SHYLOCK IN FINLAND The Jew in the Literature of Finland 1900–1970*

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Finnish identity has since the national awakening, i.e. for more than 150 years, been based on the concept that Finland as a political entity was born with the peace in Tilsit in 1807, when the Czar acquired the right to Finland. Before that Finland was a province in the Swedish realm and a diffuse and underdeveloped hinterland in Europe. In his latest book *Väkivallan vuodet* (in Swedish translation "Finlands väg") Max Jakobson writes that contrary to the persistent myth that the Czar and Napoleon in Tilsit would have used Finland as a political article of exchange, with the knowledge of today, it could be stated that the conquest of Finland was aimed at making the continental blockade more attractive to the King of Sweden, by cutting off Britain's trade contacts with the European continent.

Jakobson is also critical to the other half of the myth that Finland as a cultural and national entity would have been born with the assembly of representatives gathered in Borgå in 1809. Jakobson says simply that although the Czar used the term "nation" in his address in French, there were innumerable nations in the immense Russian Empire and the Grand Duchy of Finland was not established on national grounds: there was Finnish population both east and west of Finland. Finland was a geopolitical product — a buffer for the protection of St. Petersburg.¹

The fact that young radicals in Finland were less fierce in their expression than in continental Europe, Jakobson sees as a consequence of the balance act, with which Finland had learnt to live, squeezed between the power blocks. There was no revolution such as the "Year of Madness 1848". Instead people

sang "Vårt land" (the present national anthem of Finland) and made cautious speeches. The ideas of Hegel and Herder had naturally also a certain influence in Finland, but nationalism was considered a Finnish affair, and it was deeply anchored in the so-called unique Finnish-national independence strivings.

It is not difficult to agree with Jakobson's political analysis. His thesis would also explain why the Finnish establishment until the very end of the Czarist rule so stubbornly and consistently observed, on one hand the restrictive policy towards the Jews as established under Swedish rule, and on the other hand and above all, applied the directives of the Czar.

In view of Jakobson's analysis the indifference of the Finnish intellectual echelons towards the Jews during the crucial periods are explicable, i.e. the period around the turn of the century 1900, when the civil and human rights of the Jews in Finland were seriously debated, and the period around the Third Reich, when the fate of the Jews in Europe was sealed.

In the first stage the indifference led to a literary silence, which was nearly total with only very few exceptions. In the second stage the literary silence was not so total, but not even then was there any heavy storm wave for or against Hitler's racial dogmas. Those who expressed views favourable to Hitler's Germany and its cultural concepts were either intellectual opportunists, such as the author Olavi Paavolainen, or had their ideological roots in the old fascination for Germany, with Germany as the ally and the basis of cultural ideals and liberty. The author Maila Talvio was the most prominent representative of that fraction. The fact that also so called respectable scientists, medical experts and theologists expressed themselves favourably vis-à-vis Nazi-Germany can partly be seen against the background of the pair of opposites Communism-Western culture, which were the only options that people in those days could grasp.

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Political and other ideological fluctuations have, generally speaking, had a peripheral impact on the literary portrayal of the Jews. The literary portrayal of the Jew goes back 2000 years. The traces of Shakespeare's Shylock, the archetypal literary image, can be followed both backward and forward in time, from the New Testament to contemporary fiction. It was from that anti-Jewish tradition that Hitler developed his grotesque gallery of Jewish stereotypes.²

The introvert Finnish culture has also had other interesting implications: There is practically no specific Finnish-Jewish literary archetype. The very few examples that Finnish literature offers, both in the positive and in the negative sense, have no particular national characteristics or individual personality, which would deviate from the general picture. They follow foreign models, such as Isak, the Jew, in Sam Sihvo's (1892–1927) musical burlesque Jääkärin morsian (Swedish transl. "Jägarens brud", "the Bride of the Jäger", the Finnish men who were trained in Germany in 1917–1918 for the liberation of Finland) of 1921. Isak is the Shylock figure in Finnish stage literature, a spy, a man without honour, national abode, or proper language, ready to sell his information to the highest bidder. Isak speaks the special Jewish stage gibberish, already established with Barabas, Marlowe's The Rich Jew of Malta, and his character is most unsympathetic. The play takes place in Libau, in the Baltics, which was an anchor point for international espionage and both German and Russian troops during the First World War. It is rather typical that the few Jewish actors in Finland have in this very play played the villains, either von Lichtenstein, the Russian spymaster, or Isak, the treacherous Jew.

The virtually only lengthier descriptions of Finnish Jews can be traced to a pair of opposites Hilja Haahti (1874–1966) and Ester Ståhlberg (1870–1950), both writers of the first period. Hilja Haahti was a popular religious writer representing a rather fundamentalist and rigorous tradition in Finnish religious literature. She sees the conversion of the Jews to Christianity as the only solution to the Jewish problem, which at the time of her literary concern with the Jews was prevalent, with ongoing political debates on Jewish presence in Finland. Ester Ståhlberg, on the other hand, represents a totally different ideological starting-point. She was the spouse of the first President of Finland J.K. Ståhlberg and a bearer of the Finland-Swedish liberal tradition. Like many others with the same background, she was bilingual, but more sympathetic to the strivings to enhance the position of the Finnish language. Her solution is the realisation of a Zionist homeland in Palestine.

Common to both writers is that they describe the Finnish Jews as orderly, diligent and family bound. Hilja Haahti emphasises the foreignness of the Jews in Finland and equates integration and assimilation. Thirty years later the integration process of the Finnish Jews had advanced considerably and Ester Ståhlberg's major concern is no longer integration, but the rights of the Jews as a people to their own homeland. The bottom line in both *Hilja Haahti's Israelin tyttäret* (Swedish transl. "Israels döttrar", "Israel's daughters") of 1903 and Ester Ståhlberg's *Katso, unennäkijä tulee* (Swedish transl. "Se, drömmaren kommer", "Look, the dreamer is coming") of 1933 is the role of the Jews as victims. In both books the theme of mixed marriages is brought forth. To Hilja Haahti the marriage between the Jew and the Christian seals the liberation of the Jews through Christianity. Ester Ståhlberg describes with fictional means the marriage of Max Jakobson's father Jonas Jakobson to

Helmi Virtanen, but contrary to Hilja Haahti, Ester Ståhlberg's female character joins the Jewish people and becomes part of their liberation process. It should be pointed out that neither Haahti's nor Ståhlberg's books are leading novels in their respective literary production, nor are they major writers of their time.

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In a literary sense the two major writers of the second period, who had an opinion on the Jews, Maila Talvio (1871–1951) and Olavi Paavolainen (1903–64), were in fact concerned with the Jews in hardly more than footnotes. The Jewish question was not a major theme for either writer. Maila Talvio treated Jews in her writings only a couple of times, but even from those instances a clearly negative attitude can be read. In her collection of essays and letters Rukkaset ja kukkaset of 1947, she describes her impressions of Jews during a train journey to the Baltics at the turn of the 20th century, ostensibly in her husband's words, which she has written from her husband's dictation. She speaks of a Jew, whom she has met, on a train to Vilno. The following translation is mine:

The trip took 48 hours – but what travelling companions! Part of the trip a ragged Jew sat opposite us, who kept scratching his back against the seat, even screaming when night fell, and on the other side another Jew, who was so orthodox, that he kept his feet in a bowl of water, because Jews were on this day forbidden to travel except "on water". — We were drowsing, leaning against each other, trying to avoid the bags of junk that the Jews had put under the seats, to use them as bolsters. The night passed somehow, in agony. And so did the second night.³

The Jews that Maila Talvio encounters are to her a strange, "anational" group, which exists everywhere, but which lacks a clear national and patriotic anchorage. She sees only the rags of the Jews in Lithuania and their different behaviour, and gives an explanation, which is almost mystical. Wherever she got the idea of the Jewish holiday, which allows only travelling on water, can but be guessed. She forwards the myth without any attempt to verify it. The Jews are a kind of inferior race, which she does not want to meet.

Conscious was also the concession that she made to the German propaganda machinery when she in the German translation of *Itämeren tytär* rewrote and emphasised the negative characteristics of the only Jewish figure in the novel. The abbreviated and more negative version appears in all latter prints of the book. The novel trilogy takes place in Helsingfors in the 18th

century, and there is a strong personal influx on some of the characters, which were Maila Talvio's ancestors in fictional disguise.

The Jewish character seduces the merchant Jakob Suthoff's daughter, and there is a scene where the Jew writes a letter to the father asking for his daughter's hand. In the first version of the novel the father's reply is considerably milder and the Jew is described less negatively than in the latter versions. The father's reply also contains an explanation and arguments, whereas all conciliatory remarks are excluded from the latter versions, and the text becomes one single outburst of hatred and contempt.⁵

Do these negative opinions make Maila Talvio an anti-Semite or was she "merely" a child of her age with reflections of contemporary stereotypical views? There is no clear answer. Maila Talvio's fascination for Germany was surely more a relic of traditional Finnish pro-German attitudes than ideological consciousness of the 1930s – in contrast to the poet V.A. Koskenniemi (1885–1962), who seems to have been a devout Nazi. 6 Maila Talvio was overwhelmed by what she saw and experienced in the new Germany and above all by the literary attention that she received there. But where did she stand concerning the Jews?

Did Maila Talvio see the ragged Jew in all Jews, including those she did not meet, but on whom she might have had a general opinion? Why did she make the seducer in *Itämeren tytär* a Jew, and above all, why did she consent to the negative changes in her text, if her basic view was not a negative one? Does this make her an anti-Semite? There are parallels elsewhere, e.g. T.S. Eliot, Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers, to mention a few of Maila Talvio's contemporary authors from the English realm of literature. T.S. Eliot's alleged anti-Semitism has been studied, but there are no serious allegations of anti-Semitism regarding the two leading ladies of murder mysteries. Where is the borderline between unconscious literary stereotypes and passive anti-Semitism? Anthony Julius writes about T.S. Eliot:

...that because Eliot's times were anti-Semitic, his anti-Semitism should be forgiven. It is unavoidable. The culpable anti-Semites are those who choose to be hostile to Jews; those others, who merely 'reflect' the anti-Semitism of their milieu should not be judged harshly. Yet anti-Semitism is a social prejudice. As a group phenomenon it is not an appropriate case in which to plead moral safety in numbers. Widespread wickedness does not make individual evil less reprehensible. Writing an anti-Semitic poem does not reflect the anti-Semitism of its times; it enlarges it, adding to the sum of instances.⁷

With the above quoted in mind, Maila Talvio's literary examples undoubtedly added to the sum of prejudices.

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Olavi Paavolainen's (1903–64) views on Jews will not be treated in depth here. In studying his major books from the 1930s and 1940s, a general feeling of extreme controversialism is apparent. Typical of this writer, a member of the Finnish modernist group *Tulenkantajat* ("fackelbärarna", "torch carriers"), the *enfant terrible* of his time, is literary snobbism and opportunism. It is obvious, though, that his rather liberal use of popular stereotypes and anti-Semitic slogans characteristic of the time are reduced as time goes by and he is informed of the atrocities against the Jews during the war.⁸

His three major personal documentaries Kolmannen valtakunnan vieraana (1936) (Swedish transl. "Som gäst i tredje riket", "Guest in the Third Reich"), Synkkä yksinpuhelu (1946) (Swedish transl. "Finlandia i moll", "Gloomy monologue") and Risti ja Hakaristi (1937) ("Kors och hakkors", "Cross and swastika") are considered among the most important personal impressions of that period.

Kolmannen valtakunnan vieraana is so controversial that it is difficult to say whether Paavolainen was for or against what he saw as a guest in the Third Reich in 1936. He was obviously impressed by the pompous rituals. He admits that he does not criticise the concentration camps and the persecution of the Jews, because he did not see them. He is pseudo-neutral as to the anti-Semitism of the Nazis, but quotes lengthy passages from Rosenberg's and Hitler's speeches.⁹

Paavolainen comments on common anti-Jewish themes of the Nazis, reflecting their view of Judaism as a kind of racial doctrine. He even compares both racial doctrines. He coquets with parallels such as "Jews, cocottes and other Zuhälter" in his description of Travemünde, and similarly in his remark on how the Third Reich struggles against the Old Testament, because it is "a pure Jewish product". He calls it a justified struggle.¹⁰

There are numerous such examples. Whether they are merely a reflection of the Zeitgeist, Paavolainen's own opportunism or his real conviction is a matter of taste. To attack Judaism intellectually was a norm already before the Nazis. In that sense Paavolainen displays nothing new. But with a perspective of sixty years and considering what such remarks led to, they undoubtedly sound distasteful.

His enthusiasm has evidently petered out when he publishes his wartime diary *Synkkä yksinpuhelu* in 1946. He mentions Jews en passant several times in his diaries from 1942–44, here with clearer views against the anti-Jewish campaign. His diaries also show that the Finns were not unaware of what had happened to the Jews in other parts of Europe. He remarks on the deportation

of the eight Jewish refugees from Finland in 1942. In May 1943 he wonders how many Jews that the Germans have "slaughtered" in particular in Poland, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, and he is shocked by the fate of the Jews in Warsaw. In 1943 he reflects on how the Hungarians will deal with their Jews, whom the Germans have claimed. In October 1943 he comments on the literary silence in Finland concerning the fate of the Jews and is sarcastic about the philosopher and writer Eino Kaila's article in Uusi Suomi. He calls it a "nice gesture" and regrets that Kaila "in such a gloriously stupid way" shows that he knows nothing about National Socialism. In March 1944 he follows up the fate of the Hungarian Jews and states that the persecution had started.¹¹

Paavolainen had gone through an awakening process in the years between the report from Germany and his wartime diary. Was this the usual manoeuvre of the opportunist or was it based on genuine conviction, is a question that is yet to be answered. Compared to Maila Talvio's egocentric attitude Paavolainen displays a much more vivid view. The Jewish dilemma was of secondary value to both Talvio and Paavolainen, but their attitudes are none-theless — or perhaps for that very reason — in no way free of common prejudices.

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Post-WW II literature in Finland lacks a profound reaction against Hitler's destruction of the Jews in Europe. There are a number of reasons, i.a. the loss of Karelia and the settlement of the evacuated half a million people, the rebuilding of the country and above all the end of the military pact with Germany in belligerence, which in Finland having lost the war but won the peace, appeased the enthusiasm of former friends of Germany, particularly after the retreating German troops had burnt down Lapland. With Stalin's blunt anti-Semitic policy in its right light, but with the Russians breathing down the neck, it was not opportune for writers of fiction with leftist sympathies to deal with the Jewish question. There are actually only two writers, both Finland-Swedish women, to whom the Jews became an important theme, Mirjam Tuominen (1913–1967) and Marianne Alopaeus (1918–).

In her works Mirjam Tuominen repeatedly deals with the question of victims and victimisation. To her the Jews represent the ultimate victims, the Nazis the extreme executioners. Her empathy is so intense that she in Besk Brygd (Bitter Brew) of 1947 almost identifies with the Jews.

She describes in scene after scene the inhuman treatment of Jewish children by the Germans. There is no mercy in the actions of the executioners although the victim maintains his hope to the very end. The victim represents humanity; the executioner has lost his. Humanity is the ability of verbal expression; the executioners can only express themselves by action. Words are the means of the victim. The following translation is mine.

Victim and executioner – executioner and victim. Was the executioner created without a voice? Is it only the victim, who can express himself —? The executioner speaks through his actions, the victim whines in words. Which words? —? Impotent words – The executioner only understands harsh, hard tales, the executioner can only be nourished with the bitterest brew.¹²

She vacillates between the belief whether the executioner is born the way he is or whether circumstances make him an executioner. Her conclusion is that every human being should be aware of himself, because the executioner lurks in each of us. Her Jew is the victim and it is the victim that awakens her sympathy. Franz Kafka, the Jew, is the personification of the Jewish sacrificial animal, the beetle.

She polemises against the accusations that young Swedish poetry would be too pessimistic in emphasising feelings of guilt. She asks what reason for optimism the poet has, what reason not to feel guilty. The translation is again mine.

We can surely not pretend that nothing has happened, only because the gas chambers and other war machines are not being used right now, but if we are going to proceed, we shall proceed directly through the world of the gas chambers, where you almost cannot avoid meeting Kafka, standing a little in the way pinpointing and we must stop for a moment, because his pinpointing is so expressive that we must stop and listen.¹³

There is an ongoing debate about Jews and Judaism or portraits of Jews in most of Marianne Alopaeus' books. Very often she focuses on Jewish men, whom the leading female character confronts with. Marianne Alopaeus' attitude towards the Jews and Judaism is throughout positive. In reference to how often and in which contexts she portrays Jews, it is easy to conclude that the Jews and Judaism have been of crucial importance to her literary production.

The author expresses her sympathies often in contexts, where the opposition of the female character is polarised against the stubborn bourgeois conservatism of her husband and his likes. They are contexts, where the typical ideals of Alopaeus' youth encounter the brave liberalism and internationalism of the female character. It is a world where France and the French lifestyle represent ideals of freedom.

The Finland-Swedish bourgeois man is a constant character and appears in most of her books, from her debut *Uppbrott* ("Breaking Up") of 1945 to her central novel *Mörkrets kärna* ("The Core of Darkness") of 1965. This male character appears as both the father and the husband of the female character in *Mörkrets kärna*. Against this male type she reflects the Jewish men in the life of the female character. The leading female characters bear strong evidence of self-portrayal.

In Marianne Alopaeus' novel the leading female character is the only woman who dominates the scene, whereas the others are in the background counterbalancing the leading female character. The male characters show a greater variety. The Jewish man in *Uppbrott* is a symbol of Jewish tragedy, the unobtrusive Jew with tragic eyes and a secretive appearance unappealing to less sensitive people than the leading female character, but with whom she as an outsider easily sympathises – and perhaps also slightly romanticises. She is always sympathetic to the Jews, whereas the others utter common prejudices.

There are no less than four Jewish men in Mörkrets kärna. They are very different, but nevertheless have certain characteristics in common. They are outsiders and have a high intellectual level of ambition. Their physical appearance is consistent with Alopaeus' typology. They are slim or delicate, unobtrusive but simultaneously intense, passionate lovers. They are more marked by their Jewish ethnicity than by their religion, with the last male character Marc as an exception. He combines both ethnicity and religion. To Marianne Alopaeus religion is more faith than tradition. All Jewish men are outside the mainstream and it is obvious that the author through her leading female character sympathises with the persecuted, in her case the men.

The only Finnish-Jewish man Jurek, the first love of the female character, is the most important person and it is on Jurek that she bases her other Jewish men. Jurek is "the other", the stranger, the immigrant child, more talented than the others, shy and also brave. He is very intelligent, plays chess and reads a lot, teaches others. And what more, he is a good dancer. He disappears during patrol duty in the so called War of Continuation 1941–1944, where the Finnish Jews showed the utmost solidarity with their "Aryan" Finnish comrades in arms by fighting side by side with them and the Germans against the enemy of the Motherland. It is surely not a coincidence that Jurek is lost during that war and not during the Winter War 1939–1940.

There is an interesting description of a train-journey with a Jew in the same compartment. It is the complete opposite to Maila Talvio's encounter with a Jewish fellow traveller. Alopaeus expresses her rare intuitive and almost mystical spirit of community with the Jews in a subtle way, with only a few skilled strokes of the brush in *Avsked i augusti* ("Farewell in August") of 1959. The translation is mine.

Pushed in the corner between the window and the bench is a man ...In his lowered dark face is something which does not belong there: seriousness, burning mildness. Eyes like those of a rare noble bird of prey.

When the train stops I discover the girl: seven years old about, brown plaits and her father's long face in miniature. A lively little character, who points and talks unconcerned with the silence of the adult.

Preoccupied, as if he was listening introvertly to himself and still with intense concentration he looks at the girl. As if he was looking through her backward and forward in time. As if she was something beyond merely a child.

—Not a word – and still as if his lips were moving: – Feigileh – little bird... Did he say it, did I hear it, or was it my heart?

This shattering feeling of writing oneself in advance blindfolded, writing oneself to a déja-vù. Of being inadvertently one's own medium. Of that everything that is of importance means coming home.

I have always had it.14

Marianne Alopaeus manifests in a masterly way with fictive means her own kinship, perhaps even affiliation, with the Jews and Judaism in the last chapter of *Mörkrets kärna*, in a dialogue between Marc and Mirjam. And therewith the circle is closed, the mystical, mythical circle of Jewishness, in the focus of which Marianne Alopaeus' lives. My translation.

- —through you I have opened my eyes for how self-evidently we live here in our Cartesian tradition or in our ancient Mediterranean rationalism. But I am a Jew, predestined, or if you prefer: chosen yes predestined as a victim. This confounded Jewish ethics. We are so terribly deadly moral. You too Mirjam, you too.
 - It sounds like a declaration of love.
 - It is a declaration of love. The only one you will get from me. 15

Notes

- This paper is an excerpt of a larger study in Swedish, which will be published by Åbo Akademi University in 2000.
- 1. Max Jakobson, *Väkivallan vuodet*. 20. vuosisadan tilinpäätös. Otava, Helsinki 1999, p. 18–19.
- 2. There are numerous sources for the portrayal of the Jew in the literature of various countries, which seem to confirm the origin of the negative picture of the Jew. A list will appear in my study.
 - 3. Maila Talvio, Rukkaset ja kukkaset. WSOY, Porvoo-Helsinki 1947, pp. 221–222.
 - 4. See Liisi Huhtala, Kulttuuri-ihmisen kärsimykset, Maila Talvion matkakirjeiden

diskurssit. Manuscript s.a., and Tyyni Tuulio, *Maila Talvion vuosikymmenet 1*, WSOY, Porvoo-Helsinki 1963, p. 159.

5. The passage is quoted and analysed in my study.

- 6. See Pertti Karkama, *Runoilija ideologina*. V.A. Koskenniemen poliittiset näkemykset 1930-luvulla in Pertti Karkama-Hanne Koivisto (toim.), Ajan paineessa, SKS, Helsinki–Jyväskylä 1999, pp. 40–77.
- 7. Anthony Julius, T.S. Eliot, Anti-Semitism, and Literary Form, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1995, p. 3.

8. A more comprehensive analysis will appear in my study.

9. Olavi Paavolainen, *Kolmannen valtakunnan vieraana*, Valitut teokset III, Otava, Helsinki 1961, pp., 113–118, 122–132.

10. ibid., pp. 41-42, 71.

- 11. Olavi Paavolainen, *Synkkä yksinpuhelu*, Valitut teokset IV, Toinen painos. Otava, Helsinki 1960, s. 285, 347, 363, 411, 587.
- 12. Besk brygd, Mirjam Tuominen i urval 2. Det outgrundliga leendet. Söderströms, Helsingfors 1990, p. 97.
 - 13. ibid., pp. 130-131.
 - 14. Marianne Alopaeus, Avsked i augusti, Schildts. Helsingfors 1959, pp. 43–44.
- 15. Marianne Alopaeus, *Mörkrets kärna*. Reviderad upplaga. Söderströms, Helsingfors–Uddevalla 1976, p. 262.

SAMMANFATTNING

På den litterära framställningen av judar har de politiska eller ideologiska fluktuationerna haft en perifer betydelse. Den allmänlitterära judebilden har tvåtusenåriga anor. Shakespeares Shylock, arketypen för litteraturens jude kan följas upp från Nya Testamentet till dagens skönlitteratur.

Man kan knappast tala om någon finsk-judisk litterär arketyp. De få exempel som den finländska litteraturen erbjuder, både i positiv och negativ bemärkelse, har ingen speciell nationell prägel eller någon utpräglad karaktär. De följer antingen utländska modeller eller uttrycker författarens ideologiska eller religiösa sympatier eller antipatier. I denna kategori finns några finskspråkiga författare, Sam Sihvo med den enda Shylock-figuren spionen Isak i lustspelet Jägarens brud, Tysklandssympatisören Maila Talvio och Olavi Paavolainen, opportunisten inom Tulenkantajat, den finska modernistgruppen före andra världskriget.

Två finskspråkiga författarinnor har beskrivit finländska judar ur bjärt olika synvinklar, Hilja Haahti, en rigoröst religiös författare, som rekommenderar evangelisering av judarna för att lösa judeproblemet, och Ester Ståhlberg, som pläderar för ett sionistiskt hemland i Palestina.

Judarna har rönt något större intresse hos finlandssvenska författare. Det är speciellt för två finlandssvenska författarinnor som judarna blivit ett genomgående tema, Mirjam Tuominen och Marianne Alopaeus och utanför ramen för denna framställning Mikael Enckell.