**Brod, Max (1884-1968)**

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Max Brod was one of the most influential figures of the modernist literary scene in Prague, as well as its most important chronicler and promoter. Best remembered today for his role in preserving and editing the work of his close friend Franz Kafka, Brod was himself a writer of extraordinary breadth and output. Among the most prolific German-language critics and authors of the twentieth century, he published hundreds of essays and works of criticism over the course of his life, along with a range of other publications that included novels, biographies, memoirs and translations. Brod was a leading public intellectual in interwar Czechoslovakia and later in Israel, where he emigrated in 1939, and he also wrote extensively on Judaism and Zionism.

Brod grew up in an acculturated German-speaking Jewish household in Prague. He studied law at Prague University and there befriended Kafka, a fellow student. After earning his law degree in 1907, Brod went on to work in a series of administrative positions for the postal service, while at the same time fully devoting himself to writing. Through these efforts he became close to other Jewish Prague writers of the same generation, including Kafka, Oskar Baum, Felix Weltsch, and Franz Werfel. Brod would later term this group of friends the “Prague Circle” in his eponymous memoir *Der Prager Kreis* (1966), and he was instrumental in promoting them as emerging modernist authors. In Kafka’s case, Brod also played a monumental role in defining the writer’s posthumous legacy. When Kafka died in 1924, Brod famously safeguarded his unpublished manuscripts, diaries, and letters, which he helped edit and publish over the years. Brod also authored the first biographical study of Kafka, *Franz Kafka: Eine Biographie* (*Franz Kafka: A Biography*) (1937).

As a critic and essayist, Brod had a reputation for his acutely observed reports on contemporary literature, art, theatre, music, and culture, which he published in German-language periodicals in Prague and Germany. He contributed to small but influential modernist magazines such as *Die Amethyst*, *Die Opale,* *Hyperion*, and *Pan*; to the expressionist magazines *Die Aktion* and *Der Sturm*; and to more established journals that included *Deutsche Arbeit*, *Die Gegenwart*, *Der Merker*, *Die neue Rundschau,* and *Die weißen Blätter*.In 1924 he joined the editorial staff of Prague’s leading German daily newspaper, *Prager Tagblatt,* where he remained involved as an editor and contributor until his emigration. A lightly fictionalized account of his years with the newspaper later appeared under the title *Prager Tagblatt: Roman einer Redaktion* (1968).

As a fiction writer, Brod’s work initially provoked more disapproval than admiration. His early novels, among them *Ein tschechisches* Dienstmädchen (1909) and Jüdinnen (1911), were seen as especially controversial for their seemingly unflattering portrayal of middle-class German, Czech, and Jewish identities. Brod earned greater acclaim with subsequently published works of historical fiction such as T*ycho Brahes Weg zu Gott* (*Tycho Brahe’s Path to God*) (1916) and *Reubeni, Fürst der Juden* (1925), which thematized the tensions between worldly existence and religious spirituality, and explored existential problems of faith and belief through historical protagonists.

Brod first became seriously interested in Judaism after attending a series of lectures given by Martin Buber in Prague, and performances of a traveling Yiddish theatre group headed by the actor Yitzhak Löwy. Buber’s philosophy of cultural Zionism was remarkably influential to Brod’s own writings on Jewish topics, which included articles for Buber’s magazine *Der Jude*, as well as for the Zionist Prague periodicals *Selbstwehr* and *Židovské zprávy*. Brod’s book Heidentum, Christentum, Judentum: Ein Bekenntnisbuch (Paganism, Christianity, Judaism: A Confession of Faith) (1921) is still regarded today as a foundational text in the history of modern Jewish thought, reflecting Brod’s increasing belief that Judaism and its followers could serve as a force of reconciliation for humanity in modern times.

A liberal humanist in his outlook, Brod identified with the latter idea personally. During his years in Prague he frequently positioned himself as a mediator, building bridges across the national and cultural divisions that traditionally separated the city’s historically competing German and Czech spheres, and their respective Jewish and Christian constituencies. He was a key advocate of the bilingual modernist group known as the Eight (*Osma*, or *Die Acht*), and a close friend and frequent collaborator of the composer Leoš Janáček. He translated several of Janáček’s librettos into German, and wrote the first major study of Janáček’s life and work, *Leoš Janáček: Leben und Werk* (1925). Himself conversant in Czech, Brod maintained close ties with the Czech community, and had much of his own writing translated into the Czech language.

When Germany occupied Czechoslovakia in 1939, Brod left Prague with his wife Elsa Taussig and settled in Tel Aviv. He was witness there to the formation of the state of Israel, and was an uneasy observer of the ensuing Arab-Israeli War, the subject of his novel *Unambo: Roman aus dem jüdisch-arabischen Krieg* (*Unambo: A Novel of the War in Israel*) (1949). Brod’s new life in emigration brought him new contacts, in particular with the Israeli press and the national theatre of Israel, Habima, where he worked on several productions. In Israel in the 1950s and 1960s, Brod also returned to his work on Kafka, editing new editions of Kafka’s letters and writings. Since Brod’s death in 1968, there have been ongoing court battles over claims to his and Kafka’s papers, which Brod took with him when he emigrated from Prague. In 2015 Brod’s estate was transferred to **the National Library of Israel.**

**List of Works**

Novels

Schlo*ß* Nornepygge: Der Roman des Indifferenten (1908)

Ein tschechisches Dienstmädchen (1909)

Jüdinnen (1911)

*Tycho Brahes Weg zu Gott* (1916)

*Reubeni, Fürst der Juden* (1925)

*Stefan Rott, oder das Jahr der Entscheidung* (1931)

*Unambo: Roman aus dem jüdisch-arabischen Krieg* (1949)

*Prager Tagblatt: Roman einer Redaktion* (1968)

Essays and Criticism

*Über die Schönheit häßlicher Bilder* (1913)

Im Kampf um das Judentum (1920)

Heidentum, Christentum, Judentum: Ein Bekenntnisbuch (1921)

Zionismus als Weltanschauung, with Felix Weltsch (1925)

Die Musik Israels (1951)

Das Unzerstörbare (1968)

Von der Unsterblichkeit der Seele (1969)

Biography

*Leoš Janáček: Leben und Werk* (1925)

*Heinrich Heine* (1934)

*Franz Kafka: Eine Biographie* (1937)

Autobiographical Writings

*Streitbares Leben* (1960)

*Der Prager Kreis* (1966)

Translations

Auguste Rodin, *Die Kathedralen Frankreichs* (1917)

Leoš Janáček, *Jenůfa* (1918)

Leoš Janáček, *Káťa Kabanová* (1922)

Letters and Diaries

*Korespondence Leoše Janáčka s Maxem Brodem* (1953)

*Max Brod, Franz Kafka, eine Freundschaft,* 2 vols. (1987-1989)

**Further Reading**

Gelber, Mark. “Max Brod’s Zionist Writings.” Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook33 (1988), 437-448.

Pazi, Margarita. *Max Brod: Werk und Persönlichkeit*. Bonn: H. Bouvier, 1970.

Spector, Scott. *Prague Territories: National Conflict and Cultural Innovation in Franz Kafka's Fin de Siècle.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000.

Susskind, Charles. *Janáček and Brod*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985.

Vassogne, Gaëlle. *Max Brod in Prag: Identität und Vermittlung*. Tubingen: Max Niemeyer, 2009.

**Illustration Caption**

Max Brod at his writing desk in Prague, 1920s. Photograph courtesy of the National Literary Monument, Prague.