

Wandering Jew

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This article is about the legendary figure.



The Wandering Jew by Gustave Doré

The **Wandering Jew** is a mythical figure whose legend began to spread in Europe in the 13th century.^[1]

The original legend concerns a Jew who taunted Jesus on the way to the Crucifixion and was then cursed to walk the earth until the Second Coming. The exact nature of the wanderer's indiscretion varies in different versions of the tale, as do aspects of his character; sometimes he is said to be a shoemaker or other tradesman, while sometimes he is the doorman at Pontius Pilate's estate.

Name

The earliest extant manuscript with the legend is the *Flores Historiarum* by Roger of Wendover, where it appears in the part for the year 1228, under the title *Of the Jew **Joseph** who is still alive awaiting the last coming of Christ.*^[2]

At least from the 17th century the name **Ahasver** has been given to the Wandering Jew, apparently adapted from Ahasuerus, the Persian king in the Book of Esther, who was not a Jew, and whose very name among medieval Jews was an *exemplum* of a fool.^[3] This name may have been chosen because the Book of Esther describes the Jews as a persecuted people, scattered across every province of Ahashuerus' vast empire, similar to the later Jewish diaspora in Christian countries.^[4]

A variety of names have since been given to the Wandering Jew, including **Matathias**, **Buttadeus**, **Paul Marrane**,^[5] and **Isaac Laquedem** which is a name for him in France and the Low Countries, in popular legend as well as in a novel by Dumas.

Where German or Russian are spoken, the emphasis has been on the perpetual character of his punishment and he is known as "Ewige Jude" and "vechnyy zhid (вечный жид)", the **Eternal Jew**. In French and other Romance languages, the usage has been to refer to the wanderings, as in French "le Juif errant", and this has been followed in English from the Middle Ages, as the **Wandering Jew**.^[6]

Origin and evolution

Biblical sources

The origins of the legend are uncertain; perhaps one element is the story in Genesis of Cain, who is issued with a similar punishment – to wander over the earth, scavenging and never reaping, although without the related punishment of endlessness. According to Jehoshua Gilboa, many commentators have pointed to Hosea 9:17 as a statement of the notion of the "eternal/wandering Jew".^[7] According to some sources, the legend stems from Jesus' words given in Matthew 16:28:

Ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν, εἰσὶν τινες ὧδε ἐστῶτες, οἵτινες οὐ μὴ γεύσωνται θανάτου, ἕως ἂν ἴδωσιν τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐρχόμενον ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ αὐτοῦ.

"Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom." (New International Version)

'Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.' (King James Version)^[8]

A belief that the disciple whom Jesus loved would not die was apparently popular enough in the early Christian world to be denounced in the Gospel of John:

"And Peter, turning about, seeth the disciple following whom Jesus loved, who had also leaned on His breast at the supper, and had said, Lord, which is he who betrayeth Thee? When, therefore, Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, Lord, and what shall he do? Jesus saith to him, If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou Me. Then this saying went forth among the brethren, that that disciple would not die; yet Jesus had not said to him that he would not die; but, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?" (John 21:20-23, KJV)

Another passage in the Gospel of John speaks about a guard of the high priest who slaps Jesus (John 18:19-23, KJV). Earlier, the Gospel of John talks about Simon Peter striking the ear from a servant of the high priest, named Malchus (John 18:10, KJV). Although this servant is probably not the same guard who struck Jesus, Malchus is nonetheless one of the many names given to the wandering Jew in later legend.^[9]



The Wandering Jew by [Samuel Hirszenberg](#) (1899).

Early Christianity

Extant manuscripts have shown that as early as the time of Tertullian some Christian proponents were likening the Jewish people to a "new Cain", asserting that they would be "fugitives and wanderers (upon) the earth".^[10]

Aurelius Prudentius Clemens (b. 348) writes in his *Apotheosis* (c. 400): "From place to place the homeless Jew wanders in ever-shifting exile, since the time when he was torn from the abode of his fathers and has been suffering the penalty for murder, and having stained his hands with the blood of Christ whom he denied, paying the price of sin."^[11]

Medieval legend

Some scholars have identified components of the legend of the Eternal Jew in Teutonic legends of the Eternal Hunter, some features of which are derived from Wotan mythology.^[12]

"In some areas the farmers arranged the rows in their fields in such a way that on Sundays the Eternal Jew might find a resting place. Elsewhere they assumed that he could rest only upon a plough or that he had to be on the go all year and was allowed a respite only on Christmas."^[12]

A variant of the Wandering Jew legend is recorded in the *Flores Historiarum* by Roger of Wendover around the year 1228.^{[13][14][15]} An Armenian archbishop, then visiting England, was asked by the monks of St Albans Abbey about the celebrated Joseph of Arimathea, who had spoken to Jesus, and was reported to be still alive. The archbishop answered that he had himself seen such a man in Armenia, and that his name was Cartaphilus, a Jewish shoemaker, who, when Jesus stopped for a second to rest while carrying his cross, hit him, and told him "Go on quicker, Jesus! Go on quicker! Why dost Thou loiter?", to which Jesus, "with a stern countenance", is said to have replied: "I shall stand and rest, but thou shalt go on till the last day." The Armenian bishop also reported that Cartaphilus had since converted to Christianity and spent his wandering days proselytizing and leading a hermit's life.

Matthew Paris included this passage from Roger of Wendover in his own history; and other Armenians appeared in 1252 at the Abbey of St Albans, repeating the same story, which was regarded there as a great proof of the truth of the Christian religion.^[16] The same Armenian told the story at Tournai in 1243, according to the *Chronicles of Phillip Mouskes*, (chapter ii. 491, Brussels, 1839). After that, Guido Bonatti writes people saw the Wandering Jew in Forlì (Italy), in the 13th century; other people saw him in Vienna and elsewhere.^[17]

The figure of the doomed sinner, forced to wander without the hope of rest in death till the second coming of Christ, impressed itself upon the popular medieval imagination, mainly with reference to the seeming immortality of the wandering Jewish people. These two aspects of the legend are represented in the different names given to the central figure. In German-speaking countries and Russia he is referred to as "Der Ewige Jude" (the immortal, or eternal, Jew) and "vechnyy zhid" ("вечный жид"), while in Romance-speaking countries he is known as "Le Juif Errant" (the Wandering Jew) and "L'Ebreo Errante"; the English form, probably because it is derived from the French, has followed the Romance. As well as "El Judío Errante" (The Wandering Jew), he is known in Spanish as "Juan [el que] Espera a Dios", (John [who] waits for God).^{[18][19][20]}

There were claims of sightings of the Wandering Jew throughout Europe, since at least 1542 in Hamburg up to 1868 in Harts Corners, New York.^[21] Joseph Jacobs, writing in the 1911 Encyclopædia Britannica, commented 'It is difficult to tell in any one of these cases how far the story is an entire fiction and how far some ingenious impostor took advantage of the existence of the myth'.^[22] It has been alleged by an 1881 writer, who however cites no instances, that the supposed presence of the Wandering Jew has occasionally been used as a pretext for incursions by Gentiles into Jewish quarters during the late Middle Ages, when the legend was accepted as fact.^[23]

In literature

17th and 18th centuries

The legend became more popular after it appeared in a 17th-century pamphlet of four leaves, "Kurtze [sic] Beschreibung und Erzählung von einem Juden mit Namen Ahasverus" ("Short description and tale of a Jew with the name Ahasuerus").^[24] "Here we are told that some fifty years before, a bishop met him in a church at Hamburg, repentant, ill-clothed and distracted at the thought of having to move on in a few weeks".^[25] As with urban legends, particularities lend verisimilitude: the bishop is specifically Paulus von Eitzen, General Superintendent of Schleswig. The legend spread quickly throughout Germany, no less than eight different editions appearing in 1602; altogether forty appeared in Germany before the end of the 18th century. Eight editions in Dutch and Flemish are known; and the story soon passed to France, the first French edition appearing in Bordeaux, 1609, and to England, where it appeared in the form of a parody in 1625.^[26] The pamphlet was translated also into Danish and Swedish; and the expression "eternal Jew" is current in Czech, Slovak, and German, *der Ewige Jude*. Apparently the pamphlets of 1602 borrowed parts of the descriptions of the wanderer from reports (most notably by Balthasar Russow) about an itinerant preacher called Jürgen.^[27]

In France, the Wandering Jew appeared in Simon Tyssot de Payot's *La Vie, les Aventures et le Voyage de Groenland du Révérend Père Cordelier Pierre de Mésange* (1720).

In England the Wandering Jew makes an appearance in one of the secondary plots in Matthew Lewis's Gothic novel *The Monk* (1796). The Wandering Jew is depicted as an exorcist whose origin remains unclear. The Wandering Jew also plays a role in *St. Leon* (1799) by William Godwin.^[28] The Wandering Jew also appears in two English broadside ballads of the 17th and 18th centuries, *The Wandering Jew*, and *The Wandering Jew's Chronicle*. The former recounts the biblical story of the Wandering Jew's encounter with Christ, while the latter tells, from the point of view of the titular character, the succession of English monarchs from William the Conqueror through either King Charles II (in the 17th century text) or King George II and Queen Caroline (in the 18th century version).^{[29][30]}

19th century

England

In England a ballad with the title *The Wandering Jew* was included in Thomas Percy's *Reliques* published in 1765.^[31]

In 1797 the operetta *The Wandering Jew, or Love's Masquerade* by Andrew Franklin was performed in London.^[32]

In 1810 Shelley had written a poem in four cantos with the title *The Wandering Jew* but it remained unpublished until 1877.^[33] In two other works of Shelley, Ahasuerus appears, as a phantom in his first major poem *Queen Mab: A Philosophical Poem* (1813) and later as a hermit healer in his last major work, the verse drama *Hellas*.^[34]

Thomas Carlyle, in his *Sartor Resartus* (1834), compares its hero Diogenes Teufelsdröckh on several occasions to the Wandering Jew, (also using the German wording 'der ewige Jude').

In Chapter 15 of *Great Expectations* (1861) by Charles Dickens, the journeyman Orlick is compared to the Wandering Jew.

George MacDonald includes pieces of the legend in *Thomas Wingfold, Curate* (London, 1876).

North America

Nathaniel Hawthorne's stories "A Virtuoso's Collection" and "Ethan Brand" feature the Wandering Jew serving as a guide to the stories' characters.^[35]

In 1873 a publisher in North America (Philadelphia, Gebbie) produced *The Legend of the Wandering Jew, a series of twelve designs by Gustave Doré (Reproduced by Photographic Printing) with Explanatory Introduction*. For each illustration there was a couplet, such as "Too late he feels, by look, and deed, and word, / How often he has crucified his Lord".^[36]

In 1901 a New York publisher reprinted, under the title "Tarry Thou Till I Come", George Croly's "Salathiel", which treated the subject in an imaginative form. It had appeared anonymously in 1828.

In Lew Wallace's novel *The Prince of India*, the Wandering Jew is the protagonist. The book follows his adventures through the ages, as he takes part in the shaping of history.^[37] An American rabbi, H.M. Bien, turned the character into the "Wandering Gentile" in his novel *Ben-Beor: A Tale of the Anti-Messiah*; in the same year John L. McKeever wrote a novel, *The Wandering Jew: A Tale of the Lost Tribes of Israel*.^[35]

A humorous account of the Wandering Jew appears in chapter 54 of Mark Twain's 1869 travel book *The Innocents Abroad*.^[38]

Germany

The legend has been the subject of German poems by Schubart, Aloys Schreiber, Wilhelm Müller, Lenau, Chamisso, Schlegel, Julius Mosen (an epic, 1838), and Köhler; of novels by Franz Horn (1818), Oeklers, and Schücking; and of tragedies by Klingemann ("Ahasuerus", 1827) and Zedlitz (1844). It is either the Ahasuerus of Klingemann or that of Ludwig Achim von Arnim in his play, *Halle and Jerusalem* to whom Richard Wagner refers in the final passage of his notorious essay *Das Judentum in der Musik*.

There are clear echoes of the Wandering Jew in Wagner's *The Flying Dutchman*, whose plot line is adapted from a story by Heinrich Heine in which the Dutchman is referred to as 'the Wandering Jew of the ocean',^[39] and his final opera *Parsifal* features a woman called Kundry who is in some ways a female version of the Wandering Jew. It is alleged that she was formerly Herodias, and she admits that she laughed at Jesus on his route to the Crucifixion, and is now condemned to wander until she meets with him again (cf. Eugene Sue's version, below).

Robert Hamerling, in his "Ahasver in Rom" (Vienna, 1866), identifies Nero with the Wandering Jew. Goethe had designed a poem on the subject, the plot of which he sketched in his *Dichtung und Wahrheit*.^{[40][41][42]}

Denmark

Hans Christian Andersen made his "Ahasuerus" the Angel of Doubt, and was imitated by Heller in a poem on "The Wandering of Ahasuerus", which he afterward developed into three cantos. Martin Andersen Nexø wrote a short story named "The Eternal Jew", in which he also refers to Ahasuerus as the spreading of the Jewish gene pool in Europe.

The story of the Wandering Jew is the basis of the essay, "The Unhappiest One" in Søren Kierkegaard's *Either/Or* (published 1843 in Copenhagen). It is also discussed in an early portion of the book that focuses on Mozart's opera *Don Giovanni*.

In the play "Genboerne" (The neighbors across the street), the Wandering Jew is a character (in this context called "Jerusalem's shoemaker") and his shoes will make you invisible when you wear them.

The protagonist of the play borrows the shoes for a night and visits the house across the street as an invisible man.

France

The French writer Edgar Quinet published his prose epic on the legend in 1833, making the subject the judgment of the world; and Eugène Sue wrote his *Juif errant* in 1844, in which the author connects the story of Ahasuerus with that of Herodias. Grenier's 1857 poem on the subject may have been inspired by Gustave Doré's designs, which were published the preceding year. One should also note Paul Féval, père's *La Fille du Juif Errant* (1864), which combines several fictional Wandering Jews, both heroic and evil, and Alexandre Dumas' incomplete *Isaac Laquedem* (1853), a sprawling historical saga.

Russia

In Russia, the legend of the Wandering Jew appears in an incomplete epic poem by Vasily Zhukovsky, "Ahasuerus" (1857) and in another epic poem by Wilhelm Kuchelbecker, "Ahasuerus, a Poem in Fragments", written from 1832–1846 but not published until 1878, long after the poet's death. Alexander Pushkin also began a long poem on Ahasuerus (1826) but abandoned the project quickly, completing under thirty lines.

Other literature

The Wandering Jew makes a notable appearance in the gothic masterpiece of the Polish writer Jan Potocki, *The Manuscript Found in Saragossa*, written about 1797.^[35]

Brazilian writer and poet Machado de Assis often used Jewish themes in his writings. One of his short stories, *Viver!* ("To Live!"), is a dialog between the Wandering Jew (named as Ahasuerus) and Prometheus at the end of time. It was published in 1896 as part of the book *Várias histórias* ("Several stories").

Castro Alves, another Brazilian poet, wrote a poem named "Ahasverus e o gênio" ("Ahasverus and the genie"), in a reference to the Wandering Jew.

The Hungarian poet János Arany also wrote a ballad called "Az örök zsidó", meaning "The everlasting Jew".

20th century

Latin America

In Argentina, the topic of the Wandering Jew has appeared several times in the work of Enrique Anderson Imbert, particularly in his short-story *El Grimoire* (The Grimoire), included in the eponymous book. Chapter XXXVII, *El Vagamundo*, in the collection of short stories, *Misteriosa Buenos Aires*, by the Argentine writer Manuel Mujica Láinez also centres round the wandering of the Jew. The great Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges named the main character and narrator of his short story "The Immortal" Joseph Cartaphilus (in the story he was a Roman military tribune who gained immortality after drinking from a magical river and dies in the 1920s). In *Green Mansions*, W.H. Hudson's protagonist Abel, references Ahasuerus, as an archetype of someone, like himself, who prays for redemption and peace; while condemned to walk the earth. In 1967, the Wandering Jew appears as an unexplained magical realist townfolk legend in Gabriel Garcia Márquez's *100 Years of Solitude*. A Colombian writer, Prospero Morales Pradilla, in his novel "Los pecados de Ines de Hinojosa" (The sins of Ines de Hinojosa) describes the famous Wandering Jew of Tunja that has been there since the XVI century. He talks about the wooden statue of the Wandering Jew that is at Santo Domingo church and every year during the holly week is carried around in the shoulders of the Easter penitents around the city. The main feature of the statue are his eyes, they can express the hatred and anger in front of Jesus carrying the cross.^[43]

French

Guillaume Apollinaire parodies the character in "Le Passant de Prague" in his collection *L'Hérésiarque et Cie* (1910).^[44]

Jean d'Ormesson: *Histoire du juif errant* (1991)

Simone de Beauvoir in her novel *Tous les Hommes sont Mortels* (1946) - *All Men are Mortal*, the leading figure Raymond Fosca undergoes a faith similar to the wandering Jew, who is being explicitly mentioned as a reference.

German

In both Gustav Meyrink's *The Green Face* (1916) and Leo Perutz's *The Marquis of Bolibar* (1920), the Wandering Jew features as a central character.^[45] The German writer Stefan Heym in his novel *Ahasver* (translated into English as *The Wandering Jew*)^[46] maps a story of Ahasver and Lucifer against both ancient times and socialist East Germany. In Heym's depiction, the Wandering Jew is a highly sympathetic character.

Dutch

The Belgian writer August Vermeylen published in 1906 a novel called *De wandelende Jood* ("The Wandering Jew").

Romanian

Mihai Eminescu, an influential Romanian writer, depicts in his romantic fantastic novella *Sarmanul Dionis* a variation. A student follows a surreal journey through the book of Zoroaster, a book seeming to give him God-like abilities. The book is given to him by Ruben, his Jewish master which is a philosopher. Dan is eventually tricked by Ruben, and is sentenced by God to a life of insanity, which he can escape only by resurrection.

Similarly, Mircea Eliade presents in his novel *Dayan* (1979) a student's mystic and fantastic journey through time and space under the guidance of the Wandering Jew, in the search of a higher truth and of his own self.

Russian

The Soviet satirists Ilya Ilf and Yevgeni Petrov had their hero Ostap Bender tell the story of the Wandering Jew's death at the hands of Ukrainian nationalists in *The Little Golden Calf*. In Vsevolod Ivanov's story *Ahasver* a weird man comes to a Soviet writer in Moscow in 1944, introduces himself as "Ahasver the cosmopolite" and claims he is Paul von Eitzen, a theologian from Hamburg, who concocted the legend of Wandering Jew in the 16th century to become rich and famous but then turned himself into a real Ahasver against his will. The novel *Overburdened with Evil* (1988) by Arkady and Boris Strugatsky involves a character in modern setting who turns out to be Ahasuerus, identified at the same time in a subplot with John the Divine. In the novel "Going to the Light" (Идущий к свету) (1998) by Sergey Golosovsky Ahasuerus turns out to be Apostle Paul punished (together with Moses and Mohammed) for inventing false religion.

Swedish

In Pär Lagerkvist's 1956 novel *The Sibyl*, Ahasuerus and a woman who was once the Delphic Sibyl each tell their stories, describing how an interaction with the divine damaged their lives. Lagerkvist continued the story of Ahasuerus in *Ahasverus död* ("The Death of Ahasuerus", 1960).

English

In O. Henry's story "The Door of Unrest" a drunk shoemaker Mike O'Bader comes to a local newspaper editor and claims to be the Jerusalem shoemaker Michob Ader who did not let Christ rest upon his doorstep on the way to crucifixion and was condemned to live until the Second Coming. However, Mike O'Bader insists he is a Gentile, not a Jew.

Robert Nichols' novella "Golgotha & Co." in his collection *Fantastica* (1923) is a satirical tale where the Wandering Jew is a successful businessman who subverts the Second Coming.^[35]

In Evelyn Waugh's *Helena*, the Wandering Jew appears in a dream to the protagonist and shows her where to look for the Cross, the goal of her quest.

An unidentified Wanderer appears in *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, A post-apocalyptic science fiction novel by Walter M. Miller first published in 1960; some children are heard saying of the old man, "What Jesus raises up STAYS raised up;" by implication a reference to St. Lazarus of Bethany, whom Christ raised from the dead. The character appears again in three subsequent novellas, and in Miller's 1997 follow-up novel, *Saint Leibowitz and the Wild Horse Woman*.

J.G. Ballard's short story "The Lost Leonardo", published in *The Terminal Beach* (1964), centres on a search for the Wandering Jew. The Wandering Jew also appears in Mary Elizabeth Counselman's story "A Handful of Silver" (1967).^[47] Barry Sadler has written a series of books featuring a character called Casca Rufio Longinus who is a combination of two characters from Christian folklore, Saint Longinus and the Wandering Jew. Jack L. Chalker wrote a five book series called "The Well World Saga" in which it is mentioned many times that the creator of the universe, a man named Nathan Brazil, is known as the Wandering Jew. There is a discussion about the Wandering Jew in the Robert Heinlein novel *Time Enough for Love*. In January 1987 DC Comics the 10th issue of *Secret Origins* gave The Phantom Stranger four possible origins. In one of these explanations, the Stranger confirms to a priest that he is the Wandering Jew.^[48] Angela Hunt's novel *The Immortal* (2000), features the Wandering Jew under the name of Asher Genzano.

George Sylvester Viereck and Paul Eldridge wrote a trilogy of novels *My First Two Thousand Years, an Autobiography of the Wandering Jew*, (1928), in which Isaac Laquedem is a Roman soldier who, after being told by Jesus that he will "tarry until I return," goes on to influence many of the great events of history; he frequently encounters Solome (described as 'The Wandering Jewess'), and travels with a companion, to whom he has passed on his immortality via a blood transfusion (another attempt to do this for a woman he loved ended in her death). In *Ilium* by Dan Simmons, (2003), a woman who is addressed as the Wandering Jew plays a central role, though her real name is Savi.

The Wandering Jew is revealed to be Judas Iscariot in George R.R. Martin's distant-future science fiction parable of Christianity, the 1979 short story "The Way of Cross and Dragon".

The Wandering Jew appears as a sympathetic character in Diana Wynne Jones's young adult novel *The Homeward Bounders*. His fate is tied in with larger plot themes regarding destiny, disobedience, and punishment. "Ahasver," a cult leader identified with the Wandering Jew, is a central figure in Anthony Boucher's classic mystery novel, *Nine Times Nine* (originally published 1940 under the name H. Holmes). The Wandering Jew encounters a returned Christ in Deborah Grabien's 1990 novel *Plainsong*.^[49]

"The Wandering Jew" is the title of a short poem by Edwin Arlington Robinson which appears in his book *The Three Taverns*.^[50] In the poem, the speaker encounters a mysterious figure with eyes that "remembered everything." He recognizes him from "his image when I was a child" and finds him to be bitter, with "a ringing wealth of old anathemas;" a man for whom the "world around him was a gift of anguish." The speaker does not know what became of him, but believes that "somewhere among men to-day / Those old, unyielding eyes may flash / And flinch – and look the other way."

21st century

Uzbekistan

Uzbek writer Isajon Sulton published his novel "The Wandering Jew"^[51] in 2011. In this novel, the Jew does not characterize a symbol of curse; however, they appear as a human being, who is aware of God's presence, after being cursed by Him. Moreover, the novel captures the fortune of present-day wandering Jews, created by humans using high technologies.

In art

Nineteenth century

Nineteenth century works depicting the legendary figure as the Wandering (or Eternal) Jew or as Ahasuerus (Ahasver) include:

- 1846, Wilhelm von Kaulbach, *Titus destroying Jerusalem*. Neue Pinakothek Munich.^{[52][53][54]}
- 1836 Kaulbach's *painting* initially commissioned by Countess Angelina Radzwill; 1840 Kaulbach published a booklet of Explanations identifying the main figures;^[55] 1846 finished work purchased by King Ludwig I of Bavaria for the royal collections; 1853 installed in Neue Pinakothek, Munich.;^[56] 1842 Kaulbach's *replica* for the stairway murals of the Neues Museum, Berlin commissioned by King Frederick William IV of Prussia; 1866 completed; 1943 destroyed by war damage.
- 1852, a coloured caricature was used as a cover design for the June number of the satirical *Journal pour rire*, published by Charles Philipon.^{[57][58][59]}
- 1854, Gustave Courbet, *The Meeting*.^[60]
- 1856, Gustave Doré, twelve folio-size illustrations of *The Legend of The Wandering Jew*.^[61]
- 1876, Maurycy Gottlieb, *Ahasver*. National Museum, Kraków.^[62]
- 1888, Adolf Hirémy-Hirschl, *Ahasuerus at the End of the World*. Private Collection.
- 1899, Samuel Hirszenberg, *The Eternal Jew*. Exhibited in Lodz, Warsaw and Paris in 1899, now in the Israel Museum, Jerusalem.^[63]

Twentieth century

In another artwork, exhibited at Basel in 1901, the legendary figure with the name *Der ewige Jude*, *The Eternal Jew*, was shown redemptively bringing the Torah back to the Promised Land.^[64]

Among the paintings of Marc Chagall having a connection with the legend, one of 1923-25 has the explicit title *Le Juif Errant* (1923–25).^[65]

In ideology (19c. and after)

By the beginning of the eighteenth century, the figure of the "Wandering Jew" as a legendary individual had begun to be identified with the fate of the Jewish people as a whole. After the ascendancy of Napoleon Bonaparte at the end of the century and the emancipating reforms in European countries connected with the policy of Napoleon and the Jews, the "Eternal Jew" became an increasingly "symbolic... and universal character" as the continuing struggle for Jewish emancipation in Prussia and elsewhere in Europe in the course of the nineteenth century gave rise to what came to be referred to as "the Jewish Question".^[66]

Before Kaulbach's mural replica of his painting *Titus destroying Jerusalem* had been commissioned by the King of Prussia in 1842 for the projected Neues Museum, Berlin, Gabriel Riesser's essay "Stellung der Bekenner des mosaischen Glaubens in Deutschland" (On the Position of Confessors of the Jewish Faith in Germany) had been published (1831) and the journal "Der Jude, periodische Blätter für Religions- und Gewissensfreiheit" (The Jew, Periodical for Freedom of Religion and Thought) had been founded (1832). In 1840 Kaulbach himself had published a booklet of Explanations identifying the main figures for his projected painting, including that of the Eternal Jew in flight as an outcast for having rejected Christ. In 1843 Bruno Bauer's book with the title *The Jewish Question* was published,^[67] to which Karl Marx responded by an article with the title On the Jewish Question.^[68]



The wandering eternal jew (Le Juif Eternel), coloured woodcut, later shown at the Nazi exhibition *Der Ewige Jude* in Germany and Austria 1937–1938. Here a reproduction at an exhibition at Yad Vashem, 2007

A caricature which had first appeared in a French publication in 1852, depicting the legendary figure with "a red cross on his forehead, spindly legs and arms, huge nose and blowing hair, and staff in hand", was co-opted by anti-Semites.^[69] It was shown at the Nazi exhibition *Der Ewige Jude* in Germany and Austria in 1937–1938. A reproduction of it was exhibited at Yad Vashem in 2007.^[70]

The exhibition had been held at the Library of the German Museum in Munich from November 8, 1937 to January 31, 1938 showing works that the Nazis considered to be 'degenerate art'. A book containing images of these works was published under the title *The Eternal Jew*.^[71] It had been preceded by other such exhibitions in Mannheim, Karlsruhe, Dresden, Berlin and Vienna. The works of art displayed at these exhibitions were generally executed by avant-garde artists who had become recognized and esteemed in the 1920s, but the objective of the exhibitions was not to present the works as worthy of admiration but to deride and condemn them.^[72]

The Jew's portrayal in popular media

Stage

Fromenthal Halévy's opera *Le juif errant*, based on the novel by Sue, was premiered at the Paris Opera (Salle Le Peletier) on 23 April 1852, and had 48 further performances over two seasons. The music was sufficiently popular to generate a *Wandering Jew Mazurka*, a *Wandering Jew Waltz*, and a *Wandering Jew Polka*.^[73]

A Hebrew-language play titled "The Eternal Jew" premiered at the Moscow Habimah Theatre in 1919 and was performed at The Habima Theatre in New York in 1926.^[74]

Donald Wolfitt made his debut as the Wandering Jew in a stage adaptation in London in 1924.^[75] The play "Spikenard", (1930) by C.E. Lawrence, has the Jew wander an uninhabited Earth along with Judas and the Impenitent thief.^[35] Glen Berger's 2001 play *Underneath the Lintel* is a monologue by a Dutch librarian who delves into the history of a book which is returned 113 years overdue, and becomes convinced that the borrower was the Wandering Jew.^[76]

Film

There have been several films on the topic of *The Wandering Jew*:

- 1933, the Jewish Talking Picture Company released a Yiddish-language film entitled *The Eternal Jew*.
- 1934 British version *The Wandering Jew*, starring Conrad Veidt in the title role, and entitled *The Eternal Jew*, is based on the stage play by E. Temple Thurston, and attempts to tell the legend literally, taking the Jew from Biblical times all the way to the Spanish Inquisition. This version was also made as *The Wandering Jew* a silent film in 1923, starring Matheson Lang in his original stage role. The play had been produced both in London and on Broadway. Co-produced in the U.S. by David Belasco, it had played on Broadway in 1921.
- 1940, there was a propaganda 'documentary' film made in Germany entitled *Der Ewige Jude* (*The Eternal Jew*), reflected National Socialist anti-Semitism, linking the legend with alleged Jewish malpractices over the ages.
- Still another film version of the story, made in Italy in 1948, starred Vittorio Gassman.
- In the 1988 film *The Seventh Sign* the Wandering Jew appears as Father Lucci, who identifies himself as the centuries old Cartaphilus, Pilate's porter, who took part in the scourging of Jesus before his crucifixion.

- The 2000 horror film *Dracula 2000* and its sequels equate the Wandering Jew with Judas Iscariot.

Other

The Jew appears as Adam in the 2015 TV series *Forever*. His Jewishness is brought to light in the Episode "Hitler on the Half-Shell."

The Jew appears as an NPC in the third installment of *Gabriel Knight*. He is redeemed during the course of the game.

In Pokémon X & Y, the character AZ may be based on the Wandering Jew because after his best friend was killed in a war, he created a revival machine to bring it back to life and turned the machine into a weapon to destroy both sides in the war. He was cursed to wander for 3,000 years after creating this ultimate weapon powered by the life force of other Pokémon, up until the events of the game.

In *Assassin's Creed* there are characters called Sages who inherit the mind and memories of previous people in history. One of the Sages was said to Run into Jesus, his name in the series is only known as the Wanderer. Given the fact that the Character never really dies but his consciousness transfers to new hosts with the same exact appearance this character can be possible to be construed as the Wandering Jew.

The Doom Metal band Reverend Bizarre also has a sprawling narrative track entitled "The Wandering Jew", which appears on their *Harbinger of Metal* EP.

In the episode titled "Lagrimas" of the fantasy/sci fi TV series *Witchblade* the Wandering Jew/Cartophilus is portrayed by Jeffrey Donovan as a cursed Roman soldier who arrives in modern New York City and becomes romantically involved with protagonist Sara Pezzini before revealing his true identity & agenda to her.

As part of the numerous Christian references in the anime *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, the mysterious head of SEELE, Keel Lorenz, is implied to be the biblical Wandering Jew; he is portrayed as an old man whose body has been heavily augmented with cybernetic implants. Like most of humanity, Lorenz's remaining biological parts are converted into LCL when Human Instrumentality commences, leaving behind his bionic components. The original *Evangelion* manga by Yoshiyuki Sadamoto depicts SEELE's existence as dating back centuries, lending further credence to Lorenz's implied identity.

When Ribbentrop was Nazi Germany's Ambassador in the United Kingdom he spent so little time at his post and so much back in Berlin that he was nicknamed the "Wandering Aryan"

See also

Prester John – a similar legend, of a mythical Christian monarch, who ruled a kingdom lost to Christendom deep in Islamic terra incognita.

Notes

1. as described in the first chapter of *Curious Myths of the Middle Ages* where Sabine Baring-Gould attributed the earliest extant mention of the myth of the Wandering Jew to Matthew Paris. The chapter began with a reference to Gustave Doré's series of twelve illustrations to the legend, and ended with a sentence remarking that, while the original legend was so 'noble in its severe simplicity' that few could develop it with success in poetry or otherwise, Doré had produced in this series 'at once a poem, a romance, and a chef-d'oeuvre of art'. First published in two parts in 1866 and 1868, the work was republished in 1877 and in many other editions.^[1]
2. ^[2] (Latin, *De Joseph, qui ultimum Christi adventum adhuc vivus exspectat*) p.175 ^[3] and Encyc. Brit. 11th edition ^[4]
3. David Daube, "Ahasver" *The Jewish Quarterly Review* New Series **45.3** (January 1955), pp 243-244.
4. <http://www.sztetl.org.pl/en/person/334.ahasverus-wandering-jew-ahasver-/>
5. *The Turkish Spy. Book 3, Letter I. 164*
6. Encyc. Brit. 11th edition.^[5] The title for the article in the print edition was "Jew, the Wandering". It was signed "J.Ja." for "Joseph Jacobs, Litt.D., Professor of English Literature in the Jewish Theological Seminary, New York., formerly President of the Jewish Historical Society of England, author of *Jews of Angevin England, Studies in Biblical Archaeology* etc.
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16. Matthew Paris, *Chron. Majora*, ed. H.R. Luard, London, 1880, v. 340-341
17. Anderson (1991), 22-23
18. For Jews in Germany in and after middle ages see History of the Jews in Germany.
19. For 14c. expulsion of Jews and 16c. return see History of the Jews in France.
20. For Jews in Spain in and after middle ages see History of the Jews in Spain.
21. "Editorial Summary", *Deseret News*, 23 September 1868.
22. © One or more of the preceding sentences incorporates text from a publication now in the public domain: Jacobs, Joseph (1911). [*"Jew, The Wandering"*](#). In Chisholm, Hugh. *Encyclopædia Britannica* **15** (11th ed.). Cambridge University Press. p. 362a.

23. Conway, Moncure Daniel (1881). [*The Wandering Jew*](#). Chatto and Windus. p. 28. Retrieved 2 December 2010. The animus of the revival of the legend is shown by instances in which the Jews' quarters were invaded under rumours that they were concealing the Wanderer.
24. This professes to have been printed at Leiden in 1602 by an otherwise unrecorded printer "Christoff Crutzer"; the real place and printer can not be ascertained.
25. Daube 1955:244.
26. Jacobs and Wolf, *Bibliotheca Anglo-Judaica*, p. 44, No. 221.
27. [Beyer, Jürgen, 'Jürgen und der Ewige Jude. Ein lebender Heiliger wird unsterblich', *Arv. Nordic Yearbook of Folklore* 64 \(2008\), 125-40](#)
28. Wallace Austin Flanders, *Godwin and Gothicism: St. Leon*. Texas Studies in Literature and Language Vol. 8, No. 4 (Winter 1967), pp. 533-545.
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31. Third edition: Reliques of ancient English poetry: consisting of old heroic ballads, songs, and other pieces of our earlier poets, (chiefly of the lyric kind.) Together with some few of later date (Volume 3) - p.295-301, 128 lines of verse, with prose introduction [7]
32. [Andrew Franklin](#)
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37. William Russo's 1999 novella *Mal Tempo* details Wallace's research and real-life attempt to find the mythical character for his novel. Russo also wrote a sequel, entitled *Mal Tempo & Friends* in 2001.
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46. Northwestern University Press (1983)
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49. Chris Gilmore, "Grabien, Deborah" in *St. James Guide To Fantasy Writers*, edited by David Pringle. St. James Press, 1996. (pp.238-39)
50. [The three taverns: a book of poems : Robinson, Edwin Arlington, 1869-1935 : Free Download & Streaming : Internet Archive](#)
51. [10]
52. [File:Kaulbach Zerstoerung Jerusalems durch Titus.jpg](#)
53. Fig.1 and details Figs. 2 and 3 AVRAHAM RONEN KAULBACH'S WANDERING JEW [11].
54. the replica for the stairway murals of the New Museum in Berlin (see fig.5 "The New Museum, Berlin" [12]) which had been commissioned from Kaulbach in 1842 and was completed in 1866, was destroyed by war damage during WW II.
55. Kaulbach's booklet had quotations from Old and New Testament prophecies and references to [Josephus](#) Flavius' Jewish War as his principal literary source, AVRAHAM RONEN KAULBACH'S WANDERING JEW[13]
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61. for a short poem of Pierre-Jean de Béranger, derived from a novel by Eugène Sue of 1845: Eric Zafran, with Robert Rosenblum and Lisa Small, editors, *Fantasy and Faith: The Art of Gustave Doré*, Yale University Press, 2007 [15]
62. [Fig.5, Ronen "Kaulbach's Wandering Jew"](#)
63. Ronen "Kaulbach's Wandering Jew"[16] Fig.6
64. Sculpture by Alfred Nossig. Fig.3.3, p.79 in Todd Presner *Muscular Judaism: The Jewish Body and the Politics of Regeneration*. Routledge, 2007. The sculpture was exhibited in 1901 at the Fifth Zionist Congress, which established the Jewish National Fund.[17]
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External links

- [Wandering Jew and Jewess](#) dramatic screenplays
- *The Wandering Jew, by Eugène Sue* at [Project Gutenberg](#)
- [Catholic Encyclopedia entry](#)
- [The \(presumed\) End of the Wandering Jew from The Golden Calf by Ilf and Petrov](#)
- [Israel's First President, Chaim Weizmann, "A Wandering Jew"](#) Shapell Manuscript Foundation
- ["The Wandering Image: Converting the Wandering Jew" Iconography and visual art.](#)
- ["The Wandering Jew," and "The Wandering Jew's Chronicle"](#) English Broadside Ballad Archive
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The Wandering Jew

legends of Aarne-Thompson-Uther type 777

edited by



[D. L. Ashliman](#)

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Contents

1. [The Wandering Jew](#) (A ballad from *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*).
2. [Shoemakers Are a Poor Slobbering Race](#) (England).
3. [The Wandering Jew](#) (retold by Horace E. Scudder).
4. [The Jerusalem Shoemaker, or Wandering Jew, in Jutland](#) (Denmark).
5. [The Story of Judas](#) (Italy).
6. [Malchus at the Column](#) (Italy).
7. [Buttadeu](#) (Italy).
8. [Wodan as the Wandering Jew](#) (Germany).
9. [The Lost Jew](#) (Germany).
10. [The Eternal Jew on the Matterhorn](#) (Switzerland).
11. [The Wandering Jew on the Grimsel Pass](#) (Switzerland).
12. [The Mysterious Stranger](#) (England).
13. [Links to related sites](#).

The Wandering Jew

England/Germany

The story of the Wandering Jew is of considerable antiquity: it had obtained full credit in this part of the world before the year 1228, as we learn from Mat. Paris. For in that year, it seems, there came an Armenian archbishop into England, to visit the shrines

and reliques preserved in our churches; who, being entertained at the monastery of St. Albans, was asked several questions relating to his country, &c. Among the rest a monk, who sat near him, inquired if he had ever seen or heard of the famous person named Joseph, that was so much talked of; who was present at our Lord's crucifixion and conversed with him, and who was still alive in confirmation of the Christian faith. The archbishop answered, that the fact was true.

And afterwards one of his train, who was well known to a servant of the abbot's, interpreting his master's words, told them in French, that his lord knew the person they spoke of very well: that he had dined at his table but a little while before he left the East: that he had been Pontius Pilate's porter, by name Cartaphilus; who, when they were dragging Jesus out of the door of the Judgment-hall, struck him with his fist on the back, saying, "Go faster, Jesus, go faster; why dost thou linger?"

Upon which Jesus looked at him with a frown and said, "I indeed am going, but thou shalt tarry till I come."

Soon after he was converted, and baptized by the name of Joseph. He lives for ever, but at the end of every hundred years falls into an incurable illness, and at length into a fit or ecstasy, out of which when he recovers, he returns to the same state of youth he was in when Jesus suffered, being then about 30 years of age. He remembers all the circumstances of the death and resurrection of Christ, the saints that arose with him, the composing of the Apostles' creed, their preaching, and dispersion; and is himself a very grave and holy person.

This is the substance of Matthew Paris's account, who was himself a monk of St. Albans, and was living at the time when this Armenian archbishop made the above relation.

Since his time several impostors have appeared at intervals under the name and character of the Wandering Jew; whose several histories may be seen in Calmet's dictionary of the Bible. See also *The Turkish Spy*, vol. II. book 3, let. 1.

The story that is copied in the following ballad is of one, who appeared at Hamburg in 1547, and pretended he had been a Jewish shoemaker at the time of Christ's crucifixion. The ballad however seems to be of later date. It is preserved in black-letter in the Pepys collection.¹

When as in faire Jerusalem
Our Saviour Christ did live,

¹ We need hardly recount the numerous fictions, or poems, which have since been founded on this story, such as Shelley's "Ahasuerus"; a novel by John Gait; a tale in an early work of Lord John Russell's, entitled, "Essays by a Gentleman who had left his Lodgings"; and Cioly's splendid romance of "Salathiel," which the literary world would like to see completed. -- Ed.

And for the sins of all the worlde
His own deare life did give;
The wicked Jewes with scoffes and scornes
Did dailye him molest,
That never till he left his life,
Our Saviour could not rest.

When they had crown'd his head with thornes,
And scourg'd him to disgrace,
In scornfull sort they led him forthe
Unto his dying place;
Where thousand thousands in the streete
Beheld him passe along,
Yet not one gentle heart was there,
That pityed this his wrong.

Both old and young reviled him,
As in the streete he wente,
And nought he found but churlish tauntes,
By every ones consente:
His owne deare crosse he bore himselfe,
A burthen far too great,
Which made him in the street to fainte,
With blood and water sweat.

Being weary thus, he sought for rest,
To ease his burthened soule,
Upon a stone; the which a wretch
Did churlishly controule;
And sayd, "Awaye, thou king of Jewes,
Thou shalt not rest thee here;
Pass on; thy execution place
Thou seest nowe draweth neare."

And thereupon he thrust him thence;
At which our Saviour sayd,
I sure will rest, but thou shalt walke,
And have no journey stayed."
With that this cursed shoemaker,
For offering Christ this wrong,
Left wife and children, house and all,
And went from thence along.

Where after he had seene the bloude
Of Jesus Christ thus shed,
And to the crosse his bodye nail'd,
Awaye with speed he fled

Without returning backe againe
Unto his dwelling place,
And wandred up and downe the worlde,
A runnagate most base.

No resting could he finde at all,
No ease, nor hearts content;
Bo No house, nor home, nor biding place:
But wandring forth he went
From towne to towne in foreigne landes,
With grieved conscience still,
Repenting for the heinous guilt
Of his fore-passed ill.

Thus after some fewe ages past
In wandring up and downe;
He much again desired to see
Jerusalems renowne,
But finding it all quite destroyd,
He wandred thence with woe,
Our Saviour's wordes, which he had spoke,
To verifie and showe.

"I'll rest," sayd hee, "but thou shalt walke,
So doth this wandring Jew
From place to place, but cannot rest
For seeing countries newe;
Declaring still the power of him,
Whereas he comes or goes,
And of all things done in the east,
Since Christ his death, he showes.

The world he hath still compast round
And seene those nations strange,
That hearing of the name of Christ,
Their idol gods doe change:
To whom he hath told wondrous thinges
Of time forepast, and gone,

And to the princes of the worlde
Declares his cause of moane:

Desiring still to be dissolved,
And yeild his mortal breath;

But, if the Lord hath thus decreed,
He shall not yet see death.
For neither lookes he old nor young,
But as he did those times,
When Christ did suffer on the crosse
For mortall sinners crimes.

He hath past through many a foreigne place,
Arabia, Egypt, Africa,
Grecia, Syria, and great Thrace,
And throughout all Hungaria;
Where Paul and Peter preached Christ,
Those blest apostles deare;
There he hath told our Saviours wordes,
In countries far, and neare.

And lately in Bohemia,
With many a German towne;
And now in Flanders, as tis thought,
He wandreth up and downe:
Where learned men with him conferre
Of those his lingering dayes,
And wonder much to heare him tell
His journeyes, and his wayes.

If people give this Jew an almes,
The most that he will take
Is not above a groat a time:
Which he, for Jesus' sake,
Will kindlye give unto the poore,
And thereof make no spare,
Affirming still that Jesus Christ
Of him hath dailye care.

He ne'er was seene to laugh nor smile,
But weepe and make great moane;
Lamenting still his miseries,

And dayes forepast and gone:
If he heare any one blaspheme,
Or take God's name in vaine,
He telles them that they crucifie
Their Saviour Christe againe.

"If you had seene his death," saith he,
"As these mine eyes have done,
Ten thousand thousand times would yee
His torments think upon:
And suffer for his sake all paine
Of torments, and all woes."
These are his wordes and eke his life
Whereas he comes or goes.

- Source: Thomas Percy, [*Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*](#), vol. 2 (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1858), [book 2, no. 3, pp. 236-42](#).
- This collection was first published in 1765.

Shoemakers Are a Poor Slobbering Race

England

An old woman of the North Riding once asked a friend of mine whether it was wrong to wash on Good Friday.

"I used to do so," she said, "and thought no harm of it, till once, when I was hanging out my clothes, a young woman passed by (a dressmaker she was, and a Methodist); and she reproved me, and told me this story.

While our Lord Jesus was being led to Calvary they took Him past a woman who was washing, and the woman "blirted" the thing she was washing in His face; on which He said, "Cursed be every one who hereafter shall wash on this day!"

"And never again," added the old woman, "have I washed on Good Friday."

Now it is said in Cleveland that clothes washed and hung out to dry on Good Friday will become spotted with blood; but the Methodist girl's wild legend reminds me more of one which a relation of mine elicited from a poor Devonshire shoemaker. She was remonstrating with him for his indolence and want of spirit, when he astonished her by replying, "Dont'ee be hard on me. We shoemakers are a poor slobbering race, and so have been ever since the curse that Jesus Christ laid on us."

"And what was that?" she asked.

"Why," said he, "when they were carrying Him to the cross they passed a shoemaker's bench, and the man looked up and spat at Him; and the Lord turned and said, 'A poor slobbering fellow shalt thou be, and all shoemakers after thee, for what thou hast done to Me.'"²

- Source: William Henderson, [*Notes on the Folk-Lore of the Northern Counties of England and the Borders*](#), a new edition with many additional notes (London: Published for the Folk-Lore Society by W. Satchell, Peyton, and Company, 1879), [p. 82](#).

The Wandering Jew

Retold by Horace E. Scudder

When our Saviour was passing out of Jerusalem to the place where he was to be crucified, he was made to carry the heavy cross on his shoulders. Many people followed him, and others stood in the doorways of the houses he passed, or looked out of the windows.

One of these who looked on was a shoemaker, Ahasuerus by name. He did not believe in Christ. He had been present when Pilate pronounced the sentence of death, and, knowing that Christ would be dragged past his house, he ran home and called his household to see this person, who, he said, had been deceiving the Jews.

Ahasuerus stood in the doorway, holding his little child on his arm. Presently the crowd came by and Jesus in the midst, bearing his cross. The load was heavy, and Jesus stood a moment, as if he would rest in the doorway. But the Jew, willing to gain favor with the crowd, roughly bade him go forward.

Jesus obeyed, but, as he moved away, he turned and looked on the shoemaker and said: "I shall at last rest, but thou shalt go on till the last day."

Ahasuerus heard him. Stirred by some impulse, he knew not what, he set his child down, and followed the crowd to the place of crucifixion. There he stayed till the end. And when the people turned back, he turned back with them, and went to his house, but not to stay. He bade his wife and children farewell.

"Go on!" a voice said to him, and on that day he began his wanderings.

Years afterward he came back, but Jerusalem was a heap of ruins. The city had been destroyed, and he knew that his wife and children had long since been dead.

² This curse is suggested, I presume, by the legend of the Wandering Jew; Cartaphilus or Ahasuerns, whichever was his name, having been a shoemaker, and cursed, it is said, by Our Lord, for refusing to allow Him to rest on the doorstep of his shop. -- S. B. G. [Sabine Baring-Gould]

"Go on!" he heard, and he wandered forth, begging his way from house to house, from town to town, from one country to another.

He wandered from Judaea to Greece, from Greece to Rome. He grew old, and his face was like leather, but his eyes were bright, and he never lost his vigor.

He went through storms and the cold of winter, he endured the dry heat of summer, but no sickness overtook him. He joined armies that were going forth to battle, but death never came his way, though men fell by his side.

He was never seen to laugh. Now and then, some learned man would draw him into talk, not knowing who he was, and would find him familiar with great events in history. It was not as if he had learned these in books. He talked as if he himself had been present.

Then the learned man would shake his head, and say to himself, "Poor man, he is mad," and only after the old wanderer had left would the thought suddenly come, "Why, that must have been the Wandering Jew."

Where is he now? No one knows. Wandering, weary, he moves from place to place. Sometimes he is driven off by the people, he looks so uncanny.

When war breaks out, he says to himself, "Perhaps now at last the end of the world is coming."

But though wars have lasted a hundred years, they cease at last, and still the Wandering Jew goes on, on.

- Source: Horace E. Scudder, [*The Book of Legends: Told Over Again*](#) (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1899), [pp. 28-30](#).

The Jerusalem Shoemaker, or Wandering Jew, in Jutland

Denmark

It is now very long since there was seen in Jutland a man mean and lowly in his garments, riding on a little white horse, with stirrups made of wood. When any one asked him whence he came and whither he was directing his course, he was wont to answer: "From Vendsyssel over Himmelsyssel southwards."

He foretold, and said of a stone in Mae: "A thorn shall grow through the fissure in the stone, and in the thorn a magpie shall build her nest, hatch her young, and afterwards fly away with them."

And this came to pass as he had said. He further foretold that when the magpie was flown, there should be a great battle in Vendsyssel, and the greater part of the people

perish. Afterwards the women should acquire the courage and heart of men and slay the enemy.

But when he was asked what further should happen, he answered: "Let the end follow."

In Aalborg he foretold something to the town magistrate, which did not particularly please him, and for which he caused him to be scourged. He then foretold again, that like as his blood was running down his back, so should the magistrate's blood run over the streets of Aalborg. And it happened as he had said; for in a quarrel which arose in the town, the townsmen slew the magistrate in the street.

Of Haseriisaa, which at that time did not flow through Aalborg, he foretold that a time should come when it should run through the town; which also took place as he had predicted.

Coming one day to Bolstrup, and having according to his custom taken up his quarters in a kiln, he rode the next day to the public assembly (Ting), where the judge of the district asked him: "How will it fare with me?" and got for answer: "Thou shalt die in a kiln."

Nor did he fare better; for coming to poverty, he had at last no other place of shelter.

Once when some boys scoffed at him, and one among them threw a cask stave after him, he said, that a stave should be the boy's death; and the same boy, some time after, fell from a tree and struck a stave into his body.

Of alms he accepted only so much as he required for the moment, and thus traveled from place to place.

- Source: Benjamin Thorpe, [*Northern Mythology, Comprising the Principal Popular Traditions and Superstitions of Scandinavia, North Germany, and the Netherlands*](#), vol. 2 (London: Edward Lumley, 1851), [pp. 212-13](#).
- Thorpe's source: J. M. Thiele, "Jerusalems Skomager i Jylland," [*Danmarks Folkesagn*](#), vol. 2 (Copenhagen: Universitetsboghandler C. A. Reitzels Forlag, 1843), [pp. 311-13](#).
- Comment by Thorpe: "The story of the shoemaker of Jerusalem is generally known. When Jesus passed by his house, bending under the weight of the cross, he would rest an instant at his door; but the miscreant came out, and with imprecations drove the Savior away, for the sake of gaining the favor of his enemies. The shoemaker, whose name was Ahasuerus, then drew on himself the curse ever to be a wanderer and never to find rest until doomsday."

The Story of Judas

Italy

You must know that Judas was the one who betrayed Jesus Christ.

Now when Judas betrayed him, his Master said: "Repent, Judas, for I pardon you."

But Judas, not at all! He departed with his bag of money, in despair and cursing heaven and earth. What did he do? While he was going along thus desperate he came across a tamarind tree. (You must know that the tamarind was formerly a large tree, like the olive and walnut.) When he saw this tamarind a wild thought entered his mind, remembering the treason he had committed. He made a noose in a rope and hung himself to the tamarind. And hence it is (because this traitor Judas was cursed by God) that the tamarind tree dried up, and from that time on it ceased growing up into a tree and became a short, twisted, and tangled bush; and its wood is good for nothing, neither to burn, nor to make anything out of, and all on account of Judas, who hanged himself on it.

Some say that the soul of Judas went to the lowest hell, to suffer the most painful torments; but I have heard, from older persons who can know, that Judas's soul has a severer sentence. They say that it is in the air, always wandering about the world, without being able to rise higher or fall lower; and every day, on all the tamarind shrubs that it meets, it sees its body hanging and torn by the dogs and birds of prey. They say that the pain he suffers cannot be told, and that it makes the flesh creep to think of it. And thus Jesus Christ condemned him for his great treason.

- Source: Thomas Frederick Crane, [*Italian Popular Tales*](#) (London: Macmillan and Company, 1885), [no. 56, pp. 195-96](#).
- Return to the [table of contents](#).

Malchus at the Column

Italy

Malchus was the head of the Jews who killed our Lord. The Lord pardoned them all, and likewise the good thief, but he never pardoned Malchus, because it was he who gave the Madonna a blow.

He is confined under a mountain, and condemned to walk around a column, without resting, as long as the world lasts. Every time that he walks about the column he gives it a blow in memory of the blow he gave the mother of our Lord. He has walked around the column so long that he has sunk into the ground. He is now up to his neck.

When he is under, head and all, the world will come to an end, and God will then send him to the place prepared for him. He asks all those who go to see him (for there are such) whether children are yet born; and when they say yes, he gives a deep sigh and resumes his walk, saying: "The time is not yet!" for before the world comes to an end there will be no children born for seven years.

- Source: Thomas Frederick Crane, [*Italian Popular Tales*](#) (London: Macmillan and Company, 1885), [no. 58, p. 197](#).

Buttadeu

Italy

It was in winter, and my good father was at Sacalone, in the warehouse, warming himself at the fire, when he saw a man enter, dressed differently from the people of that region, with breeches striped in yellow, red, and black, and his cap the same way. My good father was frightened. "Oh!" he said, "what is this person?"

"Do not be afraid," the man said. "I am called Buttadeu."

"Oh!" said my father, "I have heard you mentioned. Be pleased to sit down a while and tell me something."

"I cannot sit, for I am condemned by my God always to walk." And while he was speaking he was always walking up and down and had no rest. Then he said: "Listen. I am going away; I leave you, in memory of me, this, that you must say a *credo* at the right hand of our Lord, and five other *credos* at his left, and a *salve regina* to the Virgin, for the grief I suffer on account of her son. I salute you."

"Farewell."

"Farewell, my name is Buttadeu."

- Source: Thomas Frederick Crane, [*Italian Popular Tales*](#) (London: Macmillan and Company, 1885), [no. 59, pp. 197-98](#).
- This story was reported by the daughter of a certain Antonino Caseio, a peasant of Salaparuta.
- The name *Buttadeu* comes from *buttari*, to thrust away, and *deu*, God; or, in popular terms, "the Jew who repulsed Jesus Christ."

Wodan as the Wandering Jew

Germany

At the introduction of Christianity we find a new development of the ancient myths. Wodan becomes the foul fiend, then the godless Hunter, and the Wandering Jew. In the Black Forest the Eternal Hunter and the Eternal Jew are regarded as the same person. They both always carry a groschen in the pocket. In some parts of Germany the harrows are placed in the fields with the teeth together, that the wanderer may rest himself. According to some authorities, he may only rest Christmas night, and then only when he finds a plough in the field; only on that may he sit down.

Every seven years the Huntsman passes over the seven mining towns of the Harz, and woe to him who calls after him.

According to one legend, the Wild Huntsman met Christ at a river where He sought to quench His thirst, and would not permit Him to drink; he also drove Him from a cattle trough, and when the Saviour found water in a horse's foot-print, and would drink there, he drove Him away. As a punishment, he is doomed to wander for ever, and eat only horse-flesh.

This is the pagan legend Christianized. In West and South Germany we find the Wild Army. Odin, or Wodan, was the god, too, of armies, and always went out from Walhalla at the head of his ghostly array, while his nine Walküren [Valkyries] conducted the fallen heroes back to Walhalla [Valhalla].

- Source: Toofie Lauder, [*Legends and Tales of the Harz Mountains*](#) (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1881), [pp. 125-26](#).
- Lauder does not give this account a separate title.

The Lost Jew

Germany

Eighty-one year old Frau Bandow from Fünfeichen narrated:

Once in my life I saw the lost Jew. One afternoon I was home alone when a youthful Jewish man entered my house. He wanted neither to buy nor to sell anything, but with his Jewish accent asked me for a bite of bread.

I said to him, "You won't like our coarse peasant bread," to which he replied, "I will like it, if the lady would just give me some."

I then asked him, "Have you come a long way?"

He answered, "My way is long! I must travel forever throughout the world!" With that he left, but a short time later he returned and asked again for a bite of bread.

I immediately said to myself, "Today you have seen the lost Jew," but to make sure I asked the preacher. He listened to my story and said that he could not prove it, but that the belief was there.

This answer only strengthened the woman's opinion, which was further verified through an innkeeper's wife from a neighboring village, where the Jew had stayed overnight. She reported that he had eaten nothing and that he had not slept. She had prepared a place for him to lie down, but he paced back and forth in the sitting room the entire night.

Even in her old age, the woman who told this story took great pleasure that she had had the good fortune to have seen the lost Jew.

- Source: Karl Gander, "Der verlorene Jude," [*Niederlausitzer Volkssagen, vornehmlich aus dem Stadt- und Landkreis Guben*](#) (Berlin: Deutsche Schriftsteller-Genossenschaft, 1894), [no. 41, pp. 14-15](#).
- Translated by D. L. Ashliman.

The Eternal Jew on the Matterhorn

Switzerland

Mount Matter beneath the Matterhorn in Valais is a high glacier from which the Vispa River flows. According to popular legend, an imposing city existed there ages ago. The Wandering Jew (as many Swiss call the Eternal Jew) came there once and said: "When I pass this way a second time there will be nothing but trees and rocks where you now see houses and streets. And when my path leads me here a third time, there will be nothing but snow and ice."

And now nothing can be seen there but snow and ice.

- Source: Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, "Der ewige Jud auf dem Matterhorn," [*Deutsche Sagen*](#), vol. 1 (Berlin: in der Nicolaischen Buchhandlung, 1816), [no. 343, pp. 443-44](#). In later editions this legend is numbered 344.
- Translated by D. L. Ashliman.
- The Grimms' source: "Oral, from Oberwallis."

The Wandering Jew on the Grimsel Pass

Switzerland

On the way from Meiringen to the famous Rhône glacier, one sees some of the most beautiful and varied scenery in the world. After passing charming points too numerous to mention, the road, which rises rapidly, leads over the barren Grimsel Pass, where stands a famous refuge for poor travellers, the well-known Grimsel Hospice.

A legend claims that in olden times this region blossomed like the rose, and that the highest mountains were as fertile as any valley nestling in a sheltered location at their foot. When Our Lord bade the Wandering Jew³ begin the never-ending journey for which he is so noted, he immediately set out, and tramping incessantly, started to cross the Alps at the Grimsel.

Although constantly urged along by a power he could not resist, Ahasuerus, the Jew, marked the happy people dwelling on the banks of the Aare and the Rhône, and marvelled at the extreme fertility of the pass, where grapes and figs grew in abundance, where no barren spot could be seen, and where mighty oaks covered the tops of mountains now crowned by eternal snows.

The air was mild and balmy, even at the greatest altitude; and hosts of birds in bright plumage flitted about, twittering and singing in the merriest way. Ahasuerus also noticed that the people were gentle and hospitable, for wherever he asked for food or drink it was quickly granted, and he was warmly invited to tarry with them and rest his weary limbs. This invitation, however, he could not accept; but hurried on, unconscious of the fact that a blight fell over every place through which he passed; for the curse laid upon him not only condemned him to move on for ever, but enhanced his punishment by making cold, want, and pestilence follow in his train.

Many years passed by before the Wandering Jew again found himself near the Alps; but weary as he was, he somewhat quickened his footsteps, hoping to feast his eyes upon the landscape which had so charmed him the first time, and to meet again the warm-hearted people who had been so kind to him once before.

As he drew near the mountains, however, sad forebodings wrung his heart, for they were enveloped in a dense fog, which seemed to him particularly cold and clammy. Hurrying on up the pass, he eagerly looked from side to side, yet saw nothing but dark pines wildly tossing their sombre branches against a gray sky, while ravens and owls flew past him, croaking and hooting. Vines, figs, and oaks had vanished, and the happy people, driven away by the constant windstorms which swept the mountains, had taken refuge in the sheltered valleys. But although all else was changed, the spirit of hospitality still lingered on the heights, for the charcoal-burners gladly shared their

³ See the author's [Legends of the Virgin and Christ](#).

meagre supply of coarse food with the Wandering Jew, and warmly invited him to be seated at their campfire.

The Jew, however, had to hasten on; and many long years elapsed before he again trod the Grimsel Pass. For a while he still perceived dark firs and smouldering fires, but it seemed to him that they were much nearer the foot of the mountain than they had been at his second visit. As he climbed upward he also noticed that the path was much more rugged than before, for rocks and stones had fallen down upon it from above, making it almost impassable in certain places. As no obstacle could stop this involuntary traveller, he went on over rolling stones and jagged rocks, and nearing the top of the pass discovered that every trace of vegetation had vanished, and that the place formerly so fertile was now covered with barren rocks and vast fields of snow. Raising his eyes to the peaks all around him he perceived that oaks, beeches, and pines had all vanished, and that the steep mountain sides were heavily coated with ice, which ran far down into the valleys in great frozen streams.

The sight of all this desolation, which had taken the place of such luxuriant vegetation, proved too much for poor Ahasuerus, who sank down on a rock by the wayside and burst into tears. There he sat and sobbed, as he realised for the first time the blighting effect of his passage. His tears flowed so freely that they trickled down into a rocky basin, and when he rose to pursue his way down into the Hasli Valley, he left a little lake behind him.

In spite of the masses of snow and ice all around, and of the cold winds which constantly sweep over that region, the waters of the lake still remain as warm as the tears which fell from Ahasuerus's eyes; and no fish are ever found in this pool.

Still, notwithstanding the desolate landscape, Ahasuerus found the spirit of hospitality not quite dead, for far up on the pass rose a shelter for weary travellers, where they were carefully tended by pious monks. But even here he could not rest, and as he passed along down the mountain, he heard the thunder of falling avalanches behind him. It is during this last journey that he is supposed to have lost the queer old shoe which was long treasured in one of the vaults of the Bern Library.

It is also said that when pausing at one of the huts in the Hasli Valley, he sorrowfully foretold that when fate brought him there for the fourth and last time, the whole fruitful valley, from the top of the mountains down to the Lake of Brienz, would be transformed into a huge unbroken field of ice, where he would wander alone in quest of the final resting-place which until now has been denied him, although Eugene Field claims he found it in the New World.⁴

⁴ See ["The Holy Cross"](#) by Eugene Field.

This account of the passage of the Wandering Jew is told with slight variations of all the passes between Switzerland and Italy. Every particularly barren spot in the former country is supposed to have been blighted because he passed through there, or because mortals sinned so grievously that they brought a curse down upon it.

- Source: H. A. Guerber, [*Legends of Switzerland*](#) (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Company, 1905), [pp. 126-31](#).

The Mysterious Stranger

England

Anno 165_.

At _ _ in the Moorlands in Staffordshire, lived a poor old man, who had been a long time lame. One Sunday, in the afternoon, he being alone, one knocked at his door; he bade him open it, and come in. The stranger desired a cup of beer; the lame man desired him to take a dish and draw some, for he was not able to do it himself. The stranger asked the poor old man how long he had been ill.

The poor man told him.

Said the stranger, "I can cure you. Take two or three balm leaves steeped in your beer for a fortnight or three weeks, and you will be restored to your health; but constantly and zealously serve God." The poor man did so, and became perfectly well.

This stranger was in a purple-shag gown, such as was not seen or known in those parts. And nobody in the street after evensong did see any one in such a colored habit.

Doctor Gilbert Sheldon, since Archbishop of Canterbury, was then in the Moorlands, and justified the truth of this to Elias Ashmole, Esq., from whom I had this account, and he hath inserted it in some of his memoirs, which are in the [Ashmolean] Museum at Oxford.

- Source: John Aubrey, [*Miscellanies upon Various Subjects*](#), 5th edition (London: Reeves and Turner, 1890), [pp. 83-84](#).
- Although the mysterious stranger in this account is not identified as the "Wandering Jew," this legend does show similarities to other stories in this group.

Revised September 9, 2013.

The Legend of the Wandering Jew

By George Anderson, 1965

As Christ was carrying His cross to Golgotha, He stopped for a moment to rest outside the house of a shoemaker named Ahasuerus. When Ahasuerus saw this, he jeered the Savior, asking Him why He was dallying. Christ then looked at Ahasuerus and pronounced the curse: "I will stand here and rest, but you must wander the Earth until I return." And so it was the Ahasuerus became the Wandering Jew—a man cursed to live for century after century, never knowing the release of death until Judgment Day. He has no home on this Earth and no rest from his wandering. Some say he seeks death but can't find it, and some say he still rebels against Christ and the One who sent Him, but most say that he has repented and hopes for God's mercy on the Last Day. He spends his centuries of waiting in prayer and good deeds. So, at least, goes the legend whose lifetime is now nearly half that attributed to its subject. In this book, Anderson spends 400 pages cataloging and describing all the variations in the story in both folk tale and literature from its appearance in the 13th century to the 1960s. I ended the book somewhat disappointed, because the Legend seems to have such great dramatic potential that it's just waiting to be turned into a literary masterpiece, but like Ahasuerus, it's been waiting a long time. Many famous writers have tried their hands at it—including Goethe, Shelley, Hans Anderson, and Dumas, but their efforts didn't really pay off. In fact, the best treatments have usually been by lesser-known authors. Anderson spends more than half of the book describing bad fiction. This gets rather tedious for both reader and author (again, bizarrely appropriate for the subject), but the author's frustrations can sometimes be amusing, such as when he describes reading David Hoffman's 1700 page chronicle as a "penitential achievement", or in his appropriate disgust with the quasi-pornographic retelling by Viereck and Eldridge ("partners in literary crime"), in which a Wandering Jew and a Wandering Jewess spend their millennia in the pursuit of sexual gratification. More seriously, Anderson points out a fundamental weakness in the legend—that once the Jew commences his wandering, there aren't any dramatic incidents left until Doomsday. This is why many versions of the story devolve into disguised history and geography lessons. To have a compelling story, an author needs to add things.

The story has endless variations. Sometimes Ahasuerus is an old man; sometimes he remains forever young; sometimes he ages and then returns to youth. In the English poetic drama *The Immortal Jew* by S.R. Lysaght, he lives, dies, and is reincarnated over and over again, but unlike the reincarnations the rest of us are imagined to go through, Ahasuerus is condemned to remember all his past lives. When the Wandering Jew is the main character, his redemption is usually the main issue. Very often, Ahasuerus is a secondary character in fiction, a sort of *deus ex machina* who comes out of nowhere and does good deeds: reuniting separated lovers, and the like.

It seems that Anderson's favorite dramatic adaptation of the legend is the 1833 French work *Ahasverus* by Edgar Quinet. This version has several things going for it. First, it works hard to capture a sense of vast stretches of time unfolding. (The story goes from the creation of the world to mankind's old age, to Judgment Day, and then to a time after the death of God Himself.) Second, it introduces the character of Rachel, an angel expelled from heaven for her pity towards Ahasuerus. They meet on Earth and fall in love, and she follows him through his eons of wandering. According to Anderson, their love is portrayed quite well. (Not having read the play, I can't comment.) Anderson gets to Quinet about half-way through the book. Unless you're a serious enthusiast about the legend, you might consider stopping after this point, because the masterpiece you're waiting to hear about hasn't been written yet, and the last hundred years of work on the legend hasn't been too impressive.

Alberto Manguel

Saturday 21 February 2009 00.01 GMT

"Strange, is it not? that of the myriads who
Before us pass'd the door of Darkness through,
Not one returns to tell us of the Road,
Which we discover we must travel too."

When I was five years old, my family spent a summer in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, a postcard Alpine village with geranium-filled balconies, heart-shaped openings in the shutters and orange cows that waddled through the little streets at dusk, sounding their copper bells. In those days, I had no sense of my social or cultural identity: I didn't know that my family was Jewish, and therefore I had no notion of how strange it was for a Jewish family to choose, as a holiday destination, and less than a decade after the war, a village that had been one of Hitler's favourite haunts. Deep-blue woods rose on the surrounding slopes, and often we trekked up the shaded paths to one of the hilltops for a picnic. One of these paths was a via crucis, each station sculpted in wood and set high up on a pole: 14 little scenes that led, as through a comic strip, from Christ's trial and sentence to the laying of his body in the tomb.

My nurse (a Czech Jew who had escaped the Nazis, and who possessed little imagination and less humour) knew the story of the passion only vaguely, and her explanation of the various images never quite satisfied me. One scene, however - that of Christ's third fall - she seemed to know well. Christ, having stumbled twice under the weight of the cross, stumbles once more, this time by the door of a Jewish cobbler called Ahasverus. The cobbler pitilessly pushes Christ away, telling him to move on. "I will move on," Christ answers, "but you will tarry till I come." From that day onwards, Ahasverus is condemned to wander the earth, and is only allowed to stop here and there for short respites. His shoes and his clothes never wear out completely, and every 100 years he is miraculously rejuvenated. His beard hangs down to his feet, he carries five coins in his pocket that match the five wounds of the man he offended, and he is able to speak every language in the world. Since he is a little over 2,000 years old, he has witnessed countless events of historical importance and knows every story there is to tell.

Though the Eternal Wanderer, condemned because of a sin committed or a promise not kept, has a few precursors in Jewish, Islamic and early Christian and even Buddhist literature, the story as we know it first makes its appearance some time in the 13th

century. The earliest dateable telling is Italian, tucked away in a Bolognese chronicle spanning the years 781 to 1228. In 1223, according to the chronicle, a group of pilgrims arrived at the abbey of Ferrara and informed the abbot that, when travelling in Armenia, they had met a certain Jew who had revealed to them that he had been present at the passion and had driven Christ from his door, and was thus cursed till the second coming. "This Jew," the chronicle explains, "is said, every hundred years, to be made young to the age of 30, and he cannot die until the Lord returns."

However, the most influential of all the early versions of the legend, in that it lent the Wandering Jew a tangible contemporary presence, was a small German pamphlet published in 1602 under the title of *Kurtze Beschreibung und Erzählung [sic] von einem Juden mit Namen Ahasverus* ("Short Description and Narrative of a Jew Called Ahasverus"). It tells how the Bishop of Schleswig, in his youth, had visited Hamburg in 1542, and there had seen in church, one Sunday, "a man who was a very tall person, with long hair reaching down over his shoulders, standing barefoot by the chancel". The soles of his feet were hard as horn, and so thick that one could measure them with two fingers held across. The stranger turned out to be Ahasverus, the Jew who drove Christ away from his door. He told the bishop that, at the time of Christ's passion, he was a shoemaker, and that after he was cursed, he wandered without respite through the world. To the bishop's astonishment, Ahasverus was able to describe in detail "the lives, sufferings and deaths of the holy apostles". Years later, in 1575, the Schleswig ambassadors to Spain reported back to the bishop that they had seen a stranger of similar traits in Madrid, and that he spoke good Spanish: later versions lend him the power to speak all the languages in the world. This is the Wandering Jew who appears in the work of countless writers, from Chaucer to Cervantes, from Rodrigues Lobo to Mark Twain, from Eugène Sue to Fruttero and Lucentini.

The story of the tireless wanderer haunted my dreams. I didn't feel his fate as a curse; I thought how wonderful it would be to travel alone and endlessly, to visit every country in the world and to meet all sorts of extraordinary people; above all, to be able to read any book that fell into your hands. Until the age of eight, my only languages were English and German. I had enviously scrutinised the Hebrew letters in my father's coffee-table Haggadah, and the Arabic inscriptions on the boxes of Egyptian dates that my mother ordered from Cairo, and the Spanish words in the storybooks sent to me from Buenos Aires by an enterprising aunt who hoped that they would encourage me to learn my native language. All these scripts were as tantalising and mysterious as the secret codes

that appeared in the Sherlock Holmes stories. I envied the Wandering Jew's ability to read in the universal library.

To see the Wandering Jew's fate not as a curse but as a blessing may be less odd than we might think. Two conflicting impulses rule our short time on earth: one draws us forward, towards the distant horizon, curious to find out what awaits beyond; the other roots us to one place and weds us to one sky. Both impulses are ours, define us as human beings as much as self-consciousness and its corollary, language. The impulse to move on and the impulse to stand still, shape our sense of place; the urge to know who we are and the urge to question that knowledge define our sense of time.

Stateless wanderers and city dwellers, cattle herders and crop farmers, explorers and householders (or, in literary terms, Enkidu and Gilgamesh, Cain and Abel, Ulysses and Penelope) have, throughout time, embodied these two longings, one for what lies outside, the other for what lies within. And two moments in Christ's passion, two stations in his via crucis, symbolise, perhaps, these opposing forces. The moving and the questioning are acted out in the ninth station, when the meeting with Ahasverus takes place; the standing still and the mirroring of self occur in the sixth station, when Veronica places a cloth on Christ's face and finds his image miraculously embedded in the fabric.

These vital forces compete with and complement one other. To move away from the place we call ours allows us a better sense of our identity but, at the same time, distracts us from self-reflection; to sit in a steadfast point helps us unveil that identity in communion with the numinous, but also renders the task impossible by blinding us to what defines us in the surrounding tangible world.

It may be that, of all the instruments that we have invented to help us along the path of self-discovery, books are the most useful, the most practical, the most concrete. By lending words to our bewildering experience, books become compasses that embody the four cardinal points: mobility and stability, self-reflectiveness and the gift of looking outward. The old metaphor that sees the world as a book we read and in which we too are read, merely recognises this guiding, all-encompassing quality. Even after Ulysses has returned home to sit by his quiet hearth, Ithaca remains a port of call on the shores of the beckoning sea, one among the countless volumes of the universal library; Dante, reaching the supreme vision of love holding bound "Into one volume all the leaves whose flight / Is scattered through the universe around", feels his will and his desire turned by

that love "that moves the sun and the other stars". Likewise, the reader in the end finds the page written for him, a part of the vast, monstrous volume made up of all the libraries and lending sense to the universe.

And yet, almost all the depictions of the Wandering Jew show him bookless, keen on finding salvation in the world of flesh and stone, not that of words. This feels wrong. In the most popular of the fictionalised versions, Eugène Sue's 19th-century roman-feuilleton, *Le Juif Errant*, the underlying theme is the wicked Jesuit plot to govern the world; the intellectual undertakings of the timeless Wanderer himself are not explored. On Ahasverus's ongoing journey (according to Sue) libraries are merely gathering-rooms in aristocratic houses, and books either pious tracts or evil catalogues of sin under the guise of Jesuitical confession manuals.

But it is hard to believe that a merciful god would condemn anyone to a worldwide waiting-room without reading material. Instead, I imagine Ahasverus granted 2,000 years of itinerant reading; I imagine him visiting the world's great libraries and bookstores, exhausting and replenishing his book-bag with whatever new titles appear during his travels, from Marco Polo's *Il Milione* to Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, from the Chinese *Dream of Red Mansions* to Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*, in which (like all readers) he will find traces of his own curious destiny. Closer to our time, so as not to be overladen, the Wanderer travels perhaps with an e-book which he periodically recharges at an internet café. And in his reader's mind, the pages, printed and virtual, overlay and blend, and create new stories from a mass of remembered and half-remembered readings, multiplying his books again and again.

Long after the destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem, Jews in scattered lands continued to carry out the appointed rituals, moving about in a space that no longer existed in stone and mortar, but only in the words set down for their guidance. That is the nature of all exile: it affirms the perseverance of memory. Expelled from their native al-Andalus, the Arabs of Córdoba, Toledo and Granada continued to recite the verses that their Spanish landscape had inspired; as refugees in South America and Canada, the Armenians who survived the Turkish massacre rewrote the libraries destroyed in their Anatolian homeland; the survivors of the military dictatorships in Chile and Argentina created publishing companies in their new countries for the literature that continued to be written in spite of the blood-imposed silence; in Paris, the Cubans who fled Castro's regime borrowed the French language and tailored it to suit the retelling of their stories; in London, Mahmoud Darwish blended the Palestinian cadence of his verses with his

readings of Borges, Paul Eluard and Emily Dickinson; Vladimir Nabokov carried with him, into his American exile, the Russian dictionary which held, he said, the building-blocks of all his childhood reading.

The examples are countless. The condemned crowds outside the city walls, Ahasverus's travelling companions in the detention camps of Calais, Lampedusa, Málaga and scores of other places, carrying with them the tattered libraries of their past, are so vast and varied that our protected inner citadels seem desolate in comparison. In our anxiety to punish our enemies and protect ourselves, we have forgotten what it is that we are meant to be securing. In our fear, we have allowed our own rights and freedoms to be distorted or curtailed. Instead of locking the other out we have locked ourselves in. We have forgotten that our libraries should open on to the world, not pretend to isolate us from it. We have become our own prisoners.

That is the deeper meaning of the Wandering Jew's punishment, and its inevitable consequence, because no curse is ever one-sided. The legend of the man condemned to wander because of an uncharitable act became an uncharitable act in which many men were condemned to wander. Pogroms, expulsions, ethnic cleansings, genocides regardless of nationality or creed are the abominable extensions of this reading of the legend.

But whether we wander to lose or to find ourselves, in libraries and on roads, depends on our own will, not on the hostile or welcoming cities that lie behind and before us. We can allow ourselves to be anchored in a shallow page, never moving forward, or, like the Wandering Jew, steer forward with the flow, on and on, towards the enlarging horizon. "For my part," wrote Robert Louis Stevenson, one of the most charitable of men, "I travel not to go anywhere, but to go. I travel for travel's sake. The great affair is to move."

- For information and tickets to events in Jewish Book week call 0844 847 2274.

Ahasver, der Ewige Jude

als Thema in der Weltliteratur – ► [Literarische Verarbeitung](#) – ► [Literatur](#) – vergleiche: ► [Fliegender Holländer](#)
Ahasver [hebräisch »Fürst«] (Ahasverus)

1. im Alten Testament Name des Perserkönigs **Xerxes**,
2. in der Volkssage der Ewige Jude,
3. übertragen: ein ruhelos umhergetriebener Mensch; ein verfolgter, ziellos und friedlos irrender Wanderer.

wandering Jew

Sammelname für Hauspflanzen der Familie *Commelinaceae*, speziell die Arten *Tradescantia albiflora* und *Tradescantia fluminensis*;

Im italienischen Wallfahrtsort: **Maria Weißenstein / Pietralba**, südlich von Deutschnofen / Nova Ponente, ist im Gewölbe des Kirchenschiffes die Königin Ester vor dem **Perserkönig Ahasver** dargestellt. Marianne Mehling, Hg.: *Knaurs Kulturführer in Farbe. Südtirol*. Stuttgart [1981].

Ewiger Jude,

der zu ewiger Wanderung verurteilte Jude Ahasverus. Nach der Legende darf der Ewige Jude bis zum Ende der Welt (in Varianten der Legende: bis er erlöst wird) nirgends ruhen und muss unetw über die Erde wandern. Es ist seine Strafe dafür, dass er Christus verhöhnt oder geschlagen oder ihm bei seinem Gang zur Kreuzigung eine kurze Rast versagt hat. Dazu Joh. 18, 22-23, **Jesus** vor den Hohenpriester **Annas und Kaiphas**.

Bei diesen Worten gab einer der Knechte, der dastand, Jesus einen Backenstreich und sagte: "So antwortest du dem Hohenpriester?" Jesus entgegnete ihm: "Habe ich unrecht geredet, so beweise mir das Unrecht; habe ich aber recht geredet, warum schlägst du mich?"

Als Ursprung wird auch **Malchus**, der Knecht des Hohenpriesters (Joh. 18, 4-10) genannt, ebenso, daß Johannes am Leben bleibt, bis Jesus wiederkommt (Joh. 21, 20-23). Allerdings wird dies im Johannes-Evangelium relativiert: "So entstand bei den Jüngern die Meinung, jener Jünger werde nicht sterben. Aber Jesus hatte zu ihm nicht gesagt: »Er stirbt nicht«, sondern: »Wenn ich will, daß er am Leben bleibt, bis ich wiederkomme, was kümmert dich das?«" (Joh. 21, 23).

Hier eine katholische Begründung von **Michael Faulhaber** wie die Juden zum Ahasver wurden: "Nach dem Tode Christi wurde Israel aus dem Dienst der Offenbarung entlassen. Sie hatten die Stunde der Heimsuchung nicht erkannt. Sie hatten den Gesalbten des Herrn verleugnet und verworfen, zur Stadt hinausgeführt und ans Kreuz geschlagen. Damals zerriss der Vorhang im Tempel auf Sion und damit der Bund zwischen dem Herrn und seinem Volk. Die Tochter Sion erhielt den Scheidebrief, und seitdem wandert der ewige Ahasver ruhelos über die Erde."

► [Auszug aus einer Predigt von Michael Faulhaber, Kardinal](#), 3. Dezember 1933 in St. Michael zu München

Ursprünge des literarischen Themas

Der englische Chronist **Roger of Wendover** beschreibt in *Flores historiarum* einen anderen biblischen Ursprung. Ein Erzbischof aus Gross-Armien, der 1228 England besuchte, erzählte von einem Mann in Armenien namens **Cartaphilus**. Dieser behauptete, er sei der Torhüter von **Pontius Pilatus** gewesen und habe Jesus auf seinem Weg zur Kreuzigung geschlagen, damit er

schneller gehe. Jesus antwortete: "Ich gehe, aber du musst warten, bis ich wiederkomme." Cartaphilus trat später zum Christentum über und wurde auf Joseph getauft. Er lebte fromm und hoffte, erlöst zu werden.

Eine italienische Variante der Legende nennt **Giovanni Buttadeo** ("Schlage Gott") als Ursprung. In der italienischen Sage heißt "der von Gott verstoßene", der Ewige Jude, daher **Buttadio**. In der spanischen Sage "Hoffe auf Gott" ist es **Juan Espera-en-Dios**, in der bretagneischen Sage ist es **Boudedeo**.

Um 1602 erschien die deutschsprachige Broschüre »Kurtze Beschreibung und Erzählung von einem Juden mit Namen Ahasverus«. Darin wird beschrieben, daß 1542 **Paulus von Eitzen** (+ 1598), ein Lutherischer Bischof aus Schleswig, in Hamburg einen uralten Juden traf. Dieser bekannte, daß er Jesus auf dem Weg zur Kreuzigung verhöhnt habe. Jesus antwortete: "Ich bleibe und ruhe, aber du wirst wandern." Die Popularität der Broschüre mag mit dazu beigetragen haben, daß der Glaube entstand, der Antichrist werde im 17. Jahrhundert auftreten und von den Juden unterstützt werden. Daraus entstand Haß auf die Juden. Die Broschüre wurde in viele europäische Sprachen übersetzt.

Kundry gilt als weiblicher (Gegen?)Part zum Ewigen Juden. Ihr wurde von **Richard Wagner** im *Parsifal* ein musikalisches und literarisches Dokument gesetzt.

Literarische Verarbeitungen des Themas, chronologisch

Johann Wolfgang von **Goethe**: Eposfragment, 1774

Christian Friedrich Daniel **Schubart**: "Der ewige Jude. Eine Lyrische Rhapsodie" 1783 oder 1787;

beginnt mit: "Aus einem finstern Geklüfte Karmels / Kroch Ahasver. Bald sind's zweitausend Jahre, ..." ► [online](#)

Aloys Wilhelm **Schreiber** (1761?63?–1841): "Der ewige Jude";

beginnt mit: "Von des Hügels kahlem Rücken / Wankt ein hager Greis herab, ..." ► [Text online](#)

Jan **Potocki**: *Die Handschrift von Saragossa*, 1803-15 ► [Auszüge](#) – ► [Rezension](#)

Achim von **Arnim**: *Halle und Jerusalem*, Drama, 1811

(Johann Ludwig) Wilhelm **Müller**, auch: Griechen-Müller (1794-1827). "Der ewige Jude";

beginnt mit: "Ich wandre sonder Rast und Ruh, / Mein Weg führt keinem Ziele zu;" ► [Text online bei Gutenberg](#)

Man lese: ► [Erika von Borries: Wilhelm Müller: Der Dichter der Winterreise. Eine Biographie](#)

Ludwig **Bechstein** (1801-1860): "Die verwünschte Stadt", Märchen ► [Text online](#)

Nikolaus **Lenau**: "Ahasver, der ewige Jude"; Gedicht 1827-1831; beginnt mit: "Ein Wäldchen rauscht

auf weiter grüner Heide, Hier lebt die Erde still und arm und trübe" ► [Text online bei Gutenberg](#) – ► [Text online](#)

Ludwig **Aurbacher**: *Ein Volksbüchlein. Enthaltend: Die Geschichte des ewigen Juden, die Abenteuer der sieben Schwaben, nebst vielen andern erbaulichen und ergötzlichen Historien*.

Zweyte, vermehrte und verbesserte Ausgabe für Volksfreunde. München, in der literarisch-artistischen Anstalt. 1835. 312 S. Neuauflage, siehe 1905

Nikolaus **Lenau**: "Der ewige Jude"; Gedicht 1836; beginnt mit: "Ich irrte allein in einem öden Tale, / Von

Klippenkalk umstarrt, von dunklen Föhren" ► [Text online bei Gutenberg](#) – ► [Text online](#)

Nikolaus **Lenau**: "Der arme Jude"; Gedicht 1841; beginnt mit: "Armer Jude, der du wandeln Mußt von

Dorf zu Dorf hausierend" ► [Text online bei Gutenberg](#)

Adalbert **Stifter**: *Abdias*. 1843. ► [Rezension](#)

Eugène **Sue**: *Le Juif errant*, 10 vol., 1844-45; Der Wandernde Jude; Der ewige Jude.

Johann **Nestroy**. *Zwei ewige Juden und keiner*. Burleske in 2 Akten. 1846 ► [Daten, Inhalt, Personen](#)

Karl **Simrock**: "Der ewige Jude". In: Zs. F. dt. Mythologie u. Sittenkunde, hg. v. J. W. Wolf, 1. Bd. 1. Heft, Göttingen 1853, S. 432-436.

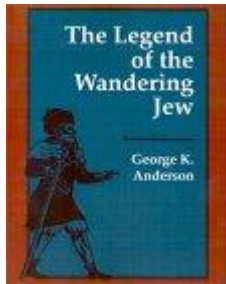
Gustave **Doré**: Serie von 12 Holztafeln, 1856.
 Robert **Hamerling**: *Ahasverus in Rom*, 1866; epische Gedicht
 Fritz **Mauthner**: *Der neue Ahasver*, 1882 – [▶ online](#)
 Max **Haushofer**: “Der ewige Jude Ein dramatisches Gedicht in drei Teilen”; Liebeskind 1894
 Ludwig **Aurbacher**: *Münchener Volksschriften Nr. 29. Geschichte des ewigen Juden / Geschichte des Doktor Faustus; Legende vom Ritter St. Georg*. Kevelaer: Bukon & Bercker, ca 1905/1910.
 Hans von **Kahlenberg**: *Ahasvera*. Vor 1914
 Joseph **Roth**: *Flucht ohne Ende*. [▶ Rezension](#)
 Franz **Werfel**: *Jacobowsky und der Oberst. Komödie einer Tragödie in drei Akten*. 1940/41. [▶ Rezension](#)
 Walter **Jens**: *Ahasver*. Hamburg 1956.
 Pär **Lagerkvist**: *Die Sibylle*, 1956; *Der Tod Ahasvers*, 1960
 Stefan **Heym**: *Ahasver*, 1981
 Hermann **Kuprian**: *Ahasver. Einakterzyklus in 6 Teilen*. Innsbruck: Universitätsverlag Wagner, 1984.
 Franz **Pehr**: [▶ Der ewige Jude in Sagen aus Kärnten](#)
 Carlo **Fruttero**, Franco **Lucentini**: *Der Liebhaber ohne festen Wohnsitz* – [▶ Rezension](#)
 Fred **Wander**: *Das gute Leben oder Von der Persönlichkeit im Schrecken. Erinnerungen*. Göttingen: Wallstein, 2006. Dazu die Rezension der SZ, 26.5.2006, S. 16: "In seinen Erinnerungen beschreibt sich Fred Wander als »Ahasver«".

Filmverarbeitungen des Themas und Verwandtes

“Jew Süß” Regie: Mendes, GB 1934
 November 1937: Ausstellung „Der ewige Jude“, zuerst im Deutschen Museum München, später auch in anderen Städten
 “Jud Süß” Regie: Veit Harlan, D 1940: November 1940 Premiere
 “Der ewige Jude” Regie: Fritz Hippler, D 1940
[▶ "Der Ewige Jude" Filmprogramm](#) – [▶ Stig Hornshøj-Møller: "»Der ewige Jude« Geschichte und Inhalt des nationalsozialistischen Propagandafilmes"](#) – [▶ Eckdaten zur Genesis des Propagandafilmes "Der Ewige Jude"](#) – [▶ Joseph Süß Oppenheimer in der Geschichte](#) –
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 Heni, Clemens (1996): „German Ideology: Understanding Ahasver, Mammon, and Moloch”. *Journal for the Study of Antisemitism* 13:97, S. 49-87. [▶ Online](#)
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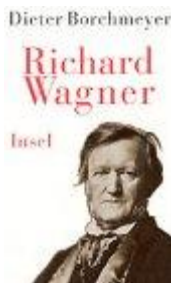


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Jerold S. **Auerbach**: *Jacob's Voices. Reflections of a Wandering American Jew*. Southern Illinois UP, 1996. Gebunden, 164 Seiten ▶

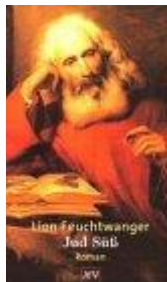


◀ Wolfgang **Benz**: *Der ewige Jude. Metaphern und Methoden nationalsozialistischer Propaganda*. Berlin: Metropol, 2010. Broschiert, 220 Seiten



◀ Dieter **Borchmeyer**: *Richard Wagner. Ahasvers Wandlungen*. Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 2002. Gebunden, 600 Seiten.

„Der Untertitel *Ahasvers Wandlungen* spielt nicht nur auf den Fliegenden Holländer und Kundry im *Parsifal* an, mit denen Wagner die Gestalt des Ewigen Juden in Verbindung gebracht hat (...), sondern vor allem auf die Tatsache, dass Wagner die Gestalt des nicht sterben könnenden, ewig unbehausten Wanderers als Existenzsymbol seiner selbst und seines Künstlertums gesehen hat, dessen ‚Wandlungen‘ auch seine Wirkungsgeschichte manifestiert. Daß sich in der Ahasver-Legende für Wagner zugleich das Schicksal des Judentums spiegelt, läßt tief blicken, deutet auf die von ihm verkannte und verleugnerte, von den Zeitgenossen und Nachgeborenen aber sehr wohl durchschaute Affinität Wagners zu manchen Traditionen jüdischen Denkens hin.“ (Borchmeyer)



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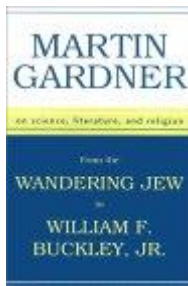


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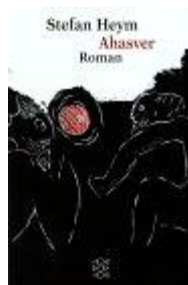
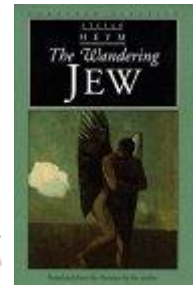
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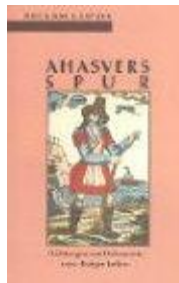
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◀ Mona **Körte**, Robert **Stockhammer**, Hg.: *Ahasvers Spur. Dichtungen und Dokumente vom 'Ewigen Juden'*. Leipzig: Reclam, 1995. Broschiert, 253 Seiten

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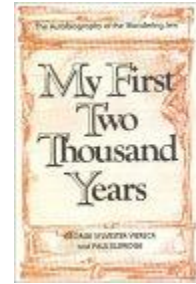


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„Der Ewige Jude“-Stereotype auf der europäischen Wanderung

Frank Stern

Ein graphisch gekonntes Exlibris eines jüdischen Buchliebhabers aus dem 19. Jahrhundert zeigt einen wandernden Juden – erkennbar am mittelalterlichen Judenhut – vor einer idyllischen ländlichen Berglandschaft, irgendwo am Alpenvorland. Eines der Motive, die von dem jahrhundertealten Stereotyp des ewig wandernden Juden in der heutigen österreichischen und deutschen Kultur erhalten geblieben sind. Doch bei diesem hier abgebildeten Buchzeichen handelt es sich um keine antijüdische Diskriminierung. Gewandert sind wir durch die Jahrtausende, unsere Geschichte haben wir mitgenommen, scheint der jüdische Auftraggeber dieses Holzschnitts sagen zu wollen. Doch muss dies ja nicht gleich eine antihumanistische, eine antisemitische christliche Wendung erfahren.

Der Ursprung der Legende, des Mythos vom ewig wandernden Juden ist natürlich nicht in bodenständigen Alpensagen zu suchen, sondern liegt weit zurück in den ersten nachchristlichen Jahrhunderten. Eine englische Chronik von 1235 berichtet über die Erzählung eines armenischen Bischofs, diese erwähnt allerdings noch nicht den Namen Ahasverus. Ihre definitive volkstümliche literarische und antijüdische Gestalt bildete sich erst mit der Reformation heraus. 1586 erschien in Zürich eine deutsche Version der englischen Chronik, 1602 das erste überlieferte deutsche Volksbuch mit diesem Thema. Der „Ewige Jude“ hatte – so meint die Legende zu wissen – Jesus von Nazareth auf dem Wege der Kreuzigung weder geholfen noch dessen Durst gestillt, ja sogar hämisch zu dessen Kreuzigung aufgerufen. Jesus verfluchte ihn, er möge für alle Zeiten umherwandern, ohne Heim und ohne Heimat, bis an den Jüngsten Tag. Ahasverus steht in der ursprünglichen, in christlicher Tradition überlieferten Legende stellvertretend für die Juden, die in Jesus nicht den Messias erkennen wollen. Er ist halsstarrig, mitleidlos, lässt den unter der Last des Kreuzes schwitzenden Jesus nicht an seiner Hauswand lehnen, beleidigt Jesus und rechtfertigt damit für die christliche Heilslehre rückwirkend den kollektiven Fluch, der vermeintlich durch die Jahrhunderte über dem Volk der Juden liege.

Die Gestalt des Juden mit dem Namen Ahasverus tritt im 17. Jahrhundert auf die Bühne der europäischen Judenfeindschaft. Das deutsche Volksbuch vom Beginn dieses Jahrhunderts mit dem Titel „Kurze Beschreibung und Erzählung von einem Juden mit Namen Ahasverus“ lässt einen Bischof zu Wort kommen, der berichtet, dass er nach seinem Studium bei Martin Luther zu Wittenberg in Hamburg anno 1547 beim sonntäglichen Kirchenbesuch einen hochgewachsenen Mann mit Zottelmähne erblickt hätte, der stets seufzte, wenn der Name Jesus genannt wurde, sich an die Brust schlug und trotz des harten norddeutschen Winters barfuss und mangelhaft gekleidet gewesen sei. Dieser Wanderer erzählte, dass er Ahasverus heiße, in Jerusalem geboren und Schuhmacher sei.

Seit er Jesus' Hinrichtung gesehen habe, irre er umher, nach hundert Jahren sei er nach Jerusalem zurückgekehrt und habe es zerstört gefunden. Gott hätte ihn am Leben erhalten, so resümierte der barfüßige Jude in der Hamburger Kälte, als „lebendigen Zeugen der Leiden Christi zu mehr Überzeugung der Gottlosen und Ungläubigen“. Zugleich bedarf jedes Volksbuch selbstverständlich der Moral. Jener Besucher in Hamburg, so weiß der von Luther geschulte Bischof zu berichten, sei nun doch ein beispielhafter Christ geworden, bekannt für seine Wohltätigkeit.

Die Inquisition in Toledo hingegen hatte 1547 einen Vagabunden, der sich Juan Espera an Dios nannte und behauptete, jener Schuhmacher zu sein, schlicht hingerichtet.

In vielfältiger Form und mit nationalen Besonderheiten wurde in diesen Geschichten ein durchgängiges Motiv der Legende vermittelt: Gottesbeweis, Zeugnis der kommenden Erlösung durch einen auf geheimnisvolle Weise überlebenden Zeitzeugen der Epoche des Pontius Pilatus. Dieses Volksbuch fand in vielfältigen Fassungen weite Verbreitung in Deutschland, Frankreich, Holland, Dänemark, Schweden, Finnland. Mehr als 200 mündlich überlieferte Versionen der Legende sind in Europa bis heute gesammelt worden. Stets spricht die Sagengestalt die Landessprache, und immer neue Drucke des Volksbuches fügen hinzu, wo Ahasverus denn nun letztthin gesehen worden sei. In Basel, Bern, Ulm und anderen Orten, wo Ahasverus angeblich auftauchte, wurden Besuchern in der Vergangenheit dessen zurückgelassene übergroßen Schuhe gezeigt. Ahasverus zog es auch in die neue Welt; denn – so will die Überlieferung wissen – „in Salt Lake City hat er noch 1868 dem Mormonen O'Grady den Talmud überreicht.“

Die Sage vom von Jesus zur Unsterblichkeit verdamnten Sünder ist gleichwohl viel älter. Quellen des 13. Jahrhunderts weisen in verschiedenen europäischen Ländern auf die Legende hin. Im Deutschen, Polnischen und Tschechischen ist es der „Ewige Jude“, in den meisten anderen europäischen Sprachen ist es der wandernde, unstete Jude, bisweilen mit einem überlieferten typischen Schmähnamen. In vielen Legenden tritt er zugleich an verschiedenen Orten auf. Doch ist die Legende bei den slawischen Völkern weniger verbreitet als in Nord-, West-, Mittel- und Südeuropa. Deutlich wird allein schon durch den Namen Ahasverus, dass es sich um nichtjüdische Ursprünge der Legende handelt; denn in der Esther-Rolle jüdischer Überlieferung ist Ahasverus der Name des persischen Königs. Warum der Verfasser des Volksbuches von 1602 ausgerechnet auf den Namen Ahasverus für die Gestalt des „Ewigen Juden“ verfiel, werden wir nie wissen. Vielleicht klang der Name aus der Bibel einfach altertümlich, fremd auf jeden Fall war er lang und hat keine Entsprechung in einem der üblichen Namen des christlichen Abendlands.

Die Betonung der Ewigkeit in der Gestalt des Juden weist nicht nur auf christliche eschatologische Glaubenssätze hin, sondern darüber hinaus auf das Motiv der Lebenskraft und Überlebensfähigkeit des jüdischen Volkes, das in einer Mischung aus volkstümlichen Aberglauben und christlicher Mythologie verklärt werden musste. „Ahasver, eine Art neuer Kain, personifiziert die Geschichte des jüdischen Volkes, und seine Geschichte ist so ambivalent wie die zeitgenössischen Haltungen gegenüber den Juden. Einerseits bezeugt die Figur des Ahasver das christliche Evangelium durch die ihm auferlegte Strafe, andererseits ruft er Sympathie und Mitleid hervor.“ Es handelt sich hier um einen Dualismus von im 16. Jahrhundert verbreiteten theologischen

antijüdischen Vorstellungen und neuen eschatologischen Hoffnungen, nach denen die Juden durch die Taufe eine Wiedergeburt erfahren konnten. Gleichzeitig impliziert dieser Dualismus aber auch, dass selbst eine Bekehrung zum Christentum die Juden nicht erlöse, ihr Schicksal unumgänglich sei. Volksbücher im Taschenformat sorgten im 18. Jahrhundert für weite Verbreitung dieser Vorstellungen, wovon sich intellektuelle Kreise der Aufklärung wiederum distanzieren und den „Edlen Juden“ als bildungsbürgerliche Alternative zum „Ewigen Juden“ entdeckten. Für die Romantik passte Ahasver so recht in die Reihe der großen tragischen Gestalten der Menschheitsgeschichte, und als Reaktion auf die Ära der Revolution bot Ahasverus eine fortschrittsorientierte Metapher: „Das menschliche Fegefeuer, das Ahasver zu durchwandern hatte, konnte als Zeichen der Versuchung und Unwägbarkeiten verstanden werden, die die Menschheit auf dem Wege des Fortschritts durchzustehen hatte.“ Schließlich war Ahasverus ja Schuhmacher gewesen, wahrlich Repräsentant des dritten Standes, der unteren Schichten, die der irdischen Erlösung harren. Allerdings gab es neben utopischen Lesarten auch ausgesprochen reaktionäre Deutungen des Bildes des Ahasver. Bei Wagner wabert Todessehnsucht durch ein Volk, das alle anderen geschichtlich überlebt hat, in seiner Tradition erstarrt und als Parasit am Körper seiner Gastvölker dahinvegetiert. Seine Erlösung sei der Tod. Das konnte man als Aufgabe jüdischer Identität verstehen, aber – so wie Wagners nationalsozialistische Nachläufer Jahrzehnte später – auch in einem anderen, antihumanistischen und tödlichen Sinne. Im großen Brockhaus von 1930 heißt es denn auch zeitgemäß, Ahasverus sei „ein symbolisches Abbild seines unruhigen, heimatlosen Volkes“. In moderneren Interpretationen wird so auch nicht mehr das religiöse Motiv betont, sondern nach den ruhelosen Eigenschaften des jüdischen Volkes gesucht. Zugleich findet sich das Motiv des ewigen Wanderers, des zum ewigen Leben verdamnten Individuums auch in den Mythen und Sagen vieler anderer Völker.

Parallel zu den Volksbüchern entwickelte sich der „Ewige Jude“ zu einem wichtigen Motiv der bildenden Kunst, vor allem in Holzschnitten. Später findet sich Gestaltungen bei Doré, Kaulbach, Gottlieb und anderen, die sich zum Teil antisemitischer Stereotypisierung entziehen und das Motiv des nachdenklichen Reisenden, auf der Suche Befindenden dem antisemitischen Bild des schmutzigen Zotteljuden entgegensetzen. Im 19. Jahrhundert verbindet sich das Bild des wandernden Juden mit Darstellungen jüdischer Hausierer. Wanderstab, Umhängetasche, langer Bart und Hakennase wiederholen sich in diesen Abbildungen, die so manches unschuldige Kind in Angst und Schrecken versetzten und an alle möglichen Legenden des bösen „Schwarzen Mannes“ erinnerten.

Untern anderen finden sich in der französischen, niederländischen, englischen Volksdichtung Beispiele für diesen Stoff. Ahasverus entsprach so ganz dem romantischen Bedürfnis, der Todessehnsucht und dem Weltschmerz Ausdruck zu verleihen. „Als der Unwandelbare im Wandel der Zeiten ist er berufen, die Bilder der Entwicklung der Menschheit an sich vorüberziehen zu lassen, Zeitgemälde und Weltgemälde zu entwerfen, die Geschichte zu deuten oder zu beurteilen.“ Wie nicht anders zu erwarten, hat Ahasverus ergiebige Begegnungen mit Judas, dem Fliegenden Holländer, dem Wilden Jäger, Faust und anderen. Romane, Novellen, Dramen, Gedichte suchen, teils mit judenfeindlicher, teils mit wohlwollender Absicht, Ahasverus kulturell

heimisch zu machen. Goethe, Schubart, Schlegel, Brentano, Chamisso, Auerbach, Lenau, Hauff unter den deutschsprachigen Schriftstellern; Eugène Sue, Dumas, Richepin, Quinet unter den französischen; Byron, Shelley, Twain unter den englischsprachigen und viele andere in weiteren europäischen Ländern. Die Schriftsteller sorgten dafür, dass Ahasverus seine Wanderung auch im 19. Jahrhundert munter fortsetzen konnte. Dass der Kampf um die Emanzipation der Juden nicht so ganz der romantischen Verklärung entsprach, scherte die meisten Schriftsteller recht wenig. Das geheimnisvolle Bild des Juden im Kopf kontrastierte recht anheimelnd mit den wirklichen Juden, die das so gar nicht romantische Ghetto verlassen wollten.

Wer jedoch nur das negative, denunziatorische Motiv im Bild vom „Ewigen Juden“ sehen will, der sei beruhigt. Der Schriftsteller Stephan Heym hat 1981 in seinem vorzüglichen Roman Ahasver der Gestalt des „Ewigen Juden“ eine utopische und mithin positive Wendung gegeben, die sich an die nichtantisemitischen Variationen des Motivs vom „Ewigen Juden“ anlehnt. Ahasverus ist nicht einfach nur ein Wanderer der Zeiten, eine Art galaktisch-irdischer Handels- und Zeitreisender, sondern tritt aus dem Schatten der antisemitischen Legende. Er habe sich, so Stefan Heym im Roman, Jesus gegenüber so verhalten, weil er ihn nicht am Leiden, am Opfer zugrunde gehen lassen wollte, sondern ihn erwecken wollte: Sohn Gottes in der Welt, in der heruntergekommenen Gesellschaft des damaligen Palästinas unter römischer Besatzung zu sein und die Juden zum Aufstand zu bewegen. Und das wäre natürlich ein Aufstand gegen Gott, wenn doch die gesellschaftlichen gottgegebenen Verhältnisse so miserabel seien. Ahasverus ist hier nicht Symbol christlichen Leidens, Opfer, das sich der Erlösung entgegensehnt, sondern die menschliche Verkörperung des Widerstandsgeistes, einer Theologie der Veränderung, des aufständischen Zeitgeistes quer durch die Jahrhunderte. Um die Verbesserung des Hier und Heute geht es, um die Erlösung der Menschen durch die Menschen selbst. Er ist der Geist, der stets verneint, um das Neue, das Gute zu schaffen. Er will verändern, aber nicht wie Mephisto das vorhandene Schlechte bewahren und das Gute zerstören, sondern verändern, um Neues zu schaffen. Er will, wie es im Hebräischen heißt, *Tikkun Ha'Olam*, die grundlegende Veränderung, die Revolutionierung, die Reformierung, die Besserung der menschlichen Gesellschaft bewirken.

De begraafplaats van Praag

Umberto Eco

Door Lisa Kuitert

Umberto Eco schreef een meesterlijke roman over de rol van beroepsintrinsicanten in de opkomst van het antisemitisme.

Het is altijd leuk om in het hoofd te kruipen van een slecht mens, en Simonini, de hoofdpersoon in Umberto Eco's nieuwe roman *De begraafplaats van Praag* is slecht. Heel slecht. Hij is een sjacheraar, een onderkruiper, een leugenaar maar bovenal: een vervalser. Uit oude boeken scheurt hij de onbedrukte pagina's en gebruikt die om – voor wie er maar voor betaalt – documenten op te stellen die oud en dus authentiek lijken. Hij begint daarmee rond 1850, als jongeman in de leer bij een notaris. Dan gaat het alleen nog maar om testamenten, maar gaandeweg krijgen zijn vervalsingen een meer politiek karakter.

Umberto Eco heeft zijn roman opgezet volgens de beste negentiende-eeuwse tradities. Er is sprake van een alwetende verteller, die ons het levensverhaal van Simonini inloodt. Eco heeft zich, overigens net als zijn hoofdpersoon, laten inspireren door de negentiende-eeuwse feuilletonisten die romans schreven in afleveringen. De lezer abonneerde zich op een verhaal waarvan wekelijks een nieuwe aflevering uitkwam. Dat eindigde vaak met een cliffhanger, zodat de lezer reikhalzend uitkeek naar het vervolg. Schrijvers kregen betaald per aflevering, zodat ze er belang bij hadden het verhaal breed op te zetten, met steeds nieuwe verhaallijnen en personages. Zij schreven niet om de kunst maar om den brode, net als Simonini. Het ging om 'ijselijke' geschiedenissen, waarin complotten, duistere machten, wulpse vrouwen en dieven in donkere steegjes de lezers in vervoering brachten. Vaak met verwijzingen naar werkelijke gebeurtenissen en bestaande personen, waardoor de lezers extra geboeid raakten. De negentiende-eeuwse lezers waren gemakkelijk te beïnvloeden, want wie wist wat waarheid was? Ook in Eco's

roman zijn er voortdurend verwijzingen naar negentiende-eeuwse actualiteit, vaak geniaal vervlochten in de verzinsels van zijn hoofdpersoon. Het is fascinerende lectuur, zeker, maar de vraag wat waar is en wat niet, houdt je bij de les.



Foto: Remo Cassili / HH

Nep-fabrieksmeisjes

Simonini heeft een gespleten persoonlijkheid, gevolg van de slechte daden die hij niet onder ogen durft te zien. Zijn familie komt uit Piemonte, Italië, en zijn grootvader bracht hem al jong een rabiate vorm van antisemitisme bij. De logica van opa was onverbiddelijk: Joden die geen traditionele kleding dragen en ogenschijnlijk geassimileerd zijn, zijn juist gevaarlijk, want ze zijn ‘vermomd’. Simonini draagt dit antisemitisme – ook al heeft hij nog nooit met een Jood kennisgemaakt – zijn leven lang bij zich, en als het maar even kan, geeft hij er uiting aan in zijn vervalsingen. Zijn vaste opdrachtgever wordt gaandeweg de overheid – de Italiaanse, aanvankelijk. Hij moet documenten fabriceren die nu eens de jezuïeten, dan weer de vrijmetselaars belasteren. Zijn eigen preoccupaties brengen hem op het idee om de Joodse begraafplaats in Praag – die hij slechts kent van horen zeggen – erin te betrekken. Die begraafplaats blijkt later nog meermalen in zijn verzinsels dienst te kunnen doen als decor voor sinistere bijeenkomsten, bijvoorbeeld een samenkost van Joodse leiders die de wereldmacht

willen overnemen. De Joden, zo redeneert hij, gebruiken de christenen als een vruchtbare akker, ze laten hen eerst goed geld verdienen om, als de tijd daar is, te oogsten en dat geld in te pikken.

Als Simonini gevraagd wordt om naar Sicilië te gaan om het gezag te ondermijnen van Garibaldi, de Italiaanse voorman en nationalist, worden zijn belevenissen complexer en gaat hij zich extremer gedragen. Hier zakt de roman een beetje weg in een moeras van verwickelingen, die in elk geval leiden tot moord en doodslag. Er gaat steeds meer bloed kleven aan de handen van de verder zo flegmatieke Simonini. Het enige waar hij zich aan te buiten gaat, zijn copieuze maaltijden die door Eco met opvallend veel genoeg tot in de kleinste details beschreven worden: ‘zalm met bieslook en artisjokken met Javaanse peper, rumsorbet en kruidenkoekjes, natuurlijk met twee flessen oude bourgogne’.

Simonini neemt de wijk naar Parijs – waar nog veel meer heerlijke gerechten op hem liggen te wachten. Hij is nu fulltime ‘indicateur’ en verdient goed geld. Eco laat hem met veel fraaie details het negentiende-eeuwse Parijs verkennen, zoals de brasserie femmes, een soort hoerenkasten, en de vele passages met elk hun eigen sfeer. De Passage Jouffroy bijvoorbeeld, waar heren op leeftijd, de zogeheten suiveurs, naartoe gaan om de fabrieksmeisjes die daar flaneren te bespioneren. Alleen, het zijn geen fabrieksmeisjes: ze doen alsof, om de perverse genoegens van de bemiddelde heren te bevredigen, en sommige meisjes kunnen daar zelfs van leven als de heren hun wat geld toestoppen. Simonini volgt die heren soms, en noteert alvast hun adres zodat hij ze in geval van nood nog eens kan chanteren, ‘je weet maar nooit’. Uit nieuwsgierigheid gaat hij naar de Porte de Clignancourt waar de lompenhandelaren eten in een nattevoetenrestaurant, zo genoemd omdat de clientèle buiten staat te wachten. Wie aan de beurt is, mag voor een stuiver een vork in een pan soep steken om er iets eetbaars uit te vissen. Hij komt in de Chateau Rouge, waar handelaren in foetussen de bij ziekenhuizen opgehaalde lichaampjes verkopen aan medische studenten en andere geïnteresseerden.

Het antisemitisme van Simonini wordt steeds sterker en houdt Eco’s roman tot de laatste bladzijde in zijn greep. De Dreyfus-affaire komt voorbij, en ronduit spannend wordt het als Simonini met Leo Taxil een vervolgverhaal schrijft over duivels en satanisten, waarbij zij handig

gebruikmaken van de hersenspinsels van de geesteszieke zieners Diana. Simonini doodt haar in een woede-uitbarsting en legt haar lichaam naast de overige slachtoffers die hij in de afgelopen jaren heeft gemaakt, in het riool dat een van de nieuwigheden is waar Parijs in die jaren prat op gaat. Een andere nieuwigheid, het ondergrondse gangenstelsel dat de metro moest gaan worden, wordt door Simonini handig ingepast in een van zijn gruwelverhalen over de Joden: die zouden de ondergrondse aanleggen alleen maar om zo de stad te kunnen opblazen.

Morbide fantasie

In Simonini's verzinsels over de Joden herkennen we de Protocollen van de Wijzen van Zion, het geschrift dat op dezelfde leugenachtige wijze in elkaar is gezet. Dat document heeft de nationaal-socialisten in de kaart gespeeld, en er zijn nog altijd mensen die het voor waar houden, zoals je op internet kunt zien. In werkelijkheid was het eind negentiende eeuw in elkaar geflanst door de Russische geheime dienst, die het gebruikte om een zondebok aan te wijzen voor de grote ellende waar het land in terechtgekomen was. Eco heeft aan het ontstaan van die Protocollen een voorgeschiedenis toegevoegd, al is het een fictieve, want van alle personages in dit boek is uitgerekend Simonini verzonnen. Toch maakt Eco aannemelijk, door het combineren van bestaande feuilletonisten en intriges, dat het zo is gegaan. Dat het antisemitisme ontstaan is door beroepsintriganten, die met hun morbide fantasie – omgevormd tot sappig proza – het publiek in de ban hielden en langzaam vergiftigden met Jodenhaat.

Met De begraafplaats van Praag heeft Umberto Eco een bij vlagen geniale roman afgeleverd, beter dan zijn boeken Baudolino en De slinger van Foucault. De roman is geestig en vernuftig, prachtig van stijl, erudiet zoals we van hem gewend zijn, maar dit keer zit er ook iets verontrustends in, iets wat raakt aan actuele maatschappelijke kwesties. Het antisemitisme is terug, zeker, maar de verontrusting zit dieper. Wat Eco laat zien, is hoe gemakkelijk je waanideeën kunt verspreiden, en hoezeer we daarom onze eigen geschiedschrijving, onze cultuur, zouden moeten wantrouwen. Hebben er niet altijd en overal Simonini's bestaan die ons zand in de ogen strooiden? Of overheden die Simonini's inhuurden en betaalden?

De roman is in het najaar in Italië verschenen en heeft daar al veel losgemaakt. Begrijpelijk, omdat de historische setting door Italiaanse lezers gemakkelijk herkend zal worden. In de

gauwigheid toegepast op Nederland, zou je kunnen denken aan een roman waarin wordt aangetoond dat het hele koningshuis in de oorlog fout was, of dat Multatuli nooit bestaan heeft. Toch valt men in Italië vooral over de unverfroren antisemitische complottheorieën: brengt het de mensen niet op wilde ideeën van ‘waar rook is...’? Die angst is wel te begrijpen, maar brengt je bij de vraag of dan soms alle romans waarin nare dingen staan geweerd moeten worden. Nee natuurlijk. Ook kun je je afvragen of Eco zich niet te gemakkelijk afmaakt van de vraag wie moreel verantwoordelijk is voor het ontstaan van antisemitisme. Hij legt de oorsprong ervan bij een paar slechteriken en de rest van de wereld kan gerust ademen. Ook daar past een weerwoord op, want als hij de oorsprong niet bij die paar individuen zou leggen maar bij de goegemeente, dan zou hij suggereren dat er misschien tóch een algemene geldigheid schuilt in Jodenhaat.

De begraafplaats van Praag is niet een roman waar neonazi's – zappend door het boek – hun voordeel mee zullen doen. Je kunt er niet zo gemakkelijk wat losse flarden uit lezen. En na lezing van het hele boek kun je niet anders concluderen dan dat Eco met deze grootse roman heeft laten zien dat vooroordelen uit eigenbelang worden verzonnen, en dat je de agitators en hitsers met hun pamfletten, praatjes, hun televisiespotjes en films ten diepste moet wantrouwen.

Eugène Sue

Een beroemde feuilletonschrijver in de negentiende eeuw was Eugène Sue (1804-1857). Hij schreef over Parijs, over armoede en sociale ellende en was ook in Nederland mateloos populair, onder meer met het feuilleton *De wandelende Jood*, dat niet tegen Joden is gericht, maar tegen de Jezuïeten. Ook zijn bekende boek *Les Mystères du peuple* was niet antisemitisch maar tegen de kerk en de regering gericht en werd daarom in 1856 verboden. Dit boek inspireerde Maurice Joly, die ook voorkomt in Eco's roman, bij zijn *Dialogue aux enfers*, dat op zijn beurt weer de feuilletonist Goedsche tot het schrijven van zijn antisemitische *Biarritz* bracht.

De protocollen

De Protocollen van de wijzen van Zion zouden in 1897 zijn opgesteld in Basel door de Russische geheime dienst. De tekst was gebaseerd op *Biarritz*, een feuilleton van de Duitse schrijver

Hermann Goedsche, die publiceerde onder het pseudoniem Sir John Retcliffe. Hij was in dienst van de Pruisische geheime dienst en speelt onder zijn eigen naam een belangrijke rol in Eco's boek. Zijn Biarritz was in feite plagiaat van een boek dat in Frankrijk uit de handel genomen was, namelijk de politiek getinte satire *Dialogue aux enfers entre Machiavel et Montesquieu* ou *La politique au XIXe siècle* van Maurice Joly uit 1864. Joly's boek was niet gericht tegen de Joden, maar tegen Napoleon III. Goedsche gebruikte de intrige, maar voegde er zelf een abject antisemitisch hoofdstuk aan toe, dat handelde over een Joodse samenzwering op het Joodse kerkhof te Praag.

Vrijmetselaars

In de negentiende eeuw lagen de vrijmetselaars onder vuur. Regeringen en de katholieke kerk moesten niets hebben van dit geheime, in de achttiende eeuw ontstane broederschap, dat de kerkelijke dogma's ter discussie stelde. Vanwege het geheime karakter was de vrijmetselarij een geliefd onderwerp voor samenzweringstheorieën, zoals die van de schrijver Leo Taxil. Volgens sommigen waren de vrijmetselaars en de Joden er gezamenlijk op uit om de wereldmacht te veroveren. Ook in de De protocollen van de wijzen van Zion worden de vrijmetselaars als handlangers van de Joden geschetst. Er is zelfs een woord voor: het judeo-maçonniek complot.

Jezuïeten

De Jezuïeten zijn leden van een katholieke religieuze orde, opgericht in de zestiende eeuw. De leefregel is onder meer absolute trouw aan de Paus. Het is geen kloosterorde, en opvallend is ook dat Jezuïeten niet afgezonderd in kloosters leven maar 'gewone' beroepen vervullen, zoals leraar of advocaat. De Jezuïeten zijn in de geschiedenis meermalen beticht van samenzweringen. Zelf hadden ze het op hun beurt gemunt op de vrijmetselaars, onder meer in het veelgelezen geschrift *Mémoires à servir pour l'histoire du jacobinisme* van de Jezuïet Augustin Barruel (1797-1799). In Eco's roman is Simonini grootgebracht met de denkbeelden van Barruel.

Garibaldi

Al vroeg in de negentiende eeuw ontstond in Italië de wens om meer eenheid te smeden in het door ministaatjes gekenmerkte gebied. Het geheime genootschap van de carbonari, geïnspireerd

op de vrijmetselaars, slaagde daar niet in, maar de Piëmontees Giuseppe Garibaldi (1807-1882) wel, zij het niet zonder moeite. Hij deserteerde om de nationalisten te kunnen steunen en moest daarna in ballingschap. Frankrijk en Oostenrijk, en ook de Paus streden tegen de Italiaanse nationalisten. Toen Garibaldi in 1860 terugkeerde, lukte het hem met zijn leger van vrijwilligers, bijgenaamd ‘roodhemden’, de diverse staatjes te verenigen onder het bewind van Victor Emanuel, de eerste koning van Italië. Het koninkrijk Italië was daarmee in 1861 een feit.

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Traditions orales sur le Juif errant en Dauphiné et Savoie

Alice Joisten

DIFFUSÉE PRINCIPALEMENT par la littérature de colportage, l'histoire du Juif errant est largement représentée dans les traditions orales, et les enquêtes de Charles Joisten en Dauphiné et Savoie – qui sont à la source de ce travail – ont mis à jour d'assez nombreux récits sur ce personnage qui s'y trouve montré sous de multiples aspects.

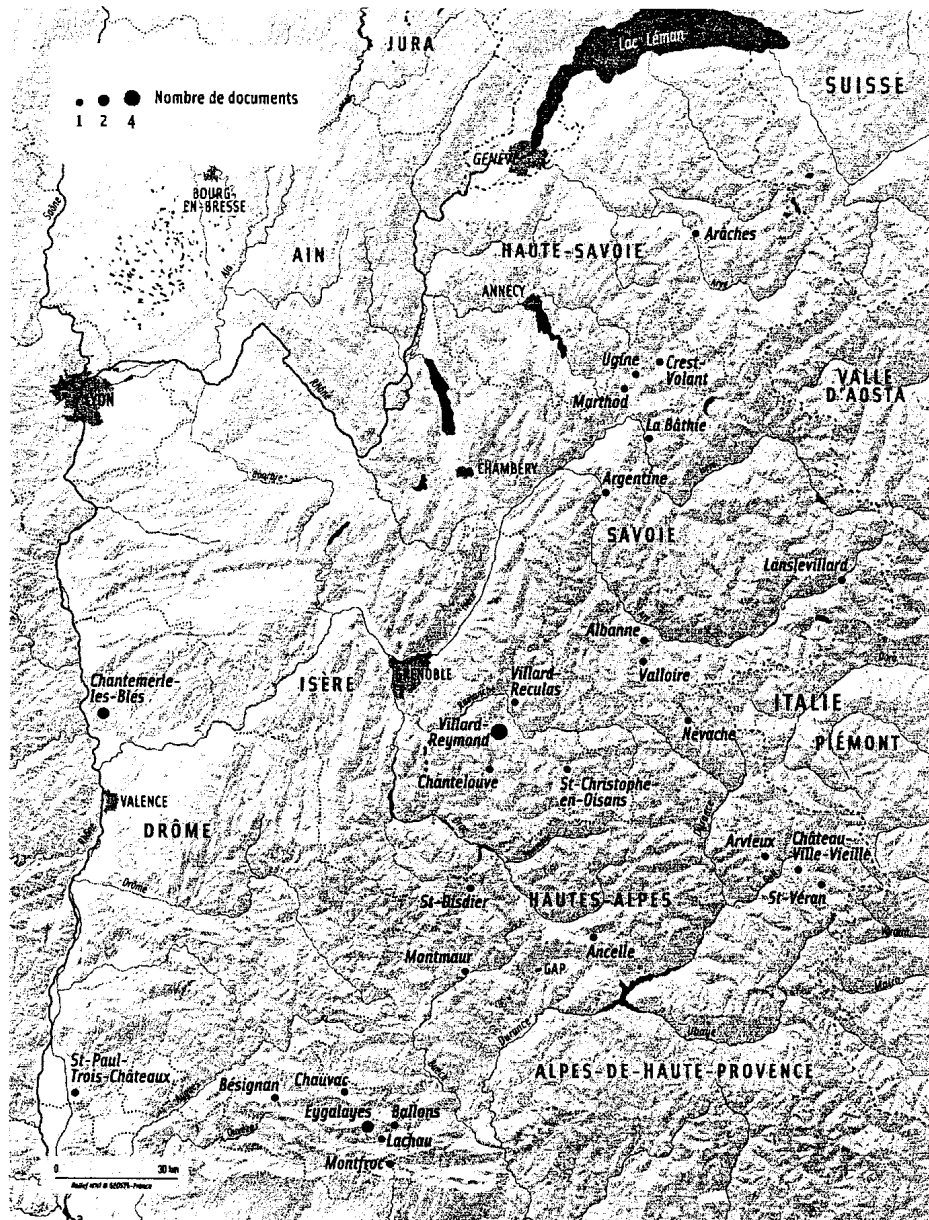
Le récit fondateur de l'histoire du Juif errant est un texte, publié pour la première fois en Allemagne en 1602 (en France en 1605) ⁽¹⁾ sous la forme d'une « lettre » décrivant la rencontre que l'on fit de lui dans une église ⁽²⁾:

L'auteur de la lettre se recommande d'un théologien dont il donne le nom, Paul d'Eitzen, qui lui raconta « qu'étudiant à Wittemberg en hiver, l'an 1542 [...] le prochain dimanche au sermon, il vit, vis-à-vis de la chaire du prédicateur, un grand homme ayant de longs cheveux qui lui pendaient sur les épaules, et pieds nus, lequel oyait le sermon avec [...] dévotion [...]. Il n'avait autres habits, en ce temps-là d'hiver, que des chausses à la marine, qui lui allaient jusque sur les pieds; il semblait, à le voir, âgé de cinquante ans [...]. [Il] dit qu'il était Juif de nation, nommé Ahasvérus, cordonnier de son métier, qu'il avait été présent à la mort de Jésus-Christ, et depuis ce temps-là, toujours demeuré en vie, pendant lequel temps il avait été en plusieurs pays [...]. [Il raconta] que, du temps de Jésus-Christ, il demeurait en Jérusalem et qu'il persécutait Jésus-Christ, l'estimant un abuseur, l'ayant ouï tenir pour tel aux grands prêtres et scribes, et n'en ayant plus particulièrement connaissance, fit tout pour l'exterminer; que finalement il fut un de ceux qui le menèrent devant le grand prêtre, et l'accusèrent, et crièrent qu'on le crucifiât [...].

- (1) Des états antérieurs de cette légende mettant en scène un personnage (nommé Malchus, Cartaphile, Jean Boutedieu...), qui avait frappé le Christ lors de sa Passion, et fut puni pour cela de l'impossibilité de mourir, sont attestés dès le VI^e siècle. Voir G. MILIN, 1997, p. 13-64.
- (2) Ce récit est publié *in extenso* dans E. KNECHT (1977, p. 24-27), ainsi que dans G. MILIN (1997, p. 73-75), d'après P.-V.-P. CAYET, *Chronologie septénaire...* (J. Richer, 1605, p. 442 *sq.*). Il s'agit d'une traduction de la publication allemande parue en 1602, *Kurtze Beschreibung und Erzählung von einem Juden mit Namen Ahasverus...* Il avait déjà été publié par Ch. NISARD en 1864 avec une graphie modernisée, p. 480-483. C'est ce dernier texte que nous utilisons pour les extraits qui suivent.

Le Monde alpin et rhodanien, 3^e-4^e trimestres 2004, pp. 27 à 40.

Localisation
des récits recueillis
sur le Juif errant en
Dauphiné et Savoie



Notre Seigneur Jésus-Christ, passant chargé de sa croix, s'appuya contre la maison du Juif, lequel montrant son zèle courut à lui et le repoussa avec injures, lui montrant le lieu du supplice où il devait aller. Lors Jésus-Christ le regarda ferme et lui dit ces mots: "Je m'arrêterai et reposerai; et tu chemineras! Aussitôt le Juif mit son enfant à terre et ne put s'arrêter en sa maison. [...] Depuis ce temps-là, il avait toujours été errant en pays étrangers [...]. Or, il ne savait ce que Dieu voulait faire de lui, de le retenir si longtemps en cette misérable vie, et s'il le voulait peut-être réserver jusqu'au jour du jugement, pour servir de témoin de la mort et passion de Jésus-Christ, pour toujours convaincre les infidèles; de sa part, il désirait qu'il plût à Dieu de l'appeler [...]. »

Cette histoire fut relayée au fil des ans dans de nombreux imprimés. Des images et des complaintes la répandirent dès le XVII^e siècle, jusqu'à ce qu'au XIX^e siècle l'une de ces complaintes devienne célèbre entre toutes. Très diffusée par l'imprimé, cette dernière est sans doute – ainsi que les images –, une source importante des représentations du Juif errant exprimées dans les récits populaires⁽³⁾.

Dans les récits anciens, le personnage se nomme Ahasverus, Isaac Laquedem dans la complainte du XIX^e siècle, Boudedeo en Bretagne... Dans la tradition populaire alpine il ne porte pas de nom propre et on le désigne toujours sous le nom de Juif errant.

ATTESTATIONS ET SOUVENIRS DE LA COMPLAINTE

Le récit émouvant de ce personnage condamné à l'errance est pris parfois, peut-on dire, comme « parole d'évangile », puisque certains témoignages évoquent une rencontre du Juif errant ressentie comme authentique. L'abbé Pont écrivait en 1872⁽⁴⁾ :

« La légende du Juif-Errant est très populaire en Tarentaise. Il y a environ trente ans, on le vit, dit-on, passer à la Bâthie: sa chevelure soyeuse, d'un blond foncé, descendait avec majesté sur ses épaules; les traits de son visage étaient très accentués; il avait le regard perçant, une longue barbe argentée, une forte stature, le pas noble; il fredonnait d'un ton mélancolique les vers suivants:

<i>Dzai thin sous dein ma borsa,</i>	J'ai cinq sous dans ma bourse,
<i>Vaika tota ma ressorsa;</i>	Voilà toute ma ressource:
<i>Ein tô loué, ein tô teimp,</i>	En tout lieu, en tout temps,
<i>Dzein ai todzor à tant.</i>	J'en ai toujours autant.» ⁽⁵⁾

On notera qu'en Tarentaise c'est en patois que, vers 1850, ces vers étaient chantés, preuve de la grande assimilation du texte de la légende par la tradition orale.

On peut actuellement trouver la complainte, plus ou moins complète – la version intégrale compte 24 couplets –, dans plusieurs livres de chansons régionaux⁽⁶⁾.

(3) Pour l'inventaire et l'analyse des publications existantes sur le thème du Juif errant, voir E. KNECHT (1977) et G. MILIN (1997). Pour les traditions populaires, voir P. SÉBILLOT (1904-1907), I, 20, 217-218, 253, 313; II, 55, 60; III, 219. Les traditions bretonnes sont rassemblées dans G. MILIN, p. 119-131. Pour les versions françaises de la complainte, voir P. COIRAULT, t. III (à paraître), n° 8609 *Le Juif errant* et 8610 *Le cordonnier errant* (renseignement aimablement communiqué par Georges Delarue).

(4) Abbé G. PONT, p. 45.

(5) Ce sont les paroles de la complainte, légèrement modifiées. Voici le couplet correspondant (d'après la version publiée dans Oncle Edmond, cf. *infra*, p. 188-189) : « *Je n'ai point de ressource, / Ni maison et ni bien; / J'ai cinq sous dans ma bourse, / Voilà tous mes moyens. / En tous lieux en tous temps / J'en ai toujours autant.* »

(6) Outre les versions répertoriées dans Coirault (voir note 3), on trouve localement: une version complète (24 couplets) avec musique notée dans un recueil de chansons qui se dit « Petit écho savoyard de la Lyrique traditionnelle du Pays de France » (ONCLE EDMOND, 1946, p. 188-189). Tout au sud du Dauphiné, dans le Queyras, une version à laquelle il manque quelques couplets a été relevée dans un cahier de chansons (A. BOURGUE, 1968, p. 66-69). Pour la Suisse romande, Coirault mentionne A. ROSSAT (p. 67-67, une version complète avec les variantes de deux autres, trois mélodies notées), et en Piémont F. GHISI (p. 10-11, musique notée, paroles fragmentaires). En Val d'Aoste, deux versions fragmentaires mais avec musique notée se trouvent dans *Les chants et les chansons valdôtains*, t. II, p. 482-483.

Dans les années 1960, Charles Joisten a encore rencontré deux informateurs qui la connaissaient: à Arvieux dans les Hautes-Alpes (1962) et à Allemont en Isère (1963). Plus récemment encore, à Orcières (Hautes-Alpes), Patrick Mazellier a non seulement découvert trois cahiers de chansons où elle était recopiée et une feuille de colportage, mais il l'a enregistrée auprès d'une chanteuse en 1996 (voir sa transcription en annexe).

Les deux brefs documents qui suivent renvoient à l'explication « historique » de la malédiction du Juif errant:

- Le Juif errant avait désobéi au Bon Dieu. En punition il devait marcher toute sa vie sans s'arrêter. (Saint-Véran, Hautes-Alpes, 1951)
- Il y a 80 ans environ, le Juif errant, de passage à Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux, avait pris un pain à la devanture de la boulangerie Benoit, sise Grande Rue, en donnant ses cinq sous. (Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux, Drôme, 1960)

RENCONTRES

Comme un siècle plus tôt en Tarentaise, quelques récits recueillis par C.J. font état d'une rencontre avec le Juif errant tenue pour authentique par les informateurs⁽⁷⁾. Trois proviennent de Savoie (Maurienne), un des Hautes-Alpes (Queyras), un de la Drôme. Les descriptions du personnage concordent entre elles et avec celle des récits imprimés: grande taille, longue barbe, marche sans fin. On peut rappeler ici un couplet de la complainte, que les documents oraux vont plus ou moins illustrer: *« Je traverse les mers, / Les rivières, les ruisseaux, / Les forêts, les déserts, / Les montagnes, les coteaux, / Les plaines et les vallons, / Tous chemins me sont bons. »*

Ici, le passage du Juif errant se fait dans des lieux familiers aux témoins:

- Des habitants de Lanslevillard prétendaient avoir rencontré le Juif errant au col du Mont Cenis. (Lanslevillard, Savoie, 1965)
- Une femme du Point-Rogerel (commune de Valloire) avait vu passer le Juif errant. Il avait une longue barbe et un grand bâton. Il lui avait dit, en passant, qu'il était encore obligé de marcher pendant quarante jours sans s'arrêter. (Valloire, Savoie, 1961)
- Un habitant d'Albannette rencontra un jour, près de l'oratoire de saint Eldrade, le Juif errant en personne, qui portait une barbe blanche lui descendant jusqu'aux genoux et couvert d'un vieux manteau. Il l'invita à venir se reposer chez lui:
 - Vous êtes bien si fatigué, vous venez de si loin, vous êtes déjà si vieux, venez vous reposer un moment chez moi.
 L'étranger lui a répondu:
 - Ça ne m'est pas permis, je suis le Juif errant. J'ai refusé l'hospitalité à Jésus et il ne m'est plus permis de me reposer dans une maison chrétienne.
 Il a filé. (Albanne, Savoie 1962)

(7) Notons que les anciens récits imprimés donnent pour authentique l'histoire du Juif errant, et réels ses passages en maintes villes.

• Vers 1810, un oncle de ma mère, qui était gamin, montait avec son âne chercher du foin au plateau de Roux et, arrivé au lieu-dit la Combe, il a rencontré un homme bien vieux qui avait une longue barbe blanche et qui lui a dit :

– Ne t’effraye pas mon enfant, tu diras à tes parents que tu as vu le Juif errant. C’est la cinquième fois que je fais le tour du monde. L’âne effrayé fit un écart et le Juif errant continua sa route. Depuis, plus personne n’en a entendu parler. (Château-Ville-Vieille, Hautes-Alpes, 1962)

• Au lieu-dit le Quatre (commune de Séderon), dans une maison seule au bord de la route, une dame qui veillait en attendant le retour de son mari, entendit tout à coup du bruit et la porte, qui n’était pas fermée à clef, s’ouvrit et laissa passer un homme d’une taille exceptionnelle; elle n’en avait encore jamais vu d’aussi grand. Une fourche sur l’épaule, il fit le tour de la pièce sans rien dire et ressortit. On dit que c’était le Juif errant. (Ballons, Drôme, 1959)

LE JUIF ERRANT, UN GÉANT

Dans presque toutes les descriptions – et en conformité avec le texte imprimé le plus ancien –, le Juif errant est crédité d’une haute taille. Il est possible que l’imagerie populaire – qui a l’habitude d’agrandir les personnages à la dimension de la page et de rapetisser le paysage et les personnages mineurs – ait accentué dans les esprits cette caractéristique⁽⁸⁾. En tout cas, dans les récits traditionnels, plusieurs des aspects du Juif errant rejoignent ceux d’un autre géant populaire, Gargantua, que l’on représente souvent campé sur deux montagnes, asséchant une rivière ou un lac en y buvant⁽⁹⁾.

Thèmes « gargantuesques »

En Isère, les massifs montagneux du Trièves, de la Matheysine, ainsi que les versants de Chartreuse et de Belledonne qui longent le Grésivaudan connaissent de nombreux récits dans lesquels Gargantua se perche sur les monts et enjambe les vallées⁽¹⁰⁾. Curieusement, l’Oisans, dont les hautes montagnes forment l’autre ver-



«Le Juif-Errant», gravure, chez Pellerin à Épinal (début du XIX^e siècle)

(8) Telle est l’opinion de C. Joisten dans son étude « De quelques sources d’influences dans la formation des récits populaires alpestres », cf. p. 151-152.

(9) Cf. A. JOISTEN & C. ABRY, 1992, « Gargantua dans la Drôme ».

(10) Cf. enquêtes C. Joisten, documents inédits.

sant de Belledonne, connaît très peu de récits sur Gargantua et il semble que le Juif errant y ait « remplacé » ce dernier ⁽¹¹⁾.

- Le Juif errant mettait un pied sur chaque versant de la vallée de la Romanche et buvait à la rivière. (Villard-Reculas, 1957) [I/3605]*
- Le *Père Juif errant* était un grand géant: il mettait un pied sur le Signal de Pré-Gentil, l'autre sur Corbière et il buvait au Grand Riou. (Villard-Reymond, 1959) [I/3606]
- Mon oncle de Villard-Reymond me disait que le *Père Juif errant* mettait un pied sur l'Armentier (hameau de la commune de La Garde), l'autre sur la Gardette (ancienne mine d'or) et qu'il avait asséché la Romanche en buvant. (Villard-Reymond, 1959) [I/3609]
- Le Juif errant avait posé ses mains aux Fumas et ses pieds au Serre du Con et il avait bu à la cascade de l'Epoucha. (Saint-Christophe-en-Oisans, 1957) [I/3608]

La Drôme connaît aussi ces thèmes:

- Le Juif errant mettait un pied sur la montagne de Chamouse, l'autre sur celle de Pale (Eygalayes, 1960)
- ... un pied sur le Serre des Fourches, l'autre sur le Serre de Charbuisse, et il buvait au ruisseau de Caillette. (Chauvac, 1960)
- ... un pied de chaque côté du Rhône, et il buvait au Rhône. (Chantemerle-les-Blés, 1960)

Autre thème « gargantuesque »: le caillou dans la chaussure.

- Le Juif errant avait vidé ses sabots à Chavannes et à Chantemerle-les-Blés. Leur contenu a formé deux mamelons, dont l'un est celui du Malin, situé sur la commune de Chantemerle. (Chantemerle-les-Blés, Drôme, 1960)
- Un pied sur la pointe d'Arreu, l'autre sur les communaux d'Arâches, le Juif errant avait extrait de son soulier la Pierre à Laya et l'avait déposée dans les communaux d'Arâches, au-dessus des rochers de Balme. Selon une autre version, cette pierre a été déposée là au moment du déluge. (Arâches, Haute-Savoie, 1964)

Un géant marcheur

- Le Juif errant passait dans les maisons où il y avait des enfants. Il courait tout le temps, un bâton à la main. Il avait une très grosse langue qui l'empêchait de parler. (Chantelouve, Isère, 1959) [I/3603]

Il fait ici fonction de croquemitaine, également attestée à Villard-Reymond (Isère) [I/3612].

(11) P. SÉBILLOT, dans *Gargantua dans les traditions populaires*, signale un nombre (minime) de cas où le Juif errant est assimilé à Gargantua (p. 14; p. 117: thème du gravier dans la chaussure, voir plus loin; p. 176).

* Les références entre crochets que l'on rencontrera à la fin de quelques documents renvoient au répertoire informatisé du fonds Joisten, en cours de réalisation.

C'est dans la Drôme que la vision du marcheur éternel est la plus frappante. Il porte parfois les bottes magiques du conte :

- De quelqu'un qui marche vite, on dit qu'« il marche comme le Juif errant » (Séderon, Ferrassières, 1960), ou qu'« il a les jambes du Juif errant ». (Montfroc, 1960)
- Le Juif errant marchait très vite et faisait de très grands pas. Il avait des « bottes de sept lieues » (Eygalayes, 1960) ; il faisait de très grands pas, car il avait des « bottes de cent lieues ». (Lachau, 1960)

Empreintes dans le paysage

- Le Juif errant faisait de grands pas. Il allait d'une montagne à l'autre. En passant à Bésignan, il a laissé l'empreinte de son talon dans le rocher qui se trouve à quelques mètres de l'église, au vieux village, où on peut encore la voir. (Bésignan, Drôme, 1960)
- Mon père avait été placé comme berger dans sa jeunesse un peu partout dans le Champsaur. Il me racontait que le Juif errant, passant à un certain endroit (l'informateur ne se souvient pas du lieu), n'avait pu avancer plus loin et que l'âne, obligé de faire demi-tour, avait laissé l'empreinte de son pied marquée dans la pierre. (Ancelle, Hautes-Alpes, 1961)
- Le *pied du Juif errant* est une espèce d'empreinte sur une pierre du quartier de Roche Noire, situé près des chalets de Laval, commune de Névache. (Névache, Hautes-Alpes, 1956)

Des « empreintes » de cette sorte sont aussi souvent attribuées à Gargantua.

Un géant nocturne

- Le Juif errant avait une lanterne vitrée d'étoffe rousse pour s'éclairer. Lorsqu'il est passé dans le Dévoluy, il a mis un pied sur la Goudine (rive droite de la Souloise), l'autre sur Gampalou (rive gauche) et il est parti en direction de Beaufin. (Saint-Disdier, Hautes-Alpes, 1959)

Toujours dans la région du Dévoluy, un météore, phénomène nocturne plus souvent interprété comme une manifestation du *serpent volant*, est attribué au Juif errant.

- C'est ma mère qui nous racontait ça. Elle était de Gap. Alors elle nous disait que les domestiques se levaient l'été pour arroser les prairies vers onze heures, minuit. Des fois ils restaient jusqu'au jour. Une nuit qu'il faisait un beau clair de lune, les hommes avaient vu un gros machin, comme un gros ballon ; ils l'avaient vu traverser le ciel comme si ça allait vers Charance. Il paraît que c'était le Juif errant. Du côté d'Oriol (commune de Veynes) on l'avait aussi aperçu [...]. (Montmaur, Hautes-Alpes, 1954) ⁽¹²⁾

(12) La mise en relation du Juif errant avec des phénomènes météorologiques extraordinaires a été signalée par P.-L. JACOB dans *Curiosités de l'histoire des croyances populaires au Moyen Age*, Paris, 1859 : « *C'est le Juif-Errant qui passe !* disent, en se signant, les paysans de Bretagne et de Picardie [...] à l'occasion de ces coups de vent terribles qui s'élèvent soudain au milieu d'une atmosphère tranquille et par un beau jour d'été [...] » (Cité par G. MILIN, p. 118, note 27.)

En Savoie, près d'Albertville, un récit entendu dans l'enfance est resté imprimé dans l'esprit d'un informateur de 77 ans. Nocturne aussi, ce géant enjambait les châtaigniers, passant au-dessus d'un homme effrayé. Un tel témoignage, utilisé par « les vieux » comme récit d'avertissement, incitera les plus jeunes à ne pas sortir après l'angélus!

• Le Juif errant, c'était du coin. On a un coin, à la limite de Césarches, qui s'appelle le Touvet. Alors on avait un vieux qui était notre voisin, on l'appelait Jean-Gustin (Vivenza). Moi j'avais sept, huit ans quand il est décédé, vers 1910.

Alors ce vieux il avait des propriétés, des champs à cet endroit-là. Puis un soir, il s'est trouvé à travailler après l'angélus – parce qu'ils sonnaient l'angélus tous les soirs –, c'était à tombée de nuit. Il était allé étendre du foin ou mettre du foin en tas, c'était en été. Alors quand le vieux est parti de son boulot, il y a le Juif errant qui est passé par-dessus les châtaigniers, qui les enjambait, et qui l'a suivi jusqu'à l'entrée du village. À l'entrée du village, il s'est volatilisé.

Alors il n'y a plus personne qui allait dans ce coin-là après l'angélus. On disait que c'était le Juif errant. C'était un bonhomme qui dépassait les châtaigniers, qui marchait au-dessus de lui en enjambant les arbres. On disait qu'il fallait plus sortir après l'angélus. Alors, bien sûr, les gens n'osaient plus passer dans ce coin-là. Les vieux nous faisaient peur, on n'osait plus sortir de la porte! (Marthod, 1980) ⁽¹³⁾

ET CE SERA LA FIN DU MONDE

La complainte annonce qu'à la fin du monde seulement le Juif errant s'arrêtera de marcher: « *Tu marcheras toi-même / Pendant plus de mille ans; / Le dernier jugement / Finira ton tourment.* »

En Savoie, selon une légende bien fournie que nous résumons brièvement ici ⁽¹⁴⁾, dans la plaine d'Argentine en basse Maurienne, existait autrefois une ville qui reçut la visite d'un mendiant passant pour demander l'aumône. Personne ne le reçut, à l'exception d'une pauvre femme chargée de famille qui, manquant de tout, se désolait de ne pouvoir lui offrir un repas. Le mendiant, en réalité Jésus-Christ, fournit miraculeusement de la nourriture, puis annonça à la femme qu'il lui fallait partir. Aussitôt après la ville fut engloutie avec ses habitants au cœur dur, et seule resta debout la maison de la femme. Selon les uns, on en fit une chapelle appelée le Temple ⁽¹⁵⁾. Selon d'autres, on construisit le Temple sur son emplacement. Voici ce que l'on dit, entre autre, de ce « Temple ».

• On disait autrefois que lorsque le Juif errant entrerait dans le Temple ce serait la fin du monde. (Argentine, 1966)

(13) On peut signaler à Besse-en-Oisans un récit faisant état d'un homme qui avait été enjambé par un géant (non nommé). Ce dernier avait « posé une jambe sur le toit d'une maison » et « l'autre jambe dans un champ à côté. Lui, il était passé dessous. » (Enquête C. Joisten, 1959)

(14) Le cycle complet de cette légende est publié dans C. ABBY & A. JOISTEN, 1996, p. 39-42.

(15) Selon A. GROS, 1935, p. 553, il est possible qu'il s'agisse d'anciennes propriétés des Chevaliers de Malte, successeurs des Templiers.

Ainsi, ici, le Juif errant n'attend pas seulement la fin du monde comme sa délivrance, c'est lui qui du même coup l'apportera au monde.

LE JUIF ERRANT OUVRIER PRODIGIEUX

• Le *Père Juif errant* s'était trouvé de passer dans un village de la région de Bourg-d'Oisans. C'était un grand et bel homme qui mesurait au moins trois mètres. Il était si grand qu'il ne pouvait pas entrer dans les maisons autrement qu'à quatre pattes! Il était allé chez une bonne vieille qui s'était plainte à lui qu'elle n'avait pas de bois. Il lui a dit:

– Vous en faites pas, je vais aller vous en chercher!

Alors il a été dans la forêt où il prenait les sapins par la pointe et les arrachait. Il en a fait un bon fagot et il a arraché quelques arbres moins grands pour l'attacher. De retour dans la forêt, il a posé son fagot devant la maison de la bonne vieille. Elle lui a fait cuire une tête de cochon pour manger; mais comme il lui fallait la moitié d'un bœuf à son repas, il a repris son fagot et il est reparti. Et avec les débris qui étaient restés par terre, la bonne vieille a pu se chauffer pendant sept ans. (Villard-Reymond, Isère, 1959) [I/3610; une version fragmentaire: I/3607]

Il s'agit du thème classique de l'ouvrier inconnu qui se fait embaucher, abat un travail gigantesque mais, mécontent de n'être pas nourri à son appétit, plante là son « employeur ». Cependant, dans ce cas précis, la femme recueille un long bienfait du passage du géant.

Il s'agit là de l'unique cas connu dans notre région avec le Juif errant dans ce rôle (mais on peut rappeler le document de Ballons dans la Drôme, dans lequel on voit cet homme « d'une taille exceptionnelle » avec « une fourche sur l'épaule », qui pourrait être aussi un ouvrier dont on peut attendre des prodiges). Dans les autres récits recueillis en Savoie et Dauphiné, l'« ouvrier prodigieux » est Gargantua ou le diable ⁽¹⁶⁾.

LE JUIF ERRANT ET LA TROUPE DES MORTS

Le document recueilli par André Bourgue à Arvieux dans le Queyras situe le Juif errant dans un tout autre monde.

• « [On conte] que le Juif Errant et ses compagnons (d'autres disent le roi Hérode et ses soldats) passèrent à la montagne de Brunissard, un matin d'été, tandis que tous étaient occupés à faucher. À l'entrée du vallon, tout près des chalets de l'Eychaillon, une femme était seule, occupée à charger une troussée de foin sur son mulet, mais elle était trop faible et désespérait d'y arriver. Aussi, lorsqu'elle vit déboucher cette troupe d'hommes robustes et forts, poussa-t-elle un soupir de soulagement, et, s'adressant au premier:

– Bel homme, lui dit-elle, veuille aider une pauvre femme à hisser sur son mulet cette charge de foin trop lourde pour elle, mais légère pour tes muscles puissants!

(16) Voir C. et A. JOISTEN, 1999, contes n° 13.3 « Gargantua bûcheron » et 13.4. « Le diable et la vigne du Pillon », p. 72-73.

– Je n'ai pas de temps à perdre, répliqua l'homme sans s'arrêter. Adresse-toi à qui me suit.

Le deuxième l'adressa au troisième, le troisième au suivant, et ainsi de suite jusqu'au dernier. Le dernier, c'était le Juif Errant. Celui-ci fut touché par les supplications de la pauvre femme et, en un clin d'œil, mit la trousse sur le bât. Mais pendant ce temps, ses compagnons avaient pris *sept pas* d'avance sur lui. Et il s'enfuit à toute vitesse, criant à la femme interloquée :

– Maintenant, lie et délie la trousse de foin autant de fois que tu voudras. Moi, il me faut *sept ans* pour rattraper ma compagnie.»⁽¹⁷⁾

Nous avons déjà ainsi commenté ce récit⁽¹⁸⁾ : « Cette troupe se comporte en fait comme la *procession des morts* telle qu'elle apparaît dans la même région : les morts retardés par un vivant n'arrivent plus à rejoindre leurs compagnons de l'au-delà car un temps magique s'est écoulé depuis qu'ils se sont arrêtés ». Le Juif errant apparaît ici comme un alter ego d'Hérode, lequel n'est autre qu'un personnage damné apparenté au *Chasseur sauvage*. Personnage qui persécuta le Christ enfant, comme Ahasverus persécuta le Christ au moment de sa passion, Hérode/Juif errant a ainsi rejoint la troupe des morts errants, celle conduite par le *Chasseur sauvage*, qui doit expier éternellement son impiété.

LE JUIF ERRANT CHASSEUR SAUVAGE

Cette assimilation Juif errant/Chasseur sauvage se retrouve explicitement dans plusieurs récits de la région du Val d'Arly en Savoie, là où le Chasseur se nomme le *Résseran*. Le *Résseran*, dit-on à Saint-Nicolas-la-Chapelle, est un homme qui préféra aller chasser un lièvre avec ses deux chiens au lieu d'aller à la messe et se tua en se dérochant. « Depuis lors, le jour de Noël et même à d'autres époques de l'année, on entend la course folle des deux chiens du *Résseran* lancés à la poursuite d'un lièvre »⁽¹⁹⁾. Plusieurs informateurs citent à sa place le Juif errant, en particulier comme croquemitaine pour interdire aux enfants de sortir le soir du 25 décembre (Crest-Volant, 1965), et en évoquant ses chiens qui sont au nombre de sept :

- À Noël, on entendait le Juif errant appeler l'un après l'autre par leur nom ses sept chiens : « To to to ! *Brise-Fer ! Passe-Partout !* » Les autres noms ont été oubliés. (Crest-Volant, 1965)⁽²⁰⁾

L'étude de C. Joisten et C. Abry sur ce Chasseur sauvage souligne à propos du *Résseran* (ou *Rasséran*) que « [...] la confusion la plus commune, la plus profondément enracinée aussi, qui se réduit parfois à une identification pure et simple, se produit avec le *Juif Errant* [...], confusion facilitée par la paronymie des noms

(17) A. BOURGUE, 1968, p. 84-85.

(18) C. ABRY & A. JOISTEN, 2001, p. 18.

(19) C. JOISTEN et C. ABRY, 1983, voir p. 297 et, pour les récits cités, p. 317-319.

(20) En Ariège, le Juif errant, marcheur éternel, apparaît aussi comme chasseur sauvage. Étant allé à la chasse pendant la messe, il est condamné à chasser éternellement. On entend ses chiens passer dans les airs au milieu d'un tapage infernal. Voir C. JOISTEN, 2000, p. 147-148.

et, surtout, par un motif commun aux deux légendes: la condamnation divine à l'errance perpétuelle» ⁽²¹⁾, ce que montre bien le récit suivant:

• Le Bon Dieu s'était arrêté devant la porte du *Rasséran*, mais il était si mal habillé, que celui-ci l'avait chassé, « il lui faisait honte». Prenant son sac, le Bon Dieu était reparti en lui disant:

– Pour te punir, tu vivras jusqu'à la fin du monde avec cinq sous dans ta poche! («C'est pas tant gros, cinq sous, fait remarquer l'informatrice en riant, ils lui auront bien augmenté sa pension!»)

Puis il avait ajouté:

– Tu marcheras toi-même / Pendant plus de mille ans / Au dernier jugement / Finiront tes tourments ⁽²²⁾.

Et depuis ce jour, le *Rasséran* parcourt le monde sans jamais pouvoir s'arrêter.

À notre question: «Comment dites-vous *Rasséran* en français?», l'informatrice répond: «*Juif Errant*». (Ugine, 1980)

*

* *

Le Juif errant, dont la thématique originelle de facture savante est figée par l'écrit et assez peu étoffée, a fini, par attractions diverses autour de deux de ses aspects – celui de la grande taille et celui de l'errance –, par s'enrichir d'autres thèmes présents par ailleurs dans la tradition orale dauphinoise et savoyarde ⁽²³⁾. En investissant cette tradition, il a gagné une complexité qui est en fait celle de beaucoup d'êtres du monde fantastique.

Le thème du Juif errant dans la zone d'enquête de Charles Joisten ne recouvre pas tout le territoire (voir la carte p. 28). On le trouve essentiellement à l'est, dans les régions montagneuses; pour les Hautes-Alpes: le Queyras surtout, le Dévoluy, le Champsaur; pour l'Isère: exclusivement l'Oisans; pour la Savoie: la Maurienne, la Tarentaise et le Val d'Arly. Curieusement, la Haute-Savoie est très peu représentée avec une seule brève mention. La Drôme par contre présente une zone dense à l'extrême sud (avec un point un peu plus au nord, près du Rhône). Si l'on tente de faire coïncider cette géographie avec des cartes que nous avons déjà réalisées pour rendre compte des thèmes légendaires, celle avec laquelle elle coïncide le mieux est celle de la zone centrale de Hérodote/Chasse sauvage: Oisans, Briançonnais, Maurienne, Tarentaise, Val d'Arly ⁽²⁴⁾.

(21) *Ibid.*, p. 297.

(22) Ces paroles reprennent textuellement quatre vers de la complainte du Juif errant.

(23) Dans le Valais voisin, le Juif errant a « attiré » sur sa personne un autre thème très emblématique de la tradition orale alpine (cf. ABRY *et al.*, 1996) : dans les récits où l'hospitalité lui est refusée lors de son passage, il maudit la région, qui se couvre de glace. « Ce qui ne l'empêche pas de regretter son geste à son prochain passage. Versant alors toutes les larmes de son corps, il en remplit un Lac Noir, comme à Zermatt. Autre trait intéressant, la périodicité de son passage: la première fois, il a vu un pays prospère, la seconde fois, déserté de ses habitants, la troisième, transformé en glacier. Cette périodicité est chiffrée à cinq cents ou mille ans et Dieu finit par avoir pitié de lui en lui promettant qu'à son prochain passage ce sera la fin du monde » (cf. ABRY *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 35). Pour les récits valaisans sur le Juif errant, cf. GUNTERN, 1978, p. 301-306; carte générale pour la Suisse dans GEIGER, WEISS *et al.*, 1949, *Atlas de folklore suisse*, n° 132 *Der ewige Jude*, et *Kommentar*, II, p. 700-706.

(24) C. ABRY & A. JOISTEN, 2001, carte p. 10.

Nous avons déjà eu l'occasion de voir qu'à l'est de notre région, les préoccupations exprimées dans les récits concernent généralement le salut de l'âme – avec une forte présence du thème de *La punition de l'impiété* ⁽²⁵⁾. Le personnage du Juif errant entre bien dans cette perspective. Quant à la Drôme, à l'ouest, généralement exclue de cette sphère de préoccupations, si dans une petite zone de son territoire, elle a accordé une si bonne place au marcheur éternel, c'est sans doute à cause de la complémentarité bien attestée Juif errant/Gargantua, car ce dernier s'est avéré être un des personnages phares des récits légendaires de ce département.

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Annexe

Cette *Complainte du Juif errant* dont nous donnons ici le premier couplet a été enregistrée le 22 avril 1996 à Orcières (Hautes-Alpes) auprès d'Odette Blanc-Gras, alors âgée de 74 ans, par Patrick Mazellier. Sa mélodie était encore connue de quelques personnes, plutôt des femmes. En ce qui concerne les paroles, pas de variantes constatées d'une version à l'autre. Dans la mélodie, le mélisme de fin est plus ou moins appuyé suivant les couplets.

♩ = 104

Es - il rien sur la ter - re Qui soit plus sur - pre - nant Que la gran - de mi - sé - re du
pau - vre juif er - rant Que son sort mal - heu - reux pa - rait trist' est fa - cbeux

(Transcription P. Mazellier.)

Témoins de la diffusion de cette complainte à Orcières: une feuille de colportage dans la famille d'Odette Blanc-Gras; paroles copiées dans trois cahiers de chansons: J. Marchand, P. Gueydan, O. Blanc-Gras.

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