

**Jewish Juvenile Literature in Interwar
Czechoslovakia as a Mirror of Identity Search**

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Abstract

The thesis is analyzing Jewish juvenile literature of pre-WWII Czechoslovakia as a source of important information on the development of the plural identity of the Jews of the Czech Lands, following the formation of a Czechoslovak political identity within the twenty years of the First Republic's life (1918-1938) and the Second Republic (1938 – 1939). Basing the theory on the research of Kateřina Čapková and Hillel Kieval, the author of the thesis is using studies of selected children's literature to illustrate the social, cultural and political changes and the way they were perceived by children and youth.

A special focus is being given to ideologies behind the specific Jewish children's literature and the reflections of such writings by the young readers themselves. The research of the primary sources is used to support the theory of multiple identities of pre-WWII Czechoslovak Jewry.

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1 Theoretical Chapter

After the first Czechoslovak Republic was formed in 1918, the Jewish community resident in its territory had to face a new identity question. Due to the relatively good social and legal status, the Jews enjoyed in the Austro-Hungarian monarchy after their full emancipation in 1869, many Jews turned into loyal citizens of the monarchy, while others followed the ideology of Zionism and yet others inclined to support the Czech national efforts. It was a part of what Kateřina Čapková as a major Czech expert on this topic would identify as a plural identity, when an Austro-Hungarian/Czech/German and Jewish melted into one unit.¹

The birth of the first Czechoslovak Republic left the Jews with a choice of a national identity, or possible multiple identities and various world views ranging from German or Czech assimilationist tendencies to Zionism or even orthodoxy in some cases. At the same time, the Jews in Bohemia and Moravia led a very rich social and cultural life basing on two languages and cultural milieus: Czech and German. As Hillel Kieval pointed out, the Jews of Bohemia and Moravia had to undergo two identity changes: one from the pure Jewish one to the German one and the next one from the German identity to the Czechoslovak one.²

The development of the Jewish society in the pre-WWII Czechoslovakia can be followed on the pages of the Czechoslovak Jewish periodicals that were issued in

¹ Kateřina Čapková, *Češi, Němci, Židé: Národní Identita Židů v Čechách 1918-1938*. (Praha: Paseka, 2005), 353.

² Hillel J. Kieval, *The Making of Czech Jewry: National Conflict and Jewish Society in Bohemia, 1870-1918 (Studies in Jewish History)* (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 1988), 296.

both Czech (*Rozvoj*) and German (*Jüdische Volksstimme*, *Selbstwehr*, *Jüdisches Volksblatt*) language. One of those periodicals (*Jüdisches Volksblatt*) also contained a small and relatively short-lived children's section filled with quite general short stories, Talmudic stories and fairy tales. There were also periodicals with main focus on the juvenile reader, such as *Itonenu or Jaldut*, which are much more interesting as a research material due to the fact they are peer-written and containing a clear ideological message.

My main focus in this case will be the territory of Bohemia and Moravia, since the situation in Slovakia and later the Carpatho-Ukraine was diametrically different due to the eastern Jewish population. The Jews in Bohemia and Moravia belonged to the western stream of Judaism with more or less assimilatory (or integrationist, as Čapková would call them) tendencies. The thesis will be focused on the Czech Lands in order to keep it in a reasonable scope.

This research should provide not only the overview of Jewish juvenile literature in the interwar Czechoslovakia which has been long neglected, but its main objective is to illustrate and analyze the value system, the norms, the hopes, the illusions and the educational efforts and how they corresponded with the formation of cultural identities of the interwar youth. The identity question of Czechoslovak Jewry has been described in research before (Kieval, Čapková), but the focus was still strictly on the adult society that were aware of the political changes and their meaning and free to choose from several cultural identity patterns. One would expect that the children were quite unaware of this process and thus relying on the adult world to transmit

certain formative information, also in the form of juvenile literature, but the study of the source material shows, that the children and youth in fact were conscious of political and social changes.

The first Czechoslovak Republic had a production of Jewish children's literature both in German and in Czech. There was a path for juvenile literature paved by the pre WW-I periodical *Jung Juda*. Also, the German *Jüdisches Volksblatt* published various pieces of juvenile literature intended for the Jewish public. The characters of the different streams within the Czechoslovak Jewry also influenced the content of the youth and children's sections, and it is possible to differentiate the Zionist-oriented ones from those focusing more on the Czech-Jewish bonds. Czechoslovakia was also the home of children's literature authors like Irma Singer or Ilse Weber or the famous Rabbi Feder, who penned a series of readers in Czech for Jewish youth.

Although these examples show the significance of Jewish juvenile literature in interwar Czechoslovakia, the exact parameters of the source material are unknown since nobody has overviewed and described it yet. There are many established studies on the Jewish identities in interwar Czechoslovakia, most notably by Kieval, Čapková and Lichtenstein, but there is only a very short article on juvenile Jewish literature in Czechoslovakia by Leo Pavlát.³ The German part of the sources was covered by Zohar Shavit and Annegret Völpele as a part of the broader German Jewish children's literature, but without any special focus on the Czechoslovak specificity.⁴ Also, Gabrielle v. Glasenapp and Michael Nagel covered the early

³ Leo Pavlát, "Jewish Children's Literature in Czechoslovakia," in "First International Symposium on Jewish Children's Literature: proceedings," *Judaica Librarianship* 7, no. 1 (1992-1993): 36-38.

⁴ See: Zohar Shavit, Hans-Heino Ewers and Annegret Völpele, *Deutsch-jüdische Kinder- und*

children's literature in Bohemia.⁵

Jewish children's literature is not the most frequently researched primary source material in Jewish Studies. However, the pioneering work of Zohar Shavit has shown that the emergence of Jewish children's literature, both in Germany in nineteenth-century Central Europe and also in Modern Hebrew in early twentieth-century Palestine, were crucial steps in the development of distinct German-Jewish or Israeli cultural identities. Though addressed to children, juvenile literature is usually penned or at least supervised by adults and it sometimes reflects the fears, hopes, illusions, and values of the adult society in a more straightforward and direct way than the more sophisticated products of "high culture". It is precisely its marginality, its peripheral location that makes juvenile literature a brilliant medium of studying social universalia and norms⁶. While the center-based literature is open to innovations, the periphery still operates with the norms encoded in the society of the given time. Assuming this, the focus of my research will be the explorations of the identities and social norms and how and by what means they were transmitted.

After carefully processing the primary source material available in the Jewish Museum of Prague, I selected several publications worth a closer case study. It would be impossible to cover and analyze all the sources within the scope of the thesis, so I focused on such pieces of literature, which carried a clear message and had a norm- and value-shaping character, such as *Židovské besídky*. Also, I

Jugendliteratur von der Haskala bis 1945: Die deutsch- und hebraischsprachigen Schriften des deutschsprachigen Raumes : ein bibliographisches Handbuch (German Edition) (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1996), 1495.

⁵ Gabriele von Glasenapp, *Das jüdische Jugendbuch: Von der Aufklärung bis zum Dritten Reich* (German Edition) (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1996), 283.

⁶ Itamar Even-Zohar, *Polysystem Studies* (Durham: Duke Univ Pr (Tx), 1990), 253.

consciously chose examples of peer-written periodicals to be able to study the feedback of the young readership: *Jaldut*, *Itonenu*, *El Al*, *Dopisy z Eretz*. As Zohar Shavit along with Annegret Völpele compiled an overview of German Jewish juvenile literature, I will also consult this publication, as the Czechoslovak and the German literature are overlapping each other in Shavit's research. I will also mention two of the most famous children's authors, who were born in the Czech Lands: Irma Singer (Berkowitz)⁷ and Ilse Herlinger (Weber)⁸

Finally, I will go through the collected material and choose several representative and typical examples that will help me (along with the secondary resources) illustrate the topic and answer the questions formulated above. First of all I will try to classify the sources according to the prevailing programmatic focus into the categories of German-Jewish, Czech-Jewish, Czechoslovak-Jewish and Zionist streams. It is important to note, however, that these categories are outlined by permeable borders and are never expressed in absolute terms. Since the identities themselves were layered and overlapping, it would be a mistake to expect complete ideological clarity in most of the text, with the exception of the leftist Zionist periodicals, such as *Itonenu* and even there, there are tropes and sujets demonstrating the identity struggle, in spite of the clear ideology behind such writings. There will also be room for comparison and analysis of several selected interesting tropes and motifs present in all the streams.

There are several methodological approaches I will use to illustrate the identity search or to possibly affirm or refute my thesis questions. First of them will be a

⁷ Irma Singer, nee Berkowitz is appearing in literature both under her maiden and her married name

⁸ Ilse Weber, nee Herlinger

linguistic, or more precisely, a lexicological analysis of the material. I will mainly search for uncommon bohemisms, yiddishisms, germanisms, hebraisms and other irregularities in the texts. The language perspective could clarify a hidden affiliation or simply serve as a proof of a closer cultural relation between the different linguistic milieus. Also, I will keep a closer watch on the cultural figures mentioned in the text, the national mythologies and narratives involved. Last, but not least, the greater deal of my work will be dedicated to tracing down the norms and moral codes transmitted by the means of juvenile literature; the straightforward ones and the once hidden in parables, fairy tales and other small literary units featuring a morale. An important, if not the key position, will have the periodical *Jaldut* with its section dedicated to the letters from the readership. This will help me evaluate the feedback from the actual group of focus, the Jewish children of Czechoslovakia, their interests and their concerns in terms of identity and affiliation, if any. Another important fact about *Jaldut* is, that it is covering a wider scope or readership; from the Czech-Jewish camp due to the fact that it was published in Czech, the Czechoslovak camp due to the programmatic focus supporting the Czechoslovak state and the Jewish national camp due to the moderate Zionism expressed on the pages of *Jaldut*.

Before proceeding, it is still necessary to clarify, what is it I actually have in mind when writing about Czechoslovak Jewish juvenile literature. Obviously, the problematic word for definition is “Jewish”. As I am dealing exclusively with sources explicitly marked as Jewish, so a broader scope of literature, which might still be otherwise considered Jewish, is falling out. Such source materials are those either written by Jewish authors, but not explicitly dealing with Jewish topics or such written

by a mixed team of authors, Jewish and Gentile, that were widely read and accepted by Jewish audience, but again, not aimed at Jewish audience only.

2 Introduction

2.1 Why children's literature? Reforming childhood in Bohemia.

For the contemporary man, the notion of childhood, a child and their opposition to the concepts of adult age and an adult are a matter of course. The concepts are so clear and well-understood and we are even experiencing a boom of pedocentrism and prolongation of the arbitrary boundary of the child age up to the physical adulthood. Yet, it is important to keep in mind, that the whole notion of childhood has not always been a given thing, that it is indeed a relatively new concept and so is literature for children and the attribution of a specific dress, games and toys to children. Also, children's books could only appear at the point, when the adult belletristic was already well- established; children's books were only a rarity before the 18th century.⁹

First, it was necessary to create the concept of a child. As Townsend puts it: *"Before there could be children's books, there had to be children – children, that is, who were accepted as beings with their own particular needs and interests, not only as miniature men and women."*¹⁰ Following Ariès' theory, it was the beginning of the 17th century, which saw the birth of a revolution in the concept of childhood and started the process of invention of childhood as we know it now. This process created two new cultural institutions: on one hand a new system of education, on the other hand a new readership, which produced a market for children's literature.¹¹ It would be a

⁹ Shavit, *Poetics of children's literature*, 4-5.

¹⁰ Townsend, *Written for Children*, 17.

¹¹ Shavit, *Poetics of children's literature*, 5.

mistake to take the temporal framework given by Ariès as a single defined event: it was merely a starting point of a process, which culminated in the late 19th and early 20th century, when the needs and a definition of the child was clearly outlined. Ariès was building largely on the French cultural space, while the process did not have a totally unified course in Europe.

Before Ariès, the emergence of the modern concept of childhood was attributed rather to the Industrial Revolution and the emergence of the middle class, better healthy conditions and economical status and last, but not least, a lower infant mortality rate and the resulting decrease in birth rate among the bourgeoisie.¹²

Marion Kaplan is basically tracing the same process of building the Jewish middle class and follows the dropping birth rate and a resulting emergence of the pedocentric orientation of the society. In the very specific Jewish situation, it comes to a confluence of the Torah exalting women as the teachers of the young and the emerging middle class values.¹³ It is interesting to note, that according to Kaplan, the Jews introduced the policy of smaller families a generation earlier than the Gentiles in Germany. Not only in Germany proper did the Jews seem to precede the Gentiles in the childhood concept. It was the Maharal of Prague¹⁴, who proposed a very innovative and modern reform of schooling and children's education even slightly before the Bohemian reformer Comenius¹⁵ did so. Aharon Kleinberger in his study extensively compares the works of both Comenius and Maharal and finds parallels

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Kaplan, *The Making of the Jewish Middle Class*, 42.

¹⁴ Jehuda Löwy ben Bezalel (1525–1609)

¹⁵ 1592 – 1670

between the two enlightened thinkers. Kleinberger, however, does not claim that Comenius was influenced by Maharal in any way. On the other hand, Otto Dov Kulka in his exploration of the same topic does accept a possibility of influence.¹⁶

Kleinberger points out the stress on language learning and natural sciences in the proposed schooling reforms by both Maharal and half a century later, Comenius. Holding on to Kleinberger's theory, that the two have not influenced each other, Kaplan's observation of the Jews' readiness to accept new ideas and concepts in the sphere of family and childraising could be also applicable for the case of Maharal. The very fact, that such reforms were happening in the temporal framework of the late 16th and the course of 17th century, would support Ariès' theory of the invention of childhood as a new concept.

At the same time, the geographical location of the two proposed reforms is of no less importance. It was precisely Bohemia and Moravia, the Lands of the Czech Crown, where this took place, founding a tradition of education, not only the Gentile one, but also the Jewish one and with the education, also the need for teaching materials and books for children of instructional values.

A state-based institutionalization came under the rule of Maria Theresa and was continued by the enlightened Emperor Joseph II. A school reform was introduced in the form of a duty to attend schools and the state-established *Normalschulen*, which were obligatory for both Gentile and Jewish children. It is interesting, that there was a

¹⁶ Compare: Kleinberger, Aharon F. *The Educational Theory of the Maharal of Prague*. Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1962.
Otto Dov Kulka, "Comenius and Maharal: the historical background of the parallels in their teachings", *Judaica Bohemiae* 27,1-2 (1991), p. 17-30.

tendency for conditioning of general Austrian schoolbooks especially for the Jewish children. This initiative came from Ferdinand Kindermann Ritter v. Schulstein, an enlightened provost and a school supervisor in Prague, who addressed Moses Mendelssohn in a letter asking him to edit an adaptation of a school textbook for a *Normalschule* and add some Jewish material to it. Mendelssohn replied to his letter, but did not completely agree with Schulstein's idea, fearing a possibly exaggerated assimilation. The *Lesebuch für jüdische Jugend* was published in Prague in 1781¹⁷ and started a tradition of Jewish readers, which continued into the 20th century with the *Židovské besídky* of rabbi Richard Feder, that I will extensively deal with in the next chapters.

As the tradition in the Lands of the Czech Crown was set already, it only took the *fin-de-siècle* children's literature boom and the popularity of Zionist youth movement in the 1920's and 1930's to create a solid pensum of Jewish children's literature in the Czech Lands.

Just as the children's literature itself is a relatively new phenomenon, so is the study of children's literature itself. It was left out of the scope of serious literary criticism for a long time and only the 1970's and 1980's brought a new interest in children's topics. It is precisely the marginality of children's literature that makes it an ideal object of study of prevalent social norms and values, which are given by a long tradition and are very central and well-based on one hand and the new ideologies deliberately introduced to children's world to condition the future adults in them on

¹⁷ For more information on the *Lesebuch*, see Glaserapp, Gabriele von. *Das jüdische Jugendbuch: Von der Aufklärung bis zum Dritten Reich* (German Edition). Stuttgart: Metzler, 1996.

the other. Since Jewish children's literature has a long tradition in Bohemia and has not yet been researched on a regular basis, it makes for an excellent material for analysis of the forming identities of Czechoslovak Jews and reflection of the political changes in the Czech Lands. I am aware, that the scope of the thesis is not able to encompass all the motifs and themes, but it will hopefully serve as a starting point for my further research in this field.

2.2 *The Identities of Jews of the Czech Lands*

This chapter should provide a general historical overview relevant for the studies of the identity changes within the Jewry of Bohemia and Moravia. Before I provide the theoretical outline, it is necessary to precisely define the geographical framework of my study. The title of the thesis is referring to interwar Czechoslovakia in order to state the true name of the political unit, as it was at the time that I am mostly concerned about. However, describing my geographical scope with the mere word Czechoslovakia would be slightly inaccurate, or to be more precise, rather too broad of a definition. My focus will lie only on the historical lands of the Czech crown; Bohemia, Moravia and a small part of Silesia¹⁸.

The first Czechoslovak republic consisted of the lands of the Czech crown, Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia annexed to it. I have a good reason not to mention the latter. The historical, socio-cultural and religious development in Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia followed a pattern diametrically different from the Czech Lands. There is a dividing line between western and eastern Jewry, as Ezra

¹⁸ I will further on refer to this area for brevity as to "the Czech Lands"

Mendelsohn defined it basing on sociological parameters such as the level of acculturation. While the Jews of the Czech Lands belonged to the western type of Jewry with a high level of acculturation, assimilatory tendencies, mobility towards the middle class and more readiness to abandon tradition, part of the Slovak Jewry and even more characteristically, the Jewry of Subcarpathian Ruthenia, belonged to the eastern stream, described by Mendelsohn as traditional, orthodox, unwilling to acculturate or assimilate and belonging to the lower classes.¹⁹ This is also the reason, why the development of identity took different ways in the case of the Jewry of the Czech Lands on one hand and Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia on the other hand. Of course, a different political development of the given areas also played a role in my decision to leave Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia out.

It would be very complex to try and integrate the two worlds into one historical narrative also due to different problems of minorities and national developments. In my thesis, I will explore the oscillation of the Jewry of Czech Lands among the German, Czech and Jewish national identities, two of which could have actually only been born of assimilation. In Slovakia, there would also be a Hungarian influence present that would need to be explored further. This is why, I will further on focus on the Czech Lands only, in order to give the narrative a reasonable scope.

The temporal framework of the thesis is lying within the years of the first Czechoslovak republic (1918 – 1938). However, as I will be exploring the changes and odds of Jewish identities, it is necessary to define, which types of identities those

¹⁹ Ezra Mendelsohn, *The Jews of East Central Europe between the World Wars (A Midland Book)* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987), 6.

were and feature the history preceding the foundation of Czechoslovakia in order to follow the development of identities. Čapková in the introduction to her study *Češi, Němci, Židé*²⁰ enumerates the identities to be observed in the following terms: national, ethnic, cultural, political and religious.²¹

The least problematic one is the ethnic one, as this is clearly defined by Jewishness and the concept of the “people of Israel”, that is the idea of some distinct people, if not already a nation, implemented not only from the inside by Jewish tradition, but also from the outside by the Gentile society, especially within the anti-Semitic narratives basing on the “foreignness of the Jew.” To trace down the cultural, political, religious and national identity, the historical framework has to be slightly extended towards the past, in order to follow the changes and identity crises. For this, it is useful to monitor the developments from the onset of modernity, politically seen from the measures adopted by the monarch, in this case Joseph II of the Habsburg Empire, who started employing enlightened politics. His *Toleranzpatent*²² was the first step towards a new status of the Jews, although it would be wrong to understand it as a significant or immediate change and it is important to keep in mind that while it granted tolerance to other religious groups, it still did not mean emancipation or abolishment of the restrictions towards Jews. Quite on the contrary, restrictions, most importantly the *Familianten* laws, kept following the Jewry of the Czech Lands further into the modern times up until 1867, when they were finally granted full emancipation.

²⁰ Čapková, *Češi, Němci, Židé*, 12.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Toleranzpatent: Bohemian Jews: 1781, Moravia: 1872

The Josephian measures had a direct effect on the Jewry of the Czech Lands, especially the introduction of the *Normalschulen* had a significant effect on the cultural identity of the Jews. Since the *Normalschulen* established a trend of a secular education in German, also the Jews benefited from this and adopted more and more not only the German language, but also the German culture, as opposed to the Czech/Slavic culture own to the rural population. While *Normalschulen* could be counted into the list of influences leading to the German acculturation of the Jews, it was also paradoxically seen by the contemporaries, especially in the 1840's, as a common platform for the Czech, German and Jewish population and so a unifying phenomenon.²³

There were also substantial differences between Moravia and Bohemia. In Bohemia, the Jewry was much more urbanized, but also tending more towards the Czech assimilation than in the more rural German-oriented Moravia. Also the attitude towards religion was different, as the religious orientation of the Jews was influenced by the attitude towards religion of their Gentile neighbors. This is why Moravia, where the Gentile population was generally more pious than in Bohemia, also the Jews stuck to tradition and religion longer. In Bohemia, however, the Gentile population had a rather lukewarm attitude towards religion and so also the Jews were more ready to embrace religious innovations or abandon religion as such. This would explain the differences in the religious identity. Also, the Jews of the Czech Lands were specific in their way of abandoning orthodoxy. Unlike their German or Hungarian fellows, the Bohemian and Moravian Jews did not replace orthodoxy by a

²³ Hillel J. Kieval, *Languages of Community: The Jewish Experience in the Czech Lands* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), 5.

different religious view, such as the reform movement, they rather abandoned religion as such.²⁴

The cultural identity of the Jews of the Czech Lands underwent a series of changes during the course of history. Until 1840, the linguistic and ethnic boundaries were relatively fluid.²⁵ For a short time period, there were strong Jewish tendencies towards the acculturation to the Czech milieu, in the case of the Czech assimilationist stream, the ideal was an assimilation till the very end – the disappearance of Jews as such and their total melting into the Czech nation. In spite of the voices pointing out the positive Jewish influence of the German national culture and their possible capacity of doing the same for the Czech nation, the Czech – Jewish assimilatory trend was not accepted by the Czechs with great understanding. This is why the Jews mostly retreated back to the German acculturation around the middle of the 19th century. There have, however, always been assimilatory tendencies toward the Czech environment represented by the founding of several Czech-Jewish associations such as *Spolek českých akademiků Židů* (1876), *Or Tamid* (1883) or *Národní jednota českožidovská* (1893).²⁶

The Jews of the Czech Lands were granted full emancipation in 1867. As a result of that, they set out on a path of upward social mobility and urbanization. In 1870's and 1880's, the Jewry of Bohemia started to move to the cities and the urbanization along with the generally good relation towards the monarchy provided yet another platform for the German cultural identity of the Bohemian and - to an even greater

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Kieval, *Languages of Community*, 30.

²⁶ Čapková. *Češi, Němci, Židé*, 12.

extent - Moravian Jewry. As Kieval described the situation:

*"Within the Jewish communities of Bohemia and Moravia, social and cultural elites promoted a new ideology of "Europeanness" tied to a program of German linguistic acculturation and middle-class social aspirations."*²⁷

The emergence of Zionism brought yet another item on the list of identity options.

This time, it was not only a cultural identity, but a blend of cultural, ethnic and national identities, the national one being the innovation of Zionism. Zionism offered a third way, a post-assimilationist tendency, a reaction to the failure of the assimilatory tendencies. While the Czech and the German assimilatory streams were also building on a linguistic identity and showing proficiency in German and Czech, Zionism was building on Hebrew as an ideal language of the new Jew and yet, most the discourses and periodicals appeared in German. Hillel Kieval managed to find a brilliant account of a meeting of Zionists in Prague in 1919, where all the people attending tried to speak only Czech in order to show respect to the newborn Czechoslovakia, but the speeches turned out awful, as the speakers did not exactly master the Czech language. It is German most of the Zionist periodicals were in, although there were always tendencies to teach Hebrew and educate the next generation to the creative use of the Hebrew language, as if it was not *lashon kodesh*²⁸, but just about any vernacular.

When the first Czechoslovak republic was established in 1918, the generally very monarchy loyal Jews had to face the situation and find themselves a new identity pattern than the one they had before. Some stayed true to the German milieu, some however felt themselves a part of the Czechoslovak state and this created a political

²⁷ Kieval, *Languages of Community*, 5.

²⁸ Holy language

identity. In fact, Jews did not have only one identity, but rather plural identities. The Hroch concept of plural identities²⁹ is definitely more than applicable on the Czech Jewry. Their identity consisted of the cultural (Czech x German x Zionist) and linguistic part (Czech x German), the religious part (orthodox x non-orthodox) and the political part (Czechoslovak). So it would be completely possible to have a German speaking Jewish nationalist, who would still identify himself as a Czechoslovak.

The figure of Tomáš G. Masaryk, the first Czechoslovak president also played a role. Not only he was popular amongst Jews for his public pro-Jewish opinion in the Polná case³⁰, but he was also known as a supporter of Jewish national tendencies and skeptical, when it came to the Jewish assimilation. It was Czechoslovakia, which granted the Jews a status of nationality in 1921, when they could choose between Czechoslovak, German, Hungarian and Jewish identities. This, however, contributed to the complex problem of Jewish identity in Czechoslovakia.

The Czech Lands were not only the place of Jewish identity plurality or even confusion, but also – as Tara Zahra describes it- of a fight for the education of children in the way, which would suppose the national cause: be it Czech or German³¹. In my thesis, I will explore the norms and values transmitted by the children's literature to the Jewish youth as a part of the national and identity struggle among Czech assimilationists, German assimilationists and Zionist. Children are the

²⁹ Miroslav Hroch, *V narodnim zajmu: Pozadavky a cile evropskych narodnich hnutí devatenáctého století ve srovnávací perspektivě (Knihnice dějin a současnosti) (Czech Edition)* (Praha: Nakl. Lidové noviny, 1999).

³⁰ A case of blood libel, in which Masaryk publicly stepped out in defence of the Jews. See the chapter on Masaryk.

³¹ Tara Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls: National Indifference and the Battle for Children in the Bohemian Lands, 1900-1948*, 2nd edition ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008). 1-12.

most conservative of societies³², this is why I am hoping to find the shaping values hidden in between the lines of children's stories and place them within a framework of different Jewish identities in the Czech Lands.

3 Jewish Juvenile Literature as a Mirror of Identity Search

3.1 *We Are All Czechs Now: Židovské besídky as a Textbook of Czech-Jewish Assimilation*

*"Pocházíme-li od Germánů nebo Slovanů,
od Semitů nebo Jafetitů, to jedno jest- nyní
jsme Češi všichni."*³³

When searching for a piece of juvenile literature that would represent the Czech-Jewish movement, the choice was not too broad. There were Czech-language Zionist periodicals such as *Jaldut* and *El Al*, but it would have been a great mistake to judge them as Czech-Jewish merely by their language. They were rather Jewish national with a smaller or greater degree of the Czechoslovak political identity and every now and then a trace of a Czech cultural assimilation, which was, indeed quite a commonplace phenomenon, but no real programmatic focus on the Czech-Jewish (as opposed to German-Jewish or Czechoslovak-Jewish program). Fortunately, there are the volumes of *Židovské besídky* representing the stream of Czech-Jewish assimilatory ideology in its purest form. The definite drawback of the four volumes is the lack of reader feedback and peer-written accounts. On the other hand, the in this case omnipotent adult figure of the editor and author can provide information on what

³² Philippe Aries, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* (New York: Vintage, 1965), 66.

³³ The speech of rabbi Saul Izák Kaempf in Prague in Richard Feder, "Rok 1848.," *Židovské besídky : pro zábavu a poučení mládeže židovské. Kniha druhá* (1920): 80.

exactly it was the older generation of the Czech-Jewish movement wanted to educate their youth in, which figures they wanted to present to the readership and what values they stressed. Also, it is important the note, that the Czech-Jewish movement was gradually declining throughout the course of appearance of *Židovské besídky*. When Czechoslovakia was established in 1918 and the Jews gained some trust in the new state basing on Czech national and cultural values, there was no need of any pronounced Czechness anymore. As Soukupová stressed: “*The Jews came to the horizon of the Czechness and so they had to define their Jewishness.*”³⁴

The first book of *Židovské besídky* appeared even before the establishment of the First Czechoslovak Republic in the war year of 1912, the next two volumes appeared in 1920 and 1924 respectively and the fourth and last book of the cycle appeared after WWII in 1948. The cycle of short didactic stories, historical surveys, poems, short biographies and philosophical and theological texts was compiled by the well-known Bohemian rabbi Richard Feder (1875 - 1970), who also contributed to the Hebrew language instruction by writing a Hebrew textbook *Ha Safah Ha Ivrit* and an even more popular instruction book *Haleluja*, both of which were reedited in the 2000's. He was a known figure active in the social life and honored for his didactic work with the Jewish youth.

Rabbi Feder was born in a small Bohemian town of Václavice (near Benešov) to a poor Jewish family. He completed his secondary education both in Benešov and in Prague and pursued his university studies at the philosophical faculty in Vienna,

³⁴ Blanka Soukupová, “Identita Čechů Židů v Nové Evropské Realitě,” *Židovská menšina v Československu ve třicátých letech : sborník přednášek z cyklu ve Vzdělávacím a kulturním centru Židovského muzea v Praze v říjnu 2003 až červnu 2004* (2004): 38.

where he also attended the rabbinical seminary. After his studies, Feder was active as a rabbi in Kojetín, Louny, Roudnice and for more than thirty years in Kolín, where he also taught at a secondary school. He was an active supporter of the Czech-Jewish movement and contributed to the Czech-Jewish periodical *Kalendář českožidovský*.³⁵ After the Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia, Feder recognized the danger the Czechoslovak Jews were facing and attempted several emigration projects for the entire Jewish community of Kolin, but none of them succeeded. He was deported to Theresienstadt along with his family and even in the ghetto, he fulfilled his duties of a rabbi and a moral role model for his fellow inmates. While his family perished, Feder himself survived the Shoah and saw the end of the war still in Theresienstadt. After the war, Feder returned to Kolín and worked hard on the renewal of the Jewish community there. Later in his life, he served as the chief rabbi for Moravia in Brno.³⁶

The pronounced Czech-Jewish assimilatory orientation of Richard Feder is very much reflected in his *Židovské besídky*, which were mainly oriented towards Jewish youth of the secondary school age. Feder wrote in a very polished and cultivated Czech without using any Hebrew words within the text, unless they were religious terminology that could not have been easily translated to Czech. The curious thing about the lexical structure of *Židovské besídky* is not only the Ashkenazic pronunciation marked in the very few Hebrew words used (this was still a commonplace to teach and use the Ashkenazic pronunciation of Hebrew, before it gradually made way to the modern Hebrew with the Zionist ideology), but also the

³⁵ The Czech-Jewish Calendar

³⁶ Michal Frankl. "Richard Feder," www.holocaust.cz, <http://www.holocaust.cz/cz2/history/people/feder> (accessed June 4, 2011).

fact, that Feder is in fact using very Christian vocabulary, so instead of *Torah*, he would often use *Písmo svaté*.³⁷ This was not an unknown phenomenon also for other periodicals, such as *Jaldut*, where the Jewish children did not go to a *synagogue* for their Shabbat prayers, not even to a *temple* anymore; they went to *church*.³⁸

This does not in any way mean that Feder was attributing Christian religious values to Judaism or making any conversion appellation, quite on the contrary: “*One can’t leave Jewishness, one can’t take it off, one can’t disclaim it, one can’t get rid of it and one can’t even discuss it.*”³⁹ So the question for Feder was not abandoning Judaism or Jewishness, but rather incorporating both into the broader spectrum of Czechness: “*Jewishness won’t perish, it will just finish modeling the Czechness.*”⁴⁰

All in all, *Židovské besídky* are following the path of Czech-Jewish apologetic tendencies, similar to the German-Jewish ones of the *Haskalah* or the later Graetzian concept of Jewish history. Feder points out the constant undeserved suffering of the Jews, who he still calls a nation while claiming the belonging to the Czech nation at the same time. The most prominent motif of such writings is the recurring image of a good, moral and educated Jew being the role model for the Czech population.

One case to illustrate the rest is the lachrymose story of a young Josef Havlasa and his Jewish mother as published in the third volume of *Židovské besídky*.⁴¹ The old Havlasa was a hard working honest Czech man showing a great laxity towards his religion, Catholicism. He married a god-fearing Jewish woman, who never left the

³⁷ The Holy Scripture

³⁸ “Msta se nevyplácí,” *Jaldut*, January 1937, 55.

³⁹ Soukupová, “Identita Čechů Židů v nové evropské realitě,” 36.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Richard Feder, “Vzpomínky žebračského studenta,” *Židovské besídky : pro zábavu a poučení mládeže židovské. Kniha třetí* (1920): 81.

faith of her fathers, but realized it would be better for the children to be baptized and raised in Catholic faith. To avoid the mocking from their Catholic neighbors and to save her children from the fate of outsiders, the Jewish mother started vigorously studying the Bible and also some theological works in order to educate her children as proper Christians. She succeeded and raised the most pious and knowledgeable children in the whole village. Especially her son Joseph was exceptionally talented and earned praise and admiration not only from his peers, but also from the local priest. The little Joseph and his mother dreamed that Joseph would study one day, but they were poor and could not afford to keep the child in the city. The Jewish mother, however, refused to give up, took Joseph and went to a nearby city to look for some charitable people to offer room and board for the boy. When she went to the Christians, she only met rejection, but she always received a warm welcome and an assurance of good care for the boy in Jewish households, even though little Joseph was a practicing Catholic. Thanks to Jewish charity, little Joseph received his education and became a great and honored man. When Joseph's mother was telling the story of the Jewish charity to a Czech carter, who gave them a ride back to their village, the carter remarked: "*Yep, 'em Jews, they're supporting each other and Christian folk, too, but look at us! We're only lookin' to tear the last piece of bread from the other's mouth, we're such dirty scruffs!*"⁴²

In fact, *Židovské besídky* is filled with stories of a similar orientation, constantly pointing out the moral credit of Jews as opposed to the Christians, while still carefully measuring the amount of criticism towards the Czech population only to achieve the feeling of a moral duty of the Czechs to accept their Jewish neighbors in the broader

⁴² Ibid.

circle of the Czech family. Feder follows the interest to introduce Jews as carriers of education and literacy and to awaken pride in the Jewish youth; that kind of pride, which would then help them integrate into and to contribute to the growth and progress of the Czech nation. As Feder himself remarked: "*The nation of the book is the nation of culture and the nation of culture are the pioneers of progress and freedom.*"⁴³

Another means of transmission of the idea of belonging to the Czech nation are legends set in Bohemia describing idyllic coexistence of Czechs and Jews, but also historical surveys, which keep a certain degree of credibility and which are not subject to the programmatic idealization so often practiced in *Židovské besídky* and also in the adult Czech-Jewish literature, such as *Rozvoj*⁴⁴. So, for example, Feder featured the story of Shimon Abeles, the famous blood libel story of early modern Prague.⁴⁵ Feder, however, uses this story to point out to suffering of the Jews and their moral credit, following so the typical Graetzian apologetic historiography.

In order to reinforce the youth's affiliation to the Czech land, Feder also reprinted the

⁴³ Richard Feder, "Židé a knihy," *Židovské besídky* : pro zábavu a poučení mládeže židovské. Kniha třetí (1924): 17.

"Národ knihy jest národem kultury a národ kultury jest průkopníkem pokroku, svobody."

⁴⁴ It is important to note, that *Rozvoj* could never top the popularity of the German Zionist oriented periodica such as *Selbstwehr* or *Juedische Volksstimme*. This also shows that the Czech-Jewish assimilatory movement was on the decline and giving way to the Jewish national and Czechoslovak political identities.

⁴⁵ Daniel Soukup, "Šimon Abeles: Zrození barokní legendy," *Czech Literature* no. 3 (2009): 346-71, www.ceeol.com.

The 12-year old Jewish boy Shimon Abeles wanted to get baptized by the Prague jesuits. His father Lazar Abeles along with another Jewish man, Loebl Kurtzhandel, supposedly killed the boy in order to prevent him from abandoning the Jewish faith (1694). Lazar Abeles hanged himself in prison, as the Christian sources say "under the weight of his bad conscience", and as Feder claims: rather under the weight of the interrogation methods. Loebl Kurtzhandel was tortured and "voluntarily" accepted Christianity before his execution.

curious poem by Hugo Freund⁴⁶ on the arrival of Jews to the Czech Lands, with
appellation to the Czechs for acceptance and the reassurance, that the Jews would
only bring prosperity to the Czechs.

*"Slyš, dí tu Libuše, mé prorocství:
vez, malý národ sem kdys zavítá
do počtu malý, velký silami
jenž Boha jediného pouze zná*

*Ten zavítá sem, nemá domova
byl světem štván, je poutí znavený
a žádat bude moje potomky
by poskytli mu místa k bydlení
by poskytli mu svojí ochrany
ó, přijměte ten národ, přijměte,
jen ku blahu to bude národu,
jen štěstí přinesou mu cizinci."⁴⁷*

In this poem, Hugo Freund is rephrasing the founding legend of Prague, where the
legendary princess Libuše with a prophetic gift, speaks out her prophecy of a "*big
city reaching the stars with its fame*,"⁴⁸ This time, however, it is the friendly
acceptance of Jews articulated by Libuše and so creating a desired image of the
Czech-Jewish brotherhood dictated by a legendary Czech princess.

⁴⁶ This poem originally appeared in *Kalendář českožidovský*

⁴⁷ Hugo Freund, "Příchod Židů do Čech," *Židovské besídky : pro zábavu a poučení mládeže židovské. Kniha druhá* (1920): 39.

"Hear, says Libuše, my prophecy:
a people will come here
small in numbers, but great in power
knowing one God only

They will come here, homeless
driven around the world and tired from the journey
and they will ask my descendants
to give them a place to dwell
and their protection

Oh, accept the people, do accept it
it will only do well to the nation
those strangers will only bring luck"

⁴⁸ The legend of Libuše and especially the "city reaching the stars" can be found as early as in the 12th century in *Chronica Boemorum* of Cosmas and was gladly accepted, rewritten and edited with the growth of the Czech national consciousness, so that the famous sujet can be found in Jirásek and other literary figures of the fin-de-siècle Czech cultural scene.

Last, but not least, it is quite interesting to take the choice of role model figures presented in *Židovské besídky* into account. An important role was ascribed to the German *maskilim* and especially Moses Mendelssohn, who for the Czechness' sake, is consequently referred to as "Mojžíš Mendelssohn" (although this was not an uncommon practice at that time to use the Czech equivalents of foreign names) and who is playing a key role as an identification figure. Mendelssohn is looked up to not only as a philosopher and a cultural icon, but mostly for his ability to bring the Jews and the Christians closer together and as a spiritual father of the German-Jewish assimilation. This role of Mendelssohn only supports the statement made by Blanka Soukupová, that the Czech-Jewish assimilation movement looked up to the German model as to the successful assimilation program worth following.⁴⁹ Another personality from the German milieu celebrated in *Židovské besídky* and offered as a role model for the Czech-Jewish youth was the 19th century Austrian poet, social activist, journalist and indeed a man of many talents, Ludwig August Frankl. It is true, that he was born in a small town of Chrast near Chrudim in Bohemia, but he was German-speaking and is generally included in the bulk of Austrian/German literature, as he lived, published and worked mostly in Vienna. In *Židovské besídky*, however, the Viennese connection of Frankl is suppressed to a great extent and the emphasis is put on the Bohemian heritage of Frankl; Frankl "took the material for his work from the Czech history, as he loved the Czech land, the Czech people and only German-language education prevented him from being a Czech poet."⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Soukupová, "Identita Čechů Židů v nové evropské realitě," 42.

⁵⁰ Feder, *Kniha třetí*, 107.

"že látku k svým pracím volil si z českých dějin, onť miloval českou zemi, český lid a jen německá škola zavinila, že se nestal českým básníkem."

Frankl's slightly younger contemporary and fellow poet, Siegfried Kapper, celebrated as a spiritual father of the whole Czech-Jewish movement, however, was not prevented from becoming a Czech poet (although greatly misunderstood by his Czech Gentile colleagues of his time). The whole idea of Czech-Jewish assimilation that the figure of Kapper is symbolizing is the reason why Feder is constantly coming back to his work, reprinting his short stories and poems and quoting Kapper frequently. Kapper is presented as an ideal role model for the Czech-Jewish youth and a figure worth studying and following, because he was the first one to formulate the thought permeating through the whole bulk of *Židovské besídky* that "*a Jew belongs to the nation he was born and raised in; the Czech Jew to the Czech nation.*"⁵¹

Although Feder's *Židovské besídky* was a well-written didactic work aiming at the union of the Czechs and the Jews, it is lacking the feedback of the youth and in the strong concurrence of the Zionist youth movements of the 1920's, the 19th century idea of Czech-Jewish assimilation did not stand too much chance among the youth. This could be documented by the fact, that there were many more Zionist and Czechoslovak-Zionist pieces of literature for the youth and the Czech-Jewish ideology was on the decline. *Židovské besídky*, however archaic for their time already and still lingering on on 19th century literature and behavior models, as if there was no reflection of the new political reality whatsoever, is still the only source of children's literature containing and spreading the very essence of the Czech-Jewish movement, which was gradually fading to make way for the Czechoslovak or Jewish national

⁵¹ Max Lederer, "Ben Oni," *Židovské besídky: pro zábavu a poučení mládeže židovské. Kniha třetí* (1924): 105.

"on prvý vyslovil myšlenku, že Žid patří národu, v němž se zrodil a vyrostl, český Žid českému."

identities.

3.2 The Jewish "Tatíček Masaryček"⁵²

I decided to dedicate one chapter to the interpretation of the personality and phenomenon of the first Czechoslovak president, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk. Not only he was indeed an important figure for the Jews and was very well received not only in Palestine, but also by the Jews in the United States and elsewhere⁵³, but he also was a figure creating the cultural and ideological climate of the First Czechoslovak Republic and Czechoslovaks, Czechoslovak Jews among them, built on that Masaryk tradition for the times to come. Another reason why it is of convenience to explore the writings on Masaryk in Jewish juvenile literature is simply the fact, that such periodicals reinforced the Masaryk legend and made it a repetitive theme, founding a Masaryk hagiography in a certain sense, or even a cult of Masaryk – the local modern age Messiah. Before exploring deeper the relation of Czechoslovak Jews and Masaryk, it is important to note, that such a glorification of the first Czechoslovak president was in no way a sole Jewish phenomenon, but a given guideline officially propagated and believed in in the First Czechoslovak Republic, especially among the Czechs/Slovaks and among the Jews.

Also, the superlatives connected to Masaryk's name are definitely not a specialty of Jewish children's literature, but they were a golden standard of the Czechoslovak Jewish press, both German and Czech. As Miroslava Kyselá claims: "nobody in the

⁵² tatíček Masaryček - little daddy Masaryk- a popular and up to this day generally known nickname for the first president of Czechoslovakia.

⁵³ Pojar, Miloš. "T.G. Masaryk's Relations with Jews." *Judaica Bohemiae* 38 (2002): 160-81.

Jewish press said one bad word about Masaryk during 1920's and 30's.⁵⁴ Here, I would take Kyselá with a grain of salt and interpret this statement as a generalization committed in order to illustrate the overall Masaryk-friendly climate among the Bohemian and Moravian Jewry. However, as Hillel Kieval points out, Masaryk was also often a source of bitter disappointment and misunderstanding, especially in the circles which expected Masaryk's criticism the least – the Czech Jewish assimilatory circles, that is, for whom Masaryk did not have much understanding.⁵⁵

In fact, Kyselá herself in her research on the German Jewish press in interwar Czechoslovakia might have worked still under the holy Masaryk legend, in fact so holy, that it persists in the Czech culture and sometimes also in the scientific literature to this very day. Also, not only the general admiration of the first president, but also the legend of his philosemitism survives. The latter is still alive in the popular notions of not only Czechs, but also of Jews (it is enough to see Israeli topography and see how many places are named after Masaryk)⁵⁶ Further into this chapter, I will follow Hillel Kieval, who dared to question Masaryk, the philosemite and explore the controversy of Masaryk the antisemitic philosemite, or rather the realistic antisemite, in order to return to the myth creation (by means of children's literature in this very case) among the Czechoslovak Jewry.

It is important to note, that children's literature is generally simplistic and serves as an instant pack of concentrated values. So in the Masaryk case, the main task of such literature was obviously to reinforce the exaggerated positive image of Masaryk (and

⁵⁴ Miroslava Kyselá, *Jüdische Volksstimme 1919 - 1934 : Thematische und sprachliche Analyse*. Ostrava : Ostravská univerzita Ostrava, Filozofická fakulta, 2002. 27-50.

⁵⁵ Hillel Kieval, ed., *Insiders and Outsiders: Dilemmas of East European Jewry (Littman Library of Jewish Civilization)*, ed. Richard I. Cohen, Jonathan Frankel and Stefani Hoffman (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2010), 103-19.

⁵⁶ Pojar, "T.G. Masaryk's Relations with Jews," 160-81.

just on the next level, the image of the Republic) and build a solid basis for the loyalty for the “state of nationalities” such as the habit was in the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. Another role, which I personally ascribe the Masaryk cult, is not only the custom of “praising the Kaiser“, but also a different, deeper role connected to the anxieties and worries of the Czechoslovak Jewry facing and coping with political changes.

Although Masaryk still has the popular reputation of the only philosemite among the interwar central European statesmen, Hillel Kieval and not only him recently revised this black-and-white notion of Masaryk and set it into a more reasonable and credible frame of an antisemite in heart and a prejudice-fighting realist in the mind. This concept, in fact, should not be controversial at all, as it was Masaryk himself, who addressed his childhood superstitions in a literary conversation with his friend, a writer and another icon and honored social figure of the First Czechoslovak Republic, Karel Čapek. It was, indeed, Masaryk himself, telling about his mother planting anti-Semitic prejudice into the head of her little son. Masaryk confesses that he avoided the Jewish houses and did not want to play with Jewish children, although they showed interest in playing with him. All through his childhood, Masaryk was checking the hands of the Jews he met for the traces of blood, a sign of the ritual murder.⁵⁷

How paradoxical and absurd it is, that it was the very same Masaryk, who stepped out criticizing the Polná affair⁵⁸, also known as the Hilsner affair, and thus earned his

⁵⁷ Karel Čapek, *Hovory s TGM* (Prague: Československý Spisovatel, 1969), 28-29.

⁵⁸ Arno Pařík, “Vražda v Polné,” Židovské muzeum v Praze, <http://www.jewishmuseum.cz/cz/vystavy/czpolna.htm> (accessed June 4, 2011). A case of suspected ritual murder that happened in the village of Polná in Bohemia in March 1899. A young woman Anežka Hružová was found dead with a wound on her neck that made the officials suspect that the murderer was a young Jewish man Leopold Hilsner. Under the

favorable name among the Jewry. But again, Masaryk alone explained, that his main concern were definitely not the Jews, but rather the consciousness and reason of the Czech nation. It was not the Jew Leopold Hilsner or other Bohemian Jews possibly threatened by pogroms and riots, but his very own, Czech nation, which he wanted to renew and purge of unreasonable medieval prejudice.⁵⁹ By courageously speaking out in the Polná affair, Masaryk gained a good name among world Jewry and his activity in the case provided the much needed reassurance for the Jews, who suddenly had to cope with the brand new political reality of 1918. Also the children perceived the changes with a certain anxiety and often, they found the reassurance exactly in the Masaryk figure. Joseph Wechsberg, a journalist from Moravská Ostrava, gives an account of those times in his autobiography *Die Manschettenknöpfe meines Vaters*. Joseph Wechsberg was 11 years old, when the First republic was established. He describes the historical event from the perspective of a young boy with following words:

“I was a pupil in the 3B class of the Gymnasium around the end of 1918, as the picture of our Emperor Karl I was removed from the class...After a while, a picture of a bearded man with a pince-nez. Under the picture stood: Tomáš G. Masaryk, President of the Czechoslovak Republic.”⁶⁰

Further on, Wechsberg describes, how his Jewish class teacher would tell them about Masaryk's pursuits in the Polná affair and how this particular fact gave the 11-

social pressure of the public and escalating anti-Jewish riots, Hilsner was found guilty, although the evidence was less than convincing, and sentenced to a capital punishment. After the fierce protest of T.G.Masaryk, the Hilsner affair was revisited in 1900 and the capital punishment sentence was cancelled. In the revisited cause, however, Hilsner was sentenced to death again, this time also for a murder of another young woman (the evidence was more than dubious and chaotic again). This, however, was changed to a life-long prison sentence by the mercy of the Emperor.

⁵⁹ Kieval, Hillel J. *Languages of Community: The Jewish Experience in the Czech Lands*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000.

⁶⁰ Joseph Wechsberg, *Die Manschettenknöpfe meines Vaters*. (Munich: Hugendubel, 1982), 223. *“Ich war Schüler der Klasse 2B im Gymnasium, gegen Ende des Jahres 1918, als das Bild von Kaiser Karl I. aus unserem Klassenzimmer entfernt wurde....Nach einer Weile erschien an der Wand das Bild eines bärtigen Mannes mit einem Kneifer. Darunter stand: Tomáš G. Masaryk, Präsident der tschechoslowakischen Republik.”*

year-old Wechsberg the feeling of security and comfort.

In the adult Jewish press, comforting and glorifying accounts of Masaryk can be found, some of them using almost messianic rhetoric.

“Is it a wonder that the new President of the City of Hundred Towers could march in in triumph, greeted by the nation’s rejoicing? The nicest hopes are connected to his presidency.”⁶¹

Some authors of the Jewish juvenile periodicals even went as far as comparing Masaryk to Moses.

“We, the young Jews, promise that the laws given to the nations by the Great Teacher T.G.Masaryk will be as sacred to us as those our Great Teacher Moses have us thousands of years ago.”⁶²

It is true, that Masaryk was sympathizing with the Zionist movement and was especially favoring the cultural Zionism as presented by Achad Ha’am, while seeing the possible Jewish state in Palestine as a utopia, rather than something achievable in the near future. Masaryk respected some Zionist writers, such as the above mentioned Achad Ha’am or Max Nordau.⁶³ The Czech-Jewish movement, which would have been expected to attract Masaryk’s sympathy as it was openly proclaiming assimilatory politics and the readiness to become Czechs and support the Czech national cause, met a disappointing rejection from Masaryk, as he found such a movement “ridiculous”⁶⁴ This might be a part of the reason, why the ones

⁶¹ J. Eisenberg, “Präsident Masaryk,” *Jüdische Volksstimme*, 28.3.1919. www.compactmemory.de. *“Ist es dann ein Wunder, dass der neue Präsident in die hunderttürmige Stadt wie ein Triumphator, von der ganzen Nation mit Jubel begrüßt, einziehen konnte? Die schönsten Hoffnungen werden an seine Präsidentschaft geknüpft”*

⁶² “President Masaryk”, *Jaldut*, 1937. s. 27.

“My mladí Židé, slibujeme, že zákony, jež dal národům Velký učitel T.G.Masaryk, budou nám stejně svatými, jako ty, které nám před tisíci lety dal náš Velký učitel Mojžíš.”

⁶³ Pojar, “T.G. Masaryk’s Relations with Jews,” 160-81.

⁶⁴ Kieval, *Languages of Community*, 2000.

turning to the Czechoslovak political identity were paradoxically Zionists, creating a curious overlapping of the Jewish national and *staatsreu* feelings at the very same time without openly expressing much contradiction.

Unfortunately, there are not enough sources to document the German-Jewish (non-Zionist) attitude towards Masaryk expressed in children's literature and so in children's values, although the lack of primary material might also be precisely the telling piece of information, taking into account that the pro-German identification of the Jews was gradually decreasing within the 1920's and especially 1930's.⁶⁵ The only German language children's periodicals available were those of leftist Zionist focus and they did not address Masaryk much. The Czech language sources, however, are overflowing with news about Masaryk, stories about Masaryk, letters and poems of children to Masaryk and other pieces forming a firm culture of admiration and after Masaryk's death in 1937, the promise to live up to his legacy. As a young reader of *Jaldut*, Pavla Kleinová, put it:

*"Dnes v noci se mi zdálo,
že jsem do Prahy běžela,
spěchala jsem celou cestu,
bych tatíčka viděla*

*Seděl ve velikém křesle
hlavu v ruce opřenou
pousmál se na mne vlídně
kývl na přivítanou*

*Vítej mi, dívěnko milá,
přístup klidně ke mně blíž
a pověz mi bez ostychu
copak ty mi přinášíš?*

*Jenom to, že mám Tě ráda,
chtěla jsem Ti povědět,*

⁶⁵ Hillel Kieval, ed., *Insiders and Outsiders*, 106.

*vždycky jsem si tolik přála
do Tvých očí pohledět.*

*Za Tvou práci, za Tvou lásku
chtěla jsem Ti děkovat,
za tisíce jiným dětí
přišla jsem to zvěstovat*

*Překrásný jsem to sen měla,
avšak smutné probuzení,
že tatíčka Masaryka
více mezi námi není.*

*Naše dětská srdce truchlí,
vroucně, upřímně Tě želí,
všechny děti – do jednoho
tolik jsme Tě rády měly.*

*Budeme Tě vzpomínati
a odkazu Tvého dbáti,
poctivými, upřímnými,
čestnými se chceme státí.*⁶⁶

⁶⁶ "President Masaryk", *Jaldut*, 1937. 26.

"Tonight I had a dream,
I was running to Prague,
I was in a hurry the whole way,
to see daddy Masaryk

He was sitting in a big armchair
his head leaning on his palm
he kindly smiled at me
an nodded hello

welcome, my dear girl
and step a little closer to me
and tell me without fear
what you are brining?

Merely the fact that I love you,
this is what I wanted to say
and I always wished so dearly
to look into your eyes.

For your work and for your love
I wanted to thank you,
for thousands of other children
I came to tell you

what a pretty dream I had,
waking up, it felt so sad,
that our daddy Masaryk dear
is not here, as he lies dead.

A by far more realistic picture of Masaryk is offered by rabbi Richard Feder in his *Židovské besídky*, a collection of short texts aiming at a slightly older readership, mostly Czech speaking Jewish gymnasial youth. In *Židovské besídky*, Feder published polemical essays on Masaryk by Dr. Otakar Outh, offering also the other side of Masaryk and portraying the president as a great man, but still just a man and thus, a man with his own mistakes and errors.⁶⁷ But even in spite of an exceptional criticism and realism of the writings on Masaryk in *Židovské besídky*, the frequency of Masaryk-themed articles and the stress on Masaryk's effort to eradicate "savage prejudice among the Czechs."⁶⁸ It is not a coincidence, that Feder is following the path of Czech-Jewish assimilatory tendencies and so tends to be paradoxically more critical towards the head of the state, than the Czechoslovak/Zionists, who were uncritically accepting of Masaryk on the pages of their juvenile literature.

In spite of the recent criticism of Masaryk and also the expressed criticism from the side of the Czech-Jewish assimilationist, I would still ascribe the first Czechoslovak "liberator" president a triple role in the value building of Jewish youth as expressed in the literature. First of all, there has been an established tradition of loyalty to the head of a multinational state, such as it was seen under the Monarchy. As Hillel Kieval claims, the Czechoslovak Jews ceased to recognize Czechoslovakia as a Wilsonian

Our children's hearts are mourning,
in a warm and honest sorrow
all of us children, without an exception
loved you so much.

We will be remembering you
and care for your legacy,
honest, sincere, honorable
just like you we want to be."

⁶⁷ Outh, Otakar. "Masaryk a Židé" *Židovské besídky* 3 (1924): 4-18.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

model state, but rather a state of nationalities, such as the Habsburg empire was.⁶⁹ It would, however, be an oversimplification to be satisfied with the tradition and continuity as an explanation of the immense popularity of Masaryk and the glorification of his personality in many cases. For the young Jews, it was not simply the old “praying for the Kaiser“, but a leaning point and a pathway of moral and ethical values they wanted to follow. So Masaryk was not only a respected statesman, but also a role model of the new ideal Czechoslovak (Jewish or Gentile). In so far, this would not differ from the roles of the Masaryk figure transmitted among the majority population of Czechoslovakia. For Jews, however, Masaryk played a role of a reassuring element helping them to find a way in the changing political situation and the legacy of Masaryk helped them face the new anxieties of the thirties. Especially *Jaldut* was retaining and reinforcing the Masaryk legend in its young readership, which corresponded to the uncritically positive reception of Masaryk by the Czechoslovak Zionist or rather Czechoslovak/Zionist and build a solid ground for the creation of a strong Masaryk legend among Czechoslovak Jews for years to come.

⁶⁹ Kieval, *Insiders and Outsiders*, 104.

3.3 *Jaldut : A Journey into the Depth of the Czechoslovak-Jewish Soul*⁷⁰

*"Vážím si však Republiky
slast i strast s ní sdílím rád
i když židovskou svou zemi
nepřestávám milovat"*⁷¹

While the German-Jewish and Czech-Jewish category was often difficult enough to outline, the children's literature that I marked for the sake of classification as Czechoslovak is even more tricky to categorize. As I abandoned the clear and black-and-white division of the sources already, Czechoslovak-Jewish children's literature is indeed a bridging concept, which could easily connect all literature mentioned and categorized here before. While working with the sources in the previous chapters was the matter of analysis, attributing the Czechoslovak identity patterns to them would not be a harsh contradiction, but rather a result of a synthesis and finding a bridging element, which would connect all the Czech-Jewish, German-Jewish and Zionist tropes and make them peacefully coexist within one unit: Czechoslovak-Jewish children's literature. Applying David Sorkin's theory on German Jewry, it is important to stress the permeability of the boundaries between the the German Jewish minority and the surrounding majority, which integrated the Jews into the

⁷⁰ The title of the chapter is an allusion to a film genre very popular in late 30's Czechoslovakia, the gymnasium student movies such as *Cesta do hlubin študákovy duše* (The Journey *into* the Depth of the Student's Soul), which to a great extent propagated the same values as the children's newspaper *Jaldut*.

⁷¹ "K 28.říjnu," *Jaldut*, October 1936, 25.
*"But I respect the Republic
and gladly share its joy and sorrow
even if I don't stop loving
my Jewish land"*

society on one hand, but set them apart on the other hand and thus created a subculture.⁷² The same structure could be applied also on the Czech-Jewish movement. The Czechoslovak political identity, such as the Austrian monarchy loyalty before 1918⁷³, provided the common roof covering all the subidentities and joining them into one supranational unit.

As already mentioned in the previous chapters, Zionism and the Czechoslovak identities seemed to go hand in hand especially well. Oppenheim⁷⁴ points out the romantic myth under the Zionist youth ideology – the return to the nature, national renaissance in the national territory, the revival of the national language. All that was also reflected in the Czechoslovak youth movements and the state representatives (especially Masaryk) could understand such a striving for national consciousness quite well, as the young Republic was no stranger to such concepts. According to Ezra Mendelssohn, there was a continuation of the inclination of Czech Jews towards German culture from 18th century already, which led to a natural German assimilation. When the Danube monarchy crumbled down, the Jews lost their natural political and language orientation. This caused a curious in-between situation, when the German conditioning of the Czech Jews was not yet quite a matter of history, but the new identity was not completely established yet and the Jews had to find their ways of adapting to this reality. A new Czechoslovak political orientation sure was a solution.

To explore the tropes and motifs characteristic for the Czechoslovak-Jewish self-

⁷² David Sorkin, *The Transformation of German Jewry, 1780-1840* (Detroit, MI.: Wayne State University Press, 1999), 3-9.

⁷³ The Austro-Hungarian citizens (and especially Jewish citizens) were determined by patriotism and loyalty rather than by a feeling of belonging to a certain nation. Marsha Rozenblit, "Sustaining Austrian "national" Identity in Crisis, the Dilemma of the Jews in Habsburgh Austria, 1914-1919," *Constructing Nationalities in East Central Europe* (2005):18.

⁷⁴ Israel Oppenheim, *The Struggle of Jewish Youth for Productivization*, 0 ed. (Boulder [Colo.]: East European Monographs, 1989), 23.

identification, I chose the richest and most diversified source: the children's newspaper *Jaldut*, an illustrated monthly for children and youth of an older school age up to the younger gymnasial age published by *Kruh přátel židovské mládeže*⁷⁵ in Prague, appearing from 1931-1939. *Jaldut* was the periodical with the longest life that I could access within my research and it covered a readership scope of the whole Republic, mostly Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia, but occasionally there are contributions and letters to be found from Slovakia and even Subcarpathian Ruthenia. It covered a wide variety of topics reaching from articles without any Jewish theme whatsoever to Jewish holiday specials, medallions of famous figures of both the Czechoslovak cultural life and the culture life in Palestine, sport reports, peer-written short stories, Palestine reports, Talmudic stories and modern fairy tales. *Jaldut* also contained a section, where the readers could try their luck as authors. Especially this section is important, because it brings closer the really Czechoslovak-Jewish child with his/her worries, joys, expectations and every-day life narratives. This makes *Jaldut* an interactive medium, where an adult supervision and choice of topics is complemented with peer-written articles and vivid reactions of the readership. Due to the variety of topics and the stress on the loyalty to Czechoslovakia and its cultural legacy, *Jaldut* is a perfect example to illustrate the Czechoslovak-Jewish political and cultural identity.

The fact that *Jaldut* could be also considered a Zionist periodical is not in contradiction with the Czechoslovak focus. Quite on the contrary, both Zionism and the formation of Czechoslovak identity (supranational rather than national, although basing to a greater part on the Czech tradition) were both relatively new

⁷⁵ The circle of friend of Jewish youth

phenomena, as opposed to the well established Czech and German national traditions. This is why both Jewish national and Czechoslovak identities needed reinforcement in the form of a stronger back-up ideology. In the Czech context, Zionism with its emphasis on the revival of the Hebrew language, Jewish traditions and education was often compared to the Czech national revival, a comparison made by both Jews and non-Jews. For Czech intellectuals, including Masaryk, the Zionist movement in Bohemia was acceptable particularly because of its emphasis on cultural renewal.⁷⁶ This is why the two elements, the Czechoslovak one and the Zionist one are overlapping in *Jaldut*, creating a common Czechoslovak-Jewish platform.

The loyalty to Czechoslovakia is well demonstrated on the “hagiography” of Masaryk and later also his successor, Edvard Beneš (although to a lesser extent) in *Jaldut*. The Masaryk image was given enough space on its own in the previous chapter and it is no surprise that he was popular, but the really interesting phenomenon is the Beneš reception. *Jaldut* was bringing short accounts of Beneš’ life, stories from his student years and his quotations and never forgot to mention that Beneš was indeed the carrier of the Masaryk legacy. Also the children themselves were very happy to see the president on their strolls through Prague and reported on it with great excitement in the letter section, such as the little Eva Weinsteinová did:

*"We thought it was our Mr. President Beneš and the police officer confirmed that. I saw Mr. President for the very first time and was very excited"*⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Čapková, *Češi, Němci, Židé*, 124.

⁷⁷ Eva Weinsteinová “Jak Jsem Viděla Poprvé Našeho P. Prezidenta,” *Jaldut*, June 1936, 245. “Domnívali jsme se, že je to pan prezident Beneš, což nám strážník potvrdil. Viděla jsem pana prezidenta po prvé a měla jsem velikou radost.”

Of course, Beneš could never reach that immense popularity of Masaryk, but was still respected and looked up to as Masaryk's follower.

Another way of expressing the Czechoslovak identity was sport. First of all, sport is up to this day a very popular and accessible means of expressing national feelings and/or patriotism. Sport activities and fandom was even more stressed in the Jewish periodicals as many of the readers were involved in *Makabi*, a Jewish youth movement oriented towards physical culture, a Jewish parallel to the Czech *Sokol* and also because physical culture started by the Zionist concept of *Muskeljude*⁷⁸ was still relatively new. Jewish youth demonstrated their fitness to integrate into the Czechoslovak family by following Czechoslovak teams and actively playing sports. Indeed, sport related articles and shorts stories take up a very prominent position especially in *Jaldut* and they help express the loyalty to Czechoslovakia, sometimes in a very naive form of children's poems celebrating the sport success of Czechoslovak teams:

*"ach, to je to mužstvo ČSR,
které už hrálo mnoho, mnoho her
protože všechny vyhrálo
jenom jednu prohrálo
ve světovém mistrovství druhé se stalo."*⁷⁹

This, of course, is the expression of the Czechoslovak pride stripped of any particular Jewish features. *Jaldut*, however, contained also articles with a strong apologetic tendency, especially when it came to sports and the imagined unfitness of the Jews

⁷⁸ Muscle-Jew, a new image of a physically fit Jew, such as in the works of Max Nordau

⁷⁹ H. Kohn, "Mužstvo ČSR" *Jaldut*, October 1934, 287.

*"Oh, this is the team of the Czechoslovak Republic,
that has won many games already
and because it kept winning
and lost only once
it won the second place in the world championship."*

for physical activities that the authors of *Jaldut* so wanted to refute, following the general Zionist trend of the physical renewal of the Jew and also the general trend set by different sport associations, which were flourishing. This is a typical example of pointing out the contemporary Jewish vitality as opposed to the past image of the frail and pale *bocher*⁸⁰

“The greater and greater oppression of Jews in the Middle Ages was drawing Jews apart from sports. When we ponder, what it means for a man from the point of view of sports, when he has to live in stuffy narrow streets with no sunshine, we have to be astonished, how fast the Jews liberated themselves from the ghetto captivity and how promptly they gained a significance in sports in the 19th and 20th century.”⁸¹

An interesting short story set in Czechoslovakia and populated with young Czechoslovak characters without explicitly mentioning of their ethnic or religious background, is the story called “Freinds”,⁸² describing a life journey of a young boxer, Jarda a true self-made man, his good-hearted and understanding Grandmother and his best friend and manager Ferda. Not only that they are keen sportsmen, but they also have practical and rather non-intellectual professions: they are mechanics. The short story stresses the importance of physical fitness, friendly cooperation and family values and builds up a role model for the readership: a young Czechoslovak sportsmen coming from a modest economic background who made it to the most famous box rings in America and married a daughter of an American millionaire, who is as sporty, natural and friendly as the Czechoslovaks back home and not “*some American dressy girl with a painted mouth, prolonged lashes, peroxide hair and the*

⁸⁰ Bocher – a yeshiva student, an iconic image of an underfed frail Jew abstaining from any physical activity and constantly engaging in intellectual activities.

⁸¹ *Jaldut*, Židé A Sport, February 1936, 109.

“Větší a větší utiskování židů ve středověku vzdalovalo je sportu. Když si tak pomyslíme, co to znamená pro člověka s hlediska sportovního, žít v úzkých uličkách bez vzduchu a bez slunce, musíme žasnouti, jak rychle se židé vzpamatovali ze zajetí ghetta a jak rychle nabyli významu ve sportu 19. a 20. století.”

⁸² Hanča Krausová “Kamarádi,” *Jaldut*, June 1935, 333-34.

*fingernails of a predator.*⁸³

As this story is peer-written, it is possible to trace a genuine value system within the naivety of the story and also see a certain desired gender role images. The boys are fair to each other, friendly, sporty, physically strong, fun to be around, successful in their economic activities and considerate to their family. The girls are equal partners and friends to men in their sport and economic activities, while still keeping the family running. This reflects the rapid change of the attitude towards the role of a woman and also to the scope of recognized and unrecognized work.

The letters of the girl readers of *Jaldut* are also showing a shift in the aspirations of the girls and the acceptability of having a job as compared to the *fin-de-siècle* bourgeois idea that having a profession is a shame for a woman, especially one of the higher middle class.⁸⁴ When *Jaldut* asked their readers to write to their peers about their ideal future, it were mostly girls responding and imagining their future in the following way:

*"I will go to the office in order to get a wage. Because I want to keep on with my education, I will attend evening courses."*⁸⁵

*"I would like to keep a book shop, but that costs a lot of money. First I would have to become a bookseller apprentice. And then, when I earn a lot of money, I will be able to establish my own book shop."*⁸⁶

⁸³ Hanča Krausová "Kamarádi," *Jaldut*, June 1935, 333-34.

"nějaká americká parádnice, jak je babička zná z ilustrovaných časopisů, s nabarvenou pusou, prodlouženými řasami, odbarvenými vlasy a nehty dravce."

⁸⁴ For more detailed information on the changes and the gender problematic, see Marion A. Kaplan, *The Making of the Jewish Middle Class: Women, Family, and Identity in Imperial Germany* (Studies in Jewish History (Oxford Paperback)) (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 1994), 137-234.

⁸⁵ Marta Kacjevová "Kdybych si hodně uspořila," *Jaldut*, January 1935, 118.

"Budu chodit do kanceláře, abych dostávala plat. Protože se chci dále vzdělávat, budu navštěvovat večerní kurzy."

⁸⁶ Ruth Iltisová "Moje touha," *Jaldut*, January 1935, 119.

"Chtěla bych mít knihkupectví, ale to stojí hodně peněz. Nejdříve bych musela jít v knihkupectví za prodavačku. Pak, když bych měla hodně peněz, mohla bych si teprve zařídit vlastní"

These letters clearly show the ambitions of the girls following the trend of middle-class women with secondary education becoming secretaries or other “office ladies”. The same girls are also writing about the way they want to furnish their houses, but having a big family and a husband is not mentioned in any of those accounts. It is always the girls stressing their own future activities and dreams, which would confirm a certain shift of the social norms and gender roles in the generation after WWI.

Although *Jaldut* was a Czech language newspaper, it still kept a tradition of the Jewish inclination towards German culture alive. In this case, it was not demonstrated by the language use itself anymore, but by publishing works of German classics and stressing the importance of German cultural figures, especially the ones symbolizing the legacy of German-Jewish assimilation. This trend in *Jaldut* is reaching far into the 1938 and 1939, when the Nazi danger was immanent. This is why there is a choice of German role models limited to the ones accepted by the German-Jewish cultural assimilation or the German-Jewish subculture, as David Sorkin labeled it.⁸⁷ The most frequently celebrated figure in *Jaldut* was without any doubt Heinrich Heine, followed by G.E. Lessing. While *Jaldut* was publishing simplified excerpts of Lessing’s works in Czech, Heine’s verses never appear anywhere, but it is his personality, his life and the anecdotes of his childhood filling the pages. So the young reader can familiarize himself with Heinrich Heine, the enlightened and smart boy and his boyish mischief. At the same time, it is Heine’s Jewishness that is stressed in those short stories under titles such as: “Harry keeps

⁸⁷ *knihkupectví.*
Sorkin, *The Transformation of German Jewry*, 3-9.

the Shabbat.⁸⁸ Here it is specifically the Jewish feature of the German literature which is making the German culture – once so familiar and now connected with anxieties – more human. Indeed, the role of Jewishness as the carrier of humanity is nothing new within the Czechoslovak context, even for the Zionists, Jewishness meant a contribution to the universal humanity, as *“for the nationally conscious Jew, “more Jewishness” can only mean “higher humanity” and any formal Judaism is relevant to him only if it fosters this higher humanity.”*⁸⁹

The by far largest thematic clusters in *Jaldut* are decidedly formed by Zionist and consciously pro-Czechoslovak writing. Not only it was publishing short accounts from all over the Republic and stressing the importance of the newly acquired Subcarpathian province with its Jewish population, but it was also discovering the importance of Czechoslovak cooperation and the connection between the western Jewry of the Czech Lands and partly Slovakia and the eastern Jewry of Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ukraine. So *Jaldut* informs on the Hebrew gymnasium in Mukachevo ascribing it a role of a bridge between western and eastern Jews and stresses its function of a true servant to the Czechoslovak Republic.⁹⁰

The *Staatsvolk* loyalty to Czechoslovakia comes to expression especially in the October/November issues, around October 28th, the Czechoslovak independence day. The young authors and readers were always ready to contribute with a poem or a short article to the Independence Day celebration. The following poem is brilliantly summarizing the general Jewish-Czechoslovak identity composed of the Jewish

⁸⁸ “Kterak Harry světil sobotu,” *Jaldut*, December 1936, 82.

⁸⁹ Hugo Bergmann. “Židovský nacionalism po válce,” *Židovské zprávy*, 13, 4.

⁹⁰ Angelo Goldstein “Hebrejské gymnasium v Mukačevě,” *Jaldut*, December 1934, 17.

national striving and yet political loyalty to Czechoslovakia and the feeling of spiritual affinity to the Czech nation, who also, just like the Jews, had to rediscover their national pride.

"K 28. říjnu

*Třebaže jsem v Čechách zrozen
jiného jsem původu
a mé srdce patří proto
celé mému národu*

*Vážím si však Republiky
slast i strast s ní sdílím rád
i když židovskou svou zemi
nepřestávám milovat*

*Řeči česká milá, sladká
zvuků známých, líbezných,
mám tě rád, však přec se učím
řeči drahé předků svých*

*Klaním se ti, Republiko,
dnes ti chci zde hold svůj vzdát
neboť vím, co znamená to
národ křísit, budovat."⁹¹*

Not only the Jews are portrayed as loyal friends to the Republic, but also the Czechs

⁹¹ "K 28.říjnu," *Jaldut*, October 1936, 25.

"K 28. říjnu

*"Although born in Bohemia
I am of a different descent
and so my whole heart belongs
to my nation*

*But I respect the Republic
and gladly share its joy and sorrow
even if I don't stop loving
my Jewish land*

*You Czech language so sweet and dear
of familiar and pretty sounds
I love you, but I am learning still
the dear language of my fathers*

*I bow to you, Republic
today I want to pay a tribute to you
because I know what it means
to renew and build a nation"*

are praised as good and tolerant friends of the Jews. The friendship is expressed in a similar manner as within the Czech-Jewish circles by stressing the historical affinity between Czechs and Jews, their suffering under a foreign rule and their peaceful coexistence in the Czech Lands. Also, the Jewish sympathies toward the Hussite movement is stressed. Also, *Jaldut* is trying to distance the Jews from the German influence and mostly the ascription of German identity that the Czechs tended to by a dubious apologetic claim, that it was only the Habsburg forcing the prevalently Czech-speaking Jews to speak German.⁹² It is true that the system of *Normalschulen*⁹³ contributed to the German-language affiliation of the Jews of the Czech Lands, but the claim of a forced germanization in *Jaldut* is a strong exaggeration for ideological purposes. The emphasis on the Czechoslovak-Jewish friendship grew with the increasing anxiety induced by the developments west of the Czechoslovak border.

*"The Czechs stayed true to their tradition up to this very day and are giving – as one of the few nations – all the religious and spiritual freedom to the Jews. In case of an unsubstantiated hatred towards Jews, Czechoslovakia stayed a peaceful island of tolerance. This is why we love our Republic wholeheartedly, with all our soul and will protect it in case of distress with all our forces"*⁹⁴

The Czechoslovak liberal democracy did not only have a political image, but also a cultural one reflected also in Jewish children's literature. It was not only Masaryk celebrated in *Jaldut*, but also Karel Čapek as a cultural symbol of the Republic, "a good Czech, a good European and a good man."⁹⁵ Other iconic figures were Vojtěch

⁹² "Židé v Čechách," *Jaldut*, March 1937, 166.

⁹³ See introductory chapter

⁹⁴ "Židé v Čechách," *Jaldut*, March 1937, 166.

"Až dodnes zůstali Češi věrni své tradici a poskytují, jako jeden z mála národů, Židům veškerou náboženskou a duchovní volnost. V případě neodůvodněné nenávisti vůči Židům, zůstala Československá republika pokojným ostrovem snášenlivosti... Proto svou republiku milujeme z celého srdce a z celé duše a budeme ji v době potřeby hájit všemi svými silami."

⁹⁵ Karel Čapek, " *Jaldut*, November 1938, 110.

"Čapek, jsa dobrým Čechem, byl dobrým Evropanem a člověkem."

Rakous⁹⁶ as a symbol of assimilated Czech Jewry and Karel Hynek Mácha, the poet, as a romantic symbol of the Czech national consciousness.

The vast majority of themes, however, are of moderately Zionist character, which comes in a peaceful accord with the Czechoslovak identity. The tropes and motifs of the Zionist writing for children will be explored in the following chapter.

3.4 “*Wir wollen ja bessere Menschen sein!*”⁹⁷:

The values and norms of Jewish youth as expressed in the Czechoslovak youth Zionist periodicals (*Itonenu, Jaldut, El Al*).

In the 1920 and 1930, Zionism was already a well-established stream of ideology with an elaborate branching of interest, reaching from cultural Zionism to the more socialistic streams of the movement.

The Czechoslovak Zionist scene was reaching also from moderate and liberal followers of the cultural Zionism such as postulated by Achad Ha'am and supported by the key political and cultural figures of the Czechoslovak Republic, such as T.G. Masaryk, František Krejčí or Arno Novák.⁹⁸ This created a curious and indeed specific Czechoslovak situation: many a Zionist adopted – besides their obvious Jewish national identification – a Czechoslovak political identity. Also, curiously, some of the Czechoslovak Zionists were born of the Czech-Jewish movement, or as Blanka

⁹⁶ Vojtěch Rakous (1862 - 1935) recte Adalbert Östreicher was a Czech literature author of Jewish origin, a Czech-Jewish assimilationist, who earned his place in the Czech literature with rural themed prosaic works, often also describing the life of Bohemian rural Jews.

⁹⁷ “We wanted to be better people!”

⁹⁸ Čapková, “Československé sionistické hnutí v nových historických souvislostech,” 65.

Soukupová addressed it: "*The Jews came to the horizon of the Czechness and so they had to define their Jewishness.*"⁹⁹ This, of course, was a typical case for the stream of cultural Zionism and "general Zionism"¹⁰⁰, that is Zionism without any special sub-affiliation. The Czechoslovak Zionists still felt the need to express themselves to *Landespolitik*, even if it had to be only an expression of a propagated concept of *avodat hahove*, the work for the present, as a stressed necessity for the prosperity of the Jews in the Diaspora.¹⁰¹ Such a stream was represented by the organization *Bar Kochba*, an intellectual-based bastion of moderate Zionism, which built up a solid basis and reasonable legacy for the next generation of Zionists in the Czech Lands. A children's source to be attributed to this stream of moderate and indeed Czechoslovak oriented Zionism would be *Jaldut*, a periodical not programmatically Zionist, but still featuring news and articles from Palestine and generally favorable to the developments in *Eretz Israel* and the settling of Palestine. This, however, does not necessarily have to be a sign of Zionism, since the motifs of Palestine were something generally accepted and used in Jewish children's literature, whatever the affiliation.¹⁰² On the other hand, this periodical shows a very strong Czech and mostly Czechoslovak affiliation, this is why I was treating it excessively in the previous chapters and am only mentioning it here in order to keep the full overview before proceeding to the leftist Zionist sources.

Annegret Völpe¹⁰³ in her historical overview of the German Jewish children's literature of 1918 – 1933 is pointing out the fact, that it was the Zionist children's

⁹⁹ Soukupová "Identita Čechů Židů v Nové Evropské Realitě," 36.

¹⁰⁰ Bartáková, "Hašomer Hacair a Tchelet Lavan v Československu," 40.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Annegret Völpe, Zohar Shavit and Ran HaCohen, *Deutsch-jüdische Kinder- und Jugendliteratur. Ein literaturgeschichtlicher Grundriß*. (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2002), 293-295.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

literature prevailing over any other Jewish juvenile sources. What was true for the German Weimar Republic, is also applicable for the interwar Czechoslovakia, where indeed, the vast majority of children's Jewish literature is of Zionist orientation. Völpeł attributed the boom of the Zionist children's periodicals especially to the growing importance and popularity of Jewish national youth movements, such as *Blau-Weiss* (later, *Tchelet-Lavan*), *Hashomer Hatzair*, the Czech-language *El Al* and others.

An important focus of the Zionists was aiming towards the youth, the new generation of Jews bound to settle the land of Israel one day. This is why specific Zionist youth rhetoric emerged to appeal not so much to the adult population, but precisely to the youth. Following the ideological framework set up by Max Nordau, an image of the "new Jew" or the "muscle-Jew" took place of old, traditional values and young Jews turned more and more to physical exercise and manual work to prepare for their future task of settling and cultivating *Eretz Israel*. With the emergence of the general trend of nationalist youth organizations such as the *Wandervogel* or the *Sokol* in the late 19th and early 20th century, the Jewish youth also felt the need for such an organization (however, it is true that the Czech integrationists did send their children to *Sokol* rather than sending them to any specifically Jewish organization, as they believed in the success of complete integration into the Czech nation¹⁰⁴). Also, it is important to note, that the Jewish sport youth organization *Maccabi* stressed their similarity to the Czech *Sokol* with a great pride.¹⁰⁵

It was mainly the leftist Zionist youth organizations, who felt the need not only to provide entertainment and intellectual education, but to reinforce a strong ideology.

¹⁰⁴ Soukupová, "Identita Čechů Židů v Nové Evropské Realitě." 36-48.

¹⁰⁵ Čapková, *Češi, Němci, Židé*, 150.

Although their basis was built on slightly different socialist programs, their work with the youth followed very similar guidelines. One of them was education of young Jews not only towards physical fitness and love for Zion, but also towards morality and social consciousness in the framework of the socialist thought. The most interesting aspect of such writings is definitely the relative independence of the adult world and the official publishing houses.¹⁰⁶ All of the leftist Zionist periodicals discussed here were peer-written, peer-edited and published by the means of author publishing, passing by the adult control and deciding themselves about the themes, motifs and sujets of their writings. This such periodicals a certain autonomy of expression and makes them ideal source material for this study.

The representative sources for analysis are the German-language papers of Czechoslovak *Tchelet-Lavan* movement, *Itonenu* for the older audience, the Czech-language *El Al* for the younger audience and the Czech-language *Dopisy z Eretz*¹⁰⁷.

Itonenu was an unofficial youth newspaper created and published by the *chaverim*¹⁰⁸ of Brno themselves and distributed also by self-help. There were two ways of distribution – a direct purchase or subscription. Since the direct purchase was not very effective (the *chaverim* ceased to pay and just “borrowed” the paper), the team of amateur editors turned to subscriptions. Most of the articles are written in German, but there are also Czech contributions without any translation, which shows that even the German speaking readership was familiar with the Czech language and vice

¹⁰⁶ Annegret Völpel, Zohar Shavit and Ran HaCohen, *Deutsch-jüdische Kinder- und Jugendliteratur. Ein literaturgeschichtlicher Grundriß*. 295

¹⁰⁷ Letters from Eretz

¹⁰⁸ The members of the youth movement

versa. My claim of the prevalent bilingualism of the Jewish youth in Czechoslovakia is supported by Hedvika Novotná¹⁰⁹ and her study on Czechoslovakia in Jewish memoir literature, where she claims that Jewish parents often supported bilingualism by speaking one both languages with the children, or sending them to a school with a an instruction language different than their own mother tongue.¹¹⁰

One of the major tropes worth attention was the theme of morality, of education towards not simply a new Jew, but something much more: a better Jew, a socially conscious Jew, who will stand as an example not only for his fellow Jews, but also for the Gentile world all around. The education towards the new morality is practically done in several ways: through direct appellation to the youth, short stories from real life containing a moral or an amateur “philosophical” text written by the *chaverim* to provide food for thought for the rest of their *kvutzah*¹¹¹. I selected a few typical examples of such narratives and will use them to illustrate what the values were that the *chaverim* wanted to transmit to their peers, what behavior was considered unacceptable and what were the role models those young people had. I will also dedicate some space to the idea of Palestine as an abstract role model in the sense of perception of Palestine as a perfect organism needing perfect and well-prepared organs, the *chaverim*.

Tchelet-Lavan was a youth movement basing on the Marxist ideology and *Itonenu* is clearly showing this within its programmatic focus. Even the nature and the soil of Eretz Israel is not portrayed as a simple natural phenomenon, but rather as a tool or

¹⁰⁹ Hedvika Novotná, “Židé vzpomínají na Masarykovské Československo třicátých let,” Židovská menšina v Československu ve třicátých letech : sborník přednášek z cyklu ve Vzdělávacím a kulturním centru Židovského muzea v Praze v říjnu 2003 až červnu 2004 (2004): 73-83.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ A group, in which the youth movement was organized

a part of a greater plan, the Zionist colonization and the cultivation of the Eretz. So they don't see the Dead Sea only as an interesting wonder of nature, but rather as an important resource, a narrative similar to the 1950's rhetoric of the eastern bloc. So the author of one article goes on explaining in a very mentoring manner, that the salt of the Dead Sea is nothing like the salt "*you put on your bread*,"¹¹² but something very special with a high healing potential. The next sentences go on introducing extended plans for a future factory processing the Dead Sea salt. Also, the question of the lack of natural resources in Palestine is addressed, but not pessimism has a place within this narrative, it is rather the replacement/import potential that is stressed, following the pattern: "Where there is a lack, we have a solution." Also, the article slips into a very bold assumption that there is "enough asphalt to build the roads in all Palestine in the Dead Sea" and vivid description of Palestine of the future, fully industrialized and electrified with the most modern technical equipment and technologies. *El Al*, a periodical aiming at a younger audience than *Intonenu*, goes even further in its description of the modern technologies and Palestine building, often reaching to the narrative strategies and language as we know it from the later literature of social realism.

*"Before we know it, we are standing in front of a great electrical thrasher of the settlement Bet Alpha. We can see the workers feeding the insatiable jaws of the thrasher the beautiful long spikes, that grew from the soil of the Jezreel valley. We can see the endless soil of Emek in front of us, those endless fields; ever now and then a heavy tractor crosses it, leaving stripes of black and smeary lumps of clay behind."*¹¹³

This excerpt clearly shows, how the land and the technologies were portrayed by the

¹¹²Kiwi, "Und Die Kundschaften, Die Aus Dem Lande Kamen, Erzählten," *Intonenu*, 1929.

¹¹³První turbína se rozběhla, "*El Al*, 2.

"Než se nadějeme, stojíme již u veliké elektrické mlátičky osady Bet Alfa. Vidíme, jak tam vkládají do nenasytné tlamy mlátičky krásné dlouhé klasy, která vyrostly na půdě roviny jezreelské. Vidíme před sebou tu nekonečnou půdu Emeku, ty ohromné lány, přes které se tu a tam valí těžkopádný traktor, který za sebou zanechává pásy černých mastných hrud."

means of personification (“*the insatiable thrasher*”), the employment of colors (“*black lumps of clay*”) and the openly positive adjectives attributed to the products of the land (“*beautiful spikes*”). This creates a very poetic and idealized impression of the land, the technologies and the work.

This sci-fi like way of portraying Palestine gives a feeling of joy and pride to be able to help build such a “wonderland” and at the same time, there are appellations for responsibility to each and every *chaver*. The element of individual hard work is, surprisingly enough, slightly suppressed, in order to keep the flame of enthusiasm burning in the young Zionist. Another interpretation would be a more simplistic one, the mere naivety and enthusiasm of the author of that article himself.

Boaz Neumann differentiates two kinds of approaches to Eretz Israel, a naive one and a cynical one. The naive approach is basing on the aliyah as an essential and natural need and passion of the Jew. The cynical, on the other hand, expresses the economic and colonialist interests of the *chalutzim*.¹¹⁴ Following Neumann’s definition, the writings of *Itonenu* would definitely fall into the naive category, expressing youthful and natural passion for Eretz Israel.

The nature itself is also playing an important role, especially as a source of parallels for the young Zionist drawn from the life in the nature, the weather conditions and the changing seasons. So, for example, the *chaverim* of the *Tchelet Lavan* and also

¹¹⁴ chalutzim: the pioneers

Boaz Neumann, "Genealogies of Nationalism", in Yotam Hotam, ed., "The Age of Youth" - German-Jewish Young Generation and Modern Times (Jerusalem: The Richard Koebner Minerva Center for German History, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem by The Hebrew University Magnes Press, Jerusalem, 2008), pp. 168-190.

Zionists in general, are compared to the nature in spring fighting against the consequences of the cruel winter.

“Also we Jews have a place in the world, where we want to grow and prosper, a place we have to fight for, not with weapons, but with labor. Also our power, one of those who are still in the Exile, is moving. We, too, want to do something and experience the waking up of the nature.”¹¹⁵

Again, the trope of land cultivation is present, just as expected from a true labor Zionist periodical. An important notion is stressed, that also the Jews, just like any other part of the nature, are an equal part of a broader scope, just like the spring flowers are a part of the flora, the Jews are an original part of the mosaic of nations and with hopes the future also the nation states.

The perception of the Jews as a nation and thus needy of a national state is expressed throughout the texts, only the particular contexts are changing. Also when considering the class struggle, the young authors of *Itonenu* did not forget to mention the difference between the Jews and the Gentiles. In a response article to a younger *chaver*, his older peer is trying to explain, why there are no Jewish workers in Czechoslovakia and Austria. The answer lies on the assumption that it is not the Jews having their national state in Czechoslovakia and Austria, or as the author of the article put it:

“We Jews have no state here and no economy on our own, we only have that in Palestine. Here, it is the Czechs and the Germans having their states here and they also have occupied all the posts, so that the Jews can find no work.”¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ Edith, “Frühling,” *Itonenu*, 1929.

“Auch wir Juden haben einen Platz in der Welt, auf dem wir wachsen und gezeihen wollen, den wir erkämpfen müssen, nicht durch Waffen, sondern durch Arbeit. Auch in uns, die wir noch in der Galluth sind, regen sich Kräfte. Auch wir wollen etwas tun, wollen das Erwachen der Natur erleben.“

¹¹⁶ Mops, “Eine komische Frage,” *Itonenu*, 1929.

“Wir Juden haben aber hier keinen Staat, und keine eigenen Wirtschaft, sondern nur in Palästina. Hier sind es die Tschechen und die Deutschen, die hier ihre Staaten haben und sie haben auch alle

This observation is interesting from many angles. First of all, claiming that Jews in Czechoslovakia could find no work, is nothing short of bold. It is true, that the Jews were lacking the proletariat (with the exception of Ostrava, where one would find a Galician Jew working in the coal mines every now and then). The missing Jewish proletariat is a fact pointed out also by Kateřina Čapková¹¹⁷, but the reasons are understandably beyond the explanation of the young author of the article quoted above. First of all, Bohemian and Moravian Jews were similar to German Jews in the assimilation pattern, sometimes much to the dislike of their Czech Gentile neighbors.¹¹⁸ Assimilation towards the German language and culture also automatically meant the identification with the German liberal *Bildungsbourgeoisie* and such a pattern lead inevitably to the absence of the Jewish proletariat.

At the same time, the article quoted above offers yet another controversial issue and that is the fact that the author mentions the “Czechs and the Germans having their states here.” There are two possible interpretations of this statement. The first one would be a generalizing one, expressing only the fact that the Czechs and the Germans do indeed have national state, while “here” could symbolize anything from Europe to the whole wide world, when taking into account, that there was no officially established Jewish state in Palestine at that time (1929). Another explanation of the statement could be, that Czechs and Germans have a state in Czechoslovakia, as the German minority was quite large and influential at the time of the First Czechoslovak Republic, so the statement could point out to this fact, hiding the reproach of Jewish statelessness in between the lines.

Posten besetzt, so das die Juden keine Arbeit finden können.“

¹¹⁷ Čapková. *Češi, Němci, Židé*. 12.

¹¹⁸ Kieval, *Languages of Community*. 143.

Also the argument of having no job possibility within the working class scope because of lack of capacity is rather feeble. On the other hand, it shows clearly the struggle of the young Zionist, mostly from middle-class intellectual families and mostly young aspiring intellectuals themselves (most of the articles refer to the authors and readers as to the students of a *Gymnasium* or a *Realschule*), trying to live up to their ideology and fit into the desired working class. As it was not that likely for them to really be the working class, at least this young author gets involved in his slightly dubious apologetics about not having enough chances to join the proletariat.

The wish to belong or at least to identify oneself with the working class is a leitmotif of *Itonenu* and finds its expression in several shorts stories, mostly with a tragic end pointing out the difficult situation of the lower social classes and identifying with them, while clearly refusing what most of the authors have grown up in: middle class morality. There are two typical stories illustrating my point. One is called “Children”¹¹⁹ and tells the unfortunate fate of two young brothers, who instead of playing soccer like the other children, have to collect pieces of coal and coke in order to keep the family warm. The younger of the boys keeps insisting he wants to play, so eventually, the older brother lets him go and play some, while continuing his task alone. While the little boy is happily joining the game, the older brother throws himself onto the dirty ground and cries for his own childhood, lost for hard work to satisfy the family’s economic needs.

A similar story takes quite an original form of a fictitious diary found by chance in the

¹¹⁹ Kiwi, “Kinder,” *Itonenu*, 1929.

school corridors and read by a schoolmate of the author¹²⁰. The author does ponder, whether this is the appropriate way to handle somebody's private information, but in the light of the awful and disturbing entries, he decided to publish excerpts from it anyway. The fictitious author of the diary is a stuck-up and ignorant Jewish *Gymnasium* student with a pattern-like middle class morality (or actually the lack of any morality), a highly simplified and polarized character, lacking any empathy and understanding for the world, let alone for his poorer schoolmates.

However, where there is the exemplary bad character, there has to be also the exemplary good one. In this story, the good principles (and also the entire working class) are symbolized by the poor Anselm, a good-hearted shy boy, who gets constantly looked down upon by the author of the diary. There is no mention of Anselm being Jewish, however. The diary entries are contrasting the different interests of the two boys and their diametrically divergent worldviews and values and last, but not least, economic situations. While the middle-class boy is only interested in getting some time free from school and his manicure, poor Anselm has serious economic problems and has to commute every morning from the periphery, which especially is looked down upon by the middle class boy with a naive ignorance (*"Why doesn't he live in the city instead?"*).¹²¹ When one day Anselm does not come to school anymore, since he got run over by a car when walking to school, because he did not have enough money to ride the tram, the middle class boy is mostly happy that he gets a half day free of school, as the class is attending Anselm's funeral. The author of the article then speaks for the broader mass of the *chaverim* moralizing the

¹²⁰ Dan, "Eine Krone Zwanzig Heller," *Itonenu*, November, 1930.

¹²¹ Ibid.

fictitious diary owner, who wondered, why the poor Anselm could not have paid the fare.

“No, he couldn’t have paid that one Crown, twenty Heller for the ticket. Because you can go and have a fingernail manicure done, Anselm Kurzbein has to walk.”¹²²

An interesting aspect of the Anselm story is the focus on the body of both the protagonists. It seems as it was not only the socialist picture of the body as a useful tool rather as an aesthetic object, but also the Zionist idea of a healthy and natural body of a the new Jews cultivating the land of Palestine. So the author of the short story contrasts the effeminate body culture of the middle class diary writer and the harsh and rough Anselm, who has better things to do than go for manicure.

There were also other ideologically inadequate habits the author team of *Itonenu* criticized; smoking being an exemplary bad habit of the spoiled youth that the *chaverim* in the *Itonenu* warned against with quite original methods. There is no word of any health risk, but the main argument is constituted by the mere economic factor, summed up in the question: if each Jew would stop smoking, how much would we be able to build in Palestine for the money we save?¹²³ This way, not only the Zionist efforts are stressed, but also the moral value of the decision not to smoke. The third concept incorporated within the appellations against the cigarettes is the strong will and positivist work, a motif continuing not only through *Itonenu*, but also through the whole Zionist writing, starting from Pinsker or Herzl.

¹²² Ibid.

“Nein, er hat die eine Krone zwanzig Heller für die Fahrkarte nicht bezahlen können, damit Du Dir Deine Fingernägel maniküren lassen kannst, muss Anselm Kreuzbein zu Fuss gehen.”

¹²³ Kiwi, “Und Die Kundschaften, Die Aus Dem Lande Kamen, ErzähLten,” *Itonenu*, 1929.

The attitude towards the body and health is expressed more within the framework of the productivization and physical conditioning of the young Jews. This was happening through a systematic education towards a new, constructive attitude to manual work and the conditioning of the values towards the new socialistic society in Eretz Israel.¹²⁴ A perfect place to cultivate both the body and the new Zionist and socialist values were the meetings of the *Tchelet Lavan* and the summer camps, where “the Jewish youth would already have their little republic, live by the rules they themselves set up and have a chance to overcome their mistakes.”¹²⁵ Sometimes, the negotiation and overcoming of the mistakes could have even taken a slightly comical shape, such as in case of one *chaver* writing to *Itonenu* and explaining that he did not like going to the club room anymore, since it was too untidy. The answer to this reproach came in the following number from another *chaver* responding, that if someone is not attending the meetings only due to mess, it shows the weakness of his/her character.¹²⁶ Also, the individual effort for the collective good and activity is praised as a value worthy of a young member of *Tchelet Lavan*; the *chaverim* had the possibility to build up “their own very real fairy tale world, where everyone would be the prince.”¹²⁷

Strong will, reciprocity, friendship, cooperation and of course, the love for Israel, were the key values *Itonenu* (in accordance with other Zionist youth periodicals) were to transmit to their young readership. On top of that, *Itonenu* incorporated also socialistic narratives, sometimes in a very naive and childish way. When the issue of

¹²⁴ Israel Oppenheim, *The Struggle of Jewish Youth for Productivization*, vi.

¹²⁵ Uhu. “Ferien,” *Itonenu*, May, 1930.

¹²⁶ Aus unserem Briefkasten,” *Itonenu*, May, 1930

¹²⁷ Uhu. “Ferien,” *Itonenu*, May, 1930.

education and schools was addressed, the young *chaverim* were critical to their education and professors just as all students are, but there is something special about the response to the problem. The team of *Itonenu* is pointing out the solution in employing teachers, who are socialists and by introducing a socialistic education in schools based on egalitarianism and discussion. Also, Eretz Israel is brought in as an example of such an education and the symbolic dream to pursue is to have “teachers one could call by their first names.”¹²⁸ Redefining education was actually one of the major tasks of Zionist youth movements and a need expressed by such Zionist thinkers and Herzl and Buber. It was a type of education breaking off with the traditional religion, but also cultivation of the German aiming towards the character cultivation besides the cultivation of knowledge.¹²⁹

While promoting the new values of reciprocity, cooperation and work, there is also a clear dividing line drawn between the old values of the parents and the new values of the sons. This is sometimes demonstrated in an explicit rebellion against the parent generation and the ridiculing of the parents for their backwardness, ignorance, middle class morality and effeminate behavior.

Sometimes it is a mere ignorance of the parents that is stressed mostly in a satirical way, such as the not very felicitously written poem published in *El Al* can illustrate.

"DOJEM

Popustime si fantasii

¹²⁸ "Schule," *Itonenu*, 1929.

¹²⁹ George L. Mosse, "Jewish Emancipation between *Bildung* and Respectability", in *The Jewish Response to German Culture*, ed. Jehuda Reinharz and Walter Schatzberg (Hanover and London, 1985), .1-16.

*představme si rodinu
o židovstvo tu zájem není
"Jsme pouze náboženstvím židi!"*

*Synáček jde do Blauvajsu
přijde odtud rozjařen
"Neznám ani větší krásu
vždyť jsme horu tančili"*

*Tatínek se hnedle ptá
co to má za novoty
"Co ta hora znamená?
Ale to se vyhazuje nohama!"*

*"Potom jsme též zpívali
krásné to bylo, než- -"
"A tohle vy děláte?
Nikam nepůjdeš!"*

*Takto soudí lidi
o Tchelet Lavan
všude úskalí najdeš
však ty musíš ven a dál"¹³⁰*

¹³⁰ "Dojem," El Al, 15.
IMPRESSION

*"Let's set our imagination free
and imagine a family
with no interest for Jewishness
"We're Jews only by religion!"*

*The little son goes to Blau-weis
and comes back exhilarated
"I don't know a greater beauty-
we were dancing the hora!"*

*The daddy is asking straight away
about such a novelty
"What does this hora mean?
But you're kicking your feet up!"*

*"And then we were singing
it was so beautiful, till- -"
"So that's what you're doing there?
You're grounded!"*

*This is how people judge
the Tchelet Lavan
you find obstacles everywhere
but you have to keep going!*

Itonenu is providing a good example of such a mocking expression of the generation conflict in the form of a fictitious dialogue between the fathers of two *Tchelet-Lavan chaverim* (one of the fathers is modern and enlightened and the other one backwards and narrow-minded) regarding the departure of the sons to the *Tchelet-Lavan* winter camp:

“ (...) you know, I am worried about my son. He got into this social group, they are calling themselves Tcheles-Laban, you know, that guy from the Bible.

F: Oh no, I think it is rather the Techelet-Lavan.

M: Oh well, you know I can't remember any names— well, with that peer group they are engaging in this sort of a meschugge-modern sport with a Z in front and –ism at the back.

F: You mean Zionism?

M: Well yes, of course – yes – so, he got home two days ago and said he'd like to go to the winter camp over the winter holidays, you know, somewhere on a hill and they will ski there. But if he comes home afterwards with a broken hand or foot. ...(...) So I will send him there, I am actually crazy, you know. But one thing will comfort me:, there are some other fools, too.”¹³¹

An interesting aspect of this little article meant to amuse the readers is the work with the language. The reader can note the typical Ashkenazic pronunciation of “Tchelet-Lavan” as “Tcheles-Laban” the backwards father is using. This is to illustrate how set in his old ways he is, but the combination of the Ashkenazic pronunciation, a corrupt Hebrew in the eyes of the Zionists trying to cultivate Ivrit as a modern national language, with the fact that the backwards father vaguely mentions Laban, the biblical figure, gives an impression of a middle-class assimilated three-day Jew

¹³¹ “Ein Gespräch,” *Itonenu*, October, 1929.

“(..) wissen Sie, mein Sohn macht mir Sorgen. Er ist in so eine Gesellschaft hineingeraten, sie nennen sich Tcheles-Laban, wissen Sie, dass ist der, der in der Bibel vorkommt.

F: Aber nein, das wird doch der Techelet-Lawan sein

M: No ja, wissen Sie, ich kann mir keine Namen merken – ja dort in der Gesellschaft treiben sie so einen meschugge-modernen Sport, vorn hat's ein Z und hinten –ismus.

F: Sie meinen wohl Zionismus?

M: Ja natürlich – ja – also, vor zwei Tagen kommt er mir nach Hause und sagt er will im Winter in den Feiertagen in ein Lager fahren, wissen sie, irgendwo auf einem Berg und dort Skilaufen. Wenn er mir aber nochher mit einer gebrochenen Hand oder Fuss nach Hause kommt...(...) So wird' ich ihn eben hinschicken, ich bin eben ein Narr, wissen Sie. Aber einen Trost werde ich haben: Es gibt noch andere Narren.“

vaguely remembering his tradition and keeping it in the form of the old pronunciation, but stripped of any religious or national meaning. Also, the backwards father is not only corrupting Hebrew, but he is also corrupting his mother tongue, which is almost certainly German, by inserting Yiddish words, the words of a “corrupt jargon”¹³² and having a slightly yiddishized pronunciation of certain words. All that gives a picture of a German with a tendency for “jüdeln.”¹³³ Another curious example of mocking the older generation by means of language is an article in *Jaldut* describing a not very enlightened Jewish family, the Mayers, visiting the National Theater in Prague. Mrs. Mayer is complaining about the opera, using a mixture of Czech and Yiddish, in the following way: “*Host e’ narishkeyt was soj e oper is, es’ hot ka tam und ka rahm, is nischt gesalzen und nischt geschmalzen, ale co se dá dělati.*”¹³⁴

The questioning of the older generation is not only expressed in the form of student irony, but also within a more serious genre, an essay. *Itonenu* printed an essay on the breaking up with the parents and the older values under the name “The Son’s Rebellion.”¹³⁵ Here, again, the assimilated and also the religious streams are criticized, again in a very polarized way and working with the religious themes, as if most of the Czechoslovak Jewry of the parent generation were orthodox, observant and leading a life similar to the one in an east-European *shtetl*. This is, of course, an exaggeration and inaccuracy, since the Jews of the Czech Lands belonged to the most secularized Jewries in central Europe. The picture of a warm and cozy room in

¹³² Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, *The Jew in the Modern World: A Documentary History*, 3 ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2010), 402-3.

¹³³ Jüdeln – a specific way of speaking German with a trace of Yiddish as seen in Vienna, but also in other parts of the former monarchy

¹³⁴ “Rodina Mayerových v Národním divadle,” *Jaldut*, October 1934, 273.
“*What a foolish thing this opera is, it is flibby, but what can one do?*”

¹³⁵ “Auflehnung des Sohnes,” *Itonenu*, May, 1930.

a *shtetl* is most likely to be interpreted as a bridging element connecting the middle class Czechoslovak Jews with their brethren all over the world and especially in Eastern Europe. This would correspond to the fascination of Czechoslovak Jews by East European Jewry, especially due to a high degree of idealization and the lack of East European Jewish immigrants in the Czech Lands.

“East European Jewish culture was a great inspiration to Prague’s Zionists. It is well known that before WWI, Prague was not the target for East-European Jewish immigration. Unlike the Zionists in Berlin or Vienna, who had direct contact with East European Jews the Prague Zionists only had indirect experience with Hassidim, shtetlach or Yiddish literature...Eastern Jewish culture became a model for Prague Zionists, because of its perceived authenticity.”¹³⁶

Another reading, a diametrically different one, and definitely the case of the previously quoted *Itonenu* excerpt, is the rejection of the older generations by the means of the *shtetl* portrayal. On one hand, there was the Czech Zionist fascination by the East-European ghettoized *shtetl* life, on the other hand, the *shtetl* could symbolize something quite different from the East-European reality. There is a resemblance between the idealized *shtetl* narratives and central-European ghetto literature of the 19th century. Ghetto literature secured for the Jews a “*form of bourgeois cultural respectability that might serve as a marker of their newly found – or yet to be achieved – middle-class status.*”¹³⁷ So in fact, the middle-class status that the late 19th century Jews strove for, also by means of German assimilation, was definitely achieved and affirmed by the parents of the interwar youth readership of Jewish juvenile literature. So, in fact, it were not the ghetto values rejected, but rather the bourgeois values of the parental generation.

¹³⁶ Kateřina Čapková “Specific Features of Zionism in the Czech Lands in the Interwar Period.,” *Judaica Bohemiae* no. 38 (2003): 113.

¹³⁷ Jonathan M. Hess, “Leopold Kompert and the Work of Nostalgia: The Cultural Capital of German Jewish Ghetto Fiction.,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 97, no. 4 (2007): 584.

Another interesting feature of “The Son’s Rebellion” is the passion expressed in almost erotic terms, as known also from the *chalutzim* narratives. Not only they wanted to settle and cultivate the land, they wanted to be united with it, become one body and one soul, dissolve in it.¹³⁸ Also their *chaverim* are a source of almost erotic and exhilarated emotions, being described in very physical, but yet romantic terms. The following excerpt of *Dopisy z Eretz* could even be read as a parallel to a sexual act, with the typical course:

*“Someone jumps up and we are beginning to dance the hora. Our eyes are gleaming, our arms are holding the brotherly napes, we feel that we are connected for eternity. The dance is slowing down, the circle is getting narrow and finally, eve the last ones are sitting back down, exhausted from the dance”*¹³⁹

The author of “The Son’s Rebellion” is expressing an appellation to his fellows to leave the parents in their old ways and walk a new path and at the same time, he addresses the parents and asks them to let their children go.

Beyond the explicit and somewhat first-plan appellations, there is a well-hidden trope that got into the texts of *Itonenu* probably without the author’s intention. Whenever there is a comparison being made and something progressive, new and exciting is pointed out, the dreamland is often not Palestine, but Austria. This would show the traditional inclination of the Moravian Jews towards the Austrian element and especially Vienna, which continued on in spite of the establishment of Czechoslovakia. The constant obsession with Vienna is the more surprising, since

¹³⁸ Neumann, “Genealogies of Nationalism”, 168-190.

¹³⁹ *Dopisy z Erec.*, 3,
“Někdo vyskočí a začínáme tančit horu. Oči se lesknou, paže objímají pevně bratrské šíje, cítíme, že jsme spojeni na vždy. Tanec se stává pomalejším, kruh užším, konečně i poslední usedají vyčerpáni.”

some of the readership of the years 1929 – 34 might have already been born under Czechoslovakia or experienced only very little from the Habsburg monarchy. As Hillel Kieval pointed out, the Jews of Bohemia and Moravia had to undergo two identity changes: one from the pure Jewish one to the German one and the next one from the German identity to the Czechoslovak one.¹⁴⁰

While *Itonenu* is still clearly presenting the inclination towards Vienna and the German culture, *EI AI* is not only written in Czech, but also showing at least a geographical affiliation to Czechoslovakia. As both *Itonenu* and *EI AI* were published around the same time (early 1930's), the decisive role could not possibly be ascribed to a historical development of the Jewish identities withing the 1920's and 1930's, but rather to the geographical placement of the periodicals. While *EI AI* was published in Prague and was reaching out mostly to Bohemian audience, *Itonenu* was published in Brno and was covering Moravia, as Moravian Jewry was historically closer to the German assimilation and lingered on the tradition of the lost Danube monarchy for much longer. Also, the Zionists in Moravia were in quite a unique situation, as they cooperated successfully with religious authorities in Moravia and were thus not in contradiction with them, as would be the case elsewhere.¹⁴¹ It is also true that the Zionists gladly looked back to the religious tradition just as other national movements were drawing from their national mythologies and folklore.¹⁴²

All in all, *Itonenu* and *EI AI* do not go any divergent path from the rest of the Zionist

¹⁴⁰ Kieval, *The Making of Czech Jewry*, 57.

¹⁴¹ Ruth Kestenberg-Gladstein, "The Jews between Czechs and Germans," *The Jews of Czechoslovakia* (1968): 59.

¹⁴² Kateřina Čapková, "Tschechisch, Deutsch, Judisch – wo ist der Unterschied," in *Juden zwischen Deutschen und Tschechen*, vol. 104 (München: Oldenbourg Wissensch.Vlg, 2006), 79.

youth periodicals of leftist orientation, as far as programmatic is considered, so it can serve as an example of the themes addressed within the leftist Zionist youth movement framework. What is different, however, is the clear Bohemian and Moravian mark left rather subconsciously in such writings. At the same time, it gives an overview of themes and narratives commonly used to educate youth. The more valuable they are, as they are an expression of the acceptance of certain values by the youth and their self-indoctrination (*Itonenu* and *El Al* were peer-written periodicals). This is also the reason, why it is possible sometimes to trace back certain local influences that the progressive leftist Zionist youth inherited from the much refused parent generation, the socio-cultural environment and geographical location and failed to step out of their own shadow sometimes.

3.5 Irma Singer and Ilse Herlinger: Between German Literature, Czechoslovakia, Palestine and Fairy Tale World

The tradition of German-Jewish children's literature without any specific Czech affiliation was set by the pre-WWI periodical *Jung Juda*, which still belonged to the stream of didactic Jewish children's literature bringing prevalently Jewish material to the young reader in the form of holiday stories, popularized Talmudic narratives, exhilarating poetry praising Jewishness and Judaism as such and every now and then, a work by a German classic. However, *Jung Juda* was appearing at the time, when the monarchy still existed. Another source, from the time of the First Czechoslovak Republic already, is the short-lived four-page children's section of *Jüdisches Volksblatt* appearing in Moravská Ostrava in the years 1919 – 1922. It was completely apolitical and fulfilled prevalently the function of amusement. It brought Talmudic stories and also general fairy tales without any specific Jewish features.

Besides the obvious language affiliation to the German-Jewish stream, there was a stress on a certain respectability, which might be a sign of a German middle-class cultural heritage, which indeed stressed a typical German middle-class *Anstand*.¹⁴³

The problem with German-Jewish children's literature is the lack of sources and the general decline of the German affiliation among Jews in Czechoslovakia during the 1920 and even more notably, during the 1930's in the light of the Nazi threat. This is why many of the Jews, who grew up in the German assimilatory tradition, finally found their way to Zionism, when facing the Czech-German ethnic problems and the growing German antisemitism. Or as Čapková formulated this switch from the German identity towards the Jewish national one, "*the old Austrian Jews were forced to change their original ethnic allegiance and for those who did not feel Pan-German, Zionism provided a suitable alternative.*"¹⁴⁴ Also, a child from a family with a strong German inclination had a wide variety of other reading options and did not necessarily need a specifically Jewish children's literature. Due to the high number of the German-language Jewish journalists in the Czechoslovak press and the high numbers of Jewish readers of German periodicals such as *Prager Tagblatt*¹⁴⁵ There are, however, two very interesting female authors, who received their deserved place in the canon of German Jewish literature and are actually considered German Jewish by Zohar Shavit, Annegrete Voelpel and Gabrielle Glasenapp in their works on German Jewish children's literature. This fact and a lack of a strong political feature in their fairytale books contributed to my decision to consider them Zionist

¹⁴³ Mosse, "Jewish Emancipation between *Bildung* and Respectability" 1-16.

¹⁴⁴ Čapková, "Československé sionistické hnutí v nových historických souvislostech," 153.

¹⁴⁵ 1877-1939, a German-language liberal democratic daily associated with famous journalists, such as E.E.Kisch, Max Brod or Alice Rühle-Gerstel

with a German-Jewish affiliation. In fact, one category does not exclude the other.

The first author, who is well-known to the Jewish Studies circles, is a Prague-born writer Irma Singer (also known under her maiden name Berkowitz). Although Singer published her books in Vienna, she spent the first twenty years of her life in Prague, her mother tongue was Czech, but she received her education in German. In fact, many Jewish parents in Czechoslovakia opted for the bilingualism of their children in order to broaden their cultural and economic horizons. Although she experienced the flourishing German culture in Prague and got also, as she wrote in her memories, accompanied home by Kafka several times¹⁴⁶, she was an enthusiastic Zionist and emigrated to Palestine in 1920. Singer could speak Hebrew, but she kept writing in German. From the point of her emigration, she was only published in Hebrew, so the original German manuscripts are still waiting to get published. When in Palestine, Singer worked as a nursemaid in Kibbutz Deganya and wrote reports from her life, also to *Jaldut*. Beside her fairy tales *Das verschlossene Buch*¹⁴⁷, which achieved a certain popularity, Singer was also a Zionist poet. In her poetry, Singer is expressing the conflict of generations: the conservative older generation symbolized by the figure of her mother and the youth, who set out to build Eretz Israel. Other poems also contained themes, which went along the lines of the Zionist ideology: the love and passion for the land, the glorification of manual work, the stress on the collective experience.

¹⁴⁶ Rahel Rosa Neubauer of the Austrian Association for the Research of Children's and Juvenile Literature is currently working on a dissertation on Singer. During her research, she found Singer's complete works and personal documents and will pursue the initiative to publish them in German.

¹⁴⁷ Irma Singer, *Das Verschlossene Buch: Jüdische Märchen* 3rd ed. (Vienna: R. Löwit, 1925)

The other female writer, Ilse Herlinger (also known under her married name Weber), famous not only for her pre-war fairy tale collection, but also for the poems and songs she wrote in Theresienstadt, shared in many ways the talent and career path with Irma Singer. Just like Singer, she wrote her own fairy tales, she also wrote poems and songs and was a talented musician. Although Herlinger was born and raised in Moravská Ostrava, a city with Jewry traditionally inclined to the German cultural assimilation and a bastion of Zionism at the same time, she moved to Prague in 1930, kept writing and was active as a radio producer. Her fate, however, took a tragic end. Ilse Herlinger was deported to Theresienstadt along with her husband Willi Weber and their younger son Tommy. Her older son, Hanuš, was saved by a *Kindertransport* to Sweden, where he lives to this very day. Ilse Herlinger worked as a children's nurse in Theresienstadt and kept writing her poems, which appeared in German and also in a not very fortunate Czech translation. Recently, there had been a collection of Herlinger's works collected and published with a word of introduction by the German historian Ulrike Migdal.¹⁴⁸

The importance and popularity of both Singer and Herlinger does not lie in any ideology or affiliation, it was indeed the timelessness of their motifs and their belletristic innovation, which made the difference. Singer introduced fairy tales with more Zionist features, so she made cedar trees and other objects typical for Palestine come to life, but her sujets were not a mere copy or retelling of older stories, as often was the case, but her own innovative creation. Herlinger chose a more East-European setting, following the German tradition of idealization of the past and the life before the assimilation. As Hess pointed out:

¹⁴⁸ Weber, Ilse. *Wann wohl das Leid ein Ende hat*. München: Hanser, Carl GmbH + Co., 2008.

*"The Literature and art expressing nostalgia for the ghetto in this manner thus actively promoted the promulgation of middle-class mentalities and mores among German Jews, and they did so at the same time as they claimed these Jews' only decidedly probourgeois past as an integral part of their own present-day identity as members of the middle class."*¹⁴⁹

Herlinger is using the idealized setting as a background to stress unspoilt family values and ties between friends and family members. So a little boy sells his favorite book in order to keep the family and another little boy works hard to earn money for his poor Grandfather.¹⁵⁰ In other stories, Herlinger creates Jewish children characters, who are not only passive observers, but they are creative and become the true agents of the story. In fact, precisely this activity and especially creative activity is a prevalent motif in Weber's fairy tales. In this way, a little boy who liked to play with clay becomes a famous artist and a rich man.¹⁵¹ In this manner, Weber is supporting the creativity and activity of the young readership. Singer, on the other hand, stresses more the love for the land and the Jewish pride in her works.

Due to the lack of other sources and the relative timelessness of both Weber and Singer, it is hard to trace down any pronounced German affiliation, but the background stress on family values, *Bildung* and *Anstand* and their contacts to the Prague circle. Aside from that, both Singer and Herlinger deserve more the attribution to the politically vague realm of timelessness, where the Czech, Zionist or German identities could form a background, an invisible basis, but the stories themselves and the values in them are universally applicable.

¹⁴⁹ Hess, "Leopold Kompert and the Work of Nostalgia," 583.

¹⁵⁰ Ilse Herlinger, *Jüdische Kindermärchen* (Mährisch-Ostrau: R. Färber, 1932), 20.

¹⁵¹ Herlinger, *Jüdische Kindermärchen*, 23-28.

4 Conclusion

As I emphasized before throughout the thesis, it is extremely difficult, if not completely impossible, to distill a pure essence of any Jewish identity from the sources, as the four categories used in this thesis are merely a set of ideal categories and their boundaries are more than permeable. In fact, the sources are giving an ideal picture of the Jewish identity after all: they are a compilation of different and sometimes quite contradictory values. This illustrates well the identities of Jews in the Czech Lands quite well and supports Čapková's theory on multiple identities of the interwar Czechoslovak Jews.

While there is a lack of clear sources and a general decline in the German linguistic and cultural affiliation of the young readership throughout the 1920's and even more notably in the course of 1930's under the influence of the Nazi threat, there still remains a certain tradition and nostalgia connected with the German cultural milieu. It is not expressed within the terms of any pronounced ideology, but rather as a stress on education and good manners. The German cultural basis forms a solid background for the new Czechoslovak identity. The German milieu cannot be defined as an attempted national affiliation, as it was already clear already, that the Jews were refused the entry ticket to the Pan-German national self-identification and were confronted with increased antisemitism. Rather than attempting a national identification, the Czechoslovak Jews incorporated the German-speaking past of many of them in the attempt to keep their children bilingual and the stress on the classics of German cultural. So, the pre-Nazi Germany served as a cultural model for

the Jews, on which they built their Czechoslovak identity. This is why the German influence in the works of juvenile literature is not very prominent, but yet silently present.

The Czech-Jewish stream in Jewish children's literature of interwar Czechoslovakia was – similarly to the German affiliation – also on the decline, but for slightly different reasons. There was Rabbi Feder and his *Židovské besídky* as a tradition-keeper, but the youth was already driven by a newer and far more attractive movement: Zionism. The stress on the Czech-Jewish affiliation was, however, preserved and continued in the Czechoslovak loyalty and the growing political self-identification of the Jews with the Czechoslovak state and its key figures, reaching beyond the traditional loyalty of the Jews to the state. Even among the Zionist, there was a conscious support of the Czechoslovak Republic and appreciation for its democracy. The Jewish youth also tended to draw a parallel between the young Czechoslovak state and the work-in-progress Palestine and that helped them accept their Czechoslovak political identity without any major contradiction. It was only the radical leftist Zionists, who for a long time still lingered on Vienna and were skeptical towards the Masaryk state at first.

The juvenile literature I presented in the thesis are in fact supporting Čapkova's theory that:

“Czech, German and Zionist oriented Jewry was in the majority of cases connected by their deep relationship towards the Czech Lands, their religious laxity and (with the exception of the Jewish communists) the loyalty to Czechoslovakia and its leading representatives. Thanks to this common basis, it was not uncommon that the national identity of individuals could change without any major interference with their everyday life or that the Jews did not feel any pronounced identity.”¹⁵²

¹⁵² Čapkova, *Češi, Němci, Židé*, 276.

Following Čapková, it is possible to say, that while there were prominent ideologies, especially in the case of Zionist literature, the profile of the young reader, the young Czechoslovak Jew, would rather be a multi-layered amalgamated identity.

I am fully aware of the fact, that the scope of the thesis is not sufficient enough to describe and analyze all the sources and also that the source material available in Prague is not a complete one, but the thesis could provide a starting point for a further research of a topic still neglected by the established historians of interwar Czechoslovak Jewry.

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