

METAPHORS AND STEROTYPES OF THE JEW IN THE WORKS OF IVAN CANKAR

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Reading one of the most respected and well-known Slovenian writers with the aim of locating and explaining anti-Semitic metaphors is a task that requires utmost care. The potentially explosive nature of the topic, and the challenge of even defining anti-Semitism in the first place, recommend caution. Examining references to Jews and Jewishness in Cankar's works, which were composed before the horrific anti-Jewish violence of the twentieth century, is fraught with difficulties. In this work, I propose to explain the image of the Jew in works that belong in part to a specific though important socio-cultural and historical context—that of late imperial Vienna.

The possibility of philo-Semitic errors is also a pitfall in this undertaking. For example, one of the loudest anti-Semitic voices of the time, that of Mayor Karl Lueger (in office from 1897-1910), was ambivalent. He is quoted many times saying: "I decide who is a Jew!" but also "... I am not really an enemy of our Viennese Jews. They are not so bad and we cannot do without them" (Lindemann 71).

Ivan Cankar (1896–1918) lived and wrote at the time when Central European anti-Semitism was mutating from Christian and Medieval superstitions into quasi-scientific biological racism. Actually, we cannot use the term "anti-Semitism" before that era.¹ The term itself was first used around 140 years ago and meant "scientifically based" hatred towards the Judaic or Semitic race.

Vienna, where Cankar studied and lived for nine years, was a conglomerate of different nations, beliefs, and social classes. It was also the intellectual hub of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire. Ethnic, social, and intellectual tensions received popular expressions, and with populism came the need for a scapegoat. As the Turks were at that time already allies in the struggle against Britain and France, the Jews became the main focus of many German-orientated parties and newspapers (Jezernik 2010). Vienna and Austria were not, of course, unique in Europe in this regard.

¹ We can talk about anti-Semitism because of the newly aquired biological view on the race and determination. Before that we can talk about Anti-Judaism. We always have to search for the connections and continuation between them and we "must avoid any kind of apologetic in the use of the term anti-Judaism that would sparate the two phenomena as unconncted" (Perry and Schweitzer, 2002: 5)

The situation in Slovene lands was similar. Even though there were almost no Jews in Slovenian lands from the sixteenth century on, there were many known anti-Semitic outbursts in politics, journalism, and literature. Paul Lendvai called this phenomenon anti-Semitism without Jews.² That is exactly the situation with the Jewish community in the Slovenian lands. In this paper I will argue that apparently anti-Semitic expressions in Cankar's works must be viewed as a function of modernization in communications and the rise of mass readership.

Determining which literary characters present images of Jews may be very difficult. Albert Lindeman states that Jewishness "is both religious and cultural; one might even say that it retains a 'racial' aspect ..." (Lindemann 2000: 9). A brief overview of the kinds of images of Jews in Cankar's works: Cankar often uses anti-Semitic metaphors, and many times there are also Jews (J₁—lexical meaning, racial/national aspect) that can be described as "Jews" (J₂—second, acquired lexical meaning - shylock, miser), and for some of them, we cannot really know if they are in truth Jews (J₁) or the author just assigned them with "Jewish" qualities (J₂). The utterances can be either ("J₁!"—"You are a Jew!") or ("J₂!"—an utterance, controlled by the *objective stereotype* "You are (not) like the Jews are!").

For the purpose of the easier classification of the different stereotypes Cankar knows and uses, I made a typology solely for his works. I defined four basic categories: pre-Christian Anti-Semitism, Christian Anti-Semitism, Medieval Anti-Semitism, and Modern Anti-Semitism. Those are not all of the categories that are present in the works of other researchers; however, they are sufficient for the research of Cankar.

Pre-Christian Anti-Semitism

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| Anti-Semitism before the New Testament. There is not much hatred; however, the difference between Jews and non-Jews is starting to show. There is the start of a disagreement between Christian and Jewish religions and later the accusation of Jewish exclusivity. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the difference between the Esau and Jacob, • Jews as the chosen people. |
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² One would not see that through this description of a Jewish barkeep from a small village in Cankar's work *Krčmar Elija*. In the beginning we learn that "in one parish, lived a man, plunderer, usurer and miser, such as countless others that live in Dolenjska, Croatian and other parishes."

Christian Anti-Semitism

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| <p>The Anti-Semitism in the time between the New Testament and the beginning of the Middle Ages. The stereotypes are being proven by philosophers on the basis of the extracts in the New Testament, where they are finding God's attitude towards the Jews. The main "sin" of this time is deicide, that is transferred to the later Anti-Semitism and is a base for the argumentation of the majority of the other stereotypes.</p> | <p>Jew as...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • deicide • Devil (Antichrist) • Judas • greedy person • plunderer • usurer • wealthy person • Messiah • Ahasuerus • rigid believer |
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Medieval Anti-Semitism

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| <p>Anti-Semitism from the start of the Middle Ages to the French Revolution. On the basis of the Christian stereotypes, the authors derive many new ones. In this time, there is an increase of the big cities, guilds and merchants and that add the stereotype of the Jew as a dishonest merchant that stays one of the most known up until today.</p> | <p>Jew as...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • poisoner, • merchant, • deliberate evildoer, • miser |
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Modern Anti-Semitism

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| <p>Anti-Semitism from the French revolution and its reforms and to the present time. The most apparent characteristic of this era is "scientific" argumentation of the stereotypes with the help of evolutionism, biology, racism and nationalism.</p> | <p>Racist association with physical characteristics, specifically...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • nose • caftan • stench • mutilation • beard or hair • eyes |
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Summary

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| <p>In each of the previous categories, the modern Anti-Semite also takes the patterns of the older ones and connects them with the new “evidence”. For this era, the most used stereotype is the world conspiracy theory that did not end until the present time.</p> | <p>Recent forms of Anti-Semitism and connections to older forms</p> <p>Jew as...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • coaxer • displaced person • journalist • capitalist • foreigner • barkeep • literary critic • publisher • liberal • octopus |
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“Krčmar Elija” (The barkeep Elijah)

In order to show as many of the qualitative stereotypes as I can in the short paper, I will concentrate just on a few short stories that capture the topic of the research the most. The first of the stories is called “Krčmar Elija,” but to show that this is not a solitary example, I will combine the quotes from some other novels and short stories as well.

The story concerns an idyllic village in the Dolenjska region, where for a few weeks the old likable priest is dying. During this process, he is constantly preaching about the sins that are hovering above the inhabitants. In the last hours of his life, the main protagonist, Jew Elijah Nachmias, comes into the village and takes over the local pub. This location is then the bane of all of the village elders, and they slowly begin to lose all of their fortune and property. When the Jew takes over a large portion of the village, they unsuccessfully try to rebel a few times. At last the barkeep squanders his money on drinks and his spendthrift wife, and then he perishes.

It is apparent to a reader that the main protagonist is a Jew, we know it from the name and the surname. Elijah comes from the words El and Yah, which roughly translates into God is Jahve. The surname is not a

coincidence either, as Cankar uses it a few times later in the short stories. Also we can see that the anti-hero is often connected with the words miser, usurer, etc. Therefore we can actually talk about the “J₂!” i.e. the utterance of the metaphor, where the speaker knows the “objective” stereotype and utters the reflected Anti-Semitic metaphor.

Pre-Christian Anti-Semitism

Pre-Christian anti-Semitism does not often appear in Cankar's work. A few times there are allusions to the Esau and Jacob story, mainly in the statement of the old dying priest, when he sees the black clouds gathering above the valley. He claims: “You are like Esau that sold his birthright for a mess of pottage. For one happy hour, for one glass of wine, you would sell your honorable and eternal welfare” (Cankar 1970: 79). Of course, this is a well-known biblical story, one in which Esau loses his birthright and Jacob later has to flee. In this action, some of the authors see the first origins of the later persecution of the Jews and the stereotype of the wandering Jew, Ahasuerus. There are a few mentions of the other stereotypes; however, they are fewer than the following Christian Anti-Semitisms.

Christian Anti-Semitism

Cankar's works contain a great number of this stereotype; however, I will mention just a few, namely Jew as a deicide, devil, miser, and usurer. The deicide stereotype has roots in the long-lasting interpretation of the Gospels in which the Jews were considered the killers of Christ. This archcrime of deicide turned the Jews into the embodiment of evil, a criminal people cursed by God and doomed to wander and suffer tribulation to the end of time. No other religious tradition has condemned a people as the murderers of its god, a unique accusation that has resulted in a unique history of hatred, fear, and persecution (Perry and Schweitzer 2002, 18). Cankar knows this stereotype and uses it several times in different stories, climaxing in a shout to the Elijah: “But you, Jew, you are for ninety of those Jews that crucified the Christ, I know so much” (Cankar 1911: 18). Not only are the Jews deicides, but the anti-hero also counts for ninety of them. One of Cankar's most well known novels, *Na klancu*, also contains such a characterization. When young Francka (later Cankar's idealized mother) is running to catch the carriage to the fair, the people “won't wait, they are sitting on the carriage and are watching her run behind them and screaming and crying; and they are laughing, sitting comfortably (...) with the heads tilted slightly, as that Jew in the church that sits at the side and is watching, how they are crucifying Jesus” (Cankar 1971: 18).

Closely connected to deicide is the appearance of a Jew in the form of the devil or his helper. That Elijah is an antichrist/Satan/the Devil (or at least cooperates with him to slay the Christians) is very apparent to the villagers in the short story. On a rebel walk, they are shouting:

“Let’s first find him, the antichrist!”

(“To the antichrist!”)

“How can we find him if he is the Satan, not human!”

“He sunk into the ground, because he is not a human. He stayed in the fire, because he was the Devil himself” (Cankar 1911: 47, 48.)

Closely connected to the stereotype of the Jew being the Devil is the stereotype of a Jew being a miser, greedy person and usurer, which comes from the Gospel of John, where Judas supposedly took thirty pieces of silver in order to betray the Christ.

In Cankar’s novels and short stories there is an abundance of such stereotypes. The same goes for the Jews being the plunderers and rich people. Literary critics in the beginning of the twentieth century saw these stereotypes and depicted them. In the Catholic monthly newspaper *Duhovni pastir*, a critic wrote: “The second short story, “Krčmar Elija,” is mysteriously picturesque and thrilling. The Leech-Jew and his Mefisto are exterminating the rich village” (Cankar 1974: 341). (Another critic, in *Veda*, writes about a “Jew, foreigner, that sees in the villagers’ hearts; that rules over them, until he is not buried by his diabolical greediness.”) At this moment we have to be mindful of the fact that the later critics in the vast majority didn’t see the stereotypes or at least didn’t want to acknowledge them. In fact only a handful of researchers talked about this part of Cankar’s works.

Medieval Anti-Semitism

I would like to closely describe just one of the most known stereotypes of the Jew being a poisoner of the wells during the plague epidemic in the Europe. “Satan, it was believed, recruited lepers and Jews to carry out his sinister plan” (Perry and Schweitzer 2002: 79). The poisoning of the wells and, with that, people, was one of the major lies that were spread in the Medieval times.³

³ Joshua Trachtenberg writes more about this in chapter 7 of *The Poisoners* (97–108).

The reader can feel this stereotype in the following utterance: “You were pouring me the poison, wastrel Jew... you were pouring it to all of us, so you could dupe us” (Cankar 1911: 7).

However, we cannot find so many of the Medieval Anti-Semitic stereotypes in Cankar’s works as the Christian or the later Modern Anti-Semitic ones. In the following few chapters I will show you that he was actually more or less a modern Anti-Semite, as would be logical if we knew that he was living during the time when the Modern type of this hatred was developing.

Modern Anti-Semitism

Modern Anti-Semitism can be identified by its quasi-scientific base for labeling of characteristics. In fact, we cannot talk about the true Anti-Semitism before that era, as the distinction between the Semites and non-Semites was not yet invented. The characteristics of the inferiority were supposed to be externally appointed ones, as follows: darkness (blackness), cruel yet blunt huge eyes, grey face and sunken cheeks, unhealthiness, foul smell, etc. Cankar lived in the modern era and was certainly aware of those stereotypes.

The barkeep is always paired with the symbolic darkness. The dark clouds gather when he comes, and it seems that “the barkeep’s black coat, buttoned to the neck and extended to his ankles” truly helped Elija to “collect[ed] hundred times hundred of the parishes under” (Cankar 1911: 7). He is accompanied by the black birds, and there are so many that they darken the sky and the before white village sinks into the black lake. He is looking at the village with an “Evil, greedy eye, his face is (...) as made from a grey stone” (Cankar 1911: 4).

A foul smell was another of the supposed qualities the Jews possessed. In the short story “Polikarp,” the main protagonist is persecuted and is roaming around the world.

It doesn’t help, to close the doors ...When I was in the city, think about what happened there. A company of corpses, godless people, tramps, who ended their lives by their own hand, are lying in the mortuary. The door was locked securely – but in the morning – look – there is a beaten up and neglectful Jew lying in front of the door. During the night, at midnight, the comrades beat him up and threw him out of the mortuary, because he was disgusting and he smelled foul (Cankar 1972: 116).

Not only do the dead criminals not want the presence of the foul Jew, they throw him out through the locked closed door.

The body of a Jew morphs into our fears also. In the “Evildoer,” a short story about an assassination of a criminal in Vienna, Cankar depicts the Jewish writer like this:

Skinny man with a shiny star on his chest (...) went up a chestnut tree, he was climbing with the dexterous small feet and situated himself in the dusty branches. (...) At the top of the biggest chestnut there was a Jewish journalist and it was as if a fat goatee-bearded and blunt-eyed head was growing out of the trunk (Cankar 1968: 209).

Cankar definitely uses and knows the opposition between the “correct and beautiful” and the “unhealthy and ugly” characteristics of the face and body. We can see the opposition of in the following sentence in his letter depicting a poet to his friend: “He was the most beautiful Slovenian boy: Roman nose, black eyes, soft lips, fine voice. (I don’t know why people respect exterior so badly, I for one respect it highly)” (Cankar 1972: 412).

The new stereotypes in the connection with the older ones

With the opposition between the right and wrong appearances came also the “modern” and quasi-scientifically proven connection with the “Jewish” character. At the start we have to acknowledge that the Jew is a foreigner, and as such successfully plays a role of a scapegoat. Cankar’s Jew is no different. At the very beginning of the “Barkeep Elijah,” the narrator observes, “The foreigner stepped on the hill” (Cankar 1911: 1). In the first chapter alone, the characteristic of foreignness is mentioned nine times. In the two other stories, published simultaneously in a book, we have foreigners who are never called foreign. So we have to assume that Elijah is foreign because of something else. If the Jewish people are aware of their difference, Cankar doesn’t hold a grudge against them. In the novel *Hiša Marije Pomočnice*, the relatives of Paula, the Jewish girl, speak “quietly, coldly, almost with constraint, as on a visit to the unknown people” (Cankar 1972: 21).

However, Elijah is not just a foreigner, he is also a barkeep. The stereotype of a Jewish barkeep is most common in Polish and Russian literature. The barkeeps were bound to be the reason for the alcoholism and involvement in debt in the villages. The pub is a non-Christian place, where the villagers are losing their money instead of going to the Church.

The next modern stereotype is the Jewish octopus or Jewish spider that emerged after the appearance of the *Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion*, which, in short, portrayed Jews as wanting to rule over the world through tentacles—connections among themselves. Even though the book

was quickly labeled as forgery, the stereotype was born. In Cankar's works, the octopus is covered by the gesticulation that is supposed to be Jewish.

The foreigner smiled, when he heard the happy song. He stretched the long fingers and counted the homes like a scrupulous seizer. (Cankar 1911: 1)

But he never said and thought: I am small, bad and stupid – but went and grasped everything that the long fingers could get to. (Cankar 1911: 39)

And if they asked you: What? How? – you would stretch out hands and stretched the fingers like a Jew. (Cankar 1972: 92)

He bowed his head even lower, shrug his shoulders and spread his hands like a Jew. (Cankar 1974: 195)

Oddly, this story has been largely ignored in contemporary literary history, with the exception of a paper by Igor Grdina.

Other of Cankar's short stories provide additional examples of anti-Semitism. The story "Materina slika" (Mother's picture) introduces a sly Jewish merchant with a wish to harm. The protagonist sells a briefcase to the merchant but forgets that he put in it the picture of his dead mother. The theme is almost autobiographical, and the protagonist is a fine picture of the writer. The selling of the briefcase with the idealized picture of his mother is caught in the protagonist's cry: "I sold my mother (...) I went as Judas, and sold her" (Cankar 1974: 327–28). The utterance is not necessarily anti-Semitic; however, the depiction of the Jewish merchant shows another picture: "The antiquarian, an old, aged, dirty Jew" (Cankar 1974: 328), does not have the suitcase anymore. In the narrator's eyes he "is a Jew (...) and joyful because of his mishap" (329). The Jewish way of selling and bargaining is depicted in many of the stories as mean and on the margin of illegality. The merchant in *Dve družini* (Two families) measures flour "so skimpily that any customer would scold her if she would sell it in such a Jewish way" (Cankar 1967: 65).

The short story "Uboge rože" (Sad flowers) introduces the stereotype of a Jewish capitalist, acquiring money through exploitation of the common people. The same stereotype is quite often used in Cankar's novels, especially in *Dve družini*, *Blago z Dunaja*, and *Grobovi*.

This description of a Jew in the short story "Uboge rože" in the paragraphs appears where the narrator describes a procession. Everything is white: the horses, the carnations on their heads, the carter's whip, and the whole carriage full of white, fragrant carnations. The obese Jewish lady who is sitting in the carriage with her husband takes a fistful of the flowers and throws them into the crowd. Then a transformation takes place: "in the

sweaty hand of the fat Jewish lady [the carnations] lost their fragrance and color” (Cankar 1970: 284–85).

The contrast between the whiteness of the carnations and the sweatiness of the Jewish lady is stark. The fact that the flowers are no longer fragrant in the capitalist’s grasp could be a literary criticism of commodity fetishism. However, when the fixation on the exchange-value against the use-value is related to the character’s being Jewish, we have to see the move into racism. The meaning of the utterance is fully apparent. It is an anti-Semitic metaphor. Some could say that it is just a literalization—that is, a process and not an ideological critique, nor a theoretical analysis. However, the literalization leans on a definite ideology—it could be such, which later produced the mass support of Nazism. In the following paragraph, we get to know that the couple is Mr. and Mrs. Mayer, and she is a “wife of a factory owner that was served by two thousand slaves” (Cankar 1970: 288).

Their work has a special meaning to the writer. They are slaves; however, they are not alienated from their products. Mimi is a seamstress, working for a Jew from *Blago z Dunaja* knows to “whom is (she) writing this greeting (...) this letter for twenty kreutzers.” (Cankar 1975: 208)

Among the most shocking aspects of anti-Semitism is the accusation of blood libel—the belief that Jews ritually sacrifice Gentiles in their alleged ceremonies. One researcher of Cankar’s anti-Semitism perceives evidence of the writer’s neutrality in the story “*Melanholične misli*” (Melancholy thoughts):

The puny Jewish vagabond was convicted in a puny Czech city to be hanged, because he murdered two Christian girls. The trial lasted almost two years and in that time the human rats were celebrating their orgies. Thousands of people yearned for the blood of that puny Jew. They didn’t yearn for his blood to “satisfy justice” or any other foolish ideal; they yearned for his blood, for red, hot blood, because the rat told them to. (Cankar 1970: 272)

Cankar seems almost to be defending the “puny Jew.” Yet Tomáš Masaryk, the president of the Social Democrats, the party that Cankar belonged to, strongly opposed the Czech accusations and demanded a second trial. Extreme nationalists attacked Masaryk as the betrayer of Bohemians. There were many anti-Semitic demonstrations, and the Social Democrats were under a lot of pressure (Perry, Schweitzer 2002:, 63–64). We can assume that the writing was just a show of support for the social democrats and not so much an opposition towards the accusations of the

Blood Libel, about which Cankar says: "I believe strongly and sincerely in the ritual murder" (Cankar 1970, 272).

Conclusion

The works of Ivan Cankar have not yet been researched for Anti-Semitism in the way I have just discussed them. This paper offers some of the answers to the question about the Anti-Semitic metaphors in the literature at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. At that time, the new Anti-Semitism began to brew in Europe and as such it posed many more questions about the causes and context of the hatred towards Jews, which escalated in the thirties and forties. However, we cannot and we should not connect those two eras too quickly as there are many traps along the way. What we need is a wholesome and objective study of the literature, which I intend to do in the following years. In this work I will try to look at all of the different influential Slovenian literary works from the sixteenth century to the 1930s to see if there are Anti-Semitic metaphors in them.

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