9 WHAT IF FRANZ KAFKA HAD IMMIGRATED TO PALESTINE?*

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The following essay, "Franz Kafka in Israel: 'It Was No Dream,'" is reprinted here with the permission of the Viennese publishing house, Paul Zsolnay. Written by Tel Aviv University literature professor, Hugo Immerwahr, for the edited anthology, *Jewish Nobel Prize Laureates in Literature: 1910–2005* (Vienna, 2010), the essay discusses the life and career of the famed Israeli novelist and 1966 Nobel Prize-winner, Franz Kafka. In addition to his fellow prize recipients, Harold Pinter (2005), Imre Kertesz (2002), Nadine Gordimer (1991), Joseph Brodsky (1987), Elias Canetti (1981), Isaac Bashevis Singer (1978), Saul Bellow (1976), Boris L. Pasternak (1958), Henri Bergson (1927), Paul Heyse (1910), and Elie Wiesel (who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1986), Kafka was one of the twentieth century's literary giants. In this probing essay, Immerwahr, one of the world's leading Kafka authorities, explores the former Prague lawyer's metamorphosis into a *chaluz*, a school teacher at Ben Shemen, a member of the underground resistance, and, finally, a celebrated Israeli cultural figure (Figure 19). Readers will be fascinated by how Kafka immersed himself in the culture of his adopted homeland and eventually returned to his writing in the midst and the wake of the Jewish catastrophe in World War II.

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* This chapter is a work of fiction. I would like to thank Gavriel Rosenfeld for his excellent suggestions, pushing me further and further into alternative realities. Many thanks also to Dr. L. Gross for his inspiring insightful ideas.

Figure 19. Franz Kafka, Israel's first recipient of the Nobel Prize for Literature.

Franz Kafka in Israel: "It Was No Dream"

Hugo Immerwahr

"It was no dream," comments the narrator in Kafka's famous novella, *The Metamorphosis*, after the protagonist, Gregor Samsa, wakes up one morning to find himself transformed into a "monstrous vermin." The rest of the narrative shows how Gregor is wounded, expelled from his family, and dies. Without pushing the comparison between this fictional novella from 1912 and more recent contemporary history too far, the assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in November

1995 was, in my view, also "no dream." Recognized for his peace negotiations with the Palestinians worldwide and the signing of the Oslo Accord (1993), Rabin (along with Shimon Peres and Yasir Arafat) was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1994. Ironically, a year later, Rabin was gunned down by a fanatically religious, right-wing terrorist. There is a Kafkaesque link between the fates of Gregor Samsa and Yitzhak Rabin: the brutal irony of being condemned and killed by someone in the family, on whose behalf the individual has worked tirelessly. To be sure, the history of Zionism in Israel, with its turn to the political right, is a complex chapter in and of itself. My modest attempt in this essay is to revisit Kafka's involvement with Zionist ideas and depict their impact on his fiction. By examining how Kafka chronicled events in Palestine and Israel from his emigration there in 1924 until his death in 1968, we will learn about a writer who rebelled against restrictive ideologies, transcended national boundaries, and won international recognition for his literary realism, powerful symbolism, courageous satire, and independence of thought.

Franz Kafka saw Zionism as "positively the only path . . . that can lead to spiritual liberation."[1] His friend Max Brod (1884–1968) testified to the fact that Kafka often talked "about his intention to emigrate to Erez-Israel. He wanted to live there as a simple craftsman. He thought like a *chaluz*, a pioneer."[2] From 1910 on, several of Kafka's friends and acquaintances began to travel to Palestine. On September 12, 1912 he invited three of these *Palästinafahrer* to his home: Dr. Hugo Löw, Dr. Viktor Kellner (1887–1970), and Dr. Hugo Bergmann (1883–1975). They were traveling to Palestine during the Second Aliya (1903–14), when approximately 40,000 Jews emigrated there. Kafka's high school friend Hugo Bergmann had visited the country in 1910; Viktor Kellner, a leading member of the Zionist Bar Kochba club in Prague, emigrated in 1911 and was teaching at the first Hebrew high school in Jaffa; Hugo Löw, the editor of the *Prager Tagblatt*, was in the process of emigrating and planned on working in the Palestine Office in Jaffa. Reflecting on their veneration for Palestine, Kafka placed this evening in an ironic light:

> Another traveler to Palestine [*Palästinafahrer*]. Is taking his bar examination a year before the end of his clerkship and is leaving (in two weeks) for Palestine with 1,200 K [crowns]. Will try to get a position with the Palestine Office. All these travelers to Palestine

> (Dr. B[ergmann], Dr. K[ellner]) have downcast eyes, feel blinded by their listeners, fumble around on the table with the tips of their extended fingers, their voices quiver, they smile weakly and prop up these smiles with a little irony.

Everyone listened with great interest to Viktor Kellner's first-hand experience with the students, whom he called "chauvinists, [who] have the Maccabees forever in their mouths and want to take after them."[3] Kellner reported that the school had grown considerably since it started out in 1910 with nineteen students and three teachers.[4] A substantial donation by a British donor – justice of the peace Jacob Moser, Lord Manor of Bradford – had enabled them to erect a new building (the biggest yet in Palestine) and hire more teachers, including Kellner himself. Moser had also requested that the school be renamed after Herzl: the Herzlia Gymnasium. By September 1911, there were 254 students from all over the world (Russia, Romania, Portugal, Australia, South Africa, and Canada), and about 60 more students arrived in 1912. The school would eventually expand in size and accommodate some five hundred students.[5]

Many Prague Zionists were interested in this kind of humanistic, practical Zionism. Although they were influenced by the leading cultural Zionist, Ahad Ha'am (1856–1927), the circle of friends around Kafka felt especially close to Micha Josef Berdyczewski (1865–1921), who "emphasize[d] more consistently than Ahad Ha'am that the national foundation of Zionism exist[ed] independent of any ideology." More importantly, Berdyczewski identified all Judaism with humanity: "We are Jews only because we are human beings that are part of the Jewish people and our humanity is our Judaism."[6] Bergmann described their ideological position to Martin Buber (1878–1965) in 1915 as follows:

> I long for the simple way in which people of other nations grow up and become themselves by the very fact of serving their nation – I long for that, not only because I feel (and Kellner said much the same thing to me recently in reference to his work at the Gymnasium) that we can serve our Jewishness by our humanity and that Jewish work that interferes with our development as human beings cannot be fruitful; I feel also, above all, that such a life has no reality.[7]

Two important projects of this nature became especially significant for Kafka: the Jewish *Volksheim* (People's Home) in Berlin, which was established during World War I (1916) for the Jewish refugee children from Eastern Europe; and the practical community work he and others engaged in at the Jewish Elementary School in Prague in 1923.[8]

Like many of his contemporaries, Jews and non-Jews, Zionists and non-Zionists, Kafka participated in the *Körperkultur* (popular body culture) movement at the turn of the century. He supported the call of Max Nordau (1849–1923) for physical exercise to create a new "muscle Jew": he went swimming, rowing, and hiking, and in July 1912 he spent three weeks at a nudist colony, the Jungborn sanatorium (under the guidance of Christian naturopath and occultist Adolf Just).[9] Furthermore, Kafka's passion for gardening derived from the cultural Zionism he was exposed to in Prague, as well as at the Eleventh Zionist Congress in Vienna, which he attended in 1913. By this point, a shift toward cultural Zionism had taken place, and the Congress was presided over by Dr. Otto Warburg (1859–1938), a botanist from Berlin. At the Congress, Kafka met his friend Viktor Kellner again, as well as Davis Trietsch (1870–1935), an expert on Palestine and the Orient, whose recent lecture in Prague on "Palestine as Land of Colonialization" he had attended and greatly enjoyed.[10]

Kafka never felt that the achievements of Western culture made Western Jews superior or meant that they should be role models for Eastern Jews or the new Jews in Palestine. He was extremely self-critical and saw himself only as a

> typical example of the Western Jew; as far as I know I'm the most Western-Jewish of them all. In other words, to exaggerate, not one second of calm has been granted me; nothing has been granted me, everything must be earned, not only the present and future, but the past as well – something which is, perhaps, given every human being – this too must be earned, and this probably entails the hardest work of all.[11]

Thus, in 1916, he did not think that Western Jews had much to teach the Eastern Jewish refugees in the Berlin *Volksheim* and criticized the teachers' attempts to "raise them to the standard of the contemporary, educated, West European Jew, Berlin version, which admittedly may be the best type of its kind. With that, not much would be achieved."[12] For

Kafka, "Zionism and sweeping enthusiasm [were] not enough," and it was the Western Jew who ironically needed help.[13] The only real alternative Kafka saw was to go back to the sources – to learn Hebrew and read the traditional texts – which was "the hardest work of all." Kafka's friend, Hugo Bergmann, was acutely aware of this dilemma when he wrote, "I cannot imagine that our generation's artificially acquired relationship to biblical and to hasidic Judaism, etc., will ever become so natural to us as our relationship to . . . Fichte or to that man of European culture who showed us the way to humanism [Goethe]."[14]

In May 1917, Kafka began to teach himself modern Hebrew. During this period, the Balfour negotiations were causing a stir in the Middle East, and Kafka and Brod were following the events. "What things are going on in Palestine!" Kafka remarked to Brod, referring to Field Marshal Allenby's "campaign against the Turks in Palestine, which was to end Turkish rule in that region in November 1918."[15] As for the Balfour negotiations, Kafka remained skeptical. His short tale, "Jackals and Arabs," written a month before the Balfour Declaration was proclaimed, depicted the impotence and naïvety of a Northerner (a likely allusion to Max Nordau) – that is, a Western acculturated (Jewish) traveler to Palestine – who is unable to mediate between the Arabs and Jews, let alone solve any racial problems on a political level, because of his inability to understand the Middle Eastern mindset.[16]

In August of that same year, Kafka suffered his first hemorrhage and was eventually diagnosed with tuberculosis. The doctors remained optimistic, however, because they believed that the disease was treatable and even curable in this early stage. Indeed, Kafka biographer Reiner Stach claims that Kafka was cured when he was convalescing in the country on his sister's farm. By October 1918, Kafka was said to have "recovered from TB, and the Spanish flu represented the real threat."[17] More than 20 million people died in the influenza epidemic, and Kafka was lucky that he was not infected. There was no further indication of TB.

Kafka continued to take an intense interest in all aspects of life in Palestine. After the Balfour Declaration, he and his friends were troubled by the territory's escalating racial and political problems. In 1919, Brod mentioned a "dream in which I was tormented by Jewish and Zionist catastrophes. The situation in Palestine was critical at the time." Kafka himself was so preoccupied with the racial conflicts that in 1920 he complained to his friend Felix Weltsch (1884–1964), editor of

the Zionist newspaper *Selbstwehr*, that he had not received the paper: "And just at this moment, when Palestine, according to a newspaper story, has been overrun by Bedouins and perhaps the little bookbinder's workbench in the corner has been smashed." At this point in his life, Kafka was toying with the idea of becoming a "bookbinder in Palestine."[18] The racial turbulence continued, however: in 1921, in Jaffa, forty-seven Jews were killed during an Arab attack, including the writer Y. H. Brenner (1881–1921). All the newspapers that Kafka read, such as *Selbstwehr*, *Der Jude*, *Das jüdische Echo*, and *Die Welt*, provided readers with continual reports about the situation in Palestine: agricultural disasters, racial clashes, the spread of diseases, the condition of the hospitals, the availability of jobs, and the like. Kafka and Brod shared this information with one another and discussed it all intensely.

Meanwhile, on the home front, growing antisemitism encouraged more of Kafka's friends to leave for Palestine. Hugo Bergmann emigrated to Jerusalem in May 1920, and Irma [Miriam] Singer (1898–1989), with whom Kafka had studied Hebrew, moved to the first kibbutz, Degania Alef, founded in 1909. Kafka was deeply disturbed by the antisemitic November riots in Prague in 1920: "The other day I heard someone call the Jews a 'mangy race.' Isn't it natural to leave a place where one is so hated? (Zionism or national feeling isn't needed for this at all.) The heroism of staying on is nonetheless merely the heroism of cockroaches which cannot be exterminated, even from the bathroom." He knew that departing was the only "way out" when he wrote to his gentile lover, Milena Jesenska (1896–1944), that he agreed with the antisemitic Czech newspaper: "The *Venkov* is very correct. Emigrate, Milena, emigrate!" This is why he found it "odd," in January 1921, that his friend Max Brod "hesitat[ed] to throw all [his] professional energies . . . into Zionism."[19]

When Bergmann returned from Palestine in 1923 for a visit, the Prague Zionists organized a series of lectures for him at the Zionist club, Keren Hayesod, on "The Situation in Palestine."[20] After one of these lectures, Kafka approached him and said, "You gave this talk only for me."[21] In his Hebrew notebook of this time, Kafka wrote down the words for "bookbinder" and "waiter" (his imaginary professions in Palestine).[22] He proceeded to throw himself into his Hebrew studies, taking lessons with two friends, Friedrich Thieberger (1888–1958) and Jiři Langer (1894–1943), as well as with the native speaker Puah ben Tovim (1903–91).[23] He also began making his own

connections for a possible move to Palestine, starting with Aharon D. Gordon (1856–1922), one of the leaders of the Zionist Labor movement, and other Palestinian Jews, who were present at a meeting of the socialist Zionist Party Hapoel Hatzair and its youth organization Zeire Zion.[24] While vacationing with his sister's family in Müritz (outside Berlin) in July 1923, Kafka was excited to receive his first letter in Hebrew from Hugo Bergmann and replied that this holiday was to test his fitness for travel to Palestine. Bergmann's wife Else happened to be in Prague and encouraged Kafka to accompany her on her return to Jerusalem. Unfortunately, all the tickets were sold out.[25]

Instead, Kafka moved to Berlin with his new love, Dora Dymant (1898–1952), who, like himself, dreamed of going to Palestine. They imagined opening a restaurant in Tel Aviv, where Kafka would work as a waiter and Dora as a cook. In Berlin, Kafka read "only Hebrew," in particular "thirty-two pages of a novel by Brenner, a page every day. The book is entitled *Shekhol ve-Kishalon* ['Breakdown and Bereavement']."[26] Dora shared his love of Hebrew and both attended classes at the Rabbinic Institute in Berlin for a few months. In February 1924, they finally made their momentous decision: through a travel agency in Vienna, they bought tickets not for the cheaper mail-boat, but for the more expensive express steamer to Jaffa. Kafka and Dora were on their way to Palestine (Figure 20).

At the old Jaffa port, Miriam Singer and her husband Jakob Berkowski were waiting to take them to Degania Alef. Following in the footsteps of A. D. Gordon, they first paid a visit to the early settlements Petah Tikvah (1878) and Rishon LeZion (1882), recovering with friends from their exhausting journey before heading to the Sea of Galilee. A few days later, on their way north to Degania Alef, they understood how harsh life was for the *chaluzim* (pioneers): they saw the hard physical labor that was required for building roads; individuals were hammering away at blocks of rock in the heat for days on end. Kafka had seen such pictures in *Schiwath Zion*[27] ("Return to Zion"), a 1921 silent film by Ya'akov Ben Dov that depicted the lives of the *chaluzim* after coming to Palestine. Kafka and Dora were lucky that they had been allowed to proceed to Degania Alef to do agricultural work. Normally, all new arrivals were sent to build roads, drain swamps, or help with the construction of buildings for six months, a year, or sometimes even longer.[28] When Kafka met Gordon in Prague in 1920, the latter had just moved to Degania Alef. Now Kafka and Dora themselves were arriving there

Figure 20. Franz Kafka in Prague before his departure to Palestine in 1924.

two years after his death and living the life of the poor, in touch with the land and the people. Kafka had long envisioned pursuing this kind of frugal existence in an early kibbutz. Sometimes there were days when he literally lived on bread, water, and dates. However, Kafka soon became

the intellectual leader of this small group of pioneers. He drew up a plan, "Workers Without Possessions," to create a new structure for an alternative existence, outlining the workers' "duties" and "rights" in an environment that had no need for money or material possessions. Individuals should only own a simple gown, as well as some books and food. They should have no possessions; all should be shared with the poor. Everyone should earn his or her living through work alone, and a supervisor might delegate work to the workers. Other duties involved the workers' relationship to the employer. Kafka was adamant that he wanted no lawyers there: no legal courts should ever be involved, and one should only have personal relationships based on trust. His famous statement from this period is that "the average set of lawyers . . . must first be ground to dust before they may reach Palestine. Palestine needs earth but it does not need lawyers." As for workers' "rights," Kafka suggested a maximum of six hours of labor and, in the case of heavy physical labor, four to five hours of work a day. He also envisioned building hospitals and old-age homes to provide for the sick and old.[29]

In their daily lives, Kafka and Dora worked as agricultural laborers. Kafka had long ago tried to prepare himself and others to be pioneers in Palestine. As early as 1913, he had worked in vegetable gardens and at the Pomological Institute for Viniculture and Gardening in Troya, close to Prague. He also spent much time in the garden and fields at his sister Ottla's farm house in Zürau in 1917–18 and fed the animals: a horse, a pig, goats, and geese. Afterwards, he went again to the Pomological Institute, and when he was vacationing in Turnau (September 1918) he did gardening "in the largest nursery in Bohemia (Maschek, Turnau)." He encouraged Ottla to do "an apprenticeship in an agricultural winter school in Friedland [in the Iser mountains]." He also pushed to get her into the Hachschara, an agricultural school near Cologne, and promised to donate a thousand crowns to the Jewish National Fund if Ottla were to be successful, but the place was full. This was in 1920, when Hugo Bergmann's family and Miriam Singer emigrated, as well as several of Ottla's other friends from the Club of Jewish Women and Girls; but Ottla married Josef David, a non-Jew, in July 1920 and stayed in Prague. Kafka continued to recommend agricultural schools to young Jews who were searching for a focus in their lives, such as the Israelitische Gartenbauschule (Israelite Agricultural School) in Ahlem. Even when he was living in Berlin, just before his

emigration, it did not take him long to find a "famous gardening school at Dahlem."[30]

When he immigrated, Kafka brought along the "renowned study on land reform: Adolf Damaschke's *Die Bodenreform*" (1902), which was "declared the basis of the policy of the future state" at the Zionist Congress in 1903.[31] Apart from a mass of practical, everyday expressions, his Hebrew notebook from this period contained much agricultural vocabulary such as "pitchfork," "pumpkin," "harvest," and "grains." A Department of Agriculture had been established a few years earlier, and Kafka took a keen interest in plant diseases and insect pests. Several veterinary hospitals existed as well, and a field staff of veterinary surgeons had recently come to deal with a contagious livestock disease.[32] Kafka's Hebrew notebook mentions the introduction of the Karakul sheep to Palestine and "cattle breeding," and he wrote down the Hebrew names for various animal diseases that he learned about from the Degania veterinarian Ilan Gross – another recent immigrant and relative of Kafka's friend, the late Viennese psychoanalyst Otto Gross (1877–1920), a famous anarchist who was well known for his bohemian life style.

During the late summer of 1924, Kafka's Viennese friend, the writer and journalist Felix Salten (1869–1945), came to Palestine, and Kafka traveled to Tel Aviv to meet him. He had known Salten since the latter's first lecture in Prague (together with Martin Buber) in 1909. Salten's recent novel *Bambi* (1922/3) had been widely discussed not only in Europe, but also among European intellectuals in Palestine. In Zionist circles, *Bambi* was hailed as a new type of Zionist children's literature. The old King of the Forest was easily recognizable as Theodor Herzl (1860–1904), and the dangers of assimilation were obvious in poor Gobo's fate, who was shot by a hunter. Kafka remarked that he saw *Bambi* as a "novel of abandonment," since it was written so many years after Herzl's death, with no new charismatic leader in sight.[33] The two writers discussed the impact of Zionism on their creative work. Kafka insisted he had always been critical of dogmatic Zionist discourse and would never write "*the* Jewish novel," with a Jewish hero, which many Zionists called for. Salten, too, replied that he had consciously cast *Bambi* in a universal light. Kafka acknowledged that even though he had indeed presented an obvious, devastating critique of the assimilated Jew in "Report to an Academy" (1917), this was a commonplace theme by now in Zionist literature, and he had moved beyond it. He

also drew attention to his satires of Zionism and colonialism: his parody of the excessive, arrogant nationalism of young Western Zionists in Blumfeld's bouncy blue and white balls (1915), his critique of religious fanaticism in Palestine in "Jackals and Arabs" (1917), and his satire of practical Zionism in "Investigations of a Dog" (1922). Had Zionism not intervened, Kafka joked, his literary work "might easily have developed into a new secret doctrine, a Kabbalah."[34] In fact, Kafka remarked, he had been very impressed with the "national poet" Chaim Bialik for having achieved a balance between nationalism and humanism and was hoping that Salten might meet Bialik later on in Tel Aviv.

Felix Salten had traveled in the Middle East before, but this trip was different. He had come to tour Palestine, to observe life in the colonies, and to write a book about it afterwards. Salten had a car and a driver, and he now invited Kafka to come along, beginning with Mikve Israel, the first agricultural settlement with its famous agricultural school (1870), established and maintained by Karl Netter (1826–82). Here they made the acquaintance of Shlomo Zemach (1886–1974), whose book, *Jewish Peasants*, Kafka had read in 1919.[35] Zemach was a close childhood friend of David Ben-Gurion and had already immigrated in 1904. They learned that he had worked as an agricultural laborer and as "director of the extension service of the WZO's Agricultural Experiment Station" at the *moshav* (cooperative farming settlement) Ben Shemen (1905), southeast of Tel Aviv, where he "offered instruction in irrigation and established experimental irrigated fields in some of the Galilean settlements."[36] Then, again, for several years he had returned to Europe, obtained a degree as an agricultural engineer in France, and continued his literary pursuits. When Zemach came back to Palestine in 1921, he chose to work at the Mikve Israel agricultural school as a teacher. A blonde German Jewish guide proudly showed Kafka and Salten around: he had escaped the antisemitism in Germany, was only eighteen years old, and considered himself "a child of a new time." At the end they asked to see the grave of the founder Karl Netter. Their next stop was Rishon LeZion (1882), a larger *moshava* (private farming) with 1,500 inhabitants and known for its famous winery. The problem they encountered here was that the second generation was leaving the *moshava*: they returned to Europe or moved on to America or Australia. The main reason for this was the failing wine business caused by the Prohibition laws in the United States and Russia. Since

there was no longer a market for wine, *moshava* farmers were now focusing on tobacco.[37]

Kafka and Salten continued driving north to the Galilee. Along the way, Kafka pointed out the Hashomer watchmen (Jewish defense organization) on horses with their mustaches, keffiyehs, rifles, and bullet belts across their chests. These men were of all ages, some of them even in their fifties or sixties, who had often lost their families in pogroms in Europe. Salten observed that they could not overcome their pain and therefore decided to take on this difficult job, putting their lives in constant danger. Arriving at Kafka's home in Degania Alef, the two friends spent several days with Dora. Then they moved on to see three small colonies in the Jezreel Valley: Ein Harod (1921), Tel Josef (1921), and Beit Alfa (1922). The view of the Gilboa Mountains was stunning. Many young people, students from Europe, had come to these new *kibbutzim*. Though surrounded by swamps that needed to be drained (a breeding ground for malaria), Ein Harod had trees and fresh water, because it was located near the Harod Spring. The students here still lived in tents. Kafka and Salten had a heated argument there with an opinionated Zionist. Salten insisted that it was unnatural to separate children from their mothers and thought the Zionist was quite a fanatic, but Kafka countered that he had always agreed with Jonathan Swift, who said that children should be brought up away from their families, and not by their parents. Salten was also adamant that individuals must keep their property, whereas Kafka was happy to give it all up. For the *kibbutznik*, Salten's views represented typical bourgeois thinking, which had to be wiped out.[38]

The next colony, Tel Josef, was close by, named after Joseph Trumpeldor (1880–1920), the famous Hashomer commander who had fought valiantly to defend the farming village Tel Hai in the Galilee in 1920, when he was killed by Arabs. There they met an interesting Arab writer, Asis Domet (1890–1943), who had made a name for himself especially in Europe as a Christian Arab who had fought for the Zionist side and had written a play about the national hero Trumpeldor's heroic death. Salten had met Asis Domet once before, in Vienna, but for Kafka, this was a new and fascinating encounter. The youngest little kibbutz, Beit Alfa, was located further east from Ein Harod and Tel Josef, in the shadow of Mount Gilboa. Here Kafka and Salten encountered young people from Austria and Bohemia; again, there were very few houses and people lived mostly in tents. Yet there were also a few

older settlers who already spoke Hebrew and had lived in the area for a while. Kafka and Salten had come especially to see an old friend who had been a lawyer in Europe. He had arrived not long before Kafka and Dora, but he had been made to perform all sorts of odd jobs when he arrived: stone-breaker, road-builder, handyman, locksmith, blacksmith, carpenter, and house painter.[39]

Finally, traveling further south toward Jerusalem, Salten and Kafka stayed with Hugo Bergmann's family for a few days and admired the splendid sights of Jerusalem, before ending their tour in Tel Aviv with its over thirty thousand inhabitants. They were especially curious to see Ruttenberg's new Jaffa Electrical Company, which had just been established in 1923. The composer Mordechai Zeira (1905–68) was working here as an electrician. Kafka had made his acquaintance already: Zeira had also immigrated in 1924, and for a little while had lived not far from Degania Alef, on the land of the later kibbutz Afikim. Kafka admired Zeira because he refused to be only an artist: he wanted to be useful to the community. Zeira stressed the greater importance of technology, which related to the Arab–Jewish conflict. He told them that for quite some time Jaffa had wanted nothing to do with this electrical plant, but now the Arabs no longer resisted, and at this very moment the electricians at the plant were working on a connection to provide Jaffa with light and electricity for streetcars. The advancement of technology, according to Zeira (and Salten agreed), was the key to peaceful Arab–Jewish coexistence.[40] Zeira was also an accomplished musician, and had worked with the well-known composer Joel Engel (1868–1927), now living in Tel Aviv.[41] Engel had been a friend of the late S. Ansky (1863–1920) and had been part of his famous expedition in 1912, traveling with a group of artists through Ukraine to collect Jewish folk art and music. Kafka knew about Ansky's expedition and was fascinated by the group's collection of Jewish folklore. Engel also wrote the musical score for Ansky's 1914 play *The Dybbuk*. Kafka and Salten spent a very pleasant evening with Engel and Zeira, listening to some of Zeira's popular settler songs.

Their very last evening was reserved for Israel's national poet Chaim Nahman Bialik (1873–1934), who had just emigrated from Berlin to Tel Aviv. Bialik frequently invited guests to his beautiful home in Bialik Street (named after him before he even arrived): Kafka and Salten admired the architecture and inside decoration, the zodiac and folklore motifs on the pillars in his living room, and the magnificent

garden. Bialik and Kafka had lived in Berlin at the same time, but their paths had not crossed, though Kafka and Dora had studied at the Rabbinic Institute in Berlin, and Bialik had contacts there as well. Now Kafka told him how much he had admired his powerful condemnation of the Kishinev pogrom (1903) in his poem, "In Schhite Stot" ("In the City of Slaughter"), when he first heard it recited in Yiddish in 1911. Also present that evening was Bialik's close friend Ahad Ha'am, whose cultural Zionism had inspired not only the Prague Zionists but Felix Salten in Vienna as well. It was an experience to meet Ahad Ha'am in person. They were later joined by another close friend, the painter Reuven Rubin (1893–1974), some of whose gentle, visionary paintings of Palestine decorated Bialik's living room. Kafka's and Salten's earlier discussion about nationalism and humanism, and the meaning of humanist Zionism for their art, resurfaced that evening, with Ahad Ha'am present, and all agreed with Bialik that a great artist can combine the national and universal in him or herself, because the universal element is always present in any national consciousness. At the end of the evening they were invited up to the roof terrace with its view of the sea, where Bialik pointed out the lights of the growing city around them.

After Salten left Palestine, Kafka returned to Degania Alef and resumed his agricultural activities in the community. Gordon remained an inspiration to both Kafka and Dora throughout this whole period. They identified with the pacifist, socialist, Zionist Hapoel Hatzair (The Young Worker), which Gordon had founded, and which attracted intellectuals of all kinds: agricultural workers, writers, and teachers. Dora participated in the feminist activities of Hapoel Hatzair, together with Ada Fishman-Maimon and Yael Gordon, the late A. D. Gordon's daughter. Gordon had strongly believed in an equal education for boys and girls; his daughter was the product of her father's educational projects in Eastern Europe (which reminded Kafka of his own involvement with the Jewish elementary school in Prague) and she became a Hebrew teacher and advocate for women's rights. Kafka was hoping that at some point there might be a possibility for him and Dora to become teachers as well. In his last letter to Kafka, Martin Buber had confided in him that it was his dream to

> establish a school of adult education (a *Volkshochschule*) as an instrument for the education of the people. Not in Germany, where such a school would stand in the shadow of the university,

> but in Palestine, where no university had yet been created. There lay the chance to make a reality of [his] concept: "An institution for real popular education, not for certain classes who enjoy the privilege of education, but, as the name *Volkshochschule* implies, for the whole nation that is coming into being."[42]

Ironically, two years later in 1926, when Buber had a chance to realize this dream, he did not want to leave Europe: he had been asked to become chancellor of the new Hebrew University after it opened on Mount Scopus in Jerusalem (1925).[43]

At Degania Alef, Kafka and Dora briefly made the acquaintance of the poet Rachel Bluwstein (1890–1931), who inspired Kafka to return to his fictional writing. However, finding a new literary style was very difficult for him. He had read Zemach's realist fiction in *Jewish Peasants* (1919) about the hardships of daily survival, conflicts with the Arabs, and the increasing hatred on the Jewish side. Kafka, too, had by now participated in defending farms from external attacks, and for this reason appreciated some of Zemach's realism. At the same time, he loved Brenner's Hebrew fiction, though he found him too bleak and wished for a rebirth of Jewish literature in Palestine. Nonetheless, the novel *Shekhol ve-Kishalon* ("Breakdown and Bereavement") was a great work of art, far more so than the melodrama that Zemach produced. In Zemach's story, "Brachfeld" ("Barren Field"), a Jewish man, was left badly injured after an Arab attack: in his "frozen look there was irreconcilable hatred," and "the spilled blood . . . cried out from the depths for retaliation and the cut-off finger lying in the mud called out: Revenge, Revenge!" Kafka fundamentally disliked the heavy-handedness of this kind of expressionistic writing about Palestine, which had already filled the Zionist newspapers in the old country. He had criticized the militant Berlin Zionist, physician, and writer Hans Bloch's "Legende von Theodor Herzl" ("Legend of Theodor Herzl") for the "Geschrei" (the "scream") of his expressionistic style, his "effusiveness with mere words": "('life in me began to rebel and let out a piercing cry like that of a mortally wounded beast,' etc. – no, that's no good, or rather it's childish and might mean anything). Undoubtedly, he will write better things, or has already."[44] It was not only the melodrama that Kafka criticized but also the nationalist and frequently racial discourse in this type of Zionist literature and politics.

In Jerusalem in the late 1920s, Kafka tried to contact S. Y. Agnon (1887–1970) who was a close friend of Martin Buber during the years Agnon lived in Germany. Agnon had already immigrated to Palestine in 1909, but moved to Germany in 1913, and had only returned to Tel Aviv the same year that Kafka and Dora immigrated. He was considered *the* literary icon in Palestine now. Yet Agnon showed little interest in Kafka and claimed that he barely knew the titles of Kafka's few short stories that had been published in Europe. Neither did Agnon appreciate it when readers approached him and asked if he knew Kafka's writings, since some of his stories seemed similar to Kafka's. He insisted he had never read Kafka. Kafka himself admired Agnon for his literary work, as well as for his knowledge of Jewish tradition. He knew that he would never be able to write in Hebrew like Agnon, who was instrumental in developing the Hebrew language through his art. As Gershom Scholem rightly said, Agnon "stood at the 'crossroads of Hebrew'; his Hebrew exemplified the development of the language of religious tradition into the revived spoken language."[45] There were rumors that Agnon was planning to write a monumental novel about the second Aliya, a magnum opus capturing his time – his later 700-page epic, *Tmol Shilshom* ("Only Yesterday," 1945), which Kafka considered a masterpiece when it came out. Kafka did not aspire to such heights; he still felt very much like the Western Jew who had to acquire everything. There was also a fundamental ideological difference between Agnon and himself; Kafka was not interested in preserving the Jewish religious tradition. Not only did he lack a basic knowledge of the original texts, but he was a satirist at heart, who loved to pun and make fun of the religious heritage. Though his Hebrew was good and he was able to communicate, he could not play on words in Hebrew in the same way that he could in German. For a satirically inclined writer like himself, it was virtually impossible to write in the new language.

Kafka therefore decided to rewrite and finish his three unfinished novels in German and have them translated into Hebrew later. *Amerika*, the land of immigration in his first novel, had now been replaced by Palestine. The immigrant Karl Rossman, "The Man Who Disappeared" in the Promised Land of America, would not disappear in Palestine but begin a new life. *The Trial* had been inspired by the 1913 Beilis ritual murder trial and the Dreyfus affair.[46] But all of this seemed like history now. There were new possibilities for Joseph K., who Kafka decided must not die. Finally, in *The Castle*, bureaucracy prevented the

land-surveyor from finding a home: there might be a new home for him here as well. For the moment, however, Kafka was so busy at Degania and with his Haganah (literally, "Defense"; Jewish paramilitary organization) activities that he felt no urgency to write.

During these four years on Degania Alef, Kafka remained close to a group of friends including Arthur Ruppin (1876–1943), Hugo Bergmann, Martin Buber, Gershom Scholem (1897–1982), Hans Kohn (1891–1971), and Ernst Simon (1899–1988). All firmly believed in their vision of a cultural, humanistic Zionism, which found expression in "Brit Shalom" (A Peace Treaty), a peace group they founded in 1925. Supported by Judah L. Magnes (1877–1948), Buber, Walter Benjamin (1892–1940), and Albert Einstein (1879–1955), Brit Shalom advocated peaceful coexistence between Jews and Arabs, and Buber especially stressed that "the altogether desirable immigration of steadily increasing numbers of Jews into Palestine should take place without any violation of the rights of the country's Arab inhabitants."[47] Magnes, who shared Buber's pacifism, spoke up for many, saying: "The Jewish national homeland must not be established by force of arms – 'not in the way of Joshua' – as he expressed it in his opening speech at Hebrew University in 1929, the year of the Arab riots."[48] Kafka shared these sentiments. Yet self-defense was paramount for him at Degania during this period and was part of daily life. Like most, he was working in the Haganah to help protect the farms and *kibbutzim*. This did not alienate him from his intellectual friends, nor did it mean that Kafka did not support their humanistic form of Zionism.

Kafka and Dora stayed in Degania Alef until 1928. The situation in Europe had become increasingly desperate, and they decided to move to the youth village, Ben Shemen, which was established outside Tel Aviv in 1927 by their old acquaintance from Berlin, Siegfried Lehmann (1892–1958), who had arrived in Palestine that same year. Kafka had always supported Lehmann's work for the Jewish *Volksheim* during World War I, which provided boarding and an education for Jewish refugee children from the East. He had encouraged his fiancée Felice Bauer to be one of the helpers at the *Volksheim*. Kafka and Brod had also been engaged in similar activities helping Jewish refugees in Prague. These convictions explain why he and Dora wanted to help Lehmann bring children from Jewish orphanages in Berlin and elsewhere to Palestine. At the same time, Kafka and Dora finally saw an opportunity for themselves to become teachers: Kafka was already

familiar with the British model of the settlement houses from Lehmann's Berlin *Volksheim*; they were based on nineteenth-century community-oriented educational facilities, which encouraged teachers to live with their students at close quarters. This arrangement had proved difficult in Berlin, where the teachers generally lived elsewhere and only came in to teach. But in the youth village Ben Shemen all lived together as a collective. Viktor Kellner visited a few times from the Herzlia Gymnasium, as did Erwin Arnstein, a popular teacher from the Jewish Elementary School in Prague, who had emigrated in 1923, returned to Prague for a year to obtain his doctorate, and later made his home in Jerusalem. As Kafka's niece, Marianne Steiner (1913–2001), recalled:

> Erwin Arnstein was a marvelous teacher and all children, myself included, adored him. His method, for Prague of that time, was revolutionary indeed. The children were asked to call him Erwin (not "Herr Lehrer" as was the custom then); he introduced plasticine and encouraged the children to use their imagination and create models of everyday life: a wedding, a funeral etc. When he left Prague with his fiancée Klara, we children were heartbroken.[49]

Arnstein and Kellner now joined Kafka and Dora at Ben Shemen: all became part of Lehmann's teaching team.

After the Nazi rise to power, Tile Rössler, a good friend of Kafka and Dora, immigrated from Germany to Tel Aviv. Now going by the name of Tehila Ressler (1907–59), she opened one of the first dance studios in Tel Aviv, the "Tehila Ressler School," and inspired the development of free movement dance in the Yishuv, which was now suppressed in Germany. Also in 1933, the writer Arnold Zweig (1887–1968) came to Palestine. Like Kafka, he had Zionist sympathies as a young man, and later began to work for the Zionist newspaper, *Jüdische Rundschau*. Kafka had met Zweig before, and their literary work had once been mentioned in the same column in the Zionist newspaper *Selbstwehr*, but they were not close. In 1938, Martin Buber, too, finally emigrated to Palestine. Through Gershom Scholem's influence, Buber obtained a professorship at the Hebrew University. And it was Buber who ultimately encouraged Kafka to write again. When Kafka began rewriting *Amerika* at Ben Shemen, he changed the title to *Driftwood*, given the desperate situation of European Jews. Some of the children who were

"driftwood" and had come to Ben Shemen later became famous. One was Shimon Peres (1923–), later Prime Minister of Israel and recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1994 (together with Rabin and Arafat), who arrived in Tel Aviv in 1934. He left high school in Tel Aviv at the age of fifteen and went to Ben Shemen to continue his education there. Another was the later literary celebrity, Dahn Ben Amotz (1924–89), who came to Ben Shemen in 1938 as an orphan from Poland. Kafka was fifty-five years old when he met Shimon Peres and the fourteen-year-old Ben Amotz. He became their counselor, mentor, and friend. Both students left in 1941; the seventeen-year-old Ben Amotz joined the Palmach (underground elite fighting force of Haganah), while Peres joined the Haganah. Both distinguished themselves in the military, and later enjoyed successful careers in Israeli political and cultural life.

Kafka's novel *Driftwood*, rewritten in the midst of these turbulent political events, took a less optimistic turn and lost much of the light-hearted playfulness of the original *Amerika* novel. While retaining the central character, Karl Rossman (horseman), the novel depicts him as a refugee child at Ben Shemen, who later joins the underground Haganah. As a member of the Guard Corps, we see him patrolling Jewish settlements on his horse, defending and protecting them from Arab invasions. Eventually Karl becomes a spy for Israel/Palestine and discovers many state secrets that destroy the power of the Arabs and enable the Jews to create their own Jewish state much sooner than anyone expected. Yet the ending of *Driftwood* is just as ironic as in the original *Amerika* novel (in which the promising theater of Oklahoma falsely advertised itself as a haven where everyone was welcome and betrayed all who had hope). In *Driftwood*, Kafka transformed this "theater" into the ugly political spectacle during the last phase of the British Mandate, with the British playing the Jews off against the Arabs and vice versa. *Driftwood* depicts both Arabs and Jews as helpless "driftwood," at the mercy of selfish, greedy, and power-hungry authority figures at all levels of society. The novel ends with a highly ironic vision of a soon-to-be-realized Jewish state in 1942, which held out no promise for a peaceful coexistence between Arabs and Jews.

When World War II broke out, Kafka grew even closer to Martin Buber and both became increasingly involved with Brit Shalom. Moreover, Kafka was especially proud of Hugo Bergmann who, since he had become rector of the Hebrew University in 1935, never ceased to emphasize that his university "teaches Arabic, promotes Arab

culture and does scientific work in the fields of agriculture and health, [all of which] 'will create new possibilities for future cooperation between Arabs and Jews.'"[50] In 1939, the group formed the League for Arab–Jewish Rapprochement.[51] Arnold Zweig had always been a strong pacifist and at this stage he joined them as well. Through Zweig, Kafka also came to participate in a few political activities advocating peace and understanding.

In 1940 Kafka, Zweig, and the painter Hermann Struck (1876–1944) were invited to Kibbutz Masaryk, to celebrate the renaming of the kibbutz after Tomàš Masaryk (1850–1937), the first President of Czechoslovakia. Arnold Zweig read from his play, *Ritual Murder in Hungary* (1914), for which he had received the Kleist Prize in 1915.[52] Zweig was the attraction of the evening, for his play was about the Hilsner ritual murder trial, which had made Masaryk famous. This was a Czech Dreyfus trial (1894–1906), which also dragged on for years. Like Dreyfus, Leopold Hilsner, a poor Czech Jewish villager, had been wrongly convicted and imprisoned in 1900–18. Hilsner's lawyer Masaryk became the Zola of the Hilsner trial, courageously speaking up against antisemitism at great cost to his personal and professional life. Though Masaryk was initially unable to win Hilsner's release, the case eventually made him very popular and paved the way for his later political career. Moreover, after he became President, his pro-Jewish sentiments set the tone in the country for many years to come. Because he stood by Hilsner unswervingly until the latter was set free by the last Austro-Hungarian Emperor Charles I at the end of World War I, Masaryk was honored by the Kibbutz Masaryk as a righteous gentile. After Zweig's performance, Kafka read excerpts from "The Judgment" and "The Penal Colony," both of which contained echoes of the Beilis ritual murder trial (1911–13).[53] The evening ended with a reading by Hermann Struck, who had immigrated in 1922 and taught at the Bezalel Art School. Struck read from *Das Ostjüdische Antlitz* ("The Face of East European Jewry"), which he had published together with Arnold Zweig in 1920, and afterwards he discussed the lost world of Eastern European Judaism in his own drawings, which he had contributed to the volume.[54]

In 1942, Magnes and Buber, as well as two Hebrew writers, Rabbi Benjamin (Yehoshua Radler-Feldman, 1880–1957) and S. Yitzhar's uncle, Moshe Smilansky (1874–1953), founded the association Ihud (Unity), which supported a binational state.[55] However,

these efforts to find peaceful solutions to the Arab–Jewish conflict went largely unnoticed because of other pressing concerns. The war and the Holocaust, news of which had begun to arrive in the Yishuv, were on everyone's minds. Kafka continued his clandestine work in the Haganah and helped refugees who were coming into the country, including his friends Max Brod, Jiři Langer, and the former editor of the Zionist newspaper *Selbstwehr*, Felix Weltsch. Brod and Weltsch managed to get the last train out of Prague in 1939 and eventually were able to establish themselves. Brod found work at the Habima National Theater in Tel Aviv and by 1942 he was already its artistic director; Weltsch became a librarian in Jerusalem. Langer, however, was in very poor health when he arrived in Tel Aviv from Slovakia in 1939. He had been Kafka's most flamboyant friend in Prague. Not only did he "positively reaffirm . . . his Jewishness and his homosexuality," he lived with the Hasidim in Galicia off and on from 1913 to 1916, introduced Brod and Kafka to the wonder rabbis of Grodek and Belz, and was the first to publish his Hebrew poetry in Prague. A scholar and poet, he was also Kafka's Hebrew teacher for years and practiced everyday Hebrew conversation with him long before Kafka emigrated to Palestine. Though Langer's health declined, he continued writing Hebrew poetry in Tel Aviv, and after spending several years translating his Hasidic legends into Hebrew, eventually died in March 1943.[56] Despite desperate personal circumstances and the increasingly worsening political situation, the German émigré community tried to keep their spirits up and founded literary clubs and salons. From 1941 on, Max Brod was a regular visitor at the salon of his brother-in-law Ernst Taussig and his wife, where political and intellectual discussions took place and writers read from their work in German. Kafka accompanied Brod only once: he found the nostalgic, backward-looking German émigré community stifling.

After World War II, Kafka suffered from severe depression when he received the news that most of his family had been killed by the Nazis. He had been informed that all of his three sisters had died in concentration camps: Gabriele ("Elli" [1889–1944?]) and her youngest daughter Hanna (1920–41?), as well as Valerie ("Valli" [1890–1944?]) and her husband Josef Pollak were sent to the Lodz ghetto in 1941 and perhaps died in the Chelmno extermination camp, either in 1941/2 or 1944. Elli's son Felix (1911–40) died in a concentration camp in France. Kafka's youngest sister Ottilie ("Ottla" [1892–1943]) died in Auschwitz-Birkenau. Not long after the war ended, Kafka discovered

a little bit more about Ottla's fate. Survivors from Terezin told him that she made her non-Jewish husband divorce her in order to save their two children; thereafter, she was taken to Terezin in 1942, where she attended to a group of severely traumatized Polish orphans from the Bialystock ghetto, who needed special care. Along with fifty others, Ottla had volunteered to accompany these orphans when they were ordered on a transport, supposedly to be exchanged at the Swiss border or in Denmark or Sweden. Yet, their transport was turned back and all of them were sent to Auschwitz and immediately gassed upon arrival.[57] Moreover, word had reached Kafka that his second fiancée Julie Wohryzek had died in Auschwitz in 1944, and his non-Jewish lover, Milena Jesenskà, who had fought courageously in the Czech resistance, had died in the Ravensbrück concentration camp, also in 1944. The Jewish world that he had left behind had collapsed. At first, Kafka believed that only Ottla's two daughters, Vera and Helene, had survived in Prague with their non-Jewish father. He later found out that Valli's daughter, Marianne Steiner (1913–2000), was still alive because she had emigrated with her husband to Great Britain in 1939. There had been no news of Elli's daughter Gerti (1912–72) for the longest time, but Kafka subsequently learned that she was alive as well.

Because of the changing political climate in Israel, Kafka's longtime friend, Arnold Zweig, always a convinced pacifist, openly criticized Israel's nationalistic turn and went back to East Berlin in 1948 "to serve the cause of socialism."[58] Yet Kafka knew that he himself would never return to Europe, though the political future in Israel did not look promising. Kafka's intellectual circle of friends in Brit Shalom tried once again to influence the course of political events. This was Israel's chance to build a democratic foundation for a new Jewish state, grounded in the humanistic values of cultural Zionism. Judah Magnes had become "Buber's most influential and important associate in the struggle for peace during the decade preceding the foundation of the state of Israel."[59] But again their dream failed, as new realities determined Zionism's direction after the war. Faced with the immediate creation of a state, political Zionism triumphed over cultural Zionism. Given the necessity for national security, "the Zionist culture that emerged in Jewish Palestine idealized the New Muscle Jew" and was also "unmistakably gendered; for it was largely the men who claimed the additional mission of national defense."[60] This represented a road not taken, a chance missed.

Perhaps it was because he was emotionally paralyzed by the Holocaust and disappointed about the direction of political events that Kafka gradually rediscovered the urge to write. With hesitation, he turned to his abandoned 1914 novel, *The Trial*, shocked at how many scenes seemed to foreshadow the horrors of war and genocide. He immediately transformed the ethnically unidentifiable protagonist, Joseph K., who was arrested in the original novel without ever having committed a crime, into a Czech Jewish protagonist. This new Josef K. is not only traumatized by the course of events in the late 1930s but has acquired a debilitating illness: he is literally becoming paralyzed when the Germans enter Czechoslovakia in 1938. K.'s "trial" is this mysterious disease, both symbolic and personal, a slow and inevitable process of paralysis, which slowly turns his entire body into stone. Witnessing the deportations around him in 1942, K. is eventually confined to his bed and receives news about the events in Prague and the destruction of the Jewish world only on the radio or from caretakers and friends who visit him. When his friends are deported one by one, his symptoms worsen and he feels his body's rigidity intensify. With no one left to take care of the helpless man, K. is transferred to a local non-Jewish hospital, where this bizarre clinical case becomes a challenge for the medical community in Prague. But no one can find a cure for his mysterious illness.

In September 1940, orders are issued to remove all Jewish patients to a Jewish hospital. K.'s doctors fight this decision for a while, but are helpless in the end. In January 1942, now paralyzed up to his neck, K. is placed on a stretcher to be taken away. After years of confinement, K. is carried one last time through the streets of Prague during daylight. He sees a strange world that he no longer belongs to. Most passersby are afraid to look at him and rush by. Some stare at his strange immobile body and his stony face. No one stops, no one knows him any longer. All of a sudden, K. has a last vision: he witnesses the deportation of a group of little children ahead of him – a few faces seem familiar – as they pass the Jewish Elementary School of Prague, which he himself had helped found in 1920. His sister Valli had been working as a teacher at the school even after the Nazi invasion and his niece Lotte had been one of the first students there. K. tries to get a last glimpse of the group as they are forced onto a truck that he knows will take them to the Terezin concentration camp and from there to Auschwitz. The novel ends with K. straining to move his head one last time when he feels, horrified, that his entire body has now turned

to stone and he can no longer move. We never find out what happens to him.

Rewriting this novel was painful and took many years. While Kafka was reworking *The Trial*, other friends also found their voices by addressing the Holocaust. His friend Miriam Singer, still living on Degania Alef, translated the wartime memoirs of Elieser Jerushalmi from Hebrew into German and published them in 1960.[61] *The Trial*, however, was much more than therapeutic release. It became Kafka's seminal work about the Holocaust and earned him international acclaim. When it was published in 1958 it became a worldwide success. As Norman Mailer commented: "Kafka's *Trial* is an emotional *tour de force*. No reader will ever forget Kafka's powerful metaphor of a human being who is slowly turning into stone. This metaphor perfectly captures the inexpressible human suffering of millions who had no voice. A most profound evocation of the holocaust indeed."

Kafka's next novel, *Hordus' Castle*, followed in 1963. This was Kafka's last major work, which helped make him a celebrity around the world. The plot differed significantly from *The Trial*, which had no closure, since the protagonist's fate was deliberately left unknown. *Hordus' Castle* begins with Adolf Hitler's 1939 speech from the Prague Hradcany Castle, proclaiming the creation of the German protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. The protagonist, Hordus, is a young Zionist who witnesses Hitler's speech. Hordus, the Hebrew name for King Herod, alludes to the legend of Herod the Great, Roman King of Judea, who built, amongst other palaces, the fortress at Masada. For Zionists, Masada always symbolized ultimate Jewish heroism and resistance: as the legend goes, during the Roman siege of Masada in the first century BCE, the Jewish warriors on top of Masada defended themselves valiantly, never giving up, choosing death through mass suicide over surrender. After Hitler's speech at the Prague Castle, Hordus decides to immigrate to Palestine in order to climb the Masada rock in the Judean desert and build his own castle on top of Herod's palace ruins. In Israel, he works as a land-surveyor for many years, surveying the rocky, sandy landscape, working out construction plans to realize his dream of rebuilding Herod's Castle on Masada.

In this highly symbolic novel, which combined Jewish and European history with contemporary Zionist dreams and realities, Kafka used multiple word plays: the German "Schloss" (castle) also carries the meaning of a "lock" in a door, which needs to be opened, while

the Hebrew–Aramaic word for the German "Landvermesser" (land-surveyor) ("mashikha") alludes not only to "messiah" but also to "desire."[62] The novel's distinguishing features, in fact, are linguistic playfulness, pervasive irony, and even slapstick comedy, reminding us of the younger Kafka's Chaplinesque humor at the beginning of his *Metamorphosis*, or of some of the hilarious scenes in his original *Trial* or the *Amerika* novel. Most importantly, unlike the struggles of Kafka's previous protagonists, Hordus' relentless pursuit of his goal is not futile: Hordus never loses faith and his struggle is never without purpose. At the end of *Hordus' Castle*, Hordus lays the first stone. The daunting task of resurrecting his castle from the old ruins of Herod's palace on top of Masada has begun.

This last novel received rave reviews. Saul Bellow wrote:

> *Hordus' Castle* is a remarkable contemporary Zionist epic, exploring the fears and anxieties of two generations struggling for a safe home in the midst of political and military upheaval from the British Mandate to the foundation of the Jewish state, to the present Israel now. Playing with multiple allegorical and symbolic meanings drawn from Jewish tradition and history, Kafka has captured the desires and longings of an entire generation that has lived through the War of Independence and the turmoil of the years to come. Kafka has not only found a new voice for himself but truly established himself as an Israeli writer.

Together with Agnon, Kafka was nominated for the Nobel Prize for Literature. In 1966, he became the Nobel laureate and the world's attention turned to Israel, which was increasingly viewed as a bastion of literary brilliance. The Nobel Prize committee announced that:

> This year's Nobel Prize for Literature will be awarded to Israeli writer Franz Kafka as a tribute to his stunning achievement of creating great art out of the ruins of devastation. In his three major novels – *Driftwood*, *The Trial*, and *Hordus' Castle* – Kafka has persistently chronicled important historical and personal events of his time with profound sensitivity and masterly artistic form. The committee believes that Kafka's writings testify to the power and survival of the human spirit. Kafka is truly a literary icon of our times.

Overnight, Kafka had become a celebrity in Israel and around the world. Prior to that point, few of the German émigré writers who had

immigrated to Israel had managed to establish themselves within the country's popular literary culture. Kafka knew only one writer who had achieved such a breakthrough, the comedian Sammy Gronemann (1875–1952). In 1943, Kafka accompanied Max Brod to the popular artist café Atara in Tel Aviv to celebrate Sammy's success after his musical comedy, *King Solomon and Shalmai the Shoemaker*, played to a full house in the Ohel ("Tent") Hebrew theater.[63] Now, over twenty years later, Kafka himself had achieved the virtually impossible.

Today, everyone around the world knows the adjective "kafkaesque." In Israel, Kafka first became the idol of the 1960s generation. A few times, he was sighted at the legendary Café Kassit in Tel Aviv, sitting at a table in the company of the old composer, Mordechai Zeira.[64] His former pupil from Ben Shemen, Ben Amotz, was always there, together with Arik Einstein (1939–[2013; editor's note]) and other artists and singers on the political left. Ben Amotz had become a leading left-wing bohemian cult figure of the 1960s. Charismatic and outrageous, he was "a symbol of his generation, the generation of the War of Independence."[65] Projecting his own image of the Sabra, the former Palmach fighter had transformed himself into a bestselling novelist, radio star, and friend of Marlon Brando and other Hollywood stars. He set the tone in Café Kassit – vibrant, flamboyant, intellectual, and critical of contemporary Israeli society and politics. These artists welcomed Kafka into their circle and invited him to share their generation's dreams and visions. After Kafka's death, an original mural by the painter Yosl Bergner (1920–) was dedicated to Kafka and hung in Kassit for many years in the 1970s.[66] Bergner had made his first acquaintance with Kafka at Kassit and acknowledged Kafka's profound influence on his art, stating "it is Kafka who gives me form" and that he used "[Kafka's] writing . . . [as] a starting place for his own journey."[67] Bergner later created a famous cycle of Kafka paintings.[68] Few older writers were able to connect with this young generation. Kafka's increasing presence in Israeli culture meant that he was right to cling to the hope that "our humanity is our Judaism."[69] For this reason, Israeli novelist and peace activist Amos Oz stressed in 1982 the importance of humanistic cultural Zionism for contemporary Israeli society. "Young people," he wrote, "have rediscovered the secret charm of the original visions" and "there is, at long last . . . a painful reconsideration of the ideological, ethical and political propositions of the early Zionists, a growing tendency on the part of young Israelis to give a flat no to their parents – and, at the same time, to say 'perhaps' to their grandparents."[70]

Kafka's writing is no utopian Herzl *Alt-Neuland* ("Old-New Land," 1902), which already envisioned the peaceful coexistence of Arabs, Jews, men, and women in Palestine. Kafka's alternative vision addresses the complexities and absurdities of contemporary realities beyond our own time and place. He highlights the trials of individual human beings, even if their goals seem out of reach. Many of Kafka's protagonists struggle against all odds and rarely give up. His voice is both new and old. It is heard by many generations around the world and in Israel, too: a modern, secular Jewish voice, questioning certainties, deconstructing truths, continually searching for alternate answers in climates of conflict. Today Kafka's fame in Israel is well established: unlike the diaspora voice of nineteenth-century German Jewish poet Heinrich Heine (1797–1856), whose name is ironically honored by a small dead-end street in Jerusalem, all major Israeli cities have important streets or buildings named after Kafka.