

Abstract & Keywords

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Introductory Remarks

Beginning in the late 1820s, numerous Jewish characters surface in Danish fiction. Ingemann and Blicher, Hauch and Sibbern, Gyllembourg and Andersen – all of them wrote at least one novella or novel, in which a Jewish character plays a central role. Often, the names of the Jewish figures also serve as the title. Although none of these characters is free from stereotypes and ambivalent attributions, it is noticeable that the narrative voices are sympathetic to the Jewish figures. They consistently express admiration for the Jewish characters and consequently generate sympathy and empathy in their readers. Though mostly positive – or better in quotation marks “positive” – the representations of Jews are not unproblematic. The title of this book summarizes this ambivalence: The phenomena at the centre is an idealizing devotion to a coveted object – the enthusiasm for “the Jew” or “Judaism”. It is thus a philosemitic enthusiasm. The concept of “philosemitism” serves primarily as a tool for naming that which connects the selected novels and novellas. It thus helps grasp the irritating ambivalence inherent in them.

Context and Questions

The texts analysed were created during the *Guldalderen* (the Golden Age), a period in the first half of the 19th century during which a rich cultural life developed in Denmark. It was also a time of crisis both economically and politically, due to the Napoleonic Wars. The tension between the rich cultural development and crisis is also evident with regards to the emancipation of Jews. Denmark was one of the first European countries, in which the Jewish population received extensive equal legal rights. Danish Jews were granted civil rights in 1814, however remained excluded from holding certain offices and positions. Equality was only fully attained – at least legally – after religious freedom was anchored in the constitution in 1849. The emancipation process was accompanied by fierce, public debates; the dispute in 1813 became known as *litterære jødefejden* (the literary Jewish feud). In different cities during the autumn and winter of 1819/1820 Christians grew violent against the Jewish population. These so-called Hep-Hep riots began in Würzburg and spread from southern Germany across a large part of Europe. Violent attacks against Jews were documented again in 1830. The texts I am analysing, thus arose amidst national uncertainty, Jewish emancipation and anti-Jewish violence. On the one hand, they are commentaries on the political and social processes of their time; on the other hand, they themselves, constitute the discourse. As philosemitic texts, they reflect and criticize anti-Jewish tendencies and actions, while countering them with their own positions. They thus shape and change the discourse which first produced them, with which they then inevitably remained tied to. My book pursues the following questions: What impact do the Jewish characters have in the text? Which narrative possibilities do they open up? And following that: When, how and why are Jewish characters written about and how is knowledge about Jews questioned, changed or consolidated in the literature? The focus however, lies not exclusively on Jewish characters. I also consider non-Jewish characters and plot lines that initially seem unrelated to Jews. It is here, in the seeming incoherence

between the described events and the Jewish characters, that the most impressive and surprising explanations for the literary attractiveness of Jewish characters is often found.

Approaches

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the object of my investigation, I negotiate within a framework of different methods and theories. The work ties into antisemitism research in literary studies. Methodological impulses are derived primarily from Stephen Greenblatt and Moritz Baßler's poetics of culture approach, as well as from Roland Barthes and his metaphors of pleasurable obstacles and irritations, tears and shadows, fissures and breaks of a text. The concept of 'philosemitism' is not only useful in identifying and naming these moments of irritation and ambivalence in my analysis, but also seems necessary. For me, 'philosemitism' is in no way a clear concept, quite the contrary, it is highly ambivalent. Ultimately, it is always tied to external attributions, always tied to conditions, such as how to be a Jew, to behave and how to develop. In my work, the concept serves as a heuristic tool which aids in capturing and naming a commonality between the analysed texts: namely, the strong irritation springing from these texts, although they position themselves for the equality of Jews and against anti-Jewish violence and discrimination. In addition, I also follow Philipp Theisohn and Georg Braungart's approach: They identify philosemitism as a decidedly Christian discourse, in which Judaism is a Christian phantasm and "the Jew" is an object of desire, which should disappear in the unification with Christianity and at the same time, always remain Jewish so as to remain desirable.

Texts Analyses

My work aims to undertake an as complete as possible analysis of the "Golden Age's" narrative texts, in which Jewish characters are narrated from a Christian perspective. Moreover, the analysis of these previously, rarely considered texts should demonstrate how the concept of philosemitism can be made fruitful for Scandinavian literary studies and beyond.

Based on Bernhard Severin Ingemann's novel *Den gamle Rabbin* [The Old Rabbi; 1827], the Danish novella, in which Jewish characters first surface, I introduce the topoi of the 'fair Jewess' the 'noble Jew' and 'Ahasverus'/'eternal Jew', which are repeatedly taken up and modified in the following texts. I also use this novel to carve out the subjects and motifs that are also significant for the subsequent readings: Questions about Jewish emancipation and hostility towards Jews, about religion and secularization, about gender images and about the role of art and the artist in this web of discourse. A comparison with H.C. Andersen's tale *Jødepigen* [The Jewish Maiden; 1855] demonstrates the tenacity of certain narrative patterns, in particular that of conversion discourse and the topos of the 'fair Jewess'. A further comparison with one of Andersen's texts, a chapter from his satirical-phantastic novel *Fodreise fra Holmens Canal til Østpynten af Amager i Aarene 1828 og 1829* [A Journey on Foot from Holmen's Canal to the Eastern Point of Amager 1828 and 1829; 1829], and a look at the history of reception of the extremely productive Ahasverus topos show that both the restlessness and lack of development of many Jewish figures is part of this topos.

The next text, Steen Steensen Blicher's *Jøderne paa Hald* [The Jews at Hald; 1828] is an impressive example of this. This novella illustrates what it is about Jewish characters that is interesting for 19th century narrative literature: They bring an excess of associations

to the text, which can also spill over onto non-Jewish characters. They make improbable connections and events plausible, without requiring an explanation or resolution. With them, erotically connotated images of an imagined Orient can be evoked in the middle of a northern European winter landscape. They facilitate a space in which positions can be taken on then current social and political issues. Above all, they make it possible to reflect and valorise Christianity and moreover, to assert Protestantism as tolerant and superior to Catholicism.

Thomasine Gyllembourg questions this superiority at least to some degree in her novella *Jøden* [The Jew; 1836]. Her Jew is so magnanimous, that he raises his son as a foster child in the Christian faith in order to protect him from anti-Jewish discrimination. The novella broaches the subject of a specific Jewish physicality, without giving into the temptation to give a clear or clarifying answer. Instead it asks: When is a Jew a Jew, and who or what makes him one? And: How tolerant and accepting of Jews is the Danish-Christian majority really?

Carsten Hauch's historical novel *Guldmageren* [The Gold Maker; 1836/1851] takes place in baroque Dresden and tells the story of two contrasting Jewish characters: a stereotypically negatively drawn court Jew and a noble Jewish alchemist. Above all, it focuses on a young Christian and his journey to become an adept. As a novel about alchemy, the text deals with the search for the philosopher's stone. Hauch thus draws on the parallel of the philosopher's stone and Christ, first established in the Middle Ages. Moreover, the text equates (Protestant) Christianity and romantic love. Consequently, in the end, the Christian protagonist turns away from alchemy and finds the true philosopher's stone in romantic love, which the novel treats as exclusively Christian. The Jewish characters provide the opportunity for the text to reflect on different religions, confessions and ideological concepts as well as to delve into the contemporary issues of emancipation and Christian hostility towards Jews. They establish or at least amplify the novel's discourses. Even though the two Jews are narrated rigidly and stereotypically, the other, non-Jewish characters are aesthetically valorised through their relationships with them. In the case of the female figures, this involves them being orientalisised and eroticised.

The Jewish protagonist in Frederik Christian Sibbern's epistolary novel *Udaf Gabrielis's Breve til og fra Hjemmet* [From Gabrielis' Letters To and From Home; 1850] is characterized by rigidity as well. The novel intertwines discourses on 'money' and 'religion' by describing a religious crisis using the metaphors of an economic bankruptcy; the supposed beneficiary of which is presented as the Jew. The text therefore exposes anti-Jewish stereotypes, but fails to break with them completely, instead perpetuating them through the pairing. The Jewish character in this novel is the only "good" Jew in the body of my analysis, who is not described as being a Christian at heart and who is allowed to argue for Judaism on a theological level. That is, similar to the other Jewish protagonists, he too fails to develop, however, by adhering to his own faith he becomes a stable religious authority and point of reference for the first-person narrator. He thus, to some extent, calls into question the conversion discourse of the other texts.

Hans Christian Andersen does the same with his Jewess in his novel *Kun en Spillemand* [Only a Fiddler; 1837]. Nonetheless, she neither remains a Jew, nor does she fully commit to being Christian. Instead she develops her own syncretistic and superficial belief. Her counterpart is a Christian male character, who fails equally as a man, Christian and artist. The

novel continually sets the two in relation to one another, thus creating a space to discuss a third matter: sexual desire and queerness, and to identify this as the driving force behind true art. Here, the otherness of the Jewess as Jew is always the implicit reason for the alterity of sexuality and gender which the novel discusses, as well as for her religious indifference and her eccentric way of life. For her Christian counter-figure, the artist, his non-identification with her, the absence of her sexual otherness and therefore, the related lack of any sexuality and potency is ultimately responsible for his failure as artist. Although the novel seems to want to suppress that the Jewess was introduced into the novel as a Jew, her being Jewish remains in the reader's memory and thus makes her a projection surface for different kinds of otherness. The novel is therefore an extraordinary example of the productive potential achieved through Jewish characters in a literary text.

With *At være eller ikke være* [To be or Not to be; 1857] Andersen returns to the conventions he so impressively broke with 20 years previously in *Kun en Spillemand*. This novel is not concerned with sexuality and art, but with a young, sceptical Christian's search for the belief in the immortality of the soul. His girlfriend and fiancée, a "fair Jewess", transforms into the most convicted and convincing spokesperson for Christianity, eventually choosing to be baptised. Her early death becomes a moment of redemption for the Christian hero, through which he returns to his Christian beliefs. This novel thus enters into the same conversion discourse which Ingemann had utilized in 1827, when initiating the Danish narrating of Jews.

Closing Thoughts

The results of my analysis are ambivalent: The texts do not represent any scrutinization of Judaism, but they do examine the significance of Judaism for Christianity. They use known stereotypes and paradigms, however, repeatedly call them into question and develop counter-images. The Jewish protagonists confirm time and time again the supposed superiority of (Protestant!) Christianity, but are also imperative for its renewal. The authors use Jewish characters to generate literary effects while – with the exception of the Jewess in Andersen's *Kun en Spillemand* – allowing them no space to develop. In doing so, they still evoke in readers, an advocative voice for Jews – literary as well as real ones – and clearly criticize anti-Jewish violence and discrimination. The concept of philosemitism makes it possible to understand the attraction and persuasiveness of these texts and to consistently reflect that the texts undertake projections and attributions that are clearly problematic, because their objects, the Jewish characters, are precisely these: objects of philosemitic enthusiasm.

Translated from German into English by Rett Rossi.

Keywords

19th century literature; Danish golden age; Danish literature; Denmark; Jews in literature; Novel; Novella; Philosemitism; Andersen, Hans Christian; Blicher, Steen Steensen; Gyllembourg, Thomasine; Hauch, Carsten; Ingemann, Bernhard Severin; Sibbern, Frederik Christian.

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