Exclusion, Exile, and the Wandering Jew in Jewish Literature

Exclusion, Exile, and the Wandering Jew in Jewish Literature

Regine Rosenthal

With a Foreword by Donald E. Pease

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing

Exclusion, Exile, and the Wandering Jew in Jewish Literature

By Regine Rosenthal

This book first published 2024

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN (10): 1-5275-6255-7
ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-6255-4

For Julian
in loving memory

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book is the result of many years of studying the manifold manifestations of the Wandering Jew in his legendary and symbolic dimensions. It retraces this journey in the following chapters.

It is a labor of love, continuing a long, ongoing conversation. Yet the text presented here would never have come together without the patient insistence of my cherished friends and colleagues at Dartmouth College and its MALS (Master of Arts in Liberal Studies) program at the Guarini School of Graduate Studies. These friends have been instrumental in my finally taking on the project. They lent their critical voices and made sure that I never lost sight of my goal of seeing the project to its completion. Thus, I express my deep gratitude to all of them, especially Barbara Kreiger, Anna Minardi, Alan Lelchuk, and Donald Pease. The latter, as chair of the MALS program, has given me the chance and latitude to follow my various research interests and grow intellectually in my years of teaching graduate seminars. Furthermore, my sincere thanks go to Klaus Milich, friend and co-teacher in a yearly recurring course on Diasporas and Migrations, who keeps me on my toes and loves to challenge my theoretical thinking. My gratitude also goes out to Susannah Heschel, who kept me sane during the COVID-imposed isolation by welcoming me to her inspiring special series of Jewish Studies Zoom seminars. I am also deeply grateful to Irmela von der Lühe, who came to Dartmouth as guest lecturer, graciously offered her expertise and critical skills in far-reaching discussions, and left Dartmouth as a friend. Most importantly, though, my deep appreciation goes to all my students over the many years of teaching who have challenged, enriched, and broadened my thinking in class discussions, seminar papers, and thesis writing in infinite ways.

Furthermore, I extend my heartfelt thanks to our children, Julian Jr., Anne, Hendrik, Micha, and Alex, who over the years have watched, with bemused curiosity and pride, my intellectual engagement with teaching and writing. They have also come to not only accept but encourage and support me in my scholarly work.

But most importantly, my deepest gratitude goes to my late husband, Julian. Without him as my impassioned interlocutor, this project would never even have been imagined. He was my inspiration for this book's overall topic, and added his own distinctive variation to the manifold,

complex journeys of the Wandering Jew. The present collection of essays is dedicated to him in loving memory and deepest appreciation for his unfaltering support.

Permission to reprint the following chapters is gratefully acknowledged

Rosenthal, Regine. 1996. "Inventing the Other: Ambivalent Constructions of the Wandering Jew/ess in Nineteenth Century American Literature." In *Representations of Jews Through the Ages*, Studies in Jewish Civilization 8, edited by Leonard Jay Greenspoon and Bryan F. Le Beau. Omaha, NE: Creighton University Press, 171–188.

Rosenthal, Regine. 1996. "Immigrants' Daughters: Mary Antin, Anzia Yezierska, and the Democratic Self." In *Democracy and the Arts in the United States*, edited by Alfred Hornung, Reinhard R. Doerries, and Gerhard Hoffmann. München: Wilhelm Fink, 219–226.

Rosenthal, Regine. 1996. "Reinscribing the Other: Transformations of the Wandering Jew in Heym, Kafka, and Werfel." *Carleton Germanic Papers*, 24, 127–153.

Rosenthal, Regine. 1999. "The Ravenous Wandering Jew: Mordecai Richler's Irreverent Tale of Gursky Im/migration." In *Canada and the Nordic Countries in Times of Reorientation/Le Canada et les Pays Nordiques à L'Heure de la Réorientation*, edited by A. K. Lauridsen, The Nordic Association for Canadian Studies (NACS) Text Series, Vol. 14. Aarhus, Denmark: NACS, 45–57.

Rosenthal, Regine. 2004. "Identity, Difference, and Exile: Demythologizing the Wandering Jew." In *Komparatistik als Arbeit am Mythos*, edited by Monika Schmitz-Emans and Uwe Lindemann. Heidelberg: Synchron, 275–290.

Rosenthal, Regine. 2006. "Cultural Identity, History, and National Allegiance: Ludwig Lewisohn's Search for Belonging." *Mattoid*, 55, 23–35.

Rosenthal, Regine. 2010. "Modernism, Cosmopolitanism, and Difference in Yvan Goll's Work." In *Redefining Modernism and Postmodernism*, edited by Şebnem Toplu and Hubert Zapf. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 124–137.

Rosenthal, Regine. 2011. "Literary, Critical and Theoretical Peregrinations: Geoffrey Hartman, Deconstruction, and the Wandering Jew." *A Voyage Through American Literature and Culture Via Turkey: Festschrift for Sam S. Baskett's 90th Birthday*. Prepared by Belma Ötüş-Baskett and Oya Başak; edited by Nur Gökalp Akkerman. Istanbul: Boğaziçi Üniversitesi Yayınevi, 226–252.

Rosenthal, Regine. 2022. "(Re)imagining Raoul Wallenberg: History, Fiction, and the Meaning of Truth." *Across a Broad Horizon: A Festschrift in Honor of Belma Ötuş-Baskett*, edited by Gönül Pultar and Louis Mazzari. Istanbul, 272–284.

FOREWORD

Regine Rosenthal intends this rewardingly speculative, carefully argued critical genealogy of the legend of the Wandering Jew to engage a set of inter-related questions. How do Jewish writers and thinkers of the twentieth and twenty-first century find themselves reflected and refracted in the legendary figure of the Wandering Jew? In what ways do their life experiences of exile and wandering enable these writers to reimagine and repurpose this originally antisemitic trope? Can the diversity of historically and socially situated responses to this Jewish stereotype alter the settled meaning of the Cultural Other over time? Based on the long history of the Wandering Jew's engagement with matters of cultural identity and difference, what are the prospects for the figure's survival as a wide-ranging paradigm in the present and future?

Individually and collectively, the essays gathered in this volume address these questions at first by demystifying and subsequently reassessing the legend of the Wandering Jew from the perspective of an emergent Jewish counternarrative. Rosenthal draws on Michel Foucault's and Edward Said's work on intra- and intercultural difference, and Bhabha's postcolonial theory of the ambivalence of stereotype (1994b, 66–84), to explain how the figure of the Wandering Jew opened an interstitial space within late twentieth century American culture that, in fostering the dialectical interplay of Jewish Self and Other, instigated the ongoing mutations of Jewish cultural identity. In the North American context of the twentieth century, the production of an alternative Jewish narrative involved negotiations of group and individual identities as they converged and collided with definitions of Americanness, and Jewishness. As evidenced in works by Antin, Yezierska, Kafka, Werfel, and Heym, Jewish cultural identity suffered constant threat of persecution in the Old World, and, from the 1920s to the postwar years of the 1940s–1960s, intolerance in the United States. In those years, the symbolic meaning of the Wandering Jew was still resonant, as shown, among others, in Yvan Goll's and Ludwig Lewisohn's accounts of their search for belonging, and in Mordecai Richler's satiric Jewish send-up of them.

Dr. Rosenthal has been working on the essays gathered in this volume for over three decades, first in her comparative literature courses on The Wandering Jew, on exile, on Jewish American literature, and the Holocaust.

Later it was as part of her ongoing research for the immensely popular course on global Diasporas and Migrations that she teaches as my colleague in the Master of Arts Program at Dartmouth College. As Dr. Rosenthal astutely remarks, and for reasons I'll turn to shortly, questions surrounding the essentialized antisemitic figuration of the Jew as an eternal and accursed cultural wanderer that sits at the center of the consistently brilliant essays collected in this monograph no longer plays a key role in analyses of the production of Jewish cultural identity. However, at the time she continued her work on the project in Dartmouth, Geoffrey Hartman, who might be considered one of the tutelary figures who rekindled and encouraged this research, embraced the figure of the Wandering Jew as his professional persona.

Under the auspices of the School of Criticism and Theory at Dartmouth where she attended a seminar on trauma and the Holocaust, Rosenthal was deeply inspired by Geoffrey Hartman's lecture on the intersections of Romanticism, trauma, and the Holocaust. In the essay on Hartman included in this volume, Rosenthal pays particular attention to Hartman's claim that the Romantics proffered a revisionary interpretation of the Wandering Jew:

> One of the themes which best expresses this perilous nature of consciousness and which has haunted literature since the Romantic period is that of the Solitary, or Wandering Jew. He may appear as Cain, Ahasuerus, Ancient Mariner, and even Faust . . . These solitaries are separated from life in the midst of life, yet cannot die. They are doomed to live a middle or purgatorial existence which is neither life nor death, and as their knowledge increases so does their solitude. It is, ultimately, consciousness that alienates them from life . . . Rebels against God, like Cain, and men of God, like Vigny's Moses, are equally denied "le sommeil de la terre" and are shown to suffer the same despair, namely, "the self . . . whose worm dieth not, and whose fire is not quenched" (Kierkegaard). And in Coleridge's Mariner, as in Conrad's Marlowe, the figure of the wanderer approaches that of the poet. Both are storytellers who resubmit themselves to temporality and are compelled to repeat their experiences in the purgatorial form of words.

However, according to Hartman, it is not the curse of the Christian savior but a torment of traumatizing consciousness that dooms the Romantics' Ahasuerus to live a purgatorial existence.

A German Jew whom the Nazis forced into exile, Hartman represents on an obvious level the figure of the persecuted Wandering Jew. In 1939, at the age of nine, he was compelled to emigrate from Nazi Germany to England and, in 1946, on to the United States, to escape the Holocaust.

However, in addition to his personal experience of persecution and exile, Hartman becomes a Wandering Jew on a more complex, intellectual level when he appropriates Ahasuerus from the antisemitic Christian tradition that invented this trope, purges the Solitary Wanderer of all traces of the Christian Savior's antisemitic curse, and, as we shall see, replaces Christ's death on the cross with the traumatizing consciousness of the Holocaust as that which Ahasuerus must eternally witness. Since it bears on the question of its viability as a wide-ranging paradigm, I want to devote the remainder of this foreword to a consideration of Dr. Rosenthal's compelling explanation of what happened to the figure of the Wandering Jew after the Holocaust.

Rosenthal locates the origin story of the Wandering Jew in a widely circulated medieval Christian legend that tells the tale of a man in Jerusalem who, when Christ was carrying his cross to Calvary, refused to let the suffering Savior rest on his doorstep. With the verdictive pronouncement "I shall stand here and rest, but you must walk," Christ condemned this man to an unending life of wandering and turned this personal insult into the collective guilt of the Jewish people. In merging this individual's alleged sacrilege with the crime of Christ-killing, of which all Jews were made guilty, the Christian Church universalized the Wandering Jew into an antisemitic figure of speech.

The stereotypical and symbolic features of the Wandering Jew were thereby made to fulfill important theological functions. Inasmuch as the promise of redemption in the Christian faith depends on divine sacrifice, the Wandering Jew was needed to fulfill the role of "sacred executioner" in "the great but necessary crime of Christ's Crucifixion" (Maccoby 1982, 166). Furthermore, the figure was conscripted as a witness to the wonder-working power of God in that this Jew in Jerusalem had been present at the crucifixion of Christ and would persist in life to bear witness as well to Christ's Second Coming. For centuries thereafter the dominant Christian culture constructed the Wandering Jew as its necessary, if detestable, Other. Ahasuerus, the name commonly attributed to the Wandering Jew, became the personification of the entire Jewish people. Since he had sinned grievously against the Savior and World-Redeemer, he could never be delivered from the travails of earthly existence and was condemned to wander, a stranger and homeless, in foreign lands. According to the belief, particularly prevalent during the millennial expectations of the seventeenth century, the Second Coming of Christ could not take place until the Jews had admitted their guilt, accepted their sufferings as deserved punishment, and were converted to Christianity.

Across the 12th to the 19th centuries the antisemitic stereotype of the Wandering Jew featured a rootless nomad whose endless wandering represented the objectionable Otherness of all Jews. The politics of Jewish exclusion and persecution violently established these perceived negative characteristics in the actual Jewish experience of enforced wandering. In the 19th century, the images of the Wandering Jew in the dominant cultural discourse ranged from anti-Jewish stereotype to Romantic hero or villain.

Whatever ambivalence Romantic literature may have brought to this trope in the 19th century disappeared in the 20th when Nazism enhanced the paradigmatic negative significance of the Wandering Jew. Nazi racial doctrines altogether rejected the Christian Church's concept of Christian–Jewish interdependence. Propagating the antisemitic stereotype as an eternal plague—signified in the German designation of *Ewiger Jude* or *Eternal Jew*—Nazi ideology's portrayal of the Wandering Jew as a vermin-like despicable Other introduced the legalized politics of Jewish exclusion and, in its ultimate consequence, the machinery of extermination in the Holocaust.

Following the usage to which the Nazis put the figure of the Wandering Jew to motivate and valorize the Holocaust, how was it possible for this negative stereotype of the Jewish Other to survive this event? To explain the impact of the Holocaust on her genealogy of the Wandering Jew, Rosenthal turns her readers to the poetry and criticism of Geoffrey Hartman. The Wandering Jew in Hartman's poem "Ahasuerus," first published in his 1978 poetry collection *Akiba's Children*, is a reinvention of the figure from the perspective of the Holocaust. Assuming in that poem the first-person voice of Ahasuerus as the persecuted Other, Hartman radically redefines Nazi ideology's negative paradigm of Jewish difference as a positive, because necessary, figure of Jewish memory. Suffering from the unbearable, if also darkly Romantic, burden of consciousness—the knowledge of an unspeakable crime in an unending life condemned to the memory of that trauma—Hartman's Wandering Jew quenches his own desire for death in order to bear witness to it. "Ahasuerus" thereby turns the legendary figure's aimless, endless wandering into a purposeful act of survival. In Hartman's recreation of the figure, Ahasuerus is thus driven by the burden of his own survivor guilt, and by the knowledge as well of the dominant Christian culture's injustice, persecution, and destruction of its Jewish Other.

Suffering from the unbearable knowledge of an unforgiveable crime in an unending life condemned to the memory of that trauma, Hartman's Wandering Jew sacrifices his own desire for death so as to carry out the biblical injunction, "Remember, Thou shalt not forget" (Hartman 1975, 112). In replacing Christ's legendary verdict, "I shall stand here and rest, but

you must walk," with the poem's injunction, "Thou shalt tell," Hartman also replaces Christ's death on the cross with the Holocaust as that to which Ahasuerus must bear witness. In assuming responsibility for keeping historical record of that unspeakable atrocity, Hartman's Wandering Jew assures Jewish futurity by bearing permanent witness to the historical event that would have extinguished it. Hartman's Ahasuerus has reversed the stereotypical image of the endlessly and aimlessly Wandering Jew suffering never-ending punishment for the murder of Christ into an exemplary Jewish witness. Ahasuerus has taken upon himself the meaningful labor of mourning and remembering, while also appealing, after his painful tale of unimaginable horrors, to "the mercy-seat of humanity" for justice. Inasmuch as it was the Christian savior who imposed this antisemitic curse, Ahasuerus holds the Christian religion in part responsible for this catastrophe.

Where does this leave the trope of the Wandering Jew? Hasan-Rokem and Dundes (1986) write in the dedication to their essay collection, *The Wandering Jew*, that in the wake of the Holocaust, the Wandering Jew became a symbol of "all the Jews whom prejudice and intolerance have forced to wander." In light of the historical reality of the Holocaust, the legendary Wandering Jew, who was originally conceived as an anti-Jewish stereotype, was now imagined by Hartman to encompass, from the Jewish perspective, the archetypal imago of the collective Jewish Self who had survived the Holocaust. However, as Hannah Arendt points out in her essay "We Refugees" and that Dr. Rosenthal glosses in the splendid final chapter of this volume, in fact, "the historical situation of exile and displacement . . . was not exclusively a 'Jewish' problem," it rather rendered Arendt critical of the fervor of nationalism in all its negative political effects (Butler 2012, 135).

In Dr. Rosenthal's view, this negative stereotype of the accursed wanderer does not primarily apply to Jews anymore, but to a vast and growing global population of migrants and transborder refugees. In line with pervasive xenophobia and racism, these migrants and refugees are now increasingly viewed "as a threat to the definition, homogeneity, and sovereignty of nations in contrast to their own claims for human rights and belonging" (Epilogue). As a Jewish representation of self, the figure of the Wandering Jew may enjoy an after-life as the symbolic reflection of the ever-recurring threat of persecution and the need to be physically and mentally prepared for renewed wandering. But the pain of uprootedness, non-belonging, diaspora, and exile is felt today by a large part of the global population and thus does not only apply to Jews (Rosenthal 2019). Rather, as Hannah Arendt cautions, the Wandering Jew should give rise to

the larger question of what it means to be human that in these dark times should preoccupy us all.

Donald E. Pease
Dartmouth College

INTRODUCTION

TRACING THE FOOTPRINTS OF THE WANDERING JEW

All things are mortal but the Jew;
all other forces pass, but he remains.
What is the secret of his immortality?
(Mark Twain, "Concerning the Jews")

During his lecture tours in Europe and German-speaking countries, Mark Twain spent time in Berlin in the early 1890s and, from September 1897 to May 1899, in Vienna. While living in Vienna, he was able to observe up close the political upheaval in Austria manifested in heated debates in Parliament on the status of minorities in the multicultural, multinational Austro-Hungarian empire that laid open the contentious decision-making process around the nation-state's official language(s). Following his report on these political battles in the article "Stirring Times in Austria," published in *Harper's Magazine* in 1898, he turned to the topic of the unreasonable—as he argued—pervasive antisemitism he encountered in Vienna at the time. In his famed 1899 essay, "Concerning the Jews," he traced the history of ancient civilizations and their rise and fall, and then singled out and defended in logical arguments the monolithic figure of "the Jew," and the Jew's art of survival and staying power over the past millennia. Speaking of the members of old civilizations and cultures as generalized figures, Twain referred to "[t]he Egyptian, the Babylonian, and the Persian . . . the Greek and the Roman . . . [and] other peoples [who] have sprung up and . . . vanished" over the ages. He then argued, rather ambiguously, that only "the Jew" is still "exhibiting no decadence, no infirmities of age, no weakening of his parts, no slowing of his energies, no dulling of his alert and aggressive mind," before ending the essay with the striking statement and question, "All things are mortal but the Jew; all other forces pass, but he remains. What is the secret of his immortality?" (Twain 1992, 370).

Over time, this assessment has prompted not only contentious, heated discussions about Twain's position toward Jews, especially some Jewish

critical pushback to his alleged antisemitism.[1] But it also has presented the Jew as a stereotypical figure—an essentialized, homogeneous Jew—though, in Twain's case, with arguably positive features (Gilman 1993). Against this essentializing view of group identity expressed by Twain—one that is also linked, in intriguing ways, to the legend of the Wandering Jew—stands the more recent poststructuralist and postcolonial critical turn. This approach understands cultural identity as hybrid, contested, and flexible; posits multiplicity and diversity even within a self- or outside-defined cultural group; and allows for change over time, depending on positionality, place, and history (Hall 1990; Gilroy 2010; Said 1994a, [1978] 1994b). It also indicates the possibility that the historically and socially situated meaning of the cultural Other as a stereotype may or will change over time.[2]

The differing approaches to cultural or group identity presented above are not contradictory in themselves and will be addressed in multiple contexts in the various essays collected in this volume. While the latter posit the duality of Self and Other in broader cultural terms, they also offer, in the figure of the Wandering Jew, a deeper and more complex discussion of the stereotypical group identity imposed by the discourse of the dominant culture. Specifically, this volume takes up a particular antisemitic trope as representation of the Jewish cultural Other to then offer a Jewish counternarrative by various writers and thinkers that deconstructs and reinvents that figure as a Jewish image of self. Thus, while the collected essays do not directly address the debate around Mark Twain's view of "the Jew," they do speak to the sense of mystery and

[1] In the 1990s, for instance, a spate of Jewish critical reassessments of Twain's controversial essay were published. While Sander Gilman provided a measured, detailed evaluation of Twain's changing, increasingly accepting stance toward Jews between his 1869 (1984) travel account, *The Innocents Abroad*, and the 1899 essay, "Concerning the Jews," Andrea Greenbaum condemns Twain outright for his alleged antisemitism in his 1899 essay, and Dan Vogel, in turn, condemns Greenbaum for her indiscriminate accusations without judicially applied evidence (Gilman 1993; Greenbaum 1996; Vogel 1998).

[2] Nicolas Berg, in his study *Luftmenschen*, for instance, traces the social and cultural history of the *Luftmensch* "metaphor," as he calls it, to demonstrate how the popular inner-Jewish trope of the *Luftmensch* changed from its mid-nineteenth-century presence in East European Yiddish literature to its slow adoption into mainstream culture, where it was eventually turned into a violently antisemitic stereotype used in Nazi propaganda (Berg 2014, 11–17).

ambivalence suggested in Twain's claimed "immortality" of the Jewish cultural Other.[3]

The following chapters take up and explore, in their manifold ways, the Jew's alleged aspect of everlasting life and wandering that is clearly captured in the dominant Christian culture's legendary and symbolic figure of the Wandering Jew. In the English language, the designation "Wandering Jew" emphasizes the features of restlessness and wandering, while in German, the term "Ewiger Jude" adds the relentless, merciless curse of everlasting existence. These portentous names also implicitly pose the question of whether the dominant culture's perception of the Jew's supposedly inherent traits of nomadism, ceaseless wandering, and never-ending life reflects an image that Jews as cultural outsiders have adopted about themselves. Speaking from a critical Jewish perspective, Laurence Silberstein argues that, though Jewish public and academic discourses often continue to posit "the natural givenness of Jewish group identity" as a fixed, "coherent, identifiable entity" (1994, 3), this notion of a "fixed, stable identity" has also been questioned by Jews themselves, especially, as I would add here, in the present-day challenges of national and cultural politics.

After pondering the discourse on cultural identity by Stuart Hall; on Self and Other by postmodern thinkers such as Derrida and Foucault; on Feminism and the Other by Kristeva, Scott, and Butler; and on Jewishness and the Other by Gilman, Silberstein argues in conclusion against the claim of a stable, unchanging Jewish identity. Instead, he quotes Sander Gilman, who posits in *Jewish Self-Hatred* (1986) that Jews have over time internalized the negative stereotypes of themselves, which, in turn, has affected and changed their image of self. As Gilman claims, "the central paradigm of self-hatred is but a carbon copy of the nature of stereotyping itself." It works dynamically, with "a constantly fluctuating series of self-images." In other words, "As Jews react to the world by altering their sense of identity, what they wish themselves to be, so they become what the group labeling them as Other has determined them to be" (Gilman 1986, 12). This means, as Silberstein argues, that Jewish identity is constantly evolving, in response to the challenges from without and

[3] As Maccoby explains in *The Sacred Executioner*, much of the mysterious Christian attraction to the legend of the Wandering Jew lay in its investment in the "miraculous survival of the Jews" demonstrated by this figure, or, as Twain ambiguously puts it, "the secret of their immortality." As Maccoby argues, this endless Jewish survival was ascribed by Christians at the time, "not to the strength of Jewish identity and culture, but to the desire of God to prolong their agony until the time of the millennium" and the Second Coming of Christ (1982, 167).

within, to history, place, and a changing cultural, discursive environment. It also means that there is a diversity of possible responses to Jewish stereotyping, and that the Jewish writers and thinkers can respond in a range of ways to these mostly negative representations. The present collection of essays takes up this challenge in discussing a variety of responses, subversions, and reinventions of the figure of the Wandering Jew. The central question it poses is if and how Jewish writers and thinkers of the twentieth century see themselves reflected in the legendary and symbolic figure of the Wandering Jew. How do they reinvent, from their personal (Jewish) perspective, this originally antisemitic image? What are the varied perspectives and creative (re)presentations displayed in their texts, based on their own outlook and life experiences of exile and wandering?

In a 1992 interview, the eminent critic George Steiner addressed this issue from his own French American Jewish perspective in the aftermath of the Holocaust. When referring to his upbringing in Paris, he told the interviewer about his father, "a man of somber wisdom, [who] taught me from my earliest childhood that we had to have our bags packed." His father's previous experiences had made him "a great teacher of uncertainty," which deeply influenced his son's sense of un/rootedness, non/belonging, and survival skills. As a result, Steiner continued, the "notion that we should have roots fills me with absolute irony and even derision. Trees have roots and that's why lightning cuts them down; I have legs and that's why I can move and survive." Referring to his own experiences with Hitler's Nazi invasion of Europe, he commented, "Once we were able to escape by miracle in 1940, I've never again invested any love or trust in a place" (Steiner 1992, 3). Rather, for Steiner, Jewish survival as cultural Others has long been equated with enforced wandering, which in itself reduces the Jews' physical existence to a question of place as territory. However, as Steiner explained, Jewish survival in terms of belonging is based on tradition. "The Jew has his anchorage not in place but in time, in his highly developed sense of history as personal context. Six thousand years of self-awareness are a homeland" (Steiner 1967, 175). Specifically, Steiner identified the centrality of the text as the foundation of Jewish belonging and self-awareness; it is the tradition of studying canonical Jewish texts and commentaries, and thereby creating a portable home, that counteracts any exclusion, wandering, and exile. As Steiner argued in "Our Homeland, the Text," "In post-exilic Judaism, but perhaps earlier, active reading, answerability to the text on both the meditative-interpretative and the behavioral levels, is the central motion of personal

and national homecoming . . . Heine's phrase is exactly right, [it is] *das aufgeschriebene Vaterland*"[4] (Steiner 1985, 5).

The essays collected in this volume all grapple, from a range of perspectives, with the thoughts and theories discussed above. They are independent, yet strongly connected by their overall topic. They were written as self-contained units whose theoretical framing may overlap in some chapters, yet they are distinct in each critical reading of the individual works and lives of the writers discussed. As such, they represent my work over many years on the legendary and symbolic meaning of the Wandering Jew as perceived by Jewish writers and thinkers in the twentieth century, and thus explore the figure from their own Jewish perspective as a counterimage to the various negative representations by the surrounding culture. As most of the essays have been published before, as contributions to books or journals, they also revisit and demonstrate the critical and theoretical approaches to literature and culture of a certain period. In that sense, they are critical testaments to their time, and for that reason, their arguments have been left largely intact with only minor stylistic changes. However, for the last chapter on Hannah Arendt, it took the pandemic-mandated lockdown to finally help me distill the many years of research and reflection on what may be considered the Jewish content of Arendt's life and work into a coherent argument.

In their discussion of Jewish works of literature and criticism throughout the twentieth century, the various chapters follow a loosely historical order. As a point of departure, Chapter 1 opens the overall discussion in a broader historical frame. It reaches back to the nineteenth century to establish the dominant cultural discourse in American literature at that time. In anticipation of the later introduced counternarratives of the Jewish image of self, it offers mainstream versions of the Wandering Jew in both popular and classic American fiction of the nineteenth century. Its critical readings range from Eugène Sue's bestselling novel *The Wandering Jew*; via F. Marion Crawford's popular novel *The Roman Singer*; to Nathaniel Hawthorne's *English Notebooks* and the romance, *The Marble Faun*; and to Herman Melville's epic poem, *Clarel.* Thus, this chapter demonstrates the basic sense of ambiguity or negativity attached to the paradigmatic figure of the Wandering Jew by the dominant (American) culture.

[4] This is a quote from Heinrich Heine, a nineteenth-century German Jewish writer who described the Jews' special relationship to the text as a sense of belonging and home, that is, the text as "*das aufgeschriebene Vaterland*" ("the written down fatherland").

Chapter 2 addresses the vast wave of Jewish immigration from Eastern Europe at the turn of the twentieth century in works of two Jewish immigrant women writers, Mary Antin and Anzia Yezierska. It illustrates how these women were torn in different ways: on the one hand, between the dream and the disillusioning reality of immigrating to the perceived Promised Land of America, and on the other hand, by the conflict among their role as a Jewish daughter according to Jewish gender traditions, their aspiration for freedom in the New World, and the pursuit of their own dreams of independence in a writing career. It showcases how they were haunted by a past of persecution in the Old World, their drive to escape, and the promise of the New World to overcome all obstacles, even at the risk of losing their sense of belonging to the world of their fathers and the traditional Jewish family.

Chapter 3 discusses theoretical approaches to the concept of the (cultural) Other; the history of the Wandering Jew as legend and cultural metaphor; and literary texts focusing on this subject by the three prominent German- and American-language Jewish writers, Franz Kafka, Franz Werfel, and Stefan Heym. Covering the historical time span of the beginning, mid-, and later twentieth century, these writers perceive and represent the paradigmatic figure of the Wandering Jew each from their own perspective. While in Franz Kafka's unfinished 1926 (2019) novel, *The Castle*, the protagonist K. keeps anxiously searching for human community, acceptance, and inclusion by the castle and/or the village, the latter both persist till the very end in their elusive and ambiguously reticent attitude toward him, the newcomer and stranger. By contrast, Franz Werfel's 1944 play, *Jacobowsky and the Colonel*, is based on Werfel's own real-life experience as a Wandering Jew under the conditions of Nazi persecution, war, and close escape, staging this position in all its aspects of tragedy, comedy, and absurdity. In turn, Stefan Heym's 1981 novel, *Ahasver* (1983) or *The Wandering Jew* (1984), complicates the trope by emphasizing the revolutionary potential of the figure and arranging its plot on three levels of time and place that each offer reinventions of the figure from an innovative perspective. Besides the narrative level adopting and reinventing the 1602 German pamphlet version of the legend, the modern-day political level of the German Democratic Republic (GDR, or East Germany) develops the Wandering Jew in a satirical attack on the GDR state to expose its authoritarian system as a revolution gone dogmatic and stale.

Chapter 4 expands the geographic national frame to North America to include the Jewish Quebecois writer Mordecai Richler with his 1989 novel *Samuel Gursky Was Here.* This expansive, epic saga of the Gursky family

positions the Wandering Jew within a satiric canvas of the Montreal Canadian Jewish community. Through the Jewish cultural insider's lens of the failed aspiring writer Moses Berger, it reinvents the Wandering Jew as a bawdy, resilient, but cunning and elusive reincarnation in subsequent generations of Gurskys in a postmodern playful narrative; it invests the figure with qualities of the Indigenous character of the raven; and it imagines him as a key member of an eminently Canadian family of Prohibition-era, whiskey-producing fame.

Presupposing the characteristic features of the Christian legend's Wandering Jew as a myth according to Roland Barthes, Chapter 5 undertakes to demythologize the figure by examining it in its complexity from a variety of Jewish and critical perspectives. The chapter draws on theoretical approaches to cultural difference; the historical development of the legendary figure; its poetic reinterpretation in light of the Holocaust by literary and cultural critic Geoffrey Hartman; the meaning of cultural identity as conceived by Stuart Hall; Jewish religious and political perceptions of exile and wandering; the nature and ambivalence of stereotype according to Homi Bhabha; and the impact of history and social psychology on the aspects of unending, forced Jewish wandering in works of literature, here in the 1993 Holocaust-foreshadowing novel, *The Conversion*, by the Israeli writer Aharon Appelfeld.

Chapter 6, in turn, focuses on the life and work of Ludwig Lewisohn, a late-nineteenth-century German Jewish immigrant to the United States. It deals especially with his struggle to fully belong, as a Jew of German descent, in a white, Anglo-Saxon America. He experiences aggression against him on three fronts: as a Jew, prohibited to teach English literature; as a German, suffering from the anti-German fervor around World War I; and as a writer, whose novel was banned from publication in the United States. But most of all, it is his painful search for a meaningful Jewish identity that makes him vacillate obsessively between a firm national commitment to America and an ardent Zionism. Critical evaluations of works from the 1920s, such as his autobiography, *Up Stream*; his Zionist account, *Israel*; the novel *The Island Within*; and his 1950 pamphlet, *The American Jew: Character and Destiny*, combine to draw a fuller picture of this complex, never-ending internal battle.

Chapter 7 examines a comparable kind of struggle in the life and work of the poet and writer Yvan Goll, a French German Jew of the first half of the twentieth century, when tracing him within the evolving historical events and larger artistic movements of his time. It also underscores the cultural impact on his work by language, as Goll had grown up in the contested French–German border region of Alsace-Lorraine, which

facilitated his knowledge of French and German, and was later complemented by English. In fact, Goll lived in France and Germany through World War I, the 1920s, and 1930s, but with the rising threat of Nazism in Europe, he escaped to the United States. Representing trends of his time, his work reflects a deep involvement in expressionism, modernism, pacifism, internationalism, and cosmopolitanism. Yet most of all, it was his Jewishness that engendered a painful search for identity in which he viewed himself as the Wandering Jew Ahasuerus, restlessly wandering the world without a sense of belonging or home. His novels of the 1920s and early 1930s, such as *Die Eurokokke* (*The Eurococcus*), *Der Mitropäer* (*The Mideuropean*), and *Lucifer Vieillissant* (*Aging Lucifer*), attest to his strong commitment to culture and art, while his bilingual poetry cycle *Jean sans Terre / Landless John* of the 1930s and 1940s focuses on the paradigm of the Wandering Jew and the never-ending peregrinations of Landless John, unmoored from national or human belonging.

Centering on the above-mentioned literary and cultural critic Geoffrey Hartman, Chapter 8 traces his "intellectual journey" as a German American Jewish "displaced child of Europe" (Hartman 2007) from Germany via England to the United States. It demonstrates the impact of Hartman's early uprooting and exile on his scholarly work at Yale; his extensive exploration of the poetry of Wordsworth in its reflection of the English countryside of his exilic youth; and of Wordsworthian Romanticism in relation to the contrasting systems of Enlightenment and Nazism. The latter, in turn, led to Hartman's deep engagement with Holocaust testimony that prompted him to reinvent the Wandering Jew as a figure of witness to Jewish trauma and survival, especially in the poem "Ahasuerus." Furthermore, the chapter tracks Hartman's critical work, which joins the wound of this trauma with the theory of deconstruction and with erring as wandering in search of meaning. In a final turn, it links the work of the literary critic to the Jewish Talmudic practice of continuous re/interpretation of the text. Against the failure of humanism to prevent the destruction of the Holocaust, Hartman embodies the open-ended, continued peregrinations of the literary and cultural critic as a modern-day representation of the Wandering Jew.

Chapter 9, in turn, examines Alan Lelchuk's 2015 novel, *Searching for Wallenberg*, both as a fictional reinvention of the Swedish diplomat and savior of Budapest Jews and as a critical engagement with the larger issues of historiography, factuality, fiction, and contemporary Jewish American identity. Exploring the numerous historical uncertainties around Wallenberg's life and death, the novel's protagonist, Gellerman, is drawn

ever deeper into a restless journey of balancing the assumed certainty of historical facts against a coherent narrative that may be closer to fiction. At the same time, measuring himself against the historical figure of Wallenberg, Gellerman feels increasingly attached to him and his sense of purpose, which also impels him to revise the meaning of his own modern-day secular Jewish identity. Different from the traditional figure of the Wandering Jew, Gellerman's restless wanderings are no longer driven by a sense of difference and persecution in the novel's contemporary America, but by a need for personal fulfillment in a redefined spiritual yet secular Jewishness.

Chapter 10, finally, focuses on the Jewish aspects of Hannah Arendt as a German American political thinker. Arguing for the significance of her little-known early work in terms of its decisive influence on her later major writings, this chapter explores Arendt's 1929 dissertation, *Love and Saint Augustine* (1996), in conjunction with her 1930s biography of Rahel Varnhagen, an early nineteenth-century German Jewish woman and founder of a literary salon in Berlin. While Arendt's dissertation elucidates Saint Augustine's philosophical stance on the Christian concept of love, man's being in the world, and man's love of the world, her biography, *Rahel Varnhagen: The Life of a Jewess* (1997), examines the specific challenges posed by Rahel's outsider position as a Jewish woman in the context of her time. Caught in the conflicting ideas of Enlightenment, French Revolution, Romanticism, German nationalism, and antisemitism, Rahel hoped to overcome her social exclusion by converting to Christianity and marrying into nobility. Yet her new social position as the wife of Karl August Varnhagen von Ense resulted in the sham existence of the pariah–parvenu, as Arendt argues, that masked a deep inner division between her public image of Christian noblewoman and her covert identity as a Jew. Arendt wrote the work from her pre-war perspective, but together with her own experience of persecution, exile, and statelessness, it laid the foundation for her 1951 (1994c) momentous work, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, with its intricate deliberations on the nation-state, states' rights, human rights, minority rights, and the status of the refugee. It also carried over into her many other Jewish writings and, in the early 1960s, her much-debated report on the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem. In the face of widespread global migration, civil and international wars, and continuous waves of refugees, Hannah Arendt's work is thus of major significance for today's political thinking.

This also begs the larger question of the nature of stereotype, especially the continued viability of the Wandering Jew paradigm, a topic picked up and continued in the Epilogue. The latter both concludes the

previous discussions on perceptions of Jewish self as reflected in the figure of the Wandering Jew and further explores its complex twentieth-century intersections with secular Jewishness and its antisemitic stereotype in Nazi propaganda that culminated in the Holocaust.

CHAPTER 1

INVENTING THE OTHER: AMBIVALENT CONSTRUCTIONS OF THE WANDERING JEW/ESS IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICAN LITERATURE

For centuries, the dominant cultural discourse of the Christian Western world has perceived the Jew as the Other, as an element alien to that culture and thus to be excluded for their difference. This practice of exclusion is not only apparent in the history of the Jews over the ages but also reflected in their representation in the literature of the Christian culture. According to Michel Foucault, the author of texts, including literary texts, is not an independent agent; rather, the author is subject to an author-function, which he adopts, with modifications, from his own times and which is "characteristic of the mode of existence, circulation, and functioning of certain discourses within a society" (1989, 202). Discourse, in Foucauldian terms, is related to power and the struggle for dominance. It is both the object and the tool of struggle and the power one seeks to gain control of.[1] Thus, in writing, an author is both giving voice to and appropriating certain discourses within a society, while these discourses, as Foucault argues, are "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (1994, 49). That is to say, the image of the Jew constructed by writers of the dominant Christian culture is a reflection of how that culture has perceived and invented the Jew, and a means of facing, manipulating, and subjugating the Other.

The ambivalence of the dominant culture toward its Jewish Other is clearly demonstrated in its most prevalent representations of Jews as either denigrated or idealized stereotypes: the villainous Shylock, the accursed Wandering Jew, the beautiful Jewess, or the Enlightenment-inspired

[1] Foucault, in his lecture "The Order of Discourse," offers a detailed explanation of the power dynamics inherent in discourse. He claims that it "is the thing for which and by which there is struggle, discourse is the power which is to be seized" ([1971] 1981, 53).

benevolent anti-Shylock, as identified by Edgar Rosenberg (1960) in his study of English fiction. Though these concepts of the Jew have their tradition in the literatures of Europe, they were eventually adopted by American writers as well. Thus, by the nineteenth century, the figure of the Wandering Jew is not only widely addressed in European poetry and fiction but has become an integral part of popular culture and literature in America. After the bestselling success of Eugène Sue's French novel, *Le Juif Errant/The Wandering Je*w (1844–1845), American texts such as F. Marion Crawford's *A Roman Singer* (1884), Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Marble Faun* ([1860] 1983), and Herman Melville's *Clarel* ([1876] 1960) attest to the popularity of the figure in nineteenth-century America. This chapter will examine how these writers construct the Jew as cultural Other in their appropriation, modification, and/or transformation of the mythical figure of the Wandering Jew and how they conceive of his recurring female counterpart, the beautiful and/or Wandering Jewess.

Emergence of the Figure

The accursed figure of the Wandering Jew is based on an extrascriptural legend that probably first emerged, as Anderson explains in his comprehensive study, *The Legend of the Wandering Jew*, some six hundred years after Christ. In its earliest recognizable shape, it is "the tale of a man in Jerusalem who, when Christ was carrying his Cross to Calvary and paused to rest for a moment on this man's doorstep, drove the Saviour away . . . , crying aloud, 'Walk faster!' And Christ replied, 'I go, but you will walk until I come again!'" (Anderson 1991, 11). The Crusades helped spread the legend all over Europe, while the Christian Church supported it as part of its anti-Jewish discourse and as evidence of the wonder-working power of God. Its central character, the Wandering Jew, appeared under a number of different names, varying according to time, country, and interpretation of his story.[2] His most notable designations are "Cartaphilus," such as in Roger Wendover's 1228 *Flores historiarum* as one of the legend's first written versions (Anderson 1991, 18–20); "der Ewige Jude" ("the Eternal Jew"); "le Juif Errant" ("the Wandering Jew"); and, since publication of a German pamphlet in 1602, also "Ahasverus," or "Ahasuerus."

This pamphlet, the *Kurtze Beschreibung und Erzehlung von einem Juden mit Namen Ahaßverus* (*Short Description and Tale of a Jew Called*

[2] Both Anderson's study and the collection of essays by Hasan-Rokem and Dundes (1986) present a variety of European and American versions of the legend and the protagonist's name.