

## Enlightened Religion? On Buddhism in Karl Gjellerup's novel *Die Weltwanderer* (*The Wanderers of the World*, 1910)

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**Abstract:** In the broader discourse regarding the relationship between religion and secularism in modern Imperial Germany (1871–1918), this article focuses on the impact of Arthur Schopenhauer and his understanding of Indian philosophy on debates on a 'regeneration of Christianity'. In the early 20th century, thanks to the mediating activities of philosophical societies and cultural magazines, these debates spread from academic circles and spilled over into popular culture. This article explains how the popularisation of Indian texts by scholars such as Paul Deussen and Karl Eugen Neumann aimed to reorient Western philosophy and Christian faith. Karl Gjellerup's once-famous, now almost forgotten, novel *Die Weltwanderer* (*The Wanderers of the World*, 1910) will serve as a literary example of an attempt at a nationalistic reorientation of Christianity between artistic fantasies of redemption and nationalist and racialised beliefs.

### NEGOTIATING THE RELIGIOUS IN IMPERIAL GERMANY

If we examine the negotiation of the religious and the secular in Germany, this occurs over a long period of time in parallel with broader debates about a nationally oriented Christianity<sup>1</sup> formed from autochthonous elements. This topic seems to have received little attention so far for a variety of reasons. First, a final step towards secularisation in German history took place relatively late: the constitution of the Weimar Republic (1919–1933) finally imposed a reorganisation of the relationship between church and state. With the end of the monarchy in 1918, Kaiser Wilhelm II went into exile. With this, not only a secular ruler abdicated but also a religious leader, for Wilhelm II was also the supreme bishop of the Protestant Church of Prussia. This paved the way for further measures toward secularisation, and the idea of a nationally oriented form of Christianity for the German Empire seemed like another

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<sup>1</sup> I understand the terms Christian/Christianity, as well as Buddhist/Buddhism and Hinduism as constructed and in their mutual dependence in the sense of a global history of religions, cf. Thurner 2021: 1–19.

detour toward modern developments. On the other hand, as Rebekka Habermas notes, ‘this long-lasting ignorance was rampant among German historians, who all shared the same Weberian vision of nineteenth-century Germany as a country experiencing an increasing disenchantment and decline of religious world-views’ (Habermas 2019: 5). This neglect of religion’s social and cultural function in the imperial era was also true for a long time among specialists in religious studies and sociology of religion. However, a concept of religion understood anthropologically and culturally in the Geertzian sense, which defines religion as a symbol system, can show the structure-forming power of religion (ibid.) and add another layer of understanding to the religious vs secular debate. In this, notions of the secular compete with different ideas around spiritual renewals, which, however, are not represented in a narrative determined by the secularisation thesis.

In the meantime, new approaches to studies of religion have been explored by problematising and historicising the construction of the complementary terms ‘religious’ and ‘secular’ (Asad 2003). The focus here is on the agency of subjects in processes of religio-secularisation and the specific places where religion and the secular are produced, demarcated, and distinguished (Dreßler & Mandair 2011b). This can lead to insights regarding the nodes of discourses from where new ideas around the role of religion in society emerge, especially in the context of global history (Wohlrab-Sahr & Kleine 2021; Maltese & Strube 2021). In this way, the current studies about religion and secularism can help comprehend the processes of negotiation that have led to a polarisation of the ‘religious’ and the ‘secular’ in German history. According to Asad, these are not ‘essentially fixed categories’ (Asad 2003, quoted after Habermas 2019: 5), and ‘the alleged self-evident character of the secular as simply referring to the absence of religion or the banning of religion to the private sphere’ (ibid.) should also be reconsidered. They can thus be understood as an integral part of and only within the context of confessional debates, and therefore more as narratives than timeless theory (Habermas 2019: 4; Borutta 2010). A closer look at the religious debates and assumptions in the German Empire reveals a variety of discourses that question a linear and irreversible movement towards modernism equated with secularism. The material presented in this article illuminates a section of the debates on religion and modernity. Traditional religion is not contrasted with

a concept of modernity of any kind but rather with a religious renewal that overcomes and heals the breaches of the modern age. Indeed, the period witnessed several different formations struggling for a form of Christianity that was compatible with modernity. The discussions here are related to the negotiations of the religious and the secular in the Wilhelmine Empire and aim at establishing a renewal of traditional Christianity on a national base integrating aspects of Indian traditions.

The article has three sections. It starts with considerations around a philosophical association, the *Schopenhauer-Gesellschaft* (Schopenhauer-Society). The associations can be seen as a network of persons interested in debating, among other things, aspects of reconstructing Christianity from national, autochthonous resources, namely philosophical idealism, art, and philology, as the basis to explore what is genuine *German*. As the main topic of this article, I have chosen a literary example, a novel written by a member of the Schopenhauer Society, Karl Gjellerup's book *Die Weltwanderer*, because from this emerges an opposition of two different variations of an idealised German-Indian religion: either (a projection of) Vedantism or Buddhism, both seen through a Christian lens. In a third part, this article contextualises Gjellerup's interpretation of Buddhism that goes back to Arthur Schopenhauer and Richard Wagner, which at the beginning of the 19th century was debated along with a nationalist understanding of Christian traditions. In Gjellerup's case, specifically, Buddhism became a cypher for a philosophical religion beyond a theistic belief system, i.e., a system presupposing a concept of God as a person, combining a long-standing tradition of religious anti-Judaism with more recent antisemitic invectives. Finally, against the backdrop of the politically restrictive climate of the imperial era, this study of a text serves as an example of how a bourgeois elite erects and perpetuates its political interests in cultural-political debates installing new religious models against the alleged menace of secularism and democratic institutions.

### **THE SCHOPENHAUER-SOCIETY: WHERE PHILOSOPHY, RELIGION AND ARTS MEET ... RICHARD WAGNER**

The philosophical tradition, going back to Immanuel Kant's *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der Vernunft* (*Religion within the Limits of Reason*, 1793), repeatedly formulated new approaches to reconciling reason and religion as well

as religion and natural science. From the middle of the 19th century on, Arthur Schopenhauer, who was not particularly successful in the academic world, had a broad impact on a wide range of non-academic readers, and many artists (Mann 1974 [1938]: 530). Writers, composers, and painters, some of whom were women,<sup>2</sup> were among those who served to popularise his work. His followers saw in him not only the culmination of Kant's teachings and Western philosophy in general but also regarded him as an innovator when it came to questions concerning the compatibility of empirical natural sciences and transcendently conceived metaphysics. Additionally, as Christopher Ryan has pointed out, Schopenhauer 'assimilated the ancient Religions of India to his system to create a centre of opposition to positivism and materialism, and to fill the gap opened up by the decline of Christian institutions in the wake of the increasing awareness of the intellectual indefensibility of historical Christianity' (Ryan 2010: 62). Schopenhauer thus became the focus of a 'kind of counterculture within the *Kaiserreich*, which popularised discourses on non-Western religions' (Knöbl 2019: 41; Marchand 2009: 302) and, indirectly, discourses on the compatibility of the *Christian* faith with modernity. This counterculture incorporated many aspects of what has been coined *German Orientalism* (Marchand 2009) and shared high esteem for the allegedly common linguistic, spiritual and, to a certain degree, racial origins of Germans and Indians (Aryans).

The following will examine a dispute that took place within a particular social group, namely the members of a philosophical association, the Schopenhauer-Society, founded in 1911 by, among others, Paul Deussen (1845–1919), professor of history of philosophy at the University of Kiel, and appointed editor of the first complete critical edition of Schopenhauer's works. He earned his place in the history of philosophy not for his writings but primarily for his life-long friendship with Friedrich Nietzsche (Deussen 1901). Deussen studied Indian wisdom traditions intensively, especially the Upanishads, which through their most important thinker Shankara (around 800 AD) became the basis of a doctrine (*vedānta*) in which the individual Self, the Human Soul (*ātman*) is seen as identical to the World Soul (*brahman*), the All-One. This also means that the multiplicity of things, the world, is

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<sup>2</sup> The Schopenhauer-Society developed from an academic, predominantly male association into a more diverse group over the years. The history of the women of the Schopenhauer-Society is an absolute desideratum of research.

ultimately an illusion (*māyā*) and that the ultimate mystical experience is the insight that there is no separation between creator and creature (*advaita*).

Deussen would also never tire of claiming an unbroken continuity from Indian philosophy, via the Platonism of Greek antiquity to Kant's metaphysics and its perfector Schopenhauer. Thus, in the preface to his first work of systematisation in the history of philosophy, he writes of the 'imperishable content of the doctrine' and the 'inner agreement with the most important circles of thought of the past, especially the Brahmayidyā of the Indians, the doctrine of ideas of Plato and the theology of Christianity'<sup>3</sup> (Deussen [1877] 1890: V). He continues: 'Religion and philosophy are the two forms in which metaphysics developed since the most ancient times, especially in the Indian, Greek and Christian worlds' until Kant laid 'the foundations for a completely scientific metaphysics', on the basis of which Schopenhauer built a 'metaphysical edifice without equal', which will remain an 'indelible possession of mankind' (ibid.: 7).<sup>4</sup> Deussen's *opus magnum*, the seven-volume *Allgemeine Geschichte der Philosophie mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der Religionen* (*General History of Philosophy with Special Reference to Religions*, 1894–1917), integrated the histories of philosophy and religion(s) and popularised the idea of an idealistic, eternal truth of 'Aryan' religion (Marchand 2009: 308; Myers 2013: 172–184). Its other was not only what Deussen deemed the theistic 'religious concepts of the Semites'<sup>5</sup> (Deussen 1913b: 3) which included a belief in a personalised God, but also 'the desolation of an empirical worldview' and of a 'materialism that mocks philosophy and religion' and whose 'consequences in the field of art are platitudinous and vulgar, and in the field of morality, desolate and nefarious'<sup>6</sup> (Deussen [1877] 1890: 16).

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<sup>3</sup> 'unvergängliche Gehalt der Lehre', 'innere Übereinstimmung mit den wichtigsten Gedankenkreisen der Vergangenheit, insbesondere der Brahmayidyā der Inder, der Ideenlehre des Platon und der Theologie des Christentums'. All translations were made by the author.

<sup>4</sup> 'Religion und Philosophie sind die beiden Formen, in denen sich die Metaphysik seit den ältesten Zeiten entwickelt [hat], besonders in der Indischen, Griechischen und Christlichen Welt,' bis Kant 'die Grundlagen zu einer vollkommen wissenschaftlichen Metaphysik' legte, auf dessen Grundlage Schopenhauer einen 'metaphysischen Bau ohne Gleichen' aufbaut, 'der ein unverlierbares Besitztum der Menschheit bleiben wird.'

<sup>5</sup> 'religiöse[n] Vorstellungen der Semiten'.

<sup>6</sup> 'Trostlosigkeit der empirischen Weltanschauung: So gewiß der Materialismus allem Tiefsten und Höchsten der Philosophie und Religion Hohn spricht, so gewiß Konsequenzen auf dem Gebiet der Kunst platt und gemein, auf dem der Moral trostlos und ruchlos sind, - ebenso gewiß bleibt es, daß er auf *empirischem Standpunkte* die allein richtige und konsequente

Following these ideas, many of the protagonists of this counterculture, a heterogeneous group of personalities, shared a certain degree of mistrust about modernity when understood in materialistic terms. They gathered in the Schopenhauer-Society (Schwaderer 2021), which had about 400 members shortly after its founding and gained about 80–100 new ones every year until the end of the First World War.<sup>7</sup> Particularly prominent in the Society's *Yearbook* publications are the intertwined thematic complexes of Schopenhauer's philosophy, namely, Indian religion, art, and especially music. Interestingly, next to Schopenhauer, a key figure in the common debates was Richard Wagner who recognised in Schopenhauer many of his own ideas, which he developed in his musical dramas (Karnes & Mitchell 2020). Wagner's musical visions were closely linked to his cultural criticism and anti-Semitic invectives (Bermbach 2011; Hein 1996), ideas, which in the early 19th century experienced a strong revival. The Schopenhauer-Society absorbed a number of persons that frequented also the circle of the Wagner-family in Bayreuth and gathered, thus, artists and critics that dreamed of religious renewal in national terms, for example, Indologist Leopold von Schroeder<sup>8</sup> (1851–1920), musicologist Arthur Prüfer<sup>9</sup> (1868–1944), composer Felix Gotthelf<sup>10</sup> (1867–1930), translator of Buddhist Pali-texts Karl Eugen Neumann<sup>11</sup> (1865–1915), translator and populariser of Arthur Gobineau in

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Weltanschauung [...] ist [...] daher es verlorene Mühe ist, den *Materialismus widerlegen* zu wollen' (Highlights by Paul Deussen).

<sup>7</sup> On the history and development of the Schopenhauer-Society see Hansert 2010; Ciraci 2011.

<sup>8</sup> Von Schroeder's comparison of Buddhism and Christianity can be found in Schroeder 1893. He was seen as an Indologist, but he wrote more than one theatrical plays on Indian subjects (Roy 2017: 739). On von Schroeder's views on what he understood as 'Aryan Religion' see Myers 2013: 184–191; his connections with the Wagnerians in Roy 2017: 740–741.

<sup>9</sup> Prüfer published a collection of lectures (Prüfer 1909) on various aspects of Wagner's works and donated the proceeds of the book to the Richard-Wagner-Scholarship-Foundation.

<sup>10</sup> Gotthelf composed an 'Indian' Opera in Wagnerian style which von Schroeder reviewed enthusiastically (Schroeder 1917) and published essays on the connections of Schopenhauer and Wagner (Gotthelf 1915 & 1916).

<sup>11</sup> Together with the society's eventual first chairman Deussen, Neumann also belonged to the group of first signatories of an appeal to found the Schopenhauer-Society in 1911 (Hansert 2010: 33).

Germany Ludwig Schemann<sup>12</sup> (1852–1938), and art historian and Cosima Wagner’s son-in-law Henry Thode (1857–1920), to name just a few.

In the following, the case of German-Danish writer Karl Gjellerup (1857–1919), a member of the Schopenhauer-Society from its very beginning, who won the 1917 Nobel Prize for Literature, will be treated as an example of someone who took part in the debates around alternatives to the traditional Christian faith as a moral base for the society of his time from an artistic perspective. Inspired by Schopenhauer’s interest in Indian philosophy and Wagner’s musical works he interacted in a learned debate with his teacher and friend Paul Deussen, creating literary works meant to entertain the reader and disseminate what he deemed Buddhist religion.

### **A PASSION FOR GERMANY: BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES ON AN ALMOST FORGOTTEN AUTHOR**

Karl Adolph Gjellerup was born on 2 June 1857 in Røholte, Denmark.<sup>13</sup> When he was three years old, his father died. He went into the care of his uncle, pastor Johannes Fiebiger, and his wife. In the religious and erudite vicarage, Gjellerup developed his literary inclinations and his enthusiasm for German literature and culture at an early age. At the request of his foster parents in Copenhagen, Gjellerup began to study theology, not to become a pastor but because he saw it as an opportunity to develop his interest in German education. His studies brought him to engage in biblical criticism, which shaped his later opinions on religion. After completing his studies, he wrote his first prose works, where he expressed his enthusiasm for what he perceived as the epitome of German culture, literature, and philosophy. He explained Wagner’s *The Ring of the Niebelung* to his Danish readers (Gjellerup 1891). His turn in favour of German idealism eventually caused a break with the literary landscape of Gjellerup’s homeland and, following a period of turbulence in his life, led to his move to Dresden, the hometown of his wife Eugenia. There, under the influence of Schopenhauer’s philosophy of world and self-negation, Gjellerup not only gained a different view of Christianity, from

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<sup>12</sup> Schemann and Gjellerup exchanged letters from 1900 for two decades exchanging and commenting on each other’s publications. The correspondence is located under the signatures NL 12/603 and NL 12/1889 in the archives of the University Library of Freiburg.

<sup>13</sup> A detailed biography along with archival documents is included in Nybo 2002.

which he had alienated himself during his theological studies (Gjellerup 1922: 21), but this also led him to a deeper engagement with Indian themes in the 1890s (Fedrich 1995: IV). Gjellerup immersed himself in Buddhism and Vedanta philosophy and read major German publications on these subjects. He was particularly impressed by Deussen's philosophical treatises and translations of Vedic texts and by the work of Neumann. Both personalities later belonged to Gjellerup's circle of friends.

Gjellerup was also active as a contributor to the society's *Yearbook* as he had been for the *Bayreuther Blätter*, the mouthpiece of Richard Wagner's family and spiritual heirs. These activities were highly appreciated, and his literary treatment of Indian themes and their subsequent dissemination to a broad public helped him open up important contacts with publishers (Gjellerup 1922: 21). Indeed, his first mention in documents compiled by the Nobel Prize for Literature Committee as early as 1911 came from a letter of recommendation signed by German professors from precisely these circles of Wagner and Schopenhauer supporters;<sup>14</sup> it took until 1917, however, before he was awarded the prize. Gjellerup's literary work was considered an art form committed to his time's 'high idealistic values'. These values that the committee mentions are directly influenced by his engagement with an understanding of Buddhism coined by Schopenhauer and Wagner. In the tense atmosphere around 1910, the invocation of spiritual values, religious renewal and German traditions appealed to readers and created cohesion through shared convictions and beliefs.

### **GJELLERUP'S BUDDHIST NOVEL: SUFFERING MEN AND REDEMPTION AT THE EXPENSE OF WOMEN IN *DIE WELTWANDERER***

While Gjellerup had dedicated his first 'Indian' drama, *Die Opferfeuer* (*The Sacrificial Fires*, 1903) to his friend and role model Paul Deussen, and had developed his plot based on Vedic scriptures, his most famous novel *Der Pilger Kamanita* (*The Pilgrim Kamanita*, 1906) narrates legends about the Buddha's life. This shift in emphasis from Vedic to Buddhist religion was not

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<sup>14</sup> The initiator of this letter was Ludwig Schemann from Freiburg; other signatories were Arthur Böhntlingk, Paul Deussen, Arthur Drews, Otto Harnack, Leopold von Schroeder, Henry Thode, Georg Treu and Hermann Türck. Cf. Gjellerup's letter to Otto Borchsenius of 29.06.1911, KB, Nks 46561 4°, Nybo 2002: 326 and n. 507.



accidental, and it eventually resulted in *Die Weltwanderer*), an imaginative and at times grotesque adventure novel full of Orientalist clichés depicting romantic love and palace intrigue against a stereotypical exotic backdrop. In the following, the novel's somewhat confusing plot will not be reproduced in total, but only those parts that are necessary to isolate a conflict that illustrates Gjellerup's worldview. Comparing the novel with journalistic texts by the author, we witness a development from a specific academic interpretation of (ancient) Indian philosophy as popularised by Deussen toward a blending of Buddhist and Christian motives that were to form Gjellerup's take on Schopenhauer's philosophy and Wagner's musical and cultural visions.

The novel begins with a description of a German professor and his daughter Amanda, the story's protagonist. The professor's description fits Paul Deussen in his physical appearance and his habitus. Gjellerup primarily uses personal details to emphasise in his character the very traits of a German professor par excellence that Paul Deussen embodied (Ross 1994). The descriptions of Indian people and their living conditions, which display (from today's point of view) the professor's western arrogance and colonial attitude (Delfs 2017), were not invented by Gjellerup alone but borrowed from Deussen's travelogues, *Erinnerungen an Indien (Memories of India, 1904)*, as well as from possible personal information that can be accessed with the help of his autobiography, *Mein Leben (My Life, 1922)*, published posthumously by his daughter Erika Rosenthal-Deussen (1894–1956).<sup>15</sup>

The character of the professor is described rather unsympathetically as someone 'whose aesthetic sense was merely moderately developed' (Gjellerup [1910] 1922: 13). The constellation of the travelling couple, the professor with his daughter, is also close to the model of Deussen, who undertook a six-month study trip to India in 1892–93 and, somewhat unusually for the time, took along his wife Marie (née Volkmar, 1861–1914), 14 years his junior. The fictional and the 'real' professor share views on philosophy and religion. Schopenhauer also makes a small appearance in the novel (*ibid.*: 55). The character of Professor Eichstätt, like his model, thinks little of supernatural experiences and similar 'irrational elements' (*ibid.*: 24). Deussen himself had little interest in transcendent experiences and practices of

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<sup>15</sup> On the biography of the committed child and adolescent psychologist Dr. Erika Rosenthal-Deussen cf. Feldhoff 2018.

renunciation. In his descriptions of contemporary Indian religiosity, there is 'often a certain comical disillusion in his dealings with so-called saints. Spiritual emotion made him suspicious. Deussen's faith was philosophy, intuition gained in intellectual abstraction' (Feldhoff 2009: 163). The author Gjellerup maintains a critical distance from his novel's character, and the resemblance the character of the professor in the book bears to Deussen provides grounds for understanding how Gjellerup saw the contrast between himself and the professor from Kiel concerning their interpretations of Indian traditions.

### **THE VEDANTIST, THE BUDDHIST, AND REDEMPTION THROUGH LOVE: NEGOTIATING RELIGION BETWEEN SCHOPENHAUER AND WAGNER**

However, the ironic portrait of Paul Deussen in Gjellerup's novel is more than a purely literary play on an admired friend. Gjellerup's interest in Indian themes flowed not only into his literary works but also into a series of extended essays in various journals from which his readings can be traced. His book reviews included the works of Deussen on Indian and biblical philosophy, the translations of Buddhist texts by Neumann and the works of Deussen's fellow professor and rival<sup>16</sup> at the university of Kiel, Sanskritist Hermann Oldenberg (1854–1920). This allows us to see how he directly related his Indian and Buddhist studies to the cultural processes of his time (McGetchin 2009: 124). Thus, it is possible to reconstruct the contemporary discourses on religion, art, and philosophy from these texts.

However, Gjellerup does not read these as the fruit of philological efforts or philosophical-historical tradition but as personal confessions. For him, the entire concept of his understanding of the world rests on Indian elements transmitted by Schopenhauer and modified in a certain way by his successors. Thus, in a memorial leaflet for Neumann, he summarises less the worldview of the commemorated person than his own:

One can say that Schopenhauer's philosophy is a double herm with a Buddhist and a Vedantist face. These two physiognomies are represented in our Indology by two different Schopenhauer students: the Pali scholar Karl

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<sup>16</sup> On the rivalry between Deussen and Oldenberg see Feldhoff 2009: 144, 195.

Eugen Neumann and the Sanskrit scholar Paul Deussen  
(Gjellerup 1919a: 451).

This difference between these two approaches to Schopenhauer's legacy Gjellerup stressed here is his personal interpretation, and I have not found it in other sources. In the context of his publications, I argue that this is not a scholarly comment on different philological approaches but rather an attempt to deduce from these two interpretations of Christianity, one still based on theological traditions (Deussen's Vedantism) and Neumann's non-theistic approach to religion, where morality does not need an understanding of God as a person as final justification (Buddhism).

Next to these two moral and theological approaches, Gjellerup elaborates a third theological concept: a particular notion of love understood as a self-sacrifice. He shared this idea with the composer and musical visionary Richard Wagner, to whom he had dedicated a whole book (Gjellerup 1891) before his commitment to Indian subjects. Wagner had also discovered his spiritual leaning toward Buddhism in his first reading of Schopenhauer in 1854 and saw in the critical element of Schopenhauer's ethics, the principle of the 'Negation of the Will' (Schopenhauer 1988: 319 sqq.), a confirmation of what he deemed a 'redemption-oriented' aspect of Buddhism as a prerequisite for salvation. In Schopenhauer, he found a model for his struggle for the role of love in his musical dramas (Slepčević 1920). Wagner himself wavered in his assessment of redemption, which appears on the one hand as redemption *through* love (for example, in *Tristan and Isolde*) or redemption *from* love, i.e., complete renunciation, as in *Parsifal* or the Buddhist opera sketch *Die Sieger (The Victors)* which was never composed (App 2011: 29). Particularly clear for Gjellerup were the traces of an interpretation of Buddhism prefigured by Schopenhauer in the different variants of the conclusion of *Götterdämmerung*. He analyses this as an interweaving of female self-immolation with Schopenhauerian pessimistic ethics, according to which existence itself has no intrinsic value and detachment from it is the only way for the individual to find peace (ibid.: 21–24).

Gjellerup constructed, thus, a more or less consistent eclectic system, in which he addressed the fundamental conflicts of his life, his alienation from traditional Protestant Christianity as well as his romantic inclination to find redemption in love, but ultimately also to distance himself from it, adopting

asceticism and renunciation in chastity instead. In the Schopenhauer-Society, this had an extraordinary response, and it resonated with the debates in the *Yearbook* of the society, where the connections of Schopenhauer and Wagner were perceived predominantly from a religious angle. Although the religious ideas exchanged there have always been touted as the pinnacle of occidental culture, they are philosophically unsophisticated, not to say banal. Arthur Prüfer, musicologist and Wagner specialist, had already connected them in his didactic book *The Work of Bayreuth* (Prüfer 1909) where he also traces back world-redeeming love to Schopenhauer's asceticism, which is a conscious breaking of the will. The result is a concept of redemption through which man (perceived solely as *male*, as will be shown later) can ultimately free himself from a world perceived as suffering, and the Indian ideas of overcoming the world through renunciation, all together found in Wagner's works (ibid: 182–188). Gjellerup's novel can thus also be read as a comment on the widespread disputes around philosophy, religion, and art. He developed a religious vision using literature as a vehicle, as Wagner did in his musical dramas.

Returning to the novel's content, the author consequently split two opposite adaptations of Indian philosophy and religion, both of which go back to Schopenhauer's model, into two of his characters. On the one hand, the German professor is modelled on Paul Deussen, the actual Vedantist, Eichstätt in the novel. On the other, Eichstätt's daughter Amanda, who elegantly overtakes her father with her genuine interest and intuitive understanding of Buddhist culture, is modelled as a Buddhist. Unsurpassed in his knowledge of ancient Indian scriptures, the German professor in the novel remains an ignorant spectator and has no relevant role in the book. This belongs exclusively to his daughter, who both understands the driving elements of the story and, in the end, resolves all conflicts and even brings about her happy ending in both a sensual and supernatural relationship. The elements marked as Buddhist in the novel, reincarnation and the redemption from suffering through love and compassion, are more likely a very idiosyncratic mixture of Christian protestant belief, which was Gjellerup's point of departure, and what he learned about Buddhism from the popular works of Deussen, Neumann, and Oldenberg.

Two narrative levels are interwoven in the novel. The first level is an adventurous story with the journey undertaken by the professor and his daughter, an impending palace revolution, court intrigues and mysterious religious rituals narrated as the present plot. To this, the narrator adds a second narration, in which a very similar story develops in the distant past and presupposes an idea of *karma*, according to which everything happens for a reason. In the novel, Gjellerup introduces the notion of the interconnectedness of human deeds and their consequences wondering, if this was ‘the benevolent providence of God, which directs all this for the best [...] or as this ancient land of wisdom taught and had taught before the times of European thought, Karma, an eternal moral law, which guided everything?’<sup>17</sup> (Gjellerup [1910] 1922: 202). Thus, the protagonist Amanda cannot have loved the male protagonist, Sir Edmund Trevelyan, romantic poet and hypermasculine hero with dark sides, for the first time; rather, their connection lies further back and is actualised against the background of the first story. Amanda senses the mysterious link to her own story, ‘sees’ events less than she only hears them in the account (ibid.: 305), and participates directly in her parallel character Amara’s conversion to Buddhism as well as her self-sacrifice to save the man she secretly loves. Amanda, realising that she had averted a catastrophe in one of her earlier existences, recognises her importance in the plan of salvation.

This plot is not arbitrary; Gjellerup adapts this idea of a ‘modified renewal of the Indian doctrine of the transmigration of souls’ (Gjellerup 1891: 189) from Wagner who also felt a strong connection between his dramas and the Indian thoughts he had read in Schopenhauer. Hence the notion of *karma* fulfils a double function in *The Wanderers of the World*. On the one hand, with the transmigration of souls, the author shapes one of the main themes of his literary work as Buddhist and thus moves into the cosmos of his philosophical-artistic models, Schopenhauer and Wagner. However, the core themes of love/desire - renunciation and redemption can easily be integrated into a Christian worldview. On the other, it connects the two narratives over a long period of time and serves as a justification and rationale for the moral development of the main characters. The book ends—and how

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<sup>17</sup> ‘die gütige Vorsehung Gottes, die alles dies zum Besten lenkt [...], oder wie dies alte Land der Weisheit lehrte und vor den Zeiten europäischen Denkens schon gelehrt hatte, das Karma, ein ewiges Moralgesetz, das alles leitete?’

could it not? —with love's victory over wickedness, adultery, and betrayal. The plots of the two narrative strands, which have so far run parallel, unite at the end of the novel. The protagonists of the main narrative finally succeed in breaking the cycle of life, death, and rebirth. They reach redemption by becoming aware of their former ways of existence and averting the catastrophe of their repetition at the last moment.

The second 'Indianising' element Gjellerup introduces in his novel is female self-immolation in the highly debated form of a *sati*, a widow burning. During a discussion within a group of Western travellers, Eichstätt rationalises this phenomenon, which he perceives as barbaric. This custom was, as he states 'subsequently forged into the sacred text by the Brahmins by adding a hook to a Sanskrit letter' (Gjellerup [1910] 1922: 183), taken almost verbatim from (Deussen 1894: 77: 'forged in by the bending of a hook') and explains it as 'fear of the wholly joyless life of Indian widowhood' (Gjellerup [1910] 1922: 183). Taking a contrary view, his daughter Amanda comments on the ensuing discussion as follows:

But I believe that if such an act is really done out of pure love, if there is no fear of a joyless life involved and the unfortunate woman lies down next to the corpse of her spouse on the funeral pyre because she cannot let go of him. After all, she does not want to live without her beloved, and probably also hopes to be united with him in a blissful life. Then, I do not understand how one can have any other feelings than those of unconditional esteem and admiration before such loyalty even unto death (ibid.: 187).<sup>18</sup>

Amanda thus learns about the Indian custom through conversation and initially integrates it into her ideal of absolute romantic love. As the novel progresses, this theme is shifted to the centre of the second narrative strand by Amanda's alter ego, Amara. However, self-sacrifice and renunciation of love are not enacted in the form of *sati*, in which the wife follows her dead

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<sup>18</sup> 'Aber ich finde, daß, wenn eine solche Handlung wirklich aus reiner Liebe geschieht, wenn gar nicht die Furcht vor einem freudlosen Leben mitspricht, wenn die Unglückliche sich neben den Leichnam ihres Gemahls auf dem Scheiterhaufen hinlegt, weil sie von ihm nicht lassen kann, weil sie ohne den Geliebten nicht leben will und wohl auch hofft, mit ihm in einem seligen Leben vereinigt zu werden, dann verstehe ich nicht, wie man vor einer solchen Treue bis in den Tod hinein andere Gefühle als die der unbedingten Hochachtung und Bewunderung hegen kann.'

husband to the funeral pyre. Still, the woman's willingness to sacrifice goes further. Initially, the girl had decided to consecrate herself as a Buddhist nun, but she changed her mind in order to save her lover. Like the Buddha, who in his lifetime renounced his final enlightenment and liberation to preach and save humanity, she sacrifices herself to save her secret lover from his own deeds and his damnation to eternal rebirth. This, in turn, leads her to thwart a murder and a palace revolution. With a clever plan, she puts herself in the victim's place, is killed and, finally purified, the intruder also dies. However, the couple, temporarily united in a joint suicide, incarnate two millennia later into the two world wanderers, Amanda and her lover, of the main plot and then proceed towards a happy ending. In the gradual unfolding of the novel's Buddhist subtext palpable in the ideas of *karma* and eternal rebirth, the meaning of the initially somewhat obscure title is eventually decipherable. The title *Wanderers of the World* refers to the lovers in the story whose fate unfolds in the first incarnation but is only fulfilled centuries later in a renewed cycle of life and love that turns to the good.

Next to the transmigration of souls Gjellerup thus added another element connecting Schopenhauer and Wagner in this adventurous and, from today's perspective, difficult-to-digest plot. It was the theme of a sinful man who only recognised the meaning of life when a woman sacrificed herself for him, which can be explained by its contextualisation in the author's intellectual horizon and the subjects of popular novels and operas at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. It is part of his very specific conception of love, which aims at a spiritual merging of the lovers embracing death. Gjellerup's friend and biographer Peter Andreas Rosenberg praised the conclusion of *The Wanderers of the World* in his preface to *Gjellerup's Life in Self-Testimonies*: 'The self-negation in the union of love, the sublimation of instinctual life in religious ecstasy – that is "Isolde's Liebestod in words!"' (Gjellerup 1922: 18).<sup>19</sup>

For Gjellerup and his contemporaries, the connection between Buddhism and Isolde's *love-death* lied with none other than Schopenhauer. In his last contribution to the *Yearbook of the Schopenhauer-Society* in 1919, Gjellerup described his eclectic understanding of the philosopher and the central motif, 'the negation of the will to live' (Gjellerup 1919b: 206), which he adapted

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<sup>19</sup> 'Die Selbstverneinung in der Liebesvereinigung, der Untergang des Trieblebens in der religiösen Extase (sic!) – das ist "Isoldens Liebestod" in Worten!'

as the moral foundation of his own religio-philosophical worldview deemed as Buddhist. In the novel, the first self-immolation occurs in the mythical side-narrative, though not at the funeral pyre, but, rather, in connection with a conversion to *Buddhism* of the woman willing to make the sacrifice. Finally, it is all about the last renunciation, which is supposed to result in a union in eternity. Thus Amara, having decided to sacrifice herself to prevent her lover from murdering, prays for this union, which, although for the couple means further immersion in the cycle of becoming and passing away, contains the possibility of purification and redemption:

Finding each other again and again - may we both go on  
and on  
Together on pilgrimage, so crisscrossing the vast desert  
of nature,  
Till rightly purified, cheerless, not suffering ourselves,  
only pitying,  
Tearing Maya's colourful veil asunder...  
Into the eternal light, we will rise, united, where there is  
no you and me!<sup>20</sup>  
(Gjellerup [1910] 1922: 342).

The motif of female self-sacrifice is a Wagnerian motif that is present in various works: Senta in the *Fliegende Holländer* (*Flying Dutchman*, 1843), Elisabeth in *Tannhäuser* (1845), and Brünnhilde on the pyre in the *Götterdämmerung* (*Twilight of the gods*, 1875). The latter has been connected to Wagner's reading of Schopenhauer's Buddhism (Dahlhaus 1971; App 2011) but also on the backdrop of German Orientalism (Sen 2010). The release from suffering thus lies in overcoming the deception of this world (the veil of Maya, Schopenhauer 1988: 456) and a voluntary *Liebestod* (love-death) to be united in the afterlife. Purification and redemption, two religious themes the composer struggles with throughout all his artistic and personal life, thus become possible through the self-immolation of the loving woman, who sacrifices herself and thus becomes fused with the beloved man rather than striving for redemption herself.

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<sup>20</sup> 'Einander immer wieder findend – mögen wir beide fort und fort  
Zusammen pilgern, so durchkreuzend die weite Wüste der Natur,  
Bis recht geläutert, lustentronnen, nicht leidend selbst, mitleidend nur,  
Den buntgewobenen Schleier Mayas zerreißen einst gemeinsamlich  
Ins ewige Licht empor wir tauchen, vereint, dort wo kein du und ich!'



Schopenhauer's will and its negation, which manifests itself prominently in erotic love and its renunciation, has been thematised by Gjellerup in various works (Nybo 2002: 133; here also, the discussion of how the motif could also integrate an aspect of Gjellerup's private life). Slepčević already correctly identifies this Buddhist element of redemption as something different: redemption comes through the feminine—a concept that Wagner decisively emphasised throughout his work. He quotes a passage from a letter by Wagner to August Röckel: 'the suffering, self-sacrificing woman finally becomes the true redeemer; for love is actually "the eternal feminine itself"' (Slepčević 1920: 44).

At this point, it is necessary to add some critical remarks. Strictly speaking, we see a patriarchal—and not religious per se—world view with different but exclusively male perspectives: the male characters' passivity and sufferings are widely exposed. Thus, in discourses in which the self is coded as masculine, the woman serves as the *Other*. A woman ready to become a victim can dissolve male pain and use her agency exclusively to carry it to the extreme and redeem the man and the entire community. A woman decides to sacrifice herself, and in his grief over her death, the man understands the meaning of suffering. Her death becomes thus a 'requirement for the preservation of existing cultural norms and values or their regenerative modification' (Bronfen 2017: 181). The mirror image of the protagonist Amanda (who already has *love* in her name), the nun Amara, who ultimately renounces, precisely accomplishes this healing of the schism that her beloved provoked through the palace revolution. In this way, the woman's individual sacrifice also has a collective meaning, bringing the Buddhist view very close to the Christian understanding of a self-sacrificing saviour. In the Wagnerian cosmos, women are more inclined to the flesh and to sin, but if they repent, they can move from the lowest moral level to the highest (Prüfer 1909: 185–188). They can save themselves, usually with the help of a male catalyst for whom she immolates herself, be it Kundry with Parsifal, Senta with the Flying Dutchman, and redeem others. In Gjellerup, this applies to Amara, who vacillates between the negation of this worldly life in ordination as a nun and the ultimate service of love in self-sacrifice.

With his exotic adventure novels, Gjellerup meets the literary needs of his 'civilisation-weary audience' at the turn of the century (Nybo 2002: 260). For Vridhagiri Ganeshan, too, the 'cultural fatigue of Europe' (Ganeshan 1975:

36) forms the backdrop of these and comparable texts of the time. However, reading Gjellerup's novels exclusively in terms of literary escapism would be somewhat reductive. In the pleasing form of fiction, he finds a vehicle for disseminating his religious and ideological ideas, which go beyond fictional entertainment and aim at a cultural renewal.

### **BETWEEN INDIA AND GERMANY: FORMATIONS OF A DISCOURSE AROUND A MODERN CHRISTIANITY**

While Perry Myers claims that 'Deussen [...] had no apparent organizational imperatives that might have emerged from his account of Schopenhauer. He never sought to found any social, religious, or political movements' (Myers 2013: 184), I suggest that the Schopenhauer-Society, his 'most beloved child', as his daughter Erika states in the afterword of Deussen's memoirs (Deussen 1922: 352) is exactly this: a platform to disseminate Schopenhauer's thought to a wide audience and whose publications are intended to 'provide a picture of the growing influence of Schopenhauer's philosophy on all circles of the nation and on the whole of cultural life'<sup>21</sup> (Deussen 1913a: 264–265). Here, Schopenhauer's thoughts on a spiritual renewal under Indian auspices, however, were read and continued in different forms, particularly by artists. Authors like Gjellerup connected the writings of academic specialists by incorporating their texts into their own, thus making them accessible to a broader, non-academic audience. So far, the fantasies of redemption projected on Buddhism have been traced in Gjellerup's novel. However, they also belong to a broader social context in imperial Germany, whose adherents met like-minded people in the Schopenhauer-Society, which (also) aimed to modernise Christianity through its discussion of Indian religion or even in experimenting with alternatives to the Christian faith (Marchand 2009: 302; Knöbl 2019: 41). Gjellerup's works were seen as the epitome of translating Schopenhauer's thought into art, and at the fifth annual meeting in Dresden in 1916, members applauded a symphonic performance of Gjellerup's first 'Indian' drama, *Die Opferfeuer* (*The Sacrificial Fires*, 1903).

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<sup>21</sup> 'ein Bild von dem wachsenden Einflüsse der schopenhauerschen Philosophie auf alle Kreise der Nation und das gesamte Kulturleben bieten soll'.

In his Indian-inspired novels, Gjellerup did not intend to produce books for easy consumption, but he had a mission. With this, he carried out a task that Neumann had once promoted as a translator of Buddhist texts (Gjellerup [1913] 1921: 322). Neumann had emphasised that after his philological efforts, the dissemination of Buddhism must now take place through a poetic treatment of the legends (Neumann 1893: 112), a commitment that Gjellerup endorsed in *The Wanderers of the World*. But the advocacy of Neumann's Buddhist mission, which Gjellerup considers a rejection of a theistically conceived Christianity, can also be read as Gjellerup's distancing himself from the philosophical-religious orientation of his teacher and friend Paul Deussen who finally decided to ignore critical theological stances of his age and persisted in more conventional teachings (Gjellerup 1915).

Deussen himself was widely known (and frequently frowned on) as a scholar that followed an almost prophetic mission in his teachings (Feldhoff 2009: 97–101). Like Gjellerup, he had studied theology, too, though more as a concession to his parents than out of religious conviction. He quickly grew tired of the 'Orthodox mysticism' of the theological seminary in Tübingen and the 'narrow-mindedness' of his fellow students (Deussen 1922: 91) and, later, interdenominational debates. He had sought ways to unite their contradictions, at least in his classroom and, not lacking in pride, he even reports in his memoirs that this had earned him the reputation of a 'founder of religion' (ibid.: 137). Deussen was also eager to establish contacts with religious specialists from the subcontinent and his acquaintance with Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902) was characterised by the common conviction that the Hindu tradition of *Advaita Vedānta* represented a viable alternative to the religious developments of a modern world (Deussen 1904: 239–251). Mutual influences have been recognised in this transreligious encounter, which could have influenced neo-Hinduistic movements (van der Veer 2001; Bergunder 2012).

Like in Gjellerup's case, it was Schopenhauer who first opened up a new understanding of Christianity which would become the starting point and endpoint of his philosophical and historical work (Deussen 1922: 121). His understanding of philosophy was meant to heal the modern world by rediscovering its ancient Indian forms. He saw the tradition of Indian, Greek, and Christian thought and faith finally converging in Schopenhauerian philosophy. Already in his first systematic approach to philosophy, the *Elemente der*

*Metaphysik (Elements of Metaphysics)*, we read of a ‘worldview [...] in which all the essential salvific truths of religion are derived from the analysis of experience itself’, and which is to be recognised ‘as a regenerated, purified Christianity built on an incontestable foundation’ (Deussen [1877] 1890: iv, similarly (Deussen 1894: 22).<sup>22</sup> In Schopenhauer, who challenged academic philosophy, particularly Hegel’s and that of his religion-critical disciples, Deussen saw an alternative to a ‘bleak [...] materialism as a consequence of the empirical worldview’ (Deussen [1877] 1890: 14) that was also able to repair the rupture between religion and philosophy.

As Atzert (2015: 107–110) has aptly shown, Deussen differed in this considerably from Schopenhauer’s original ideas. Although Schopenhauer had prepared this reorientation of Christianity through his connection to abstract Indian content, this did not justify Deussen’s theology of a Hellenising (and thus non-Jewish) influence of Paul on early Christianity (Deussen 1913b: 274). Thus, Deussen himself was also the origin of a universalist image of Christ, which, supplemented by the teaching of Vedanta (ibid.: 270), could dispense with the Jewish tradition (Atzert 2015: 107–108). Nevertheless, for Schopenhauer’s followers, the highest virtue of self-sacrifice, which readers also found in Gjellerup’s novels, was supposed to reunite religion and metaphysics, and thus to lead man to his purpose as a superior being.

The differences in Gjellerup’s and Deussen’s treatment of the Indian tradition can be understood more clearly from Gjellerup’s articles in cultural journals. Gjellerup reviewed new philosophical publications and participated in philosophical debates as a regular commentator on the significance of Buddhist thought in religious critiques. Thus, he underlined his disappointment at the neglect of Buddhism in Deussen’s *opus magnum*, the *Allgemeine Geschichte der Philosophie* (1908) and replaced Deussen’s interpretation of Schopenhauer’s direct dependence on Vedanta with a more meaningful approximation of Schopenhauer to *Buddhist* thought. According to Gjellerup, Buddhism was characterised above all other Indian religious currents by the unconditional ‘thought of redemption’<sup>23</sup> and linked to a purely negative wish

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<sup>22</sup> ‘Weltanschauung [...], in welcher alle wesentlichen Heilwahrheiten der Religion aus der Analyse der Erfahrung selbst gewonnen werden’, ‘als ein regeneriertes, geläutertes, und auf unanfechtbarer Grundlage aufgebautes Christentum’.

<sup>23</sup> ‘Gedanke der Erlösung’.

of leaving the transient and suffering world without needing to introduce the comforting idea of an afterlife (Gjellerup 1910: 23–24). This worldview where a personalised God is absent was, in Gjellerup’s view, thus better suited to a modern world than the continuity of an abstract but never quite abandoned notion of a divine principle that manifested itself again and again from ancient India to Schopenhauer, as postulated by Deussen. For Gjellerup, Deussen merely supplemented Christianity ‘with Vedanta, with the most abstract monism we know, which is full of contradictions because the absolute reality in it is the principle of absolute illusion’<sup>24</sup> (Gjellerup 1915: 436 f). Here he thus saw a problem in Deussen’s understanding of Kant’s metaphysics since he dogmatically transformed ‘the “transcendental character” into God’ and thereby brought critical philosophy to collapse (ibid.: 437) Similarly, Stephan Atzert explained:

In the harmonisation that Deussen undertakes, a universal morality, which resides as a natural law within the human being, stands next to a universal (for Deussen actually simultaneously Vedantic-monistic and Christian-monotheistic) conception of God, the religious equivalent of the supreme heights of philosophical reflection in the realisation of a unifying One<sup>25</sup> (Atzert 2015: 93).

Nor was the principle of rebirth, which Deussen saw as a crucial moment of his eclectic monistic approach realised in Indian philosophy via Platonism, the New Testament and finally in the idealism of Kant and Schopenhauer, a valid assumption for Gjellerup to maintain Christianity on a philosophical basis. Here lies the sharpest conflict between the two thinkers: for Deussen a Christian faith based on a transcendently conceived moral sense was not only possible but the ultimate escape from the ‘whole phantasmagoric circle of empirical reality’<sup>26</sup> (Deussen 1913b: 284–285). Gjellerup disagreed with this and repeatedly rejected Deussen’s Vedantist theology that he illustrated

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<sup>24</sup> ‘durch den Vedanta, das heißt durch den abstraktesten Monismus, den wir kennen, der so widerspruch-klaffend ist, weil die absolute Realität in ihr das Prinzip der absoluten Illusion ist’.

<sup>25</sup> ‘In der Angleichung, die Deussen vornimmt, steht eine universale Moral, die als naturgegebenes Gesetz im Inneren des Menschen wohnt, neben einer universalen (für Deussen eigentlich gleichzeitig vedantisch-monistischen und christlich-monotheistischen) Gottesvorstellung, der religiösen Entsprechung der höchsten Höhen philosophischer Reflexion in der Erkenntnis eines einenden Einen.’

<sup>26</sup> ‘aus dem ganzen phantasmagorischen Zirkel der empirischen Realität’.

in *The Wanderers of the World*. He saw the core problem in the ‘deep rift [...] that undeniably gapes with the classical period in religious relations between the majority of the German people and the highest educational circles involved in art and science’<sup>27</sup> (Gjellerup 1915: 440). He, therefore, considered it impossible to return to a naïve Christianity from before the break of a historical-critical reading of the New Testament, and neither he accepted Deussen’s arduous reconstructions of an idealistic Jesus (ibid.: 430 ff).

In summary, Gjellerup expressed massive doubts about the philosophical consistency of Deussen’s interpretation of Vedantic texts, which cannot be dismissed out of hand. Atzert also argued in the same way when evaluating Deussen’s idiosyncratic use of Schopenhauer’s terms for his theological argumentation, which already at the time of the publication of his book had fallen far behind the contemporary theological discourse (Atzert 2015: 144). Instead, in another review, Gjellerup (1916) praised the work *The doctrine of the Upanishads and the beginnings of Buddhism*, written by Oldenberg in 1915. Far from following Deussen’s religious eclecticism and rejection of Buddhism, Oldenberg calls it ‘India’s pinnacle of its religious form’<sup>28</sup> (ibid.: 61). To sum up, although Gjellerup repeatedly suggests modesty and declares himself an amateur within the philosophical and religious discussions, he succeeds in participating in and even moderating the debates between the Schopenhauer-Society and the Wagner Circle with his literary works and his semi-scientific essays.

### **ARYAN PHILOSOPHY AND RACIALISED CHRISTIANITY: GJELLERUP BETWEEN SCHOPENHAUER AND WAGNER**

However, these philosophical and theological disputes took place in a broader context. Despite his critical attitude towards Deussen, Gjellerup followed him in one aspect: he favoured a radical solution to integrate parts of Christianity into the modern age, one which Deussen did not develop himself but certainly popularised in his widely read texts. Possibly without being able to assess the full implications of his thoughts, Deussen believed removing all ‘Semitic’ parts, i.e., Old Testament, the religious doctrine would serve to establish a

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<sup>27</sup> ‘tiefen Riß [...], der unleugbar mit der klassischen Periode in religiöser Beziehung zwischen dem großen Teil des deutschen Volkes und den in Kunst und Wissenschaft sich beteiligenden höchsten Bildungskreisen unleugbar klafft’.

<sup>28</sup> ‘Indien’s Höhepunkt seines religiösen Gestaltens’.

connection to a ‘pristine, autochthonous (sic!), primeval India’ (Marchand 2009: 309). This reading paved the way for what Marchand deemed a particular form of ‘Germanic Christianity’ and ‘Aryan piety’ (ibid.) and which was present in the Schopenhauer-Society as well, but to a far greater extent in the intellectual circle that surrounded the Wagner-family in Bayreuth.

As a sympathiser of the Bayreuth Circle, it was undoubtedly not the racist subtext of this developing form of theology that deterred Gjellerup. On the contrary, Gjellerup’s racist worldview was undoubtedly the flip side of his elitist idealism. Repeated references to an ‘Indo-Germanness’ understood not linguistically, but culturally-religiously (Gjellerup 1899: 43), and even explicitly racial and antisemitic invectives can already be found in his articles from when he was still a young man. His connection to the circle of the Wagner family in Bayreuth was long-lasting, which is also worth noting. This, at least, is indicated by his involvement with the *Bayreuther Blätter* and by his detailed knowledge and appreciation of the texts by Houston Stewart Chamberlain, Wagner’s son-in-law and ‘Hitler’s mastermind’ (Bermbach 2015).<sup>29</sup>

In his criticism of Marchand, Grünendahl vehemently denied any antisemitic subtexts in Deussen’s works (Grünendahl 2019: 126). As far as Deussen’s personal attitude towards Jews is concerned, that can be discussed. Deussen’s wife came from a family of converted Jews (Feldhoff 2009: 127–128), and Deussen had innumerable friends and students of Jewish origin. Nevertheless, in his writings, he combined a long-standing tradition of anti-Judaism in theological thought with, as Atzert puts it, ‘the willingness to use linguistic terms in a racialised way as ethnic designations’<sup>30</sup> (Atzert 2015: 105, note 109). Also, Delfs read anti-Semitic statements in Deussen’s travelogues (Delfs 2017). If one considers the Schopenhauer-Society as a space for various discourses, the antisemitic bias cannot be dismissed out of hand and is closely linked to Gjellerup’s person. It is not without reason that the Dresden pastor Constantin Grossmann summed up Chamberlain’s ideas of a ‘Germanic Christianity’ with reference to Schopenhauer in the *Yearbook* (Grossmann 1917). He later dedicated a detailed memorial leaflet to the now long deceased (and largely

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<sup>29</sup> On the anti-Semitic agenda of the *Bayreuther Blätter*, see Hein 1996. On Chamberlain, who was eventually co-opted posthumously by the National Socialists, see Field 1981; Lobenstein-Reichmann 2008; Bermbach 2015.

<sup>30</sup> ‘der Bereitschaft, sprachwissenschaftliche Begriffe rassistisch gewendet als ethnische Bezeichnungen zu benutzen’.

forgotten) Gjellerup (Grossmann 1936), when he had already emerged as a prominent representative of the anti-Semitic religious movement *Glaubensbewegung Deutsche Christen* (German Christians) (Grossmann 1934). As already elaborated by Ciraci, despite its originally cosmopolitan orientation and its high number of members with a Jewish background, there were also strong anti-Semitic tendencies in the Schopenhauer-Society which became manifest in the founding of the New German Schopenhauer Society in 1921 (Ciraci 2011) and the philosophical-religious debates about a renewed Christianity in Schopenhauer's shadow (Atzert 2015: 129–144).

### THE RELIGIOUS AND THE SECULAR UNDER NATIONAL AUSPICES

If we look at Gjellerup's novel as a mirror of debates about religion and national principles of his time, personal, social and ideological dimensions become visible and are thus the main reason for the incompatibility of Deussen's and Gjellerup's views: while the famous Professor Deussen remained rather liberal-conservative, both theologically and politically, and endorsed a monist worldview opposed to modernity with a rational but nevertheless soulful Christianity, in Gjellerup's case, a narcissistic slight of the misjudged genius prevailed, for which even the Nobel Prize for Literature came too late. For him, no reformation of Christianity was radical enough, and he preferred to replace it with his own interpretation of Buddhism. In the end, he combined Schopenhauer's misogyny and his call for the renunciation of sexual drives together with a Wagnerian redemptive pathos in this very creative appropriation. These nationalist and anti-Semitic overtones resonated in vast areas, not least in bourgeois circles where membership in a philosophical society such as the Schopenhauer Society was not uncommon, and where ideas were exchanged in numerous cultural journals.

From the perspective of the negotiation of the 'religious' and the 'secular', a reassessment of what can be understood as a *philosophically founded faith* occurred, outlined here and based on the relationship between Christianity and Indian traditions in the context of the Schopenhauer-Society. This did not necessarily only occur in academic circles but in the broader context of a bourgeois *Bildungsreligion* (erudite religion) (Hölscher 2005: 330–400), or *Kulturprotestantismus* (cultural Protestantism) in general, which included the veneration of classical national philosophers, composers and writers such



as Kant, Beethoven, and Goethe, or, specifically for the circle around Gjellerup and Deussen, Schopenhauer and Wagner. This group in particular could be understood as nationalistic in nature and even as carrying the seeds of eventual völkisch movements. This form of extra-ecclesiastical religiosity, described by Thomas Nipperdey as ‘vagrant’ religiosity (Nipperdey 1990: 508), shaped the German debate on religion, in which the ‘secular’ tended to play a subordinate role, and where the focus was on the exploration of religious alternatives to Christianity (Hölscher 2019). In the current discussion in religious studies, the question of an appropriate historicisation of its objects, Religion and Christianity is highly controversial. An adequate perspective lies in a contextualisation into global negotiation processes in the second half of the 19th century, where the encounter of Christianity with Hinduism and Buddhism also occurred, as Mathias Thurner has excellently elaborated (on Deussen’s contribution cf. Thurner 2021: 427–431).

Gjellerup’s novel and its connections to popular and semi-academic discussions around a specifically German Christianity show how these negotiations took place not only in erudite circles but also between popular literature and musical dramas. For these phenomena, the classification of different strategies of religion-making according to Dreßler and Mandair is helpful (Dreßler & Mandair 2011a). The authors distinguish three levels of religion-making, which, however, can also be strongly intertwined, namely the process ‘from above’, i.e., from a position of power, ‘from below’, and ‘laterally’, i.e., from an (apparently) neutral, *scientific*, perspective. Therefore, in the case of the members of the Schopenhauer-Society, the actors in religion-making move between perspectives two and three, while the perspective ‘from below’ is dominant. Here, according to the authors,

particular social groups in a subordinate position draw on a religionist discourse to re-establish their identities as legitimate social formations distinguishable from other social formations through tropes of religious difference and/or claims for certain rights (ibid.: 21).

For a particular bourgeois stratum at the turn of the 19th to the 20th century, the debate about a rational religion went hand in hand with an ambivalent climate of colonial striving for power (Perraudin & Zimmerer 2011) and military self-conceit far beyond academic circles. It had a final idealistic boost in

the period before the First World War, before these elements underwent a decidedly national-völkisch reassessment.

German professors from Deussen's circle and the Wagner family praised Gjellerup's novels as an art form committed to high idealistic values, and they recommended him several times to the committee for the Nobel Prize in Literature. When the committee eventually chose Gjellerup in 1917, it was for his multifaceted poetry, because it was rich and supported by high ideals. As Neumann had wished, Gjellerup presented Buddhist teachings to a broader audience and emphasised a unique closeness between Indians and Germans due to an alleged affinity in both their languages and respective cultures (Gjellerup 1899: 43), something which served to perpetuate a German sense of superiority over members of the other European powers.

All three protagonists of this discussion about Christianity compatible with modernity, viz., Gjellerup, Deussen, and Neumann died in 1919 when the Weimar Republic led German history to a different development. With the end of the First World War, the time for idealist literature in the style of Gjellerup also became history. Interest in religious debates about Indianising music and literature became as much a part of the past as did the interest of readers in the aestheticisation of language and the descriptions of affects and sentiments of the anti-modern author, all of which explains why the German-Danish author is almost forgotten today. Nevertheless, his large audience at the time, however, made him an actor in the broader field of discourse around religion, race, and nation.

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