

Helena Březinová (Prag) on:

Katharina Bock: *Philosemitische Schwärmereien: Jüdische Figuren in der dänischen Erzählliteratur des 19. Jahrhunderts*. Tübingen: Narr Francke Attempto 2021, 264 S.

Katharina Bock's volume on Jewish characters in Danish prose fiction in the period 1820–1850 is a valuable, thought-provoking contribution to several fields of cultural and literary scholarship, including Jewish studies, imagology, and cultural studies. In her book, originally defended as a dissertation in 2019, Bock explores the representations of Jews by Danish non-Jewish authors. In the introduction, she convincingly argues for limiting her perspective to exploring Jewishness through the prism of non-Jewish authors. The only exception she makes is an interesting comparison of her Christian text corpus with the novel *En Jøde* written by the Jewish author Meïr Aaron Goldschmidt and published in 1845 (appearing in English as *The Jew* in 1864). She saves this juxtaposition for the closing chapter of her book, which allows it to resonate all the more – she aims in this to ensure that her readers are clearheaded, as she puts it, since the non-Jewish discourse on Jews really appears to be illusory compared to the genuine experience of Jewish authors and readers. Touché!

In her book, Bock focuses primarily on the attributes and functions of Jewish characters in literary discourse. It is therefore fair to say that her approach is closely aligned with that of imagology. Imagology as a discipline is based on discourse analysis, and its object is not the factual state of things but the discursive practice in any given society. Joep Leerssen, an expert on imagology, stresses the key role of literature in the sedimentation of stereotypes and considers other types of texts such as journalism to be more ephemeral sources (*Imagology: History and Method*, p. 26). The same assumption propels Bock in her analyses. She refers to Stephen Greenblatt's influential volume on Shakespeare and his observation that literature is based on the circulation of social energy (p. 27). According to Greenblatt, literature does not predominantly aim to depict reality but is generally understood in a vital exchange with the world beyond the pages or as Bock paraphrases him: »This exchange is two-directional, into literature and out of it, and in this it is extremely fruitful and dynamic.« (p. 27).

In this respect, Bock has chosen the immensely interesting period of Danish history referred to as the Golden Age of Danish arts and science, when the arts in Denmark flourished and Danish writers, philosophers, artists and scientists achieved fame beyond their native country and well beyond their lifetimes. Hans Christian Andersen, Søren Kierkegaard, Bertel Thorvaldsen, Nikolaj Frederik Severin Grundtvig, and Hans Christian Ørsted are names still widely known today. In the introduction to her volume, however, Bock rightly points out that the idyllic »Golden« attribute conceals the fact that the period was also full of political and social unrest. Denmark at the time suffered dramatic crises, including the bankruptcy of the Treasury in 1813 and military defeat in the Napoleonic

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Wars in 1814. Most important for Bock's argument is that this period was characterized by fierce debates about the legal status of the Jewish minority in Denmark, culminating in the full emancipation of the Jews and recognition of the Jewish religion with the adoption of the Constitution of Denmark in 1849. In the decades before Denmark reached the consensus of the fundamental religious equality of all citizens, however, widely different opinions on the Jewish minority were expressed in the public debate. Influential politicians and thinkers stated that the Jewish religion and way of life were incompatible with the Protestant one. Rather unsurprisingly, in this period of emerging civil society, while Jews were trying to win their fair place in Danish social and political life, anti-Jewish riots took place, inspired by those in Germany. Throughout Denmark in the winter of 1819–20, Jewish homes and businesses were attacked and looted. Retrospectively, the Danish riots are remarkable because they were the largest ethnic conflict in the history of the country and, what is even more significant, they were the last of their kind. Generally speaking, the first half of the nineteenth century was a period in which nearly all restrictions on Jews were abolished and Denmark experienced a significant granting of rights to the Jews: Beginning in 1788, Jews were allowed to become members of guilds, and from 1798 onwards they could attend the »Latin schools«, that is grammar schools, and marry Christians. From 1809 onwards, Jews could settle in market towns without asking permission. All this resulted in mixed marriages and the conversions of Jews to Christianity starting in the first half of the nineteenth century (Vibeke Kaiser-Hansen, pp. 20–21).

That is why Bock's choice of historical period for the analysis of Jewish characters is of the utmost relevance, promising to reveal interesting patterns in literary representations of a small yet intensely debated minority. She has chosen a critical historical moment when Jews first entered Danish literature and one can reasonably assume that their representations cast a long shadow on depicting and perceiving the Jews in literature and society.

It should be said right away that in her scrutiny of the functions and attributes of the Jewish characters, Bock fully meets her goal and the reader's expectations. Her exploration of Jewish characters in the novels, novellas, and short stories written by non-Jewish Danish authors of this period is rigorous and in several instances pioneering. In her book, Bock corroborates and discusses the findings of the German Scandinavianists Stefanie von Schnurbein and Clemens Räthel, who have recently dealt intensively with the topic. Yet her book may rightly be considered the first monothematic, comprehensive study of the Jewish presence in Danish prose fiction by non-Jewish authors in this period.

The book, including the sobering reference to Meïr Aaron Goldschmidt, presents Danish depictions of Jews as outsiders and stereotypes while showing sympathy for them. The volume may also contribute to understanding why Danish society was less prone to open and harsh anti-Jewish attitudes than other European societies of the time and, indeed, throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The price for that, however, seems to have been either that the Jews had to convert to Protestantism or assimilate with the majority in most respects. Symptomatically, the literary works Bock has chosen show the process of this assimilation.

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The initial chapters provide a solid theoretical basis for analysis of the works Bock has selected. In an exemplary way, she summarizes the previous research and explains her approach, which is based on rejecting literary formalism and adopting a broader perception of literature as a cultural phenomenon. She views literature through the lens of the poetics of culture, as Stephen Greenblatt and Moritz Baßler apply the approach in *Verhandlungen mit Shakespeare: Innenansicht der englischen Renaissance*. In the central part of the book under review, Bock scrutinizes seven works in great detail and adds two more in outline, increasing the comprehensiveness of her sample. The seven major analyses are of Bernhard Severin Ingemann's novella *Den gamle Rabbin* (1827), Steen Steensen Blicher's novella *Jøderne paa Hald* (1828), and Thomasine Gyllembourg's novella *Jøden* (1836); Carsten Hauch's novel *Guldmageren* (1851), Frederik Christian Sibbern's short story *Udaf Gabrielis's Breve til og fra Hjemmet* (1850), and two novels by Hans Christian Andersen, *Kun en Spillemand* (1837) and *At være eller ikke være* (1857). The two complementary works are both by Andersen: his short story *Jødepigen* (1855) and his experimental debut *Fodreise fra Holmens Canal til Østpynten af Amager i Aarene 1828 og 1829* (1829). Basing her argument on the notion that Jewishness is mainly a discursive phenomenon, Bock focuses on the generative potential of Jewish characters in a work of literature.

From the meticulously examined individual works, Bock identifies several patterns in the depiction of Jews – and also slight deviations from these patterns. Ingemann's *Den gamle Rabbin* serves Bock as the basis for identifying three main Jewish prototypes that appear in variations in nearly all the works written afterwards. These »prototypes«, or *topoi* as they are referred to in her English summary, Bock terms »die schöne Jüdin« (the fair Jewess), »der edle Jude« (the noble Jew), and »Ahasverus« (the eternal or wandering Jew).

In all eight examples, the Jewish characters are so central to the plot that Bock's analysis of this one element amounts to a profound interpretation of the work as a whole. Hence, the volume offers insightful interpretations of works that with few exceptions have probably never before been subject to such a thorough close reading.

In her introductory chapter on theoretical approaches, Bock mentions that Roland Barthes' joyful interpretations in *The Pleasure of the Text* (1973) have been her main impetus. As a reader of Bock's volume, I experienced the same pleasure when following her detective work analyzing the Jewish characters, their interconnectedness, and the role ascribed to them in the texts. Barthes localizes the bliss in the open spaces of a text, in its clefts, fissures, and apertures. No wonder, then, that Bock's thought-provoking analytical text confronts the reader with pleasurable obstacles, irritations, and breaks, to employ Bock's paraphrase of Barthes (p. 234). One such break is concealed immediately in the title of the volume, *Philosemitische Schwärmereien*.

The title is translated by the author as »Philosemitic Enthusiasm«. The modifier indicates the sympathy of the texts for their Jewish characters and the noun expresses that the characters are mere projections of the authors, which are far from being unproblematic, especially when confirming a stereotypical notion of the Jews and the Jewish religion. Bock uses the word *phantasm* interchangeably with the word *enthusiasm* to characterize the main way of imagining Jewishness in non-Jewish prose fiction. Here, she seems to be in agreement with the findings of Philipp

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Theisohn and Georg Braungart in *Philosemitismus: Rhetorik, Poetik, Diskursgeschichte* (2017). According to them, philosemitism is »a decidedly Christian discourse, in which Judaism is a Christian phantasm and ›the Jew‹ is an object of desire, which should disappear in unification with Christianity and at the same time, always remain Jewish so as to remain desirable« (p. 234). Indeed, the Jewish religion is often depicted in the analyzed works as authentic and pure, yet at the same time outdated and doomed to merge with Christianity. Bock therefore aptly concludes: »The Jewish protagonists confirm time and time again the supposed superiority of (Protestant!) Christianity, but are also imperative for its renewal« (p. 236). Not surprisingly, then, Jews converting to Christianity is another regular feature of the literature Bock examines.

In some instances, Bock could have elaborated further on the idea of phantasm. This is especially true when it comes to the ascribing of a particular work to a literary movement. But I want to consider first the definition of the nature of the Jewish phantasm Bock refers to. It is understood as an otherness, confirming the kindness of the Christians, as Theisohn and Braungart conclude, and whom Bock quotes: »›Judaism as imagined and performed in philosemitic discourse is a phantasm.‹ And in his phantasm, ›the Jew must [...] remain a Jew, because only in doing so may he bear witness to the kindness, the value of the non-Jew.‹« (p. 34).

Herein is one of the fissures I mentioned. Bock's insightful reading of Andersen's *Kun en Spillemand* actually shows that Naomi as a Jewish protagonist is not designed to display the Christian protagonist's kindness or gentleness (Liebenswürdigkeit), but his lifelessness. In this novel, Andersen on the whole presents the Christian majority and especially the institutionalized act of conversion as far from ideal and contested in the novel.

The Jewish character Naomi in *Kun en Spillemand* may reasonably be considered a phantasm just as Andersen's homeless fantastic creature of *The Little Mermaid* may be: They are both embodiments of a marginalized entity. Naomi's otherness, as Bock astutely shows, plays the same role as her virility, and her counterpart Christian's unmanliness. In other words, her Jewishness is a part of the complex that Bock aptly calls queerness. And queerness constitutes a central motif of non-belonging to the established society.

Naomi's Jewishness is an exotic feature and her character is structurally analogous to Esmeralda, the Romani girl in Victor Hugo's *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame*. It contributes to the general style of the novel that shares many pivotal features typical of European Romanticism. Not only does the alluring Naomi belong to a gallery of Romantic topoi but the whole novel is built on interdependent opposites, strict mirroring, making *Kun en Spillemand* emblematic of the Romantic school. It seems implausible, then, to claim that Naomi's Jewishness makes the novel a work of Realism, as Bock writes: »The point is that it is the Topos of the Jewess, the literary figure, who is ›loved‹ because she enables the narration of a realist novel that cannot be otherwise told. For the unusual plot can only be legitimized through the Jewishness of the female protagonist.« (p. 205).

Kun en Spillemand can hardly be described as a realistic novel and Naomi's Jewishness is a fantastic element organically complementing the Romantic plot twists and motifs.

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Jewishness is a mere commonplace or one of several Romantic motifs challenging non-Jewish society. Regarding characterization in the style of literary movements, Sara, the protagonist of Andersen's tale *Jødepigen*, is structurally a very different Jewish character from Naomi. In *Jødepigen*, Jewishness is not a mere cliché of Romanticism. This becomes clearer if we take a closer look at Sara. Unlike Bock, I would be hesitant to claim that Sara's Jewishness in itself makes the story a fairy tale. Bock argues that Sara, as a Christian phantasm, constitutes the fantastic element typical of the fairy tale genre. On the contrary, I would say.

Part of Bock's argument consists in comparing Sara with the clichéd portrayal of Benjamine, the female Jewish protagonist of Ingemann's novella, and some other prototypical fairy tale characters. But this similarity seems superficial. Besides, Bock argues that the text is described as a fairy tale by the editors of a 1990 edition. But this is hardly convincing; it reveals more about the editors than about the text itself. The tale was published at a time when Andersen was consistently publishing his short pieces under the title *Historier* (Stories). Accordingly, in a letter to August Bournonville of 24 November 1855, Andersen refers to *Jødepigen* as another little story (»endnu en lille Historie«). But one does not have to resort to the paratexts and Andersen's correspondence to ascribe the genre to the text. What counts is the evidence in the text itself. The story is doubtlessly told in concordance with the School of Realism, containing even some features typical of Naturalism, such as Determinism and living in poverty. By the way, the characterization of Sara does not fit the stereotype of the rich or somehow exotic Jew. It was written in 1855, four years after the constitution had guaranteed religious freedom to all Danish citizens and decades after Jewish children had begun to attend Christian schools. In this period, conversions of Jews to Christianity were common. In this respect, the religious lukewarmness or even indifference of Sara's father may well be viewed as another realistic motif in the text. It seems plausible, then, that the tale may involve a psychological depiction of the suffering of a marginalized Jewish girl who since her school years has desperately wanted to be part of the majority. Symptomatically, in *Flyveposten*, the reviewer calls the tale one of Andersen's best small sketches (»bedste Smaaskildringer«) in which he advocates tolerance (»har talt Tolerancens Sag«) (*H. C. Andersens Eventyr VI*, p. 192).

This particular projection of the suffering accompanying the process of Jewish conversion makes Sara's Jewishness a different kind of phantasm. It can legitimately be interpreted as a tale about the tragic consequences of the religious and cultural bigotry both of Jewish and of Christian individuals and institutions, and about devastating predestination owing to heritage. At any rate, it seems far-fetched to consider the Jewishness of the maiden Sara to be the fantastic element making the story a fairy tale. Jews were neighbors, friends, and schoolmates, not supernatural beings. In the light of the attempted realism of the story and Bock's initial statement about literature being part of a vital exchange with society, this kind of Christian phantasm might have had a greater impact on culture than the fantastic character of Naomi in the Romantic novel.

I would therefore have welcomed more circumspect reflection or more cautious argumentation about the literary genres and styles of the examined works. Some fine-tuning regarding the -isms employed in the selected works

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would probably have improved the analysis. After all, when considering the general style of a piece of literature, Jewishness as a literary phantasm can radically shift its meaning and function in the text.

It must be stressed, however, that my remarks have been prompted only thanks to the profoundly elaborated criticism offered by Katharina Bock. It is a pleasure to read her diligent, thought-provoking scholarship disclosing the narrative energies with which Jewish characters have enriched Danish literature. I can therefore only enthusiastically welcome this valuable addition to the laudable *Beiträge zur Nordischen Philologie* series published by the *Schweizerische Gesellschaft für Skandinavische Studien*.

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