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The Pressure to Convert

Literary Perspectives on Jewishness in the Era of Jewish Emancipation in Denmark

In the 1820s and 1830s numerous Jewish characters seem to suddenly surface in Danish fiction. During these and the following years, almost all Danish authors wrote at least one narrative text in which one or more Jewish characters appear and play a leading role. These narratives include *Den gamle Rabbin* (1827; The Old Rabbi) by Bernhard Severin Ingemann (1798–1862), *Jøderne paa Hald* (1828; The Jews at Hald) by Steen Steensen Blicher (1782–1848), *Jøden* (1836; The Jew) by Thomasine Gyllembourg-Ehrensvärd (1773–1856) and *Jødepigen* (1855; The Jewish Maiden) by Hans Christian Andersen (1805–1875) as well as the novels *Guldmageren* (1836/1851; The Gold Maker) by Carsten Hauch, *Udaf Gabrielis's Breve til og fra Hjemmet* (1850; From Gabrielis's Letters To and From Home) by Frederik Christian Sibbern, *Kun en Spillemand* (1837; Just a Fiddler) by H.C. Andersen and *At være eller ikke være* (1857; To be, or Not to Be) also by Andersen. Despite being big names in Danish literature at the time, today the majority of these authors are unknown outside of Denmark. Andersen is the only one who is currently known beyond Denmark's borders. Although mostly recognised because of his fairy tales, it was his novels which first made him popular. He is also the only one who wrote repeatedly about Jewish characters and topoi, in different phases of his life and in different literary genres; three of these texts will be discussed in this essay.[1]

1 There are two further novels, which cannot be taken into consideration here, but should at least be mentioned: His first comical-experimental 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] from 1829, in which the character of the 'eternal Jew', Ahasverus, appears as an eerie-fantastical inspiration for the searching poet on his journey through the recent history of literature. Also in his last novel *Lykke-Peer* [Lucky Peer] from 1870 an important Jewish supporting character appears, who plays a significant role as a companion of the non-Jewish main character. Here too, the focus is on creative self-expression and not questions of religion.

Note: Translated from German into English by Rett Rossi.

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Compared to the literature being written in its neighbouring countries, Danish literature proves to be a noteworthy exception. Whereas Jewish characters barely appear in Swedish and Norwegian narrative texts during the first half of the 19th century (see Bock 2021: 22–13; Räthel/Schnurbein 2020; Rohlén-Wohlgemuth 1995; Rothlauf 2009), the representation of Jewish characters in German fiction – with the exception of a few – is marked by anti-Jewish stereotypes (see Massey 2000). In contrast, the Jewish characters appearing in Danish narratives are rarely encoded with anti-Jewish sentiments, rather they tend to be characterised positively and idealised. This essay is meant to provide an overview of these texts and to introduce the context of their origin. The first part of the essay focusses briefly on some of the most important content-related and structural features of texts in which Jews are narrated from a Christian perspective. It thus represents a synopsis of my dissertation (Bock 2021). In the second half, I take a closer look at the first novel written by the Danish-Jewish author Meïr Aron Goldschmidt (1819–1887), *En Jøde* (1847; A Jew). This text is all the more remarkable because it is one of the first literary representations in Europe of the emancipation process from a Jewish perspective. In juxtaposing these texts which look at Jews from Jewish and Christian narrative perspectives, it becomes clear how formative the viewpoint of the Christian majority is for the self-understanding and emancipation process of the Jewish minority.

Though none of the characters described in the texts by Christian authors are free from stereotypes and ambivalent attributions, it is noticeable that the narrative voices are consistently sympathetic to the Jewish characters. They consistently take a position of admiration for the Jewish characters and are thus able to generate similar feelings in readers. While the representations of Jews are predominately positive – or better "positive" – they are not unproblematic. The term 'philosemitism' has proven fruitful for the labelling of this at times irritating ambivalence, even though or specifically because the history of the term is itself ambivalent (see Grimm 2013; Kinzig 2009; Rensmann/Faber 2009; Thurn 2015: 38–47; Zuckermann 2009; Theisohn/Braungart 2012; Theisohn/Braungart 2017). I use it here as a heuristic tool to name and make visible the duplicity of the texts (see Bock 2021: 29–35). Since philosemitism is a decidedly Christian discourse (see Bock 2021: 230–232; Theisohn/Braungart 2017), the first part of this essay is only concerned with texts by Christian authors. Using a selected novella as an example, some fundamental motives will be outlined, especially that of conversion, but also anti-Jewish violence and the question of who or what is

actually Jewish or is understood as Jewish.[2] First however, I will provide an outline of the historical context within which these novels and novellas arose.

1 Jews and Jewish emancipation in Denmark

The literary texts which I will be addressing here were all written during an era of cultural flourish but economical and political crisis. In 1807, during the Napoleonic Wars, Copenhagen was bombed by English naval forces and was for the most part destroyed. Thousands of civilians died and the Danish fleet was completely lost to England. Subsequent to the wars, in 1813, Denmark declared national bankruptcy. The Treaty of Kiel from 1814 also forced the Danish King Frederick VI, to cede the Norwegian region, which had been under the Danish crown for 400 years, to Sweden. Within a few short years, Denmark had therefore dramatically lost political power and size as well as economic stability. Amidst this, a rich cultural life developed which was to become known in Danish history as *Guldalderen* [the Golden Age] and lasted up until the mid-19th century. At the same time, as in many other European countries, the debate about the Jewish population's legal equality gained momentum. The first Jews had already arrived via the Netherlands in Denmark at the start of the 17th century, with the first Jewish community being established in Copenhagen in 1684. In the 17th and 18th century, Jewish life in Denmark was subject to similar restrictions as Jews in other European countries. Although, these were significantly less rigorous than for example in Prussia, there were extensive missionary efforts and anti-Jewish violence. At the end of the 18th century, the Danish Crown Prince and later King Frederick VI began implementing reforms for the equality of Jews. This set off discussions in both Christian and Jewish populations about the possibilities, conditions and consequences of equality.

When Denmark declared national bankruptcy in 1813, it was "the Jews", who, as so often, were scapegoated and considered a threat to Denmark. An inflamed public debate ensued about the question of whether Danish Jews should, may or must be rendered legally equal with non-Jewish Danes. Over a course of months, Danish intellectuals argued publicly for and against the equality of Jews, a fight which became known as the "literary Jewish feud." Finally at the start of 1814,

2 All of the texts from non-Jewish authors mentioned here have be extensively analysed in my dissertation "Philosemitische Schwärmereien. Jüdische Figuren in der dänischen Erzählliteratur des 19. Jahrhunderts" (Bock 2021). The second part of this essay, which focuses on Meïr Aron Goldschmidt's novel *En Jøde* is based on a talk I gave at my defence.

Frederick VI granted Danish Jews civil rights, making them for the most part equals with Christian Danes. They continued however to be excluded from certain public offices and positions. As Jews they were not permitted to serve the state, that means, male Jews were allowed to vote, but were not allowed to stand for election. They were not allowed to be civil servants nor could they have a military career. Thus the legal situation of Jews was clearly improved, but they were not yet completely equal. And antisemitism and discrimination were far from extinct. In the autumn of 1819, the Hep-Hep riots which started in Germany spread to Denmark. The situation settled until 1830, when the heated mood following the July Revolution sparked renewed debates about the equality of Jews and anti-Jewish violence. Ultimately in 1849, Denmark created a new constitution in which religious freedom was anchored. Jewish Danes were therefore finally, completely legally equal to their non-Jewish compatriots (see Albertsen 1984; Blüdnikow/Jørgensen 1984; Haxen 2001; Schwarz Lausten 2015: 89–172). The literary texts analysed here thus originated against the background of national uncertainty, Jewish emancipation and anti-Jewish violence. They serve as commentaries on the political and social processes of their time while simultaneously constituting the discourse. The narrative literature more clearly distances itself from a tradition of anti-Jewish representation than dramatic literature does. As philosemitic texts, they reflect and criticise anti-Jewish tendencies and plots, taking an opposing position, thus shaping and changing the discourse which originally produced them.

2 The old Jew, the young Jewess and their Christian saviour

The first Danish narration about Jewish characters is the novella *Den gamle Rabbin* [The Old Rabbi] by Bernhard Severin Ingemann (2007), which was published in 1827. From today's perspective, the novella seems anything but progressive, since it presents its Jewish characters in a very coarse and simplistic manner. The novella is noteworthy nonetheless. The old rabbi, who is the first Jewish character to enter the field of Danish narrative literature, is a 'noble Jew', a far cry from the anti-Jewish representations that had dominated European literature up until this point (see Achinger 2007; Gubser 1998; Gutsche 2014; Hartwich 2005; Klüger 2007; Krobb 2007; Nirenberg 2015). *Den gamle Rabbin* lay the basic schema of philosemitic literature. This pattern returns frequently in

Danish literature up until the end of the 1850s, although with abundant and manifold variations. We will thus take a closer look at this foundational text.

With the growing secularisation and to some degree complete assimilation of Jews in their Hamburg community, an old Jew, the deeply religious Rabbi Philip Moses, and his beautiful, pious, tolerant and caring granddaughter Benjamine, no longer have a home. Benjamine's parents are dead, thus she alternately lives with the two sons of the old rabbi. Nonetheless, she is more tolerated than welcomed by them, since the old rabbi judges their pursuance of assimilation and worldly prosperity, and causes rifts with the sons and their families through his prophetic words of admonition. The novella begins with a speech from the rabbi, immediately tuning the reader into the fact that the one who is speaking is a dignified patriarch:

> "Er din Forfølgelsesdag nu kommen igjen? fortabte, ulykkelige Israel!" – sagde den gamle Rabbin Philip Moses og rystede sit hvide graaskæggede Hoved, da en Efteraarsaften 1819 Stenene fløi ind ad Vinduerne til ham, medens den hamborgske Pøbel raabte: "Hep! Hep!"
> [...]
> "Ere I Israels Børn endnu" – svarede den Gamle rolig – "saa folder eders Hænder og bøier eders Knæ! vender Eders Aasyn mod Østen, mod Gruset af Guds hellige Stad og beder til Jehova, eders Fædres Gud!" (Ingemann 2007: 99).
> ["Has the day of your persecution returned? lost, unhappy Israel!" – the old Rabbi Philip Moses said and shook his white, grey-bearded head, as, on an autumn evening in 1819, the stones flew through the window at him, while the Hamburgerian mob cried "Hep! Hep!"
> [...]
> "Are you still the children of Israel" – the old man calmly replied – "then fold your hands and bend your knees! turn your face towards the east, towards the dawn of God's holy city and pray to Jehovah, the God of your fathers!"][3]

Already, these first sentences outline the rabbi's fundamental traits. His manner of speaking characterises him as religious, while the white hair and grey beard trigger associations with the traditional visual representation of the biblical forefathers. Both his speech and his appearance make it clear that he is a symbol of a religion that is as venerable as it is outdated. Paradoxically, the religiosity of the rabbi is emphasised by of all things, his use of "Jehovah", God's alleged name. In doing so, the text overlooks not only the belief that devout Jews do not speak the name of God, but also that the name is *per se* unspeakable. The name "Jehovah" is a Christian invention that ignores precisely this unspeakability and attempts to bypass it (see Becking 2006). At the same time, these first lines insert

3 Unless otherwise noted, the Danish quotes have been translated into German by me. From there, they have been translated into English by Rett Rossi.

the novella into the historical context of the "Hep-Hep" riots and position it on the side of the persecuted. In this situation, the fight between the old Jew and his sons who want to assimilate escalates and the rabbi along with Benjamine leaves the house of the first son and after a brief intermezzo also the house of the other.

The rabbi's granddaughter, the beautiful Benjamine, is introduced in the novella as a "ung sorthaaret Pige [young black-haired girl]", who "skjælvende af Kulde, ved en gammel Jødes Side [gikk] og syntes at trøste ham med en venlig deeltagende Stemme [trembling with cold, walked alongside an old Jew and seemed to comfort him with a sympathetic voice]". In the moonlight, the old rabbi sees "Taarerne glindse i de lange sorte Øienhaar [the tears shimmering in the long black eyelashes]" (Ingemann 2007: 106). Although this is the first time a female character such as this appears in Danish literature, it can be assumed that a large part of the reading audience was already familiar with her. Beginning in the 17th century, the character of the 'fair Jewess' developed into a topos in European literature, which reached its peak popularity at the start of the 19th century, but which is still effective today (see Krobb 1993).

After the break with their family, the old Jew and the beautiful granddaughter are wandering homeless through the cold night, when they are threatened by a violent mob. In this moment, the young Christian artist Veit, rushes to their rescue, saving them from further anti-Jewish attacks. He takes the exhausted pair to his home, where the old rabbi immediately collapses into a kind of coma. Benjamine, who henceforth tirelessly maintains watch at the bedside of the sick, reads from the bible to her restlessly sleeping grandfather. However, she reads not from the Hebrew bible, but from Veit's Christian bible, in fact, from the New Testament. The inner emotion and ultimately the baptism of the soul that she experiences by reading is in turn captured on canvas by Veit, the painter, as is the elder's peaceful, resting face as she reads. As an artist, Veit makes the internal process of divine permeation externally visible. Yet, the old rabbi wants nothing to do with Christianity when he wakes and recovers from his illness. In the meantime, the Christian and the Jewess have fallen in love and ask for the rabbi's blessing to marry. He refuses to give the two young people his blessing though and feels deeply aggrieved by Benjamine's wish. After all, it is the Christians who have pursued the Jews for centuries. For him, his granddaughter's love of a Christian man feels like a betrayal. Out of loyalty and love for her grandfather, Benjamine returns with him to their community and at the side of the elder, only awaits her own death. Veit too, who is impressed by the rabbi's deep and earnest religiosity and Benjamine's loyalty, accepts this decision. However, when the old rabbi once again falls ill and finally dies, he too is saved by the Holy Spirit's baptism of the soul, through the open window. With his dying breath, he gives Benjamine

his blessing to marry the Christian and even calls Veit her "Frelser [saviour]" (Ingemann 2007: 122). At the cemetery, Veit approaches Benjamine with a shining mother-of-pearl cross in his hand and their hands meet, literally and metaphorically, over the grave of the dead Jew. A year later, the two of them, now a married couple, once again stand there and below them in the grave, the rabbi stands upright, facing east, looking towards the rising sun and eternal life.

3 Eschatological fantasies of salvation

The three characters symbolise an eschatological conceptualisation of salvation, in which Judaism plays the role of Christianity's renewer (see Heinrichs 2009). In an increasingly areligious world, the young artist Veit represents an exception among secularised Christians and becomes himself, a quasi-religious saviour. His religiosity is characterised precisely by his respect for Judaism, which in turn is imagined here as the traditional precursor religion to Christianity and which itself exhibits no way into the future. The alienation of the rabbi and his granddaughter from the Jewish community is based on the loss of religiosity also among Jews who adapt to their secularised Christian environment. In comparison, the old rabbi embodies the idealised Jewish past, a type of original religious state**.** The character of the artist follows the idea of an art-religious renewal, which became popular in the 19th century when Christianity lost significance (see Hartwich 2005: 23–28). Gifted with divine genius, it is the artist's – and thus also the author's – obligation to fill the religious void of the enlightened secularised society. Benjamine represents the perfect vehicle for this fantasy. With her intimate relationship to her grandfather, she embodies the connection to the old "original religion". At the same time, due to her deep connection to Judaism, her conversion attests to Christianity as a superior religion leading the way into the future. The old age of the rabbi and their kinship stand in contrast to the Christian man. A future for Benjamine is only possible with the latter; only they can procreate. And a religious renewal is only possible together, a renewal that requires Judaism, but takes place exclusively within Christianity. The power of renewal thus lies in Christianity and in the Christian man, while Judaism and the Jewish woman attest to this power, making it fruitful for future generations.

In the years and decades that followed, numerous novellas and novels were published in which Jewish characters took on central roles. The subjects, topoi and motives which Ingemann introduced into Danish literature with his novella, were taken up frequently, albeit with modifications or variations. The underlying schema of most of them however resembles the setting described above. Almost

30 years later, in 1855, H.C. Andersen (2007) with his fairy tale *Jødepigen* [The Jewish Maiden] tells the story of a baptism of the soul similar to the one Benjamine experienced when she read from the New Testament. The only difference being that his pious Jewess dies in the end from the lack of a Christian saviour. The Jewess in Andersen's (2001) novel *At være eller ikke være* [To be, or Not to Be] from 1857 also dies, although in doing so she is at least able to help a confused Christian find his way back to his beliefs. St. St. Blicher's (2007) novella *Jøderne paa Hald* [The Jews at Hald] from 1828, begins as a ghost story and ends as a conventional conversion and love story. Here, the entire Jewish family even allows themselves to be convinced into baptism, so that in the end there can be a wedding. In his novel *Guldmageren* [The Gold Maker] from 1836/51, Carsten Hauch (1900) only appears to not tell a conversion story, since his character of a 'fair Jewess' is a Christian right from the start and has never been a Jewess. Yet textually, she is so clearly connected to the topos of the 'fair Jewess' that there is still a sense of a conversion story (see Bock 2021: 136–148). The gold maker, from the title, is a 'noble Jew' and takes on the function of a spiritual father and moral role model for this inauthentic Jewess**.** He himself does not convert and dies unbaptised, however, a Christian secondary character, who is introduced into the text only for this purpose, confirms that "uagtet han var en Jøde af Fødsel, dog var en Christen i Hjerte og Handlemaade [although he was a Jew from birth, in his heart and his actions he was a Christian.] (Hauch 1900: 365)" F. C. Sibbern's (1927) epistolary novel *Gabrielis's Breve til og fra Hjemmet* [From Gabrielis's Letters To and From Home] from 1850 differs from the previous examples in that the Jew in this text has neither a fair granddaughter or daughter, nor is he a central character. In a key passage, he serves to affirm the Christian first person narrator – who is threatened by a crisis of faith – of his own certainty of the immortal soul and thus implicitly confirms the truth of Christianity (see Bock 2021: 154–156). Shortly after, the Christian characters in the novel find their way back to their own faith and the Jew disappears without commentary from the plot – he is simply no longer required.

4 When is a Jew a Jew?

There are also narrative texts, which focus on other themes and pose questions about emancipation and assimilation as well as the visual recognisability of Jews. Already Blicher in *Jøderne paa Hald* takes up this topic, by leaving the origins of his Christian hero in question, only revealing later that he has a Jewish mother. Thomasine Gyllembourg (1867) even centres her novella *Jøden* [The Jew] from

1836, around the question of origins. In it, a young man puzzles about his biological parents, while his natural father, a Jew, presents him as his Christian foster child in order to protect him from the discrimination and violence that he himself experienced as a Jew. The discourse on biological-ethnic belonging or race is inscribed into both novellas. This results in an apparent paradox: Both Christian men stand out due to their "other" appearance, both however are not recognisable as Jews for the other characters. Since they are not read as Jews, they have not had experiences with violence. Revealing later in the text that they have Jewish parents, serves then as an explanation for their deviating appearances (see Bock 2021: 85, 98–100, 104–111; Schiedermair 2013). Readers, who have already been informed by the titles of the two novellas that Jews will play a decisive role in the plot, can interpret the diffuse signs of the "southern" appearances in view of the unexplained biological kinship much earlier. In the end then, they find their assumptions about the unambiguous recognisability of the Jews confirmed.

An earlier novel by Andersen (1988) treats this subject in a particularly complex way. *Kun en Spillemand* [Just a Fiddler] from 1837 is surprisingly progressive compared to the two other Andersen texts published 20 years later. In this novel, the Jewish woman is first attributed characteristics from the familiar arsenal of stereotypical traits. During a trip to Copenhagen she lands in the middle of the "Hep-Hep riots" and is recognised immediately as a Jewess and attacked (see Andersen 1988: 182–183). In the course of the story though, two opposing movements occur. First, an increasing variety of *otherness* is projected onto the Jewess: self-confidence around sexual desire, a sadomasochistic love relationship with a "gypsy", ambivalent gender, syncretism, human-animal hybridity and demonism (see Bock 2021: 165–208; Detering 2002; Schnurbein 2007: 133–139). Secondly, in the course of the plot, the Jewess loses her Jewish traits, so that she, who was introduced as the 'fair Jewess' in the novel, is no longer recognisable as a Jewess, but rather passes simply as a distinguished Dane (see Bock 2021: 208–213). She is the only Jewish character in this series of texts, who does not affirm Christianity, but rather calls it into question. In this novel, it is the Christian antihero, a failed artist, who dies at the end. The novel does not provide any certainty about the immortality of the soul. Its Christian protagonist lands literally in the ditch. Thus this novel is the only one that can be read as telling about the crisis of Christianity without offering a solution in the form of a pious Jewess willing to be converted or a Jewish Christian at heart. And yet, this Jewess also disappears, in that her being Jewish becomes invisible.

5 Christianity as a way to the future

As different as these novellas and novels are, one commonality stands out: Their Jewish characters are not provided a way into the future within Judaism, either with respect to religion or socially. With few exceptions the texts give the Jewish characters two possibilities: death or baptism, sometimes even both. Judaism is presented as the out-dated mother religion of Christianity. Its function in the texts is to be honoured and respected by the sincere Christian characters. Since it is a Christian imagined Judaism, Judaism itself is barely honoured. Instead, it is the honourability and honesty of the Christian protagonists that is brought into focus. Furthermore, in many of the texts, the Jewish characters are used to negotiate an inter-confessional conflict between Protestantism and Catholicism, always with the result that Protestantism is the better version of Christianity and that Catholicism is essentially to blame for the poor qualities of the "common" Jews. The 'noble Jews' are always an exception. Usually their noble attitude is due to them having been rescued by a noble Christian, which often occurred before the narrated time (see Räthel 2016: 123; Surall 2008: 310–314), but, as in *Den gamle Rabbin*, can also be part of the storyline. The call emanating from these philosemitic texts follows the pattern of an extremely ambivalent tolerance. Although, first made famous by Christian Wilhelm Dohm's (1781) Enlightenment essay *Über die bürgerliche Verbesserung der Juden* [On the Civil Improvement of the Jews], this pattern had already been part of the Protestant discourse on Jews since Martin Luther (see Nirenberg 2015: 253–273): If one treats Jews well, then they will quit being Jewish; if one meets them with Christian charity, or enlightened tolerance, then they will be convinced of Christianity or they will become good enlightened citizens.

How then are Jews and Jewesses written about? What knowledge do the texts convey about Jewish life in Denmark? The answer is sobering. Jewish characters predominantly serve as projection surfaces for philosemitic imaginations and for exoticising external labelling processes; both of which are idealising yet as stereotypical as the well-known anti-Jewish biases. Jewish characters have no language of their own with which they tell of Judaism and being Jewish. They embody a Christian-imagined Judaism, characterised by Christian assumptions, attributions and desires. The texts not only fail to present a living Jewish religiosity, they also lack any representation of Jewish life or emancipation processes from Jewish perspectives. In their debates for or against baptism, the literary Jews always discuss the content and meaning of Christianity, not Judaism. None of these narrative texts refer to any Jewish religious scriptures other than the Hebrew Bible, which is

referred to here as a matter of course as the Old Testament, the New Testament is thus always implicitly considered a kind of religious update.

Nevertheless, the novels and novellas, and with them their authors, achieve something that needs to be recognised and which differentiates them from anti-Jewish discourse. The texts do not offer a discussion of Judaism in their time, but do examine the meaning of Judaism for Christianity. They do not offer any insights into Jewish life and the process of emancipation within Jewish communities, but they do reflect and judge verbal and physical violence of Christians against Jews. They draw on stereotypical ideas to mark their Jews as Jews and Jewesses as Jewesses, but – despite all the idealisations and ambivalences – develop positive counter-types to existing anti-Jewish stereotypes.

Yet, in summary it can be said that 'the Jew' as a philosemitic figure of thought, serves above all to assure Christians, the non-Jews of their own identity. Jewish voices remain unheard.

6 Finally a novel from a Jewish perspective

It is this literary context, in which in 1845 the Jewish journalist and author Meïr Aron Goldschmidt (1927) published his debut novel *En Jøde* [A Jew]. Goldschmidt was 25 at the time his novel was released. He was raised in an orthodox Jewish family in Copenhagen but enjoyed both a religious and humanist education. He thus grew up amidst the era of Jewish emancipation (see Gurley 2016: 18–26). At the time of his novel's release, this process was not yet complete; religious freedom was not yet anchored in the constitution. The social process had actually just begun. And it is exactly this, which his novel *En Jøde* tells of. It is not only the first Danish novel that describes Jewish life and the process of emancipation from a Jewish perspective, but also the first one in all of Europe (see Gurley 2016: 8–18). And it is the previously published texts that I discussed above, to which his novel relates – has to relate to. In the following, I want to explore if and how the philosemitic discourse reverberates in Goldschmidt's novel. For an answer, I want to focus on the relation between Judaism and Christianity in the novel, where both meet the most intensely and painfully: In the love relationship between the Jew Jacob Bendixen and his Christian fiancée, whose name Thora carries with it a double entendre (the allusion to the Hebrew Torah and the Nordic god Thor), as well as her family, the Fangels.

First, I would like to provide a – grossly abbreviated – overview of the plot: Jacob Bendixen is born during the Napoleonic Wars, at the start of the 19th century. He grows up in a small town in the Danish province Funen in an orthodox

Jewish family. He is the only Jewish child his age in town and is thus often alone since every contact with the non-Jewish children leads to anti-Jewish abuse and insults aimed at him. Jacob is smart and gifted and in the hope that he would one day return to the Jewish community as a successful doctor and scholar, he is sent to Copenhagen in order to attend grammar school and later study medicine. Jacob absorbs the education and *Bildung* he receives in Copenhagen. He cultivates contacts in bourgeois circles; he falls in love with a Christian; her family gives him a warm welcome, the two even want to marry. However, Jacob is repeatedly thrown back to his Jewishness, again and again, sometimes subtly, sometimes explicitly, he is confronted with being different, being a Jew, and with the need to discard this otherness in order to be accepted. He is thus increasingly insecure and unresolvable misunderstandings occur between him and his fiancée and her family. Ultimately, he and Thora separate. As his love relationship falters so too does his way into Danish bourgeois society. In the end he is broken and returns to the Jewish community as the cliché of a Jewish money lender. Soon after, he dies alone and hated.

With this pessimistic end, Goldschmidt links to the topos that Jews become stereotypical characters because of the poor way they are treated by Christians. Nevertheless, the text questions this very topos through its differentiated representation of Jewish lives and Jewish characters. Moreover, Goldschmidt's novel *En Jøde* reflects the prevailing Christian perspective of Jews and Judaism in Denmark. This dominant perspective is not only shaped by anti-Jewish discourse, but also by the stories of Christian authors, which I briefly discussed above. The Fangels share this perspective. They thus do not know more about Judaism or Jewish life than the Christian reader, to whom the novel is addressed. They have no knowledge of living Jewish religious practice, nor do they question the conversion discourse. They behave "well" and "enlightened" towards Jacob and are quite benevolent. The family of his fiancée initially accepts him as a future son-in-law with apparent openness and consideration of his Jewish origins. However, while the Fangels practice tolerance in order to avoid giving Jacob the feeling that he does not belong, he always reckons that he will be unadmittedly rejected as a Jew. In social situations in which the other guests, Christians like the Fangels, chat with one another carefree and accustomed to conventions, Jacob feels uncomfortable and insecure. A vicious circle starts because he now actually becomes gruff and taciturn, which in turn makes the Fangels suspect the reason for this is his Jewishness and to then question the marriage to Thora. When Thora's aunt moves to Copenhagen, she makes Jacob's baptism her personal project, which should solve all these problems. This confirms for Jacob, what he has

always known, that as a Jew he is not accepted by Christians as long as he does not become a Christian.

The difficulties he encounters with the Fangels and their social surroundings however are not due to his denomination. Rather, it is the difference in his education and the consequences of his socially isolated childhood that are evident. And both in turn are related to his Jewish origins, which also have something – but not everything – to do with religion. As a child he is isolated because he is growing up in a small Jewish community, where he has no playmates. He is isolated because he cannot play with the Christian children. Instead of learning to play, he learns it is completely normal to be insulted by other children's anti-Jewish shouts. Thus up until his Bar Mitzvah he does not go to regular school, instead he learns from his father and uncle everything he needs to know as a devout Jew in a Jewish community. At the grammar school, the social isolation and hatred towards Jews continues, but here he encounters humanist education which for him is the part of Christianity he strives for and yearns for.

Jacob thus makes a revealing comment to his (also Jewish) friend Levy: "Mit Blod elsker Jøderne; men min Aand kan ikke leve imellem dem. Det er en kristelig Aand, og den søger med instinktmæssig Heftighed sine Lige. [My blood loves the Jews, but my intellect cannot live amongst them. It is a Christian intellect and it seeks its like with instinctual impetuosity.]" (Goldschmidt 1927: 124)[4] This quote opens various fields of discourse. For one, it introduces a blood discourse, which brings Judaism together with biological-ethnic belonging. It also continues the philosemitic idea of Christianity's superiority, even though Christianity is not understood here religiously. The Jew Jacob covets Christianity, in that he desires the *Bildung* and the intellect, which he decisively understands as Christian. He therefore also seems to succumb to the philosemitic paradigm, according to which a good Jew is one who wants to become Christian. But does Jacob want to become Christian? In response to Levy's reply that he should then let himself be baptised, Jacob counters with indignation: "Levy! Det kan De ikke mene alvorlig. Lade mig døbe! fornægte min Fortid, min Barndom, min hele Tilværelse… [Levy! You cannot be serious! Let myself be baptised! To renounce my past, my childhood, my entire being…]" (Goldschmidt 1927: 124) Here it becomes clear that Jacob does not consider Judaism to be a biological-ethnic parameter either. Incidentally the Fangel family also believes this, even though these categories resonate throughout the text. Instead, it is a parameter that is based on the memories and experiences that he has had as a Jew – both as a Jew among Christians as well as a Jew among Jews.

4 English translation cited according to Gurley 2016: 85.

7 Struggle for language and sovereignty of interpretation

While experiences with antisemitism and violence are reflected in the texts by Christian authors as well, up to this point there had not yet been a portrayal of a true, I almost want to say "authentic", Jewish life in literature. Goldschmidt meets his Christian readers' ignorance with the psychological representation of his Jewish protagonist Jacob's inner world. He also inserts extensive footnotes in order to explain to his readers the religious practices, Jewish celebrations, Hebrew terms and Yiddish idioms (see Brandenburg 2014). Even the description of the Jewish community in Jacob's hometown is multi-layered and in no way idealised. The novel tells of friendships and arguments between different members of the community. It tells of rich Jews and poor Jews, of Jewish fraudsters and Jewish benefactors, of Jews, who are often simple and sometimes smart. It tells of the love the family has for the young Jacob and their lack of understanding when he starts to question Jewish orthodoxy. In short: It tells of a little educated, but lively Judaism and it does so with a good portion of satire and a certain distance. One thing it is not though: It is not a stereotypical representation of a dead religion. The text tells of an ambivalent, diverse, contradictory Jewish community, of familial warmth and familial conflicts, which shape Jacob's life and of traditions and religious practices, which beyond their religious content are a permanent source of identity, because they are part of his world of experience.

Faced with Thora and her family however, Jacob fails to find any expression of what makes him Jewish and what ties him to Judaism. The author Goldschmidt however, finds an expression for this speechlessness through literary form. Shortly after Jacob and Thora get to know one another at a ball – a ball, to which Jacob as a Jew was almost not invited to, but then due to partly happy and partly unhappy circumstances, was – the novel's text splinters. Fragments of thoughts and associations end abruptly and begin at another point with an ellipsis. Jacob's thoughts circle around the possibility or impossibility of a relationship between a Christian woman and a Jewish man and struggle to find appropriate words (see Goldschmidt 1927: 150–152).

Only a few pages later, it is Thora whose thoughts fragment in a similar way, only to start again anew (see Goldschmidt 1927: 156–159). Here, it is letters drafted to her girlfriend, whom she wants to inform about meeting and becoming engaged to Jacob. These aborted letters give an impression of the image Thora has made of "the Jew" and how she tries to replace stereotypical ideas with the living image of the real Jew, Jacob. From the Jewish usurer to the noble Oriental, from

the Jews of the bible up to the Jews of Sir Walter Scott, her associations represent an overview of antisemitic and philosemitic stereotypes. In the letter that she ultimately sends, and which reports of the happy engagement, she however never mentions a word about her fiancé being Jewish (see Goldschmidt 1927: 159–160). One could think this means it is no longer relevant to her. One could also say though, that she wants it to be no longer relevant. And beyond that, I want to suggest that other than drawing on stereotypes, she lacks the language to say what is Jewish about Jacob.

Thus a little later, Jacob complains to his friend Levy that in his presence the Fangels try so obviously not to mention his being Jewish, that it is torturous. Their supposedly tactful way and aversion of every indication of Jews and Judaism make it so clear to him that at no point can they forget that he is a Jew. Jacob's discomfort grows and finally the misunderstandings are so many and the speechlessness so extensive that the break-up between Jacob and Thora seems unavoidable – if Jacob is not able to make himself understandable. And this is precisely the advice that Levy gives him: "Tal til Pigebarnet, Menneske! [My dear man, speak with the girl!]" (Goldschmidt 1927: 175) The prospect of a conversation with her about what being Jewish means for him, fills Jacob with hope and seems to promise salvation. The conversation though, never takes place, in the meantime the conflict is too great. Jacob thus sees his last chance for recognition and equality in a military career and, since such a career is not possible for Jews in Denmark, he goes first to France, then to Algeria and then to Poland. In his good-bye letter to Thora, he finally formulates his relation to Judaism and the conflict he finds himself in. He writes:

> "Du ved heller ikke, med hvilken Magt jeg er knyttet til Jødedommen, hvorledes den blotte Tanke om at forlade den foraarsager mig Pine og Rædsel. Og dog har jeg i Grunden forladt den; det er ikke Religionen, der holder mig – Din Slægts Gud er dog den Samme som min – det er min Barndom, Mindet om min Slægt, om mine Forældre, utallige skjønne Erindringer. Jeg kan ikke forsage dem, rive mig løs fra dem, jeg kan ikke kaste dem ud af min Sjæl [...]. Tror Du ikke nok, at der er en fælles Kjærlighed til Guddommen, hvori vi kunne leve, hvis blot ikke Verden træder forstyrrende imellem os?" (Goldschmidt 1927: 210) [Emphasis in the original].
>
> ["You also do not know, how strongly bound to Judaism I feel, how the idea alone that I should leave it torments and tortures me. Yet, I *have* in essence left it. It is not the religion that I love – the God of your ancestors is the same as mine –, it is my childhood, the memory of my tribe, my ancestors... countless, wonderful memories. I cannot disavow that, I cannot tear myself away from it, I cannot expel it from my soul. [...] Do you not believe, there is also a more comprehensive love of God in which we both could live, if only the world would not come between us?"]

Thora, does not believe this. Or rather: She does not believe that the world does not want to disrupt their love. She decides to dissolve the engagement and to marry someone else. In the moment that Jacob explains his Judaism, lays it bare to his Christian fiancée from his Jewish perspective, and she, as we later learn, understands it – she and her entire family, even the aunt with her aggressive missionary aspirations, they understand it and are deeply moved by the letter – in this moment, the love between the Jew and the Christian paradoxically becomes entirely impossible.

8 Closing considerations

What does this mean for my closing considerations? The novel *En Jøde* refers to the philosemitic discourse – not only, in taking up and criticising its ambivalence and one-sided perspective, but also by addressing the paradigm of Christianity's superiority. Jacob yearns for Christianity and turns away from Judaism. However, it is not as a religion that he longs for Christianity, since to him it seems hollow and in decline. It is the intellect and *Bildung*, presented as decidedly Christian in Goldschmidt's novel, that attracts him, while Judaism, associated with a deficient education, remains inferior. Jacob's return to the Jewish community is therefore a failure, he is thrown back into a spiritual and intellectual milieu that he had wanted to leave. The text though, does not try to find the responsibility for this failure in Jacob – at least not alone – but (also) in the Christian majority. In doing so, it also connects to the philosemitic discourse. His unwillingness to be baptised is not the problem, rather that it is expected from him. The Fangels' behaviour towards Jacob is characterised by their efforts to be tolerant and belief in their own tolerance while at the same time expecting complete assimilation, which the baptism should serve as evidence of. They are not interested in Jacob's experiences or perspective, nor are they conscious of how their own behaviour contributes to Jacob's increasing insecurity. His personal, always also specifically Jewish life experiences, remain not only unseen by the Fangels, but in view of the dissolved engagement, one could even say: They remain unwanted and undesired.

Goldschmidt however contrasts Judaism as it had previously been portrayed from a Christian perspective in literature with another, very intimate and complex depiction of Judaism. He recognises childhood experiences and memories, that is cultural and familial characteristics, as categories that are sources of identity. The speechlessness, which exists between Jacob and Thora over long stretches of the novel and which is expressed form-wise in fragmentary passages,

can be interpreted as a gap: that is a lack of a common idea of what Jewishness is. As long as Judaism is a Christian phantasm, with all the implications of baptism and assimilation, the connection between Thora and Jacob seems possible. Once Jacob finally gives voice to his understanding of Judaism though in his letter to Thora, that is, lets it transform from a Christian phantasm to a real and powerful parameter, the relationship becomes absolutely impossible. Understanding results in separation. Only the readers now have the possibility to speak about Judaism in a new and different way and the relationship between Jews and Christians and to thus create the connection that was not possible for Jacob and Thora.

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