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The Pilgrims: An Extraordinary 1841 Novel about Jews in the Netherlands

MARITA MATHIJSEN

Betsy Hasebroek was thirty years old when she wrote a novel about Jews and their position in the Netherlands against the background of the ‘Oriental Crisis’ of 1840. Her book ‘The Pilgrims’ (*De bedevaartgangers*) appeared in 1841, and in all likelihood this is the first originally Dutch novel with a Jew for protagonist.¹ It is quite enigmatic what moved Hasebroek to take this for her subject. It is hardly obvious that a young woman with little education, raised in times when the Latin school and the university were still closed to women, grown up in Leyden which lacked a large Jewish community, and living in the North Holland village of Heiloo, would take on a subject of such scope and ambition. She even makes three of her protagonists travel to Palestine, whereas she herself had never been farther away from home than Belgium or Germany.

Who was Betsy Hasebroek?² For a long time she was known only as the sister of the author ‘Jonathan’, who in everyday life was the vicar Johannes Hasebroek. Until her 25th she lived in Leyden with her mother. Her father, a pharmacist, had died young. In 1836, as soon as he graduated in theology, her brother was called to the vicarage in Heiloo. He was not yet married, so according to the custom of those times an

1. [E.J. Hasebroek], *De bedevaartgangers*. Door de schrijfster van Te laat (Haarlem 1841).

2. See about her: R. Schenkeveld-van der Dussen (ed.), *Met en zonder lauwerkrans. Schrijvende vrouwen uit de vroegmoderne tijd 1550-1850: van Anna Bijns tot Elise van Calcar* (Amsterdam 1997), p. 852-859; M. Mathijssen, *De kring van Heiloo*. Met medewerking van Marguerite de By, Marieke van Driel en José Plug (Heiloo 1982), p. 50-53; M. Mathijssen, ‘De maagdelijke pen. Over “Twee vrouwen” uit de negentiende eeuw’, in eadem, *Nederlandse literatuur in de romantiek 1820-1880* (Nijmegen 2004), p. 228-236, 317-318; J. Meijer, *De bedevaartgangers. Een proto-zionistische roman van Betsy Hasebroek (1841)* (Heemstede 1980).

unmarried sister accompanied him to do the household for him. Before Johannes Hasebroek left Leyden he had already made a name for himself as a literary author. He belonged to the Leyden ‘romantic club’.³ In the year of his graduation he published a collection of romantic poems entitled ‘Poetry’ (*Poëzy*). He did not acquire a nation-wide reputation until publication in 1840 of his prose sketches ‘Truth and Dreams’ (*Waarheid en droomen*) under the pseudonym Jonathan. Many literary friends of his looked him up in Heiloo.⁴ Moreover, Nicolaas Beets, the best known among the Leyden romantics, got engaged with a young Heiloo lady, which meant that Hasebroek and Beets saw each other just about every week. In the vicarage Betsy also became acquainted with another young writing person, a woman for a change. In 1837 Geertruide Toussaint had published her first work, a novelette entitled *Almagro*, which attracted the attention of prominent critics right away. The two female writers quickly became good friends, with their friendship naturally reinforced by their shared efforts to penetrate the male world of literature.⁵ The vicarage must have resounded with talk about current literary issues, and the instalments of the new, pathbreaking monthly ‘The Guide’ (*De Gids*) were spelled, the more so as Johannes Hasebroek himself was one of the contributors. Betsy Hasebroek must have imbibed the ongoing literary conversation, as, together with her brother, she must have read everything that entered the house. At some point, that really came quite early, she decided to give it a try herself. Various letters from her brother to his friends show that the primary push to become a literary author came from him.⁶

Her first publication, in the ‘Almanac for the Beautiful and the Good’ (*Almanak voor het schoone en het goede*; 1837) was the story ‘Marie’. A year later her first novel appeared under the title ‘Too Late’ (*Te laat*). Altogether she wrote four novels, which were forgotten already during her lifetime. During the first stage of her literary career she was often mentioned in one breath with Geertruide Toussaint, who however sur-

3. See on this subject: P. van Zonneveld, *De Romantische Club. Leidse student-auteurs 1830-1840* (Leiden 1993).

4. See: Mathijsen, *De kring van Heiloo*.

5. Mathijsen, ‘De maagdelijke pen’.

6. See J.H.K. Willems, *Job. Petrus Hasebroek. Bijdrage tot de kennis van het letterkundig leven* (Eindhoven 1939).

passed her fairly soon on her way to becoming the only female author of the 19th century still widely known in Dutch literary circles.

Betsy's first novels received fairly positive reviews, but they did not turn into real successes with reprints and all. The reviews run from favourable to laudatory.⁷ Critics passed judgment chiefly on the feminine quality of her authorship. Here is what a critic wrote about her first novel: 'It is near-impossible to draw feminine sentiment so accurately in all its subtly distinct movements if the pencil is not steered by a female hand.'⁸ Another reviewer thought that the book could not but have been written by a woman: 'such a haze of feminine tenderness, of profound sentiment and melancholy perfuses it; but it is above all those fine observations of a woman's heart, of the subtle nuances in her inclinations and observations, that betray a familiarity with the inner movements of the feminine soul which we could not in such a manner presuppose in a man.'⁹ When in 1839 Betsy Hasebroek published her novel *Elize*, this occasioned Potgieter, the principal reviewer in *De Gids*, to beg female authors 'to disclose for us the world of sentiment that too often rests enveloped in a fog to our [male] gaze. We ask this the more urgently, in that we possess fantasy, imagination, intellect enough, but lack a sufficiently open mind for those finer affects which nonetheless exert so essential a power upon the wheel of life. As we on our side acknowledge freely our one-sidedness; as we invoke the help of the more beautiful sex to liberate us from that one-sidedness, so much the more are we free to call upon her: do not too one-sidedly develop your sentiment, but let intellect and fantasy keep even pace with it.'¹⁰ We do not know whether Potgieter felt that in her later novels Hasebroek succeeded in complying with his request, as neither 'Two Women' (*Twee vrouwen*; 1840) nor

7. *Te laat* was reviewed in *De Vriend des Vaderlands* 13 (1839), p. 172-181; *Vaderlandsche Letteroefeningen* (1840), vol. 1, p. 81-83; *De Recensent ook der Recensenten* (1840), part 1, p. 129-131; *Elize* was reviewed in *Vaderlandsche Letteroefeningen* (1840), vol. 1, p. 270-271; *De Gids* (1839), vol. 1, p. 488-496, p. 532-541; *De Bedevaartgangers* was reviewed in *Vaderlandsche Letteroefeningen* (1843), vol. 1, p. 731-732. A search in journals such as *Boekzaal der geleerde wereld* and *Algemeene Konst- en Letterbode* did not yield any reviews. Possibly smaller journals did publish reviews of Hasebroek's work, but the Review book from the Bohn Collection of Archives, which rests at Leyden University Library, does not mention any further reviews.

8. In a review of *Te laat* in *De Vriend des Vaderlands* 13 (1839), p. 172-173.

9. *De recensent ook der recensenten* 33 (1840), vol. 1, p. 129.

10. In the review of *Elize*. *Door de schrijfster van Te laat*. Haarlem 1839, in *De Gids* (1839), vol. 1, p. 538.

'The Pilgrims' (*De bedevaartgangers*; 1841) received a review in the principal journal of those years. More often than not this meant that Potgieter judged negatively but did not commit his judgment to paper because he wished to spare his friends. Even though reviews in *De Gids* appeared anonymously, everyone knew that he wrote by far the most of them.

Hasebroek was forgotten fairly quickly, yet her work cannot be called insignificant. It is intriguing that she did not join in with the fashion of the historical novel, which often served as a roundabout way to comment upon contemporary issues, but turned her own time straight away into the scenery for her novels. She also chooses perspectives that one does not find with other authors in her time. For instance, in *Twee vrouwen* she addresses the position of the educated woman, who in a world run by men loses out from women with less intellectual capacities.

De bedevaartgangers was to be her last novel. After 1841 she confined herself to translations and to religious sketches, part of which appeared in almanacs. She also published a collection of descriptions of women: 'The Women of the Reformation' (*De vrouwen der Hervorming*; 1865). She also taught at a Sunday's school, but we do not know whether she could make a living out of her writing or whether she earned her money as a school mistress.

All four novels that she wrote appeared anonymous. After her first book *Te laat* (1839) she called herself: 'The authoress of *Te laat*'. That is also the name under which *De bedevaartgangers* appeared.

In *De bedevaartgangers* the central theme is love, as was the case in its three predecessors. With Hasebroek true feminine love is always sacrificial: she wants to be of service, and to place the man in a radiant light.¹¹ Such love is often the cause of the conflict around which the novel turns. Some of her female protagonists seek a more independent existence, so that they must renounce marriage. In this sense they remain sacrificial, in that they do not wish to stand in the way of male selfishness. In *De bedevaartgangers* love is not focused wholly on the sacrificial principle. It is placed in the exceptional context of Jewry

11. See also E.J. Hasebroek, *Elize*. Published with an introduction and elucidation by M.H. Schenkeveld and R. Schenkeveld-van der Dussen (Amsterdam 2004), p. 11.

versus Christendom, so here faith rather serves as the impediment. Moreover, love is presented here from the perspective of a male protagonist. A Jewish man falls in love with a Christian woman and loses his identity due to her influence.

The story of *De bedevaartgangers* reflects Hasebroek's own time. The principal sites are Amsterdam and Palestine. Before we address the story itself we throw a glance at the position of the Jews at that time at those two sites. We need such an introduction because the contemporaneous situation and the political state of affairs are of great importance in the book.

Of old, Amsterdam had a large concentration of Jews, notably so in the neighborhood where we now find the Waterlooplein.¹² The Jewish quarter was larger than in any other town in the Netherlands. Soon upon the invasion of the Netherlands by a French army in 1795 the Jews were made the legal equals of all other citizens, but this did not mean that they gained access everywhere. For instance, many societies did not explicitly exclude Jews, these simply did not make it through the ballot. In Amsterdam the many poor Jews, most of them Ashkenazi immigrants from East or Middle Europe, lived for the largest part in neighborhoods behind the South Church (Zuiderkerk), but there was also an elite of wealthy, enlightened Jews, most of whom had come to the Netherlands from Portugal. These sephardic Jews were as a rule richer, also assimilated to a larger extent, and with better education. One of them, a lawyer named Jonas Daniel Meijer, was called upon by king Louis Napoleon (who reigned the Netherlands on behalf of his brother from 1806 to 1810) to inform him about the situation in the Jewish communities, which in view of the general poverty was often abominable. He recommended the king to improve Jewish education and to see to it that Yiddish became less predominant. After the fall of Napoleon in 1813, the new king Willem I of Orange, too, inquired about the position of the Jews, seeking information from Jonas Daniel Meijer as well. Much pressure was placed upon acculturation, with little counterpressure from the

12. I owe the data that follow to J.C.H. Blom, R.G. Fuks-Mansfeld, I. Schöffner (eds), *Geschiedenis van de joden in Nederland* (Amsterdam 1995), p. 177-247.

Jewish community. Slowly but surely Yiddish eclipsed as the predominant language, and knowledge of Hebrew and of the classic Jewish disciplines diminished as well.¹³

The acculturation of the Dutch Jews forms quite a contrast with currents abroad, where the Jews displayed a preference for sticking to their Jewish identity. The preference fitted in with nationalist-romantic tendencies marking all of Europe at the time. In Germany from 1819 onward reformist rabbis and the Union for Culture and Scholarship of the Jews (*Verein für Cultur und Wissenschaft der Juden*) engaged themselves in a reinforcement of Jewish identity. No acculturation without our own cultururation, is what sums up their activities: No successful integration is possible without a thorough awareness of one's own identity. But in the Netherlands the Jews had been under threat to a lesser degree than elsewhere, so feats of integration had already taken place that now made the wish to keep one's own culture strong less urgent.¹⁴

There was even a Dutch tradition in protecting menaced Jews abroad. For instance, rich Jewish bankers from the Lehren family were active in an international charity foundation which collected funds for the benefit of Jews in the Holy Land.

Slowly but surely nineteenth century Europe witnessed the emergence of Zionism – a striving to found a national Jewish state in Palestine. Ongoing persecution of Jews all over Europe, and the fear of one's own, Jewish culture disappearing, fostered the rise of the idea of a nation of their own. Precisely the legal equality of all men proclaimed by the French Revolution appeared to rob Jews of their own identity, and a number of prominent Jewish leaders, notably in Germany, regretted that development. Not until the end of the nineteenth century was a true Zionist movement to come up. Moses Hess' call to found a nation of their own, *Rom und Jerusalem*, appeared in 1862, and the movement really got under way no earlier than with Theodor Herzl's book *Der Judenstaat* of 1896. One year after its publication the first international Zionist Congress took place.

13. R.G. Fuks-Mansfeld, 'Verlichting en emancipatie omstreeks 1750-1814', in Blom et al., *Geschiedenis van de joden in Nederland*, p. 194; R.G. Fuks-Mansfeld, 'Moeizame aanpassing (1814-1870)' in Blom et al., *Geschiedenis van de joden in Nederland*, p. 208.

14. This is the gist of the essay by Fuks-Mansfeld, 'Verlichting en emancipatie', esp. p. 180 and 202.

In the nineteenth century the Holy Land of Palestine belonged to Turkey, or rather, to the Ottoman Empire, which among many other parts comprised Syria, with Palestine as one of its provinces. Generally speaking, although Muslims tolerated Jews and Christians as the other peoples of the Book, yet quite regularly there were frictions between all three segments of the population, that is, between Jews and Christians also. In the 1820s through 1840s the Ottoman Empire found itself under considerable pressure of various kinds. The Greeks set out on their liberation struggle, which they won in 1829. The Ottoman sultanate even became so weak as to elicit attacks from all sides. Mohammed Ali Pasha, recognized by the sultan as governor of Egypt, rebelled against him because he wanted more autonomy for his native province. He conquered a number of regions, among them Syria, which included Palestine, and ruled them from 1832 to 1840. The Egyptian found support in the French state, that wished to extend its influence in Africa and the East. Consequently, the sultan received the support of France's adversaries in Napoleonic times, England, Prussia, Austria, and also Russia. In 1838 Turkish troops sought to chase Mohammed Ali Pasha out of Syria, but his son Ibrahim Pasha managed to beat them. Still, the four European powers kept exerting pressure to keep the Ottoman Empire intact. In 1840 it reconquered Syria with the help of allied troops. Mohammed Ali Pasha withdrew, and in 1841 the so-called Treaty of the Dardanelles was concluded that returned Syria and, hence, Palestine, to Ottoman rule. During this entire period of what came to be known in Europe as 'the Oriental question' there were conflicts between various groups, with the Jews for prime victims since they were regarded as inimical by both the Christian and the Muslim population.

In 1840 an incident took place in Syria's capital Damascus that shocked all of Jewish Europe. A French priest named Thomas and his servant had vanished without a trace from the Franciscan monastery in Damascus. Soon rumor spread that both had been murdered by the Jews so as to use their blood for preparing Passover bread. Anti-Jewish rows broke out among Damascus' Christian population, and the French consul helpfully insisted with the Islamic authorities upon satisfaction. A Jewish baker and a few more people were arrested. Upon heavy torture they confessed to the murder. Now the French government required their severe punishment. The affair got politically charged in Europe,

too, when prominent Jewish bankers and philanthropists in England and Austria made an appeal to their governments to intervene. These, more to annoy the French than out of concern for the affair itself, lodged complaint with the sultan over the treatment of the Jews in his territory. The Dutch ambassador in Istanbul, admonished by his Minister of Foreign Affairs, joined in, too. Thus pressured, the sultan contradicted in a formal declaration the ritual murder charge. Those Jews who had so far managed to survive torture were set free. The affair reached Dutch newspapers, too.¹⁵ In 1840 the Jewish author/printer A.C. Carillon in Amsterdam devoted a leaflet to the affair: 'Collection of Pieces Regarding What Happened with Father Thomas' (*Verzameling van stukken betreffend het gebeurde met pater Thomas*).¹⁶ The affair also entered Hasebroek's novel. It is well possible that, as part of 'the Oriental question', it stimulated her to choose the position of the Jews as the subject of her *Bedevaardangers*.

Both the Amsterdam state of affairs and the involved political developments in Palestine shall appear to be of significance for the interpretation of *De bedevaartgangers*, which opens with a dramatic sunset:

Blood-red the final rays of the sun descended into the cold, humid fog that greyed on the horizon. When the sun had sunk away in its entirety, the fog slowly got further, first extending its dark veil over the colored spot where daylight still whiled, and then enveloping all of nature in its giant shroud.¹⁷

Blood-red, descent, dark veil, shroud: the 'Natureingang' (predictive introduction by means of natural scenery) spells little good for how the story will end. We are drawn into Amsterdam, where at the Keizersgracht a poor woman with a baby on her arms calls at the door of a brightly lit house where a festive party has just begun. The servants send the beggar woman away, even though she insists to have been invited by the young lady of the house. 'We give only to our own poor, and we have plenty of them on our hands without engaging with kike brood,' a servant kindly observes.¹⁸ A young Jew who passes by gives the woman

15. Cp. Meijer, *De bedevaartgangers. Een proto-zionistische roman*, p. 40.

16. See for more data Fuks-Mansfeld, 'Moeizame aanpassing', p. 218-219.

17. [Hasebroek], *De bedevaartgangers*, p. 1.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

some money and admonishes her to go begging among her own people only. It turns out that this man is in love with the young lady of the house. They know each other only from sight, as during carriage tours through the city they have regularly exchanged polite greetings. When he learns from the servants at the front door that after dinner she is to visit the opera, he hastens there, too. That evening *La Juive* (1835) is performed, a 'grand opéra' by Fromental Halévy after a libretto by Eugène Scribe.

After these few pages already the attentive reader is clear about what the book turns around. There is a conflict between Jewish and Christian. Poor and wealthy also may become a theme, with this scene at the Keizersgracht (which to every Dutch reader stands for Christian affluence) where a wealthy Jew sends a poor Jewish beggar woman away with the message that she disowns her identity by begging at Christians' doors, yet this opposition does not play any further role in the novel. The Jew Josua Israeli is in love with the Christian Otilia van Waldemar, who on her turn is interested in him, as becomes clear during this operatic performance about the persecution of Jews.

La Juive has indeed been performed in the Netherlands around 1838, even becoming one of the most beloved opera's of that time.¹⁹ The composer was of Jewish descent, so during the Second World War his work was proscribed. Fanaticism and religious hatred form the subject of the opera. The male protagonist, the goldsmith Éléazar, is modeled after Shylock in Shakespeare's *The merchant of Venice*. A historical drama, it is set in 15th century Konstanz. On the day when the papally convened bishops' Council opens, the goldsmith just keeps working, thus evoking general indignation and expressions of Jew-hatred, as a resting day had been prescribed. Éléazar and his daughter Rachel are therefore condemned to death, but Cardinal Brogni prevents execution. In the meantime Rachel is being courted by Samuel, a Jewish artist who is really Prince Léopold. Rachel finds out that she has a relationship with a Christian – a feat punishable by death. She also finds out that the prince is married already. She makes it public that the prince has a relation with

19. Jaap Meijer mentions an advertisement for a performance on September 6, 1838, in the *Journal de la Haye*. See Meijer, *De bedevaartgangers. Een proto-zionistische roman*, p. 49.

a Jewess, upon which revelation capital punishment awaits father, daughter, and lover alike. Cardinal Brogni points out to Éléazar that conversion can prevent execution of the threefold verdict. He indignantly rejects the proposal. Éléazar does however advise his daughter to take baptism, but she insists on meeting death together with her father. With the flames already surrounding them on the stake, Éléazar finally makes it known that Rachel is not his own daughter but Cardinal Brogni's.²⁰

In *De bedevaartgangers* acquaintance with the opera is presupposed without more ado. The young lady of the Keizersgracht enters the opera at a scene of public Jew-hatred directed against 'that race rebellious and criminal' ('cette race rebelle et criminelle'). At the point where Éléazar sings: 'Let the Christians and those who love them be damned' ('Maudits soient les chrétiens et celui, qui les aime') the young man nearly faints. There is also a parallel between the protagonists of the novel and of the opera, as we shall see.

In a number of scenes the novelist sketches the Jew-hatred that reigns among the Amsterdam population. Josua is being mocked, and anti-Semitic songs are sung when he shows himself outside the Jewish neighborhood. She describes how, even after the attainment of legal equality, Jews are excluded from public life: 'Lonely and separated like the broken column of a fallen temple amidst newly erected prayer houses lives Israel among us.'²¹ Once upon a time the Netherlands have offered shelter to persecuted Jews, but that is how far it all went. The Jewish people lives on Dutch soil, but it has not really been taken up. To the contrary, 'intolerance, which was called "evangelical", and which was too hard even for Old Testament times, drew a sharp line of separation between Christians and Jews.'²² Even in the author's own time they are still regarded as lepers: 'excluded, separated, avoided, evaded'. According to her, things are no longer quite so bad as before, yet intolerance still predominates.

This is the excluded position in which the reader now really gets acquainted with Josua Israeli. From Valencia in Spain he has moved to

20. Found in *Odeon* 20 (2009), p. 74, 4-15.

21. [Hasebroek], *De bedevaartgangers*, p. 25-26.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 26.

Holland for the affairs of his father's trade company. In Spain he had shown himself an eminent young leader of the Jewish community, so he had been charged, upon settling his father's affairs in the Netherlands, to move on to the East and enter into discussion with Jews in Palestine. More specifically, the Jews in his fatherland had selected him to take up with the Pasha how he might bring together in Palestine persecuted Jews from all over the world. The idea was to squeeze out of the Pasha a promise to protect the Jews and respect their faith. Clearly Hasebroek has set her novel in the period when the rebellious Egyptian pasha Mohammed Ali (whose name she spells the Turkish way as Mehemet-Ali) acquired mandate over the region, between 1832-1840, that is. She also addresses the affair of Father Thomas, so the dating can be made even more precise: it is around 1840.²³ Regarding Josua, on acquiring the hoped-for promise from the Pasha he would return and lead Jews from all over the world to Palestine to await there the coming of the promised Messiah.

The first part of his planned travels, however, is to Holland, where he finds board and shelter with a member of his mother's family, the hate-filled Jew Alazzo and his meek daughter Lea, who begins to foster a secret love for Josua. Alazzo is rather like Shylock and, therefore, like *Éléazar* in Halévy's opera, too. But above all he is an orthodox fanatic, whereas Lea is an exemplar of feminine softness and compliance, like Rachel in the opera and like those feminine figures in Hasebroek's novels who serve as opposites to educated, independent women. About Lea Hasebroek writes: 'She hardly knew the word *I*; she had never used it as something independent in relation to others'.²⁴ However, in Holland Josua gets besotted with a young Christian woman from a prominent, patrician family.

Otilia takes another feminine role familiar in Hasebroek's work. She is neither the meek nor the independent woman, but a spoilt, selfish beauty who takes pleasure in being loved by a stranger. The only thing that has tempted her about Josua is his unusual, exotic appearance, and she reasons: 'At all times have Ladies kept such pets; magpies, parrots,

23. The *Oprechte Haarlemsche Courant* writes about the affair on April 9, 1840. The novel as a whole, however, comprises more seasons. Cp. Meijer, *De bedevaartgangers. Een proto-zionistische roman*, p. 40.

24. [Hasebroek], *De bedevaartgangers*, p. 98.

lapdogs, dwarfs, negroes even. So why would more weight be attached to her entertaining herself a little with a Hebrew for a change? To do the ordinary thing was so insipid for a woman of her character!²⁵

Ottilia's father and wider environment tolerate Josua because financial gains may be made through him. He is even invited at a dinner where businessmen from Amsterdam's inner circle are present. He wisely keeps himself out of the political conversation about the Oriental Question. One guest takes the side of the French and the pasha, another of the English and the sultan. It annoys Josua no end that no one takes the side of the rights of the original inhabitants of Palestine, the Israelites. But when the conversation turns to the vanished priest, he is no longer capable of keeping his mouth shut. Someone speaks of 'Jewbrood' that is tolerated in Holland, going on to express the hope that the devil will 'liberate Holland of all kikes'. And now Josua draws some attention upon himself by remarking that the devil is probably still occupied to full capacity with the Christians.²⁶

In contrast to the newspaper messages stand the letters that Alazzo receives from Constantinople filled with accounts of the tortures and arrests in Damascus. New persecutions of Jews seem to be in the offing. Alazzo cries for revenge, but Josua hesitates. He is clearly on the move toward another world, and no longer finds happiness in the faith. He has become aware that in Holland pure Jewishness has been diluted. In their synagogues the Jews hear only prescriptions, but the opinionated rabbi's fail to let these go accompanied by a pure doctrine. The emphasis is on hatred, reconciliation is not being preached. His own people have degenerated: 'Cold-hearted sleepers is what they were, content with a shadow of religion, and instead of kneeling for Jehova they bend in the dust for the God of the century, the Mammon.'²⁷

Alazzo, who as a member of a debating society that reads *The Hebrew Review and Magazine of Rabbinical literature*, shares these views. This high-minded English monthly filled with essays about ancient Jewry was indeed being read in elite Jewish circles in the Netherlands.²⁸

25. Ibid., p. 74.

26. Ibid., p. 63.

27. Ibid., p. 92.

28. Meijer, *De bedevaartgangers. Een proto-zionistische roman*, p. 56. The reference to the monthly is in [Hasebroek], *De bedevaartgangers*, p. 179.

It is not known to which specific society Hasebroek refers. A well-known society named *Tongeleth*, that counted Samuel Mulder among its members, was fairly progressive and attuned to acculturation, whereas Alazzo must rather have sought the company of an orthodox society.²⁹ Possibly Hasebroek refers to the Amsterdam union *Pekidim weamarkalim*, an ultra-orthodox Jewish organisation guided by Zwi Hirsch Lehren, who refused to accommodate to acculturation and who was also involved in an international charity that, as we saw already, collected funds for Jews in Palestine.³⁰ In any case, in Alazzo's society complaints go round about the organization of churches and schools in the Netherlands. Elsewhere in *Europa* rabbi's with a solid Ph.D. were appointed to lead the community, but here not even simple rabbi's could be found in the synagogues. Everywhere Jewish life was revitalized but in the Netherlands. Everywhere reforms were carried through, but here reigned the sleep of death. Everywhere thoughts went out to the reconquest of Jerusalem, except in Holland.³¹

So Josua's and Alazzo's minds meet in their critique of the lukewarm mood of Dutch Jewry. Josua fails to find the independent-minded, fiery Jews he had dreamt of. He doubts whether he will find adherents to his Palestinian plan. To Lea he confesses his doubts. He is no longer able to subscribe to the hoary belief of all hope set on the coming of the Messiah, but he does not dare believe either that the Messiah has already come in the person of Jesus Christ. God must have forgotten the Jews and his promise of a Messiah, so that every Jew nowadays lives only to punish the guilt of the forefathers, so he thinks. 'God is a God of wrath, and an all-consuming fire He is!'³²

More and more Josua turns into Otilia's plaything. She even drags him along to a Protestant service, with the preacher citing a New Testament prophecy about the fall of Jerusalem. The sermon fascinates Josua, and his doubts increase. He believes that he can win Otilia for himself by converting to her faith. Hasebroek imagines what it must have been like for a Jew to tend toward Christianity. Josua feels ill at ease with

29. For *Tongeleth* see Fuks-Mansfeld, 'Moeizame aanpassing', p. 234.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 218.

31. [Hasebroek], *De bedevaartgangers*, p. 192-193. This is confirmed in Fuks-Manfeld, 'Moeizame aanpassing', p. 209.

32. [Hasebroek], *De bedevaartgangers*, p. 101.

Christ's humility. Christ is not a heroic, powerful conqueror, which is how the Jew imagines his Messiah. How does he manage 'to exchange the throne for the crib, the sceptre for the cross, elevation for humiliation, and domination for suffering'?³³ The Man of Sorrows cannot appeal to the Jew. Josua decides in the end to become a Christian in name, without genuine belief in the faith.

And yet he is mistaken in thinking that what stands between Otilia and him is a matter of faith. She rejects him, unmoved when he confronts her with the rejoinder 'Are we then nothing but either Jews or Christians? Are we not human beings, too? Does the sole point of union between soul and soul reside in their religious faith!'³⁴ She gets engaged with a wealthy French baronet and marries him, even if he wants her solely for her status and her beauty: 'to me her hand, and to that Jew or somebody else her heart, I couldn't care less!'³⁵

A crisis emerges when Alazzo finds in his own home a copy of the New Testament. Josua confesses that he is the one to study it, but Lea tells her father that she owns the pernicious book. Alazzo believes that she says so only to spare Josua. He throws Josua out, and tells Lea that her mother had long ago become a Christian under the influence of one of her brothers, and that this has caused great misfortune to both her and him. So as to flee the shame Alazzo had moved to Holland, where shortly after Lea's birth his wife died from sorrow and nostalgia. He has taken revenge upon his brother-in-law, who had brought Christianity to her, by murdering him.

After this crisis the scene shifts and we find ourselves on a ship on its way to Palestine, with Alazzo and Lea on board. Alazzo has received letters that call him to Damascus, where the situation of the Jews keeps getting worse. Father and daughter walk from Jaffa to Damascus, everywhere passing ruins and decay, signs of Palestine's earlier grandeur: 'It is a moving writing to read in it the people's disasters, those stone remainders of bygone days of glory, those monuments which did not along with prosperity fall apart but which kept standing there as roots of the truncated stem, to show to posterity the place where the tree once

33. *Ibid.*, p. 187.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 140.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 164.

stood.³⁶ The author sketches their pilgrimage alongside many Old Testament monuments, with the father complaining about their decay all the time, whereas Lea appreciates the signs of antiquity.

In Damascus Alazzo meets another brother-in-law – the very person to ask him to make the trip in the first place. This brother-in-law belongs to an association whose members want to take revenge on all Christians, so Alazzo, who quickly joins the association, believes that he (the brother-in-law) has forgiven him (Alazzo) the murder of his (and also Alazzo's wife's) brother.

Josua in his confusion has returned to his parents in Spain, where he arrives just in time to look his dying father into the eyes. This suffices for him to take up again his old plan to go to Palestine and seek there for Lea and Alazzo, with a renewed drive to save persecuted Jews and take them to Palestine. Alazzo goes to Beirut to pick up Josua. Now that Ottilia has left the game and Josua appears to have regained his previous fanaticism, Alazzo sets his hopes on a marriage between him and Lea.

It turns out meanwhile that Lea has seen the light of the New Testament. Far more easily than Josua can she accept the Man of Sorrow. 'Each looks out for the Christ who is dearest to him,' says the author, and that is how Lea has recognized her own meekness in Him.³⁷ In Damascus she encounters Christian friends of her late mother, and she meets with them in secret. She wants baptism, but her friends advise her against it, as the political situation is too dangerous for such a step. The European powers are meddling in the troubles between Turkey and Egypt, and now that the Egyptian Pasha fears to be forced to leave Damascus his severity has doubled, with the Jewish population suffering the most from it. Still hoping for help from France, he leaves the Christians at peace, and yet unrest is brewing all over the city. Even so Lea keeps insisting on baptism, which is finally planned to take place in a mountainous gorge outside the city, so as to avoid the perils inside.

However, baptism is disrupted by a group of armed Jews, members of the association for revenge. Alazzo, fresh member of the group, throws himself with a dagger upon the veiled person ready to be baptized, who

36. *Ibid.*, p. 264.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 268.

then turns out to be his own daughter. It finally transpires that everything has been thus arranged by his brother-in-law, as his way to take revenge for the murder of his brother and the death of his sister.

The story ends with Josua's trip to Jerusalem, to visit the chapel of the Holy Grave. He has found Lea's copy of the New Testament, once owned by himself, and he has read her compassionate notes in it. His heart, turned to stone due to Ottilia, opens up again. He now realizes that Lea has always loved him, and he receives baptism in the chapel. Alazzo has not survived the murder of his daughter by his own hand, dying from a mixture of sorrow and thirst for revenge. The book's final sentence is a quotation from Psalm 121: 'Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.'³⁸

Of course *De bedevaartgangers* is a novel meant to promote conversion. In the end the sympathetic Jews are baptized, whereas those who in their fanaticism and thirst for revenge invoke only antipathy fail to see the light. The Dutch historian Jaap Meijer, who calls the book a 'proto-Zionist novel', overestimates its message. Even so, for all the givenness of the conversion objective, it is still remarkable how thoroughly the author has investigated Jewry and Judaism, and how subtly she describes Jewish religion. She forcefully opposes the ongoing exclusion and discrimination of Jews, and she shows understanding for their striving after a nation of their own. This is quite a feat in a time when, as a rule, the Jew appears in literature only as a humoristic type, always out to make money, and speaking with a heavy Yiddish accent, literally written out with the intention to get a good laugh out of the reader. One well-known case in point is the Jew Fagin, in Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist*.

As far as we know, *De bedevaartgangers* received but one review. It appeared in *De Vaderlandsche Letteroefeningen*, a reputable journal that had meanwhile lost its leading position to Potgieter's *De Gids*.³⁹ The reviewer ignores the unusual theme of the book but only points out a few improbabilities, such as Josua's excellent skating qualities right on arrival in Amsterdam from Valencia. So the public press did not pick up that the author has dared tread quite novel, ambitious paths.

38. Ibid., p. 320.

39. *Vaderlandsche Letteroefeningen* (1843), vol. 1, p. 731-732.

On reading *De bedevaartgangers* two questions impose themselves. The first is, What moved Hasebroek to choose this particular subject? It was hardly an obvious choice to make, as I have argued at the outset. She herself wrote that Geertruide Toussaint's style in *Het Huis Lauernesse*, a widely acclaimed novel on the Reformation that appeared in 1840, had been a source of inspiration.⁴⁰ Qua content, however, the books are hardly comparable, but for the love between adherents of two different faiths and the purifying conflict it leads to. The second question, which of course hangs together with the first, is: Where did she get her information from?

Regarding the subject and her decision to opt for it, a few possibilities present themselves. The Oriental Question and the pieces about Father Thomas in Damascus that appeared in the press are so manifestly present in the book that they must have inspired Hasebroek to take on a subject of larger scope than she had selected in her books so far. Maybe she wanted to aim as highly as her sister-in-writing, Toussaint, had done in her historical novels, rather than sticking to romantic love stories. With Toussaint taking on the Reformation, she may have decided to take on Jewry.

It is also well possible that recent literature and art gave her food for thought. Doubtless she was in thrall of Halévy opera *La Juive*, and we have seen that there are certainly similarities between the libretto and the novel. The theme of the impossible love between a Jew and a Christian had already been the subject of Walter Scott's historical novel *Ivanhoe*. The beautiful Rebecca cannot respond to *Ivanhoe*'s love without giving up the faith of her parents. This book was emulated countless times. The historian Reina Fuks-Mansfeld writes: 'The theme of the beautiful, steadfast Jewess, who either disdains the love of a non-Jewish nobleman or sacrifices herself to save her family but on her dying bed returns to her original faith is to be encountered everywhere in European-Jewish literature.'⁴¹

Already in 1829 Hasebroek's later publisher, François Bohn in Haarlem, published a book that throughout Europe gained much attention:

40. H. Reeser, *De jeugdijaren van Anna Louise Geertruida Toussaint 1812-1851* (Haarlem 1962), p. 121.

41. Fuks-Mansfeld, 'Moeizame aanpassing', p. 242.

‘The Jew; a Sketch of Customs and Morals In the Early Fifteenth Century’ (*De Jood; een zedekundig tafereel uit het begin der vijftiende eeuw*). It was translated from German, and the author was Carl Spindler. The sizeable volume came out in reprint in 1840, and it easy to imagine that the publisher gave a copy to Betsy Hasebroek, who in view of the book’s popularity is most likely to have read it. Maybe Bohn even suggested to her to address Jewish history in her own writing? Not that there are many correspondences between this book and *De bedevaartgangers*. It is true that revengeful, orthodox Jews make their appearance in both, as also a case of a Christian knight and a Jewish girl falling in love with each other. But whereas we may call *De bedevaartgangers* a subtly nuanced novel of ideas, Spindler’s ‘Jew’ is a historical novel dealing in adventures of little profundity, where Jews are described in stereotypes of good and bad and each predictably receives his due.

Another nineteenth century book that became quite well known, Eugène Sue’s *Wandering Jew*, did not begin to appear until 1844, so it cannot have influenced Hasebroek.

However, it is well-possible that the intriguing figure of the author Isaac da Costa inspired her. Johannes Hasebroek knew him for sure, yet we do not know whether at this time already he had been a guest at the always hospitable vicarage in Heiloo. Their known correspondence does not begin until 1843. The Jew Da Costa had taken baptism in 1822 – a feat that had caused quite a stir. In 1840, after a period during which he had not published any poems any more, he had just taken up the pen again. In his canto ‘Twenty-five Years’ (*Vijf en twintig jaren*) he addresses the political events of the past quarter-century, but he does not write in particular about the Oriental crisis.⁴² Both brother and sister Hasebroek would in due time become followers of the Christian Réveil, a movement of renewal inside Protestantism, which was directed toward an intensive experiencing of the faith. Da Costa was a leading figure in the movement. Perhaps Betsy Hasebroek wondered how a Jew can become a Christian, with Da Costa’s conversion serving as the occasion, and worked her thoughts into her novel. Her brother must definitely have subscribed to ‘Christian Voices’ (*Christelijke stemmen*), Da Costa’s journal, to which many vicars subscribed, and that was aimed at deepening the faith.

42. I. da Costa, *Vijf en twintig jaren, een lied in 1840* (Amsterdam 1840).

All this is bound to remain guesswork. Letters which might help lift the veil have not been preserved. The same is true of Betsy's sources. From where did she get her knowledge of the rituals of Judaism, how did she manage to describe Syrian landscapes, how could she know the language of orthodox Alazzo? Here, too, we just lack the required sources. It is certainly true that quite a number of publications about the history of the Jews saw the light in the first decades of the nineteenth century. In this regard it cannot have been difficult for Betsy Hasebroek to get a hold on the required information. She may have read a translation made in 1829 by J. de Breet of a French book by L.P. Graag de Segur entitled 'The History of the Jews' (*De geschiedenis der Joden*), which contained many data about persecution of Jews. Y. van Hamelsveld had published a history of the Jews in 1808. There were even children's books on the subject, like one by H. Wester, 'The History of the Israelites or Jews. A Book to be Read by Youth' (*De geschiedenis der Israëlieten of Joden. Een leesboek voor de jeugd*). It was published by the most prominent of do-good associations of the time, the 'Society for General Utility' (Maatschappij tot Nut van het Algemeen) and went through many reprints. It was an extraordinarily partisan booklet, stating for instance that among the Jews morals had been in steady decline ever after Jesus' Ascension. In addressing the Roman siege of Jerusalem Wester writes that there were mothers who boiled their own children and ate them.⁴³ 'From that time onward, that is, over seventeen centuries now, almost everywhere on the globe the Jews had to beg around as exiles among peoples of all kinds, exposed to scorn, persecution, and calamities of all kinds.'⁴⁴ If only they might get themselves to acknowledge Jesus, their sorry fate would come to an end, Wester thinks. If in her youth Hasebroek had read Wester's book, she certainly distanced herself thoroughly from the prejudices contained therein.

In 1839, hence, two years before *De bedevaartgangers* came out, a very sizeable book began to appear in many tomes, Johan Jacob Hesz' series 'History of the Israelites before Jesus' Times' (*Geschiedenis der Israëlieten voor de tijden van Jezus*). Several volumes were reviewed in *De*

43. H. Wester, *De geschiedenis der Israëlieten of Joden. Een leesboek voor de jeugd*, 7^e edition (Groningen 1829), p. 60.

44. Wester, *De geschiedenis der Israëlieten of Joden*, p. 62.

Gids, and it is quite possible that Hasebroek knew about Hesz as well. In the same year 1839 also appeared M. Russel's 'Palestine, or the Holy Land from the Earliest Times Up To the Present' (*Palestina, of het Heilige Land van de vroegste tot op den tegenwoordigen tijd*). In 1840 the Utrecht Society for Arts and Sciences (Utrechtsch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen) offered a prize for a book to be written about a history of the Jews in the Netherlands. A manuscript by H.J. Coenen, an acquaintance of the two Hasebroeks, gained the prize and appeared in print in 1843.⁴⁵ Possibly Betsy talked with him about the subject. All in all there were plenty histories for Hasebroek to draw on, only, we do not know which ones she actually had at her disposal.

It also remains anybody's guess where she got her knowledge of the Palestinian landscape from. As she had not been there herself, she must have consulted travel descriptions. For instance, in 1822 the Amsterdam publisher Portielje came with a translation from German of a travelogue to Palestine, Syria and Egypt, 'usefully arranged at the service of bible readers'.⁴⁶ But here, too, we do not know what specific Bädeker accompanied her virtual voyage to Palestine.

So the two questions I have posed have not been solved. The sense of wonder remains: How is it possible for a young, female writer in the province to dare take on such a theme, and how is it possible for her to be able to address the Jewish problem with so open a mind and so unprejudiced an eye?

This article is translated by H. Floris Cohen.

45. Fuks-Mansfeld, 'Moeizame aanpassing', p. 237.

46. T.R. Joliffe, *Reis in Palestina, Syrië en Egypte, gedaan in het jaar 1817 [...]* (Amsterdam 1822).