Thomas Mann, and Max Brod saw Meyrink as an exceptional writer whose satirical, essayistic, and novelist writings were worthy of critical reflection, commentary, and debate. His writings were so popular among intellectuals, in fact, that they were among the most widely anticipated feature articles in *Simplicissimus*, as demonstrated by comments by Meyrink's editor, Wolfskehl: "Each new 'Meyrink' was a highly anticipated event and was immediately on everyone's lips" ("Jeder neue 'Meyrink' war ein sehr erwartetes Ereignis und sofort in aller Munde").<sup>123</sup> Meyrink's ability to pinpoint contemporary cultural issues, capture them in writing, and provide biting critical observations contributed to the popularity of his works among a broad spectrum of readers. As Abret recounts in reference to Meyrink's writing in *Simplicissimus*, "At long last Langen [the journal's editor] had discovered a writer whose stories ironically illuminated the world of the bourgeoisie and its representatives, as the drawings of the *Simplicissimus* artists had done for quite some time" ("Endlich hatte Langen einen Schriftsteller entdeckt, dessen Erzählungen die Bourgeoiswelt und ihre Vertreter ebenso ironisch durchleuchteten, wie es die Zeichnungen der *Simplicissimus*-Künstler schon seit geraumer Zeit taten").<sup>124</sup> In writing *Der Golem*, Meyrink continued to target cultural fables in Prague and the Habsburg Empire that residents themselves were unable to see through. It is perhaps his precision at capturing the mood of his contemporary readers that has made it difficult for readers today to identify the many context-dependent themes he explores in the novel.

Comments by prominent authors and critics of Meyrink's day concerning his writing testify to the popularity of his works. Friends and critics alike often praised Meyrink's handling

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<sup>123</sup> Karl Wolfskehl, *Briefe und Aufsätze. München 1925-1933* (Hamburg: Claassen Verlag, 1966), 201.

<sup>124</sup> Abret, 389.

of delicate cultural themes and occult subjects in his satirical essays and fiction. In an essay concerning modern political satire, for example, Kurt Tucholsky (1890-1935) asserted that Meyrink was a “great stylist” (“große[r] Stilist”) whose writing was “[m]asterful in its intertwining of horror and the sharpness that borders on *lèse-majesté*” (“Meisterhaft, wie hier das Grausige und das Scharfe, das fast an Majestätsbeleidigung grenzt, ineinandergearbeitet sind”).<sup>125</sup> The popularity of his writing made Meyrink an icon for a rebellious literary youth.<sup>126</sup> As Theodor Harmsen has noted, young German-language authors and artists Brod, Paul Leppin, Hugo Steiner-Prag, and many other others “gathered around this fascinating and curious individual” (“scharten sich um dieses faszinierende und kuriose Persönlichkeit“).<sup>127</sup> Brod reports that he was enthusiastic about Meyrink’s writing during his youth. He was particularly taken with the author’s short stories, which he had called “the non plus ultra of all modern poetry” (“Nonplusultra aller modernen Dichtung”):

Their colorfulness, their eerily adventurous ingenuity, their spirit of attack, the terseness of their style, the overflowing originality of ideas so dense in every sentence, in every connection made between the words that there did not seem to be any omissions at all.

Ihre Farbenpracht, ihre schaurig abenteuerliche Erfindungslust, ihr Angriffsgeist, die Knappheit ihres Stils, die überströmende Originalität der Einfälle, die sich in jedem Satz, in jeder Wortverbindung so dicht geltend machte, daß es überhaupt keine leeren Stellen zu geben schien.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Kurt Tucholsky, “Die moderne politische Satire in der Literatur,” *Dresdner Volkszeitung*, no. 110 (14 May 1912).

<sup>126</sup> Boyd, 151.

<sup>127</sup> Theodor Harmsen, *Der Magische Schriftsteller Gustav Meyrink: seine Freunde und sein Werk* (Amsterdam: in de pelikaan, 2009), 59.

<sup>128</sup> Max Brod, *Streitbares Leben* (München: Verlegt Bei Kindler, 1960) 291. Later, Brod had a change of heart about Meyrink’s writing, seeing it as having a “strange, extraordinary charm” that was too “noisy” for him (“Seltsam, der ungemaine Reiz, der von seinen Erzählungen einst ausging, ist für mich heute fast völlig verrauscht”) Brod claims that during his first encounter with Kafka, the latter man shared a similar opinion of Meyrink’s work. Brod recounts: “That sort of thing [Kafka] considered too far-fetched and much too importunate; everything suggested that it was planned for effect... artificially thought up—although he himself never used labels of this kind.” Max Brod, *Franz Kafka: A Biography* (New York: De Capo Press, 1995), 44.

Erich Mühsam also praised Meyrink's "grotesque, spooky, malicious, witty and sparkling" ("geheimnisvoll, grotesk, gespenstisch, boshaft, witzig und funkend") stories in *Simplicissimus*, which he claimed stirred the imagination: "In those days, Meyrink's stories in '*Simplicissimus*' ... powerfully inspired the imagination of a spiritually awakened youth. One plunged into each new publication of the Munich journal and, if a new Meyrink had appeared, it provided material for discussion for many evenings" ("Meyrinks Geschichten im '*Simplicissimus*'... regten zu jener Zeit die Phantasie der geistig bewegten Jugend mächtig an. Man stürzte sich über jede neue Nummer des Münchner Blattes und, stand ein neuer Meyrink drin, so war für etliche Abende Diskussionsstoff vorhanden").<sup>129</sup> The suggestive power of Meyrink's works toward which Mühsam gestures—namely, their ability to awaken and inspire German minds—was what most terrified Meyrink's literary adversaries and prompted German nationalists to embark on a two-year campaign to ban his works.

Indeed, not all who encountered the author were charmed by his many eccentricities. Meyrink's eccentric personality earned him more than a few enemies who quickly made false claims about him. As Leppin states, Meyrink's notoriety did not sit well with many of his contemporaries and often made him the subject of rumors:

The influence that emanated from him—which drew not only literary Prague, people from all spheres, students, merchants, fashionable idlers into his spell, was tremendous. There were circles that would just have soon as accused him of being a modern Socrates, a seducer of youth, and condemned him to death for immoral teachings.

Der Einfluß, der von ihm ausging, der nicht nur das literarische Prag, der Leute aus allen Sphären, Studenten, Kaufleute, modische Müssiggänger in seinen Bannkreis zog, war ungeheuer. Es gab Kreise, die ihn am liebsten, einen modernen Sokrates, der Verführung der Jugend beschuldigt und wegen unsittlicher Lehren zum Tode verurteilt hatten.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Erich Mühsam, *Namen und Menschen. Unpolitische Erinnerungen* (Leipzig: Volk und Buch, 1949), 127.

<sup>130</sup> Paul Leppin, "Spiritismus um Meyrink," *Prager Tageblatt* (25 May 1926).

His adversaries were persistent in finding ways to tarnish his reputation. After he was diagnosed with spinal meningitis in 1900, for example, rumors circulated that his ailments were the side-effect of syphilis.<sup>131</sup> Shortly after the “Duel Affair,” Meyrink, who was open about his interest in the occult, was accused of taking advice from the spirit world in his bank dealings. This rumor more than likely originated from the officers involved in the duel. In January 1902, he was charged with bank fraud as a result of these accusations. His two-and-a-half-month incarceration while officials investigated the case concluded in April 1902, when the charges were dropped and he was released from prison. His reputation, however, was ruined. Unable to recover from the social disgrace of the criminal charges, Meyrink abandoned his career in banking completely, moved to Munich, and began a career as a novelist, satirist, and translator.

### **The “Meyrink-Hetze”**

A dramatic shift in Meyrink’s writing occurred shortly after the success of *Der Golem* during a period that newspapers and literary critics at the time referred to as the “Meyrink-Hetze.” The “Hetze” of 1916-17 refers to a period of heated debates in journals and newspapers concerning Meyrink’s loyalty to Germany and the war effort. The author’s experiences during these years not only demonstrate the heated role that national identity played in politics and daily life throughout the Habsburg Empire in the decades leading into and during the First World War, but examining Czech and German nationalists’ responses and targeted efforts to ban Meyrink’s writing after the popularity of his first novel also shows that his contemporary readers picked up and strongly disapproved on nationalist stereotypes and anti-militaristic messaging in his writing.

Meyrink’s adversaries’ dislike of him became particularly problematic after he achieved international celebrity status by publishing his first novel and grew during the war years. *Der*

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<sup>131</sup> Boyd, 29.

*Golem* was immensely popular, selling over 200,000 copies throughout Europe and Russia between 1915 and 1922. As “Meyrink” threatened to become a household name in Prague, journalists, authors, German nationalists, and literary critics began exploring more thoroughly Meyrink’s biography as well as his writings. Between 1916 and 1917, Meyrink became the subject of controversy in cultural battles related to nationalism as well as a target of antisemitic rhetoric. In a sixteen-month controversy that unfolded during the “Meyrink-Hetze,” contemporary critical commentary surrounding his ethnic identity, celebrity status, and writing was deeply invested in sorting out how Meyrink’s beliefs about Judaism and his ethnicity found its way into his writing and influenced the German soldiers on the frontlines. These debates later played a role in Meyrink’s censorship under the monarchy and prompted him to move away from a satirical writing style later in life.

The outbreak of the First World War and the rise of German nationalism brought a wave of criticism of Meyrink’s writing and ambiguous ethnic identity. Despite the international acclaim visible in the translation of *Der Golem* into nine languages during Meyrink’s lifetime, the author’s handling of themes surrounding Czech, Jewish, and German identity elicited the ire of Czech and German nationalist critics, as well as Jewish readers.<sup>132</sup> One Czech nationalist, for example, claimed in 1917—shortly after a Czech translation of the novel appeared in Prague—that *Der Golem* was a “systematic” and “premeditated attack” on the Czech community: “German writers,” the critic claimed, “[were] today extending a greedy hand after every woman, tomorrow possessed by mystical dreams” that provided unflattering depictions of Czechs as “sweet girls,” “prostitutes,” and “barmen”—or those working behind the bar.<sup>133</sup> Given portrayals

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<sup>132</sup> *Der Golem* sold 150,000 copies by 1916 after being translated into Czech, Swedish, Hungarian, and Dutch. By 1922, over 200,000 copies had been sold and a translation appeared in Russian. The years 1925 through 1928 brought translations in French, Bulgarian, Italian, and English. Although a period of inactivity in terms of critical commentary and translations followed Meyrink’s death in 1932, between 1958 and 1977, translations in Polish, Japanese, Danish, Portuguese, and Slovenian found their way to readers worldwide.

<sup>133</sup> Arne Novák, “Pražský roman?” *Venkov* 12, no. 86 (12 April 1917): 3. Qtd. in Spector, *Prague Territories*, 177.

of Czechs in Brod's novel, Kisch's *Shepherd of Girls*, and Rilke's "Das Heimatlied," the appearance of *Der Golem* appeared to be one more novel written by a German-language author who recirculated negative stereotypes of Czech speakers in a story about the spiritual elevation of German-speaking protagonist. German nationalists, as we shall see in the following section, also took issue with themes Meyrink presents in his novel. Meyrink's ambiguous portrayal of Jews and Jewish spirituality also troubled his contemporary Jewish critics and readership. In a poem from a diary entry in 1916, for example, seventeen-year-old Gershom Scholem wrote of Meyrink's novel: "Horror filled me deeply.... I'll seek redemption elsewhere / Not in all this wickedness, I've tired now of Meyrink!"<sup>134</sup> Such criticisms focusing on Meyrink's authorial intent in writing this and other novels, short stories, and satirical essays shaped reception of his works and ultimately altered the focus of his writing later in life, revealing a conscious turn away from participating in heated nationalist debates.

Reception by German nationalist critics were particularly damning for Meyrink. Antisemitic critics concerned about Germany's performance on the war front often used Meyrink's tendency to write anti-militaristic literature featuring Jewish characters as evidence for their claims.<sup>135</sup> Adolf Bartels, Albert Zimmermann, and Carl Groß, for example, labeled Meyrink *undeutsch* and *antinational* based on "Meyrink's perceived failure to produce literature that supported the German war effort and promoted national pride."<sup>136</sup> The most damaging anti-Meyrinkian German nationalist publication was a widely circulated pamphlet titled *Gustav Meyrink und seine Freunde. Ein Bild aus dem dritten Kriegsjahr*. This pamphlet, published by Zimmermann and Bartels, warned the public not to buy Meyrink's subversive works because of what Amanda Boyd summarizes as the fear of the author's "potential to disrupt [German]

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<sup>134</sup> Qtd. in Gelbin, 114

<sup>135</sup> See Amanda Boyd, "Nationalist Voices against Gustav Meyrink's Wartime Publications: Adolf Bartels, Albert Zimmermann, and the *Hetze* of 1917-1918," *Monatsheft* 105, No. 2 (2013).

<sup>136</sup> Boyd, "Nationalist Voices," 223.



national unity during the ongoing European conflict.”<sup>137</sup> In the pamphlet, Zimmermann stated that Meyrink’s hatred (“Haß”) toward officials of any kind, particularly those of the military, was destructive to the war effort: “All officers, judges, police officers, priests are for Meyrink quite naturally oafs of the worst kind” (“Alle Offiziere, Richter, Polizeileute, Pfarrer sind bei Meyrink ganz selbstverständlich Lumpen schlimmster Art”).<sup>138</sup> He hoped to prevent Meyrink’s texts from being mass dispersed on the battlefield and thus corrupting the minds of German soldiers fighting for a noble German cause.

Public debates concerning Meyrink’s ethnic identity were often tied to confusion about the author’s affiliation with Judaism and led to negative critical reception of his writing. As Mohammad Qasim points out,

The reception history mentions that Meyrink was criticized by the German-national circles for being a Jew or a half-Jew. Meyrink had to defend himself against this reproach; he was not Jewish, but his descent remained a mystery to his contemporaries.

Bereits bei der Rezeptionsgeschichte wurde erwähnt, daß man von Seiten der deutsch-nationalen Kreise Meyrink vorwarf, er sei Jude oder Halbjude. Diesem Vorwurf mußte Meyrink widersprechen, denn er war keiner, aber seine Abstammung war für seine Zeitgenossen jedoch ein Rätsel.<sup>139</sup>

The false assumption that Meyrink was Jewish was based on several factors: first, his actress mother, Maria Meyer, was often confused with a famous Viennese Jewish actress (Clara Meyer). Furthermore, Meyrink’s illegitimacy was common knowledge, and he kept his father’s identity secret until forced to reveal it in a civil suit. Second, while living in Prague, he still carried a Jewish-sounding last name (Meyer), which he changed to “Meyrink” after the bank scandal landed him in prison.<sup>140</sup> This name change later became a subject of debate in the “Meyrink-

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<sup>137</sup> Boyd, “Nationalist Voices,” 223-226; 227.

<sup>138</sup> Albert Zimmermann, *Gustav Meyrink und Seine Freunde. Ein Bild aus dem dritten Kriegsjahr* (Hamburg: Deutschnationale Verlagsanstalt, 1917), 18.

<sup>139</sup> Qasim, 34.

<sup>140</sup> Boyd, 21; Buskirk, 12.

Hetze.” Third, he frequently fraternized with prominent Jewish authors in Prague, such as Brod, Werfel, and Otto Pick. Finally, he had a tenuous relationship to Christianity. Although he was christened at birth and had a Christian upbringing, he states nevertheless in his autobiographical essay, “The Transformation of the Blood” (“Die Verwandlung des Blutes”), that “despite my most fervent efforts, I have never managed to make the Christian faith my own, even though I was brought up in it from childhood” (“trotz heißester Bemühungen ist es mir nie gelungen, den christlichen Glauben mir zu eigen zu machen, trotzdem ich von Kindheit an darin erzogen wurde”).<sup>141</sup>

Accusations emerged that the “Jewish leanings” of his writing not only were detrimental to the German reading public, but critics also argued that his characters’ frequent undermining of authority figures (the Habsburg Monarchs) would demoralize German soldiers on the warfront. Worse, Meyrink’s fiction might persuade them to rebel against their military commanders. For these critics, Meyrink’s writing always contained a “gross incomprehension” (“krassen Unverständnis”) of the war and the German efforts to win it.<sup>142</sup> Furthermore, antisemitic German nationalists claimed that the decadent content of the author’s fiction indicated that Meyrink himself was a Jew, and thus an enemy of the German state. Carl Groß, for example, claimed a careful analysis of the content and style of his works revealed his Jewish affiliation: “Meyrink wants nothing more than to push Jewish politics in the framework of the novel and the novella and to drag the German culture of the German race through the mud” (“Meyrink will nichts weiter, als im Rahmen des Romans und der Novelle jüdische Politik treiben und die deutsche Kultur der deutschen Rasse erniedrigend in den Kot ziehen”).<sup>143</sup> In addition to the author’s

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<sup>141</sup> Gustav Meyrink, *An der Grenze des Jenseits* (Leipzig: Durr & Weber Verlag, 1923), 16. Translation can be found in Gustav Meyrink, *The Dedalus Meyrink Reader*, ed. and trans. Mike Mitchell (Dedalus: Gardena, CA: Dedalus, 2010), 143.

<sup>142</sup> Zimmermann, *Gustav Meyrink und Seine Freunde*, 19.

<sup>143</sup> Carl Groß, “Gustav Meyrinks Stellung zur deutschen Literatur,” *Natur und Gesellschaft* 5 (1924): 13.

exaggerated, grotesque mode of storytelling, Albert Zimmermann asserted, Meyrink's depiction of the Jewish ghetto proliferated images of Jewish degeneracy and the anti-Monarchy themes his texts conveyed were harmful to the German nation: "The persons who live in this milieu are... degenerate, criminal, and morbid at the same time displaced, half-animal beings" ("Die Personen, die in diesem Milieu leben, sind... verkommen, verbrecherisch und krankhaft zugleich verlegte, halb tierische Wesen").<sup>144</sup> Thus, Meyrink's writing proliferated the cultural "ills" that German nationalists believed crippled the war effort and the German nation itself, including decadence, the Jewish presence, and anti-military attitudes.

Meyrink's experience with these national controversies had a profound impact on his career as a writer and literary celebrity. He stayed silent during the years of the "Hetze," fearing that anything he said could lengthen the duration of the debate, which had resulted in the banning of his books from many bookstores throughout Habsburg territories. Only when the publication of right-wing nationalist Adolf Bartels' three-volume *Deutsche Dichtung der Gegenwart* claimed that Meyrink was Jewish did the latter call for civil action, resulting in a lengthy and costly trial. Bartels claimed in the publication that "Meyrink has denied he is Jewish; however from his literary physiognomy and the slant of his writings he is Jewish."<sup>145</sup> Bartel's language, particularly his use of the word "physiognomy" with reference to Bartel's writing, echoes racialized, antisemitic rhetoric that linked degenerate behavior with one's appearance. More will be said about these beliefs in Chapter Three, but for now, it suffices to note that by applying the racial science of the day to Meyrink's fiction, Bartels implied that certain thematic and stylistic elements of *Der Golem* and Meyrink's stories were clear markers of his "Jewishness."

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<sup>144</sup> Zimmermann, "Gustav Meyrink," *Bühne und Welt (Deutsches Volkstum)* 19.4 (1917): 4.

<sup>145</sup> It is unclear why Meyrink changed his name, but it possible that change may reflect his attempt to distance himself from rumors of being Jewish, as well as the social disgrace he experienced for the Duel Affair that led to his imprisonment in Prague. In the early 1900s, the author, previously known as "Gustav Meyer," began using the pen name "Meyrink"—a slightly modified version of his old family name, Meyerinck, which has been traced to his noble ancestors of the Austrian Steiermark. Boyd, 21; Buskirk, 12.

Meyrink spent almost a decade expunging Bartels' statement from a literary history of prominent German-language authors. Eventually he received a court settlement shortly before his death in 1932.<sup>146</sup> The considerable investment of money and time in the court case was surely tied in part to his fears that misinformation about his personal biography would negatively impact his book sales.<sup>147</sup>

The aftermath of the "Meyrink-Hetze" indicates not only the role that ethnicity played in Habsburg social and political spheres shortly after the turn of the twentieth century, but also that his contemporary readers were quick to recognize his fiction as participating in (anti)nationalist cultural debates taking place throughout the Empire. While nationalist themes and caricatures in his writing may be difficult for today's readers to identify, they were the subject of heated public debates that followed Meyrink long after he left Prague. The two-year "Hetze" controversy had professional ramifications for Meyrink and played a decisive role in the derailing of his career. Despite the success of *Der Golem* among international readers, nationalist controversies unfolding in the Habsburg Empire impacted the sales and circulation of his later novels. On December 3, 1916, for example, the *Wiener Zeitung* announced the banning in Austria of Meyrink's short story collection *Des deutschen Spießers Wunderhorn*. After the ban, two hundred copies of Meyrink's *Gesamtausgabe* sent to the *Buchhandlung Hugo Heller* in Vienna were confiscated.<sup>148</sup> The defamation campaign also resulted in physical abuse and discrimination. When Meyrink passed through Munich, for example, street workers pummeled him with rocks, and his local baker and butcher refused him service.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> In a court case in which he tried to expunge labels of being Jewish in an German literature encyclopedia, Meyrink had to divulge his father's identity from court in his lawsuit against Bartels regarding the latter man's charge that Meyrink was of Jewish descent. Meyrink had to produce his father's birth and baptismal certificate. For further details, see Qasim, 42 and Mitchell, 13-4.

<sup>147</sup> Baer, 43-4, qtd. in Mitchell, 159.

<sup>148</sup> "Nachrichten," 1918, qtd. in Boyd, "Demonizing Esotericism," 225-6.

<sup>149</sup> Weber, "Die Meyrink-Hetze," 8, qtd. in Boyd, "Nationalist Voices," 227.

In response to the “Hetze,” Meyrink abandoned the satirical writing style that had earned him his celebrity, withdrew from the public eye, and began producing works laden with esoteric themes, the fantastic, and popular occultism. The change in focus of his writing led to still more financial difficulties and negatively impacted his already failing health. The “Hetze” was largely triggered by Meyrink’s recreation of nationalist themes and ethnic stereotypes in *Der Golem*. I now turn to these themes below as they pervade much of his literary work.

### **Blending Fact and Fiction: Meyrink and *Der Golem***

The characters and protagonists of Meyrink’s novels and short stories—either by their own choice or because of social ostracism—often stand at the margins of society. The Master (“Meister”) in Meyrink’s 1907 short story “The Ring of Saturn” (“Der Saturnring”), for example, confines himself to his observatory with only his most trusted assistants as he tries to force an “escaped soul” from outer space away from earth and back to the place from which it came. Fortunatus Haberriser, the protagonist of Meyrink’s second novel, *The Green Face* (*Das Grüne Gesicht*, 1916) also feels isolated during his wanderings through Amsterdam. Haberriser’s uprootedness prevents him from connecting with the denizens of a war-torn city filled with underemployed intellectuals, counterfeit counts, aristocrats, and mystics on his quest for truth and salvation. Like their creator, these characters find themselves in a hostile environment that forces them to turn inward to find inner truth and contentment.

Dr. Hiob Paupersum in Meyrink’s short story “How Dr. Paupersum brought his Daughter Red Roses” (“Wie Dr. Hiob Paupersum seiner Tochter rote Rosen brachte”), published in a collection of short stories in the volume *Fledermäuse* (1917), serves as one example of the inescapability of social ostracism in a threatening urban setting once one’s reputation has been tarnished. Paupersum is a scientist whose financial hardships during the war leave him at the

margins of society and unable to provide medicine for his sick daughter. Once reputable in his field, Paupersum finds himself out of work. Pondering his desperate situation at a café, Paupersum meets an impresario for monstrosities who convinces him take a position working on a medical experiment that would reestablish the physician's good reputation in the scientific community. The position would require the scientist to replicate a contaminated water supply near a small, remote town in Austria that is responsible for producing giants in the area. Taking this job would provide Paupersum with the means to purchase his daughter's medicine, but the experiment would deform him physically, forcing him to become a member of the impresario's sideshow. No matter which path Paupersum chooses, he will be an outcast; even if he succeeds in the experiment, saves his daughter, and redeems his professional reputation, he will be socially ostracized because of his physical disfigurement. If he does not accept the job, his daughter will die, leaving him alone in the world with no career prospects. Both alternatives have bleak outcomes.<sup>150</sup> One might guess with the timing of this publication shortly after the "Hetze" that Meyrink was contemplating his own position in society. Though not a scientist, he was left with few opportunities to repair his tarnished reputation. Thus, we might read the author's willful deviance from accepted social norms in writing and in the flesh as an act of rebellion by an individual whose social standing was constantly put into question.

The experiences of many of Meyrink's fictional characters resemble those of their author, a man who felt uprooted, was prone to self-isolation, and once tried to take his own life.

Meyrink's crisis of identity during his time in Prague is most visible in his construction of his

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<sup>150</sup> The story's conclusion is perhaps the darkest of Meyrink's fiction writing. After winning a mark in the chess game with the impresario, Paupersum rushes to purchase medication for his sick daughter. Once he arrives at home, he realizes he has been hallucinating; he had buried his daughter earlier that morning. With all worldly comforts and joys lost to him (e.g., his career, social prestige, material wealth, family), he has no hope for the future. He runs to his daughter's grave with roses she had requested as a gift the day before, slits his wrists, and thrusts his arms into the fresh mound of dirt over her grave.

protagonist in *Der Golem*, Athanasius Pernath. Elements of Pernath's experiences in *Der Golem* strongly parallel Meyrink's own, echoing the author's melancholy and feelings of social ostracism in the Bohemian capital. Pernath's ambiguous cultural affiliation and personal history are a consistent source of contention throughout the novel; the German-speaking protagonist struggles to connect with the ghetto's many German and German-Jewish misfits, as well as the doctors, lovers, and aristocrats from his former life outside of the *Josefov/Josephstadt*.

Like Meyrink, the narrator of *Der Golem* is rootless, estranged within his own community, as his friend and neighbor, Zwakh, points out: "I don't know, nor have I any idea where he might come from or what work he did before" ("Ich weiß es nicht, ich habe auch keine Vorstellung, wo-her er stammen mag und was früher sein Beruf gewesen ist").<sup>151</sup> All that is known about Pernath is that he was once committed to an insane asylum "Irrenhaus." Following a mental breakdown leading to his ostracism from Prague society in general and his confinement to *Josefov/Josephstadt*, Pernath seems to have "forgotten everything about his madness" and his past ("alles, was mit seinem Wahnsinn zusammenhängt, vergessen zu haben scheint").<sup>152</sup> Struggling to recover after the world he once knew has changed drastically into a violent and unwelcoming place, Pernath has difficulty orienting himself in his new social and physical environment in the ghetto. Once part of the middle class German (and cultural elite) outside of *Josefov/Josephstadt*, Pernath is banished to a space filled with the city's most impoverished citizens and monstrous criminals, as Zwakh explains: "Many, many years ago, a friendly old doctor asked me to take a little care of him and pick a small flat here in those streets where nobody would notice him and bother him with questions of former times." ("Vor vielen, vielen Jahren hat mich ein befreundeter alter Arzt gebeten, ich möchte mich seiner ein wenig annehmen und ihm eine kleine Wohnung hier in diesen Gassen, wo sich niemand um ihn kümmern und mit

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<sup>151</sup> *Der Golem*, 62.

<sup>152</sup> *Der Golem*, 62.

Fragen nach früheren Zeiten beunruhigen würde, aussuchen”).<sup>153</sup> Pernath’s only solace in mourning the lost cultural privileges of his former life stems from interacting with pious Jews in the district. After a brief absence, however, Pernath discovers that a demolition project in the ghetto has decimated the district, dispersed all its inhabitants, and left him homeless. Even though Pernath finds spiritual salvation at the end of the novel, the next chapter will further illustrate, however, that his encounters with his few remaining contacts in the ghetto leave him feeling confused, alone, and further traumatized through his isolation.

In *Der Golem* a man later identified as the Golem follows Athanasius Pernath into his apartment and slips him the *Book of Ibbur*, a Hebrew text describing the process by which a righteous soul temporarily occupies a living person's body, spiritually "impregnating" the existing soul.<sup>154</sup> Sitting in his bed, Pernath hears the man groping his way through the dark outside his door:

Now he is feeling his way along the wall, and now, right now, he must be reading my name on the door-plate, laboriously deciphering each letter in the dark.  
I positioned myself in the middle of the room, looking towards the entrance.  
The door opened, and he came in.  
He took only a few steps towards me, neither removing his hat nor saying a word of greeting. . . .  
He reached into his pocket and took out a book.  
He spent a long time flipping through its pages. . . .  
Finally he found the place he searched for and pointed to it. . . .  
Without thinking, I read the page as well, and the one opposite.  
And I read on and on.  
The book spoke to me as dreams speak, only more clearly and much more precise.  
It touched my heart like a question.

Nun tastet er sich an der Wand entlang, und jetzt, gerade jetzt, muß er, mühsam im Finstern buchstabierend, meinen Namen auf dem Türschild lesen.  
Und ich stellte mich aufrecht in die Mitte des Zimmers und blickte zum Eingang.  
Da öffnete sich die Türe, und er trat ein.  
Nur wenige Schritte machte er auf mich zu und nahm weder den Hut ab, noch sagte er ein Wort der Begrüßung. . . .  
Er griff in die Tasche und nahm ein Buch heraus.  
Dann blätterte er lange drin herum. . . .

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<sup>153</sup> *Der Golem*, 62.

<sup>154</sup> For a discussion of the *Book of Ibbur* and its significance in *Der Golem*, see Schmidt, 58-74.



Endlich hatte er die Stelle gefunden, die er suchte, und deutete darauf...  
Unwillkürlich las ich auch diese Seite durch und die gegenüberliegende.  
Und ich las weiter und weiter.  
Das Buch sprach zu mir, wie der Traum spricht, klarer nur und viel deutlicher.  
Und es rührte mein Herz an wie eine Frage.<sup>155</sup>

After becoming engrossed in a series of visions triggered by reading the book, Pernath comes back to reality and realizes that the strange visitor has disappeared: “I looked up. Where was the man who brought me the book? Gone!?” (“Ich blickte auf. Wo war der Mann, der mir das Buch gebracht hatte? Fortgegangen!?”).<sup>156</sup> Pernath uses his encounter with the Golem to pose questions about and explore the depths of human consciousness and morality, particularly in his conversations surrounding Jewish mysticism under the guidance of Hillel (the archivist in the Jewish Town Hall). In Meyrink’s description of his own experience as well as those of his protagonist, the strange visitor entering each man’s chambers presents the inhabitants with written materials that prompt a spiritual quest. According to his own statement in the Berlin newspaper, reading the pamphlet led Meyrink to pursue occult studies, begin practicing yoga, join the Theosophical Society, study Buddhism, and found the Theosophical *Loge zum blauen Stern* (Lodge of the Blue Star) in Prague in 1891.<sup>157</sup>

The letterbox in both accounts is significant. This object not only establishes a clear parallel between both passages; when examined alongside Meyrink’s biography, it also draws attention to Meyrink’s role, as contemporaries described it, in commenting on the sociopolitical state of the Bohemian capital. Whereas Meyrink’s visitor selected his door at random, as evidenced by the comment, “If there had been a letterbox hanging outside, I would scarcely be alive today,” the Golem figure seeks out Pernath directly. The Golem’s intentions become clear in Pernath’s supposition: “he must be reading my name on the door-plate, laboriously

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<sup>155</sup> *Der Golem*, 17.

<sup>156</sup> *Der Golem*, 22.

<sup>157</sup> Mitchell, 65.

deciphering each letter in the dark.” The Golem’s selection of Pernath foreshadows the final outcome of the novel, namely that this character will be one of the few to find transcendence through death. Along the way, Pernath recalls and understands his forgotten past, heals from former and present heartbreak, and recovers from the dispersion of the ghetto residents and his ethnic community. Through these steps, he transcends the tense environment in turn-of-the-century Prague and ascends to an Eden-like garden at Prague’s castle at the novel’s conclusion.<sup>158</sup>

Mike Mitchell points out that Meyrink’s “self-stylization” of his personal experience blurs the lines between fact and fiction, but as the following pages will show, Meyrink’s writing is also allows modern readers to explore broader social dynamics unfolding in Prague during Meyrink’s lifetime.<sup>159</sup> As an outcast in the ghetto who takes on personal traits resembling those of his creator, Pernath’s story parallels that of Meyrink, a dandy whose occult practice, strange dress, and controversial writings set him apart from other German speakers in Prague and elsewhere. It is precisely these men’s separation from society that makes them expert observers of culture, able to recognize the decadence and decay of Prague’s German-speaking community. Unlike other characters who disappear after the *Finis Ghetto*, Pernath survives. Like his creator, who was cast out of the city but continued to comment on its developments from afar, Pernath stands outside of the city, observing the events taking place within it from a privileged vantagepoint.

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<sup>158</sup> The scene at Prague’s castle, which was mentioned in Chapter One, will also be explored in Chapter Three.

<sup>159</sup> Mitchell, Boyd, and others have noted the author’s tendency to draw from and embellish his personal experiences in his fiction writing. For a discussion of these embellishments, see Michael Mitchell, “Gustav Meyrink.” *Major Figures of Austrian Literature: The Interwar Years 1918-1938*, ed. Donald Daviau (Riverside: Ariadne Press, 1995), 265.

## Nationalism and the “Prague Novel”

*Der Golem* contributes to a trend in German-language stories written in Prague that Kisch claims was characteristic of a new generation of literature written by *Prager Deutsche*, or Prague Germans. As Kisch explains, German-language authors such as Brod, Meyrink, and Rainer Maria Rilke took “nourishment from the Slavic atmosphere and the national conflict rather than ignoring these.”<sup>160</sup> In novels by these (and other) authors, ethnic tensions inform tales of heartbreak, loss, and displacement in Prague. According to Spector, “Prague Novels” explore “the dynamic of relations of nation or ‘race,’ gender identifications, and social stratification in Prague at the moment before the outbreak of the First World War.”<sup>161</sup> Not only are representations of gendered and ethnic power dynamics characteristic in these texts, but stories by the *Prager Deutsche* also focus on the “real life” of the city, including day-to-day experiences of the German-speaking male bourgeoisie and working-class Czech-speaking women—particularly the taboo romantic relationships that developed between them. In reference to Brod’s novel in particular, Gaëlle Vassogne notes that “the numerous reactions that the novel has evoked are in fact less the result of the love story being depicted than of its political dimension” (“die zahlreichen Reaktionen, die der Roman hervorgerufen hat, werden tatsächlich weniger durch die dargestellte Liebesgeschichte also von seiner politischen Dimension verursacht”).<sup>162</sup> Stories within Prague novels are constructed to prompt readers to contemplate the social questions posed by the author that emphasize his aesthetic agenda.

The plot developments in *Der Golem* parallel a number of German-language novels, poems, and short stories that described taboo romantic affairs that cross ethnic and class lines,

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<sup>160</sup> Spector, *Prague Territories*, 177.

<sup>161</sup> Spector, *Prague Territories*, 180.

<sup>162</sup> Vassogne makes this comment in reference to Brod’s *A Czech Servant Girl*. See Gaëlle Vassogne, *Max Brod in Prag: Identität und Vermittlung* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), 43.

resulting in devastating consequences.<sup>163</sup> My brief discussion of Brod's *A Czech Servant Girl/Ein tschechisches Dienstmädchen* (1909), an example I will revisit in Chapter Two, will identify typical themes of the "Prague Novel" and set the stage for my reading of Meyrink's *Der Golem*.

*A Czech Servant Girl* comments on intersecting discourses of gender and nationality in Prague by foregrounding one bourgeois German man's experience with the "struggle of two cultures" ("dem Kampf der zwei Kulturen") in Prague.<sup>164</sup> At his father's request, the Vienna-born William Schurhaft moves to Prague, where he lives with a distant relative whose new household servant (Pepi, or Pepička) catches his attention. Before meeting the Czech girl, Schurhaft only experiences a German Prague, most clearly identifiable by language use: "So far I have noticed nothing of any other nation, haven't heard a Czech word" ("ich habe bisher von einer andern Nation gar nichts bemerkt, kein tschechisches Wort gehört").<sup>165</sup> His experience with only a "German" Prague marks the sharp divisions between the city's two ethnic groups at the time. His conversations with Pepi, however, are his introduction into Czech culture, a culture that, as is typical of the "Prague Novel," is portrayed as primitive, provincial, closer to nature than the metropolitan German culture. The novel makes these stereotypes visible through the strong spruce scent ("Fichtenduft"; "den Geruch eines sonnigen Fichtenwald") that Schurhaft

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<sup>163</sup> Another example not discussed in this dissertation is Wilhelm Raabe's *Elderflowers/Holunderblüte* (1862). Although Raabe was not from Prague, this short story draws upon cultural tensions related to ethnicity and class that prohibited a love affair between a German bourgeois medical student and a Jewish girl in Prague's Jewish ghetto. This story, which appeared in a collection "Ferne Stimmen" and in a band "Gesammelten Erzählungen" in 1895. The story conveys the memories of a German doctor as he holds a wreath made of elderflowers in a patient's home. The wreath causes him to suddenly recall his youthful love affair with a sickly Jewish girl (Jemina Loew) while he was a young medical student in Prague. Forty years ago, he remembers, Jemina also wore a wreath made of elderflowers similar to that which he holds in his hands, which now belongs to another deceased young girl who he could not save through medicine. Using Gothic imagery to describe Prague's Jewish ghetto in the nineteenth-century Prague and the degenerative effects the district had on the human body, the story underscores Hermann's feelings of failure as a lover and a medical practitioner in preventing the death of Jemina years before.

<sup>164</sup> Max Brod, "Ein tschechisches Dienstmädchen," in Arnold Beer, *Das Schicksal eines Juden und andere Prosa aus den Jahren 1909-1913* (Düsseldorf and Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2013), 187.

<sup>165</sup> Brod, "Ein tschechisches Dienstmädchen," 187.

smells when Pepi enters the apartment.<sup>166</sup> Although the romance that blossoms between Schurhaft and Pepi brings meaning and heartbreak to his time in Prague, a long-term relationship is impossible, as the servant girl is already married to an abusive Czech man. Confronted with hopeless prospects for life either with Schurhaft or with her husband, Pepi drowns herself in the Vltava/Moldau river. After her death, Schurhaft transforms their love story into a novel that comprises the tale presented to the reader.

Questions of gender, nationality, language use, and power dynamics pervade the “Prague novels.” In these stories, Spector explains, “Czech” and “German” cultures, which are signified above all by language preference, are represented “specifically in terms of power relations” in which Czech characters are presented as passive, uneducated, and unable to overcome their social standing.<sup>167</sup> Schurhaft enters a cross-cultural relationship that on the surface suggests his promotion of equality between Prague’s German and Czech-identifying characters by defying taboos about bourgeois/working class relationships and love affairs between the two ethnic and linguistic groups. At the same time, however, the novel reinforces Czech subordination to dominant, patriarchal German-speaking culture.<sup>168</sup> Brod’s description of Pepi as “primitive” (“primitiv”), childlike (“kindisch”), and subservient to the German man she loves<sup>169</sup> resembles that of Rainer Maria Rilke’s description of Czech women native to Bohemia as “silent” (“schweigt sie still”) with their eyes swimming with tears turned to the German-speaking narrator of the poem (“Voll Tränen/das Aug mir zugewandt) description in his poem “Das Heimatlied.”<sup>170</sup> These characterizations are common to German-language literature and poetry

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<sup>166</sup> Brod, “Ein tschechischen Dienstmädchen,” 180-92.

<sup>167</sup> Spector, *Prague Territories*, 177-8;

<sup>168</sup> For a close reading of these two novels, see Spector, *Prague Territories*, 174-84.

<sup>169</sup> Brod, *Ein tschechisches Dienstmädchen* (Berlin: A Juncker, 1909), 41, 101-2, 106.

<sup>170</sup> The full version of “Das Heimatlied” is provided below and is found in Rainer Maria Rilke, *Sämtliche Werke, Band I*, ed. Rilke-Archiv in Verbindung mit Ruth Sieber-Rilke (Frankfurt am Main: Insel-Verlag 1955) 68–69. Rilke, a poet and writer of German modernism, spent his life searching for his true home(land). His works illustrate his pilgrimage in a quest to find “home.” After leaving Prague, he took two trips to Russia in 1899 and 1900. See

set in Prague, which portray German-speaking characters as refined, educated, culturally dominant, and prone to unconscious condescension toward working-class Czechs even when their intentions are otherwise. As H. D. Zimmermann summarizes, “Unfortunately Brod includes [in *A Czech Servant Girl*] a generalized observation about the Czechs. This characterization is well intended yet, like all national stereotypes, skewed. For him, the poor maid becomes an embodiment of the Czech people, a misunderstood generalization that they rightly resented” (“Leider fügt Brod eine allgemeine Betrachtung über die Tschechen ein. Sie ist gut gemeint und schief wie alle nationalen Klischees. Das arme Dienstmädchen wird ihm zur Verkörperung des Tschechischen Volkes, eine ungute Verallgemeinerung, die man ihm mit Recht übel nahm”).<sup>171</sup> As a result, Brod’s novel supports German male patriarchy at the expense of Czech female characters who embody a culture that Germans feminized and thus saw as passive.

As Spector has shown, the lasting significance of *A Czech Servant Girl* stems from the fact that “[i]t is the first source to look to for a clue to the morass of issues of desire and patronization” across class and ethnic lines in Prague—themes that Meyrink revisits in *Der Golem*.<sup>172</sup> As the “son of rich bourgeois” (“Sohn reicher Bürgersleute”), the novel’s protagonist

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Karin Wawrzynek, “Rainer Maria Rilke and his Mystical Russia. A Portrait of the Sense of Home and an Eternal,” *Wawrzynek*, Nr 7 (2013): 263-264.

Vom Feld klingt ernste Weise;  
weiß nicht, wie mir geschieht...  
«Komm her, du Tschechenmädchen,  
sing mir ein Heimatlied.»

From the field sounds serious way;  
do not know how it happens to me ...  
"Come here, you Czech girl,  
sing me a Song about Home."

Das Mädchen läßt die Sichel,  
ist hier mit Husch und Hui, -  
setzt nieder sich am Feldrain  
und singt: «Kde domov muj»...

The girl leaves the sickle,  
is here with Husch and Hui, -  
sits down at the [Feldrain]?  
and sings: «Kde domov muj» ...

Jetzt schweigt sie still. Voll Tränen  
das Aug mir zugewandt, -  
nimmt meine Kupferkreuzer  
und küsst mir stumm die Hand.

Now she is silent. Full of tears  
her eye turned to me,  
take my copper cruiser  
and kiss my hand silently.

<sup>171</sup> Hans Dietrich Zimmermann, “Juden, Tschechen, Deutsche. Zu Max Brods frühen Romanen,” 4.

<sup>172</sup> Spector, *Prague Territories*, 177-8;

represents typical German-identifying male protagonists in Prague novels who experience heartbreak. Emotional turmoil in the texts are caused by rigid social structures that prohibit long-term romantic relationships crossing class and ethnic lines. Nevertheless, the heartbroken German-speaking characters (unlike their Czech-speaking female counterparts) do not face social ruin because of their affairs and carry on emotionally in spite of the relationship's tragic end. For example, when recalling his experiences with Pepi in the novel's opening sentence, which frames the embedded narrative recasting the love story that will follow, Schurhaft states that things for him after her death are "not easy" ("nicht leicht"), but overall, he is "not unhappy" ("Ich bin nicht durchaus unglücklich").<sup>173</sup> The tragedy with Pepi, though emotionally devastating, appears to be a necessary step toward the spiritual development of the German-speaking narrator, whose love for the Czech servant girl brings him emotional clarity and sparks his creative energies. At the beginning of the novel, Schurhaft describes his time in Vienna and first weeks in Prague as an "empty time" ("leere Zeit").<sup>174</sup> His love for Pepi—as well as her death at the end of the novel—provides him with inspiration, her memory unlocking his aesthetic potential. A note of hope for his future closes the novel in his final words to his deceased beloved: "Farewell forever, forever ... And also you, seeing enjoying energetic living William Schurhaft, may you also fare well forever" ("Lebe wohl für immer, für immer... Und auch du, sehender genießender tatkräftiger lebender William Schurhaft, auch du lebe wohl für immer!").<sup>175</sup> Only through her death can Schurhaft find meaning in his own life; the sacrifices of his Czech servant and love interest re-invigorate him and help him achieve his own literary potential, prompting him to enjoy each moment of his life fully. As we shall see in the following sections (as well as in Chapter Two), Meyrink's German-speaking protagonist also endures a

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<sup>173</sup> Brod, "Ein tschechischen Dienstmädchen," 179.

<sup>174</sup> Brod, "Ein tschechischen Dienstmädchen," 183.

<sup>175</sup> Brod, "Ein tschechischen Dienstmädchen," 185.

number of sacrifices in a world torn by nationalist conflict. His death, however, as well as the death of his Jewish true love, Mirjam, allows him to transcend his earthly existence and reside with her for eternity at Prague's palace, a place free of national hostilities and ethnic intolerance.

At the time of publication, authors of Prague novel recognized that the prioritizing of national strife in these texts gives them their unique character that resonated with local readers. Brod's comments on early drafts of Kisch's *The Shepherd of Girls/Der Mädchenhirt* (1914), for example, betray his own prioritizing of national conflict in fiction portraying ethnic tensions, gender identification, and social stratification in Prague.<sup>176</sup> Working with similar themes found in *A Czech Servant Girl*, Kisch also uses Prague's national conflict as a backdrop in *The Shepherd of Girls* to highlight the negative effects of class struggle. Conflating class and nationality through the novel's protagonist, Jarda, this German-language novel set primarily in Czech-speaking Prague shows how this impoverished, illegitimate son of a German nobleman and a Czech woman turns away from his German schooling to become a pimp. Not only does the novel link Czechness and poverty, but national power also becomes associated with sexual power in Jarda's career choice and his treatment of women. After the protagonist becomes embroiled in crimes involving his absent father and a police commissioner, the novel ends with Jarda—like the female protagonist of Brod's novel—drowning himself in the Vltava/Moldau river. After Kisch requested Brod's feedback on an early draft of *The Shepherd of Girls*, Brod remarked that the novel's leftist impulses—particularly in Zolasque scenes of the Czech underworld—lacked the “pathos” (“Pathos”) necessary to give the novel a “true social sensitivity, forcefulness, greatness.”<sup>177</sup> In order for the novel to succeed, Brod claimed, a handling of nationalism in Prague—particularly Zionism—should play a role. Spector summarizes Brod's view: “Kisch needed Zionism [...] (the inner experience of Zionist conviction) in order to discover the ‘great

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<sup>176</sup> For a close reading of this novel based on these themes, see Spector, *Prague Territories*, 177-80.

<sup>177</sup> Brod to Egon Erwin Kisch (21 January 1914), qtd. in Spector, *Prague Territories*, 180.



love' that a work on the destitution of Czech Prague would require." Including these elements, Brod claimed, would give Kisch's readers "access to the common, popular or national (*volkstümlich*) essences of his object of study."<sup>178</sup> Given Brod's strong view of the necessity of including local nationalist themes to enliven a text and infuse it with a sense of authenticity, it is hard to imagine that he himself had not incorporated this same literary objective into his own creative writing.

As we have seen in reception of Meyrink's writing, many of these authors were criticized for their incorporation of national strife into their novels, which, after their publication, became the subject of controversies and heated debates. Like *Der Golem*, *A Czech Servant Girl* was also heavily criticized in Bohemian German-nationalist newspapers.<sup>179</sup> Although defenders of Brod's work, such as Otto Pick, argued that the novel's depiction of a German/Czech love affair was "an unheeded gesture for conciliation" between the two ethnic communities, critics, such as German-liberal Heinrich Teweles and Zionist Hugo Hermann, argued that "if the book had been intended as a 'conciliatory work,' it was as unlikely to be successful as the copulation of a bourgeois German with a proletariat Czech was to halt national strife."<sup>180</sup> It is possible that, given the controversies the novel stirred, Brod was trying to distance himself from political readings of a novel that he in fact originally intended to touch on tense contemporary political issues. Faced with criticism from both Czech- and German-speaking readers after the publication of *A Czech Servant Girl*, Brod changed his opinion on the intended message of his novel, insisting that his writing was not meant to be political: "I did not write a political novel, I only wanted to portray

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<sup>178</sup> Spector, *Prague Territories*, 181.

<sup>179</sup> Otto Pick in *März* 3, no. 3 (March 1909): 155, qtd. from Spector, *Prague Territories*, 176. Original found in Manfred Jähnichen's recounting of Eduard Goldstücker in *Weltfreunde: Konferenz über die Prager deutsche Literatur*, ed. Eduard Goldstücker (Prague: Academia, Verlag der Tschechoslowakischen Wissenschaften, 1967), 159.

<sup>180</sup> On April 1, 1909, Brod published a piece in the *Prager Tageblatt* notes that some Bohemian German-national newspapers were so deeply offended by his novel that his name was banned forever from their pages. Spector, *Prague Territories*, 176.

the strange transformation of a lover in whose head politics, along with many other things, is reflected strangely” (“Ich habe keinen politischen Roman schreiben, ich wollte nur die seltsame Verwandlung eines Liebenden darstellen, in dessen Kopf nebst vielem anderen Politik sich seltsam spiegelt”).<sup>181</sup>

These cultural sentiments and literary trends informed Meyrink’s recapitulation of themes of national strife, ethnic intolerance, and forbidden love in *Der Golem*. Meyrink began writing his novel sometime in 1908. After Meyrink became lost in his own maze of characters and subplots, resulting in his destruction of several early drafts, Brod offered his editorial assistance and helped bring the novel to completion.<sup>182</sup> The tale that was serialized in *Die weissen Blätter* (1913/1914) and published in novel form in 1915 stages stereotypical interactions between middle-class and aristocratic Germans, working-class Czech speakers, and impoverished Jews in a nationally charged environment.

### ***Der Golem* as a Gothic Iteration of the “Prague Novel”**

Meyrink’s love story takes on a darker tone than Brod’s novel, underscoring Athanasius Pernath’s despondency upon realizing the futility of his existence as a former middle-class German-speaking citizen confined to an impoverished ghetto that, at the end of the novel, is transformed into a luxury district under Prague’s new Czech leadership. While Schurhaft suffers heartbreak over the death of a woman he loved, Pernath’s entire world is destroyed twice, figuratively and literally. Suffering from amnesia that deprives him of memories of his life in Prague’s other city districts, Pernath suddenly and inexplicably finds himself in the ghetto, where he is surrounded by decay embodied by the items in his neighbor’s junk stand: “dead, worthless things hang on the edges of the wall of his vault, day after day, year after year” (“An den

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<sup>181</sup> Max Brod, *Prager Tageblatt* (1. April 1909). Qtd. in Vassogne, 43.

<sup>182</sup> Sigrid Meyer, *Golem: Die literarische Konzeption eines Stoffes* (Bern: Herbert Lange, 1975), 197. Gelbin, 99.

Mauerrändern seines Gewölbes hängen unverändert Tag für Tag, jahraus jahrein dieselben toten wertlosen Dinge”).<sup>183</sup> In the ghetto, he lives among murderers, pedophiles, and fatherless children who roam the streets with “dirty hands” (“schmutzigen Hände[n]”) and subjected to various forms of sexual and criminal predation that leaves them destined for a “bleak, gloomy life” (“trübe, düstere Leben”).<sup>184</sup> The destruction of *Josefov/Josephstadt* concludes the embedded narrative with a dystopic, Gothic-inspired scenario that evokes chaos and confusion. Not only is his heart broken after he has become embroiled in several crimes tied to a decadent German noblewoman, but his home, along with all that he knew in the city district of *Josefov/Josephstadt*, is also destroyed without his knowledge through the historic *Finis Ghetto* urban renewal project. The incorporation of nationalist themes in *Der Golem* becomes most visible in Pernath’s relationship to German culture in Prague in terms of decadence.

How then was “decadence” understood in Meyrink’s day? In recent decades, William Hughes, David Punter, and Andrew Smith have shown that *decadence* numbered among many literary and artistic movements that contributed to the revival of Gothic literature at the turn of the twentieth century. In the *Encyclopedia of the Gothic*, for example, these scholars claim that “[d]ecadence, as represented by the journal *The Yellow Book*,<sup>185</sup> challenged some common cultural assumptions of the late Victorian period, such as an underlying moral purpose to art, and by the fin-de-siècle decadence was applied to denigrate many kinds of innovative or subversive art and literature.”<sup>186</sup> Authors of the Gothic drew upon themes of decadence and degeneration to subvert social ideologies, political developments, and taboos of their day. These “Gothic” themes

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<sup>183</sup> *Der Golem*, 9.

<sup>184</sup> *Der Golem*, 6; 10.

<sup>185</sup> As a British quarterly and literary periodical published in London from 1894 to 1897, *The Yellow Book* featured articles ranging from literature to artistic genres. It published poetry, short stories, essays, book illustrations, portraits, and reproductions of paintings related to Aestheticism and Decadence.

<sup>186</sup> *The Encyclopedia of the Gothic*, ed. William Hughes, David Punter, Andrew Smith (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015), 250.

inform *Der Golem*, a novel that features the moral perversity of the German aristocracy. These themes are visible in the German nobles Prince Ferri Athenstädt and Angelina, who descend from their luxurious palace on the hill into the impoverished ghetto below and cross the river in order to satiate taboo sexual cravings before returning again to German “high society.” Indeed, the novel’s focus on class difference not only links Meyrink’s tale to trends seen in the “Prague Novel,” but also to the Gothic. David Punter claims that the Gothic examines class, ideology, and “highly material conflicts among cultural groups and retrogressive-versus-progressive modes of production.”<sup>187</sup> Decadence is visible in *Der Golem* in the novel’s German nobles, who revel in the extravagant display of wealth while those in the ghetto are reduced to begging for food. As we will see, the German-speaking noblewoman Angelina’s excessive flaunting of jewels and silk as well as her sexual behavior with Pernath illustrate the impossibility of the relationship that crosses class lines as well as the moral decline of German-speaking Prague society.

Pernath, the German-speaking protagonist in *Der Golem*, experiences the tightening of economic affairs under Czech leadership. Because of his ethnicity, he enjoys economic privileges experienced only by Prague’s German-speaking middle class and aristocracy. These privileges are embodied by one of his love interests, the married German noblewoman (Angelina), as well as the Habsburg prince Ferri Athenstädt (who makes only two appearances in *Der Golem*). The novel’s depiction of the decadent dress, behavior, and social downfall of these two characters alludes to the failures of Prague’s middle-class and aristocratic German-speaking community that led to its marginalization in Czech-dominated Prague. Pernath witnesses the removal of the German presence in Prague through the disappearance and fate of these two German-speaking characters at the end of the novel.

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<sup>187</sup> David Punter, *The Literature of Terror: A History of Gothic from 1765 to Present Day* (New York: Longman, 1980), 6, qtd. in Sharon Rose Yang and Kathleen Healey, “Introduction: Haunted Landscapes and Fearful Spaces—Expanding Views of the Geography of the Gothic,” in *Gothic Landscapes: Changing Eras, Changing Cultures, Changing Anxieties*, ed. Sharon Rose Yang and Kathleen Healey (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016), 8.

Textual evidence suggests that Pernath belongs to Prague's German-speaking middle class. As a gem cutter ("Gemmenschneider"<sup>188</sup>), he has more economic and social liberties than do the ghetto's impoverished Czech-speaking and Jewish contemporaries. These liberties are demonstrated by his charity to those in need, the noblewoman with whom he has sex, and his ability to move freely in German-speaking circles and spaces that are closed off to the novel's other characters.

His economic freedom becomes visible in his generosity toward his friends Mirjam and Charousek. Upon learning that his pious Jewish neighbors Mirjam and her father, Hillel (the archivist at the Jewish Town Hall), are desperately poor yet will not accept his charity, Pernath begins slipping coins in loaves of bread that Mirjam purchases at the local bakery. He recalls with joy the excitement that she experienced upon witnessing the "miracle" in the bread: "The way she had leaned on the wall with excitement in order not to fall over, when she told me that a miracle had happened, a real miracle: she had found a piece of gold in the loaf of bread that the baker had put through the bars onto the kitchen windowsill" ("Wie sie sich vor Erregung an der Wand hatte halten müssen, um nicht umzufallen, als sie mir erzählen gekommen, ein Wunder sei geschehen, ein wirkliches Wunder: sie habe ein Goldstück gefunden in dem Brotlaib, den der Bäcker vom Gang aus durchs Gitter ins Küchenfenster gelegt").<sup>189</sup> He displays similar generosity toward Charousek, "a poor, Czech-Jewish student" ("ein armer böhmischer Student") who cannot afford medicine for his tuberculosis.<sup>190</sup>

As the product of a rape of a Czech Christian woman by the Jew Aaron Wassertrum, Charousek grew up parentless and dependent on the generosity of neighbors, who took him in, fed him, and helped him pursue his education. When Charousek tells Pernath the details of his

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<sup>188</sup> *Der Golem*, 255.

<sup>189</sup> *Der Golem*, 192.

<sup>190</sup> *Der Golem*, 149.

past, Pernath thinks to himself, ““I must find a way of helping him... at least do whatever I can to relieve his immediate need. Without his noticing, I took the hundred crown note I kept at home out of the sideboard drawer and slipped it into my pocket” (“Irgendwie muß ich ihm helfen, überlegte ich, wenigstens seine bitterste Not zu lindern versuchen, soweit das in meiner Macht steht. Ich nahm unauffällig die Hundertguldennote, die ich noch zu Hause hatte, aus der Kommodenschublade und steckte sie in die Tasche”).<sup>191</sup> As the two men part company, Pernath slips the hundred-crown note into Charousek’s pocket. Not only does Pernath’s generosity enable the student to pursue medical studies in the hopes of curing his own disease, but Pernath’s interactions with these two characters also demonstrate the desperate financial conditions of those living in the ghetto and his own relative economic comfort.

Although Pernath was not born into nobility, his German ethnicity and language use allow him to have a relationship with a German noblewoman, Angelina. The novel implies that Pernath met her outside of the ghetto prior to his mental breakdown. Early in the novel, she reappears on his doorstep asking for help in covering up her adulterous love affair with a local doctor. After convincing Pernath to help her, she seduces Pernath in the Hradschin, a city district traditionally inhabited by Prague’s German-speaking aristocracy. Twice Angelina draws him to this district: first, in the novel’s eighth chapter (“Snow”/“Schnee”), when she beckons him to the St. Vitus Cathedral in Prague’s castle complex, and second, in the fourteenth chapter (“Eve”/“Weib”) when she seduces him in her carriage in one of the castle’s gardens. I will return to both of these scenes in Chapter Three to explore the seduction’s effect on Pernath; for now, I turn to the historic and generic significance of these Gothicized spaces in relation to depictions of the fall of the German-speaking aristocracy in the novel.

The novel recreates spaces that had been historically occupied by the Habsburg nobility

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<sup>191</sup> *Der Golem*, 160.

in order to reveal the hypocrisy of the German-speaking nobility and ethnic-based class differences in the city. The castle complex in *Der Golem* is home to two of the novel's wealthy German-speaking characters: the Habsburg prince Ferri Athenstädt and Angelina.<sup>192</sup> Meyrink chose a historically burdened urban space in which to locate his German aristocrats.

Since the Catholic Habsburg victory over Protestant Bohemians in the Battle of White Mountain (1620), Catholicism supplanted Protestantism in the region while crushing the Czech-speaking nobility.<sup>193</sup> Prague's elegant castle complex—boasting more than 400 apartment buildings and a Catholic cathedral at its center—became a symbol of German Catholic cultural, political, and religious dominance. As such, it presents as a “Gothic” setting. As Sharon Rose Yang and Kathleen Healey have shown, Gothic landscapes featuring castles and religious landmarks (i.e., monasteries, cathedrals, churches etc.) become sites “by which political, psychological, social, and cultural ideals are laid bare, transmitted, and often critiqued.”<sup>194</sup> The events that take place in this fraught quarter of the city lay bare the degeneracy and spiritual impoverishment of the aristocrats who live there.

During her meeting with Pernath at the St. Vitus Cathedral at the heart of the palace complex, Angelina lures him into the cathedral in hopes that he will help her buy a potential blackmailer's silence concerning her love affair with Dr. Savioli. She carries with her “a little purse filled to the brim with pearls and precious gems” (“ein Täschchen... das vollgestopft war mit Perlenschnüren und Edelsteinen”), which she asks Pernath to give to the blackmailer.

In this scene, to which I will return in Chapter Three, the cathedral operates as a Gothic projection “of historical conflicts of power and thought that have been pushed beneath the veneer

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<sup>192</sup> Hugh LeCaine Agnew, *The Czechs and the Lands of the Bohemian Crown* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2004), 118.

<sup>193</sup> Askey, 60.

<sup>194</sup> Yang and Healey, 1.

of society.”<sup>195</sup> Gothic imagery emphasizing solitude, loss, sadness, and decay abound in Pernath’s portrayals of the sights, sounds, and smells in the palace square and its cathedral as he waits for Angelina: “I entered the lonely place from whose center the cathedral rises to the throne of the angels” (“da trat ich auf den einsamen Platz, aus dessen Mitte der Dom aufragt zum Thron der Engel”).<sup>196</sup> While approaching the palace courtyard, he hears the “soft, lost tones” (“leise, verlorene Töne”) of a harmonium playing from a distant house “[l]ike melancholy tears trickling down into the desolation” (“Wie Tränentropfen der Schwermut fielen sie in die Verlassenheit”). Outside of the cathedral, the “[h]igh, proud windows” of the nobility’s chambers, which enclose around the cathedral like a fortress, have “ledges glittering and icy” and “looked up impassively at the clouds” (“Hohe, stolze Fenster, die Simse beglitzert und vereist, schauten teilnahmslos zu den Wolken empor”). The “tall, proud” chambers inhabited by German speakers look to the sky—a symbol of the divine described in Catholic doctrine—with indifference, eschewing the moral codes embodied in the cathedral. Inside the cathedral, Pernath notes the “withered scent” (“[w]elker Duft”) of wax, emphasizing decay. His descriptions draw attention to the withering Catholic moral values in Prague’s imperious German-speaking aristocracy, paralleling his later unflattering portrayals of the nobility and the religious ideologies from which it has deviated. As a result, the entire palace complex carries an odd, ghostly presence conveying loss, similar to a wilted flower’s reminder of lost life like “a life without a heartbeat” (“Ein Leben ohne Herzschlag”).

His later conversation with Angelina reiterates the German-speaking community’s break from tradition and the decay of moral values among Prague’s nobility. Angelina, Prince Athenstädt, and the place in which they live embody the corruption, hypocrisy, and decadence of

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<sup>195</sup> Yang and Healey, 8.

<sup>196</sup> All quotes in this paragraph can be found in *Der Golem*, 110-1.



Prague's German-speaking aristocracy. The interactions that take place in this space traditionally occupied by the Habsburgs suggest that the political power the space embodies is "as decrepit and corrupt as the morality and legitimacy (literal and figurative) of [the castle compound's] owners."<sup>197</sup> Angelina's choice of the Cathedral to enlist Pernath's services in concealing her immoral behavior puts her iniquity on full display. It also alludes to a rift that the novel implies exists between the actions and behaviors of Prague's German-speaking nobility and well-known doctrines in the Catholic Church. Catholic teachings commanded pious followers to "flee from sexual immorality" and "youthful passions" in pursuit of "righteousness, faith, love, and peace,"<sup>198</sup> yet Angelina hatches a plan to cover up her "sexual immorality" in the very building that prohibits them. She thus turns the purpose of the church as a place of sanctuary, forgiveness, and repentance on its head. Yang and Healey claim that in Gothic literature, "castles, churches, and family homes.... should offer women protection and nurturing, but instead are realms of danger and terror."<sup>199</sup> Indeed, Angelina explains to Pernath upon meeting him there, "I could think of no other place where I would be safer from spies and danger than here" ("ich wußte keinen andern Ort, wo ich sicherer vor Nachforschung und Gefahr bin, als diesen").<sup>200</sup> Angelina's shocking disregard for the sanctity of the cathedral, however, not only reveals her flawed character, which will be further explored in the Chapter Three, but also signals a general breakdown in the Empire's religious values and political control over the city.

Pernath, however, is foolishly enraptured by Angelina's beauty, her wealth, and the sense of false security the Gothic cathedral and the intricate architecture surrounding it convey. He describes the elegance of the castle complex with the Cathedral at its center, which mirrors its elegant inhabitants: "Archways took me in and released me, palaces slowly passing by, with

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<sup>197</sup> Yang and Healey, 6.

<sup>198</sup> 1 Corinthians 6:8 and 2 Timothy 2:22 (New Revised Standard Version)

<sup>199</sup> Yang and Healey, 8.

<sup>200</sup> *Der Golem*, 101.

carved, lofty portals where lions' heads bit into bronze rings" ("Torbogen nahmen mich auf und entließen mich, Paläste zogen langsam an mir vorüber, mit geschnitzten, hochmütigen Portalen, darinnen Löwenköpfe in bronzene Ringe bissen").<sup>201</sup> His description of the palaces' archways with lions' heads ("Löwenköpfe") carved into them, leading him on and then dismissing him, foreshadows his interactions with the woman herself who lives there. Like lion that stalks and attacks its prey, leaving its carcass behind, Angelina willfully entices him, seduces him, damages him emotionally, and then disappears along with the rest of Prague's German-speaking aristocracy. The grandiose architecture of the palace and its medieval cathedral, indeed the entire compound, recall structures in Gothic novels that, which are "weak with age and dissolution" and thus "admit agents of lust, violence, hypocrisy, greed, and other kinds of corruption."<sup>202</sup>

While Angelina's seduction of Pernath will be addressed at greater length in Chapter Three, it is important here to note that the description of Angelina's home makes clear the class divisions in Prague society in keeping with the function of such edifices in Gothic fiction. David Punter claims that "Gothic castles... while denying modernity, at the same time express the political and class conflicts of the period in which the texts were written." Gothic texts, he asserts, "both question and resist given scripts of power."<sup>203</sup> The elegant palace in which she resides contrasts with the discolored ("mißfarbig"), dilapidated ("verkommen"<sup>204</sup>) buildings that surround Pernath's apartment in the ghetto, as well as with the yellow stream of water ("ein gelber Schmutzbach") running through the ghetto streets that is infused with what is presumably urine or fecal matter.<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> *Der Golem*, 99.

<sup>202</sup> Yang and Healey, 6.

<sup>203</sup> Punter, *The Literature of Terror*, qtd. in Yang and Healey, 8.

<sup>204</sup> *Der Golem*, 27. Pernath describes the buildings in the ghetto in the following terms: "I turned my attention and looked at the houses that sat in front of me in the rain like dull old animals in the rain. How scary and degenerate they all looked!" ("ich wandte meine Aufmerksamkeit... ab und musterte die mißfarbigen Hauser, die da vor meinen Augen wie verdrossene alte Tiere im Regen nebeneinander hockten. Wie unheimlich und verkommen sie alle aussahen!").

<sup>205</sup> *Der Golem*, 26.

Class differences are also made visible in the physical appearance of the German-speaking aristocracy, which strongly contrasts with that of the ghetto inhabitants. Angelina and the prince Athenstädt wear clothing made of costly materials. Angelina's entrance, for example, is always preceded by "the rustling of silk" ("[d]as Rauschen eines seidenen Kleides"<sup>206</sup>). This costly fabric is inaccessible to those in the ghetto, who struggle to afford shoes. Like Angelina, prince Ferri Athenstädt always wears costly materials. Drinking among patrons in Salon Loitschek who are "barefoot, stubborn, ragged and tattered" ("barfuß, schmutzstarrend, zerlumpt und zerfetzt"<sup>207</sup>) in the novel's sixth chapter ("Night"/"Nacht"), he appears in "black patent leather shoes" ("schwarzen Lackschuhen"), wearing pearls, and "glittering rings" ("blitzende Ringe").<sup>208</sup> And such clothing exudes power. When the officers try to shut down Salon Loitschek, the prince's presence in the establishment immediately prompts the police to leave. The lead inspector, who blushes with embarrassment upon seeing the prince, "stares at the pearl on the aristocrat's breast pocket" ("Der Polizeikommissar hat sich verfärbt und starrt in der Verlegenheit immerwährend auf die Perle in der Hemdbrust des Aristokraten") and mutters an apology before departing.<sup>209</sup> I will explore this character further in Chapter Two, but this scene draws attention to the weight that German wealth and social prestige carry throughout the city; while his noble background allots him social privileges, expensive clothing, and access to spaces not shared with Prague's impoverished citizens (e.g., Prague's palace), his corruption is internal, visible in his depraved behaviors with an impoverished Jewish prostitute in the ghetto.

The negative effects of class difference are made visible in Pernath's failed relationship with Angelina. The novel suggest that Angelina has sex only with German men who are financially stable or are famous. Her choice of suitors is demonstrated by her marriage to her

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<sup>206</sup> *Der Golem*, 101.

<sup>207</sup> *Der Golem*, 78.

<sup>208</sup> *Der Golem*, 80; 79.

<sup>209</sup> *Der Golem*, 81.

noble husband, her affair with the young, German physician, Dr. Savioli (“ein junger deutscher Arzt”<sup>210</sup>) who will be discussed in Chapter Three, and the gem dealer Pernath. Any chance of a relationship between Pernath and Angelina is, however, thwarted by his lack of social status. Whereas Angelina wears jewels, Pernath’s gem collection comes from repairing gems owned by others; he has neither the noble heritage nor the reputation to hold her affections. In pondering his predicament, Pernath contemplates how he might improve his social status to make himself worthy of her: “Was it so completely impossible that I became a famous man overnight? If not your equal by birth, if not by origin? At least Dr. Savioli’s equal?” (“Konnte denn nicht vielleicht doch in Erfüllung gehen, was mir da die Sehnsucht meines Herzens vorgaukelte? War es so ganz und gar unmöglich, daß ich über Nacht ein berühmter Mann wurde? Ihr ebenbürtig, wenn auch nicht an Herkunft? Zumindest Dr. Savioli ebenbürtig?”).<sup>211</sup> Although Pernath is financially stable, his profession does not carry the social prestige outside of the ghetto or in noble circles.

Near the conclusion of *Der Golem*, Meyrink visualizes the fall of the German nobility and German cultural elites in Prague by upending the social prestige associated with Angelina and the prince Athenstädt. Angelina and the Habsburg prince carry on a decadent lifestyle that is abruptly brought to a halt at the end of the novel. Angelina cuckolds her husband multiple times, her promiscuity nearly leading to her social ruin. Although Angelina successfully evades public scandal by enticing Pernath to facilitate a bribe on her behalf, at the end of the novel she disappears from Prague, leaving a trail of rumors that she fled the city with her German lover, Dr. Savioli. Prince Athenstädt’s fate in the novel’s final chapter (“Conclusion”/“Schluss”) is generalizable to the entire German aristocracy in Prague. In a scene that will be analyzed in more detail in Chapters Two and Three, the reader learns that the prince was betrayed by a Jewish girl named Rosina—a character who is in effect Angelina’s Jewish double and who, the novel

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<sup>210</sup> *Der Golem*, 39.

<sup>211</sup> *Der Golem*, 190.

intimates, is a prostitute.<sup>212</sup> Rumors suggest that, by using sex, Rosina persuaded the prince to renounce his royal title and have a relationship with her. After robbing him of his wealth (“er [hat] kein Geld nicht mehr gehabt hat”), she ran off with another lover.<sup>213</sup> Mirroring the historic decline of German political, economic, and cultural authority in Prague, the prince, deprived of his social status, is reduced to hustling at billiard tables at a pub in the newly renovated, Czech-dominated district.

Pernath witnesses the downfall of German cultural authority as he slowly realizes that a future with Angelina will never be possible. He becomes certain of its impossibility, however, only after his release from prison. In the middle of the novel, he is embroiled in a complex murder case that is indirectly linked with Angelina and her affair with Dr. Savioli in the ghetto. In trying to defend Angelina, Pernath himself lands in prison but is eventually released. Not only does he discover upon his release that his entire neighborhood has been destroyed by ghetto clearance, but he also never sees or hears from Angelina again. Heartbroken, Pernath tries to reestablish himself in the new Czech-dominated city district. In order to pay for a new apartment on the *Altschulgasse*, he recounts, “I had sold my precious gems and rented two small, furnished rooms in the attic of a house in the *Altschulgasse*—the only street spared from the demolition of the Jewish Town” (“Ich hatte meine Edelsteine verkauft... und mir zwei kleine, möblierte, aneinanderstoßende Dachkammern in der Altschulgasse — die einzige Gasse, die von der Assanierung der Judenstadt verschont geblieben, — gemietet”).<sup>214</sup> His desperate financial circumstances after serving time force him to sell the last of his gem collection in order to rent an apartment. By selling his gemstones, Pernath sheds the last bit of material wealth linking him to centuries of German economic privilege in the city. Selling these stones also signifies a final

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<sup>212</sup> For a discussion of Rosina as Angelina’s double, see Chapter Three of this dissertation.

<sup>213</sup> *Der Golem*, 341.

<sup>214</sup> *Der Golem*, 332.

break with Angelina, a woman whose own jewels mark her social position within Prague's German aristocracy.

Making this break, Pernath can start a new life. He resolves to search for his Jewish friends Hillel and Mirjam, another woman for whom he had developed feelings and who he believes fled the ghetto during clearance: "Before the end of the year I might well already be on my way, searching for the two of them in villages and towns, or anywhere else I might find them" ("Ehe das Jahr noch zu Ende ging, war ich vielleicht schon unterwegs und suchte in Städten und Dörfern, oder wohin es mich innerlich ziehen würde, nach Hillel und Mirjam").<sup>215</sup> Realizing that there is little hope for his future in Prague and for connection with its German community, Pernath renounces his German identity and commits himself to a life following his nomadic Jewish friends. As one of the only characters who remains in the district after clearance and who remembers the former Jewish ghetto, he plans to take on a life as a nomad like his exiled German-Jewish friends.

Pernath's relinquishing of his precious gems for this apartment as well as his inability to access funds in his bank account gesture towards the loss of German financial control in Prague with the Czech take-over of municipal economics. While in prison, Pernath learns that he has inherited a large sum from his Czech-Jewish friend, Charousek, who has meanwhile committed suicide. I will revisit these plot developments in Chapter Two, but for now it is pertinent to note that according to Charousek's will, Pernath, as well as his friends Prokop, Vrieslander, Zwakh, Hillel, and Mirjam will each receive a hefty sum. Charousek himself had unexpectedly inherited this money from his millionaire father, the Jewish junk-dealer Aaron Wassertrum, who was murdered near the end of the novel and shortly before Charousek's suicide. When Pernath visits the bank to retrieve these funds, however, he learns, "my account was still blocked by court

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<sup>215</sup> *Der Golem*, 333.

order” (“Auf der Bank hieß es, mein Geld sei gerichtlich immer noch mit Beschlagnahme belegt”).<sup>216</sup>

As we will see in Chapter Two, the investigators in Pernath’s murder case are Czech. As a result, the court order placing a hold on his funds likely comes from Czech municipal authorities: “Charousek’s inheritance would have to go through the official channels, and I waited for the money with burning impatience before using everything to track Hillel and Mirjam” (“die Erbschaft Charouseks mußte noch den Amtsweg gehen, und ich wartete doch mit brennender Ungeduld auf das Geld, um dann alles aufzubieten, Hillels und Mirjams Spur zu suchen”).<sup>217</sup> The German protagonist, however, never receives these funds, shut out from an economy now under Czech political authority.

In the novel, all German social capital and monetary currency have been deprived of their value, as demonstrated by a scene involving a trinket from Angelina that Pernath discovers among a local merchant’s wares. As he looks through a peddler’s worthless wares on the way home from buying a Christmas tree, he finds a heart carved of some red stone on a faded ribbon. The silk on the trinket immediately links it with Angelina. The discovery of this old trinket intensifies the pain of his nostalgia, and he is shocked to find that this trinket unlocks his long-forgotten past outside of the ghetto:

I was rummaging around among all the fobs, small crucifixes, hairpins and brooches when I happened upon a heart carved out of some red stone on a faded silk ribbon. To my astonishment, I realized it was the memento that Angelina had wanted to give me when she was still a little girl, at the fountain in the palace where she lived.

All at once the days of my youth flashed past my inward eye, as if I were watching a peep-show drawn by a child. —

I was so moved I just stood there a long time staring at the tiny red heart in my hand. — — —

Ich kramte in seinem Kasten unter all den Uhranhängseln, kleinen Kruzifixen, Kammnadeln und Broschen herum, da fiel mir ein Herz aus rotem Stein an einem verschossenen Seidenbande in die Hand, und ich erkannte es voll Erstaunen als

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<sup>216</sup> *Der Golem*, 331.

<sup>217</sup> *Der Golem*, 331.

das Andenken, das mir Angelina, als sie noch ein kleines Mädchen gewesen, einst beim Springbrunnen in ihrem Schloß geschenkt hatte.  
Und mit einem Schlag stand meine Jugendzeit vor mir, als sähe ich in einen Guckkasten tief hinein in ein kindlich gemaltes Bild. —  
Lange, lange stand ich erschüttert da und starrte auf das kleine, rote Herz in meiner Hand. — — —<sup>218</sup>

The discarded trinket Pernath finds among the peddler's wares has a double significance in the novel: it is indeed a symbol of Pernath's heartbreak over a woman he will never see again, but it is also a nostalgic object that prompts the mourning of the once prominent role Germans played in Prague society. As a lone man on an island ruled by Czechs, Pernath himself sees the discarded heart-shaped trinket as a memento of his last connection to his German past outside of the ghetto. It intensifies his feelings of loss and mourning for a previous chapter of his life while alluding to the erasure of the German presence in the city.

In the novel, ghetto clearance occurs alongside the disappearance of Prague's German-speaking community, its nobility, and its economic and social control over the Czech population. Like the many "worthless antiques" ("wertlose Antiquitäten") on the peddler's tray, all things German in Prague have become obsolete; the street signs, delegate seats, and the German language itself had significantly decreased in value at the time of the tale's serialization in *Die weissen Blätter*.<sup>219</sup> Surrounded by Czechs, the Prince and Pernath are the only German residents who remain in *Josefov/Josephstadt* after renovation. Prince Athenstädt, for his part, has no titles to his name, as he "had to give up all honor" ("[er] hat... auf alle Ehre verzichten müssen") in order to be with Rosina.<sup>220</sup> It is possible that the reason why he chose (and was allowed) to stay in the new, Czech-dominated district was that he had separated himself from the monarchy as well as the ideals and economic stratification it symbolized. His distance from his Habsburg title

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<sup>218</sup> *Der Golem*, 333-4.

<sup>219</sup> *Der Golem*, 333.

<sup>220</sup> *Der Golem*, 341.



and former life as a privileged German nobleman corresponds to what Calinescu claims as typical of decadent literature: “the breakup of traditional aesthetic authority” characterized in “the fatality of decline,” “corrupting influence,” and the “anguishing prelude” to “imminent cosmic collapse and doom.”<sup>221</sup>

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Through the novel’s characterizations of interactions between German speakers across class lines at the turn of the twentieth century, Meyrink recreates for his readers the despondency felt universally by Germans as an ethnic and linguistic group upon realizing that their presence was no longer welcome in the city. The experiences and fates of the novel’s characters resemble those of the city’s historic middle-class German-speaking population, whose political, cultural, and economic dominance in the city was usurped by the city’s majority Czech-affiliated population—the group that Prague resident Oskar Werfel (1873-1944) referred to as “the healthy, hale and hearty race now master in the country.” Pernath’s alienation is not simply a vague despair but is historically linked to the decline of German authority and the rise of Czech power in the region. For his contemporary German readership familiar with the social climate in Prague at the time, Pernath’s tale translates “the tragic story” (“das tragische Geschick”) that Wiener described for all German-language poets. Prague’s German-speaking community, Wiener claimed, was a “self-reliant” society that was “strictly separated from the Slavic environment (“auf sich selbst angewiesenen, von der slawischen Umgebung streng abgeschlossenen Gesellschaft”).

In sum, Meyrink’s tale of a middle-class German-speaker who longs for a forgotten past in Prague makes visible for his readers what Scott Spector calls the shrinking German “linguistic

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<sup>221</sup> Calinescu, 151; 152; 153.

island” in Czech-dominated Prague at the turn of the twentieth century. These ethnic divisions intensified during the war years and culminated in German feelings of being unwelcome in the new Czech state after the conclusion of the Great War. After 1918 with the creation of Czechoslovakia, many Germans, such as Werfel and Rilke, no longer identified with the new country: “They must have considered many things in the new country as hostile, the anti-German sentiments, sometimes even anti-Semitism... the old world no longer existed, and they had to adapt to the new situation.”<sup>222</sup> Thus, the German-speaking narrator’s accounts describe the loosening of Habsburg control over Prague culture and municipal politics.

The following chapter will explore the new dystopic, Czech-led world that emerged as a result. In this new world, community and communication are impossible. The aftermath of the *Finis Ghetto* prohibits those who speak or affiliate themselves with German language or culture from locating themselves within the city’s new social structures and hierarchies, engaging in constructive dialogue with the ghetto’s new inhabitants, and coexisting with the city’s ethnic and linguistic communities who populate the former Jewish ghetto.<sup>223</sup>

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<sup>222</sup> Richter, “Egon Erwin Kisch – The Raging Reporter.”

<sup>223</sup> This argument was inspired by Paul Buchholz’s claim that German experimental fiction published at the *Jahrhundertwende* drew inspiration from the nihilistic worldviews of Arthur Schopenhauer, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Fyodor Dostoevsky. According to Buchholz’s analysis of monologue in turn-of-the-twentieth-century experimental fiction by Kafka and others, texts featuring impossible communities create for the reader a “void” that is “verbally conjured” by a speaker “for whom community and communication are impossible and who locates himself in a nowhere alongside nobody.” Buchholz, 35.

## Chapter Two: The Czech Awakening: The *Finis Ghetto* and the Loss of Communal Memory in Prague's Minority Communities

In a story reflecting on non-Jewish discourse surrounding the history of Prague's former Jewish ghetto, *Der Golem* aestheticizes two German speakers' experiences with the beginning stages and aftermath of the *Finis Ghetto*. Under the auspices of a historic Czech-led government order sanctioned by the Habsburg seat in Vienna, the *Finis Ghetto* leveled *Josefov/Josephstadt*, expelled its residents, and installed wider streets as well as luxury apartments and businesses inhabited and owned by Czech-speaking residents. In the novel, the ghetto clearance project comes as a surprise to Pernath, who is shocked by and unprepared for the dramatic changes that take place in his neighborhood because of it. His shock highlights the lack of communication between Czech-speaking authorities who implemented the plan and those most deeply affected by it, as well as the municipality's lack of concern for these residents following demolition. As we shall see, the novel's few remaining former ghetto residents in *Josefov/Josephstadt* after clearance are silenced, "othered" in the new community. As a result, communal memories of the former district—particularly the German-speaking (non-)Jewish communities that the space represents in the cultural imagination—are not carried into the newly renovated, Czech-dominated space. These narrative details follow and reflect upon historical developments in Prague that irreparably changed the city's physical, demographic, and cultural landscape.

Historically, the *Finis Ghetto* emerged alongside the birth of the struggles of Bohemia's fragmented middle class and Czech-affiliated interest groups. Unlike the development of Vienna's *Ringstrasse*, Haussmann's reconstruction plans in Paris, or projects in Budapest's *Nagykörút* (Grand Boulevard) and *Sugárút* (Radical Road), the impetus for the *Finis Ghetto* did not come from an imperial government reigning over the region; instead, it developed out of local efforts to "sanitize" the "red-light" district located adjacent to Prague's city center. This

grass-roots movement consisted primarily of middle-class Czech speakers who belonged to a nascent and antisemitic Young Czech political party. Not only did this group wish to overthrow the established Old Czech political party but its primary goal was also to oust the last vestiges of German-speaking authority in the region.<sup>224</sup> Although the Old and Young Czech nationalists wished to place the city on par with other growing, progressive European cosmopolitan centers (e.g., Paris, Vienna, and Berlin), the antisemitic *Finis Ghetto* project depicted in *Der Golem* emerged largely as the result of the Young Czechs' push for "modern hygiene" in the cosmopolitan center, which effectively drove the poor from the center of the city.<sup>225</sup> Between 1860 and 1880, as professional communities and municipal bureaucracies undertook projects rooted in public health and urban planning, the old Jewish quarter in particular became for Young Czechs a target of sanitation efforts and urban renewal. Their petition was eventually successful. In 1893, Emperor Franz Josef agreed to local Prague officials' requests to pass a sanitation bill that would level the city's former ghetto in *Josefov/Josephstadt* as well as portions of Old Town and New Town. Fueled by the persistence of antisemitic (and de facto, anti-German) hostility, Prague's City Hall and its newly developed Czech-speaking middle and upper-middle class, its managers and elected officials conceptualized and initiated demolition and rebuilt *Josefov/Josephstadt*, carrying out other smaller demolition projects in neighboring districts between 1895 and 1917.<sup>226</sup>

Meyrink's story describes one German-speaker's perspective on these historic changes. Although the novel never mentions the project by name, the final chapters of *Der Golem* recreate

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<sup>224</sup> The Old Czech national political party emerged in 1848 following the Prague Slavic Congress, which demanded the formation of Austrian federal states and the withdrawal from the German confederation. Despite the defeat of Czech nationalist movements in 1848, the experience brought a wave of ethnic nationalism called the Czech National Revival. In order to pacify internal dissent, Francis Josef I of Austria revoked absolutist policies, allowing for the formation of a Czech National Party, (*Národní strana*, later known as the "Old Czech" party). See Guistino, 6 and Cohen, *The Politics of Ethnic Survival*, 18-23;

<sup>225</sup> Guistino, 187.

<sup>226</sup> Guistino, 6.

the chaotic atmosphere that accompanied the ghetto's demolition between 1897 and 1912. During clearance, twelve passageways in *Josefov/Josephstadt* were eliminated, and some thirty streets were reduced to ten, which were widened to improve air circulation in the district. Among these streets were *Hahnpassgasse*, the site of our narrator's apartment. The narrow alley on Cervena Street—featured in *Der Golem* as the site to which Pernath moves after the *Finis Ghetto*—is one example of only a handful of streets that survived demolition in the district. Today this street stands between the *Altneuschul* (the Old New Synagogue) and the adjacent Jewish Town Hall.<sup>227</sup> The novel re-envisioned the destruction of nearly 260 buildings in *Josefov/Josephstadt* that were leveled through the *Finis Ghetto*, causing the district's former built space and the population residing within these structures to vanish almost entirely from Prague's urban landscape. Eighty-three buildings replaced the countless shanties, brothels, shops, and overcrowded apartment buildings that were demolished, and the new structures became choice real estate in Prague in the early twentieth century. By dramatizing the restructuring of the city and its community, Meyrink wrote a story that recreates Prague's local cultural history within a Gothic crime narrative that depicts trauma, heartbreak, and loss.

As we shall see, the antisemitic (and anti-German) objectives of Czech-speaking members of Prague's municipality may have played a role in the radical social changes enforced through the *Finis Ghetto*. *Der Golem* addresses the German cultural experience and antisemitism in Prague while providing a counternarrative to Czech-language historical narratives that sought to erase German cultural memory from Prague. His story affirms Guistino's claim that the Czech-led "sanitation" of the ghetto did not respond to public health concerns alone, but also

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<sup>227</sup> Eli Valley, "Visiting Prague: The 'Jewish Town' Today," *The Great Jewish Cities of Central and Eastern Europe: A Travel Guide and Resource Book to Prague, Warsaw, and Budapest* (Lanham, MD: Jason Aronson Inc, 1999), 51.

targeted the city's most impoverished (German-speaking) Jewish residents.<sup>228</sup>

Jews had long been a target of political agendas in Prague. In the late eighteenth century, antisemitic Czech speakers began to view Prague's Jewish population (and the district they inhabited) as an extension of the Habsburg monarchy and German-speaking authority in the city. This characterization stemmed from Emperor Josef II's 1781 Emancipation Edict (*Toleranzpatent*), which offered Bohemian Jews civil liberties in exchange for their adoption of German last names, the German language in daily use and in schools, as well as swearing loyalty to the German monarchy in Vienna. As briefly mentioned in the introduction, *Josefov/Josephstadt* honored Habsburg Emperor Joseph II, who granted Prague's Jews civil and religious liberties through various edicts between 1764 and 1790.<sup>229</sup> Hostile beliefs surrounding the presumed connection between Prague's Jewish and German-speaking communities intensified in 1867 when Franz Josef I of Austria granted further civil liberties to Prague's Jews. Liberties included lifting housing restrictions that had limited Jewish residency to the ghetto, granting Jews limited suffrage, and allowing Jewish participation in economic sectors previously closed off to them. With changes to housing restrictions following 1867, wealthy Jews found more desirable housing in Prague's districts of Old Town (*Staré Město pražské*) and New Town (*Nové Město*), while impoverished Czech-speaking artisans and craftsmen who suffered from factory production took their places in the ghetto-turned-slum.<sup>230</sup>

Despite demographic changes in the district between 1867 and 1900, many antisemitic Czech-speaking nationalists continued to see *Josefov/Josephstadt* as a Jewish space. As Guistino

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<sup>228</sup> For a summary of the steps Czech nationals took to remove traces of German-speaking authority in Bohemia and Moravia between 1918 and 1950, see Dale Askey's dissertation (2018), which focuses on the German *Verbliebene* community that remained in Czech-dominated regions following the ousting of Nazi authorities.

<sup>229</sup> Blanning, 67-70.

<sup>230</sup> The occupants inhabiting Josefov were some of Prague's poorest residents, many of whom were Czech lower-middle-class artisans whose handcrafted products were not competitive in a market flooded with new factory-manufactured goods. See Michael John, "Obdachlosigkeit – Massenerscheinung und Unruheherd im Wien der Spätgründerzeit," in *Glücklich ist, wer vergißt...? Das andere Wien um 1900*, ed. Hubert Ch. Ehalt, Gernot Heiß and Hannes Stehl (Vienna and Cologne: Hermann Böhlau Nachf, 1986), 173-94.

has shown, Czech nationalists developed a modernizing plan to remove the “backward” and “oriental” blot on the city’s landscape that tainted the image of Czech modernity. Members of the Young Czech movement in particular believed that only by removing the Jewish ghetto completely could the municipality limit the presence of those who identified with and supported German cultural and political agendas in the Prague.<sup>231</sup> The novel makes visible the devastating emotional consequences of racial ideology turned into xenophobic legislation through the silencing of German-speaking and German-speaking Jewish characters. As we will see, these characters are deeply traumatized by their unexpected displacement because of a dominant Czech-speaking community that made no attempt to integrate them into the new social order.<sup>232</sup>

*Der Golem*, however, explores themes of immortality and memory of the district through one character’s recounting of the golem legend: “[T]here is something here in this quarter of the town, of that I am certain.... Something that cannot die, and has its being within our midst” (“[Es gibt] irgend etwas, was nicht sterben kann, in diesem Stadtviertel sein Wesen treibt und damit zusammenhängt, dessen bin ich sicher”).<sup>233</sup> This being, as Pernath’s Czech-Jewish friend Zwahk recounts, manifests itself cyclically as a dreadful clay figure that terrorizes the district’s inhabitants:

“Every thirty-three years or so, something happens in our streets which brings nothing particularly exciting, yet spreads a horror for which neither an explanation nor a justification can suffice. Again and again, a complete stranger, a beardless, yellow-complected Mongolian type wrapped in old-fashioned, faded clothes and with an oddly stumbling gait as if in any instant he might fall on his face, emerges from the direction of *Altschulgasse*, passes through the Jewish city suddenly—he vanishes.”

“Ungefähr alle dreiunddreißig Jahre wiederholt sich ein Ereignis in unsern Gassen, das gar nichts besonders Aufregendes an sich trägt und dennoch ein

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<sup>231</sup> Guistino, 1-13; 98-102; 150.

<sup>232</sup> In the neighboring district of Old Town, a district that historically had a large Jewish population, 324 of the 978 buildings were slated for demolition in comparison to the mere eighteen of the 1,711 buildings in New Town. Guistino, 89-174.

<sup>233</sup> *Der Golem*, 50.

Entsetzen verbreitet, für das weder eine Erklärung noch eine Rechtfertigung ausreicht: Immer wieder begibt es sich nämlich, daß ein vollkommen fremder Mensch, bartlos, von gelber Gesichtsfarbe und mongolischem Typus, aus der Richtung der Altschulgasse her, in altmodische, verschossene Kleider gehüllt, gleichmäßigen und eigentümlich stolpernden Ganges, so, als wolle er jeden Augenblick vornüber fallen, durch die Judenstadt schreitet und plötzlich — unsichtbar wird."<sup>234</sup>

This creature in *Der Golem* embodies the curious and horrific presence in Prague's Jewish Town that local scientists, medical professionals, and antisemitic local authorities during Meyrink's day fervently hoped to identify, contain, and eradicate. Meyrink aestheticizes these professionals' goals with a novel depicting the dispersal and silencing of the former ghetto inhabitants through the *Finis Ghetto*.

Although the historically overpopulated district of *Josefov/Josephstadt* was plagued with crime and disease, the history that Meyrink provides describes a district that had its own community, one that was lost through clearance. Artist and author Hugo Steiner Prag (1880-1945), a friend of Meyrink who provided illustrations to accompany *Der Golem*, best characterizes those who lived in the district in a document he assembled in 1935. His description allows readers to witness the district's transition from a ghetto as a place that confined a religious group to a slum following the opening of the district's gates in 1867:

Once it was the ghetto and it had its own secluded existence until the end of the eighteenth century. After that Jews were permitted to live outside the ghetto walls. Those who were wealthy moved, while the poor and the poorer stayed... in the vicinity of their house of worship. But gradually all types of people moved there: the destitute, the dissolute and finally criminals. The streets were crowded with pubs of the foulest sort, dark hideouts and famous bordellos....

It was picturesque, hazardous and dreary at the same time. It smelled of corruption and misery, disease and crime. The people fit the setting. But side by side with this misery lived peaceful lower-class people and pious Jews. On Friday evenings one could hear their monotone prayers mingling with the bickering of whores and the loud tumult of the drunken.... Around 1895 the demolition was begun. Hundreds of buildings and numerous alleys were destroyed. It was an

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<sup>234</sup> *Der Golem*, 52.



unbelievable sight... but for one who knew this district as it once was, in spite of its seeming ugliness, it remains immortal.<sup>235</sup>

In this passage, Steiner-Prag counters the typical negative imagery surrounding the district with redemptive images of the pious individuals who lived side-by-side with criminals and prostitutes prior to ghetto clearance. No longer confining one minority religious group, the overcrowded, crime-infested district now housed only the most pious Jews among “all types of people.”<sup>236</sup>

What neither this passage nor Meyrink’s novel show, however, is that because Prague’s aristocracy and middle-class consisted of German speakers, many of the impoverished residents in the historic ghetto were Czech speakers or identified with Czech-working-class issues and political agendas. The reader is thus left to question why Meyrink’s ghetto is primarily filled with Jewish characters who converse only in German. Although the novel makes reference to several characters who have mixed Czech-Jewish heritage (e.g., the tubercular student Innocence Charousek), most of Meyrink’s characters in the ghetto—even those with Czech names (e.g., Zwahk and Prokop)—speak in German. Meyrink does not overtly call attention to the language they use, but because he writes the novel in German, prominent characters in the text perforce converse in German. The author does, however, occasionally use a colloquial-sounding German dialect to allude lightly to the “otherness” of those who primarily speak the rural language, as we shall see shortly in my discussion of Pernath’s imprisonment in a local jail or in the case of

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<sup>235</sup> Qtd. in Emily Bilski, *Golem! Danger, Deliverance and Art* (New York: The Jewish Museum, 1988), 59 and Baer, 45.

<sup>236</sup> Using three different statistical methods to ensure precision and the most accurate representation of reality, an elaborate set of statistics produced by the Municipal Health Commission in December 1886 suggested that overcrowding was a fact of life for many citizens in Josefov, especially in comparison to other wards of the city. These studies measured the amount of built surface land in the five wards of historic Prague and two of the city’s neighboring suburbs, *Vyšehrad* and *Holešovice*. The results showed that buildings in Josefov covered far more surface area than any other ward in Prague. According to the study, 68 percent of *Josefov’s* ward surface was developed, as compared to 46 percent of Old Town, 38 percent of New Town, 34 percent of Little Side, 26 percent in Hradčany, 12 percent in *Vyšehrad*, and 5 percent in *Holešovice*. See “Městská zdravotní rada,” *NL* (19 December 1886), qtd. in Giustino, 99-100.

Aaron Wassertrum, who struggles to speak “high German” (“hochdeutsch”).<sup>237</sup> In other examples, the protagonist states outright that characters in his vicinity speak “in the Czech language” (“in böhmischer Sprache”).<sup>238</sup>

This chapter will investigate the significance of Meyrink’s linking of the German and the Jewish experience in Prague at the *Jahrhundertwende* through his representation of space. As I shall show, the novel’s conclusion allows us to see how Paul Bucholz’s discussion of “collective isolation” characterizes “impossible communities” in the Prague German context depicted in *Der Golem*.<sup>239</sup> While the novel portrays the *Finis Ghetto* as cleaning up a district filled with crime, prostitution and degeneracy (embodied by the Jew Aaron Wassertrum and his kin), the text also suggests that the physical destruction of *Josefov/Josephstadt* destroyed the sense of community shared for centuries by Prague’s Jewish community, as well as all impoverished citizens who resided there after 1867. Nearly all ghetto residents are displaced by the demolition project, which forces them to leave the city. Beggars, prostitutes, and other criminals disappear from the urban landscape, as do pious Jews such as the district’s archivist Hillel and his daughter Mirjam, as well as Pernath’s impoverished ethnic Czech, German-speaking friends Zwahk and Prokop, as well as Vrieslander, who speaks German and has a German name. With the loss of their homes, these characters vanish from Prague without a trace.

As the novel suggests, the disappearance of these residents may help provide a safer and cleaner environment for the new inhabitants; social progress, however, comes with the cost of erasing the shared memories, sense of fellowship, and common experiences of those who lived in

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<sup>237</sup> *Der Golem*, 196.

<sup>238</sup> *Der Golem*, 265.

<sup>239</sup> Bucholz claims that German-language authors at the turn of the twentieth century “symptomiz[e] some version of modern alienation” by using monologue as “*the* medium for the imagination and creation of new community beyond the practical options available in current, concrete reality.” Through monologue, fictional protagonists “redeem the frightening prospect of collective alienation, turning it into a starting point for an affectionate and anarchic form of togetherness.” Bucholz, 5.

the ghetto for religious reasons (Hillel; Mirjam), out of economic need (Zwahk, Prokop, Vrieslander, Jaromir), or because of social ostracism (Pernath). The erasure of the entire community in *Josefov/Josephstadt* eliminates shared memories of the poverty-stricken ghetto, which are removed from social discourse and thus silenced in the new Czech-dominated city.

Examining the novel's characterization of Prague's Czech-speaking community reveals the ways in which Meyrink draws upon common stereotypes of the day that characterized this ethnic and linguistic group as primitive, uneducated, and illiterate, yet nevertheless dedicated to (even relentless in) achieving their goals. These stereotypes are rooted in a long history of ethnic and nationalist tensions in the region. As we shall see, the novel's portrayal of the historic Czech-led ghetto clearance project appears alongside Meyrink's representation of the Czech take-over of the district, as well as the social changes that accompany the urban renewal project.

In *Der Golem*, German speakers and Jews born of Czech parents inhabit the ghetto, as does Pernath, a German-speaker who is sent to the district to recover after a mental breakdown.<sup>240</sup> At the novel's conclusion, only Czech-speaking residents occupy the district, with the exception of three characters: the deaf-mute Jaromir; the blind, Jewish musician Nephtali Schaffranek who, in his advanced age, has forgotten his own name; and the former Habsburg prince Ferri Athenstädt, who, in the aftermath of an affair with the Jewish Rosina, lost his wealth and noble title. Either as a result of physical disability or social castration, these figures have been deprived of their ethnic and/or noble heritage under the new Czech government.

Despite his unflattering depictions of Czech-speaking characters, Meyrink reimagines the aftermath of clearance to suggest that the social changes enacted by Czechs benefit the city as a whole. Building upon my findings in Chapter One, this chapter analyzes the novel's implication that cultural and demographic changes in Prague—namely, the dispersal of the city's most

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<sup>240</sup> Three of Pernath's impoverished friends (Prokop and Zwahk) have unclear relationships to Judaism, although their names and knowledge of Jewish legend suggests that they are Czech Jews.

impoverished, decadent, and degenerate populations alongside the eradication of Prague's German and German-Jewish citizens in *Josefov/Josephstadt*—was necessary for social progress to occur. By removing a large portion of individuals tainted by the effects of poverty, decadence, and degeneracy from Prague's urban landscape, Czech-speaking characters have, in the view of the text, taken steps to make Prague a more peaceful, egalitarian, and idyllic society. Nevertheless, Pernath experiences despondency and despair in response to the *Finis Ghetto* and thus provides a counterpoint to the shining city that has come to be.

The following pages provide a brief history of the rise of Czech nationalism in Prague to contextualize Meyrink's characterization of the Czech-affiliated community in *Der Golem*. While this historical examination cannot and does not pretend to offer a comprehensive account of nineteenth century Czech-German politics, interactions, and conflicts, it provides a brief look at cultural issues that would have been familiar to Meyrink's contemporary readers and are depicted in his novel. These cultural issues, which culminated in the urban renewal project, are relevant to my interpretation of visible nationalist tensions in *Der Golem*. Although Meyrink does not directly mention nationalist tensions in Prague or label the demolition project featured in the novel the *Finis Ghetto*, these historical developments inform character interactions between Prague's German-speaking, Czech-speaking, or Jewish citizens.

### **The Rise of Czech Nationalism in Prague**

As we shall see, Pernath's response to Czech speakers' usurping of positions of municipal authority, the tightening of German finances by Czech-speaking authorities, as well as the Czech-led *Finis Ghetto* project serves as the climax of the tale. His descriptions parallel many German speakers' experiences in the nineteenth-century as German industry in Prague experienced a loss of economic dynamism to a Czech-speaking community that German

speakers had often seen as “backward,” “uneducated,” and “uncivilized.” As Germans-speakers in Prague advocated preserving the “German character” of the city and their “national cultural property” in Bohemia, Czech speakers profited from concessions from the Monarchy on local issues.<sup>241</sup> In hopes of combating continent-wide stereotypes of Eastern Europeans as inferior “outcasts” and members of a “lower order” in comparison with the West,<sup>242</sup> members of the Old and Young Czech nationalist parties in Prague developed theaters, literature, and wide-scale urban renewal projects designed to communicate to the rest of the world that Czech culture was progressive, forward-thinking, and innovative—namely all the characteristics of a “modern” culture. As a result of grassroots efforts to organize cooperatives, cultural movements, educational societies, and literary journals wherever police regulations and Habsburg censorship after 1848 allowed, Czech-speaking organizers began to see the fruits of their labors: the nationalist movement created a well-educated but underemployed population of artisan sons and lesser burgher families, who then became leaders for mobilizing “Czech masses” and took over local regulations and state bureaucracy.<sup>243</sup> Starting in the early 1880s, when Czech-speaking representatives gained the majority in the Bohemian Diet, the hopes of the Czech-affiliated leadership to fulfill a nationalist agenda in municipal politics slowly became reality. Echoing requests made during the 1848 revolutions, these leaders intensified their legal demands for cultural autonomy, political control, secularization, and tolerance from the German-speaking minority. Some of these demands were productive. In 1880, for example, the Diet passed the Austrian language law, known as the *Stremayr* Ordinance, which required any individual in Bohemia, Moravia, and Austrian Silesia to have a command of the Czech language in dealings

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<sup>241</sup> Agnew, 145.

<sup>242</sup> Ivan T. Berend, *Decades of Crisis: Central and Eastern Europe before World War II First Edition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), xxiii.

<sup>243</sup> Cohen, *The Politics of Ethnic Survival*, 24

with courts and bureaucracy.<sup>244</sup> In a region in which for centuries all political and legal dealings had been carried out in German, this law marked the first steps in recognizing the Czech-speaking majority within municipal and bureaucratic sectors.

Despite the growing autonomy Czech speakers established for themselves in the region, negative perceptions of this ethnic community persisted and prompted the Czech language movement. Stereotypes of Czechs as uneducated and illiterate had roots in a long history of battles for cultural dominance in the region.<sup>245</sup> As I outline in this dissertation's introduction, the Battle of White Mountain (1620) determined the fate of the region's Czech-speaking community for almost three centuries by altering the region's religious landscape<sup>246</sup> After two centuries of Protestant dominance, Roman Catholicism became the dominant religion until the late twentieth century, as demonstrated by the prominence of Catholic signifiers that permeate *Der Golem*. The Czech language became the language of peasants, small tradesmen, and servants, and the Czech language was only taught in the lower grades in school."<sup>247</sup>

Until the nineteenth century, those who spoke Czech as their primary language were unlikely to obtain a position in bureaucratic or business sectors—professions that required literacy.<sup>248</sup> As a result, many peasants could not afford to learn to read or write the Czech

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<sup>244</sup> For more information on this ordinance, see Kieval, *The Making of Czech Jewry*, 64. Agnew has shown that in the decades leading into the turn of the twentieth century, "[a]mong the urban government, professional, and mercantile elites, many, if not most, preferred to speak German, even if they might also speak the other local language to some degree; and they seemed to identify their interests with the leading German-speaking elements of the monarchy." This tendency changed after the Czech take-over of government at the twentieth century's turn. See Agnew, 118.

<sup>245</sup> Cohen, *The Politics of Ethnic Survival*, 2.

<sup>246</sup> The Bohemian Crown lands included Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia. The regions had for long centuries existed as a separate state formation within the Holy Roman Empire. With the dissolution of Napoleon's empire, this region became part of the German Confederation, created in 1815 as an associate of states (not a federal state) that included many former members of the Holy Roman Empire. Houžvička, 16.

<sup>247</sup> Peter Demetz, *Prague in Black and Gold: Scenes in the Life of a European City* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1997) 171-200.

<sup>248</sup> During the Enlightenment, and as Marie Theresa's son Emperor Joseph II (1780-1790) attempted to make the whole of the Empire uniformly German, elementary schools that had been taught in Czech up until this time were administered in German with German as the language of instruction. Wilma A. Iggers, *Women of Prague: Ethnic Diversity and Social Change from the Eighteenth Century to the Present* (Providence, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1995), 5.

language, marking a transition of Czech to a primarily spoken language.<sup>249</sup> Throughout the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century, however, a small Czech-speaking elite developed and resuscitated the “Czech culture” and language in written form.<sup>250</sup> For instance, statements by member of the Imperial Council, F.L. Rieger, a supporter of Czech liberals, claimed, “Nowhere in the world do people say ‘science française’ or ‘English science,’ but I have heard and read the words Deutsche Wissenschaft’ hundreds and thousands of times! And how often have we had to hear that ‘The German language is utterly unique, that it is our language of culture, science and that science can be cultivated only in the German language!’”<sup>251</sup> Through efforts by dedicated individuals such as Rieger and others, the Czech literary movement slowly gained momentum in the 1830s and onward alongside a national awakening that emphasized the speaking and reading of the Czech language. These movements became widespread through the publication of Czech grammars, dictionaries, and literary works.<sup>252</sup>

This political history informs Meyrink’s construction of Prague’s Jewish ghetto and the vulnerability of its mixed population as well as the reception of the novel. As we saw in Chapter One, Czech-leaning critics of Meyrink’s day saw his international best-selling novel as undermining efforts of Czech artists and intellectuals to redefine their community. This chapter will show, however, that the novel surprisingly supports Czech speakers’ autonomy under the governance of the Habsburgs.

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<sup>249</sup> Statistics from the German Casino in Prague illustrate the income discrepancies between Germans and Czechs in Prague. These records show that most members in 1860s and 1870s were lawyers, wealthy merchants, manufacturers, professors, and a few state officials. Virtually all were tenured employees of the state with high standards of living. Small businessman joined but never won high honors. On the other hand, the majority of Czechs at this time were laborers and hand-craftsmen. Cohen, *The Politics of Ethnic Survival*, 50-62.

<sup>250</sup> The first scholar of Slavic Philology, Josef Dobrovský (1753-1829), for example, wrote his works in Czech in addition to Latin in hopes to revive the language. He, like other scholars of his time, was convinced that Czech would never again become a living language in academic circles and publication. His efforts inspired Czech nationalist leaders to argue for the importance of using Czech in academic, scientific, medical, and cultural spheres.

<sup>251</sup> Rieger made this statement on June 19<sup>th</sup>, 1861. O. Urban, *Česká společnost 1848-1918*, 170. Original found in Gary Cohen, *Němci v Praze 1861-1914*, qtd. in Houžvička, 18.

<sup>252</sup> Iggers, 6.

## **Pernath's Imprisonment and Stereotypical Caricatures of Czechs**

The scenes depicting Pernath's incarceration feature his first interaction with Czech speakers outside of his primarily Jewish neighborhood. After being framed by Aaron Wassertrum, Pernath finds himself in prison for the murder of the Jewish pedophile Karl Zottmann. In a scene describing Pernath's experiences immediately after his arrest while being held in the police holding cell, he encounters a new social hierarchy through his interactions with Czech-speaking criminals. Here, Meyrink indicates that social hierarchies based on language and ethnicity in Prague are beginning to shift in favor of Czechs. Not only is the police officer leading the murder investigation of Czech origin, as demonstrated by his name (Alois Otschin), but Pernath also notes that the main language spoken in his office is also Czech. As he waits in police custody for Superintendent Otschin to interrogate him, Pernath stands between two prison guards who murmur to one another "a few words in the Bohemian language" ("Jemand murmelte ein paar Worte in böhmischer Sprache").<sup>253</sup> In a region where Habsburg officials or German-speaking authorities had dominated local municipal affairs ranging from legislation, bureaucracy, and criminal proceedings, the presence of Czech speakers in the superintendent's office signals a transfer of power among those who administer the law in the region. Although Meyrink makes clear that the ultimate source of authority in Prague still comes from the German-speaking monarchy in Vienna, as suggested by the "picture of the Emperor on the wall" ("Das Bild des Kaisers an der Wand") looking down upon all proceedings in the police station, the presence of Czech-speaking police officials presiding over local arrests and interrogations suggests that a new Czech-dominated system of authority in Prague was developing independent of the region's shrinking German-speaking minority.<sup>254</sup>

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<sup>253</sup> *Der Golem*, 255.

<sup>254</sup> *Der Golem*, 255.



Meyrink further underscores this cultural shift in scenes depicting Pernath's experiences in prison. Pernath's descriptions of his fellow cellmates reproduce common nineteenth-century German stereotypes of "Czechs," namely, of Czechs as uncultured, uneducated, and unintelligent. Most of his fellow inmates ("Zellengenossen") in the holding cell are affiliated with the Czech culture or language, as he realizes after his first night there: "I hear the other prisoners waking up and, yawning, starting a conversation in Czech" ("Ich hörte, wie die Gefangenen erwachten und gähmend eine Unterhaltung in böhmischer Sprache führten").<sup>255</sup> After noticing that he has not received any letters from friends, Pernath asks his fellow inmates in German whether letters are forbidden. He reports, "They did not know. They said they had never received any, but, to be sure, they had no one who could write to them" ("Sie wußten es nicht. Sie hätten noch nie welche bekommen — allerdings wäre auch niemand da, der ihnen schreiben könnte, sagten sie").<sup>256</sup> While one may be tempted to interpret the responses given by Pernath's prison mates to indicate that they had no one outside of the ghetto who cared to write them, it is more likely that Pernath means to denigrate Czech speakers as uneducated and illiterate.

Pernath's interactions with Czech-speaking criminals while incarcerated reveal a shift in social hierarchies taking place in the city as demonstrated in the microcosm of the prison cell. Pernath recognizes a neighbor boy in the holding area, a young Czech named Loisa, who is also a suspect in Zottmann's murder case. After one of the other convicts, Black Vóssatka, realizes that Pernath knows Loisa, he addresses Pernath in a mocking tone that ridicules German assumptions of superiority. Speaking in a dialect typical of Viennese Czechs ("in dem geschraubten Dialekt eines tschechischen Wieners"), Vóssatka gives Pernath a "mocking bow" ("eine halb Verbeugung") before asking "Well, and what brought you here, Count?" ("No, und

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<sup>255</sup> *Der Golem*, 265.

<sup>256</sup> *Der Golem*, 272.

zweng was für einen Verdachtö sin Sie hier, Herr Graf?“).<sup>257</sup> The sarcastic use of the word “Graf,” or Count, acknowledges both men’s position in the ethnic, linguistic, and social hierarchy governing the Habsburg Empire—a system that generally placed German speakers above Czech speakers and Jews. Using sarcasm and mocking gestures, Vóssatka draws attention to the power shift taking place in the prison setting. Pernath immediately sees that his elevated social position as a German-speaker outside of the prison’s walls carries little weight among criminals caged behind the same bars. Here, prison hierarchy is configured in terms of Czechness, alluding to the dramatic social changes taking place outside of the prison during Pernath’s incarceration and foreshadowing his experiences with new social hierarchies upon his release. Recognizing that his wealth and ethnicity have little meaning in his current situation, Pernath answers, “Because of murder in the course of robbery” (“Wegen Raubmord”).<sup>258</sup> After his response, a brief silence falls over the inmates, then a choir of voices filled with the “utmost respect” (“grenzenloser Hochachtung”) begin chanting in dialect, as if coming from one mouth, “Respect, Respect” (“...sie riefen fast wie aus einem Munde: “Räschpäkt, Räschpäkt”).<sup>259</sup> The chanting reinforces the impression that most of the inmates are Czech speakers, the linguistic difference made clear through the word “Räschpäkt,” which in high German would be “Respekt.” Pernath’s response, designed to shock those in the cell with its violence, achieves the desired effect: it restores Pernath’s social standing and place of respect within the group of the Czech-speaking convicts.

Critics of Meyrink’s day picked up on Meyrink’s unfavorable characterization of Czech speakers in this scene and others as primitive, illiterate, and criminal. A leading Czech critic, Arne Novák, for example, noted the stereotypes following the novel’s release in Czech

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<sup>257</sup> *Der Golem*, 266.

<sup>258</sup> *Der Golem*, 267.

<sup>259</sup> *Der Golem*, 267.

translation. For Novák, *Der Golem* was one of many local German-language authors' "premeditated attack[s]" on Czech culture. He maintained that authors such as Meyrink, Max Brod, and Egon Erwin Kisch saw life in Prague "through a dualistic curtain":

Two races live on the Moldau, of differing languages, customs, and blood: one born to spiritual and physical pleasure, noble manners and enterprise; today extending a greedy hand after every woman, tomorrow possessed by mystical dreams—and the second servile and uneducated, cowering at the wall and waiting there for alms or a slap in the face, reserved for supplying Aryans or Semites with servants or barmen, 'sweet girls' and prostitutes.<sup>260</sup>

Novák's assertions not only recognize the dividedness of the city's ethnic populations at the turn of the twentieth century but also show how Czech speakers in Meyrink's day interpreted ethnic caricatures in the novel. Meyrink's negative depictions of those who speak Czech undermine the positive images Czech nationalists were trying to create.

Stereotypes that characterize the region's Czech-speaking population as uncivilized, uncultured, and unintelligent are, of course, a common feature of German-language literature coming from Prague during Meyrink's era, as we saw in chapter one in the example of Max Brod's descriptions of Czechs as "a hurried, melancholy people consisting of workers, servants, and whores" ("ein gehetztes, melancholisches Volk von Arbeitern, Dienstboten, Huren").<sup>261</sup> Despite these and other common negative characterizations of Prague's Czech-speaking community, Meyrink's novel, by contrast, celebrates several positive attributes of the ethnic and linguistic group—particularly their assertiveness and persistence in fulfilling goals and agendas. His Czech-speaking characters use legal means as a strategy to reduce the German-speaking presence and economic dominance in the city. For instance, superintendent Alois Otschin<sup>262</sup>

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<sup>260</sup> Arne Novák, "Pražský roman?" *Venkov* 12, no. 86 (12 April 1917): 3. Qtd. in Spector, *Prague Territories*, 177.

<sup>261</sup> Hans Dieter Zimmermann, "'Distanzliebe': Max Brod zwischen Tschechen und Deutschen," in *Juden, Tschechen, Deutsche. Zu Max Brods frühen Romanen*, ed. Marek Nekula and Walter Koschmal (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2006), 4. doi: <http://www.exil-archiv.de/grafik/biografien/brod/Zimmermann-Vortrag.pdf>.

<sup>262</sup> Mike Mitchell has pointed out that the name Otschin in *Der Golem* has deliberate echoes of the police superintendent responsible for Meyrink's temporary incarceration, which led the author to leave Prague. When army officer Captain Budiner in Prague brought a case of libel against Meyrink, the author was sentenced to fourteen days in prison, which was lessened to a fine. Meyrink refused to accept the sentence, claiming that Budiner and Olič, the

interrogates Pernath “cunningly” (“geschickt”), as if trying to use deceit or deception to achieve his own ends of arresting Pernath. Darting from one topic to another, he tries to lure Pernath into revealing his involvement in a local murder: “Cleverly, he tried to make me contradict myself through a criss-crossing of questions” (“Er suchte mich geschickt durch Kreuz- und Querfragen in Widersprüche zu verwickeln”).<sup>263</sup> When Pernath fails to fall into his traps, the superintendent feigns a painful grin, (“Schmerzlichkeit in seiner Fratze”) and says, “But Athanasius, you can tell me—me, an old friend of your father’s—me, who carried you in his arms... tell me, Athanasius, it was self-defense, wasn’t it?” (“Mir können Sie es doch sagen, Athanasius, — mir, dem alten Freund Ihres Vaters — *mir*, der Sie auf den Armen getragen hat — .... — ‘nicht wahr’ Athanasius, es war Notwehr?”).<sup>264</sup> Pernath can “hardly stop himself from laughing” at the man’s unremitting interrogation strategies, pointing out that Otschin “was at most ten years older” than he (“ich konnte das Lachen kaum verbeißen: er war höchstens zehn Jahre älter als ich”).<sup>265</sup> The superintendent’s methods of questioning, however, are ultimately successful. After rounds of questioning, Otschin believes himself to have procured a confession from Pernath: when the latter man claims he made “a mistake. A dreadful mistake” (“ein Irrtum. Ein entsetzlicher Irrtum”) and can explain everything, the superintendent becomes convinced that Pernath’s reaction implies the German man’s guilt.<sup>266</sup> As a result, Pernath spends several months in prison (the exact time is never disclosed), and the superintendent is convinced that he has caught the criminal.

Here, Meyrink’s text temporarily does not correspond to Ritchie Robinson’s findings concerning common national stereotypes in German-language novels written in Prague at the

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senior police officer in the case, had colluded in the case to frame him. Some sources claim that Olič fancied the woman who later became Meyrink’s second wife (Mena Bernt). Mitchell, 79; 82; 86.

<sup>263</sup> *Der Golem*, 256.

<sup>264</sup> *Der Golem*, 258.

<sup>265</sup> *Der Golem*, 258.

<sup>266</sup> *Der Golem*, 258.

time: “The Germans embody masculinity, activity, culture; the Czechs embody femininity, passivity, nature. Their role is to be dominated by the Germans, while helping to regenerate their masters spiritually to their closeness to nature and the *Volksgeist*.”<sup>267</sup> In this scene, by contrast, Pernath becomes a passive figure, unable to defend himself against Otschin, who is relentless in asserting his dominance over the German protagonist. The superintendent’s determination in the interrogation is analogous to the diligence of the Czech-speaking community in reasserting economic, political, and cultural dominance in Prague by identifying German speakers’ wrongdoing and using existing legal channels to create a safer, egalitarian society free of a German presence. The novel, however, falls back on common stereotypes of German and Czech speakers at its conclusion. In keeping with Robinson’s description of the Prague novel quoted above, Pernath’s incarceration by the command of the Czech Otschin ultimately leads him to the final step in his spiritual journey—to encounter a somnambulistic guide who teaches him occult secrets needed for his ultimate transcendence and enlightenment.<sup>268</sup> As we will see in the following pages, despite the novel’s seeming support of the Czech nationalist movement, the perspective provided by his German-speaking protagonist on the political moment uses the Czech-speaking community as an instrument to facilitate the hero’s ascension on his spiritual journey.

### **Pernath’s Reaction to the *Finis Ghetto***

Pernath’s response to the *Finis Ghetto* and an increasingly militant Czech nationalist presence in Prague parallels the experiences of many German speakers and German-speaking Jews. Pernath’s displacement after losing his home resembles what Giustino summarizes as the

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<sup>267</sup> Ritchie Robinson, “National Stereotypes in Prague Fiction,” *Colloquia germanica* 22, no. 2 (1989): 132.

<sup>268</sup> As we will see in the final section of this chapter, the Eden-like scene in which Pernath appears at the Hradschin castle reveals a sense of “closeness to nature” and the German *Volksgeist* carried on through his cultural memory.

common experience of those affected by the Czech-led efforts to demolish the ghetto:

In order to carry out the metamorphosis of Josefov from ghetto to luxury district, thousands of the ward's impoverished residents were expelled from their homes.... These poor denizens were left with the difficult task of finding new low-cost housing in the city's other wards where rents were significantly higher. None could afford to live in Josefov's new luxury apartments. The upper-middle-class Czech liberals dominating City Hall had little concern about the fate of these people or about the impact of resulting lower-middle-class experiences on local liberal power.<sup>269</sup>

Pernath embodies the experience of displacement, his experience being analogous to the historical ghetto residents who were expelled from their homes during the *Finis Ghetto*. Like the impoverished residents mentioned by Giustino, the German-speaking protagonist is ill prepared for the social changes brought on by ghetto clearance. As a result, his return to Prague society after his temporary incarceration is tragic and painful. His shock at discovering the destruction of his home leaves him psychologically debilitated; he must find new housing in a district that has been so radically altered that it is almost unrecognizable to him.

*Der Golem* conflates the German and German-Jewish perspectives through his ethnic German protagonist. Pernath, one of the few residents of the former Jewish Town, remains in the district after clearance and preserves the memories of the space. His job as a gem dealer—a profession typically associated with Jews—further reinforces the German-Jewish perspective.<sup>270</sup> Pernath, however, stands apart from the novel's Jewish characters in that he can afford housing in *Josefov/Josephstadt* after the renovation, as demonstrated by his rental of a room in one of the few remaining structures, the Old New Synagogue (*Altneu-Synagoge*). Additionally, Pernath's

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<sup>269</sup> Guistino, 7.

<sup>270</sup> Stereotypes of Jews as gem dealers have a long tradition in German literature. In describing the plight of Eastern Jews after the First World War, for example, Joseph Roth, describes the prevalence of the "Jewish gem trade" ("jüdischen Juwelenhandels") in Europe, which extended from Paris through Brussels to Amsterdam: "The Jewish gem trade goes to Amsterdam. A few aspiring Jewish gem dealers found themselves compelled to remain on French-speaking territory" ("Der direkte Weg des jüdischen Juwelenhandels führt nach Amsterdam. Einige armgewordene und einige reich werdende jüdische Juwelenhändler bleiben aus Zwang im französischen Sprachgebiet"). Joseph Roth, *The Wandering Jews: The Classic Portrait of a Vanished People*, trans. Michael Hofmann (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1985), 80; Joseph Roth, *Juden auf Wanderschaft* (Berlin: Verlag der Contumax GmbH & Co., 1927), 47.

German presence at Prague's castle at the story's conclusion indicates the novel's message that despite the dramatic changes in the city as the result of nationalist movements, the monarchy will remain intact, overseeing and having the final say in these developments from afar.

As we shall see, scenes tracing Pernath's wandering through the streets of *Josefov/Josephstadt* draw attention to hostilities between the region's two dominant cultural and linguistic communities. In turn-of-the-century Prague, the city's streets themselves became markers of increasing Czech dominance in municipal politics. The two "corsos" where middle-class residents took their strolls, for instance, marked a division between German and Czech speakers: Prague's middle-class Germans walked on Ferdinandgasse (today's Národní), while the Czechs strolled along Příkopy (Graben in German).<sup>271</sup> Divisions based on ethnicity informed municipal planning, as Gary Cohen has shown. In a widely discussed action carried out in 1892, for example, "the Czech nationalists who controlled Prague's board of aldermen decided to replace the bilingual Czech-German street signs in the city with exclusively Czech ones."<sup>272</sup> Leaders of the city's German-speaking minority protested this action, but Austrian imperial authorities ultimately upheld the aldermen's decision. These examples not only demonstrate the visible effects of nationalist tensions between Prague's two most prominent ethnic and linguistic communities, but they also demonstrate the political weight that Czech nationalist leaders carried under Habsburg rule. This weight is made visible in *Der Golem* through the destruction of the former streets of *Josefov/Josephstadt* under a project carried out by Czech-speaking laborers.

A scene depicting Pernath's release after being incarcerated shows how his initial elation at his unexpected release quickly transforms into shock as he realizes that his entire neighborhood has been destroyed in his absence, without explanation. He struggles to navigate the rubble in his neighborhood. With the ghetto's demolition, all his external references have

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<sup>271</sup> Iggers, 8.

<sup>272</sup> Cohen, *The Politics of Ethnic Survival*, 1.

been disassembled piece by piece and without his knowledge. He expresses his disorientation:

Everything had become so strange, so bewilderingly new, the houses, the streets, the closed shutters....  
Everywhere was barricaded by heaps of cobblestones!  
Red lamps burned on top of them.  
The way was blocked by piles of debris and broken masonry. I clambered over it, sinking in up to my knees.  
There, that must be Hahnpassgasse, mustn't it?!  
I had the greatest difficulty orienting myself. Nothing but ruins all around.  
Wasn't that the house where I had lived? The façade had been ripped off....  
Everything had been razed to the ground, the junk-shop, Charousek's basement  
———everything, everything.

Alles war mir so fremd geworden, so unbegreiflich neu: die Häuser, die Straßen, die geschlossenen Läden....  
Barrikaden aus Pflastersteinen überall!  
Rote Laternen brannten darauf..  
Halden von Schutt und Mauerbrocken versperrten den Weg. Ich kletterte umher, versank bis ans Knie.  
Das hier, das mußte doch die Hahnpaßgasse sein?!  
Mühsam orientierte ich mich. Nichts als Ruinen ringsum.  
Stand denn da nicht das Haus, in dem ich gewohnt hatte? Die Vorderseite war eingerissen....  
Alles dem Erdboden gleichgemacht: der Trödlerladen, die Kellerwohnung Charouseks  
— — — alles, alles.<sup>273</sup>

As this quotation suggests, the destruction of his district has removed all street signs and landmarks that would help Pernath orient himself in the radically altered district. “The whole Jewish quarter,” Pernath claims, “was nothing but a stone desert, as if an earthquake had destroyed the Ghetto” (“Das ganze Judenviertel war eine einzige Steinwüste, als hätte ein Erdbeben die Stadt zerstört”).<sup>274</sup> Covered in dust (“Schmutzbedeckt”) from clambering through the rubble with torn shoes (“mit zerrissenen Schuhen”), Pernath takes in the ruins around him, which are illuminated by red lights.<sup>275</sup> The more he tries to make sense of his surroundings, the more forlorn he becomes, lost in a “Labyrinth” consisting of “fields of debris”

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<sup>273</sup> *Der Golem*, 323-5.

<sup>274</sup> *Der Golem*, 327.

<sup>275</sup> *Der Golem*, 327.



(“Schuttfelder”).<sup>276</sup> His external environment reflects his internal state: shattered, confused, chaotic. The earth and buildings beneath him are broken, and with his torn shoes, he has no solid footing to ground himself in physical space. He finds himself stuck, metaphorically “sinking in up to [his] knees” in a world that is no longer familiar to him. His disorientation transforms into despondency with the recognition that he will need to rebuild his life once again.

In the scenes following his discovery that his home has been destroyed, Pernath realizes that the ghetto clearance has dispersed his entire social network. His friends’ disappearance marks a social and economic shift in the region, as demonstrated by his exchange with Czech workers who help him find the former ghetto resident Jaromir. While wading through the rubble in his former neighborhood, Pernath asks a group of workers whether they know his friends and where they might have gone. One of these workers answers him using broken German with a heavy Czech accent: “Nix daitsch” (“not German”).<sup>277</sup> Pernath recounts, “I gave the man a Gulden: he instantly recovered his knowledge of German, but still could offer me no help. Neither could his fellow workers” (“Ich schenkte dem Mann einen Gulden: er verstand zwar sofort deutsch, konnte mir aber keine Auskunft geben. Auch von seinen Kameraden niemand”).<sup>278</sup>

The worker’s initial reluctance to speak German combined with his ability immediately to summon fluency in the language reveals more than the common belief that “money talks”; the exchange underscores the economic and cultural changes that have taken place in the ghetto as a result of the Czech take-over of municipal planning and politics and economic reform. Throughout the nineteenth-century, German industry experienced a loss of economic dynamism. As Václav Houžvicka has shown, these changes had immediate results in the social sphere,

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<sup>276</sup> *Der Golem*, 327.

<sup>277</sup> *Der Golem*, 325. The New High German form of this response would be “Nicht Deutsch.”

<sup>278</sup> *Der Golem*, 325.

“where modernizing processes were retarded with the corresponding effects on the political choices of Bohemian Germans and the political leaders.”<sup>279</sup> Alongside the building of new banks, coalitions, and industries owned by Czech speakers and that conducted business in the Czech language, similar German-speaking institutions and organizations experienced a “slowdown” of the economic development through a general failure to exploit new trends, such as restructuring a textile industry that was falling behind. The result was a growing strength in the Czech economic sector in comparison to its German-speaking counterparts, who were less willing to take risks with new industries. The transference of social and economic dominance from German- to Czech speakers in Prague as a whole is made visible through the linguistic and monetary exchange in *Der Golem*. The scene with the Czech-speaking workmen makes clear that Czech is the new linguistic and cultural currency. In the complete absence of German speakers, Pernath must now pay the new Czech residents for information, thus transferring German wealth into the hands of members of the Czech-speaking working class. Obtaining the information he desires requires him either to adapt to the new cultural lingo or pay a fee for the information he seeks.

When, furthermore, the tubercular student Charousek who is half-Czech, half-Jewish, yet speaks German unexpectedly learns that after the murder of his Jewish father (Aaron Wassertrum), he has inherited a large fortune. Charousek himself does not plan to use the inheritance; instead, he commits suicide at his father’s grave, where he is found with his slit wrists plunged into dirt covering his father’s body. Pernath learns of Charousek’s suicide through a letter that he receives while in prison, which also informs him that Charousek willed him “one-third of all his inheritance” (“Überdies ist der Athanasius Pernath ... ein Drittel von dessen

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<sup>279</sup> Václav Houžvicka, *Czechs and Germans 1848-2004: The Student Question and the Transformation of Central Europe* (Prague: Karolinum Press, 2015).

gesamter Verlassenschaft ins Erbe zugefallen ist”).<sup>280</sup> Because of his incarceration, however, he remains completely unaware of the large-scale social, economic, and physical changes taking place throughout the city during his absence. As Chapter One has shown, Pernath is released from prison, only to learn that he cannot access the money Charousek left to him after his suicide, as “the inheritance must go through the official [Czech] channels” (“die Erbschaft Charouseks mußte noch den Amtsweg gehen”).<sup>281</sup> This narrative development further reiterates the closing off of Prague’s economy to German participation, as the Czech student’s inheritance is not accessible to the German-speaking protagonist.

These scenes also illustrate the fictional Czech-speaking community’s lack of concern for those whom they hoped to expel. The Czech workers’ inability to provide information about the whereabouts of Pernath’s friends reflects Giustino’s claim that the newly dominant community “had little concern” about the fate of the former ghetto residents. After Pernath inquires about his acquaintances in the neighborhood (Zwakh, Vrieslander, Prokop), a worker responds that none of the district’s former inhabitants live in the district anymore. All were removed from *Josefov/Josephstadt* by order of local authorities. “Far and wide, you won’t even find a cat living here,” the worker says, “Forbidden by authorities. Because of typhus” (“Weit a breit wohnt sich keine Katz,” sagte der Arbeiter, “weil ise behärdlich verboten. Von wägen Typhus”).<sup>282</sup>

Here, the novel draws upon historic discussions of the ghetto as a site of disease and unsanitary living conditions as justification for the removal of its inhabitants. Medical doctors and scientists of both linguistic backgrounds in Prague’s Municipal Health Commission (*Městská zdravotní rada; städtischer Gesundheitsrat*) agreed that the Bohemian capital was “rich with health problems” and filled with “a great number of health-harming influences.”<sup>283</sup> While

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<sup>280</sup> *Der Golem*, 320.

<sup>281</sup> *Der Golem*, 331.

<sup>282</sup> *Der Golem*, 326.

<sup>283</sup> Qtd in Giustino, “Pamětní spis jednoty českých lékařů,” *NL* (22 April 1874).

Germans and Czechs agreed that Prague’s geographic location was a source of the problem (as the city was “encompassed by a powerful iron ring, before those gates opens a decently populated suburb [*Vinohrady*] bordering a cemetery [*Olšanská*], where about 60,000 corpses are rotting”<sup>284</sup>), petitions pushed by Czech-speaking medical professionals (particularly those in the Young Czech party) insisted that leveling *Josefov/Josephstadt* would “remove the largest part of health defects in Prague,” as living conditions there were deadly for human life.<sup>285</sup> For instance, Jan Kaftan, a prominent member of Prague’s Municipal Health Commission, reinforced assertions by Czech-speaking town hall members that most basements in the ghetto contained “sanitary evils” that were hazardous to the health of their inhabitants.<sup>286</sup> Leveling the ghetto and the “quick construction of systematic sewers in New and Old Town,” he and a municipal health inspector named Machulka claimed, would be key to “the process of sanitation.”<sup>287</sup> The antisemitic (and de facto, anti-German) leaders in Prague’s City Hall reflected a newly developed upper-middle-class of Czech speakers who demolished and rebuilt *Josefov/Josephstadt*.<sup>288</sup> This very process is what our protagonist witnesses upon returning to his neighborhood.

*Der Golem* bears traces of the antisemitic politics that, as Guistino argues, fueled the

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<sup>284</sup> To learn more about the role of professionals in municipal politics, see Horst Matzerath, “Kommunal Leistungsverwaltung’: Zu Bedeutung politischer Function des Begriffs im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert,” Blotvogel, *Kommunal Leistungsverwaltung*, p. 11. Qtd. in Guistino, 81-82.

<sup>285</sup> All quotes are from Guistino, who provides a translation of documents found in the Czech medical doctors’ petition “Pamětní spis jednoty českých lékařů,” *NL*, 22 April 1874. As Giustino points out, one report citing a municipal health inspector named Machulka claimed that “all of the main street sewers in the entire Jewish Town have comparatively little drainage to the river, because of the unfavorable level of the land in this part of Prague.” Not only had many of Prague’s houses, streets, and sewers been constructed in the Middle Ages, but the location of many of these houses and streets caused the sewers beneath them frequently to become obstructed, polluting the district above it. As a result, municipal officials in town hall meetings claimed that the “foul odor” from the rotting walls in many basements caused the district to be filled with a “reproachable evil” that could only be remedied through drastic action. Guistino, 106. Original source found in: “Machulka to Slavný magistrát,” 15 April 1882 k č.j. 45’91/3921, AHMP, *Magistrát*, D/5/207, Carton 4178. See also *Městská zdravotní rada*,” *NL* (31 March 1885).

<sup>286</sup> Qtd. in Guistino, 106.

<sup>287</sup> See “*Městská zdravotní rada*,” *NL*, 31 March 1885), qtd. in Guistino, 106.

<sup>288</sup> See Guistino, 6, as well as Guistino, “Municipal Activism in Late-Nineteenth-Century Prague: The House Numbered 207-V and Ghetto Clearance,” *AHY* 34 (2003): 247-78.

project. The novel brings discussions of the ghetto, Jews, and disease to the forefront by mentioning “typhus” in the predominantly Jewish district. Its connection to historical discussions evoke the milieu in which Meyrink’s protagonist operates; in so doing the author points to the nationalist forces that drove the demolition project.

### **The Traumatic Effects of the *Finis Ghetto***

The conclusion of Pernath’s brief conversation with the Czech-speaking workers reveals that only one of his former contacts remains in the ghetto. This individual is the Czech deaf-mute Jaromir Kwássnitschka, the twin brother of the novel’s suspected murderer, Loisa. Word on the street says that Jaromir, who spent his life taunted and tormented by his brother and Rosina, now spends his days cutting out paper silhouettes of the Jewish prostitute. The worker directs Pernath to an all-night café in the inner city (“ein Nachtcaféhaus in der inneren Stadt”) where Jaromir usually can be found.<sup>289</sup>

Pernath’s search for Jaromir brings him to an establishment symbolically named Café Chaos. The name reflects Pernath’s own physical appearance, his psychological state, and the general effect of ghetto clearance on those who used to live there.<sup>290</sup> A look from a waiter at Café Chaos confirms that Pernath’s desperate internal state has manifested itself in his outer appearance: “The insolent look with which he scanned me from head to toe made me realize how tattered and torn I must look. I glanced in the mirror and was horrified to see an unfamiliar face staring at me, pale and anemic, wrinkled, grey, with a scrubby beard and long, tangled hair” (“Bei dem frechen Blick, mit dem er mich vom Kopf bis zu Fuß musterte, kam mir erst zum

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<sup>289</sup> *Der Golem*, 326.

<sup>290</sup> While waiting in the café for Jaromir, the protagonist’s only acquaintance in the ghetto post-clearance, Pernath sees a “few policemen with shimmering green feathers on their helmets” (“ein paar Schutzleute mit grünlich schillernden Federbüschen”) periodically enter the café. These green plumes, typical of Habsburg military officers, make clear that the Austrian monarchy still rules the region, but a grassroots movement has effectively upended the physical structuration of the ghetto. *Der Golem*, 328.

Bewußtsein, wie abgerissen ich aussehen mußte. Ich warf einen Blick in den Spiegel und entsetzte mich: ein fremdes, blutleeres Gesicht, faltig, grau wie Kitt, mit struppigem Bart und wirrem, langem Haar starrte mir entgegen”).<sup>291</sup> When Jaromir finally arrives, the young man’s appearance is equally ragged: “He had changed so much that at first I did not recognize him: his eyes were vacant, his front teeth had fallen out, his hair was thinning, and there were deep hollows behind his ears” (“Er hatte sich so verändert, daß ich ihn anfangs gar nicht wiedererkannte: die Augen erloschen, die Vorderzähne ausgefallen, das Haar schütter und tiefe Höhlen hinter den Ohren”).<sup>292</sup> The physical appearances of both men indicate that, although they have survived the destruction of the ghetto, the experience has scarred them physically and psychologically.

The confusing interactions between the two men further intensify the German protagonist’s unsettled state. Upon first seeing Pernath, Jaromir is increasingly distrustful of him:

He behaved with extraordinary apprehensiveness and kept glancing at the door. Through every gesture I could think of, I tried to show him that I was happy to see him. — He seemed for a long time not to believe me. Whatever questions I posed, they were all received with the same helpless gesture of incomprehension.

Er benahm sich außerordentlich scheu und blickte immerwährend nach der Türe. Durch alle möglichen Gesten suchte ich ihm begreiflich zu machen, daß ich mich freute, ihn getroffen zu haben. — Er schien es mir lange nicht zu glauben. Aber, was für Fragen ich auch stellte, stets die gleiche hilflose Handbewegung des Nichtverstehens bei ihm.<sup>293</sup>

After a series of confusing gestures, Pernath sketches the faces of his acquaintance and scribbles words onto a piece of paper that the illiterate Jaromir cannot understand (“he could not read”/“er konnte nicht lesen”).<sup>294</sup> Eventually, the young deaf-mute confirms that none of Pernath’s German-speaking friends remains in *Josefov/Josephstadt*. The exchange leads Pernath to

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<sup>291</sup> *Der Golem*, 327.

<sup>292</sup> *Der Golem*, 328.

<sup>293</sup> *Der Golem*, 328.

<sup>294</sup> *Der Golem*, 329.

conclude that Prokop, Vrieslander, and Zwakh left the ghetto to pursue careers as traveling puppeteers, while the fate of the Jewish archivist Hillel and his daughter, Mirjam, remains unclear. When the men discuss the whereabouts of the latter two characters, a street-sweeper watching the exchange translates for Jaromir in broken German, “He’s just saying the gentleman has gone away, but no one don’t know where” (“Er meint halt, daß der Herr weg ist, und niem’d weiß nicht, wohin”).<sup>295</sup> Pernath learns that Mirjam had also disappeared without a trace (“Auch verschwunden. Spurlos”<sup>296</sup>). Jaromir makes clear that she has not died, but Pernath cannot decipher Jaromir’s confusing gestures describing what happened to her: “Jaromir repeated his mime of someone sleeping... Again Jaromir laid his head on his arm... still, I could not fathom what the gesture was intended to convey” (“Jaromir wiederholte die Gebärde des Schlafens.... Wieder legte Jaromir die Stirn auf den Arm.... noch immer konnte ich nicht herausbringen, was die Geste bedeuten sollte”).<sup>297</sup> The scene closes with both men sitting in silence, frustrated and exhausted from trying to decipher the series of miscommunications in the conversation.

The novel never makes clear what Jaromir’s pantomiming of sleep is meant to indicate, but the final image of him in the novel draws attention to the loss felt by those most deeply affected by the *Finis Ghetto*. After their conversation Jaromir snips away at a piece of paper to create a silhouette. Pernath recounts: “I recognized Rosina’s profile.... [Jaromir] cried silently to himself. — — Then he sprang up suddenly and stumbled out the door without saying goodbye” (“Ich erkannte das Profil Rosinas... [Jaromir] weinte still vor sich hin. — — Dann sprang er plötzlich auf und taumelte ohne Gruß zur Tür hinaus”).<sup>298</sup> Jaromir leaps to his feet and staggers out the door without a word, never to be seen again at the café or in the novel. Jaromir’s snippings in this scene are significant in terms of the cultural and personal memories that were

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<sup>295</sup> *Der Golem*, 329.

<sup>296</sup> *Der Golem*, 330.

<sup>297</sup> *Der Golem*, 330.

<sup>298</sup> *Der Golem*, 331.

lost through the ghetto's clearance. In the absence of the community that once lived in *Josefov*, Pernath's and Jaromir's memories of Rosina, Angelina, Mirjam, or any of the men's former acquaintances are only shadows of a former reality, only visible in parts, not as a whole. In short, these figures are silhouettes of someone who is now only a ghost of memory.

After the encounter in Café Chaos, Jaromir becomes a similar ghost within the novel. Pernath says, "Once I went to the tiny café to invite Jaromir to spend Christmas Eve with me, but I was told he had not been back since I was last there" ("Einmal war ich noch in dem kleinen Kaffeehaus gewesen, um Jaromir zum Weihnachtsabend zu mir zu holen. Er habe sich nie mehr blicken lassen, erfuhr ich").<sup>299</sup> Jaromir's disappearance at the end of the novel suggests that remembering the past is so traumatic for the young man that he must leave the site of origin. The omission of further information regarding his fate underscores the incomprehensibility of the trauma experienced by the impoverished citizens who were displaced.

The encounter between the men suggests that those who survived clearance are neither capable of adequately understanding and communicating their traumatic experiences to others nor reintegrating into the Czech-dominated society. Like Pernath's, Jaromir's appearance bears signs of extreme physical and psychological distress, indicating that he has perhaps endured similar difficulties following ghetto clearance. Despite the shared trauma, he cannot speak with Pernath. The young man's initial distrust of the ravaged Pernath results from a confrontation of his own traumatic experiences with heartbreak, loss, and homelessness in the ghetto; facing Pernath means Jaromir must face his own trauma and disorientation

### **The Loss of Ghetto Memory by Muting Traumatized Survivors**

The novel's aestheticization of the breakdown in communication highlights the loss of

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<sup>299</sup> *Der Golem*, 333.



cultural memory in the district due to the *Finis Ghetto*. Only three former residents of *Josefov/Josephstadt* remain in Prague after clearance. These men's inability to communicate about or remember their ghetto past draws attention to the marginalization of the city's (impoverished) minorities, individuals who are no longer heard of, thought about, or seen in Prague's antisemitic, Czech-dominated society. It is perhaps these very disabilities that allow them to remain in the district post-clearance: though not fully welcomed by the new Czech-speaking community populating *Josefov/Josephstadt*, they cannot communicate memories of the district to the current residents and are thus allowed to stay. Nevertheless, each man's disability prevents him from establishing meaningful connections with others in the new community. These characters thus become outsiders with no possibility of integrating into the newly remodeled district, ghosts of a forgotten past who are the sole carriers of ghetto memory.

Jaromir's inability to hear and produce language embodies the silencing of those who remember the ghetto and, by consequence, the erasure of cultural memories of the former district from Czech consciousness. Christopher Krentz claims that deaf literary characters "stand at the limits of knowing, serving as mediative figures on the threshold of difference." Jaromir embodies what Krentz calls "conflicting notions of speechlessness,"<sup>300</sup> including innocence and emotional imprisonment. Jaromir witnessed the disappearance of his family (Loisa), friends (Pernath, Zwahk, Vrieslander), love interest (Rosina), and his ghetto home. Because he is deaf and mute ("taubstumm"), however, he is unable to communicate to others his heartbreak over this loss or the physical abuse that caused him to lose several of his teeth. All that he once knew has vanished along with the district's built structures, leaving him alone in his suffering.

Jaromir's surprise at seeing Pernath leads the reader to believe that until the latter man appears in Café Chaos, no one had taken an interest in hearing his story. Even the reader has

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<sup>300</sup> Christopher Krentz, *Writing Deafness: The Hearing Line in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 101.

little knowledge of this character and his past. At the beginning of the novel, Pernath notes that in the absence of Jaromir's father, generous individuals in the ghetto took in the young man and his twin brother, fed them, and gave them shelter: "an old woman cares for them now, I believe.... that means: she provides them with lodging; for that they have to hand over whatever they scrounge together from begging or stealing" ("jetzt sorgt für sie, glaube ich, ein altes Weib.... Sie sorgt für die beiden Jungen, das heißt: sie gewährt ihnen Unterkunft; dafür müssen sie ihr abliefern, was sie gelegentlich stehlen oder erbetteln").<sup>301</sup> Jaromir's inability to speak makes him appear childlike and animalistic, helpless in his poverty and adolescent in his "crazed lust for Rosina" ("wahnsinnige Gier nach Rosina"). Like a "wild animal" ("ein wildes Tier"), his daily "unarticulated howling" ("unartikulierte heulendes Gebell") through the streets results from seeing her with his brother.<sup>302</sup> His abnormal behavior and physical disability posed challenges for his finding work in the former ghetto, forcing him to survive through stealing or begging, as well as the charity from ghetto residents.

In the absence of his generous neighbors and a social structure that allows him to support himself through crime, Jaromir has difficulty adjusting to his life in the new district. The novel never reveals the details of Jaromir's experiences after ghetto clearance, but one might assume that because he is Czech (which is discernable in his name) and could not speak, he was allowed to stay despite his poverty and disability. Nevertheless, Jaromir's speechlessness and deafness keep him perpetually infantilized in the new community. He is "othered" in his disability; those in the ghetto only know him as the deaf-mute ("taubstumm") who frequents Café Chaos, where he "cuts out those little pictures.... [o]ut of black paper" ("Schneid 'e sich Bildeln aus? Aus schwarzem Pappjir").<sup>303</sup> It seems that no one—not even Pernath—cares to hear his story or assist

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<sup>301</sup> *Der Golem*, 11.

<sup>302</sup> *Der Golem*, 12.

<sup>303</sup> *Der Golem*, 326.

him with integrating into the new society. Because of his battered physical appearance, we can assume that the new urban or social landscape has been hostile and unwelcoming to him. The unnarrated blow to his mouth that knocked out his teeth may be read as a further silencing of an already-muted character, impoverished because of his disability. Even though he is Czech by ethnicity, he ran in German-speaking circles that overlapped with those of Pernath. Furthermore, he represents a social class that, out of financial necessity, resided in the ghetto and thus cannot adapt to the rapidly evolving Czech-speaking society that cares little for those whose presence hinders social progress.

Perhaps rumors of Pernath's mental disability also account for the community's tolerance of this German-speaker's presence in the new, Czech-dominated district. Prior to clearance, those in the ghetto presume Pernath to be mad, claiming that he occasionally tried to impersonate other ghetto residents, including Innocence Charousek and Amadeus Laponder.<sup>304</sup> Furthermore, he often falls into unexplained paralysis that resembles neurosis, "madness," and "delirium" ("Wahnsinn,"; "Delirien").<sup>305</sup> As Habsburg prince Ferri Athenstädt recounts to the unnamed narrator at the novel's conclusion, "people thought he was insane" ("[er] galt... seinerzeit für verrückt").<sup>306</sup> Pernath's account to the reader, however, reveals that he suffers from epileptic seizures that only subside after his incarceration and release from prison. These seizures, it seems, are linked to heartbreak so devastating that it caused Pernath's mental breakdown and medical professionals to send him to the ghetto before the start of the novel. In the new district, his symptoms have subsided, but despondency over the loss of his community replaces them.

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<sup>304</sup> *Der Golem*, 344-5.

<sup>305</sup> *Der Golem*, 62; 288. This is akin to Michel Foucault's observation that in modern times, attempts to communicate with a madman are characterized by a breakdown in language: "[m]odern man no longer communicates with the madman... There is no common language: or rather, it no longer exists... the constitution of madness... bears witness to a rupture in a dialogue." Qtd. in Preface to 1961 edition of Michel Foucault, *History of Madness*, trans. by J. Khalifa (New York: Routledge, 2009), xxvii-xxxix.

<sup>306</sup> *Der Golem*, 344.

The rupture in dialogue between him and Jaromir leaves him feeling hopeless, alone. He is isolated in his experiences, cut off from a broader German-speaking community. Although ghetto clearance allows Pernath to shed the stigma of his mental instability, as with Jaromir, what could be an opportunity for reinvention is overshadowed by his despondency over the disappearance of his former community in the ghetto: “No trace where they might have gone” (“Keine Spur, wohin sie sich gewandt haben mochten”).<sup>307</sup> Realization of his changed circumstances is painful for him, as well as psychologically destabilizing. Pernath claims, “Fear struck at my heart.... Now I was completely alone in the world” (“Vor Schreck krampfte sich mir das Herz zusammen.... Jetzt war ich ganz allein auf der Welt”).<sup>308</sup> Pernath begins to question whether his memories of his experiences in the ghetto are false:

My own experiences connected with it had, during my time in prison, taken on the pale cast of a dream that had long since faded, and I now looked on at them as empty symbols lacking the pulse of real life, and struck them out of the book of memory.

Meine eigenen Erlebnisse, die sich darauf bezogen, hatten im Gefängnis die Blässe eines längst verwehten Traumbildes angenommen und ich sah in ihnen nur noch Symbole ohne Blut und Leben, — strich sie aus dem Buch meiner Erinnerungen.<sup>309</sup>

These thoughts encourage Pernath’s fear that his experiences and memories from the ghetto may have been a mere internal vision: “it must have been purely an inner vision, even though at the time it had seemed like tangible reality” (“[es] bestärkten mich darin, daß ich rein innerlich geschaut haben müsse, was mir ehemals greifbare Wirklichkeit geschienen”).<sup>310</sup> Unable to distinguish reality from delusion, he finds himself engaged in the same struggle he had experienced at the beginning of the novel: he is a man without a past who has little hope of finding his footing in the present.

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<sup>307</sup> *Der Golem*, 331.

<sup>308</sup> *Der Golem*, 330.

<sup>309</sup> *Der Golem*, 332.

<sup>310</sup> *Der Golem*, 332.

Pernath finds himself, like Jaromir, completely alone among Czech speakers who are unfamiliar to him. Furthermore, his inability to speak Czech immediately marks him as an outsider, the German “other” whose presence is no longer welcome in the city. His experiences after ghetto clearance echo plot developments recounted earlier in novel. Rumors suggest early in the novel that medical professionals blocked Pernath’s memories and moved him to the ghetto after a devastating heartbreak. There, Pernath had to establish himself in the new setting, making new friends and finding new clients. Upon his release from prison, he once again enters a new space where he must reestablish himself. Once Pernath finally finds Jaromir, neither man can revive elements of their former life and preserve memories of the ghetto into the new Czech-dominated world. Although Pernath, unlike Jaromir, has the physical capacity to speak, conversation brings him neither healing nor clarity. Those around him—as demonstrated by the Czech-speaking workers and waiter at Café Chaos—have little interest in helping him recover traces of his past.

Pernath’s bewilderment as he wanders the streets reproduces a situation akin to the disorientation German speakers in Prague during Meyrink’s day. Whereas Gary Cohen has claimed that German- and Czech-speaking camps’ tried “to alter the social boundaries separating the two groups in order to advance their respective interests,”<sup>311</sup> Pernath’s account of the *Finis Ghetto* in progress testifies to the successful efforts of Czech speakers. The physical destruction of the Jewish town gestures toward the erosion of German cultural privilege and of the Prague community’s allegiance to its Jewish population, as discussed in Chapter One. With the crumbling buildings, Pernath see the glory of the German presence in Prague and the city’s toleration of impoverished Jews begin to fade. Pernath memories seem to be filled with “empty symbols lacking the pulse of real life.” Like the indicators of German presence in Prague, his

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<sup>311</sup> Cohen, *The Politics of Ethnic Survival*, 11.

own experiences in Prague—like those of his German-speaking neighbors—will soon be “struck... out of the book of memory.” With the disappearance of German speakers from Prague, as demonstrated by Angelina’s flight from the city at the end of the novel and Pernath’s presumed death (which will be discussed shortly), Germans as an ethnic and linguistic group disappear from capital city’s landscape.

### **Meyrink’s Ghetto as a Microcosm for Turn-of-the-Century Prague**

The presence of one other former ghetto survivor, a blind Jewish musician named Nephtali Schaffranek, underscores the loss of cultural memory in the ghetto with the expulsion of Prague’s impoverished Jews. At the end of the novel’s frame narrative, the unnamed German-speaking narrator awakens and embarks on a quest to find Pernath in the former ghetto. He speaks with Schaffranek in Salon Loisitschek, a newly renovated brothel-turned-pub that the unnamed narrator first encounters while inhabiting Pernath’s body thirty years prior. The two scenes in which Schaffranek appears show how memories of this space have been silenced through ghetto clearance.

The first scene occurs early in the embedded narrative in the chapter “Night” (“Nacht”). The old, blind musician with milky-blue eyes (“blinde, greise”; “die blinden Augen milchbläulich”<sup>312</sup>) appears to the sleeping narrator (and the reader) in a dream in which Pernath visits a ghetto pub and brothel called Salon Loisitschek. Schaffranek is the key performer in a “Grand Concert” advertised on a sign as a “Heute großes Konzehr.”<sup>313</sup> The garbled German on this sign suggests that whoever wrote it (presumably the owner) is not a native speaker of German. The reader later learns that the owner of the establishment is Loisitschek. This burly man (“ein vierschrötiger Kerl”) wears a perpetual expression of “maliciously wild joy” (“der

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<sup>312</sup> *Der Golem*, 342; 70.

<sup>313</sup> *Der Golem*, 68.

Ausdruck hämischer wilder Freude”) along with a green, silken tie around his bare neck and a tuxedo waistcoat adorned with a lump of pig's teeth (“eine grünseidene Krawatte um den bloßen Hals geschlungen und die Frackweste mit einem Klumpen aus Schweinszähnen geschmückt”).<sup>314</sup> As this figure's name implies (and as we later learn in the closing of the frame narrative), this figure is Czech and one of the few former ghetto residents to remain in the district following clearance.

In the unnamed narrator's dream, Loisitschek allows Pernath and his friends to enter Salon Loisitschek and orders a fanfare from the Jewish musician on stage upon their entrance. At the time, the musician is entertaining a full crowd including a group of elegantly clad German-speaking aristocrats from outside the district. Once Pernath and his friends enter the establishment, the blind, old man tinkles away a tune on the piano that sounds as if a “rat were running across its keys” (“wie wenn eine Ratte über Klaviersaiten liefe”).<sup>315</sup> Later, while playing a harp, the musician produces a “wild jumble of sounds” (“Ein wildes Gestolper von Klängen”) accompanied by “strange Hebrew gutturals” (“seltsamen hebräischen Röchellauten”) in a song commemorating the Jews' “miraculous deliverance from death” in Prague on the first Sabbath in Passover centuries prior (“die wundersame Errettung aus Todesgefahr”).<sup>316</sup> Schaffranek's music conjures for Meyrink's contemporary readers antisemitic stereotypes of the author's day, which linked Jews with vermin and asserted that their language was auditorily unappealing.<sup>317</sup>

When a police inspector and team of officers barge in on the concert to close down the brothel, the owner Loisitschek wears a smug grin as the Habsburg prince Ferri Athenstädt emerges from the crowd. The prince hands the inspector his card (“eine Visitenkarte”), and with his gaze alone, he makes clear that the local officials should leave: “[the inspector] cannot bear the

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<sup>314</sup> *Der Golem*, 69.

<sup>315</sup> *Der Golem*, 71.

<sup>316</sup> *Der Golem*, 71; 72.

<sup>317</sup> These stereotypes are explored in more detail in Chapter Three.

flat, indifferent gaze from the unmoving, clean-shaven face with the hooked nose. It unsettles him. Shatters him” (“Er kann den gleichgültigen, glanzlosen Blick dieses glattrasierten, unbeweglichen Gesichtes mit der Hakennase nicht ertragen. Er bringt ihn aus der Ruhe. Schmettert ihn nieder”).<sup>318</sup> Although the prince clearly is not a district resident and thus cannot know every patron in the pub, he claims that all of them are his “dearest guests” (“meine lieben Gäste”), prompting the policemen to depart with the inspector muttering that he was “only doing his job” (“leidiger Pflichterfüllung”).<sup>319</sup>

In the strange images that follow, it is clear that the Habsburg prince controls all happenings in the establishment including the music and dancing, the young prostitute on stage (Rosina), the Czech-speaking owner (Loisitschek), and the military officers. A captain of the military, prompted by “elegant men in evening attire” who were “the whole of the honorable aristocracy of the land” (“vornehme junge Herren in Abendtoilette”; “der ganze verehrliche Hochadel des Landes”), drags the naked Rosina to the stage. A signal, presumably from Loisitschek, prompts Schraffranek to resume the music. Prince Athenstädt approaches the stage with an effeminate man in a pink leotard “with long blonde hair to his shoulders, lips and cheeks made up like a prostitute, his eyes lowered in flirtatious confusion” clinging to his chest (“langem blonden Haar bis zu den Schultern, Lippen und Wangen geschminkt wie eine Dirne und die Augen niedergeschlagen in koketter Verwirrung”).<sup>320</sup> The crowd chants “Loisitschek” as the strange pair dance on stage. Together, the group on stage forms a sickly union of stereotypes of the ethnic communities present in Prague prior to ghetto clearance: the degenerate Jewish woman Rosina, the decadent Habsburg prince, a military official who answers to him, and an effeminate, passive Czech-speaker (Loisitschek) who follows the German nobleman’s lead.

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<sup>318</sup> *Der Golem*, 81.

<sup>319</sup> *Der Golem*, 82.

<sup>320</sup> *Der Golem*, 83.



As we shall see in the next section, after ghetto clearance the Jewish musician, the Czech-speaking salon owner, Loitschek, and the former prince (who is later stripped of his title) remain in the district. As foreshadowed by his song in *Salon Loitschek*, in which Prague's Jews escape violent persecution, Nephtali Schaffranek is the only Jew mentioned in the novel who resides in the new *Josefov/Josephstadt* after ghetto clearance, the sole Jewish survivor of a modern attack on Prague's Jews through the Czech-led urban renewal project. Although all of the novel's other Jews vanish after clearance, Schaffranek preserves the immortality and memory of the district. He, like the golem legend represents something in this quarter of the town, something that cannot die.

Given the antisemitic thrust of the *Finis Ghetto* project and its symbolic attempt to remove the (German) Jewish presence to from the city, the reader is led to question why this character was allowed to remain in the district when others were not. A local waiter tells the narrator: "No one knows him or his name. He's even forgotten it himself. He's all alone in the world. He's a hundred and ten years old, they say. He comes in every night and gets his free coffee" ("...niemand kennt weder ihn noch seinen Namen. Er selbst hat ihn vergessen. Er ist ganz allein auf der Welt. Bitte, er ist 110 Jahre alt! Er kriegt bei uns jede Nacht einen sogenannten Gnadenkaffee").<sup>321</sup> Unlike Pernath, Schaffranek is poor, as demonstrated by the free coffee he receives nightly as charity; thus his presence cannot be related to having the financial means necessary to stay in the new luxury district. He is, however, mentally and physically disabled—like Jaromir and the German-speaking protagonist. Not only does he suffer from memory loss, but he is also blind. Furthermore, he is unable to situate himself in the past or present. His blindness is synonymous with his forgetfulness, obliviousness, and ineptitude, and his inability to communicate with the narrator signals that the century of experiences in the

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<sup>321</sup> *Der Golem*, 342.

ghetto that he witnessed is lost.

At the end of the novel, a scene describing his encounters with the unnamed narrator of the frame narrative further underscores the inability of *Finis Ghetto* survivors to communicate their memories to the new district's residents. The unnamed narrator becomes frustrated with the old man, who is unable to give him the information he seeks. The scene unfolds as follows:

I put my hand on his. "Just try to remember. About thirty-three years ago, did you know a gem dealer named Pernath?"

"Pain in the ass! Tailor and cutter!" he babbles asthmatically, laughing uncontrollably, as if I had just told him a great joke.

"No, not 'pain in the ass — — Pernath!"

"Pereies!?" — he says, jubilantly.

"No, not Pereies, either — Pernath!"

"Pascheies?" — he crows with joy — —

My hopes dashed, I give up the attempt.

Ich halte seine Hand fest: "Denken Sie einmal nach! — Haben Sie nicht vor etwa 33 Jahren einen Gemmenschneider namens Pernath gekannt?"

"Hadrbolletz! Hosenschneider!" — lallt er asthmatisch auf und lacht übers ganze Gesicht, in der Meinung, ich hätte ihm einen famosen Witz erzählt.

"Nein, nicht Hadrbolletz: — — Pernath! "

"Pereies?! " — er jubelt förmlich.

"Nein, auch nicht Pereies. — Per—nath!"

"Pascheies?! " — er kräht vor Freude. — —

Ich gebe enttäuscht meinen Versuch auf.<sup>322</sup>

Although Schaffranek lived through a century of ghetto history, his blindness limited his understanding of it. Moreover, now a very old man, he is unable to remember what he once knew. Like the "wild jumble of sounds" and strange clanging on the piano he produces in the brothel, Schaffranek's responses are jumbled, confused, and indecipherable. The exchange parallels that of Pernath and Jaromir at the end of the novel's embedded narrative: after Pernath and the unnamed narrator search for former residents of the ghetto and finally find one, the conversations leave all interlocutors exasperated, unsatisfied, and hopeless. Like Pernath's frustrations with Jaromir, Schaffranek's (lack of) responses cause the unnamed narrator to give

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<sup>322</sup> *Der Golem*, 343.

up his interrogation. Once again, the novel makes clear that no carriers of memories of the former ghetto are able to speak about them, and as a result, all communal memory of the district has been erased.

The mental and physical disabilities ascribed to Jaromir, Pernath, and Schaffranek underscore the effectiveness with which the historic Czech-led demolition project erased the social order of the district, as well as that of the Prague community. Because Schaffranek has forgotten his past, Jaromir and Pernath are the sole carriers of communal memories of the former ghetto. Only they could provide intimate descriptions of the ghetto prior to demolition: the sights and smells of its buildings and streets, typical day-to-day exchanges between inhabitants, who those inhabitants were, how they lived, etc. The two men's physical and psychological abnormalities, however, prevent them from articulating these experiences in a meaningful way. Just as the city's Jewish past is forgotten in *Der Golem*, as embodied by the forgetful figure Schaffranek, the disappearance of Pernath and Jaromir results in the complete erasure of ghetto memory from the city.

These three characters—a Czech by “blood,” a German-speaker, and a Jew—represent the three ethnic communities found in Meyrink's reimagining of the district before its destruction. The rupture of language and the social limitations shared by Jaromir, Pernath, and Schaffranek reflect the dismantling of the social structures that had previously defined Prague. The same city is now governed by Czech-speaking authorities such as the police superintendent, reconstructed by the Czech-speaking construction workers, and catered to by the Czech-speaking pub owner, Loisitschek.

Through these three disabled characters, the novel raises questions about identity in the district following the *Finis Ghetto* and the social changes it represents in the novel. Despite its many unattractive elements, the former ghetto provided a sense of home and community for its

impoverished residents. The Jewish town only exists insofar as the former residents remember it and discuss their memories with others. Battered and beaten, wandering aimlessly like ghosts, Pernath and Jaromir can neither rid themselves of memories of the space that they had called home nor recreate or reestablish interpersonal connections.

### **Pernath's Transcendence through Death**

The abrupt shift in narrative perspective and closing of the embedded narrative in the final chapter of *Der Golem* ("End"/"Schluss") emphasizes a repetition in plot developments that establishes the connection Czech speakers believed existed between Prague's German-speaking culture, Jewish tradition, and the golem legend; the scene imagines the end of the German and German-Jewish presence in Prague and the possibility of a brighter future for the city and its autonomous, Czech-speaking population. The following section explores the jarring perspectival shift from that of Pernath to the unnamed sleeping narrator of the frame narrative. This abrupt change in narrating voices underscores the swift, dramatic changes taking place in Prague that reshaped the district. "End" also indicates the novel's suggestion that the aftermath of ghetto clearance and the Czech take-over of the city was a necessary step in Prague's socio-cultural development as a city under the rule of Habsburg monarchy. An analysis of scenes describing 1) Pernath's death, which marks the transition into the novel's final chapter, 2) the unnamed narrator's search for Pernath, and 3) images surrounding the unnamed narrator's discovery of Pernath at the Hradshin reveals the suggestion that, despite the disorienting effect of the Czech take-over of Prague's municipal politics, economy, and urban planning, the new changes to the city's landscape and community allow for an egalitarian society free of decadence, degeneration, and restrictive social structures. Nevertheless, the text asserts that German-speaking authority,

even if kept at a distance, will prevail in the city—as represented by the protagonist’s occupation of the palace in the final scene of the novel.

The novel’s last two chapters depict a tension between past and present, old and new, memory and dream. Pernath moves into a house in which the other inhabitants are “mostly small artisans and tradesmen” (“zumeist kleine Kaufleute oder Handwerker”)—two professions traditionally held by Czech speakers. The presence of these individuals shows that what were once working-class professions now provide enough financial capital to reside in the luxury district.<sup>323</sup> Knowing that nothing remains for him in Prague, Pernath notes that he, too, will soon leave the city. Before departing, however, he says, “I wanted to relive my youth with the glitter of lights and the fragrance of pine needles and burning wax around me. Before the end of the year I might well already be on my way, searching for Hillel and Miriam in villages and towns, or anywhere else I felt I might find them” (“Ich wollte noch einmal jung sein und Lichterglanz um mich haben und den Duft von Tannennadeln und brennendem Wachs. Ehe das Jahr noch zu Ende ging, war ich vielleicht schon unterwegs und suchte in Städten und Dörfern, oder wohin es mich innerlich ziehen würde, nach Hillel und Mirjam”).<sup>324</sup> Like his former German-speaking Jewish acquaintances who left the city, he, too, seeks more hospitable surroundings.

A conflict between past and present in the scene depicting Pernath’s fatal fall from his home on the *Altschulgasse* bridges the novel’s embedded and frame narratives. After his exoneration for murder and release from prison only to discover that his entire neighborhood was destroyed in his absence and all of his former contacts have disappeared from Prague, he finally finds resolution, although it is short-lived. On Christmas Eve, he feels confident about leaving the city to find his friends; he senses that he is surrounded by something “healing” (“ein Heilen”)

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<sup>323</sup> *Der Golem*, 332.

<sup>324</sup> *Der Golem*, 333.

that brings him deep “contentment” (“Zufriedenheit”) whose source he cannot locate or adequately describe.<sup>325</sup> That evening, however, a fire breaks out in Pernath’s house. Amid the piercing siren of the approaching fire brigade and the gleaming helmets of firemen, Pernath hears the brusque commands of the brigade shouting to his neighbors, each of whom is jumping onto mattresses below. Realizing that he, too, must find a way out of the burning building, Pernath begins his slow descent from the building’s roof using the rope tied to the chimney. He describes his descent and the images he sees on his way down:

Past a window. Look in:  
Inside everything is brilliantly lit.  
And I see— — — I see— — —  
My whole body becomes a single, echoing cry of joy.  
‘Hillel! Mirjam! Hillel!’  
I want to jump on the bars.  
Grab next to them. Lose my grip on the rope.  
For the blink of an eye, I am hanging, head downwards, legs forming a cross  
between heaven and earth.  
The rope twangs from the jerking. Crunching stretch of the fibers.  
I am falling.  
My consciousness is fading.  
Still falling, I reach for the window-ledge, but my hand slips.  
No stopping: the stone is smooth.

Komme an einem Fenster vorbei. Blicke hinein:  
Drin ist alles blendend erleuchtet.  
Und da sehe ich — — — da sehe ich — — — mein ganzer Körper wird ein  
einzig hallender Freudenschrei:  
„Hillel! Mirjam! Hillel!“  
Ich will auf die Gitterstabe losspringen.  
Greife daneben. Verliere den Halt am Seil.  
Einen Augenblick hänge ich, Kopf abwärts, die Beine gekreuzt, zwischen  
Himmel und Erde.  
Das Seil singt bei dem Ruck. Knirschend dehnen sich  
die Fasern. Ich falle.  
Mein Bewußtsein erlischt.  
Noch im Sturz greife ich nach dem Fenstersims, aber ich gleite ab. Kein Halt:  
der Stein ist glatt.<sup>326</sup>

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<sup>325</sup> *Der Golem*, 333.

<sup>326</sup> *Der Golem*, 335-6.

The illuminated room into which he peers immediately before his fall is the same room in which he found himself in the novel's ninth chapter "Ghost" ("Spuk"). During his midnight wanderings through tunnels running beneath the ghetto, Pernath experiences a repetition of life occurrences and elements of local legend. Earlier in the novel, Pernath enters a room with a star-shaped door and finds himself in a space with only one window that he cannot reach. As he found himself wishing that someone could feed him a rope through the window from outside, he recalled a rumor that "[m]any years ago, someone had let himself down by a rope to look in through the window and the rope had broken —" ("schon einmal vor vielen Jahren hatte sich ein Mensch an einem Strick vom Dach herabgelassen, um durchs Fenster zu schauen, und der Strick war gerissen —").<sup>327</sup> He then realized that he was in the very room where ghetto residents reported seeing the cyclical appearance of the golem: "Yes! I was in the house in which the ghostly golem each time disappeared!" ("Ja: ich war in dem Haus, in dem der gespenstische Golem jedesmal verschwand!").<sup>328</sup>

Now Pernath is suspended outside the room by a rope, resembling the figure of legend who fell from the window from a rope. His body symbolically bridges past and present. As we shall see in the following section, the reader is encouraged to interpret Pernath's experiences and thoughts in "Ghost" as foreshadowing Pernath's transformation into a spectral figure at the end of the novel.

The overlapping of Pernath's two interactions with the room also forges a connection between German-speaking culture and Jewish tradition in Prague.<sup>329</sup> Gelbin has claimed that this room, only accessible through winding channels beneath the ground, links Pernath to the "interstitial realm of the Jew."<sup>330</sup> Pernath's previous experiences with this room reinforce that

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<sup>327</sup> *Der Golem*, 126.

<sup>328</sup> *Der Golem*, 126.

<sup>329</sup> Gelbin, 109-10.

<sup>330</sup> Gelbin, 109.

idea. After entering a room with the door in the shape of the Star of David, Pernath was lost, hopeless, and convinced he would “never succeed in finding the endless, eternally intersecting corridors without light” (“Ohne Licht die endlosen, sich ewig kreuzenden Gänge zurückzufinden, würde mir nie gelingen, empfand ich als beklemmende Gewißheit”).<sup>331</sup> There, Pernath imagined himself as the golem, a creature that his friends had described to him as “not a real human,” something with “a hollow, semi-conscious, vegetable existence” (“doch kein richtiger Mensch daraus geworden und nur ein dumpfes, halbbewußtes Vegetieren”).<sup>332</sup> When Pernath resurfaced onto the street, exhausted and dirty from wandering the tunnels, several passersby mistook him for the golem.

As Gelbin has shown, the golem represents the “unevolved human condition,” a creature brought to life by human hands yet incomplete.<sup>333</sup> The rumored emergence of this clay figure every thirty-three years in the novel links the golem to the myth of Ahasver the Wandering Jew, “further strengthen[ing] Meyrink’s linkage of this realm [in the tunnels] to the Jew.”<sup>334</sup>

Building upon Gelbin’s association of the protagonist with a Jewish space, we might read Meyrink’s linking of Pernath with the golem of Jewish legend as establishing a connection between Prague’s German-speaking and Jewish cultures. His envisioning of himself as the golem early in the novel while inside the room prompts a physical transformation, made visible as the ghetto residents in the street mistook him for the dreaded figure of Jewish legend. If we read the ghetto as a microcosm for Prague itself, we may read these scenes as suggesting that although Pernath is a German-speaking Catholic, his interactions with the Jewish space have perforce forged a connection with the Jewish community—one that is unbreakable even after the Jewish community has been purged from Prague’s landscape. Like the golem figure of Jakob Grimm’s

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<sup>331</sup> *Der Golem*, 126.

<sup>332</sup> *Der Golem*, 49.

<sup>333</sup> Gelbin, 109.

<sup>334</sup> Gelbin, 109.



legend, who falls to his death when his rabbi master removes an amulet from his forehead, Pernath falls from the building to his death, signifying the end of the German-Jewish presence in at the novel's conclusion.

The positioning of his body before his fall has religious, ethnic, and national significance. Pernath is a Christian living in a traditionally Jewish space that is now surrounded by Czech Catholics.<sup>335</sup> During a fire that erupts in a Jewish space on a Christian holiday, the Catholic character's body forms "a cross between heaven and earth," embodying the crossing between Christians and Jews in the district. Forming the shape of a cross, Pernath himself embodies widespread Catholicism in the district. The imagery in this scene suggests that Pernath's body could have been the connection between Christian and Jewish tradition in the district—a connection that is broken with his fall. Immobilized in his suspension, the German-speaker reaches out to one of the last remaining Jewish buildings, one that is surrounded by new Czech architecture and urbanization. He finds himself in a life-threatening situation with no promise of rescue. Staying in the Jewish building means death by fire or asphyxiation. Jumping onto the mattresses below alongside his ethnic Czech-speaking neighbors (and presumably firemen commanding them to jump) would mean diving into a world now inhabited by Czech speakers. This new community seems hostile and unwelcoming to him, as suggested by his interactions with the Czech-speaking police superintendent and unhelpful Czech laborers.<sup>336</sup>

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<sup>335</sup> The novel confirms that Pernath is Catholic through his attendance of holy mass, where he accidentally switched hats with the unnamed narrator of the frame narrative.

<sup>336</sup> The location of this scene is also significant. The *Altschulgasse*, located on modern-day Cervena Street Vezenska Street between Maiselova and Parizska, in Prague, dates back to sometime in the thirteenth century and marks a crossing of Jewish and Christian culture. The *Altschulgasse* (Old School Street) and the Spanish Synagogue (*Altschul*) near it are associated with what was likely the oldest Jewish settlement in Old Town. The construction of the *Altschul* (or Spanish Synagogue) was more than likely undertaken by Christians, as ruling monarchies left Jews formally and tactically excluded from guilds related to construction. Over the centuries, these traditionally Jewish spaces became source of frustration for prominent Christians living the city. Antisemitic leaders in the city were uncomfortable with Jewish structures in Old Town and made clear that many Gentiles in Prague did not welcome the Jewish presence. During the Easter Pogrom of 1389, Jews were murdered in the *Altschul*. A Jewish encyclopedia published in Meyrink's time also recounts violent fires that resulted in the deaths of many residents: "in the fire of 1689 many persons lost their lives and all the synagogues were destroyed; in the fire of 1750 the town hall was burned, The ghettos were often attacked by mobs bent on plunder." This document notes that the seclusion of the

Both options allude to death, literal or figurative: the death of the individual, or the death of the German-speaking community, embodied by the German-speaking protagonist, Pernath. With this scene, the novel suggests that this ethnic and linguistic population in Prague will either assimilate into Czech nationalist grassroots movements by following the new *status quo* of the city or they will suffer the fate of the Jews who presumably were expelled from the district. Pernath, as well as the German-speaking community he symbolizes, seems to have no path to transforming himself to fit the new social order or to leave the city. His body shaped like a cross, a symbol of divine sacrifice for the greater good of humankind, Pernath meets his end in the name of progress in the Czech-led district. As a German-speaker in a burning Jewish building, his absence from the community marks the erasure of the German and impoverished German-Jews' presence in the new community.

Despite Pernath's despondency, his death leads to spiritual rejuvenation that aligns with the author's occult beliefs. Multiple scholars (Baer, Goldsmith, Gelbin, Schmidt, Qasim, Boyd) agree that the scene describing his fall counterintuitively marks Pernath's ascension to a transcendental realm, an advanced state of spiritual existence symbolized by his presence at Prague's palace. Connecting his work to the broader literary context of his milieu, however, we see that Pernath's experiences also parallel what Buchholz calls an "absolute alienation from humanity" that is typical of German-language literature at this time, particularly the works of Franz Kafka. As we saw in Chapter One, settings in these texts present a "world in all its abundance" where "diversity vanishes into the self."<sup>337</sup> The vanishing of "diversity" is literal in the *Der Golem* through the homogenization of Prague's Czech-speaking community. These

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Jewish population in the ghetto led to the development of a distinct community: "In consequence of the seclusion within the ghetto, the Jewish dialect, a mixture of vernacular with Hebrew, was kept live." Isidore Singer and Cyrus Adler, ed., *The Jewish Encyclopedia: A Descriptive Record of the History, Religion, Literature, and Customs of the Jewish People from the Earliest Times to the Present Day: Volume 5* (New York and London: Funk and Wagnalls, 1904), 655.

<sup>337</sup> Buchholz, 33.

changes force Pernath's spiritual development through internal reflection prompted by his physical isolation in prison and reinforced by his social isolation in the new Czech-dominated district. Only in his deep state of loneliness can Pernath learn "to live with *nothing but oneself* [in] a state of enjoyment where one avails oneself of the internal abundance of experience, memory, and imagination."<sup>338</sup>

Through his fall, which presumably marks his death, Pernath leaves the material realm and finds spiritual transcendence, unified with nature and his true love, Mirjam, at the top of Prague's castle district (Hradschin). Schmidt claims that once Pernath "is released from his body, his mind is able to ascend to another time and place," as is demonstrated by his location at the novel's conclusion.<sup>339</sup> Guided by insights from his experiences in the ghetto and the recovery of his memory, he has achieved *Hasid*, a state in Jewish mysticism that Schmidt describes as "a student who has learned and thus freed himself."<sup>340</sup> The only escape for German speakers such as Pernath from the hostile nationalist environment is to flee to a different time and place through physical death. His spirit remains in Prague after his fall. Just as the unnamed sleeping narrator's loss of consciousness marks his transition into an "entirely different setting" ("Suddenly I stood there in a shadowy courtyard"/"Da stand ich plötzlich in einem düsteren Hofe"<sup>341</sup>), Pernath's fall releases him from the hostile contemporary setting, allowing him to ascend to the palace ("Schloss") in the castle district, a symbol of German-speaking presence in Prague.

According to traditions in the Kabbalah described by Gershom Scholem and cited by Schmidt, an elevated spiritual state is achieved when the student becomes "the true master of

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<sup>338</sup> Buchholz, 33.

<sup>339</sup> Schmidt, 18. Meyrink was raised in a Christian household. As a result, he had a loose relationship to Jewish mysticism; all references to Jewish culture, traditions, and mysticism came from his conversations with his Jewish friends, particularly Max Brod. Thus, any representations of Jewish mysticism are intertwined with his own occult beliefs, serving his own aesthetic agendas. See also Boyd, "Demonizing Esoterism," 222-234.

<sup>340</sup> Schmidt, 25.

<sup>341</sup> *Der Golem*, 5.

magical forces who can obtain everything precisely because he wants nothing for himself.”<sup>342</sup>

Through his corporeal death, Pernath has escaped the struggles in Czech-nationalist Prague and ascended to a higher state of existence, where wants and desires in the material world evaporate. Pernath’s spirit has thus escaped a city that has nothing to offer him: no hope of friendship, economic security, or promise of a better future. Through death, the pain and torment he experienced due to his heartbreak over Angelina has subsided, his madness is healed, and he escapes from an unwelcoming community.

*Der Golem* depicts the Jewish Town as so fraught with criminality and violence that the anonymous narrator can only experience this chapter in Prague’s cultural history through the protective screen of a dream.<sup>343</sup> Gelbin claims that Pernath’s spiritual development takes place over a series of lifetimes connected in the novel by a series of dreams, “for life in the text is but a dream.”<sup>344</sup> For Gelbin, the scenes featuring the room with a door shaped in the Star of David and the window above it mark “an essential stage in the development of the individual.” The scenes, she asserts, reflect themes of reincarnation. As she claims, existence and transcendence in the novel depend on each other: “These passages strengthen the function of... characters in the text to represent different states of Pernath’s spiritual development across several lifetimes.”<sup>345</sup> Only through cyclical experiences repeated lifetime after lifetime can individuals and communities evolve to a higher state of existence. In the novel, this higher state does not include a German and German Jewish presence in the heart of Prague but only in its castle. For Meyrink’s contemporary readers, the fire in the house on the *Altschulgasse* may have conjured cultural

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<sup>342</sup> Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken, 1995), 99, qtd. in Schmidt, 25.

<sup>343</sup> Baer claims that the confrontation between past and present renders a Freudian interpretation of the novel. For a reading based on these claims, see Baer, 96. Tracing evidence in the novel alluding to “the growing popularity of Freudian theory in European literary circles at the time,” Goldsmith claims, “Pernath must undergo an intensely psychological experience in which he confronts his alter ego in order to discover his true identity.” Arnold L. Goldsmith, *The Golem Remembered, 1909-1980: Variations on a Jewish Legend* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1981), 96; 100.

<sup>344</sup> Gelbin, 109.

<sup>345</sup> Gelbin, 109-110.

memories of centuries of pogroms and arson that destroyed many of the ghetto's structures or the more recent violent antisemitic and anti-German riots in the streets as result of the Bandeni affair and local ordinances that ignited nationalist fury. Through "End" ("Schluss"), the reader is brought full circle to the dreamer in the first chapter, whose dream shows how the world once was and whose awakening shows the reader how the world can be, should social reforms accompany ghetto clearance and the breakdown of the social hierarchies the ghetto represents.

After Pernath's death at the end of the embedded narrative, the reader is presented with a new world in Prague through the eyes of the unnamed sleeping narrator of the frame narrative. After following Pernath to the castle district and to the garden in the palace, the unnamed narrator claims, "the whole world, in fact, seems enchanted, seen through a haze of dreamy recognition, as though I had lived already many times, and in many places, simultaneously" ("als sei die Welt um mich her verzaubert — eine traumhafte Erkenntnis, als lebte ich zuweilen an mehreren Orten zugleich").<sup>346</sup> His comment aptly describes the novel itself. Through his perspective, we see the new order created in Prague's former Jewish ghetto after its clearance, as well as the suggestion that Prague society can move toward a better, more egalitarian future through the ghetto's removal.

This new order is best described in an analysis of the final pages of the novel's frame narrative, in which the unnamed narrator discovers Pernath's legacy in Salon Loitschek before finding the protagonist looking down upon the idyllic city of Prague from a garden in Prague's historic palace.

### **The Czech Awakening and An Idyllic Prague**

Pernath's transcendence is witnessed by the sleeping narrator of the novel's frame

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<sup>346</sup> *Der Golem*, 347.

narrative, whose experiences allude to the reversal of ethnic and linguistic roles in the city, including income redistribution that accompanied the rise of Czech nationalism in the years between the embedded and frame narrative. The novel encourages the reader to interpret this figure as Pernath's double. As the sleeping narrator awakens at the novel's conclusion, the narrative moves from Pernath's perspective to that of an unnamed narrator who finds himself in a hotel in Prague thirty-three years after Pernath lived in the ghetto: "I lie in bed and live in a hotel. I am not called Pernath" ("Ich liege im Bett und wohne im Hotel. Ich heiÙe doch gar nicht Pernath").<sup>347</sup> The man becomes aware that while sleeping, he experienced Pernath's life as if it were his own: "Everything that Athanasius Pernath experienced, so did I in the dream. In one night, I experienced what he saw, heard, experienced as if I were him" ("Alles, was dieser Athanasius Pernath erlebt hat, habe ich im Traum miterlebt, in einer Nacht mitgesehen, mitgehört, mitgeföhlt, als wäre ich er gewesen").<sup>348</sup> On a hook on the wall in his hotel, he finds a hat with the name "ATHANASIUS PERNATH" in gold letters on the inner lining. He realizes that taking the hat must have prompted his dream about the other German man. Determined to uncover the meaning behind his vision and discover whether elements of his dream are rooted in reality, he wanders along the *Hahnpassgasse* searching for Pernath. Eventually he finds his way to Salon Loisitschek. Conversations with patrons there lead him to Prague's castle, where he finds Pernath with Mirjam looking down at the idyllic city below, a German and German Jew existing as a ghostly presence hovering over the city. The novel closes with this image, as well as a porter near the garden returning the unnamed narrator's hat to him, which the narrator had accidentally taken earlier that day during mass at the palace complex's cathedral.

Before I proceed with an analysis of these scenes, a few words about the unnamed narrator situate his perspective on his interactions with characters in the former Jewish ghetto

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<sup>347</sup> *Der Golem*, 337.

<sup>348</sup> *Der Golem*, 338.

and his descriptions of Prague from the palace. The reader first encounters this figure in the novel's first chapter, "Sleep" ("Schlaf"). As he falls asleep reading passages from the Buddha, he slips into Pernath's body and relives the man's experiences thirty years prior: "I am suddenly filled with my own sense of powerlessness .... All I know is that my body is lying asleep in bed and my senses are detached and no longer tied to it" ("Langsam beginnt sich meiner ein unerträgliches Gefühl von Hilflosigkeit zu bemächtigen.... Ich weiß nur, mein Körper liegt schlafend im Bett, und meine Sinne sind losgetrennt und nicht mehr an ihn gebunden").<sup>349</sup> The unnamed narrator is absent from the novel until Pernath's fall from his house on the *Altschulgasse*, which marks the narrator's awakening and a shift from the novel's embedded narrative to the frame narrative.

The scenes describing his awakening at the end of the novel allow us to discern a few aspects of his ethnic and religious identity. Like Pernath, the narrator speaks German, is Catholic (as demonstrated by his attendance of holy mass at St. Vitus Cathedral), and finds himself in a Czech-dominated city. Whereas Pernath finds himself in *Josefov/Josephstadt* by doctor's orders and thus feels himself a foreigner in the former Jewish ghetto, the unnamed narrator's residence in a hotel suggests that he is a visitor to Prague—a fact that is reinforced by his need to ask multiple locals for directions to the former Jewish ghetto, *Hahnpassgasse*, and Prague's castle district. Because of the size of the district, its central location in the city, and the scope of the *Finis Ghetto*, any resident in Prague would easily be able to find the newly renovated district without guidance. Upon awakening and leaving his hotel room, however, the narrator finds a porter, whom he asks to take him to the Jewish ghetto. The porter gives the narrator a "malicious smile" ("lächelt malitiös") and says, "...but I must say, there's not much going on in the Jewish quarter nowadays. It's all been rebuilt, if you please." ("...aber in der Judenstadt, ich mache

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<sup>349</sup> *Der Golem*, 3-4.

aufmerksam: ist nicht mehr viel los. Alles neu gebaut, bitte”).<sup>350</sup> Although the narrator does not address the meaning behind the porter’s malicious smile, the reader is aware of its implications: the community that lived there has disappeared, leaving close to no traces behind. The antisemitic undertones of this smile convey the Czech-speaker’s approval of the city’s removal of Prague’s most impoverished citizens and Jewish community.

As the narrator retraces Pernath’s steps in Prague’s former Jewish town, he finds himself in a district that has been completely transformed, almost unrecognizably, bearing almost no trace of the place he encountered in his sleep: “So that’s *Hahnpassgasse*? Nothing in the least like how I saw it in my dream! — Nothing but new houses” (“Also das ist die Hahnpaßgasse? Nicht annähernd so habe ich sie im Traum gesehen! — Lauter neue Häuser”).<sup>351</sup> His shock at seeing the new district resembles Pernath’s disorientation at witnessing the *Finis Ghetto* in its early stages; just as Pernath describes the space as “bewilderingly new” (“unbegreiflich neu”) with newly paved sidewalks (“Trottoir”),<sup>352</sup> the narrator notes that the “narrow, dirty streets” (“engen, schmutzigen Straße[n]”) in his dream are long gone, replaced by widened boulevards and new houses.<sup>353</sup> The similarity in the characters’ responses upon reentering the *Josefov/Josephstadt* encourages the reader to draw comparisons between both accounts of the district. Unlike the filthy former ghetto described by Pernath, the new district witnessed by the anonymous narrator is clean, organized, and safe for its inhabitants. The unwholesome brothels and ghetto establishments have vanished.

The narrator finds that even Salon Loitschek, its owner, and patrons have undergone a transformation. Contrasting the establishment that was once filled with “clouds of pungent tobacco smoke” (“Schwaden beißenden Tabakrauches”) and populated by “prostitutes from the

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<sup>350</sup> *Der Golem*, 338.

<sup>351</sup> *Der Golem*, 338-9.

<sup>352</sup> *Der Golem*, 323.

<sup>353</sup> *Der Golem*, 5.



old ramparts... pimps with their soldiers caps... cattle dealers with hairy hands... [and] out-of-work waiters” (“Dirnen von den Schanzen... Zuhälter daneben mit blauen Militärmützen... Viehhändler mit haarigen Fäusten und... vazierende Kellner”),<sup>354</sup> the narrator describes the newly renovated pub as “a quiet, fairly clean establishment” (“ein stilloses, ziemlich sauberes Lokal”).<sup>355</sup> The newly renovated establishment still carries traces of the salon Pernath visited years ago (“a certain resemblance to the old ‘Loisitschek’ in the dream is undeniable”/“eine gewisse Ähnlichkeit mit dem alten geträumten ‘Loisitschek’ ist nicht zu leugnen”); its continued presence marks a layering of past and present, traces of the old world in the new district.<sup>356</sup>

The narrator discovers upon conversing with several patrons at Salon Loisitschek that its employees and clientele have changed. Once the owner of a dingy establishment targeted by police for violating local bans, Loisitschek is now a respected member of the Czech-speaking community.<sup>357</sup> After entering Salon Loisitschek, the unnamed narrator asks a barmaid, “Whom does the cafe belong to?,” to which she responds, “To Herr Loisitschek. He owns the whole building. A very distinguished, wealthy gentleman” (“Wem gehört das Kaffeehaus?” “Dem Herrn Kommerzialrat Loisitschek. — Das ganze Haus gehört ihm. Ein sehr feiner reicher Herr”).<sup>358</sup> Loisitschek’s transformation demonstrates how quickly one’s fortunes in the new district could shift based on economic interests and ethnicity. His elevation in Prague society suggests that Czech-speaking figures are no longer merely “servile and uneducated, towering at the wall and waiting there for alms or a slap in the face.”<sup>359</sup> Loisitschek represents a new social order implemented through self-governance and free of the former ethnicity- and language-based hierarchies that previously benefited German speakers. Through restructuring these hierarchies,

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<sup>354</sup> *Der Golem*, 69-70.

<sup>355</sup> *Der Golem*, 339.

<sup>356</sup> *Der Golem*, 339.

<sup>357</sup> *Der Golem*, 339.

<sup>358</sup> *Der Golem*, 339.

<sup>359</sup> Arne Novák, “Pražský roman?” *Venkov* 12, no. 86 (12 April 1917): 3. Qtd. in Spector, *Prague Territories*, 177.

Prague's Czech-speaking community now owns its own establishments, patrols the streets, and has rebuilt entire city districts previously reserved for the city's impoverished (German-speaking) Jewish populations.

The reappearance of Salon Loitschek at the end of the novel signifies the redistribution of wealth throughout the city that begins in the salon and is carried out by the Czech-speaking community throughout the city. As the legend of Dr. Hulbert and his "Regiment" ("das Bataillon") suggests, this community worked diligently to create equality in the city free of German authority. According to the legend, which Zwahk recounts to Pernath during the latter man's first visit to Salon Loitschek in "Night" ("Nacht"), Dr. Hulbert was a doctor of law and a respected man in the ghetto whose high esteem in the community led him to be appointed Chancellor of Prague's university by "His Majesty the Emperor."<sup>360</sup> After he was cuckolded by his wife, Dr. Hulbert started a grassroots movement in the ghetto that resembled the historic Czech nationalist endeavors in Prague. Like the many local leaders who formed bank coalitions, food pantries, and schools for poor Czech speakers in Bohemia and Moravia, Dr. Hulbert was responsible for founding a food pantry at Salon Loitschek, enacting a system of income redistribution in the ghetto, and birthing a grassroots movement against unfair treatment of the oppressed by corrupt officials. Zwahk recounts,

"Dr. Hulbert's comprehensive knowledge of the law was the stronghold for all who fell under the police's watchful gaze. If some recently released jailbird was close to starvation, Dr. Hubert would send him out into the Old Town Square stark naked—and the council of the so-named 'Fischbanka' was compelled to provide him with a suit. If a homeless prostitute was about to be driven from town, as quickly as possible she was married to some rogue who was registered in the city, thus giving her residency.

Dr. Hubert knew hundreds of such solutions that reduced the police to powerlessness. — Whatever kreutzer these outcasts of human society 'earned,' they faithfully gave over to the common purse, from which they all supported themselves."

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<sup>360</sup> *Der Golem*, 72.

“Dr. Hulberts umfassende Gesetzeskenntnis wurde das Bollwerk für alle die, denen die Polizei zu scharf auf die Finger sah. War irgendein entlassener Sträfling daran, zu verhungern, schickte ihn Dr. Hulbert splitternackt hinaus auf den Altstädter Ring — und das Amt auf der sogenannten ‚Fischbanka‘ sah sich genötigt, einen Anzug beizustellen. Sollte eine unterstandslose Dirne aus der Stadt gewiesen werden, so heiratete sie schnell einen Strolch, der bezirkiszuständig war, und wurde dadurch ansässig.

Hundert solcher Auswege wußte Dr. Hulbert, und seinem Rate gegenüber stand die Polizei machtlos da. — Was diese Ausgestoßenen der menschlichen Gesellschaft ‚verdienten‘, übergaben sie getreulich auf Heller und Kreuzer der gemeinsamen Kassa, aus der der nötige Lebensunterhalt bestritten wurde.”<sup>361</sup>

Just as the formation of a fully functioning Czech society was designed to liberate Czech speakers from German speakers’ cultural, political, and economic oppression, Dr. Hulbert provides impoverished citizens in the ghetto an alternate means of financial and communal survival free of police and the legal influence. Even after his death, Dr. Hulbert provides for the “barefoot, filthy, ragged and torn” followers (“barfuß, schmutzstarrend, zerlumpt und zerfetzt”) of the Regiment.<sup>362</sup> Those who contributed to the Regiment received a free bowl of soup daily, which a waitress poured into depressions hollowed out in the tables of the Salon Loisitschek that served as soup-bowls. In the case of those who could not prove their belonging to the Regiment, the waitress sucks the soup back into the pump, signifying that those who does not commit to following the new Czech-led order (Germans or Jews, for instance) are left to their own devices for survival. In a statement suggestive of the spread of grassroots nationalist movement developing throughout the Empire in Meyrink’s day, Zwahk concludes, “From the table, the story of this particular joke has gone all around the world” (“Von diesem Tisch aus machte die Gepflogenheit als Witz die Runde durch die ganze Welt.”)<sup>363</sup> Whereas “Loisitschek became home to him for what was left of his ruined life” (“der ‘Loisitschek’ wurde seine Heimstätte für

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<sup>361</sup> *Der Golem*, 76-7.

<sup>362</sup> *Der Golem*, 78.

<sup>363</sup> *Der Golem*, 79.

den Rest seines zerstörten Lebens”), at the end of the novel, this establishment is the heart of the Czech-speaking community and all that it stands for: the destruction of German-speaking authority, the erasure of German cultural memory, and its replacement with all things Czech, embodied by the Czech-speaking worker and Czech owner, Loitschek.<sup>364</sup> The “joke” to which Zwahk had referred in his retelling of the tale takes on a dark tone when the reader realizes that, although he is Czech, the storyteller himself was ousted from the city due to the *Finis Ghetto*; the new order took away his livelihood in the ghetto like the soup in the table. Although the novel does not state his reasons for leaving the *Josefov/Josephstadt*, whether he could no longer afford to live in the luxury district or whether he did not comply with the new agendas proposed by Czech nationalists, it is clear that he, along with his friends Vrieslander and Prokop, must fend for themselves after the destruction of their homes. Pernath, for his part, hopes that these men are enjoying a bright fate, using Charousek’s inheritance money to start “a mercantile company with the enlarged marionette theater around the world” (“kaufmännische Kompagnie mit dem vergrößerten Marionettentheater durch die Welt”).<sup>365</sup>

No clearer symbol of the reversal of ethnic and linguistic roles appears than the changes in fortune of the former Habsburg prince Ferri Athenstädt. Once a figure who commanded all cliental and police interactions in the space, he now appears without title, fallen into disrepute and reduced to hustling billiards. The barmaid informs the narrator that Athenstädt lost his wealth and title after his affair with the Jewish prostitute Rosina. She says,

“That Ferri, he was a sly one, that one. — They say his noble title went back for centuries — of course that’s just gossip since he don’t wear no beard — and a heap of money, he had. A red-haired little Jewess, who’d been hookin’ since she was a kid, she stripped him bare—of money, I mean. Not a penny left... Then ran off completely.... The high lord of course had to give up all his grand titles, had to go around calling himself Rider of the Underworld. Serves him right. He could never wash off of her that she used to be a ‘pro.’”

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<sup>364</sup> *Der Golem*, 76.

<sup>365</sup> *Der Golem*, 329.

“Der Ferri, der war Ihnen früher ein ganz ein Geriebener. — Er soll von uraltem Adel gewesen sein — es ist natürlich nur so ein Gerede, weil er keinen Bart nicht trägt — und furchtbar viel Geld g’habt habn. Eine rothaarige Jüdin, die schon von Jugend auf eine ‘Person’ war... hat ihn dann ganz ausgezogen. — Punkto Geld mein’ ich natürlich. No, und wie er dann kein Geld.... Der hohe Herr hat dann natürlich auf alle Ehre verzichten müssen und sich von da an nur mehr Ritter von Dämmerich nennen dürfen. No ja. Aber daß sie früher eine ‚Person‘ g’wesen ist, hat er ihr halt doch nicht wegwaschen können.”<sup>366</sup>

The barmaid, whose broken German suggests her Czech roots, is condescending in her description of Ferri’s fate. Her vilification of a former German-speaking prince certainly would have had consequences under the former social order. In the new world, however, she is free to pass along her judgments to strangers, regardless of ethnicity, language use, or social standing. The narrator (and reader) sees how the tables have turned; whereas Ferri Athenstädt was once the German-speaking prince who dictated all social interactions in the salon (a symbol for the ghetto), he is now a patron, deprived of respect and command over the district. The Czech-speaking owner of the establishment is now a respected property owner in a luxury district. He alone determines the prices of drinks, who can enter, and who can leave.

Similar to the outcome of the unnamed narrator’s conversation with Schaffranek discussed in the previous section, the narrator’s conversation with Athenstädt also fails to provide him with useful information about Pernath: “If I’m not mistaken,” the former prince says, “people thought he was mad. Once he claimed he was... just a minute...yes, he claimed he was called Laponder. And another time he tried to pass himself off as a certain... Charousek” (“Wenn ich nicht irre, galt er seinerzeit für verrückt. — Einmal behauptete er, er hieße — warten Sie mal, — ja: Laponder! Und dann wieder gab er sich für einen gewissen — Charousek aus”).<sup>367</sup> Another patron corrects the former prince: “That Charousek really lived. My father had

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<sup>366</sup> *Der Golem*, 341.

<sup>367</sup> *Der Golem*, 344.

inherited over 1000 crowns from him” (“Den Charousek hat’s wirklich gegeben. Mein Vater hat doch mehrere 1000 fl. von ihm geerbt”).<sup>368</sup> Once again, the reader is reminded of the slipperiness of memory in the district; none of the new residents can remember clearly who resided in the ghetto, what they did there, or when they left or died. Only a handful of Czech speakers who overhear the conversation can direct the narrator toward Pernath’s possible whereabouts, helping the narrator find him at the palace.

### **The Castle as a Site of German (Habsburg) Authority in Prague**

Despite changes within the municipal, social, and economic sectors in Prague, the novel’s final images communicate that any developments in the national sphere are still under the watchful eye of the German-speaking Habsburg monarchy in Vienna, symbolically depicted in the novel as the Hradschin district boasting Prague’s palace with the cathedral at its center. The historical significance of the palace contextualizes the nationalist implications of this setting in the novel’s last scene. As we saw see in Chapter One, for centuries, Prague’s castle, which is surrounded by a number of historic palaces and gardens featured in *Der Golem*, had been a symbol of secular and religious power in the region, the structure standing as synonym for whatever secular power ruled the region at a given time.<sup>369</sup> Drawing upon a historical site in Prague that for centuries was passed between the hands of local Slavs and German-speaking monarchs who answered to the Habsburg seat in Vienna, Meyrink’s recreation of the palace represents German speakers’ political, religious, and cultural control over Prague in *Der Golem*.

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<sup>368</sup> *Der Golem*, 345.

<sup>369</sup> Starting in the tenth century, for example, this structure housed Czech princes and kings, and in 1353 became the seat of the Holy Roman Emperor by Emperor Charles IV. The Protestant Bohemians’ ousting of the Habsburgs—symbolically carried out by the Defenestration of Prague on May 23, 1618, not only sparked what became the Thirty Years War but also triggered the wrath of the monarchy, who then crushed the rebellion through the Battle of White Mountain (November 8, 1620). Hugh LeCaine Agnew points out that “[h]istorical ties between the Bohemian rulers and the Holy Roman Empire never constituted a union of the German with the Czech nation, which had a right to its own existence.” Hugh LeCaine Agnew, *The Czechs and the Lands of the Bohemian Crown* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2004), 118.

Resembling an earlier scene during Pernath's criminal interrogation, which depicts a portrait of Kaiser Franz Josef looking down upon the Czech Superintendent Otschin's desk, the novel's conclusion features the unnamed narrator and Pernath—both German in language and ethnicity—looking down upon Prague's new Czech-dominated city. The city appears as a glowing paradise. Both scenes gesture toward the Habsburgs' overseeing local affairs, keeping a distance yet ready to intervene if the need should arise.

The sights, smells, and sounds experienced by the unnamed narrator in the novel's final scenes prepare the reader for the splendor that awaits him when gazing down upon the new Prague. Ascending the "small, lonely staircase" ("die kleine, einsame Schloßstiege"<sup>370</sup>) to the garden near the castle, he notices the soundlessness of his surroundings, which are filled with "fragrance and light" ("Kein Laut. Nur Duft und Glanz"), as well as with the sweet smell of lilac ("Die Luft ist voll von süßem Fliederhauch").<sup>371</sup> Prague appears to him below the mountain as a perfect city: "I am blinded by new magnificance.... At my feet lies the city in the morning's first light like a vision of promise. For a long time I just stand there turned to stone, astonished. I feel as if a foreign world appears before me" ("[Ich] bin geblendet von neuer Pracht.... Zu meinen Füßen liegt die Stadt im ersten Licht wie eine Vision der Verheißung.... Lange stehe ich wie versteinert da und staune. Mir wird, als träte eine fremde Welt vor mich").<sup>372</sup> As the narrator stands before a garden door, a gardener approaches him. The narrator gives the gardener Pernath's hat. The gardener opens the gate, and the narrator sees Pernath and Mirjam "both gazing down on the city" ("beide schauen hinab in die Stadt").<sup>373</sup> When Pernath, prompted by Mirjam, turns and looks at the narrator, the latter man is shocked to realize that he is staring at

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<sup>370</sup> *Der Golem*, 347.

<sup>371</sup> *Der Golem*, 347.

<sup>372</sup> *Der Golem*, 348.

<sup>373</sup> *Der Golem*, 349.

his double: “To me it is as if I'm looking at him in a mirror, so similar is his face to mine” (“Mir ist, als sähe ich mich im Spiegel, so ähnlich ist sein Gesicht dem meinigen”).<sup>374</sup>

Eva Christina Schmidt has shown that “[t]he sleeper and Pernath are a reflection of each other in the final scene....Pernath... has ascended to a higher place, and the sleeper will follow his example, for it is in this final scene that he encounters his *Doppelgänger*.”<sup>375</sup> Generally defined, the term *Doppelgänger* refers to a subject beholding itself in another, creating a moment in which the second figure “echoes, reiterates, distorts, parodies” traits or characteristics of the other looking upon him or her.<sup>376</sup> Ascendance to a “higher place” in this scene is literal and figurative: the narrator finds Pernath after ascending “small, lonely Castle steps” (“die kleine, einsame Schloßstiege”) to an Eden-like garden. Once there, he finds his double, a German-speaker who has moved beyond the nationalist struggles of the past and now inhabits a mysterious “foreign world” (“eine fremde Welt”) that grants him a dazzling view of the new city from afar.<sup>377</sup> The narrator gazes on Pernath, who has become the “transcendental subject” and a beacon toward which the former man can aspire, a mirror that shows him a better version of himself.<sup>378</sup> The “self-seeing” component of the *Doppelgänger* motif in this novel offers the unnamed narrator a “window into the soul” of his double, offering him a path for his own transcendence by uncovering his own place in Prague. The novel suggests that as a German-speaker, he no longer belongs in the city. The urban space is best left to the Czech-speaking community, now free to govern its own affairs without the direct interference of the monarchy yet under its distant yet watchful eye.

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<sup>374</sup> *Der Golem*, 349.

<sup>375</sup> Schmidt, 88.

<sup>376</sup> Andrew J. Webber, *The Doppelgänger: Double Visions in German Literature* (Oxford, Clarendon Press: 1996), 3.

<sup>377</sup> *Der Golem*, 347; 348.

<sup>378</sup> Webber, 3.



While Meyrink initially subverts the traditional power dynamics in the Prague novel that depict Czech speakers as subservient to German speakers, the Eden-like scene at the end of the novel suggests that the Czech community's struggle for autonomy is most meaningful to German speakers in its ability to fortify the empire. In the scenes analyzed in this chapter, we see how the Czech community's struggle for independence and the response of the German-speaking middle class and aristocracy to these movements informs his novel. In the end, the novel offers a path for peaceful existence between the monarchy and its multiethnic communities at the periphery of the empire. In this scenario, by granting ethnic local populations some rights and allowing the Czech-speaking population their expression of nationalism, the empire can remain intact. Although the novel also shows that granting these liberties comes at a great cost to others who live there, moving forward in the name of social progress apparently requires collateral damage. The novel depicts this damage at length through the destruction of the Jewish ghetto and the suffering of the populations that were lost in the process; in the end, an idyllic city and a peaceful population prevail, all traces of their violent past elided.

## Chapter Three: Forbidden Love in Prague's German Gothic: Decadence, Degeneration, and the Monstrous Feminine

As the previous chapters have shown, the tumultuous social climate in turn-of-the-twentieth-century Prague provided inspiration for “Prague Novels” written by German-language authors who wove nationalist debates into stories about love, heartbreak, and class struggles. This chapter draws upon theories of genre, degeneration, and the Gothic “monstrous feminine” to examine how *Der Golem* characterizes German men’s erotic encounters with abject (Jewish) women. While previous scholarship has focused on the novel’s characterization of Jewish culture and antisemitism—particularly how these themes manifest themselves in stereotypes of Jews—I look at an under-examined aspect of the novel: the absence of the feminine ideal in Prague and the eternal return of the monstrous feminine. Situating this text within Lombroso’s theory of the female, “born criminal,” as well as the misogynistic and antisemitic theories of Otto Weininger (1880-1903) and Anatole Leroy-Beaulieu, I will show how two women in the novel—Angelina (who was discussed in Chapters One and Two), and her impoverished Jewish double, Rosina—are depicted as embodying two stages of a devolutionary process that nineteenth-century commentators labeled “degeneration.” The decadent German noblewoman, Angelina, personifies an early stage of a disease believed to cause the physical and psychological deterioration of individuals and human communities. The nadir of the process is embodied by her Jewish double, Rosina, a girl who, the novel suggests, is a prostitute; Rosina is the main focus of this chapter, but together, these two figures, as monstrous females, threaten the Prague community by destabilizing the city’s male population.

Gustav Meyrink turned to Gothic frameworks to depict the intersections of ethnic intolerance, changing gender norms, and social decay. In his representation of a city that experienced rapid Czech urbanization from the countryside, boycotts targeting German

businesses, violent antisemitic riots, as well as the upending of “natural” laws that had previously governed gender relations, it is hardly surprising that Meyrink would take up a genre known for depicting paranoia, manipulation, injustice, violence, the taboo, and the irrational to describe the city’s cultural dynamics. Meyrink adapts Gothic themes to fit the culture and urban landscape of *Jahrhundertwende* Prague. The apprehension the reader feels when reading his novel stems from the encounter with multiple dangers, some “largely imaginary, the other[s] all too real.”<sup>379</sup> In his characterization of the monstrous feminine, as I will outline, Meyrink takes up Gothic themes of excess, sexual deviance, and otherness in order to participate in contemporary conversations about the physical and psychological effects of “degeneracy,” those who were most susceptible to this disease, and its remedy.

*Der Golem* testifies to the revival of Gothic literary tradition in the German-language context. Patrick Bridgewater and others have asserted that German contributions to the European Gothic first appeared with Johann Zacharias Gleichmann’s *Varianmando* (1737) and *Ritterroman, Bewundernswürdige Begebenheiten des Europäischen Herkuliskus* (1754) and ended in the 1830s.<sup>380</sup> In Meyrink’s novel, we see similar themes to those found in the first wave of Gothic novels, poems, and short stories written in German, which reflect “the domain of what at the time was also variously called German *diablerie* and Gothic devilism.... Devilism and *diablerie* are shorthand terms for the ‘barbarous superstitions’ of Gothic.”<sup>381</sup> In symbolic terms, the Devil and his monstrous kin are “master[s] of disguise,” lies, and conspiracies, as well as stand-ins “for the evil in human nature”—themes with which the Gothic is obsessed.<sup>382</sup> Contributing to an international genre known for reimagining unsettling real-life situations,

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<sup>379</sup> Patrick Bridgewater, *The German Gothic Novel in the Anglo-German Perspective* (Amsterdam; New York City: Rodopo, 2013), 416.

<sup>380</sup> Bridgewater, 21-2.

<sup>381</sup> In the earliest stages of the development of the Gothic, “devilism” and “*diablerie*” were “for a time more or less synonymous.” Bridgewater, 411.

<sup>382</sup> Bridgewater, 412.

Meyrink's novel takes up the "barbaric superstitions" of the German Gothic by highlighting "the everyday reality of murder, rape and robbery, and of legal systems that were, by later standards, completely inadequate."<sup>383</sup> Bridgewater points out that at the time of publication, Gothic novels were often criticized for their excessive or exaggerated representations of reality, even though the events they depict often "could or did" occur. Schiller, for example, modeled his figure Christian Wolf in *The Criminal from Lost Honour/Der Verbrecher aus verlorener Ehre* (1786) after Friedrich Schwan (1729-1760), a historical bandit chief and murderer whose misdeeds near the Stuttgart region earned him his notoriety.<sup>384</sup> Schiller's descriptions of Wolf's thefts, his activities with traveling bandits, and his capture by police follow Schwan's career closely.<sup>385</sup> In a similar vein, Meyrink evokes the reader's anxiety, dread, and horror by combining superstition, real life occurrences or cultural movements, and historical figures in a crime novel that reveals the darkest corners of Prague society before and after the Czech renovation of the city's Jewish ghetto. The connection between Meyrink's text and its historical context were examined in Chapters One and Two, but the point I would like to highlight here is that *Der Golem* participates in continent-wide conversations about the status of women and Jews and in this particular case in Prague when he turns to the Gothic mode. His recasting of antisemitic and misogynistic cultural discourses contributes to the unsettling effect the reader experiences upon encountering his representations of these demographic groups.

Building upon David Punter's claim that the Gothic genre emerged out of the convergence of what today is considered popular mass culture and "high" modernist aesthetics, Barry Murnane contends in his article "On Golems and Ghosts: Prague as a Site of Gothic

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<sup>383</sup> Bridgewater, 413.

<sup>384</sup> Bridgewater, 413.

<sup>385</sup> Jacob Friedrich Abel, the father of Schiller's favorite teacher, met Schwan as the criminal was awaiting execution. Schwan often "re-narrated his life of crime to visitors for the common good," framing his experiences as a cautionary tale. See Gail Kathleen Hart, *Friedrich Schiller: Crime, Aesthetics, and the Poetics of Punishment* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005), 141.

Modernism” that turn-of-the-twentieth-century Prague witnessed a defining moment of cultural production that often operated in the Gothic mode. Prague, he claims, occupies “an unusual position on the map of literary modernism insofar as it came to be considered more than most other locations as an uncanny site of ghosts, golems, and mysticism in spite of comprehensive programs of urban modernization in the latter half of the nineteenth century.”<sup>386</sup> German-language authors such as Meyrink, Brod, Leppin, and Kafka frequently used Gothic tropes and intertexts in order to create a literature that was inseparable from German and wider European traditions of the Gothic. Using the Gothic mode to reflect the “complicated interplay of direct historical connections and ever variable metaphor,”<sup>387</sup> select stories by these authors articulate personal struggles, frustrations with changes in day-to-day city life, and social ills they believed were plaguing the city. Frequent depictions of claustrophobia in Kafka’s oeuvre, for example, bear traces of the Gothic, drawing attention to the immobility of German-speaking Jews in Prague at the turn of the twentieth century. Ominous settings textualize anxieties felt by many German speakers, as for example Kafka’s labyrinthine castles (*The Castle/Das Schloss*), darkened apartments (“The Metamorphosis”/“Die Verwandlung”; “The Judgment”/“Das Urteil”), winding offices (*The Process/Der Prozess*), and claustrophobic cages and apparatuses (“A Hunger Artist”/“Ein Hungerkünstler”; “In the Penal Colony”/“In der Strafkolonie”). Encountering these settings through reading conjures the reader’s unease and discomfort—a trademark effect of Gothic literature.<sup>388</sup> In many cases, these authors also used the genre as a platform to call for social reform.

In the first decades of the twentieth century, Meyrink became a prominent mediator of

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<sup>386</sup> Barry Murnane, “On Golems and Ghosts: Prague as a Site of Gothic Modernism,” in *Popular Revenants: The German Gothic and Its International Reception, 1800-2000*, ed. Andrew Cusak and Barry Murnane (Rochester, New York: Camden House Press, 2012), 222-41.

<sup>387</sup> David Punter, *Literature of Terror*, Vol. 1 (New York: Routledge, 1996), 4.

<sup>388</sup> Murnane, “On Golems and Ghosts,” in *Popular Revenants*, 222-41.

international Gothic texts. As Chapter One has shown, his experiences with ostracism and antisemitism in Prague led him to abandon satire to become a successful career as a translator and novelist. In addition to translating the complete works of Charles Dickens from English to German—projects that without a doubt influenced his own Gothic renderings—Meyrink also edited a series of international ghost stories in *The Ghostbook/Das Gespensterbuch* (1913). This text was released shortly before Meyrink’s serialized editions of *Der Golem* appeared in *Die weissen Blätter[n]* (*The White Pages*).<sup>389</sup> As mentioned in this dissertation’s introduction, his role as an editor of *The Ghostbook* exposed him to canonical Gothic works by world-renowned German, US-American, French, and Russian authors, such as E.T.A. Hoffmann, Edgar Allan Poe, Nikolaus Gogol, and others.<sup>390</sup> Meyrink himself was a contributor to the volume, which was released in 1913—the same year that the serialized version of *Der Golem* appeared in *Die weissen Blätter[n]*. Not only was he a voracious reader of all things related to ghosts, the occult, and esotericism—which scholars have shown informed themes in his later novels—but his role as a translator of international literature with Gothic influences between 1906 and 1914 also prepared him to write a best-selling novel that incorporated Gothic themes surrounding forbidden love in a story about revenge, murder, and antisemitism in Prague’s Jewish ghetto.

Since the publication of *Der Golem*, scholars have struggled to classify the novel generically. Eduard Frank has claimed that Meyrink’s writing “is one of those strange phenomena in the field of mental history, which cannot be arranged schematically anywhere”

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<sup>389</sup> Amanda Boyd has suggested that romantic contributions to Meyrink’s work from both sides of the Atlantic are plentiful and include E.T.A. Hoffmann’s “Der Vampyr” (aka “Aurelia,” 1821), as well as Edgar Allan Poe’s “Berenice,” “The Fall of the House of Usher,” (1839) and “Ligeia” (1838). German narratives include Heinrich August Ossenfelder’s “Der Vampir” (1748), Gottfried August Burger’s “Lenore” (1773), and Goethe’s well known ballad “Die Braut von Korinth” (1797). See Boyd, “Demonizing Esotericism,” 359.

<sup>390</sup> Meyrink’s short story “Das Präparat” appeared alongside Guy de Maupassant’s “Le Horla” (1887) as well ghost tales by authors including E.T.A. Hoffmann’s novella *The Sandman (Der Sandmann)*, Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Masque of the Red Death (“Die Maske des Roten Todes”) and Nikolai Wassiljewitsch Gogol’s “The Viy” (“Wij, der Fürst der Dämone”). A future project will explore connections between Meyrink’s *Der Golem* and Guy de Maupassant’s short story “Le Horla” (1887), a tale which Meyrink edited in *Das Gespensterbuch*. See Gustav Meyrink, “Vorwort.” *Das Gespensterbuch*. Ed. Felix Schloemp (Munich: Georg Müller, 1913), vi-vii.

(“gehört zu jenen seltsamen Erscheinungen im Bereich der Geistesgeschichte, die sich nirgends schematisch einordnen lassen”).<sup>391</sup> Nevertheless, scholarship has approached the novel as an extension of Expressionism, Neo-Romanticism, Decadence, the Fantastic, and *Trivial-* or *Unterhaltungsliteratur*. To date, however, *Der Golem* has not been analyzed through a Gothic lens. The author’s manipulation of narrative motifs surrounding the monstrous (people and human behaviors) reflects, as I will show, what Leslie Fiedler calls a Gothic tendency to use the “dark region of make-believe” to explore “the night-side of life” and “the irrational world of dreams” and the “repressed guilts and fears that motivate them.”<sup>392</sup> In *Der Golem*, taboo love affairs unfold in a medically dangerous, socially hostile Jewish district that resembles Sara Burns’s description of Gothic cityscapes, where the “inner world of doubt and dread [becomes] tangled with the outer world of haunting history and foreboding change.”<sup>393</sup> A reading of *Der Golem* as rooted in Gothic tradition identifies anxieties embedded within Meyrink’s portrayal of decadent or degenerate women whose behavior is detrimental to men’s physical and psychological well-being. Each plot development advances the agendas of depraved (criminal) women at the expense of their male lovers.

As I will show, *Der Golem* takes up Gothic themes of sexual deviance, criminality, and social injustice in Prague’s Jewish ghetto, as well as forbidden love between German men and impoverished Jewish women that crosses boundaries of many kinds. Promiscuous women of all social classes in Meyrink’s novel are portrayed in a condescending manner, depicted according to misogynistic stereotypes of the day. Sigmund Freud, for example, asserted that women were “sex-crazed,” “hysterical,” and “subject to moods” because of their inability to control their

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<sup>391</sup> Eduard Frank, *Gustav Meyrink. Werk und Wirkung* (Budinggen-Gettenbach: Avalun-Verlag, 1957), 9.

<sup>392</sup> Leslie Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (Normal, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 1960), 136; 140; 128.

<sup>393</sup> This quote references depictions of savage wilderness and cataclysmic destruction in the Gothic paintings of American artist Thomas Cole. Sara Burns, *Painting the Dark Side: Art and the Gothic Imagination in Nineteenth-Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 3.

emotions, erotic fantasies, and sexual impulses.<sup>394</sup> As we will see shortly, these descriptions apply to some female characters in *Der Golem*, who use sex try to entice Meyrink's protagonist and other men in the novel. Afterwards, their lovers display symptoms of hysteria described by Freud and other commentators, such as neurotic behavior, excessive emotionality, and greater susceptibility to sensations than the average person.<sup>395</sup>

The eternal return of the monstrous feminine is common to literature of Meyrink's day and is featured in his novel through women who populate Prague who, even after clearance, carry on the immoral behaviors that ghetto clearance had intended to eradicate.<sup>396</sup> Edgar Allan Poe's ghost story *Ligeia* (1838), for example, describes the death of the narrator's first wife (Ligeia) and the return of her ghost at the deathbed of his second wife (Lady Rowena). At the break of dawn the morning after Lady Rowena's death, the protagonist witnesses his second wife's shrouded corpse come alive again, stand, and walk into the center of the room. Terrified, he discovers that she has transformed into Ligeia through her ghostly reawakening. In another example, Lucy, the promiscuous girl-turned-vampire in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), toys with several male suitors, only to be attacked by a monstrous beast who gives her a new life among the undead. Similar characterizations of terrifying women found their way into Prague's German-language context, as demonstrated by the Jewish female protagonist in Paul Leppin's 1914 short story "The Ghost of the Jewish Town"/"Das Gespenst der Judenstadt." The prostitute

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<sup>394</sup> See Sigmund Freud's writings on "Anna O.," pseudonym for Bertha Pappenheim in Joseph Breuer, *Studies on Hysteria*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (New York: Basic Books: 2000), 21.

<sup>395</sup> In his essay "Aetiology of Hysteria" (1896), Freud defines "hysteria" as a nervous disorder whose name derives from the Greek word *hysteria* (meaning "womb") and indeed hysteria was widely diagnosed in women. Freud argued that the disease was rooted in environmental and social factors, not heredity (as Jean Martin Charcot, 1825-1893, claimed). Common symptoms, he claimed, included emotional excitability and excessive anxiety stemming from the resurfacing of unconscious memories. In *Dora's Case: Freud—hysteria—feminism*, ed. Charles Bernheimer and Claire Kahane, Second Edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 40.

<sup>396</sup> Another example by Henry James (author of the ghost story, *The Turn of the Screw*, 1898) appears in *Daisy Miller* (1879), which describes the heartbreak of an American expatriate in Geneva, Switzerland after he falls in love with a promiscuous American woman. The titular character falls fatally ill following multiple love affairs in Rome and haunts the narrator's thoughts long after her death. Henry James, "Daisy Miller" *The Great Novels of Henry James* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing Company, 2014), 81.



in Leppin's tale (Johanna) closely resembles Meyrink's Rosina in her use of sex as a commodity and her selfish interactions with men. Set in Prague's Jewish Town, a place that, like Meyrink's ghetto, is filled with "poisonous air" ("giftiger Atem") and the "stink" of poverty ("die Armut stanken"), the short story presents readers with detailed descriptions of a Jewish prostitute who contracts a venereal disease.<sup>397</sup> Despite her hospitalization for the fatal infection, her insatiable desire for sex drives her to leave her death bed in the middle of the night in search of men. Upon discovering that her home (the location of her sex work) was levelled during the ghetto clearance project that took place during her absence, Johanna, in an act of revenge, invites a passing group of soldiers to have sex with her in the rubble: "She gave herself to them one by one, and her poor body, devastated by the disease, did not tire, and, twitching in ravaged love, dug deeper and deeper into the rubble" ("Sie gab sich einem nach den andern, und ihr armer, von der Krankheit verwüsteter Leib wurde nicht müde und grub sich zuckend im Liebestaumel immer tiefer in den Schutt").<sup>398</sup> These men then spread her disease throughout the city in the most violent epidemic seen in Prague. Her story depicts the return of the monstrous not overtly featured in *Der Golem* but ever present in the male imagination. As we shall see, themes of female promiscuity, forbidden love, disease, and prostitution also find their way into *Der Golem*.

The following analyses will show how two women in the novel—the promiscuous Jewish girl, Rosina, and her German double, Angelina—embody what Bridgewater calls the "moral monsters" of the Gothic, or figures who commit "heinous atrocities" and are "beyond redemption."<sup>399</sup> Writing in the Gothic mode, Meyrink portrays decadent and degenerate women who use sex to fulfill self-serving agendas and harm their lovers in the process; in these portraits

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<sup>397</sup> Leppin's tale was first published in *Der Sturm* V.2 in April 1914. It was later reprinted and edited by Oskar Wiener in "Deutsche Dichter aus Prag," *Sammelbuch*, Wien u.a.: Strache, 1919, 197-202. This quote can be found in Paul Leppin, "Das Gespenst der Judenstadt," in *Jüdisches Städtebild Prag*, 85.

<sup>398</sup> Leppin, "Das Gespenst der Judenstadt," 88.

<sup>399</sup> Bridgewater, 411.

he draws upon contemporary debates about female sexuality as well as antisemitic stereotypes of Prague's Jews. Meyrink's caricatures of the Jewish Rosina and wealthy aristocrat Angelina participate in broader, continent-wide debates about the sources and effects of degeneracy—a disease that nineteenth-century theorists such as Cesare Lombroso argued stemmed from a corrupted spirit, manifested itself through physical stigmata on the body, and contributed to the fall of humankind.

In what follows I consider how debates concerning the threat of degeneracy, antisemitic commentary surrounding “Jewish Question,” and the misogynistic handling of the “Woman Question” inform *Der Golem*. This novel portrays impoverished Jewish women who use sex as commerce, whose promiscuous behavior negatively affects men, and whose legacy returns to haunt Prague citizens. Meyrink's story draws attention to contemporary concerns about the place and status of Jews and women (particularly Jewish women) in contemporary Habsburg society while painting a grim picture of the Prague community's inability to curb the effects of human degeneracy. In his tale, men are victims of monstrous *femmes fatales* who will lead humankind to what Max Nordau called the “end of times.” Meyrink's Gothic-inflected descriptions of the city's dangerous cityscape alongside the sickly or depraved individuals who populate it, as we shall see, suggest that only radical social and urban reform will eradicate the disease.

Drawing upon theories by degeneration theorists Cesare Lombroso, Benedict Morel, Otto Weininger, and Nordau, I will show how Meyrink's novel depicts intersections of race and gender in the path to degeneracy. Moreover, I argue that social degeneration in *Der Golem* stems from a combination of inherited traits and environmental factors; the former is exacerbated by the latter. Using common misogynistic and antisemitic stereotypes of the day and descriptions emphasizing excess, the novel's plot developments, character dialogues, and inner monologues encourage readers to believe that the hostile social and contaminated physical environment of the

ghetto quickens and exacerbates the effects of degeneration. The onset of the disease is made visible through physical stigmata and depraved behaviors that encourage violence.

### **Degeneration: Morel, Lombroso, Weininger, and Nordau**

Nineteenth-century commentators, such as French physician Bénédict Morel, Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso, and Austrian cultural critics Otto Weininger and Max Nordau, took up “degeneracy” in its various applications. These individuals used the term to imply—as historian Scott Spector has succinctly summarized—“a departure from the genus, a migration from one’s own kind to something other (in German, *Entartung*, *ent-* implying undoing, *Art* being one’s kind).”<sup>400</sup> While the disease often evaded precise definitions, theorists throughout Europe generally agreed that it operated along two axes: 1) as a question of morality and 2) as a bodily manifestation that influenced behavior. Afflicted individuals were believed to act contrary to established social norms, either through impulsive, criminal, or neurotic behavior; through excessive and exotic home décor; or exuberant sartorial choices.

By the turn of the twentieth century, theories of degeneration permeated the fields of medicine, evolutionary biology, and anthropology, as well as sociology. Scholars in each of these fields were dedicated to developing a complex classification system to identify European society’s most threatening individuals. Taking a variety of perspectives on and approaches to the disease, psychiatrists, physicians, politicians, criminologists, and social theorists explored questions about the affliction’s origins, stigmata on the human body, and long-term effect on Western society. These scholars’ arguments and approaches tended to vary according to geographical location. French and Italian commentators, for example, analyzed the disease in order to locate the origins of rising crime rates and spikes in diagnoses of insanity, hysteria, and

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<sup>400</sup> Spector, *Violent Sensations*, 46.

melancholia in the latter half of the nineteenth century.<sup>401</sup> In England, on the other hand, those who believed in degeneration often focused on environmental causes for psychological instability and physical deformities. Psychiatrist Henry Maudsley (1835-1918), for instance, argued that acquired social ills, such as poverty, immoral habits, unhealthy working conditions and strenuous labor, were to blame.<sup>402</sup>

Continent-wide, many studies of degeneration suggested that the disease stemmed from a mixture of tainted heredity and environmental contagion, as demonstrated in the works of Viennese-born, French psychiatrist Bénédict Morel (1809-1873) and Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso (1835-1909). Since I will repeatedly call upon theories of Morel and Lombroso in this chapter, I will briefly outline their main arguments.

Morel acquired a widespread intellectual following after publishing his *Treatise on Degeneration of the Human Species (Traite des dégénérescence physique, intellectuelles et morales de l'espèce humaine, 1857)*. This work illustrates how nineteenth-century scholars, physicians, and scientists became preoccupied with exploring whether hereditary influences were related to the dangerous and “irreversible” problem of degeneration within civilization.<sup>403</sup> According to Morel, physical “symptoms” of the disease stemmed from behavioral factors (diet, excessive masturbation, etc.) and improper social habits (use of drugs or alcohol, engagement in criminal activity), as well as external disturbances of intellectual faculties, either by environmental contaminants or trauma to the brain. In his analysis of Morel’s conception of *dégénérescence* in *Treatise*,<sup>404</sup> Daniel Pick summarizes Morel’s belief, namely, that “[c]omplete

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<sup>401</sup> For further discussions on Morel’s and Lombroso’s studies, see Daniel Pick, *Faces of Degeneration: A European Disorder, c. 1848-c.1918* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 1-37; 109-55.

<sup>402</sup> Alcoholism, according to Maudsley, was the most frequent trigger of inherited degeneracy. He argued that that drunkenness in one generation would lead to alcoholism in the second, hypochondria in the third, and idiocy in the fourth. See Henry Maudsley, *The Pathology of Mind* (New York: D. Appleton and Co. 1880) mentioned in Elaine Showalter’s “On the Borderland: Henry Maudsley and Psychiatric Darwinism,” *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830-1980* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), 101-20.

<sup>403</sup> Pick, 40.

<sup>404</sup> Pick, 50.

idiocy, sterility and death were the end points in a slow accumulation of morbidity across generations.”<sup>405</sup> The concept of *dégénérescence* was applied to patterns of heredity in societies, and referred to deviations from standard conceptions of the “normal type” of humanity. Not only did these deviations encompass any individual whose appearance, religious beliefs, and ideologies deviated from the white, Christian, male standard, but they also reflected class divisions made visible through the environments in which one was raised.

Like Morel’s writings, Lombroso’s publications had a widespread effect on European intellectual thought.<sup>406</sup> Although his anthropological research was hotly contested throughout Europe, Lombroso’s studies—which drew heavily on Darwinian theories of evolution—cemented degeneracy as a legal category, in particular with the theory of the “born criminal.” Lombroso saw degeneration as a biological disorder that produced atavistic physical traits and signaled mental or spiritual deficiencies. The sources of criminal behavior, Lombroso argued, stemmed from biological deficiencies. As a leading intellectual in Italy who produced over thirty books and one thousand articles over the course of his career, he sought in his magnum opus, *Criminal Man (L’Uomo delinquente, 1876)*, to unmask criminal types by providing a detailed indexing system of human physiognomic degeneracy. His system included a taxonomy of bodily stigmata and “peculiarities of expression” that in his view signified a criminal mind, including such features as the “drooping of the upper eyelid, which gives the eye a half-closed appearance, plagiocephaly, microcephaly, macrocephaly, strabismus, facial and cranial asymmetry, prominent frontal sinuses, median occipital fossa, receding forehead, projecting ears,

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<sup>405</sup> Pick, 50-1.

<sup>406</sup> Lombrosian theory was widely popular in Europe but largely ignored in the United States. See Nancy Anne Harrowitz, *Antisemitism, Misogyny, and the Logic of Cultural Difference: Cesare Lombroso*, 17. According to Lombroso, devolution could affect all individuals, as people of “all religions evolved from savagery to civilization. Cesare Lombroso and Guglielmo Ferrero, *Criminal Woman: The Prostitute, and the Normal Woman*, trans, Nicole Hahn Rafter and Mary Gibson (Durham and Boston: Duke University Press, 2002), 271.

progeneismus, and badly shaped teeth.”<sup>407</sup> The publication of Lombroso’s text reinforced beliefs that asymmetrical physical features were linked to impure motives and criminal behavior, and the broad international success of his research inspired future research as well as representations in literature. Although his early studies focused primarily on men, his later analyses explored female “born criminals,” as well.

According to Lombrosian logic, criminal women displayed behaviors with “atavistic signs linking the delinquent to a primitive, savage world” and also had physical stigmata from “this ugly profession,”<sup>408</sup> such as “both a greater than average number of large heads and more microcephaly.”<sup>409</sup> Drawing a connection between the born criminal and the prostitute, he saw prostitution as a “substitute” for other forms of criminality carried out by men and characterized by “vagabondage and sloth.”<sup>410</sup> Through his studies measuring the average age of menarche, fertility, and physical features of convicted women, Lombroso also determined that female criminals had “larger heads” and “sloping foreheads,” were quicker to menstruate than non-criminals, and were “more often masculine looking.”<sup>411</sup> Unlike other crimes, such as theft and murder, prostitution signaled for Lombroso a reversion to primitive ancestry marked by the embrace of carnal desires. The prevalence of criminal women in European society, Lombroso claimed, rose in the nineteenth century: “Like prostitution, criminality is increasing among

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<sup>407</sup> Cesare Lombroso, *Criminal Man*, (New York and London: G.P. Putnam and Sons, 1911), 60. The 1911 version of *Criminal Man* was edited by Lombroso’s daughter, Gina Lombroso-Ferrero, who was her father’s secretary. According to Mary Gibson, Nicole Hahn Rafter, and Mark Seymour, the 1911 version “radically oversimplifies” her father’s theories, providing information not present in earlier editions of the work. For this reason, I also cite a more comprehensive addition of *Criminal Man* as translated by Mary Gibson, Nicole Hahn Rafter, and Mark Seymour in addition to Lombroso-Ferrero’s 1911 edition, which is often taken as the standard for English translations of the work, despite the fact that this document is in fact a compendium of her father’s works. I distinguish the editions of *Criminal Man* from hereon out by the years in which the works were published.

<sup>408</sup> Lombroso, *Criminal Man* (2006), 210. *Criminal Man* quickly became international sensation and the center of debate at the first International Congress of Criminal Anthropology. The text was translated into French in 1887, German between 1887 and 1890, Russian in 1889, and Spanish in 1899. 2-3.

<sup>409</sup> Cesare Lombroso, *Criminal Man*, trans. Mary Gibson, Nicole Hahn Rafter, and Mark Seymour (Durnham and London: Duke University Press, 2006), 56; 65.

<sup>410</sup> Lombroso, *Criminal Man* (2006), 328.

<sup>411</sup> Lombroso, *Criminal Man* (2006), 56-57; 238; 304.

women with the progress of civilization, which makes them more like men. In London, women made up 18.8 percent of all criminals in 1834 and 25.7 percent in 1853.”<sup>412</sup> Lombroso claimed that prostitution was also prevalent in densely populated city centers in the Habsburg Empire: “While a portion of women among offenders is only 14 percent in Austria, it reaches 25 percent in the capital city.”<sup>413</sup> As we shall see shortly, Meyrink takes up common nineteenth-century stereotypes of prostitution as articulated by Lombroso, presenting sexual commerce as alluding to broader issues of social degeneration that commentators believed plagued European society.

Building upon theories posed by Morel and Lombroso, German-speaking theorists within and outside of Austria (e.g., Max Nordau, Otto Weininger, Richard von Krafft-Ebing) explained the origins of degeneracy through a combination of social, environmental, biological, and racial factors. Pest-born critic Nordau carried this sense of cultural pessimism into the *Jahrhundertwende* in his controversial best-selling book *Degeneration (Entartung, 1895)*, which echoes Morel’s logic and definition of degeneration.<sup>414</sup> Nordau’s describes the degeneration of European society with a natural metaphor as “the impotent desperation of a sick seedling, who, in the midst of the wild, ever-thriving nature, feels itself dying” (“Sie ist die ohnmächtige Verzweiflung eines Siechlings, der inmitten der übermütig blühenden, ewig weiterlebenden Natur sich zollweise sterben fühlt”). Citing Morel, he explains that “frequently recurring noxious influences” (“häufig vorkommenden Schädlichkeiten”<sup>415</sup>) debilitate the organism’s mind and body. “Noxious influences” include any stimulants (alcohol, tobacco, opiates, tainted foods, etc.) or exposure to what he calls organic “poisons” (“Vergiftung”<sup>416</sup>), such as march fever, syphilis,

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<sup>412</sup> Lombroso, *Criminal Man* (2006), 128.

<sup>413</sup> Lombroso, *Criminal Man* (2006), 128.

<sup>414</sup> Nordau dedicated his book to Cesare Lombroso: “Dedicated by the editor to Mr. Cesare Lombroso, Professor of Healing the Insane and legal medicine at the University of Turin” (“Herrn Cesare Lombroso, Professor der Irrenheilkunde und gerichtlichen Medizin an der Universität zu Turin, gewidmet vom Verfasser. Max Nordau, “Dedication,” *Entartung*, 1<sup>st</sup> Edition (Berlin: Verlag von Carl Duncker, 1909).

<sup>415</sup> Nordau, *Entartung*, 102.

<sup>416</sup> Nordau, 45.

and tuberculosis, that were often tied to “residency in large cities” (“der Aufenthalt in der Großstadt”).<sup>417</sup>

Nordau claims that, from 1830 to 1890, the prevalence of these “influences”—particularly the widespread consumption of opium, hashish, and alcohol—had increased exponentially in England, Germany, and France, where the chief sufferers were “Eastern peoples, who play no part in the intellectual development of the white races” (“die Völker des Ostens... die in der Geistesbewegung der weißen Menschheit keine Rolle spielen”).<sup>418</sup> The effects of the degeneracy left the afflicted filled with the “embarrassment of exhaustion and incompetency” (“Beschämung von Erschöpften und Unfähigen...”) as well as a lack of morality.<sup>419</sup> Here, Nordau connects race with degenerate behavior, arguing that unconscious minds and “biological laws” (“Unbewußt,; “biologischen Gesetzen”) of these “Eastern peoples” were “inadequately developed” (“mangelhaft entwickelt”).<sup>420</sup> For Nordau, the term “Eastern” referred to any individual from “the languishing Asia and the burning Africa” (“[dem] schmachtende[d] Asien und [dem] brennende[n] Afrika”<sup>421</sup>), including Jews from Russia, Galicia, and Romania, or “classic countries of Jewish suffering.”<sup>422</sup> These individuals, Nordau claimed, made “bad or false decisions” (“so unterscheidet es schlecht und urtheilt falsch”) and displayed “indifference to what is ugly, loathsome, immoral” (“[die] Gleichgültigkeit gegen das Häßliche, Ekelhafte, Unsittliche”).<sup>423</sup> These purportedly underdeveloped physical and psychological faculties rendered them more likely to commit crimes and engage in degenerate behaviors. As we shall see, most of Meyrink’s Jewish characters—particularly Aaron

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<sup>417</sup> Nordau, 46.

<sup>418</sup> Nordau, 45-6.

<sup>419</sup> Nordau, 6.

<sup>420</sup> Nordau, 286; 287.

<sup>421</sup> Nordau, 295.

<sup>422</sup> Qtd. in Todd Samuel Presner, “Clear Heads, Solid Stomachs, and Hard Muscles”: Max Nordau and the Aesthetics of Jewish Regeneration,” *Modernism/modernity* 10, no. 2 (April 2003): 269.

<sup>423</sup> Nordau, 286; 287.



Wassertrum's morally corrupt or sickly children—parallel these antisemitic characterizations, as demonstrated by their bad-decision making and harming of others to their self-interests.

### **The “Jewish Question” and Antisemitism in Prague**

At the turn of the twentieth century, uncertainties and insecurities surrounding the status and treatment of women and Jews in European society were tied to theories of degeneration. Turn-of-the-twentieth-century Prague became a hotbed for discussions about the dangers of the effeminate Jewish male and the promiscuous Jewish women. Peter Pulzer has shown that nineteenth-century conceptions of male Jews as rapists and pedophiles, or as suffering from heightened sexuality, resembled racialized rhetoric in the United States at the time: like the black male in the United States, whose “sensuality” and “danger... is stressed most often” in relation to “white blood pollution,” the “generalized xenophobia” surrounding Jews considered this group to pose a danger to non-Jews.<sup>424</sup> As we will see, these characterizations had roots to common beliefs in the Habsburg Empire, as well, and were taken up in German-language literature such as *Der Golem*.

Broader incorporation of Jews in Prague society during Meyrink's day set the stage for cultural debates concerning Jewish assimilation. Antisemites' negative stereotypes of Jewish sexuality stemmed from broader continent-wide discussions about beliefs in “Jewish difference” as a marker of degeneracy. Cultural critics such as the antisemite Weininger (himself Jewish) and Anatole Leroy Beaulieu (1842-1912) addressed the “Jewish Question” through discussions about the origins of degeneracy in this group. Weininger linked degeneracy to issues of race,

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<sup>424</sup> One needs only to look at the rhetoric of Adolf Hitler, who came to power a few short months after Meyrink's death in 1932, to see how these beliefs gained momentum in the years following the publication of *Der Golem*: “The black-haired Jewish youth lies in wait for hours on end, satanically glaring at and spying on the unsuspecting girl whom he plans to seduce.... The Jews use every means to undermine the racial foundations of a subjugated people. In his systematic efforts to ruin girls and women he strives to break down the last barriers of discrimination between himself and other peoples.” Peter Pulzer, *The Rise of Political Anti-Semitism in Germany and Austria* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 58.

exploring the “psychological deepening in the racial character” (“psychologische Vertiefung in die Rassencharakter”).<sup>425</sup> For Weininger and other antisemitic critics of his milieu, the Jew was a racial type that lacked essence and was morally and physically distinct as well as inferior to non-Jews.<sup>426</sup> In his monograph *Israel among the Nations: A Study of Jews and Anti-Semitism* (1895), Leroy-Beaulieu argued that Jewish inferiority was related to social and environmental factors. Denying claims by antisemites such as Georg von Schönerer,<sup>427</sup> who attributed Jewish difference to race alone, Leroy-Beaulieu maintained that the “misshapen” Jewish body resulted from biological and psychological factors combined with rabbinical codes and restrictive medieval laws: “The reason for this lies not only in their early marriages and their marriages between near relations, but also, and above all, in their age-long confinement, their lack of exercise, or pure and wholesome nourishment.”<sup>428</sup> Unlike many of his contemporaries, Leroy-Beaulieu did not see Jews as fundamentally cursed or degenerate; instead, he argued that centuries of “confinement in the Ghetto,”<sup>429</sup> with its poor air circulation and unsanitary living conditions, bred illness as well as ugliness: “Such warrens could not breed a comely race.... The race is not handsome.”<sup>430</sup> I will return to views espoused by Lombroso and Weininger later in the chapter, but for now, it is worthwhile to note that right-wing, mainstream thought proposed that each of these factors coalesced into the purportedly misshapen, disproportionate, and unattractive Jewish bodies that linked the group to degeneracy.

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<sup>425</sup> Otto Weininger, *Geschlecht und Charakter: Eine Prinzipielle Untersuchung von Otto Weininger*, 19th Edition (Vienna; Leipzig: Wilhelm Braumüller Universitäts-Verlagsbuchhandlung Gesellschaft M.B.H., 1920), 401.

<sup>426</sup> For a close reading of the *Der Golem's* figure Aaron Wassertrum through Weininger's racialized theories, see Gelbin, 102-6.

<sup>427</sup> Carl E. Schorske, “Politics in a New Key: An Austrian Trio,” *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1981) 116-80.

<sup>428</sup> Anatole Leroy-Beaulieu, *Israel Among the Nations: A study of the Jews and Antisemitism*, trans. Frances Hellman (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1895), 164. Qtd. in Sander Gilman, *Franz Kafka: The Jewish Patient* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995), 54.

<sup>429</sup> Leroy-Beaulieu, 148. Qtd in Gilman, 54.

<sup>430</sup> Leroy-Beaulieu, 163, Qtd. in Gilman, 53.

The negative depictions of Jewish women and the Jewish ghetto under consideration here reflect the radicalization of antisemitism between 1860 and 1914. Not only were the Jews frequently blamed for social problems during periods of social and economic change, but these problems were also linked with pathology, as demonstrated by prevalent beliefs that their community was the natural origin of syphilis. Antisemites often claimed that this group carried with them the so-called “Jewish stench,” which was associated with slow decay of the physical body related the corporeal disintegration of late syphilis (as well, perhaps, as the stinking breath of the syphilitic undergoing mercury treatment).<sup>431</sup> Prominent nineteenth-century commentators, including Leroy-Beaulieu, Richard Wagner, Martin Engländer, and W.W. Kopp contributed to the new wave of racialized rhetoric surrounding the purportedly physical, behavioral, and intellectual characteristics of European Jewry. In 1895, for example, Leroy-Beaulieu asserted that the Jewish body was supposedly recognizable by “the feebleness and the defects of physical constitution.”<sup>432</sup> These defects, he claimed, manifested themselves in the Jew’s speech, asymmetrical facial features, and exaggerated gestures, which allegedly contradicted the “internal harmony” characteristic of spiritually balanced individuals. It was this supposed internal discord that many theorists believed brought the rise of degeneracy, which antisemites saw as a disease most common to Europe’s Jewish population. Yair Seltenreich clarifies the two main aspects of this alleged disease during Meyrink’s day, aspects he claims were linked to “the very idea of... deterioration of body and soul combined, with its nefarious implications for the individual, the nation and the race, and its growing menace as a consequence of expanding influences of modernism.”<sup>433</sup>

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<sup>431</sup> Jay Geller, *The Other Jewish Question: Identifying the Jew and Making Sense of Modernity* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011), 93.

<sup>432</sup> Leroy-Beaulieu, 168. Qtd. in Gilman 53.

<sup>433</sup> Yair Seltenreich, “Children of Our Future’: climate, degeneration and education in Hebrew society in Mandatory Palestine (1917–1948),” *History of Education* 45, no. 3 (2016): 336  
doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0046760X.2016.1156775>

Questions about the status and character of Jews came to a head in the late nineteenth century. Following the Dreyfus Affair, a highly publicized espionage case involving a Jewish artillery captain in the French army named Alfred Dreyfus (1859-1935), another public murder trial took place in Prague. This trial fanned pre-existing ethnic tensions in the city. After the body of the young seamstress Anežka Hružová was found in a forest near Polná on the Czech-Moravian border in the spring of 1899, officials arrested an unemployed Jew named Leopold Hilsner, who they claimed was responsible for her murder. Local newspapers referred to the sensationalized trial that followed as the “Hilsneraid.”<sup>434</sup> In 1899, the Jewish man was found guilty. The negative publicity surrounding the trial reinforced characterizations of Jewish men as sex-crazed criminal degenerates who preyed on Christian women and children became a rallying cry for antisemites throughout the city. This sensationalized trial and the commentaries by prominent figures in Prague made it a European cause célèbre. For antisemites, social unrest in the form of boycotts of Jewish businesses and physical violence directed toward Jews reflected the revival of the ancient “blood libel,” or the antiquated accusation that Jews murdered Christians in order to use their blood for ritual purposes.<sup>435</sup>

After the Dreyfus Affair and Hilsneraid, Jewish sexuality came under attack throughout Europe. Accompanying common stereotypes of Jews as “effeminate,” antisemites argued that

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<sup>434</sup> Because Hružová’s body contained so little blood upon discovery, local media and authorities deemed the gruesome murder an act of “ritual murder” and “blood libel” in an attempt to gather the blood of a Christian maiden which was allegedly then used to make unleavened Passover bread.” Guistino, 238. With the assistance of the anti-Jewish future Mayor of Prague, Karel Baxa, who represented the girl’s family, Hilsner was found guilty and was sentenced to death in a Bohemian court. After a re-trial, the Jewish man was again found guilty in 1900, but the Emperor commuted the death sentence to life imprisonment. In 1916, Emperor Charles lessened Hilsner’s sentence, who by then was believed to be innocent. Although not all citizens in Prague believed Hilsner was guilty (as demonstrated by T.G. Masaryk’s article “On the Necessity of Revising the Polná Trial (*O nutnosti revidovati proces Polenský:*”), Hilsner served twenty-eight years in an Austrian prison. Demetz, 336. See also Jiri Stejskal, “Prague Literature: The Germans and the Czechs, 1880-1930,” (PhD diss, University of Pennsylvania, 1998), 168 and Guistino, 238.

<sup>435</sup> Kieval, *The Making of Czech Jewry*, 64-5. See also Hillel Kieval, “Yahrzeits, Condolences, and Other Close Encounters: Neighborly Relations and Ritual Murder Trials in Germany and Austria-Hungary,” *Ritual Murder in Russia, Eastern Europe, and Beyond: New Histories of an Old Accusation*, ed. Eugene M. Avrutin, Jonathan Deckelchen, and Robert Weinberg (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017), 110-29.

this group had overabundant sexual drives and were sexually aggressive. The common practice of circumcision, for example, was believed to lead to male Jews' alleged "sexual abnormalities, either by increasing or decreasing sexual desire."<sup>436</sup> Arguments about the supposedly "corrupt sexual morality" of this population often linked Jewish men and women to syphilis and other venereal diseases, claiming that Jews used sex to pollute the Aryan race. Widespread hatred of Jews was couched in a scientific language.

### **The Dangers of "Sex-Crazed" Jewish Women**

*Der Golem* represents Jewish women as succumbing to their sexual desires, which encourages the degenerative deterioration of their own bodies and minds. The degeneracy of the individual, passed on through immoral and depraved behaviors, it was thought, could spread to the community as well as throughout the European continent. Throughout Europe, images of the sexualized woman were often conflated with the "Jewish Question." Using women and Jews as two cultural targets, for example, Lombroso's discussion of the prostitute in *Antisemitism and Modern Science (L'antisemitismo e le scienze moderne, 1894)* attempts to understand the female criminal within the broader framework of evolution.

A Jew himself, Lombroso's avoided taking an antisemitic stance in his studies, but his theories followed racial science and misogynistic beliefs of the day.<sup>437</sup> Lombroso linked female promiscuity to evolutionary processes that supposedly led the individual from lasciviousness to monogamy: "To get from promiscuous love to monogamy, man passed through various stages of sexual behavior that today would be considered crimes, including polyandry, incest and—

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<sup>436</sup> Alison Rose points out that the sexualized image of the Jew was "a mixed bag full of inconsistencies and contradictions." For example, common stereotypes asserted that Jews were prone to masturbation and sexual predation, yet the Jews' life and values were often idealized. Alison Rose, *Jewish Women in Fin de Siècle Vienna* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008), 143-44.

<sup>437</sup> Lombroso and Ferrero, *Criminal Woman*, 102.

worse—rape and abduction.”<sup>438</sup> While he claimed that “[w]omen naturally have their own criminal nature,” women in the Austrian Empire, he believed, were more prone to committing “abortion, bigamy, calumny, aiding and abetting crime, arson, and theft, but they rarely commit murder and counterfeiting.”<sup>439</sup> Lombroso believed that in Austria repeat offenders were more common than one-time offenders.

In Austria and Bavaria, these stereotypes had “a more congenial home.”<sup>440</sup> The nationalist journal *Ostara*, for example, asserted that women and monkeys were responsible for the degeneration plaguing the modern world. Founded in 1905 in Vienna, Austria with a following of about 100,000 subscribers, one antisemitic article in the journal described a conflict between the blonde, blue-eyed “Asing” or “Heldings” with ape-like creatures (called “Aeeblings” or “Scaettlings”). The journal asserted that “in an age which carefully cultivates all that is female and of inferior race and ruthlessly exterminates blond, heroic mankind,” the journal devoted itself to “actually applying the discoveries of racial science in order to combat socialist and feminist subversion.”<sup>441</sup> Journals such as *Ostara* thought that the racial struggle and the “Woman Question” could be resolved through “the castration knife.”<sup>442</sup>

These views gained momentum in Europe with the rise of the New Woman. The turn of the nineteenth century brought broad-sweeping changes in women’s role in society, as independently minded women began seeking radical changes in the professional realm, social circles, and family sphere. New Women saw opportunities for work, education, and mobility as alternatives to marriage, creating a new image of liberated women, which was “widespread in

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<sup>438</sup> Lombroso, *Criminal Man* (2006), 176.

<sup>439</sup> Lombroso, *Criminal Man* (2006), 130.

<sup>440</sup> Pulzer, 237.

<sup>441</sup> *Ostara*, Nos. 72, 18, Qtd. in Pulzer, 238. Depicting men who had degenerated from heroic beings through inbreeding, *Ostara* argued for the “extirpation” of the animal-man in order to propagate higher forms of humans.

<sup>442</sup> *Ostara*, new series, No. 9. Qtd. in Pulzer, 238.

Europe from Vienna to London, from Munich to Heidelberg to Brussels to Paris.”<sup>443</sup> Many male critics across Europe felt threatened by female emancipation and vocational education. In France, for example, Victor José wrote in the journal *La Plume*:

Feminists are wrong when they turn women away from the duties of their sex... and when they turn their heads with illusory emancipatory ideas, which are unrealizable and absurd. Let woman remain what Nature has made her: an ideal woman, the companion and lover of a man, the mistress of the home.<sup>444</sup>

Peter Pulzer summarizes commonly held opinions in the German and Austrian context: “The inundation of male professions by women was deleterious to ‘*deutsche Art und deutsches Wesen*’ [German nature and German character]... for women to earn their livelihood in men’s professions is never a marker of *Kulturfortschritt* [cultural progress].”<sup>445</sup> These misogynistic views were typical in Meyrink’s day and often became intertwined with discussions of degeneration.

Antisemitic images of the “effeminate” Jew became entangled with the questions of gender that pervaded Meyrink’s day. In Vienna, Jews were seen as “exemplary of the failure to conform to gender roles, because Jewish women supposedly dominated effeminate Jewish men.”<sup>446</sup> Richard von Krafft-Ebing (1840-1902), for example, claimed that Jewish men often displayed “womanly” symptoms of degeneration such as unreasonable fear, nervousness, and hyper-sensibility as a result of the nervous disorder “neurasthenia.” Weininger correlated femininity with what he called “Jewishness” in his book *Sex and Character (Geschlecht und Charakter, 1903)*. For Weininger, all humans consist of male and female substance; the former is

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<sup>443</sup> Michelle Perot, “The New Eve and the Old Adam: Changes in French Women’s Condition at the Turn of the Century,” trans. Helen Harden Chenut in *Behind the Lines: Gender the Two World Wars*, Margaret Randolph Higonnet, Jane Jenson, Sonya Michel, and Margaret Collins Weitz (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987) 51. Qtd. in Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 38.

<sup>444</sup> Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy*, 39.

<sup>445</sup> W. Schack, *Die Frauenarbeit im Handelsgewerbe. Schriften des deutschnationalen Handlungsgehilfenverbandes, Band 21* (Hamburg, 1904) 8. Qtd. in Pulzer, 216, emphasis in original.

<sup>446</sup> Rose, 144.

active, productive, conscious and moral or logical; the latter is passive, unproductive, unconscious and amoral. Portraying women as amoral soulless types, he asserted that the decay of modern society could be traced to the feminine, amoral, irreligious Jewish leaning of modern times. Women in particular, according to his logic, are consumed with their duty to fulfill sexual prerogatives, which leads them to pursue prostitution, marriage, procreation, and raising children.

Antisemitic publications in Prague and Vienna perpetuated these sexualized stereotypes of women, linking them with Jews. A racist newspaper, the *Deutsches Volksblatt* (1848-1915), for example, contained pornography, sexual images of Jews, stories of Jews assaulting Christian women, and depictions of Jewish girls and madams who ran bordellos and enlisted their daughters as prostitutes. Similar antisemitic publications in the *Deutsches Volksblatt* and *Ostara* attracted readers such as Adolf Hitler.<sup>447</sup> Reflecting on his years as a student in Vienna from 1907 to 1913, Hitler claimed, “In no other city of Western Europe could the relationship between Jewry and prostitution and even now the white slave traffic, be studied better than in Vienna... an icy shudder ran down my spine when seeing for the first time the Jew as an evil, shameless and calculating manager of this shocking vice, the outcome of the scum of the big city.”<sup>448</sup> The persistent potency after the Hilsneraid of antipathy toward Jews in Prague newspapers, which were filled with stories and commentaries about Hilsner’s Jewish ethnicity, deeply affected Jews.

With this history in mind, we can turn to an analysis of Meyrink’s handling of Jewish stereotypes and gender ideologies. His novel incorporates many of these stereotypes in its characterization of Jews. Eva Christina Schmidt, Elizabeth Baer, and Cathy Gelbin have examined his Jewish figures in the broader discursive context of “the Jewish Question.”<sup>449</sup> These

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<sup>447</sup> Rose, 145.

<sup>448</sup> Qtd. in Rose, 143.

<sup>449</sup> Gelbin, 100.



scholars have addressed how the novel's stereotypical depictions of Jews linked this ethnic group with contemporary beliefs in the negative effects of urbanism and disease, as well as "moral decay" that nineteenth-century antisemites believed was characteristic of this ethnic group. The role of Jewish characters in *Der Golem*, Schmidt notes, "is a complex and criticized one—criticized because of its frequent use of negative stereotypes about Jews, including greed and deceitfulness."<sup>450</sup> Gelbin's study of the golem legend, for example, shows how *fin-de-siècle* representations of Jews emphasized their purportedly warped perspectives, deformed bodies, and immoral spirit. For Gelbin, non-Jewish authors such as Gustav Meyrink fused modernist aesthetics with mass culture media to foreground negative stereotypes that conflated the Jew with perceived ills of the modern age, including loose morals characterized by heightened sexuality, a fixation on material wealth, and a proclivity toward criminality. As a result, the novel makes this ethnic group synonymous with degeneracy and social ruin.<sup>451</sup>

### **The Degenerate, Monstrous Feminine in *Der Golem*: Rosina and Angelina**

This section will explore the ways in which Meyrink's novel mirrors theories by Lombroso, Nordau, Weininger, and Leroy-Beaulieu and other social critics who participated in debates about the "Woman Question" and the "Jewish Question." In *Der Golem*, women who deviate from accepted gender norms are responsible for the emotional, physical, and social ruin of their male victims. Themes of decadence and degeneracy are embodied by the two women who try to seduce Pernath: the decadent German noblewoman, Angelina, mentioned in the preceding chapters, and her Jewish double, the red-headed fourteen-year-old girl, Rosina. Through a comparison of Rosina and Angelina, we see how the novel uses Gothic depictions of

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<sup>450</sup> Schmidt, 26.

<sup>451</sup> Gelbin argues that because of works by Meyrink and Wegener, the golem became widely known as an ambivalent sign of a Jewish modernist aesthetic. Gelbin, 97.

female sexuality to expose the feminization of Habsburg culture. Misogyny, as well as antisemitic caricatures of Jews as sexual predators, run through the novel's descriptions of both women. Like the Gothic depictions of male villains that Bridgewater analyzes in early German Gothic literature, the terror these women invoke is "deployed in the name of morality," emphasizing the dangers that they allegedly pose to the patriarchy and the damage they cause to Prague society.<sup>452</sup> A brief summary of other scholars' findings related to these claims contextualizes my analyses of these two women as the novel's female villains, "moral monsters" who act without a conscience in their interactions with men.

Scholarly discussions of the novel's villains are limited to male figures, particularly the Jewish junk dealer Aaron Wassertrum and the somnambulistic rapist-murderer Amadeus Laponder, who is Pernath's spiritual savior as well as a possible incarnation of the golem.<sup>453</sup> Because of Wassertrum's connection to Rosina, studies of this figure are worth revisiting before we turn to Rosina herself.

Schmidt's triangular reading of Aaron Wassertrum and two of his illegitimate sons (Dr. Wassory, a corrupt ophthalmologist, and Charousek, a homicidal and tubercular medical student) examines the novel's use of color, plot, and family relations to associate these figures with evil. As the story's primary villain, Wassertrum is directly involved in several crimes, including taking a bribe from Angelina to cover up her adultery with the local German physician (Dr. Savioli) and framing Pernath for the murder of the pedophile Karl Zottmann. Not only is Wassertrum often associated with the color red, the color of rust (an indicator of decay), but his unsightly appearance also signals his evil nature. His "horrible face" ("gräßliches Gesicht"), his round fish eyes ("runden Fischaugen"), and harelip ("Hasenscharte") mark the figure as

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<sup>452</sup> Maurice Lévy, *Le roman <gothique> anglais 1764-1824* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1995) 130. Qtd. in Bridgewater, 418.

<sup>453</sup> A future project compares Laponder to somnambulistic arsonist-murderer in Guy de Maupassant's short story *Le Horla* (1887). Brief studies of Laponder can be found in Baer, 41-2.

“untrustworthy and thereby establishes a connection between outward appearance and inner disposition, which is also reflected in this actions.”<sup>454</sup> Schmidt and Gelbin assert that the selfish motivations of this character reproduce antisemitic stereotypes of the Jew’s trickery in pursuit of selfish goals. Gelbin has examined Wassertrum’s association with sexual predation, arguing that the figure embodies Weininger’s claim that Jews “frequently applied trickery to seduce innocent women.”<sup>455</sup> Not only are Wassertrum’s sexual proclivities visible in his fathering of countless illegitimate children in the ghetto, but his son Charousek also believes himself to be the product of rape. After Wassertrum fell in love with Charousek’s Czech mother, Charousek claims, “With all infernal means that are his usual habit, Wassertrum forced my mother to submit to his will—if it was not much worse than that” (“Wassertrum hat meine Mutter mit all den infernalischen Mitteln, die seines gleichen Gewohnheit sind, gezwungen, ihm zu Willen zu sein, — wenn es nicht noch viel schlimmer war”).<sup>456</sup> After the incident, Wassertrum sold her to a brothel.

Neither Schmidt, Gelbin, nor Baer examines fully the effects of degeneration on Wassertrum’s offspring, particularly Rosina. Following common nineteenth-century stereotypes, the novel portrays Wassertrum as a sexual predator whose offspring are, like him, a danger to society. According to the novel, each child carries the “a dangerous secret” (“ein gefährliches Geheimnis”), one that nineteenth-century antisemites claimed Jews concealed from the world.<sup>457</sup> Wassertrum’s children inherited his physical deformities and criminal tendencies. Despite his unceasing devotion to Pernath, as evidenced by his helping clear the gem dealer’s name after the

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<sup>454</sup> Schmidt, 26. Meyrink encourages the reader to associate Wassertrum and his children with physical degeneration reflecting a corrupted spirit. By surrounding Wassertrum with broken and rusted objects in his junk stand, the novel associates him with decay, symbolized by the many “dead things” (“abgestorbenen Sachen”) in his vicinity. Each of the adjectives used to describe his wares (“old”/“alt”; “broken”/“zerbrochenbroken”; “rusty”/“verrostet”) emphasize decomposition. As if to mirror the “filthy” (“schmutzig”) setting surrounding him in the ghetto and strange accumulation of items hung from his shop front, Wassertrum’s face is distorted and grotesque, appearing as if it is a hideous mask (“wie eine scheußliche Maske”). *Der Golem*, 47; 18.

<sup>455</sup> Gelbin, 102-4.

<sup>456</sup> *Der Golem*, 159.

<sup>457</sup> *Der Golem*, 7.

Zottmann affair, Charousek carries his father's evil in his sickly body. Taking up contemporary beliefs linking Jews with disease, Charousek connects his tubercular body and immoral behavior to his father's tainted blood: "Strictly speaking, I do not hate him at all. I hate his blood" ("Ich hasse, genaugenommen, auch gar nicht ihn. Ich hasse sein Blut").<sup>458</sup> To avenge his mother, Charousek encourages his father's favorite son, the ophthalmologist Dr. Wassory, to commit suicide. After orchestrating a public investigation that reveals Dr. Wassory's unnecessary and costly, which permanently impair many ghetto residents' vision, Charousek hatches a plan that results in his half-brother drinking a deadly phial of poison. The Jewish blood in his veins, Charousek claims, helped him evade detection while carrying out his complicated plan: "My blood was also saturated with that atmosphere of hellish cunning, and so I managed to bring [Dr. Wassory] down" ("auch mein Blut ist mit jener Atmosphäre höllischer List gesättigt, und so vermochte ich [Dr. Wassory] zu Fall zu bringen").<sup>459</sup> Here, the novel takes up contemporary beliefs about the supposedly "irreversible" effects of hereditary degeneration described by Morel; both sons are evidence that Wassertrum's purported corruption has been passed down from one generation to the next.<sup>460</sup> Charousek and Dr. Wassory do not adhere to standard conceptions of "normal" behavior, and their corrupt inner dispositions are embodied in their unattractive facial features and disease-infested bodies.

Scholarship has yet to explore fully the theme of degeneracy in relation to Wassertrum's daughter/niece, Rosina, as well as to the girl's relationship to the German noblewoman, Angelina.<sup>461</sup> Gelbin mentions that the Jewish archivist's daughter Mirjam (who represents "the beautiful yet tragic Jewess"<sup>462</sup>), Rosina, and Angelina "form aspects of the misogynistic trinity of

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<sup>458</sup> *Der Golem*, 153.

<sup>459</sup> *Der Golem*, 39.

<sup>460</sup> Pick, 40.

<sup>461</sup> Both female figures are briefly mentioned in Baer, 44, 48, 62 and Gelbin, 103-6.

<sup>462</sup> The novel never confirms the fate of Mirjam, a girl with whom Pernath falls in love near the end of the novel. Textual evidence suggests (but never confirms) that Mirjam may have been raped and murdered by Amadeus Laponder

saint, mother, and whore that circulates through Pernath's tormenting sexual fantasies," yet she provides a detailed examination of neither the broader significance of the latter two villainous women, nor the novel's handling of these women's connection to contemporary discussions of degeneracy.<sup>463</sup> As we shall soon see, Wassertrum's "horse-faced" daughter/niece, Rosina, also bears the purported mark of Jewish corruption, which allows her to use sex for social advancement with little regard for the consequences for her lovers. Like the novel's Jewish men, Rosina and Angelina are synonymous with a degenerate and "catastrophic modernity."<sup>464</sup>

A comparison of the two figures reveals, however, the novel's suggestion that degeneracy is not always legible on the human body and that it is not confined to the Jewish population alone, as many antisemitic commentators of Meyrink's day claimed. The beginning stages of the disease, as depicted in the novel, first manifest themselves in deviant behaviors. While racial factors play a role in the novel's characterization of the disease, Angelina's degenerate behaviors mirror those of Rosina, whose physical symptoms appear to have been intensified by poverty and long-term exposure to the ghetto's polluted environment. The following pages explore both women's transgressions of traditional gender roles through their dubious sexual interactions with men, which these women orchestrate across class divides and which cause men physical and psychological suffering. Examining parallels in these women's story lines alongside contemporary rhetoric surrounding the role of (Jewish) women in society suggests that promiscuous women inside and outside of Meyrink's fictional ghetto are corrupt, degenerate, and dangerous to men.

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during one of his somnambulistic trances and while Pernath was in prison. At the end of the novel, the girl (or perhaps her spirit) appears beside Pernath in the garden at Prague's castle. Due to the narrow focus of this dissertation and the complexities of this character, she will not be handled here.

<sup>463</sup> Gelbin, 105-6.

<sup>464</sup> Gelbin, 97.

Female decadence and degeneration in *Der Golem*, as embodied by Rosina and Angelina, appear on a continuum; decadence can evolve into degeneration should the necessary social and environmental factors be present. This progression is most visible in scenes in which Rosina and Angelina try to seduce Pernath. Drawing upon Gothic frameworks, these scenes underscore the purportedly deviant sexuality of females whose behaviors are characterized as monstrous. As we will see, themes of decadence and degeneration in scenes featuring these women feed into the novel's handling of both the "Jewish Question" and the "Woman Question."

### **Rosina: The Degenerate Jewish Prostitute**

Rosina represents an upending of traditional, patriarchal gender constructions at the *Jahrhundertwende*. According to traditional gendered values in nineteenth-century European society, women's place was in the home, a "quiet haven of peace and unpolluted nature, marked by the cyclical and biological rhythms of gestation and nurturing."<sup>465</sup> Rosina does not reside in the typical gendered "separate-spheres" that confined women to domesticity and the homespace, away from "the coercive bustle and speed of the public world of industry."<sup>466</sup> By representing the dangerous sexual freedom that many men believed threatened the social order, Rosina embodies prevalent attitudes about Jews and female sexuality in Meyrink's day.

Throughout the novel, Rosina manipulates men's thoughts through sex. The first example occurs between Pernath and Rosina in the first pages of the novel's second chapter, "Day"/"Tag." While walking to his apartment, Pernath encounters Rosina on the staircase in front of his apartment door. Like her father/uncle, who, the novel suggests, pays little attention to sexual or personal boundaries (as evidenced by his treatment Charousek's mother), Rosina has

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<sup>465</sup> Eva Chen, "Its Beauty, Danger, and Feverish Thrill: Speed and Cycling Women in Fin de Siècle Fiction," *MFS: Modern Fiction Studies* 63, no. 4 (Winter 2017): 610.

<sup>466</sup> Chen, 610.

an intrusive and promiscuous personality made visible in her unwelcomed sexual advances and the “invasive smile” (“zudringlich Lächeln“) on her “waxy, rocking-horse face” (“wächsernen Schaukelpferdgesicht”).<sup>467</sup> As Pernath tries to pass her on the staircase, she positions herself in a manner that forces him to brush his body against hers: “I had to squeeze past her, and she stood with her back against the staircase, arching her back lasciviously” (“Ich mußte dicht an ihr vorbei, und sie stand mit dem Rücken gegen das Stiegegeländer und bog sich lüstern zurück”).<sup>468</sup> Rebuffing her advances, he slips into his apartment and closes the door behind him, leaving her in the hallway.

Although Pernath claims to be repulsed by Rosina’s appearance and behavior, Gelbin points out that his heightened awareness of her breathing on the other side of his door “nonetheless betray[s] a hidden intrigue with the girl.”<sup>469</sup> Despite professing revulsion for her and her father’s/uncle’s “Jewish faces” (“Judengesichter”), Pernath finds himself unable to “tear” (“losreißen”) the girl’s image from his mind.<sup>470</sup> He ruminates on her physical appearance, imagining that her pale, bloated skin feels similar to that of an amphibian: “I feel she must have spongy, white flesh like the Axolotl that I saw earlier in the salamander tank with the bird eater” (“Sie muß schwammiges, weißes Fleisch haben wie der Axolotl, den ich vorhin im Salamanderkäfig bei dem Vogelhändler gesehen habe, fühlte ich”).<sup>471</sup>

Rosina’s unattractive facial features allow Pernath to resist her advances. He links Rosina’s homely appearance to her relationship to Wassertrum, whose Jewish tribe, or “Stamm,” he claims, is particularly repugnant:

Rosina is one of that red-headed tribe which is even more repulsive in its physical characteristics than the others.... Everything about them is freckled, and through their whole life they suffer the torments of lust... and fight an unending, losing

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<sup>467</sup> *Der Golem*, 6.

<sup>468</sup> *Der Golem*, 6.

<sup>469</sup> Gelbin, 104.

<sup>470</sup> *Der Golem*, 6; 8.

<sup>471</sup> *Der Golem*, 6.

battle against their desires, tormented by a constant, loathsome fear for their health.

Rosina ist von jenem Stamme, dessen rothaariger Typus noch abstoßender ist, als der der andern....Alles scheint an ihnen sommersprossig, und ihr ganzes Leben leiden sie unter brünstigen Qualen... und kämpfen heimlich gegen ihre Gelüste einen ununterbrochenen, erfolglosen Kampf, von immerwährender widerlicher Angst um ihre Gesundheit gefoltet.<sup>472</sup>

Although Wassertrum bears no resemblance to Rosina (“er hatte keine Ähnlichkeit mit ihr”), Pernath assumes a close relation between the two: “Certainly all other inhabitants of our building take her for the junk dealer’s close relative, or at least a ward, yet I am convinced that not one of them could give a reason for such assumptions” (“Sicherlich halten sie alle meine Mitbewohner für eine nahe Verwandte oder zumindest Schutzbefohlene des Trödlers, und doch bin ich überzeugt, daß kein einziger einen Grund für solche Vermutungen anzugeben vermochte”).<sup>473</sup>

The reader is led to believe that Rosina is the product of inherited degeneration processes “irreversibly provoked” by her lineage, the “tribe” (“Stamm”) from which she issues: “[she] belongs to that tribe and this to another, that is all that can be read from the facial features” (“[Die] gehört zu jenem Stamm und dieser zu einem andern, das ist alles, was sich aus den Gesichtszügen lesen läßt”).<sup>474</sup> Only her lack of physical beauty prevents her from having the same power over him as Angelina, whom, as we will see, Pernath finds physically irresistible.

Although Pernath successfully eschews Rosina’s advances, other men in the district fall into her traps. Pernath’s neighbor explains Rosina’s sudden rise in popularity among men in the district following an evening at Salon Loitschek, in which she danced on stage, half-naked and drunk: “The Vice Squad booked her for a longer engagement! Perhaps she caught the Commissioner’s eye at Loitschek’s? In any case, she’s now feverishly active and contributing to

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<sup>472</sup> *Der Golem*, 7-8.

<sup>473</sup> *Der Golem*, 8.

<sup>474</sup> *Der Golem*, 7.



increasing tourism in the Jewish quarter” (“Die Sittenpolizei hat sie doch für ein längeres Engagement gewonnen! — Vielleicht hat sie dem Herrn Kommissar — damals ‘beim Loitschek,’ ins Auge gestochen? Jedenfalls ist sie jetzt — fieberhaft tätig und trägt wesentlich zur Hebung des Fremdenverkehrs in der Judenstadt bei”).<sup>475</sup> Prior to this incident, Rosina focused her attention on men in the ghetto. Afterwards, she attracted Prague’s most prominent authority figures inside and outside the ghetto. Although it never explicitly says so, the novel implies that she strategically selects the men with whom she has sex, climbing higher on the social ladder with each “victim.” Men whom she tries (often successfully) to seduce include (in order of appearance): the Czech twin brothers, Loisa and Jaromir; the Jewish pedophile and wealthy insurance salesman, Karl Zottmann; an unnamed German dragoon at Salon Loitschek; and the Habsburg prince, Ferri Athenstädt.

Regardless of social position, each of Rosina’s lovers exhibits obsessive behaviors after meeting her or makes reckless decisions in order to be with her, later suffering devastating emotional consequences. Pernath’s friend Zwakh, for example, tells a group of friends about her effect on the deaf-mute Jaromir:

“It’s astonishing when you think what a woman can make of a man, simply by making him fall in love with her.... In order to make enough money to be able to spend time with her, the poor lad Jaromir became an artist overnight. He walks around taverns cutting out silhouettes for guests who want that kind of portrait.”

“Wenn man bedenkt, was ein Weib aus einem Mann machen kann bloß dadurch, daß sie ihn verliebt sein läßt in sich: es ist zum Staunen.... Um das Geld aufzubringen, zu ihr gehen zu können, ist der arme Bursche, der Jaromir, über Nacht Künstler geworden. Er geht in den Wirtshäusern herum und schneidet Silhouetten für Gäste aus, die sich auf diese Art porträtieren lassen.”<sup>476</sup>

After the ghetto’s clearance and Rosina’s disappearance from Prague, Jaromir remains in these taverns, tearfully cutting out her profile. His twin brother is equally affected by her. After Loisa

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<sup>475</sup> *Der Golem*, 236.

<sup>476</sup> *Der Golem*, 236.

discovers Rosina's relationship with the pedophile Zottmann, his jealousy leads him to trap Zottmann in a cellar and leave him "locked, closed away, and left to himself or rather to Death to freeze or starve" ("gelockt, dortselbst eingeschlossen und sich selbst, beziehungsweise dem Tode durch Verhungern oder Erfrieren überlassen wurde").<sup>477</sup> Loisa is imprisoned for the murder but later escapes, never to be seen in Prague again.

These plot developments illustrate the far-reaching consequences of Rosina's actions. Pernath, for instance, unknowingly becomes embroiled in Zottmann's murder investigation and finds himself wrongfully imprisoned for the crime. It is only Jaromir's police testimony that vindicates Pernath by placing blame on Loisa. Although Pernath's name is cleared, Prince Athenstädt's reputation and honor are permanently tarnished because of his interactions with her. His experiences serve as a cautionary tale for other men in the ghetto. Rumors surface during Pernath's incarceration that "for some months [Rosina] has lived with his Highness Prince Ferri of Athenstädt as his mistress" ("seit einigen Monaten mit Seiner Durchlaucht dem Fürsten Ferri Athenstädt im gemeinsamen, wilden Konkubinate als Maitresse lebt").<sup>478</sup> In the novel's final pages, which describe life in the district post-ghetto clearance, a barmaid reveals to the unnamed narrator of the frame narrative that Rosina forced the prince to renounce his titles, stole his wealth ("she stripped him bare"/"[sie] hat ihn dann ganz ausgezogen"), and then ran off with another man. This man, rumors later suggest, was the fugitive Loisa.<sup>479</sup> Even years after her disappearance and ghetto clearance, her legacy as a *femme fatale* still haunts the district.

The novel's portrayal of Rosina employs misogynistic rhetoric about promiscuous women common to Meyrink's day. Agata Schwarz has shown that nineteenth-century commentators often combined discussions of women's sexuality with theories of the

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<sup>477</sup> *Der Golem*, 318.

<sup>478</sup> *Der Golem*, 318.

<sup>479</sup> *Der Golem*, 340-1.

degeneration of the human mind and body. Enlightenment ideology perpetuated beliefs in traditional gender roles: male sexuality was presumed to be “stronger and more aggressive, yet controllable”; by contrast, female sexuality was seen as “more animal,” “infantile,” and “uncivilized.”<sup>480</sup> Lombroso, Weininger, and Richard von Krafft-Ebing “maintained that the carnal desire of the female is much greater than that of the male.”<sup>481</sup> These views made their way into the political realm, where the New Woman was often cast with apocalyptic imagery as a threat to the established order that would upend the world by creating a “wild carnival of social and sexual misrule.”<sup>482</sup>

Although the novel does not explicitly state that Rosina is a prostitute, her promiscuous behavior resembles Lombroso’s discussion of the criminal female. Lombroso linked women’s supposedly dangerous sexuality to atavistic, criminal origins. Degenerate women, he claimed, often turned to prostitution—a criminal act that caused them to display similar behaviors and develop physical features to those of the male “born criminal”: “they share the same physical and moral characteristics, as well as a liking for one another.”<sup>483</sup> Living in Prague’s densely populated ghetto, Rosina displays these traits. Like Lombroso’s criminal women, Rosina’s “instability,” “impetuousness,” and sexual insatiability lead her to follow men in her district, seduce them, and discard them. In a quest to satisfy herself, she gives “no thought to the consequences.”<sup>484</sup> Just as allegedly “[a]ncient,” “primitive” and “savage” peoples and tribes in Greece, California, Ceylon, and the Canary Islands “had almost no sense of shame and found nothing offensive about copulation,” she does not recognize any wrongdoing in her behavior.<sup>485</sup>

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<sup>480</sup> Agata Schwarz, *Shifting Voices: Feminist Thought and Women's Writing in Fin-de-Siècle Austria and Hungary* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2008), 75.

<sup>481</sup> David F. Good, Margarete Grandner, and Mary Jo Maynes, ed., *Austrian Women in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives*, (Providence and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1996), 190.

<sup>482</sup> Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy*, 38.

<sup>483</sup> Lombroso, *Criminal Man* (2006), 128.

<sup>484</sup> Lombroso, *Criminal Man* (2006), 217.

<sup>485</sup> Lombroso claimed that criminal women displayed a “failure to blush” when discussing intimate details of their crimes and prostitution. Lombroso, *Criminal Man* (2006), 210.

Rosina's animalistic appearance, malicious behaviors towards men, and "unbridled sexual appetite" imply the resurfacing of "primitive" impulses, or a reversion to an ancestry that Lombroso claims is visible in asymmetrical features that accompany "savage assaults."<sup>486</sup> Read through the lens of Lombrosian theory, Rosina's behaviors "point to one conclusion, the atavistic origin of the criminal, who reproduces physical, psychic, and functional qualities of remote ancestors."<sup>487</sup> Against traditional European gender norms, her use of sex as commerce and social capital makes her a hazard to all men in Prague.

Her maliciousness is most visible in her orchestration of a love triangle with Loisa and Jaromir. Using sex, Rosina brings Jaromir physical and psychological suffering. Early in the novel, she flaunts herself to Loisa in front of his deaf-mute twin brother, Jaromir, who is also in love with her. Her taunting of Jaromir in collusion with his twin unfolds as follows:

Then they let the deaf-mute catch them in the act, apparently or really, slyly luring the love-sick boy into dark corridors, where they set up malicious traps of rusty barrel-hoops and iron rakes with upward-pointed ridges that soar when they step on them, but into which he falls and bloodies himself.

Da lassen sie sich scheinbar oder wirklich von dem Taubstummen ertappen und locken den Rasenden heimtückisch hinter sich her in dunkle Gänge, wo sie aus rostigen Faßreifen, die in die Höhe schnellen, wenn man auf sie tritt, und eisernen Rechen — mit den Spitzen nach oben gekehrt — böartige Fallen errichtet haben, in die er stürzen muß und sich blutig fällt.<sup>488</sup>

Jaromir not only is emotionally damaged by seeing the woman he loves with his twin brother, but he also endures physical injury by chasing her down. Jealous and heartbroken, he frequently runs through his apartment building howling with an "inarticulate howling bark" ("unartikulierte[n] heulende[n] Gebell") that disturbs Pernath and his neighbors.<sup>489</sup> Pernath claims that the animalistic sounds are "so eerie that it freezes the blood in your veins" ("sein

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<sup>486</sup> Lombroso, *Criminal Man* (1911), 80.

<sup>487</sup> Lombroso, *Criminal Man* (1911), 2.

<sup>488</sup> *Der Golem*, 12.

<sup>489</sup> *Der Golem*, 12.

unartikuliertes heulendes Gebell, das er, vor Eifersucht und Argwohn halb von Sinnen”).<sup>490</sup>

The novel’s archetypal representation of Rosina is multivalent: not only does she fail to control her sexual proclivities; but she also carries the so-called mark of trickery that antisemites projected onto Jews. Rosina has inherited what Schmidt calls Wassertrum’s “emotional blindness,” but she also bears the purported “mark of Jewish corruption” on her body and in her behaviors.<sup>491</sup> Whereas Wassertrum’s sons adopted only their father’s criminal minds, Rosina inherited his unattractive physical facial features, depraved sexual penchants, and disregard for others’ emotions as well.<sup>492</sup> Like Wassertrum, who, Gelbin claims, evinces “the powerful antisemitic association of the Jew with heightened sexual preoccupation,” Rosina has an insatiable sexual appetite that she uses to bring suffering to men in order to escape the poverty of the ghetto.<sup>493</sup> Resembling Weininger’s claim that Jewish men used “trickery” to seduce innocent women, Rosina uses sex to manipulate men to do her bidding and help her ascend the social ladder. The suffering she inflicts upon her lovers, moreover, brings her pleasure. Her “stealthy plotting”—a common nineteenth-century stereotype of Jews—allows for her social ascent, which is actualized through her relationship with the Habsburg prince.<sup>494</sup> Renouncing his royal titles allows Rosina to marry him, acquire his riches, and establish a life for herself outside of Prague free of social and financial limitation. Now having a means to support herself, she can start a life with Loisa, who committed murder on her behalf.

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<sup>490</sup> *Der Golem*, 12.

<sup>491</sup> Schmidt’s observations in these quotes refer to Rosina’s father/uncle, Wassertrum.

<sup>492</sup> The inclusion of Wassertrum’s son Charousek plot element resembles theories by nineteenth-century English racial scientist Houston Stewart Chamberlain, who claimed was common to Jews and the “blood” they passed on to their offspring. Chamberlain linked degenerate criminal behavior with the Jewish “blood” and moral depravity. Jews, Chamberlain claimed, used “a special element of trickery or force... so that intercourse could occur” with Christian woman. In *Der Golem*, Wassertrum appears as a figure who aimed to “infect the Indo-European with Jewish blood” to create a “Pseudo-Hebraic mestizo[sic!], a [person] beyond doubt degenerate physically, mentally, and morally (331).” Charousek appears to be a product of this infection of “Indo-European” blood, a criminal who is sickly in mind and body. See Gelbin, 101-102.

<sup>493</sup> Gelbin, 103.

<sup>494</sup> Hyam Maccoby, *Antisemitism and Modernity: Innovation and Continuity* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 95.

*Der Golem* establishes a parallel between Rosina and Angelina by describing them as two women who use their sexuality to achieve selfish aims and harm men physically and emotionally. Whereas Rosina uses sex for social advancement, paving for herself an avenue on which she can transcend ethnic and gender limitations in Prague's Jewish ghetto, Angelina orchestrates an extramarital love triangle in the ghetto with two German-speaking men in order to bring excitement to her "boring" life as an aristocrat. As the following section will show, Angelina exemplifies the danger to men posed by all promiscuous women, regardless of ethnicity.

### **Angelina: The Decadent *Femme Fatale***

This section describes Pernath's interactions with Angelina, her orchestration of a love triangle that resembles that created by Rosina, and her lovers' emotional suffering due to their interactions with her. Pernath met Angelina outside of the ghetto years ago prior to the novel's beginning. She reenters Pernath's life in the second chapter of *Der Golem*, "Day" ("Tag"). Thereafter, the pair's interactions are related to his helping her cover up her love affair with a celebrated local German physician, Dr. Savioli—a man who was instrumental in revealing the crimes of Wassertrum's son, the ophthalmologist Dr. Wassory. The reader never encounters Angelina's lover, but instead learns of his existence through other characters in the novel. Angelina is the prime informant.

Angelina's interactions with Pernath occur in the following sequence: first, she appears at his door after Aaron Wassertrum discovers her love nest with Dr. Savioli, which is next door to Pernath's apartment; several chapters later, she convinces Pernath to meet her at Prague's castle, where she gives him jewels as a bribe for Wassertrum's silence about her affair with Dr. Savioli; and last, after the threat of exposure has subsided, she takes Pernath to a garden at Prague's

castle, where she seduces him in her carriage. These scenes, as we shall see, instantiate Gothic themes of taboo erotic encounters with the monstrous feminine. This motif was common to Gothic literature of Meyrink's day and finds expression here through a *femme fatale* whose lack of containment threatens the patriarchal social order.

Eva Christina Schmidt reads this character as an angelic figure in the protagonist's journey toward self-discovery. Schmidt analyzes Meyrink's use of bright, white, and gold colors in chapters featuring Angelina (each of which is metaphorically titled "Day"/"Tag," "Light"/"Licht," "Snow"/"Schnee," and "Woman"/"Weib"). She argues that the "mostly bright imagery" in these chapters "underl[ies] her purity and outer worldly beauty" implied by the name Angelina, a name meaning "little angel." Additionally, her gold necklaces and brocade allude to "her noble heritage."<sup>495</sup> Although Angelina is pivotal in helping Pernath achieve spiritual salvation by directing him toward changes that are necessary at the personal and communal levels, the following pages challenge Schmidt's reading of Angelina as an angelic figure. Angelina's pursuit of men contradicts traditional notions of femininity, making her what Barbara Creed defines as "monstrous in relation to her 'mothering and reproductive roles.'"<sup>496</sup> In keeping with Creed's description of the monstrous feminine as a "reversal of the male monster.... defined in terms of her sexuality," Angelina contradicts traditional norms of femininity that prescribe prudence, passivity, and the preservation of the family. Quoting James B. Twitchell, Creed asserts that femininity, "by definition, excludes all forms of monstrous, aggressive behavior." Angelina, by contrast, embodies Gothic excess, sexual deviance, and decadence, each of which is characterized here as femininity gone awry.<sup>497</sup> She demonstrates her monstrosity through her

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<sup>495</sup> Schmidt, 40.

<sup>496</sup> Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 5; 7.

<sup>497</sup> Creed, 3.

desire for extramarital sex with men in the ghetto, which causes her to disregard her moral obligations as a mother and wife.

In “Tag,” the setting prepares the reader for Pernath’s unsettling interactions with a sexually deviant woman. Before Angelina bursts into his apartment, Pernath looks out his window at his Jewish neighbors in the courtyard. While watching Rosina taunt Loisa and Jaromir, Pernath notes the ghetto’s gloomy atmosphere that and “does not let [his] mind rest” (“läßt mein Gemüt nicht stillwerden”).<sup>498</sup> His description resembles the dreary atmospheres characteristic of Gothic literature. Mary Ellen Snodgrass, for instance, refers to the ominous Gothic setting as “an allegorical and psychological extension to the human character.”<sup>499</sup>

Pernath’s contemplations of Rosina, Loisa, and Jaromir are interrupted by a woman’s scream penetrating the thin wall separating his apartment from the rented space next door. After frantically knocking on his apartment door, Angelina bursts in with “her hair undone, her face as white as a sheet, a golden brocade cloth thrown over her bare shoulders” (“[m]it aufgelöstem Haar, weiß wie die Wand, einen goldenen Brokatstoff über die bloßen Schultern geworfen”).<sup>500</sup> She begs Pernath to hide her from Aaron Wassertrum, who has just discovered her love nest with the German physician, Dr. Savioli, in the apartment next door. Her disheveled appearance immediately indicates her unstable character. Although the reader does not learn until several chapters later that she was just caught committing adultery, Angelina’s bare shoulders allude to possible licentiousness.

Angelina’s role as a *femme fatale* becomes apparent in her handling of the scandal surrounding the affair in the following scenes, the first of which was briefly mentioned in Chapter One. Several chapters after Wassertrum discovers her love nest with Dr. Savioli, Pernath

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<sup>498</sup> *Der Golem*, 10.

<sup>499</sup> Mary Ellen Snodgrass, *Encyclopedia of Gothic Literature* (New York: Facts on File Inc, 2005), 158.

<sup>500</sup> *Der Golem*, 14-5.



realizes that Angelina is the “high-class” wife of a nobleman (“einer vornehmen Dame, [die] Gattin eines Adeligen”)<sup>501</sup> through a letter she leaves him referencing the event he had witnessed in his apartment building (“diese kurze Anspielung auf ein Ereignis, dessen Zeuge Sie waren”).<sup>502</sup> In the letter, she calls upon Pernath to meet her in the Catholic cathedral in Prague’s castle district to help her resolve a matter of life and death.<sup>503</sup> Once Pernath arrives, Angelina informs him of the affair, claiming that if it were to become public knowledge, her adulterous trysts would bring about Dr. Savioli’s death, dissolve her marriage, ruin her relationship with her young daughter, and permanently damage her reputation.

Initially, Angelina seems to care most deeply for the well-being and health of her lover, Dr. Savioli, whom she claims is seriously ill (“schwer krank”).<sup>504</sup> Rumors in the ghetto suggest that the threat of public scandal has caused him psychological damage: “Dr. Savioli is suddenly sick,” she says, “[H]e is delirious, and all that I could find out is that in his feverishness, he imagines that he is being followed by some monster with a hare-lip—Aaron Wassertrum!” (“Dr. Savioli ist plötzlich erkrankt... er liegt in Delirien, und das einzige, was ich erkunden konnte, ist, daß er sich im Fieber von einem Scheusal verfolgt wähnt, dessen Lippen von einer Hasenscharte gespalten sind: — Aaron Wassertrum!”).<sup>505</sup>

Immediately after sharing her concerns about Dr. Savioli, Angelina frantically (“im Wahnwitz) tears open a purse at her side, which is filled with pearls and precious gems

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<sup>501</sup> *Der Golem*, 61.

<sup>502</sup> *Der Golem*, 96.

<sup>503</sup> She writes Pernath in a letter, “I am writing you this letter with the upmost haste and greatest fear.... I beg you to come to the cathedral on Hradschin today at 5 o'clock in the evening” (“Ich schreibe Ihnen diesen Brief in fliegender Eile und höchster Angst.... Ich flehe Sie an, kommen Sie heute, abends um 5 Uhr, in die Domkirche auf dem Hradschin”). *Der Golem*, 96.

<sup>504</sup> *Der Golem*, 116

<sup>505</sup> Several chapters later, the reader later learns that Wassertrum is indeed stalking Dr. Savioli: “Wassertrum visited Dr. Savioli again. Forced his way to his sickbed with threats and violence” (“Wassertrum war abermals bei Dr. Savioli gewesen. Hatte sich mit Drohungen und Gewalt den Weg erzwungen bis zu seinem Krankenlager”). *Der Golem*, 103-104; 148.

(“vollgestopft war mit Perlenschnüren und Edelsteinen”).<sup>506</sup> She thrusts them toward Pernath and begs him to give them to Wassertrum as a bribe, which she hopes will keep him silent and preserve her lover’s health. The reader senses that, with her affair, marriage, social status, and relationship with her daughter in jeopardy, Angelina’s only recourse is the value of these jewels, which she hopes will prevent Wassertrum from revealing her transgression against her husband and family.

Later, Angelina appears again at Pernath’s door and describes new developments regarding Dr. Savioli’s condition. Pernath relays their conversation to the reader:

The nurses would not let him out of their sight, sedated him with morphine, but perhaps he'll wake up—maybe right now—and—and—no, no, she should leave, should not miss a second's time—she wants to write to her husband. To admit everything to him,—he should take the child from her, but Savioli was saved, because she would have robbed Wassertrum of the only weapon he possessed to threaten them.”

Die Krankenschwestern ließen ihn nicht aus den Augen, hatten ihn mit Morphinum betäubt, aber vielleicht erwacht er plötzlich — vielleicht gerade jetzt — und — und — nein, nein, sie müsse fort, dürfe keine Sekunde Zeit mehr versäumen, — sie wolle ihrem Gatten schreiben, ihm alles eingestehen, — solle er ihr das Kind nehmen, aber Savioli sei gerettet, denn sie hätte Wassertrum damit die einzige Waffe aus der Hand geschlagen, die er besäße und mit der er drohe.<sup>507</sup>

The structure of his description underscores the urgency in the scene and escalation of events. Her frenzy only subsides after Pernath reveals that he possesses the only evidence that could incriminate her. The scene ends with the two characters passionately kissing and Angelina’s prompt departure from Pernath’s apartment, “laughing and crying all in one breath” (“lachte und weinte in einem Atem”) before she vanishes, leaving Pernath in a daze (“betäubt”).<sup>508</sup>

This scene—particularly the passionate kissing—makes clear that Angelina may care more about self-preservation than Dr. Savioli’s well-being. Evidence from the scene at St. Vitus

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<sup>506</sup> *Der Golem*, 104.

<sup>507</sup> *Der Golem*, 149.

<sup>508</sup> *Der Golem*, 150.

Cathedral of Prague's castle, also discussed in Chapter One, also supports this interpretation. When Pernath meets her at the Cathedral, she tells him that Aaron Wassertrum has been stalking her when she is with either her husband or Dr. Savioli: "Awake or sleeping, those squinting eyes haunt me. There is no sign of what he is planning, which makes my nightly anxiety all the more agonizing: when is he going to slip the noose around my neck!" ("Im Schlaf und im Wachen verfolgten mich seine schielenden Augen. Noch macht sich ja kein Zeichen bemerkbar, was er vorhat, aber um so qualvoller drosselt mich nachts die Angst: wann wirft er mir die Schlinge um den Hals!").<sup>509</sup> She recognizes that a public scandal would force her to give up all that she has known: "all of it, wealth, honor, reputation, and so on" ("alles, Reichtum, Ehre, Ruf und so weiter").<sup>510</sup> Not only would her husband take her daughter after dissolving their marriage, but, she implies, she also would lose all of the privileges that accompany a noble status. Should the scandal be revealed, she would lose her costly clothing, her life of leisure at the castle, and her social prestige.

Although a bribe is effective in silencing Wassertrum, Angelina's desperation in the Cathedral and apartment underscores the liminal state in which Angelina finds herself as the result of her adultery. The cathedral scene exemplifies the typical Gothic theme of the "correction" of deviant femininity through the dramatization of "gothic excess," as described by Becker. Her behavior and clothing suggest excess and eccentricity, made visible through the riches she carries on her body, as well as her theatrical performance after her affair is discovered. The scene, however, highlights "the processes that engender the gothic subject as female and that make the 'I' realise herself as 'a woman'—or, more often in gothic texts, as 'a monster.'"<sup>511</sup> For women in Gothic literature, failure to adhere to the patriarchal norm poses "a threat to the

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<sup>509</sup> *Der Golem*, 102-3.

<sup>510</sup> *Der Golem*, 104.

<sup>511</sup> Susan Becker, *Gothic Forms of Feminine Fiction* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1999), 56.

heroine, who discovers alternate desires and needs, but... sometimes neither escape nor return is possible.”<sup>512</sup> After pursuing sexual desires outside of her marriage, Angelina can neither escape Wassertrum’s threat to expose the relationship, nor can she return to her husband after the affair.

Although Angelina presents herself as a victim in the scandal, both scenes are structured in such a way as to highlight her immorality and to show that men who become romantically involved with her suffer negative psychological and physical consequences. These assumptions are supported by Angelina’s behavior after the threat of scandal subsides. Her treatment of Dr. Savioli following the scandal’s resolution suggests that her concern for his physical well-being is more a recognition that she may lose her privileged lifestyle. Certain that Wassertrum is no longer a threat, Angelina instantly tires of Dr. Savioli and pays another unexpected visit to Pernath’s apartment. She arrives to find Pernath hosting Mirjam, a pious Jewish girl with whom he is slowly falling in love and with whom he ends up at the novel’s conclusion. Despite seeing that he has a guest, Angelina nevertheless persuades Pernath to leave Mirjam and accompany her to Prague’s palace. On the way there, she tells Pernath, “Now that the danger has passed... and I know that things have improved for [Dr. Savioli], everything I have experienced seems so terribly boring. I want to finally enjoy myself again, to close my eyes and plunge into life’s glittering bubbles” (“Jetzt, wo die Gefahr vorüber ist... und ich weiß, daß es ihm auch wieder besser geht, kommt mir alles das, was ich mitgemacht habe, so gräßlich langweilig vor. — Ich will mich endlich einmal wieder freuen, die Augen zumachen und untertauchen in dem glitzernden Schaum des Lebens”).<sup>513</sup> Intoxicated by her presence, Pernath hangs on her every word: “I was enchanted” (“ich war verzaubert”).<sup>514</sup> No longer amused by Dr. Savioli, a man who is driven to madness and whose reputation was nearly ruined because of their adultery, Angelina

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<sup>512</sup> Becker, 56.

<sup>513</sup> *Der Golem*, 221.

<sup>514</sup> *Der Golem*, 219.

casts him aside for Pernath. Her urgency reveals her decadent personality and the hedonistic philosophy that dictates her behavior. The scene that follows mirrors Matei Calinescu's definition of decadence: "Decadence is felt, with an intensity unknown before, as a unique crisis; and, as time is running short, it becomes the ultimate importance to do, without waiting any longer, what one has to do for one's own." Angelina's actions and her wish to dive into life's "bubbles" indicate that she lives in a world in which "every single instant can be decisive."<sup>515</sup>

Cuddled up next to Pernath in the carriage on the way to the castle, she warms her body against his, using the cold winter day as an excuse for closeness. He finds the presence of her body irresistible: "The sharpness of the wind that cut across our faces made the warmth of Angelina's body doubly beguiling" ("Der scharfe Wind, der uns ins Gesicht schnitt, ließ mich die Wärme von Angelinas Körper doppelt sinnverwirrend empfinden").<sup>516</sup> She teases him along the way, asking him playfully to call her "reckless" as she snuggles close to him: "Is it not true that I am reckless?... Tell me that I am reckless!" ("Nicht wahr, ich bin leichtsinnig? .... sagen Sie, daß ich leichtsinnig bin!").<sup>517</sup> Against these and similar comments, Pernath struggles to resist his desire to kiss her.

Once at the castle, he reads her coquettish ("kokett") questioning and movements as an invitation, one that he can no longer resist. As he recounts,

I could feel it in the throbbing of her blood. Her arm trembled ever so noticeably against my breast ... slowly I pulled her hand to my lips, drew back the soft, scented glove and, listening as her breathing became heavier, and thrust my teeth, mad with love, into the ball of her thumb.

Ich fühlte es an dem Beben ihres Blutes. Ihr Arm zitterte kaum merklich an meiner Brust ... Langsam zog ich ihre Hand an meine Lippen, streifte den weißen, duftenden Handschuh zurück, hörte, wie ihr Atem heftig wurde, und preßte toll vor Liebe meine Zähne in ihren Handballen.<sup>518</sup>

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<sup>515</sup> Matei Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987), 154.

<sup>516</sup> *Der Golem*, 221.

<sup>517</sup> *Der Golem*, 222.

<sup>518</sup> *Der Golem*, 223.

The abrupt ending of the scene implies the consummation of yet another adulterous act. Whereas in the novel's first chapters Pernath wanders confusedly through the ghetto without a sense of belonging or understanding of the reason behind his existence, his promise to defend Angelina against Wassertrum gives him a purpose. Initially, the protagonist sees his erotic dreams and fantasies of Angelina as "something to give meaning to my days, something rich and radiant" ("Meine Stunden hatten einen Inhalt bekommen, einen Inhalt voll Reichtum und Glanz").<sup>519</sup> His fantasies of Angelina throughout the novel, elicited by looking at her picture and dreaming of her after the encounter in the castle, invigorate him. Her presence leads him to believe that a "youthful destiny" ("Ein junges Schicksal") awaits him, and he thinks to himself, "Was the rotten tree to bear fruit after all?" ("So sollte der morsche Baum noch Früchte tragen?").<sup>520</sup> The carriage scene, however, marks his emotional transition. After consummating his love for her, his hope of a future with her dissipates, and he consciously acknowledges the negative effect she has on him.

This scene draws upon Gothic motifs of taboo erotic encounters, forbidden love, and the monstrous feminine. Stella Butter and Matthias Eitelmann summarize the effects of the frequent depictions of taboo sexual encounters in the Gothic:

we oscillate between fear and fascination, between "attraction and repulsion, worship and condemnation" (Punter 1996b, 190 with reference to Sigmund Freud), or, expressed in Gothic terms, we experience 'dreadful pleasure'. It is due to its pronounced focus on taboo areas of socio-psychological life that the Gothic imagination tends to realize '[o]ur 'psychological' fears . . . in very physical terms' (Morgan 6). The sheer endless tropes of bodily deviance and victimization in Gothic fictions cannot solely be seen as a 'metaphorical reference to cultural situations' (92); instead, the represented 'physicality is a medium of significance in and of itself' (ibid.). As Jack Morgan succinctly puts it, Gothic texts 'expose taboo aspects of the fleshly reality we inhabit' (91)."<sup>521</sup>

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<sup>519</sup> *Der Golem*, 97.

<sup>520</sup> *Der Golem*, 97.

<sup>521</sup> Stella Butter and Matthias Eitelmann, "The Organic Uncanny: Taboo, Sexuality, and Death in British Gothic Novels," *Taboo and Transgression in British Literature from the Renaissance to the Present* (New York: Palgrave

This carriage scene in *Der Golem* brings the reader (as well as Pernath) precisely the sense of “dreadful pleasure” that Butter and Eitelmann evoke, whereby the protagonist once again enables the married noblewoman’s adulterous inclinations. Having seen Dr. Savioli’s responses to his interactions with the German woman, the reader can only expect a similar outcome for Pernath. Seeking pleasure alone, Angelina seduces men without contemplating the consequences for herself or for her lovers and so corresponds to Creed’s definition of the “monstrous feminine.” The incident shocks the reader, who—unlike Pernath—anticipates Pernath’s heartbreak and experiences a sense of dread on his behalf. Pernath, for his part, cannot see the damage that sex with Angelina may have on him. As his fantasies of Angelina become a “fleshy reality,” he becomes an accomplice in transgressing sexual taboos and enabling her frivolous and adulterous behavior. Afterwards, he spends the remainder of the novel defending and searching for the woman who broke his heart, even after her transgressions embroil him in a murder investigation.

It becomes clear, however, that Angelina has learned nothing from her near-loss of social status. After the incident with Dr. Savioli has been resolved, she is immediately ready to plunge into the next affair. Her reckless behavior over the course of the novel not only exposes her to further scandals but also causes both Dr. Savioli and Pernath to become lovesick, dazed, and delusional.

Like Dr. Savioli, who is delusional and suicidal after the affair, Pernath also becomes emotionally unstable and reckless after Angelina reenters his life. While, as mentioned above, Pernath himself at first thinks Angelina brings meaning to his life, it eventually becomes clear to the reader that this woman is somehow related to—if not the

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Macmillan, 2010), 135-57. See also David Punter, “The Modern Gothic,” *The Literature of Terror. A History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day*. Vol. 2 (London: Longman, 1996) and Jack Morgan, *The Biology of Horror: Gothic Literature and Film* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2002).

source of—Pernath’s odd behaviors. The novel implies that Pernath’s symptoms similar to neurosis and epilepsy stem from his love for Angelina. As I mentioned in Chapter Two, rumors in the ghetto, which Pernath overhears from friends and acquaintances, suggest that in his past a mental breakdown led medical professionals outside of the ghetto to block all his memories. After the hypnosis, he was sent to the ghetto in order to block any triggering incidents that could cause a relapse.

Pernath realizes the truth behind his amnesia in the middle of the novel: his breakdown had resulted from his heartbreak over Angelina. Recovering old memories of his love for her causes yet another physical response:

I clenched my teeth forcefully and called all my strength to bury the raging pain deep in my breast, which was threatening to tear me apart. I understood: a merciful hand had bolted the door to my memories. Clearly etched in my mind stood a brief glimpse of the old days: For years a love that was too strong for my heart had gnawed at my mind until insanity had become the soothing remedy for my wounded spirit.

Mit aller Kraft biß ich die Zähne zusammen und jagte den heulenden Schmerz, der mich zerfetzte, in die Brust zurück. Ich verstand: Eine gnädige Hand war es gewesen, die die Riegel vor meiner Erinnerung zugeschoben hatte. Klar stand jetzt in meinem Bewußtsein geschrieben, was ein kurzer Schimmer aus alten Tagen herübergetragen: Eine Liebe, die für mein Herz zu stark gewesen, hatte für Jahre mein Denken zernagt, und die Nacht des Irrsinns war damals der Balsam für meinen wunden Geist geworden.<sup>522</sup>

His intense physical response and his mention of his “wounded spirit” (“meinen wunden Geist“) allude to the detrimental manifestations of his heartbreak. The suffering indicated by the forceful clenching of his teeth (“Mit aller Kraft biß ich die Zähne“) and “raging pain” (“heulenden Schmerz“) upon the return of his suffering shows that the erasure of them was an act of mercy.

As D. Mitchell has indicated as typical of the literary genre, however, “the past in Gothic

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<sup>522</sup> *Der Golem*, 106-7.



literature never stays buried.”<sup>523</sup> After the carriage scene, Pernath experiences the return of harmful emotional effects related to Angelina. Immediately thereafter, he wanders the castle landscape and the streets of Prague as if drunk (“wie ein Trunkener”).<sup>524</sup> In a scene linked with death and decay, Pernath stumbles toward the river in a trance-like state and stands at the fountain where he had encountered Angelina when she was a child. Earlier in the novel, he recovers a memory of this “stone basin at which [he and Angelina] bid one another farewell” (“das steinerne Becken des Springbrunnens, an dem [er und Angelina] schon einmal Abschied voneinander genommen”).<sup>525</sup> Now, however, the fountain is “full of rotting elm leaves” (“mit den faulenden Ulmenblättern”<sup>526</sup>). The imagery of decay indicates Pernath’s realization that although he has satisfied her desires, she will never return to him: “A few weeks, a few days perhaps, and my bliss would surely be over, leaving me with nothing but a beautiful, painful memory” (“Eine Spanne von wenigen Wochen, vielleicht nur von Tagen, dann mußte das Glück vorüber sein — und nichts blieb davon als eine wehe, schöne Erinnerung”).<sup>527</sup> The metaphor of the tree, which he had thought in earlier scenes might “bear fruit,” has withered and died after sex with her. According to Gelbin, “the postcoital setting” in this scene resembles a “vaginal image of [a] basin filled with this rot,” which “resonate[s] with morbid sexuality.”<sup>528</sup> The garden and the fountain leave no doubt as to Angelina’s perfidy.

In addition to referring to sexual perversion, the decay in the scene gestures toward the inevitability of the death of the relationship and Pernath’s resulting emotional turmoil. Standing above the Moldau/Vltava River, he expresses his torment:

The water roared over the dam, and their rushing noise swallowed up the last

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<sup>523</sup> Donna Mitchell, “From Dolls to Demons Exploring Categorizations of the Female Figure in Gothic Literature through a Selection of Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Texts,” (PhD diss, University of Limerick, 2014), 24.

<sup>524</sup> *Der Golem*, 223.

<sup>525</sup> *Der Golem*, 224.

<sup>526</sup> *Der Golem*, 224.

<sup>527</sup> *Der Golem*, 224.

<sup>528</sup> Gelbin, 108.

murmuring sounds of the sleeping city ....  
A few weeks, a few days, a few days perhaps, and my bliss would surely be over,  
leaving me with nothing but a beautiful, painful memory.  
And then?  
Then I would not belong anywhere, neither here nor on the other side, neither on  
this bank nor across the river.

Die Wasser brausten über das Wehr und ihr Rauschen verschlang die letzten,  
aufmurrenden Geräusche der schlafengehenden Stadt ....  
Eine Spanne von wenigen Wochen, vielleicht nur von Tagen, dann mußte das  
Glück vorüber sein — und nichts blieb davon als eine wehe, schöne Erinnerung.  
Und dann?  
Dann war ich heimatlos hier und drüben, diesseits und jenseits des Flusses.<sup>529</sup>

In a stereotypical, ominous Gothic setting, Pernath's self-professed lack of belonging in Prague is emphasized through the roaring waves of the Moldau, which also reflect Pernath's unsettlement after the erotic encounter with Angelina. The scene pushes the boundaries of what is appropriate and socially acceptable. Additionally, Pernath's over-the-top, melodramatic emotional state conforms with Fred Botting's claim that "Gothic is a writing of excess."<sup>530</sup> Taking up themes of "uncontrolled passion," "disturbances in sanity," "violent emotion or flights of fancy," and "portrayals of perversion or obsession," this love affair emphasizes the aftermath of interactions with the monstrous feminine. With Angelina invading his thoughts, Pernath is emotionally paralyzed. His recognition of the ephemerality of the relationship leaves him dazed, directionless: "Without a plan, I chose streets and walked in a circle without knowing it" ("Planlos wählte ich die Straßen und ging lange, ohne es zu wissen, im Kreise herum").<sup>531</sup> With no hope for the future, he is caught in a cycle of heartbreak from which he cannot free himself.

Angelina's entrance into the novel creates imbalances in gender dynamics that are devastating to the men with whom she interacts. The novel portrays Pernath and Dr. Savioli as passive in the face of her aggressive femininity. Her reckless pursuits of these two German men,

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<sup>529</sup> *Der Golem*, 224-5.

<sup>530</sup> Fred Botting, *Gothic: The New Critical Idiom* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 2.

<sup>531</sup> *Der Golem*, 223-4.

as well as the erotic relationships that develop as a result, reveal her role as a sexual predator, a reversal of the traditional male monster. Given contemporary beliefs that “[w]omen could not, or should not, ‘experience sexual pleasure,’” and that sex was considered a “marital duty only to be performed for the purpose of procreation,” this female character’s candid attitude toward sexuality must be perceived as taboo at best, socially damning at worst.<sup>532</sup> Angelina’s transgressiveness makes her a threat not only to the men with whom she has sex, but also to the late-century social system and middle class mores that prohibit such behavior.

Through Angelina, Meyrink calls upon a long tradition that combines beautiful women with monstrosity and horror. Angelina’s exaggerated interactions with Pernath link her with clichés of beauty, deception, and wickedness that are common to literary tradition. As seen with Duessa in Edmund Spenser’s *Faerie Queen* in the British tradition, the German figure *Frau Welt* of German medieval literature, and the wicked stepmother of the Grimm Brothers’ *Schneewittchen* (“Snow White and the Seven Dwarves”), feminine beauty often appears in literature as beguiling, transitory, and misleading. Similar to *Frau Welt* in *Der Welt Lohn* (a didactic allegory on the woman who is beautiful in the front, but unsightly and loathsome in the back), Angelina is charming, but her beauty is connected with moral depravity. The male perspectives provided in the novel assert that Angelina embodies “a combination of pleasure and pain, beauty and death.”<sup>533</sup> These themes are “filled with corruption and melancholy and fatal in its beauty—a beauty which, the more bitter the taste, the more abundant the enjoyment.”<sup>534</sup> Angelina’s beauty marks the physical process of destruction brought on by the woman: men who look upon her fall into a trance, which leads them to their emotional and physical demise. In *Der*

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<sup>532</sup> Mitchell citing J. Calder, *Women and Marriage in Victorian Fiction* (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd, 1976), 88.

<sup>533</sup> Mario Praz’s description is related to the Greek figure of Medusa but is applicable to Angelina in the two-sidedness of her presence in the novel. See Mario Praz, “The Beauty of the Medusa,” *The Romantic Agony* (Meridian Books: New York, 1960), 31.

<sup>534</sup> Praz, 31.

*Golem*, Pernath becomes mesmerized by Angelina’s “radiant blue eyes” and “coquettish face” (“strahlenden, blauen Augen”/“das kapriziöse Gesicht”), which prevent him from recognizing the immorality of her adulterous behavior as well as the threat she poses to him.<sup>535</sup> His experiences serve as a warning to other men, particularly male readers of Meyrink’s day.

### **Two Monstrous Women: Rosina and Angelina**

The tangled web of sexual deviance, adulterous affairs, and psychological suffering endured by these *femmes fatales*’ male victims in *Der Golem* draws on theories related to women’s and Jews’ purportedly uncivilized sexuality. This section analyzes similarities in plot developments and the structure of scenes featuring Rosina and Angelina. These women occupy polar opposites of the female social spectrum in Prague: as a wealthy German noblewoman, Angelina is at the top of the social ladder; Rosina—an illegitimate, impoverished Jewish girl—is at the bottom. Rosina embodies degeneration in its most extreme form through her heightened sexuality, physical disfigurement, and moral depravity. Angelina, who is selfish and reckless in her treatment of men, appears, however, to be at the beginning phase of a downward devolution. As we will see, Rosina is more promiscuous and malicious in her handling of men—a trait that previous scholarship has equated to her Jewish ethnicity. I show, however, that the main differences between the two degenerate women are not only linked to ethnicity, but also to class differences that are exacerbated by the environment in which they were raised.

A comparison of these two women reveals the novel’s intimation that exposure to the contaminated space of the ghetto exacerbates the proclivity for degeneracy. Both women’s immoral behaviors pose a moral threat to men in Prague, whom the women exploit financially and manipulate sexually. Embodying two stages on the (d)evolutionary continuum, the women

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<sup>535</sup> *Der Golem*, 219.

serve as a warning to readers that, without social and urban reform projects, Prague society as a whole will fall into a degenerate state. As a result, individuals residing there—Jewish or not—will all come to resemble the degenerate Jews populating the novel’s ghetto, whom the narrator unflinchingly describes as “[d]egenerate, toothless predators, who have lost their strength and their weaponry” (“[e]ntartete, zahnlose Raubtiere, von denen die Kraft und die Waffe genommen ist”).<sup>536</sup> Rosina and Angelina also represent traditional characteristics of what Julia Kristeva calls the “abject,” which refers to judgement and affect, “condemnation and yearning,” and “above all ambiguity.”<sup>537</sup> As *femmes fatales*, Rosina and Angelina enact the reversal of Prague’s gendered social order, which had traditionally positioned the male subject as dominant over the female object. Orchestrating love triangles that often pit men in the ghetto against one another, the two monstrous seductresses become the source of their lovers’ degeneration.

Structural similarities in these women’s transgressiveness occurs in the first pages of the novel’s second chapter “Day”/“Tag.” As we saw above, the reader encounters Rosina and Angelina here for the first time when both women use sex to cross boundaries. As discussed earlier, Angelina enters Pernath’s apartment uninvited, entering the same door through which Rosina was not allowed to pass earlier in the chapter: “The iron floor door clatters violently, and the next moment a lady rushes into my room” (“Die eiserne Bodentür klirrt heftig, und im nächsten Augenblick stürzt eine Dame in mein Zimmer”).<sup>538</sup> Just as Jeffrey Jerome Cohen claims that monstrosity “delimit[s] the social spaces through which private bodies can move,” Angelina ignores “borders [that] are in place to control... women.”<sup>539</sup> Caring only about escaping Wassertrum after he discovered her romantic tryst with Dr. Savioli, Angelina transgresses a

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<sup>536</sup> *Der Golem*, 29.

<sup>537</sup> Julia Kristeva, “Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection,” trans. Leon S. Rouché (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 4.

<sup>538</sup> *Der Golem*, 14.

<sup>539</sup> Cohen, “Monster Theory: Seven Theses,” 12-3.

physical boundary delineating Pernath's personal space, foreshadowing her intrusion into his emotional life as well. For Creed, "the concept of a border is central to the construction of the monstrous," and "that which crosses or threatens to cross the 'border' is abject."<sup>540</sup> In this scene, the monstrous women challenge the male order represented by Pernath's apartment by trying to enter a private male space contained only by the door and the apartment's thin walls. Angelina penetrates this space, revealing the fragility of its barriers and threatening its stability by drawing attention to its weakness: the barrier is only as strong as the man behind the door. Her transgression foreshadows her ability to breach Pernath's emotional and physical boundaries later in the novel.

By beginning and ending the chapter "Day"/"Tag" with parallel scenes of two promiscuous, sexually excited women who stand at the threshold of Pernath's personal space, the novel creates a connection between these women. Pernath himself first recognizes the women's threat through his vision that immediately follows Angelina's intrusion. After she bursts into the protagonist's room, the chapter concludes with Pernath's vision of Rosina. Similar to his previous ruminations on Rosina's unattractive physical features earlier in the chapter, recalling her face a second time prevents him from acting upon his arousal when Angelina enters his room. In his vision, he sees an arrow aimed at him, but he resists it by thinking about Rosina's degenerate physical features: "Quickly, I conjure for myself Rosina's sharp, sickly sweet, grinning profile and thus manage to avoid the arrow, which immediately becomes lost in the darkness. Yes, Rosina's face!... Now... I can become completely calm." ("Schnell male ich mir das scharfe, süßlich grinsende Profil der roten Rosina aus, und es gelingt mir auf diese Weise, dem Pfeil auszuweichen, der sich sogleich in der Finsternis verliert....Ja, das Gesicht der Rosina! ...jetzt... kann ich ganz ruhig sein").<sup>541</sup> Through mental imagery connecting Rosina's lewd,

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<sup>540</sup> Creed, "Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection," 6.

<sup>541</sup> *Der Golem*, 16.

immoral behaviors to Angelina, Pernath practices self-restraint. His decision not to act upon his physical arousal calms him. The effect is, however, only temporary. After falling in love with Angelina later in the novel, Pernath eventually finds himself the victim who experiences the devastating effects symbolized by the arrow of his vision, which later penetrates his heart.

These women's lovers experience a range of emotional and behavioral responses after their erotic encounters. The novel not only implies that these manipulative, monstrous women bring out men's effeminate qualities, but also that the more severe of the woman's treatments of her lovers are, the stranger his behavior are after the affair. Although Angelina is not physically violent with her lovers, her emotional manipulateness drives her lovers to hysteria—a psychological affliction that Freud (and other commentators of his day) believed primarily affected women—and thus effeminization. Pernath's interactions with Angelina make him passive, emotionally excitable, highly susceptible to her touch, and willing to carry out any request she makes of him. While he believes he is helping her out of his own free will, the reader sees Angelina pushing him to carry out her dirty work. Pernath falls into her traps; he becomes compliant and willing to deliver her jewels to Wassertrum as a bribe and defends her at all costs.

On one occasion, her manipulation even leads Pernath to thoughts of committing violence on her behalf. This scene is rife with Gothic excess that makes clear that Pernath finds Angelina's rebellious, inappropriate behaviors appealing, underscoring Creed's claim that the "[a]bjection 'fascinates desire'."<sup>542</sup> During one of her surprise visits, Angelina "furiously" knocks ("wütendes Klopfen") on his door and is incapable of speaking because of her alleged concern for Savioli ("Sie konnte kein Wort hervorbringen").<sup>543</sup> Through tears, she insists that the stress of the situation has compelled her to confess her sins to her husband, to which Pernath

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<sup>542</sup> Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism, and Psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 37.

<sup>543</sup> *Der Golem*, 147.

emphatically replies, “That you will *not* do, Angelina!” (“Das werden Sie *nicht* tun, Angelina!”).<sup>544</sup> While the reader detects the ploy of her over-the-top behavior aimed at gaining her host’s sympathies, Pernath’s excessive emotionality in his response shows that her touch has blinded him as she “buries her head in [his] chest, dead-tired like a child” (“sie verbarg, todmüde wie ein Kind, ihren Kopf an meiner Brust”).<sup>545</sup> Embracing her, he contemplates plans to help her: “Then a calm, ice-cold voice spoke the solution: ‘Fool! The answer is in your own hand! You only need to take the file there on the table, run down the stairs, and stick it in the junk-dealer’s throat until its point sticks out the back of his neck’” (“Dann sprach ein Gedanke eiskalt und gelassen die Lösung aus: „Narr! Du hast es doch in der Hand! Brauchst ja nur die Feile dort auf dem Tisch zu nehmen, hinunter zu laufen und sie dem Trödler durch die Gurgel zu jagen, daß die Spitze hinten zum Genick herausschaut”).<sup>546</sup> Although Pernath does not carry out the homicide, his contemplation reveals Angelina’s ability to manipulate his thoughts, feelings, and behaviors and use them for her own self-preservation.

The responses of Rosina’s victims mark an escalation in severity that equates to the *femme fatale*’s greater degree of cruelty. Rosina elevates herself financially by bringing men physical harm and financial ruin. Whereas Angelina’s lovers only threaten suicide and fantasize about hurting other men, Rosina’s lovers commit self-harm, disturb their neighbors, and injure others in her name. The deaf-mute Jaromir, for example, endures bodily injury as he chases her through the streets, and, as we have seen, his heartbreak upon finding her prompts his loud and uncontrollable howling, which disturbs his neighbors. Rosina also pits brother against brother for her own pleasure. Her treatment of these two young men exemplifies how she encourages her

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<sup>544</sup> *Der Golem*, 148.

<sup>545</sup> *Der Golem*, 147.

<sup>546</sup> *Der Golem*, 148. Later in the novel, while Pernath is in prison, Aaron Wassertrum is murdered, presumably with the very file that that Pernath envisions using to kill him during his meeting with Angelina in his apartment. For a description of the scene, see *Der Golem*, 310.



lovers to compete with one another. Not only does Loisa, as Rosina's accomplice, carry out malicious plans that torment his twin brother physically and psychologically, but the boy's jealous obsession with her also leads him to kill one of her lovers, the pedophile Karl Zottmann.

It appears that Rosina's depravity is contagious, infecting her lovers and inspiring them not just to fantasize about harming other men (as seen with Pernath), but also to commit violence in her name. Since Loisa has been trained by Rosina to inflict physical harm on others, his behavior eventually escalates into murder. His betrayal of his brother and murder of Zottmann mark his descent into abjection bordering on degeneracy. This descent, Creed points out, "occurs where the individual fails to respect the law and where the individual is a hypocrite, a liar, a traitor."<sup>547</sup> Quoting Kristeva, Creed claims, "Any crime, because it draws attention to the fragility of the law, is abject, but premeditated crime, cunning murder, hypocritical revenge are even more so because they heighten the display of such fragility."<sup>548</sup> Not only does Loisa break the law by murdering Rosina's lover in an act of revenge, but his hypocrisy also becomes visible in his treatment of his brother. Pernath notes that Loisa, Jaromir, and Rosina used to play together "innocently in the yard while they were children," yet "those times have long since passed" ("Loisa, Jaromir und Rosina.... als sie noch Kinder waren, [spielten] oft harmlos im Hof zu dritt.... Die Zeit aber ist lang vorbei").<sup>549</sup> Loisa's love for Rosina causes him to turn on Jaromir, treating him as a foe.

The intensity of each of these characters' behaviors leads the reader to question the sources of the women's immorality and treatment of men. In the novel, ethnicity, socioeconomic standing, and environmental factors speed up the devolutionary process, encouraging decadence to develop into degeneracy. Rosina's behavior is portrayed as an intensification of behaviors

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<sup>547</sup> Creed, "Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine," 5.

<sup>548</sup> Kristeva, 4, qtd. in Creed, "Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine," 5.

<sup>549</sup> *Der Golem*, 11.

already present in the figure Angelina, having been exacerbated by her ethnicity and confinement to a city district that nurtured her depraved nature.

### **The Path to Degeneracy: Class, Ethnicity, and the Ghetto**

In *Der Golem*, external factors such as familial constructions and social environment influence one's path to degeneracy. Although fathers are frequently mentioned in Pernath's descriptions of family structures in the ghetto, all of the novel's most prominent characters lack a maternal figure. These depictions apply to Gothic caricatures of the dysfunctional family described by Mary Snodgrass and Becker. Snodgrass claims that nuclear families in Gothic texts are characterized by "parents... at the height of their destructiveness," either through their "extremes of parental dominance and hysterical tirade," by leaving children "in the custody of tyrannical caregivers, or through the complete absence of the parental figures."<sup>550</sup> As Creed and Becker point out, female monstrosity in fiction is often linked with the role of the mother, who is presented either as archaic, possessed, or absent. In these dysfunctional families, Becker claims, "cruelty [often]... compensates for lovelessness," creating a living environment characterized by "domestic horror."<sup>551</sup> A look at Meyrink's novel in these terms is revealing.

*Der Golem* frequently describes male characters as having only a father; moreover, it also depicts the city as being motherless. Thus both the characters and the city lack an image of the ideal female. After his amnesia begins to lift, Pernath recalls "the tired face of an old man with white hair" ("das müde Gesicht eines alten Mannes mit weißem Haar") who is presumably his father, while no memories of his mother resurface.<sup>552</sup> Furthermore, Charousek, whose mother was sold to a brothel, was also left to fend for himself during his childhood. He survives only

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<sup>550</sup> Snodgrass, 83.

<sup>551</sup> Becker, 36. Becker speaks in the context of women achieving their own creative potential through escaping patriarchal gendered limitations in a patriarchal system

<sup>552</sup> *Der Golem*, 98.

through the generosity of his Jewish neighbors, who provide him with food as well as money for medical treatment and his studies.

Without mothers as counter-figures upholding traditional values and the family structure, women such as Rosina and Angelina destabilize the entire social order in Meyrink's Prague. They represent the sense of *borderlessness* (to use Susanne Becker's description) that characterized women's shifting position in the patriarchy at the turn of the twentieth century. By evading their roles as traditional mother figures, Becker claims, monstrous women overstepped delineations of social and gendered "border[s]," muddying the waters of their place in society. These women embodied an ambiguous place in the gendered hierarchy, thus posing a perpetual danger to men. By sleeping with multiple men and, in Angelina's case, engaging in behavior that may result in her losing her child, the two women become monstrous "Others" whose identities are "in flux," personifying "a place where meaning collapses."<sup>553</sup> While they represent women's liberation from traditional social and economic limitations, their behavior frightens men, who—seeing the blurred boundary between the male self and female "Other"—cannot detect the dangers posed by these women until it is too late. Having been blinded by their sexual desire, men become passive, nervous, and hysterical, shedding culturally conceived masculine traits such as "dominance," "aggressiveness," and "rationality." As a result, these men are caught between attraction and repulsion for the monstrous women, torn between condemning and yearning for the women who are responsible for their suffering.

Angelina's upbringing makes her less malicious than Rosina in her treatment of men. This noblewoman grew up in Prague's clean, wealthy castle district with an abundance of wealth to meet her needs. Pernath recalls "a noble family" and their "luxurious apartment... to which [he] was often called to carry out minor repairs to precious antiques" ("an eine luxuriöse

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<sup>553</sup> Becker, 56.

Wohnung und an eine adlige Familie auftauchen, zu der ich oft gerufen wurde, um an kostbaren Altertümern kleine Ausbesserungen vorzunehmen“).<sup>554</sup> As we saw in Chapter One, Angelina’s gems are associated with the wealth and privilege of German aristocracy, and she cynically uses her wealth to evade social ruin. Her beauty has intensified with age, making her monstrosity all the more difficult for Pernath and other German men to detect. While her immoral behavior is in keeping with the social decay that Meyrink links with the German aristocracy, and while her obsession with material wealth, class preservation, and enjoyment of sex betrays decadence, having been shielded from communal suffering, poverty, and inescapable predation, she has not yet devolved into degeneracy.

Rosina’s upbringing in the Jewish quarter, located directly across the river from the castle district in which Angelina resides, appears as the polar opposite of Angelina’s childhood. Rosina could not escape overcrowding, disease, and sexual predation. In the novel’s fourth chapter (“Prague”/“Prag”), for example, she is targeted by Karl Zottmann, who, while standing in a rainy street, makes clear in his movements and gestures that he finds Rosina sexually arousing. Rosina, for her part, is well-aware of his attraction to her “but behaves as if she has no idea what he meant” (“aber sich benahm, als verstünde sie nicht”).<sup>555</sup> As he traverses the street in the pouring rain to slip her into a shadowy building, a group of onlookers watch without intervening.<sup>556</sup> Although the novel later suggests that Zottmann becomes Rosina’s client following a scene in which Rosina dances naked on stage at Salon Loisitschek (a scene that I discussed in detail in Chapter Two), rumors of Zottmann’s liking of “school-aged girls” (“halbwüchsigen Mädchen”) leave open the possibility that he may have been preying on her earlier in her childhood.<sup>557</sup> In the

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<sup>554</sup> *Der Golem*, 14.

<sup>555</sup> *Der Golem*, 43.

<sup>556</sup> It is unclear whether the encounter is consensual. Although Rosina wears a “permanent smile” (“immerwährendes Lächeln”), her ignoring of Zottmann’s gestures expressing interest in her suggest she may be trying to avoid him. *Der Golem*, 49-50.

<sup>557</sup> *Der Golem*, 43.

absence of parents to protect her, the reader can imagine that she was left vulnerable to such threats. Not only is her father's identity the subject of question among ghetto residents, suggesting that she grew up without a father figure, but the novel also makes no mention of a mother figure who reprimands her for roaming the streets and taunting young men. Her Jewishness is not the only source of her depravity; the environment in which she was raised encourages her immoral behaviors later in life.

Having grown up in a district that offered few opportunities for women outside of prostitution, this impoverished Jewish girl learned from an early age to use sex as a commodity. In adulthood, sex work allows her to escape the ghetto, albeit at the emotional expense of her lovers. Rosina's Jewish "blood" circumscribes her socially, but her sexual interactions with men who are neither poor nor Jewish grant her financial freedom, and thus some social mobility. Her strategic manipulation of her lovers allows her to leave the district forever. From the male perspective of the novel, her ability to establish sexual relationships across class and ethnic lines and her spatial mobility, i.e., her departure from the ghetto, mark a break-down in the social order that prohibits sex work and keeps lower-class women socially and financially subjugated.

The causes of Rosina's malicious treatment of men are best summarized by her half-brother (or cousin), Charousek, who describes the link between the hostile environment of the ghetto and human behavior. In addition to the Jewish blood that runs in the veins of Wassertrum's children, Charousek claims,

"Only [one] whose roots were in the Ghetto and whose every fiber was soaked in Ghetto lore, [one] who had learned from [one's] earliest childhood to lie in wait for [one's] prey like a spider ... could have gone on perpetrating such atrocities for years without being caught."

"Nur ein Mensch, der mit allen Fasern im Getto und seinen zahllosen, unscheinbaren, jedoch unüberwindlichen Hilfsquellen wurzelte und von Kindheit

an gelernt hat, auf der Lauer zu liegen wie eine Spinne.... konnte jahrelang derartige Scheußlichkeiten verüben.”<sup>558</sup>

As Charousek sees it, the immoral behaviors of those in the ghetto (including Rosina) stem from their desperate living conditions. Rosina mimics the wicked behaviors displayed by her father/uncle Wassertrum and other male predators in her neighborhood. The reader is led to assume that one’s daily struggle for survival in the ghetto spawns desperation that, for those like Rosina, develops into maliciousness not experienced by those with more comfortable living conditions during their childhood. Rosina’s everyday experiences are unknown to Angelina by grace of the latter’s aristocratic upbringing. Angelina benefits from the cushion of social station and wealth and thus still bears an angelic appearance masking a soul resembling that of a demonic seductress.

The behaviors that the respective women inspire in their lovers reflect the women’s own stage on the spectrum of degeneracy. Angelina manipulates her lovers’ thoughts and feelings, causing them to fantasize about injuring those who Angelina claims have done her injustice. She is manipulative but does not orchestrate violence between her suitors. Rosina’s effect on her lovers is more intense: although both women inspire their lovers’ homicidal thoughts, only Rosina’s lovers commit murder, having been encouraged toward violence by her bidding. Read through the lens of degeneration theory, Rosina’s Jewish blood and presumed long-term exposure to the ghetto can be seen to cause a more rapid regression to an animalistic state. Additionally, her childhood victimization and exposure to social depravity have caused her interactions with her lovers to be more malicious than those of the German noblewoman. These interactions are characterized by deliberate psychological torment and physical torture. The heightened emotional and behavioral responses of Rosina’s lovers correlate to the intensity of

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<sup>558</sup> *Der Golem*, 39.

her manipulations: interactions with a morally depraved woman inspire the men's morally depraved actions. Rosina exemplifies an advanced stage of degeneration that Angelina has not yet reached, a stage that coincides with antisemitic descriptions of Jews as a social group. Not only does her waxy, rocking-horse face suggest physical disfigurement that antisemites in Meyrink's day typically ascribed to Jews, but she also devises violent plots against men and is more sexually active than Angelina, who, as the text mentions, has only two extra-marital affairs.

Through Rosina and Angelina, the novel suggests that physical degeneration due to hereditary factors may be unavoidable (as proposed by Weininger, Morel, and Lombroso); nevertheless, the contrast in the two women illustrates the intensification of the corrosive physical effects of degeneration by external factors such as social class and social conditions, as well as prolonged exposure to a polluted environment and sexual predation. However, because Angelina, a representative of the German aristocracy in Prague, fails to remedy her decadent and immoral behaviors, she and other women (regardless of ethnicity) are on the same path to degeneracy as the Jew Rosina. Angelina has been spared Rosina's destitute life in the ghetto. Surrounded by the luxuries of German nobility, Angelina does not yet bear physical stigmata, such as animalistic, unsightly facial features. Rosina, on the other hand, wears her corruption on her body (e.g., her horse-like face) that resembles Lombroso's description of the prostitute, whose devolution is visible in her facial features. Thus, the novel perpetuates a message that men cannot avoid being contaminated by judging from physical features alone; they must take into account women's behavior to avoid infection. Only by curbing the threat of these monstrous females can men hope to create a society free of social degeneracy. Unfortunately, as we shall see, a counterexample to these monstrous women cannot survive in Meyrink's recreation of turn-of-the-century Prague and its ghetto.

## The Absence of the Ideal Feminine

The story's reversal of traditional gender roles prompts the reader to question the significance behind portrayals of the monstrous feminine within the broader context of social rejuvenation in Prague. Only one female character escapes Meyrink's misogynistic characterization of women, and this is a character with a model mother. Mirjam, the Jewish archivist's daughter, provides a counterexample to Rosina and Angelina. Whereas Angelina and Rosina are associated with promiscuity, dishonesty, manipulation, and self-preservation, Mirjam represents the female ideal. Her physical appearance and the joy she brings Pernath make her unique. Pernath claims that her face is so strange ("so fremdartig") with its "unearthly narrowness" ("unirdische Schmalheit") that the beauty renders those who behold her countenance unable to speak ("die Schönheit, die einen stumm macht").<sup>559</sup> With the blueish-black shine of her hair ("blauschwarzen Glanz des Haares") and eyes whose beauty surpasses all that Pernath has seen ("der Augen, der alles übertraf"), her "strangeness" alludes not only to her Jewish difference, here positively coded, but also her dissimilarity to other bad women he has encountered.<sup>560</sup>

Unlike his encounters with Rosina and Angelina, whose presence unsettles him emotionally, Pernath is "happy" ("froh") with Miriam, and their conversations are characterized "involuntary smiles" ("unwillkürlich [L]ächel[n]") and child-like shyness when discussing love and marriage: "She became nervous like a teenager" ("Sie wurde nervös wie ein Backfisch").<sup>561</sup> When it comes to planning marriage and families, Mirjam recounts to Pernath her prudent views, which were imparted to her by her late mother:

"...as we all know, the parents of us Jewish girls direct the 'spring breezes,' we

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<sup>559</sup> *Der Golem*, 132.

<sup>560</sup> *Der Golem*, 132.

<sup>561</sup> *Der Golem*, 211; 284; Sie wurde nervös wie ein Backfisch.



only have to obey. And naturally, we do it. It's already in our blood. — Not in mine, though . . . My mother put up a terrible fuss when she was supposed to marry Aaron Wassertrum.”

“...bei uns Judenmädchen lenken bekanntlich die Eltern den Tauwind, und wir haben nur zu gehorchen. Tuen es natürlich auch. Es steckt uns schon so im Blut. — Mir ja nicht . . . meine Mutter hat böse gestreikt, als sie den gräßlichen Aaron Wassertrum heiraten sollte”).<sup>562</sup>

Mirjam's mother is the only female character unaffected by Wassertrum's influence. By denying Wassertrum, her mother rejects a marriage that would have granted her material wealth but would have embroiled her in a life of dishonesty, crime, and immorality. She chose another path by marrying the Rabbi Shemaiah Hillel, the ghetto's Jewish archivist.

The mother passed down her virtues to her daughter. From an early age, Mirjam learned from her mother's moral guidance, which in adulthood helped her stand apart from other women in Prague who are easily distracted by worldly desires. For instance, Mirjam's mother once discovered that Wassertrum had given Mirjam a diamond. Whereas most impoverished women in the novel would likely accept the gift as decadent ornamentation, a symbol of vanity, or a way to mitigate their poverty, Mirjam's mother forced the girl to return the diamond, forbidding her daughter from ever visiting Wassertrum again. Mirjam follows her mother's example in adulthood and is thus able to avoid succumbing to “spring breezes” and “life's glittering bubbles.” Even when Pernath tries to sneak her coins in the bread that she purchases from the local baker, presenting them as miracles (“Wunder”), she discovers his activities and insists that he stop giving her family money.<sup>563</sup> Thus, even in adulthood, Mirjam is defined by prudence and honesty—qualities that traditional views of women in Meyrink's day equated to the ideal feminine.

Such a woman, however, cannot survive long in Prague's Jewish ghetto as it is portrayed

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<sup>562</sup> *Der Golem*, 212.

<sup>563</sup> *Der Golem*, 194.

in the novel, or in the luxurious Czech world that replaces it. Mirjam and other women who are not promiscuous or self-serving disappear from the story. In the middle of the novel, Mirjam reveals to Pernath that her mother passed away during her childhood. Mirjam herself also disappears from the ghetto at the end of the novel, vanishing “without a trace” (“spurlos”).<sup>564</sup> Pernath’s prison mate informs him of a recent rape-murder (“Lustmord”) that occurred early in Pernath’s incarceration, one that was committed by Pernath’s former cellmate, Amadeus Laponder, who was executed for the crime.<sup>565</sup> The description of the woman resembles that of Mirjam:

“Caught ’im fresh in the act, they did. A lamp done fallen over in the ruckus and the room burnt down. The girl’s corpse was so charred, ain’t nobody been able’da bring out who she was. Black hair and a narrow face, that’s all they know. And that Laponder done refused to come out with ’er name.”

“Auf frischer Tat habn’s’n g’faßt. Die Lampen is umg’fallen bei dem Krawall und’s Zimmer is ausbrennt. Die Leich’ von dem Mädal is dabei so verkohlt, daß mer bis zum heutigen Tage noch nôt hat rausbringen können, wer sie eigentlich war. Schwarze Haar hat’s g’habt und a schmal’s G’sicht, dös is alls, was mer weiß. Und der Laponder hat net ums Verrekken rausg’rückt mit ihrem Namen.”<sup>566</sup>

Refusing to believe that Mirjam is the victim described in the rumor, Pernath searches for her upon his release from prison. Unsuccessful in that attempt, he makes plans to leave Prague to continue his search. His fall from a window on Christmas Eve while trying to escape a fire prevents him from embarking on this quest—at least in life. After his fall, Pernath finds Mirjam in the afterlife. At the end of the novel, the unnamed sleeping narrator of the frame narrative finds Mirjam and Pernath’s spirits walking together in an Eden-like garden at Prague’s castle. The scene suggests that a healthy union between man and woman, enabled through a fiery death, is possible only in the afterlife.

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<sup>564</sup> *Der Golem*, 330.

<sup>565</sup> Textual evidence also suggests that Pernath himself may have committed the crime during a somnambulistic trance. *Der Golem*, 297.

<sup>566</sup> *Der Golem*, 316.

The death of the novel's sole praiseworthy female characters suggests that virtuous women are absent from Prague's social landscape, either because they die or flee the city. With Mirjam's death, the ideal feminine in the novel no longer exists. Depicted at the end of the novel as a spirit looking down over Prague from far, Mirjam and the pious principles that she embodies appear as a distant ideal that can never be grasped fully. Thus, virtuous women appear as ghosts of a by-gone era that is lost to Meyrink's generation. In their place stand monstrous *femmes fatales* who evade the law and social censure for their treatment of men. Like the monster, which Jeffrey Cohen describes as a "harbinger of evil" that "always escapes," the abject monstrous feminine, with the absence of a feminine ideal to serve as a counterbalance, always threatens to return and upend society once again.<sup>567</sup>

The monstrous women in this novel contrast with the utopian imagery described by the Czech population in historical records and discussed in the previous chapter. In *Der Golem*, the newly renovated district is clean and orderly, free of German speakers and a Jewish presence. Nevertheless, *Josefov/Josephstadt* is still run by ruffians, such as the former brothel and salon owner, Loitschek. The unnamed narrator's description of the waitress working at Loitschek's establishment reveals that despite the physical renovations, not much else has changed. While looking for Pernath, the unnamed narrator approaches the Czech waitress for information. He is put off by her "smoldering eyes," "burning glances" ("sengende Glutblicke")<sup>568</sup> and the fact that she is "literally crammed into a red velvet tailcoat" ("in einen rotsamtenen Frack buchstäblich hineingeknallt.... [und trägt] nur einen Frack"). She wears nothing else. Not only does she raise her eyebrows as she speaks to give her eyes a wistful, "fairytale look" ("es erhöht das Märchenhafte des Blickes"), but she also leans so close to him that her hair brushes his arm as they speak. The unnamed narrator's unflattering description of this woman reveals that, although

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<sup>567</sup> Cohen, "Monster Theory: Seven Theses," 4.

<sup>568</sup> *Der Golem*, 340.

the city may have cleared itself of its impoverished, “degenerate” Jews and “decadent” German women, the new Czech population is also plagued with its own abject women.

Through these promiscuous women and the near absence of their virtuous counterparts, the novel inadvertently suggests that its final vision of the city is an illusion. The novel’s assertion echoes historical developments in the city. Guistino has shown the historical irony of the ghetto clearance project meant to rid the city of its Jewish population. Despite the city’s leveling of much of the former ghetto by 1905, including its houses, the majority of the Old Jewish Cemetery, and three synagogues, the Jewish population in *Josefov/Josephstadt* rose from 25 percent in 1900 to 40 percent in 1910.<sup>569</sup> Over the course of a decade, the city’s remaining wealthy, Czech-speaking Jews, who had moved from the ghetto following the emancipation edicts of 1867, returned to the district to populate its new luxury houses, open shops, and stroll the widened boulevards. Contrary to the intentions of antisemitic municipal leadership, Guistino suggests, ghetto clearance did not alleviate but instead exacerbated “anti-Jewish hostility” in the Bohemian capital.<sup>570</sup>

In keeping with the municipality’s lack of resolution of the “Jewish Question” through the *Finis Ghetto*, female monsters in *Der Golem* also never disappear completely: while all German and Jewish women vanish from the novel, they remain on the horizons, a threat waiting to be called back again. Little does the new Czech-speaking society realize that, even in the absence of these ethnic minority groups, abject women still remain. In fiction and historical memory, physical renovation of the district has failed to reform the alleged “monsters” in their midst.

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<sup>569</sup> Guistino, 172.

<sup>570</sup> Guistino, 309.

## Coda: The Metaphorical Leveling of Identities

As a contribution to the second revival of the international Gothic and the “Prague novel,” *Der Golem* depicts the aftermath of the increasing Czech political, social, and economic dominance over the city’s German-speaking population. Working within these literary traditions—themselves markers of his milieu—Meyrink uses his Gothic-inspired crime narrative as an intervention into local conversations and controversies that preceded the near disappearance of German-language culture in Bohemia. The novel, as I have argued, encapsulates this period of dramatic historical, cultural, and social change through depictions of historic alterations of the city’s architectural and social landscape. My study resurrects vestiges of German history as well as traces of “degeneracy” in Czech-dominated, turn-of-the-twentieth-century Prague society that underpin Meyrink’s novel.

*Der Golem* draws a parallel between the physical clearing of space in Prague at the *Jahrhundertwende* and the leveling of identities (ethnic, linguistic, class, religious, and so on) through Czech social reform efforts, which accompanied the creation of a single, unified Czech history. Just as Czech workers cleared rubble left over after ghetto clearance and paved over the space to construct new, more modern structures throughout the district, Czech authorities omitted the history of German and German Jewish characters who were traumatized by displacement from their homes and their culture after ghetto clearance. This omission of the German and German Jewish experience from local history is made visible through the “forgetful” characters who can neither describe the former ghetto nor those who had lived there. With the disappearance of the novel’s traumatized characters, the Czech community is free to create for itself an inspiring historical narrative emphasizing the Czech liberation from an oppressive German presence, thus allowing for Czech cultural rebirth in the name of “progress.” As suggested by the critical uproar that followed the publication of *Der Golem*, the author’s

contemporary Prague-based readership—particularly those who lived in Prague’s Old Town and New Town and who witnessed (or whose daily lives were directly affected by) the demolition project in *Josefov/Josephstadt*—picked up on Meyrink’s allusions to the highly charged cultural context and crumbling social order.

My analysis has focused on the novel’s portrayals of people and spaces in *Der Golem* as an unearthing of the experiences of many of Prague’s German speakers during a period of dramatic social, political, and economic upheaval. By carefully tracking interactions between the novel’s characters, I have shown how Meyrink’s representation of the *Finis Ghetto* imagines the resolution of heated linguistic debates and social conflicts related to class and ethnicity by redefining markers of social standing. He makes visible Czech efforts to shape (and edit) local history in the name of “progress.” In *Der Golem*, the historical leveling of the ghetto serves as a metaphor for the homogenization of a multiethnic, multi-religious, and multilingual community into a unified Czech community. The disintegration of communal coexistence is followed by the expulsion (or forced assimilation) of German-speaking characters from the urban landscape. The new community that stands in its place is recognizable through the characters’ language use, professions, and communal ambitions; it defines itself through its separation from German-speaking Austrian high culture and bureaucracy—namely, its complete rejection of (and unwillingness to acknowledge) the German-speaking presence or local German and German Jewish history. Nevertheless, as the text implies, national transformations unleash “monsters” even when they appear to benefit some groups.

Although descriptions of decadent love affairs within the violent crime narrative nearly eclipse the novel’s allusions to the far-reaching Czech nationalist movement that reshaped Prague’s social and physical landscape, the narrator’s (and author’s) silence surrounding those responsible for conceptualizing and implementing the *Finis Ghetto*—namely, Prague’s Czech-

dominated municipality and antisemitic Young Czech policy-makers—is striking for readers familiar with the cultural, political, and social scene in Prague at the *Jahrhundertwende*. Despite the central role that those who implemented these changes play in determining each character’s fate, these unnamed (presumably Czech) forces that controlled the fate of the entire Prague community remain in the story’s background, out of the purview of those in the ghetto, and never named or addressed directly by the author or his narrators. This absence is telling; it reveals how little say German speakers in the region had in determining and exerting their political and social rights in the region, as well as their lack of ability to be counted as subjects and citizens in the new Czech order.<sup>571</sup>

Meyrink’s literary representation of impossible communities in turn-of-the-twentieth-century Prague takes on a much darker tone in historical retrospect. *Der Golem* was serialized in *Die weissen Blätter* five years before the fall of the monarchy, yet it anticipates collapse. We might read the reconfiguration of Prague and its Jewish quarter as alluding specifically to the crumbling authority of the “decadent” Habsburg monarchy. The novel’s portrayal of prince Athenstädt’s social ruin alludes to the weakness of the Habsburg monarchy and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which collapsed at the conclusion of the First World War in 1918. Dale Askey has shown that national conflicts throughout the Empire at this time were actually “struggles of succession in a crumbling order, leading to the creation of nationalist positions and demands that prefigured if not directly precipitated many of the conflicts that ensued in the twentieth century.”<sup>572</sup> The monarchy’s disintegration created a void that national movements hoping to succeed the failed state immediately rushed to fill. In the Czech and Slovak lands,

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<sup>571</sup> This idea developed out of reading Tara Zahra’s discussion of state-mandated national ascription of children into Czechs and Germans, which ultimately forced their parents to define and register their national allegiances, as well. See Zahra, 12.

<sup>572</sup> Askey, 60. See also Jeremy King, *Budweisers into Czechs and Germans: A Local History of Bohemian Politics, 1848-1948* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press: 2002, 5).

these national conflicts only ended with the expulsion of the vast majority of German speakers after 1945. After the war, less than 10% of the pre-war German population remained, a small community of 200,000-300,000 specialized tradesmen or skilled workers whose mixed marriages and/or antifascist credentials enabled them to stay in the region. This small community nevertheless experienced anti-German discrimination in Czechoslovakia and today; as a result of long-time postwar policies, it has largely disappeared from view.<sup>573</sup> Meyrink's novel itself represents the disappearance of German-language literature and culture from Prague's intellectual landscape. His literary legacy, as well as his iteration of the Golem legend (now iconic in Prague), were neither revived nor celebrated in Czech culture until the years following the fall of the Soviet-dominated regime, when increased migration, trade, tourism (particularly Jewish tourism), and intellectual exchange reintroduced *Der Golem* to a Czech community that had forgotten its author and his international best-selling novel. The cultural reintegration between "East" and "West" that accompanied pulling back the Iron Curtain provided a space to re-examine, expand, and question readings of cultural and historical narratives that had prevailed in Czechoslovakia since the collapse of the Habsburg monarchy.

By grounding my readings in Prague's sociocultural history, the goal of my study of *Der Golem*, its author, and the story's cultural and historical context was to bring to light the implications of Meyrink's allusions to national developments and gender relations. As the temporal distance between the text, its readers, and its sociocultural context widens, textual references to nationalist conflict become more opaque and less accessible to readers who are no longer familiar with the details of the linguistic politics and cultural battles of the milieu. *Der Golem* is filled with cultural and historical signposts that are easily overlooked the more distance the reader has from the historical context. It is perhaps for this reason that recent scholarship on

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<sup>573</sup> For a detailed account of the German-speaking community who remained, who are referred to as the "Verbliebene," see Askey.



*Der Golem* has not addressed traces of nationalist discourse in this novel. Most German-speaking literary critics—even German-speaking scholars with a nuanced understanding of Prague’s cultural scene circa 1900—have gravitated toward analyzing stock themes that are easily identifiable in the text, such as antisemitism, references to the occult, and the golem legend. My hope is that my research on Prague’s local politics, linguistic debates, class differentiation, religions in the region, and other nuances of Prague culture and politics in Meyrink’s times will open new spaces for critical reflection and conversation about the text.

Much is left to be said about *Der Golem*, its author, and his other writings. I’ve taken my study of nationalism as well as gendered and ethnic stereotyping this far. I would like to outline in closing several projects that are yet to be undertaken toward which my research has pointed me. Meyrink’s satirical short stories, op-ed pieces, and commentaries in newspapers and literary journals such as *Simplicissimus*, *Die weissen Blätter*, and *Der liebe Augustin* also warrant close examination informed by questions of nationalism. Study of these shorter pieces should shed further light on the author’s characterization of Prague society and its Jewish ghetto in general and in *Der Golem* in particular. Analyzing these journals—the latter of which is only accessible at the University of Vienna—and William R. van Buskirk’s 1957 dissertation on Meyrink’s satirical writings would serve as excellent starting points for further research. Meyrink’s biting criticism of the Habsburg monarchy in these journals (as well as his representations of Viennese culture and Europe’s German-speaking community over the course of his career) needs to be compared to representations of Prague culture found in *Der Golem*. Meyrink served as editor for *Der liebe Augustin*, a Vienna-based journal, for one year immediately after scandals forced his departure from Prague in 1904. Thus, examining this journal, which coincided with Meyrink’s transition into writing full time, may provide valuable insight into the broader development of his perceptions of Prague (and Prague society) as “monstrous,” the role of the monarchy in

creating a city filled with decadence and degeneracy, and the ways that he felt that Prague and its communities had failed him.

Meyrink's prominent role as a translator, editor, and contributor to international Gothic literature also warrants an examination of possible sources of inspiration for his writing in *Der Golem* and its reception among readers with a taste for literature featuring Gothic themes and content. A look at the contents, publication history, and reception of Meyrink's German translation of Lafcadio Hearn's *Japanese Ghost Stories/Japanische Gespenstergeschichte*, as well as *The Ghostbook/Das Gespensterbuch*, a collection of ghost stories by Meyrink, Edgar Allan Poe, Guy de Maupassant, Rudyard Kipling, and other canonical international authors could bring Meyrink's mediation of the international Gothic more sharply into view. Analyzing these stories, as well as the complete works of Charles Dickens—which Meyrink encountered as a child and translated for Kurt Wolff Verlag in order to finance his writing of *Der Golem*—could, furthermore, locate possible sources of inspiration for Gothic-inspired fiction and so flesh out his place in the international Gothic revival. Such work would add a significant contribution to the underexplored imprint Meyrink had on the early-twentieth-century international literary scene.

Meyrink scholarship would also benefit from a close examination of the novel's local reception history, particularly how Meyrink's writings (*Der Golem* included) resonated with women in Prague who read his work. I would be eager to learn more about the novel's reception in women's magazines, in local women's circles, and in reading groups. Given Meyrink's celebrity status and the prominence of the "Meyrink-Hetze" in literary circles and newspapers throughout Prague, Germany, and the Habsburg Empire, it is likely that *Der Golem* reached female readers.

In spite of the many lingering questions that my examination of nationalism, antisemitism, and misogyny in *Der Golem* leaves unanswered, my research has convinced me

that Meyrink was, as Franz Werfel claimed, an expert observer of turn-of-the-twentieth-century Prague society and culture. Meyrink's mastery of the Gothic genre combined with his intimate understanding of the city's political scene and nationalist movements sets his writing apart from that of other authors and national literatures of his day. Perhaps only the works of Franz Kafka, which are celebrated worldwide for their diverse references to the turn-of-the-twentieth century Prague's cultural and political scene, rivals Meyrink's ability to craft a novel that so thoughtfully yet forcefully expresses the cultural tensions that defined Prague at the *Jahrhundertwende*. Nevertheless, *Der Golem* stands alone in its incorporation of Gothic themes. As this dissertation has shown, Meyrink's over-the-top, excessive imagery emphasizing violence, decadence, and the grotesque is carefully constructed to disturb the reader, encouraging him or her to look deeper into the many (often competing) political movements, social anxieties, and historical uncertainties that literary scholars and cultural historians have argued characterized the author's milieu. Meyrink's haunting literary masterpiece examines the intersections of and unarticulated spaces between cultural themes and historical developments related to nationalist movements, ethnic intolerance, and the loss of linguistic diversity. Thus, through the reading process, he forces his audience to reawaken, contemplate, and confront the "monsters" waiting at each page's turn.

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