

The Moments of the Wandering Jew

A Play in Four Parts

1978

David Cole

Scenes

AFTERNOON (or: FIRST of 2 EVENINGS)

PART ONE

- Scene i. With the Neighbor
- Scene ii. A Sample Itinerary
- Scene iii. With Pontius Pilate

Intermission

PART TWO

- Scene i. In the Chamber of Curiosity
- Scene ii. The Wandering Jew the World Has Been Waiting For

Dinner Break (or: End of First Evening)

EVENING (or: SECOND of 2 EVENINGS)

PART THREE

- Scene i. The Hochhimmelfahrt Passion Play

Intermission

PART FOUR

- Scene i. The Woman Who Loved the Wandering Jew
- Scene ii. The Curtain Rises on the End of the World

Characters

NOTE: The play can be performed by 9 actors (7M, 2F)
with the doublings suggested below.

The Wandering Jew
The Trumpet Angel
The Neighbor
King 1
King 2
King 3
The Goddess Futura
Pontius Pilate
The Impatient Examiner
The Subtle Examiner
The Sympathetic Examiner
The Old Man
The Burgermeister of Hochhimmelfahrt
The Director of the Hochhimmelfahrt Passion Play
The Hochhimmelfahrt Christus
The Hochhimmelfahrt Wandering Jew
The Jewish Inspector
The Woman
The Managing Angel
The Assistant Manager
Courier Angel 1
Courier Angel 2
Courier Angel 3
Courier Angel 4

Suggested Doublings

Actor 1

The Wandering Jew

Actor 2

The Trumpet Angel
The Impatient Examiner

Actor 3

The Neighbor
The Hochhimmelfahrt
Wandering Jew
Courier Angel 1

Actor 4

Pontius Pilate
The Burgermeister of
Hochhimmelfahrt
The Managing Angel

Actor 5

King 1
The Sympathetic
Examiner
The Director of the Hoch-
himmelfahrt Passion
Play
The Assistant Manager

Actor 6

King 2
The Subtle Examiner
The Hochhimmelfahrt Christus
Courier Angel 2

Actor 7

King 3
The Old Man
The Jewish Inspector
Courier Angel 3

Actress 1

The Goddess Futura
Courier Angel 4

Actress 2

The Woman

The Basic Form of the Wandering Jew Legend

Carrying His cross along through the streets of Jerusalem, the Savior stopped to rest for a moment beside the shop of an artisan, one Simon Laquedem. The artisan, however, told Him to get moving. "I go," replied the Savior, "but thou shalt wander till my return." Since that day the Jew has wandered unceasingly. His wandering will have an end only when he and Christ meet a second time, on Judgment Day.

NOTE: No one knows where or by whom the story of the Wandering Jew was told for the first time. It does not appear in the Bible. It is similar to, but cannot be shown to derive from, such myths of punishment-by-wandering as those of the Flying Dutchman, the Demon Huntsman and Cain. Neither specifically Jewish nor specifically Christian in origin, the legend has, at various times, been taken as critical of the Jews for their rejection of Christ, and of Christian society for its harsh treatment of the Jews.

What the Wandering Jew saw when he looked at Christ carrying the cross:

PART ONE

Scene i With the Neighbor

(Dim blue light comes up around a FIGURE walking in place with fluid dream-like motion. The steps of the FIGURE--who wears a heavy robe, sandals, a rope belt and a hood that completely veils his face--are in the direction of the Artisans' Stalls, down-left. These are vacant at rise, and only just barely visible by the spill of light off the FIGURE.

After a moment the pace of the FIGURE's walking slows slightly--not a running down, but a growing broader and more extended of the "wandering-in-place" movement.

The TRUMPET ANGEL appears up-right, in amber light. He is polishing his instrument--a battered silver post-horn with reddish tassel--on his sleeve.

The FIGURE's "wandering-in-place" slows further --i.e., grows still broader and more extended.

The TR. ANG. sets the post-horn to his lips.

The FIGURE slows to a halt--i.e., his "wandering-in-place" movement lengthens into motionlessness.

The TR. ANG. sounds a long note on his post-horn.

Immediately the lights on the FIGURE go down. The TR. ANG. can still be seen blowing into his horn, but the rich mix of brass tones that we hear cannot possibly all be coming from that instrument.

The TR. ANG. lowers his horn slightly.

Lights up on the Artisans' Stalls, down-left. The FIGURE is gone. The WANDERING JEW and his NEIGHBOR are at work, side by side, in their adjacent stalls.

The NEIGHBOR's stall, on the right, is fitted out with the tools and materials of a ropemaker. The length of rope on which the NEIGHBOR is now at work protrudes straight out from the stall, its cut-off end presenting a splayed cross section of hemp fibres to the audience. Nothing visible holds the rope in this position.

In the lefthand stall sits the WANDERING JEW, pedalling a potter's wheel, on which rotates a half-finished clay vessel. Since this wheel and the NEIGHBOR's rope are on the same level, and since the rope protrudes from the side of the NEIGHBOR's stall which is adjacent to the stall of the WJ, the rope gives the impression of being a "tangent" to the "circle" of the potter's wheel.

Each stall is crammed with the gear of its occupant's trade. These trappings should be as real- and used-looking as possible.

Suspended high in the air over up-left hangs a broad, lowish painting of a receding street, lined with stalls like those of the NEIGHBOR and the WJ, against a background of palm trees and intense blue sky. The further along this "street" a stall lies, the more sketchily it is rendered. The overall style of the painting seems, at first glance, quite realistic; but a more sustained look shows this effect to have been achieved by a very few suggestively placed bars and patches of color.

The NEIGHBOR and the WJ work intently for a few moments. The NEIGHBOR's method of work is steady and methodical. The WJ, on the other hand, tries one approach after another: he brakes and reverses the wheel; views the spinning pot from different angles; makes "passes" over it with his hands--but never actually lays a finger on the clay.

Both men continue work during the opening exchange.

The TR. ANG. stands with the post-horn held just away from his lips.)

WANDERING JEW. One of these days I'm going to have to be running up to Caesarea.

(The TR. ANG. lowers his instrument and exits.)

NEIGHBOR. What's in Caesarea?

WJ. (as if surprised by the question) It's my home town.

NEIGHB. Really? I thought you hailed from--

WJ. Well, or I think of it as my home town. Perhaps because so many of my people--you've heard me mention the half-brother with the mania for hunting, the moody cousin who follows the sea....

NEIGHB. I've heard you mention them maybe five times in thirty years. Now you're talking about slogging the length of Palestine--

WJ. I thought, as long as I was going to be up there on business anyway--

NEIGHB. What's this, now? What "business"?

WJ. You know: that sandalwood acreage I inherited.

NEIGHB. You've always till now been content to let that take care of itself.

WJ. Well, I am not content at this moment!

(The NEIGHB. stares at him.)

I mean, they run our lives from Caesarea! The Roman administration--it's all handled from up there. That's an easy fact to lose sight of, here in Jerusalem--we tend to see the earth and the sky revolving around our Temple courtyard. But in fact, all a man's days, there might not be one important decision concerning him that didn't emanate from--

NEIGHB. Wait a minute. That sandalwood grove of yours--didn't the Romans take that for a wall or an aqueduct or something?

WJ. A toll-highway. Yes. But I still retain an interest--

NEIGHB. And your seafaring cousin...is at sea, no? for the next--is it three years? five years?

WJ. Could run as long as seven, actually. I was just citing him as an example--

NEIGHB. And the hunting brother--wasn't it he who disappeared--

WJ. In a storm. Yes. Somewhere in the hills around Caesarea. Part of my idea was, I could make some inquiries up there, do some poking around....

NEIGHB. But that was half a lifetime ago! You can't possibly expect--

WJ. Who knows? Who can say what a good long walk in those hills might not produce? Maybe I could combine it with a tour of the Biblical sites. Isn't the spot where Elijah went up to heaven in the chariot somewhere around there?

NEIGHB. Not at all! That was by the banks of Jordan.

WJ. Well--I could circle around and take in Jordan.
(abruptly brakes the wheel and rises)
How does one go? There's the old coastal highway through Ashkalon. That would let me spend tonight in Jamnia.

NEIGHB. Tonight!

WJ. I could cut over through Samaria. Though that would cost me at least an additional twelve hours....

NEIGHB. A moment ago it was: "one of these days," "perhaps while I'm up there." Now you're packing your bags--

WJ. Via Beth-hebron, would be another possibility....

NEIGHB. --And for what? A place where everyone you know is gone, every interest you held you've relinquished, and every sight you might want to see is somewhere else!

WJ. If I'd left yesterday morning, I could be there by now.

NEIGHB. What's this sudden passion for Caesarea?

WJ. (hungrily) It's a place. It's on maps. It lies along routes. It looked one way twenty years ago, it looks another way now....

(The NEIGHB. gives the WJ a long look.)

NEIGHB. It's beginning to take hold. What the Rabbi put on you.

WJ. (startled) You heard that?

NEIGHB. "I go; but thou, wander till I return."

WJ. You think he actually could--?

NEIGHB. I didn't say that.

WJ. Then how--?

NEIGHB. It's beginning to characterize you.

(The WJ sits.)

WJ. You think he meant it? I'm not even so sure he meant he actually meant it.

NEIGHB. I should say, yes, he meant it.

WJ. For what possible--?

NEIGHB. You irritated him.

WJ. I irritated him? This is supposed to be the Light of the World we're talking about!

NEIGHB. And does one drive the Light of the World from one's doorway?

WJ. I didn't "drive" anyone anywhere. The scene had composed itself into an image. The image hung in the air. I may possibly have put forth a hand....

NEIGHB. Simon, you sped him on his way!

WJ. He had got into my work-space.

NEIGHB. You weren't at work.

WJ. He was scaring off business.

NEIGHB. No one that day had a mind for business.

WJ. I didn't want trouble with the Roman police.

NEIGHB. The Roman police seemed moved. All seemed moved. And you, Simon: were you not moved?

WJ. (gloomily) Neither moved, nor unmoved. My thoughts seem to have gone out along different lines altogether.

NEIGHB. Your laughter filled the street!

WJ. I was...interested; I laughed. Do I cry when I'm uninterested? I don't know. You seem set on opposing me, whatever answer I make.

NEIGHB. Something in me wants to say no to that laughter. I am not the last who will want to say no to it.

(Pause. The WJ shuts his eyes for a moment, and then opens them.)

WJ. I don't feel anything yet.

NEIGHB. This craving for Caesarea?

WJ. Well...

NEIGHB. Can you give me one reason?

WJ. Well--

NEIGHB. Only, spare me the cousins and the brothers and the Biblical sites. I mean a reason that is something more than... a bump in the road.

WJ. (points to the wheel) This.

NEIGHB. What "this"?

WJ. This clay on the wheel. It comes from Caesarea.

NEIGHB. Well?

WJ. Well, I spend half my life working it, I think I ought to see where it comes from.

NEIGHB. That's a new note.

WJ. Besides, they've taken to sending me a very poor grade of material lately.

NEIGHB. I thought you were the one it couldn't matter less. "All the more glory to the shaping hand"--wasn't that always your philosophy? "Let it lack strength, I put out my hand and impart strength of form"--hasn't that always been your approach?

WJ. Whereas the ropemaker puts out his hand and then--puts it out again.

NEIGHB. The rope has direction, Simon, knows increase. Quite another thing than

(gives the potter's wheel a spin)
"going about." You may yet learn a respect for straight out and on.

WJ. I'm going to Caesarea to see about some clay.

NEIGHB. Need one really point out that clay has not been brought in from Caesarea for some time now, owing to the uncertainty of the Northern roads....

WJ. (relishing the phrase) "The uncertainty of the Northern roads..."

(rises)

I'm off.

NEIGHB. And still cannot say why!

WJ. That's not true! You ask for a reason? How about: to check on the road-gradients from here to Idumaea? to stamp the paving-stones back into line, those rebels? to give the dust of the road something to rise up about....

(It is not clear whether he is being sarcastic or hysterical.)

NEIGHB. How about: "Wander till I return!"

WJ. Did he say that? I'm not so sure he even ever said that. "Wonder at my concern," may have been his words to me. Or perhaps: "Ponder, and never learn"....

NEIGHB. Your mind's wandering already.

WJ. Just as easily not go.

NEIGHB. Now: carefully.

WJ. No, really, no, really. I could go, I could stay, I could sing us a tune....

NEIGHB. A man stands with a great wind behind him. "Unusually still the air," he remarks. Already his garments are streaming in the wind....

WJ. I never said I wasn't aware of a certain pressure building. A lot of people in this town could do with a Wandering Jew.

NEIGHB. That's not what I meant by--

WJ. The Christians would have this figure to point to. The Jews would get a national symbol out of it; the Romans, another Eastern Excess to rise superior to. And, then, of course, there are those whose pulses leap at the thought of "their man in the future," if you can imagine such an enthusiasm. You may well speak of a "great wind." But let's not confuse all that with something that may or may not be happening.

NEIGHB. What makes you so sure--?

WJ. Some guy some mob wants out of town is not the Wandering Jew!

NEIGHB. Already so protective of the character?

WJ. It's no curse from on high to happen to provide a focus!

NEIGHB. This is the human world, Simon. A "curse from on high" might well have to borrow a nearer urgency to be its own.

WJ. But what sort of "curse" is that, anyway? "Having it as a road"....It's more like something one might dream about on summer afternoons....

NEIGHB. Simon! Listen to yourself! That's not a statement about the curse, that's the curse making itself heard!

(The WJ backs off from the NEIGHB., as if the NEIGHB. had suddenly become very dangerous to him. Simultaneously, the TR. ANG. appears, in strange light, up-center.)

NEIGHB. (pointing to the space that has opened up between them) Look!

WJ. (low) Think of it as the distance I put between myself and all that sort of speculation.

NEIGHB. I'll think of it any way you like, it's twenty feet of space. You can't argue with twenty feet of space.

WJ. All this is bound to appear very different from Caesarea.

NEIGHB. Then you still intend--

WJ. Look. Let me explain something to you. I'm not restless. I don't dislike it here. I just...don't see it for myself past the next minute and twenty seconds.

NEIGHB. What other form could the destiny assume, its opening moments? What have you just favored us with if not "The Earliest Recollections of the Wandering Jew"?

WJ. I'll give it some thought on the way to Caesarea.

NEIGHB. Give it some thought what you're doing on the way to Caesarea.

(For an instant, the WJ seems about to acknowledge the TR. ANG.'s presence--but then does not.)

WJ. (shrugs) Nothing but time.

(He turns sharply on his heel, like a soldier making an "about-face"; but before he can take his first step, the lights go down.)

Scene ii A Sample Itinerary

(The stage is empty at rise. Enter from up-left the THREE KINGS, following their "star"--a goldfoil and wire contraption mounted on an eight-foot pole--which they pass back and forth between them. Like a divining rod, the "star" seems to have a will of its own: whichever KING is carrying it must roll and dip and snake along after it, and the other two KINGS must roll and dip and snake along after him. Moving in this manner, the THREE KINGS describe several lurching orbits around the left half of the stage before the foot of the pole comes abruptly to rest on the stage floor, just left of center. There is a slight pile-up; then the THREE KINGS arrange themselves along a diagonal running from the star-pole toward down-left, and stand gazing raptly up at their star.

Suddenly, from the down-right entrance, a bolt of nondescript tan fabric shoots out a few feet onto the stage, in the direction of the star-pole--rather as if a carpet were being unfurled before a visiting dignitary --and comes to a stop, only partially unrolled.

After a moment, the WJ appears, treading on the strip of fabric. He advances as far as the cloth has unrolled, then suddenly whirls back, as if to surprise a pursuer. While in this position--facing backward and peering intently off-right--he absentmindedly gives the bolt a kick ahead with his left foot, so that it unwinds a few feet further out toward the star-pole. He reluctantly leaves off peering behind him, faces ahead again, ventures a few more steps out onto the cloth--then, as before, suddenly whirls back around....He repeats this sequence of movements --with, each time, a marked contrast between the intentness of his looks-behind and the offhandedness of his kicks-ahead--until the cloth is wholly unwound. It comes to an end about six inches short of the base of the star-pole.

When the WJ reaches the end of the cloth, he looks around, puzzled, in all directions. The THREE KINGS are not, apparently, visible to him. Suddenly, the star-pole in the hands of the foremost KING seems to leap aside and up. As if this drew a curtain from before the KINGS, the WJ now registers them--though not as yet their star.)

WJ. Well! I was just beginning to--Faces! Hello, travellers! And what is it sets your feet on the road to Jerusalem?

(The THREE KINGS say nothing.)

I'm forgetting: This is the Roman Empire: one doesn't respond to leading questions from perfect strangers on public highways. It's just that... you're the first human forms I've laid eyes on since... since my departure from Jerusalem, and I must be --what?--at most a day and a night from Caesarea, practically before the gates? Traffic certainly is down between our spiritual and political capitals. In fact, we four... would seem to be about the extent. What, I wonder, can have interrupted the flow? How account for the drop-off?

(The THREE KINGS say nothing.)

There I go again with the questions.... But really, I wish there were some way-- Look, I'm just going to out and say it: I have no connection whatever with the Roman-- Oh, at one time.... But any ties that may once have existed between me and the Procurator's office have long since...fallen by the way; nothing now prevents your opening to me. I would give much to know how things stand...in Caesarea. You can hardly be indifferent to the course of affairs in Jerusalem. We are companions of the way, we ought to make a moment for each other! It could mean the difference between walking in blind and--and....

(The THREE KINGS say nothing.)

You still prefer to keep your distance? Well, listen, all right, the camaraderie of the road is much exaggerated, I agree. Anyway, I'll soon be in Caesarea myself--

(His face clouds.)

Actually, I should have been there ages ago. What's going on? How do I come to have the road entirely to my-- This is the road to Caesarea? Not that I remember at any point being offered an alternative; but, you know, roads have a way of going blank on you once they get you off to themselves. Which is strange, actually: I mean, you'd think with nothing but the road to focus on, that would be when-- But listen, you don't want to listen to other people's travel impressions, no doubt you could provide a reflection or two of your own. If you could just say-- Where am I? My exact position at this moment?

KING 1. Along our path.

KING 2. Our way home.

KING 3. Toward which, we are making steadily.

WJ. Is this Caesarea? I mean, I realize I'm not standing in the Procurator's hallway; but are we within the boundaries of Caesarea?

KING 1. Boundaries mean nothing to us.

KING 3. Except perhaps the boundary which our star traces between us and all those who wander purposelessly.

WJ. Star?

KING 2. Directly overhead.

WJ. But it's broad--

KING 1. There! In the zenith!

(All three KINGS join forces to thrust the star-pole up as high as they can reach. At this, the star comes to life again, carrying the THREE KINGS into the sort of jolting orbit described above. As before, their circling is confined to the left side of the stage.)

WJ. (giving them a long look) Who are you?

KING 2. The Heralds of the Birth.

KING 1. Our gifts were long since accepted...

KING 3. ...How is it, then, we feel that something in us has not been found acceptable?

WJ. Not the Three Magi?

KING 1. Eastern Kings! Eastern Kings!

KING 2. Being the Magi was only one phase for us.

KING 3. And that, a long while past.

WJ. But you're still-- I thought I was the one slated for--

KING 3. Who are you, who gleam for a moment in our path?

WJ. Simon Laquedem, late of Jerusalem--

KING 2. (exchanging knowing nods with the other KINGS) The Wandering Jew.

WJ. I take issue with that description. No doubt some might profess to see in my recent movements an abnormal stress on, uh... movement. But, the question is, by what standard? What's abnormal for me might not occasion comment in a merchant or sailor; I mean, we're not talking about an in and of itself unprecedented-- Look, could I just say something that's been bothering me? You're not going home, because you're going in a circle.

KING 1. Don't confuse your problems with other people's.

KING 3. For you, the endless circuit.

KING 2. For us, the star and the path.

WJ. But you're not following any-- Well, or rather, yes, you've latched on to something; but it's not carrying you, you're carrying--

KING 1. (to KING 3) Lost in the windings of his own dilemma...

KING 3. ...he sees images of a private misfortune everywhere.

(The THREE KINGS nod knowingly among each other.)

WJ. Just out of curiosity: how would you boys describe this... junket you're on?

KING 1. Slowly,

KING 3. Unerringly,

KING 2. We make for home.

KING 3. The only thing is--

(All three KINGS seem to see the same thing at the same moment, and lurch to a halt.)

KING 1. (to the other KINGS, in exasperation; pointing) That manger again!

KING 3. (to WJ) We can't seem to find our way out of Galilee.

WJ. But this can't possibly be Galilee. Galilee is far to the east and south of--

KING 2. (in a strange, wailing voice) We are always wandering in Galilee!

(All three KINGS scan the heavens. After a moment, the KING holding the star sights what he is looking for, taps the KING next to him, points to a spot in the sky, and at the same moment passes on the star to the other, who, as he takes it, nods: "Yes, I see.")

Same business between this, and the remaining, KING. When the last KING has received the star, the two others line up behind him, and all three begin lurching toward an exit, down-left. Just as they are almost offstage, the WJ calls to them:

WJ. Listen, are you sure--
(They stop and turn toward him.)
Kings! Are you certain you've... understood?

KING 1. We take our orders from a star.

KING 2. Where, then, is the opportunity for error?

WJ. Yes, but this... hurtling about: it can't have been intended that--

KING 1. A star called us into motion.

WJ. Granted, but--

KING 3. To have glimpsed it was already to be under way.

WJ. And from that day to this, you've never once given a thought to... cutting loose?

KING 2. Cut loose from a star?

KING 1. By it, our entire experience has been eliminated.

KING 3. (to KING 1) You mean: "illuminated."

KING 2. (at this moment, the star, which he is carrying, takes him into a particularly sharp dive-and-loop, which nearly topples the three of them) It has given direction to our life.

(The THREE KINGS lurch off, down-left. The WJ follows them to the point of their exit; then, in an attempt to keep them in view, he starts edging along the apron towards down-center.

Meanwhile, the strip of tan fabric is withdrawn, and a broken-off classical pillar, first becoming visible up-center, begins to glide downstage. As the pillar advances, the GODDESS--hitched to it like an animal by a length of coarse dirty rope--comes circling counterclockwise out from behind. The pillar stops on a dime at the very point (slightly left of center) where the KINGS had brought their star-pole to rest just prior to the WJ's entrance. The GODDESS herself comes to a halt at the same down-right position where, earlier, the WJ had made the first of his several halts out along the "path" of fabric.

The GODDESS is a pale, bedraggled girl, dressed in a rumpled, pulled-from-stock, "classical" costume. She sees the WJ first, and so has a moment to straighten her dress and assume a majestic bearing. The WJ does not notice her until, still straining to keep the THREE KINGS in view, he happens to turn his eyes right--and there she is. He starts, then whirls back around in the direction of the offstage KINGS --but in that moment of inattention he has lost them. He looks back and forth between the GODDESS and the offstage point where the THREE KINGS disappeared from view. He seems unable to put it together.)

GODDESS. No, there has been no mistake: You stand in her presence. After what a journey, one can only imagine. Let us omit the usual preliminaries. Advance. Speak.

WJ. What happened to the road to Caesarea?

GODDESS. Suppliant, I understand no better than yourself how you found your way here--

WJ. I was following the Three Kings--

GODDESS. More votaries! Royal ones! But I told them it would be like this. "Go on," I said, "stick me off on some seacoast somewhere--"

WJ. (looking around) Seacoast?

GODDESS. "It'll take more than that to come between a classical deity and her worshippers."

WJ. Classical deity!

GODDESS. Ooooo, I wish I had that archangel here to show him the lengths!

WJ. (gesturing toward the pillar and rope) Is this what's become of them?

GODDESS. It varies. Each was disposed of more or less in accordance with his deserts--or what were perceived as his deserts. Apollo they've got manacled to a rain-cloud. Minerva has been set to indexing the Western Fathers. Sometimes, though, the connection is a little difficult to see. In my own case, for example--

WJ. You are--? I'm sorry, I should know, there's something resoundingly familiar....

GODDESS. (looks at him with a pitying smile) How terrified you must be of a disappointment; how determined not to fall victim to false hopes. But rest assured: it is I, Futura, goddess of--

(The WJ nods in anticipation.)

I can see how it might not exactly have leapt out at you....

WJ. (gesturing back and forth between the GODDESS and the pillar) What happened?

GODDESS. I had been being radiant in a meadow. I was called in and told: "Thank you, that will do for the moment. In fact, that will do more or less permanently."

(holds the rope out toward him)

You get it? I don't.

WJ. There must be something in the choice of a point halfway between Jerusalem and Caesarea....

GODDESS. Jerusalem? Caesarea?

WJ. This is the road from... to...?

(The GODDESS shrugs and smiles politely.)

Then--where am I headed?

GODDESS. (archly) Hadn't you best leave that... to the Future?

(She gives him a knowing look; he doesn't get it.

By way of a still bigger hint, she points broadly at herself.)

... see what "The Future" may bring?

WJ. You don't mean--

GODDESS. I've never understood why there has to be this great pretense of chancing on it, as if the mere presence of the suppliant didn't make everything sufficiently--

WJ. Wait a minute. Are you telling me that included in your mandate as Goddess of the Future, you know the Future?

GODDESS. The Future... is what I know.
(Her face clouds.)
Or that's how it's always been. Or late, along with so much else--

WJ. Lady, your cult is about to experience a resurgence! Listen... have you ever heard the story of the Wandering Jew?

GODDESS. I'm sorry, I'm afraid I'm not too conversant with any myths but my own.

WJ. Is he a myth, necessarily? Could he not perhaps outlive in his individuality the figure of him as a myth? That really is "one for the future." I'll settle for knowing: if I'm it.

GODDESS. It?

WJ. Him. The Wandering Jew.

GODDESS. Is that really all you ask of the Future?

WJ. A... clarification, goddess. A... statement of intent.

GODDESS. (closes her eyes) I see... a pillar. And coming out from the pillar, a rope.

WJ. Wait a minute, that's your future.

GODDESS. Oh?
(opens her eyes)

Oh. Of course. Stupid of me. Still, that was what I got....

WJ. Look, maybe we're going for too much right off the bat. Forget about my own degree of personal involvement for the moment. If you could just let me have some detail on...what's in store, what being him might be like.

GODDESS. (closes her eyes, seems about to speak--but then opens her eyes again) I'm sorry, I still keep getting that rope and pillar. It could have something to do with my method of prediction.

WJ. What's that?

GODDESS. Well, since I am the Future, I simply comply with the Delphic injunction and know myself.

WJ. I don't think that's going to produce results in this case.

GODDESS. (running the rope through her fingers) Mmm... you want to give it a try before you dismiss it. Besides,
(a quaver coming into her voice)
it isn't as if one possessed way after way. So much has been simply... taken.
(She is in tears.)

WJ. What's the matter?

GODDESS. I miss everything!

WJ. That's a fine sentiment coming from the Goddess of the Future.

GODDESS. I want my lovely, ancient, classical world!

WJ. Your lovely, ancient...! Listen, you were hardly even a goddess at all, just one of those abstractions they went in for toward the end....

GODDESS. It was the life I went with! It was a life! This rut...
(gives her rope a contemptuous toss)

WJ. (looking closer) My god, you actually have worn a rut in the ground!

GODDESS. Ankle-high! You know what they say? That when I've got in deep enough--to the chin, I believe it is--the world will come to an end. That would do it, somehow, apparently.

WJ. And have you--?

GODDESS. (dangling a toe in the "rut") I've thought about it. But I'm in no hurry. I'm not exactly in the mood to do favours for these people.

(The WJ puts his hands to his eyes as if shielding them from a sudden flash.)

Although on the other hand, what can one do them but favours, since everything ~~is~~ is taken as a favor?

WJ. That light....

GODDESS. (with a smile) Possibly the last of my aura as a classical divinity.

WJ. (opens his eyes; as if only now really seeing her:) What kinds of experiences are these? These aren't experiences at all, these are images happening to a person....

GODDESS. If that's supposed to be a reference to me--

WJ. You, those Kings,
(the thought just now occurring to him:)
that "neighbor" at my side....

GODDESS. Now look. Maybe you're an image happening to a person. I've got problems of my own!

WJ. Yes, they're all very particular on that point. It seems to be one of the distinguishing marks....

GODDESS. We had a conversation! You asked things, I answered you.

WJ. If you can call those answers.

GODDESS. All right, I realize I wasn't that helpful. But listen, sometimes it takes a minute.

(closes her eyes)

As a matter of fact, I think I'm getting something now....

WJ. Please! Don't try and improve on the picture you've already given. You have been... clarity itself.

GODDESS. But all I could come up with was a pillar and a rope!

WJ. That's all there is!

GODDESS. To something called the Wandering Jew?

WJ. The Wandering Jew never takes a step! He knows nothing about being "so" to an object and then
(takes a schematic step)
"thus." He is hardly in space at all.... How am I knowing these things?

GODDESS. But you mentioned cities, spoke of a journey....

WJ. Oh, no doubt the landscape is going to be kept flashing by at decent intervals. In fact, I imagine I've only to close my eyes, and--
(He shuts his eyes. The TR. ANG. appears in strange light, up-center. The WJ opens his eyes and looks down.)
yes! There's the road to Caesarea, right where I left it, for what that's worth.

GODDESS. But don't sound as if you're giving up on the Future!

WJ. The Wandering Jew has no future! He goes on being characterized by a perception. In no other sense can he be spoken of as "going on."

GODDESS. Well, if that's how you feel, I don't see why you ever came looking for the Goddess Futura in the first place!

(For an instant, the WJ seems about to acknowledge the TR. ANG!'s presence--but then does not.)

WJ. I never looked for anything like this!

(He breaks and runs, down-right and off, disappearing at just the point from which he made his first entrance in the scene.

The GODDESS' mouth is open to reply, but she is already alone. She stamps her foot in exasperation. The stage light dims drastically. She is startled. She taps the ground with her heel again, more tentatively. The lights dim some more.

A malicious, abandoned smile spreads over her features. She kicks at the ground again and again. With each volley, the light dims a little more.

She pauses an instant to collect her strength. Then, taking hold of one of her legs by the thigh, as if it were a hoe or digging tool, she begins dragging it clockwise around the pillar to deepen the "rut." Before she has made it once around, however, the lights go to black.

In the brief scene-break that follows, there continue to be heard thumping, scraping sounds, not all of which can possibly be the result of the GODDESS' efforts.)

Scene iii With Pontius Pilate

(When the lights come up, the GODDESS and her pillar are gone. Where the pillar had stood, there now stands a Recamier chaise--the only object onstage. On the chaise, wearing a conventional Roman costume (a sort of male equivalent of the GODDESS' outfit), PONTIUS PILATE lies reclined. Down-left, facing him, stands the WANDERING JEW. It should not be immediately clear whether this is a new scene beginning or another episode within Scene ii.

Throughout the scene, PONTIUS PILATE continuously mimes scrubbing himself all over with an imaginary cake of soap. There is no acknowledgment of this in his words or manner, except at the one point indicated.)

PONTIUS PILATE. I understand everything but this: why you seek me out at this moment of moments.

WJ. Do you really understand everything but that?

PP. Surprised in an emphasis. My question, however, hangs in the air.

WJ. Why am I in Caesarea? In the first place--

PP. But I don't ask: what brings you to Caesarea. What brings you to me?

WJ. Well, at the time I was associated with you--

PP. "Associated"--is that what you call it?

WJ. Worked for you. Did liaison for you.

PP. Administrative terms always sit so strange on a Jewish tongue. So that's the local concept of liaison, is it: coming around to the back entrance of the Procurator's residence with the gossip of the neighborhood....

WJ. I was several times admitted by the front entrance.

PP. Even so signal a favor does not explain why you now come running to me with this secret-of-a-lifetime.

WJ. Well, I was always impressed with you as--

PP. Look now: it wouldn't possibly have anything to do with the fact that my life, too, has been touched?

WJ. "Touched"?

PP. By--

(blocks out a rough Cross in the air)

WJ. Well, doesn't that give us something in common?

PP. Simon, I imagine there are quarters where you and I can only with the greatest difficulty be told apart.

WJ. Well--that's why I've come to you.

PP. What? To make silent comparisons? To swap anecdotes? To commune?

WJ. What's happening to me?

PP. Look: Have you ever carried a standard or flag--or am I now wholly outside the Jewish realm of experience? You... evoke response--only, not quite to you. Or, to you as an instance....

WJ. How is that supposed to make me feel?

PP. How do you feel already? One goes on as before, only... quit of oneself; taken in exchange, so to speak; just enough of the old you left to savor the difference....

WJ. Is that a blessing or a curse?

PP. I wonder if it even amounts to being singled out, if it isn't just what happened to everyone who Crossed The Path after a certain point....

WJ. I could stand being the Wandering Jew, it wouldn't kill me, it would be well within my compass: in fact, I'm even coming to suspect a certain latent capacity....

PP. Yes, you were never one to let a destiny weigh, so long as your attention was being held.... They say you laughed or made a remark or something equally unimaginable. What possessed you?

(WJ turns away.)

I see you're already becoming a little bored with that question.

WJ. I'm no more ready than yourself that there should be only one question to ask about me.

(shrugs)

Something about the figure He made going by,

(mimes it as he speaks)

bent almost double, with the arms of the Cross closing over Him. Suddenly it went to

(blocks out the figure ~~α~~ in the air)

a circle inscribed beneath perpendiculars. And then there He was again, shouldering the beams....

PP. And they say geometry finds no echo in the Hebrew spirit!

WJ. Not that, but... the way it went to that. I had the impression I was being offered... a perception in a form,

(closing up)

Something in the look of it I found interesting, I don't know....

PP. Ah, "interesting"--there we touch earth! I remember how that word used to crop up in your ... liaison reports, as I suppose we must call them. "A most interesting development..." "I think you will be greatly interested...."

WJ. I can't think this has all come about as a result of the style of my liaison reports.

PP. Do you know, I'm beginning to suspect that's exactly how it has come about. All this flitting from place to place--

WJ. (half to himself) Are they places? I'm not so sure. Places Not Places, I'm tempted to call them. A relation taking it into its head to happen; a terror grown suddenly ambitious to occur in space.... I'll tell you something: as far as the travelling goes... I like it. It suits me. I could keep it up forever, ~~but~~ if I didn't have the feeling I may have to. But I had been thinking more in terms of--

PP. A circuit of Eastern capitals? An eternity of country lanes? You can't seriously have supposed you were being offered a world-tour?

WJ. Of course I realize there's more to it than mileage....

PP. Come on, Simon! The distance a man puts between himself and his experience is an expanse you know a little something about covering, yes?--at least in the outward direction. In fact, if that's the terrain in question, designating you the Wandering Jew was little more than... belated recognition.

WJ. But why should He have happened along just then and designated me?

PP. Why should He be any better than you at saying why? Perhaps it was unintentional. Perhaps He was "interested."
(The WJ begins to protest.)

Or perhaps nothing much of anything occurred, beyond your mistaking, as usual, every event for an image, and the look of the image for the point of the event.

WJ. I have had to fight my way back to a world where such mistakes begin to be possible. Where I have been, there are no events to see much or see little in, but the images are the events. Obsessions circle their objects before my eyes. Roads lead straight to the conclusion that one has gone astray on them. And just when the future appears bleakest, the future--appears.

PP. It sounds to me like a long spell of Simon being very characteristically Simon. But all right then! If you've had enough of events that are more like images, locales with nothing of the local about them, and distances not on any map; if what you want is to matter, not as legends do, but on dates, at places, through acts--then fling yourself into history, where no form is pure, and no one is anything so restful as "interested."

WJ. What is history?

PP. Ah, ah, that intonation--where have I heard it before?, as if it were given one not to know....

WJ. Nothing becomes history for me! The past...recedes slightly; then locks.

PP. Oh, I think we're being a little modest about our historical gift. You, who so many times, in this very room--

WJ. Procurator, I never gave you anything you could really use.

PP. No, I'm sure. Just the perceptions you couldn't resist sharing. Just what...was "interesting." Well, all right, that's your nature. But it doesn't have to be your destiny. In fact, where is it written you have to have a destiny? Insist on the absence of a destiny! Back, back!

WJ. "Back"...?

PP. To the daily round, the common course. Back to Jerusalem!

WJ. You're raising the possibility I might still, at this late date--?

PP. Are you sure it wasn't precisely to have that possibility raised that you...?

WJ. I admit to a wild hope--

PP. Perhaps it has been gratified.

WJ. You can't seriously be suggesting that I just plop down in front of my old storefront and start knocking out water-jugs again?

PP. Say to yourself: "It's been a long trip. It has returned me to my door."

WJ. But--it's my fate! I'm him! I'm it!

PP. Or alternately: you've done this travelling. A certain time has been passed in a certain way. Anything beyond that--

WJ. You don't understand something. Look:
(holds up one of PP's hands against one of his own;
with his free hand, PP goes on soaping)
A wrinkled hand--a wrinkled hand. But with me, the age is not real, somehow; could at any moment be lifted....

PP. That's how all old people feel, Simon. I feel that way....

WJ. I can't just pretend nothing has happened!

PP. You don't have to do anything that complicated. Indeed, why should you be up and doing? If He's so anxious for marvels to appear, let Him make the arrangements. You be having your life the meanwhile.

WJ. But the fact is--

PP. Their fact. What are you being so helpful for? One needn't. Look at me.

WJ. What?

PP. I'm the proof.

WJ. I don't understand.

PP. That one needn't... do their work for them. That one can... live in their teeth.

WJ. You?

PP. Ignoring disruption, going quietly about one's business....

WJ. You?

PP. ... Above all: declining to comment.

WJ. I must have wandered into the wrong conversation.

PP. For if we refuse to allow ourselves to be stampeded-- who is to say all is not as it was?

WJ. But--look at you! Your whole body... Your every move...

PP. One has simply got to insist on one's life!

WJ. And suppose, insisting all the way, I one day five hundred years from now happen to notice I'm on a road somewhere?

(At this moment in his incessant washing, PP mimes dropping the soap. He starts to reach for it--but arrests the movement, and looks searchingly at the WJ. At first the WJ is mystified; but then, realizing what is expected of him, he slowly mimes picking up the soap and returning it to PP--who immediately resumes his scrubbing.)

WJ. (watches for a moment; then:) I must go.

PP. The old compulsion returns, eh? Well--come again. Yes, you really must look in again; you do me a world of good. Promise? The very next time you're in Caesarea?

(The TR. ANG. appears, in strange light, up-center.)

WJ. I never made it to Caesarea.

PP. Eh?

WJ. (with a sweeping gesture) Just one more of the Places Not Places.

PP. Oh, I can see how that got started! Same old Simon! You give history a try, my friend. Open yourself. Be receptive. Let the old magic take hold.

WJ. (beginning to himself) At what point,
(then turning to PP)
At what point did events stop giving of themselves to me,
and start giving me myself again at every turn?

(But PP has already become engrossed in his washing ~~once~~more. Seeing this, the WJ starts to leave.)

PP. (catching him just at the exit) Because, you know, Simon: whatever it's going to be for you, it's going to be history, history, history all around you.

(The WJ resumes his exit, more thoughtfully.)

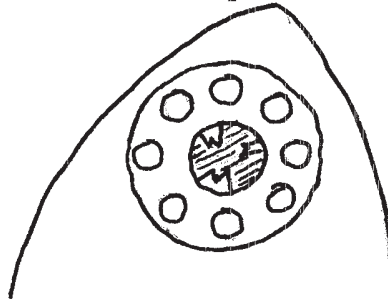
PART TWO

Scene 1 In the Chamber of Curiosity

(A corner set--two walls that converge toward up-left-center--suggestive of a windowless, vaguely gothic chamber. The convergent walls are each out-of-perspective in a different way. The stage-right wall, as it recedes from the audience, slants downward far more steeply and abruptly than its depth of recession would justify. The stage-left wall reverses perspective altogether, slanting sharply upward as it recedes from the spectator's eye. Because of these irregularities, the two converging walls do not quite meet. There is a gap at their implied up-left-center juncture; and in this gap a small, battered-looking model of a Viking ship dangles high above the stage.

Seated at a long table, right, the three EXAMINERS; on his feet, confronting them, left, the WJ.

Between the EXAMINERS and the WJ stands a slightly askew gothic arch, in which is set a circular, stained-glass rose-window. The rose-window has a dozen or so small circular panes evenly distributed about its circumference, and one large circular pane at its center. The outer panes are too small to be made out in detail; one can see only that each is composed of areas of vivid, contrasting color, no two panes exactly alike. The large central pane has been smashed. Aside from a few jagged, brightly colored slivers that remain around the edges, it is a gaping black hole.



In the darkness before the lights come up the roar of an angry mob is heard, cresting and subsiding.

At rise, the WJ has the EXAMINERS on the edges of their chairs with a story he is telling.)

WJ. It was only the next morning, far out at sea, that I suddenly understood: the slashed sails, the flaming deck, the absence of all other passengers but me and that dead man lying in state below the mast--there was only one kind of vehicle this could be.

THE IMPATIENT EXAMINER. Wait a minute. You're not telling us that smoldering wreck you drifted in here on was--

WJ. Yes. My journey now went forward upon a funeral ship.

IMPATIENT EX. But--they don't go anywhere,
(appealing to the other EXAMINERS)
do they--funeral ships? They have no rudders or oars; they're
just set ablaze, and given a push, and--
(shrugs)

WJ. That's right. Just...out, and...on.

IMPATIENT EX. But there must be some mistake. Our harbor watch reports you were most reluctant to be taken off and brought ashore.

WJ. I'd like to be getting back on board now, actually, if there are no further--

IMPATIENT EX. Isn't this carrying devotion to a dead master just a trifle--

WJ. The dead man--is a complete unknown to me!

IMPATIENT EX. Then why on earth--?

WJ. Perhaps there is something about the situation--endlessly adrift, bound helplessly to the fortunes of one whose journey has, out of nowhere, become one's own--that rings a bell.

IMPATIENT EX. But you might never have been heard from again!

WJ. Say I had not. I had found... my ideal mode of conveyance.

THE SUBTLE EXAMINER. A strange definition of "ideal," Mr. Laquedem.

WJ. I have had to teach myself some strange definitions.

SUBTLE EX. Your remarkable destiny did not come altogether naturally to you?

WJ. One does not "naturally" fall in with a view of oneself as a pair of shoes.

SUBTLE EX. Does one... offer resistance?

WJ. I fought against it like crazy--until one day I noticed I was fighting with weapons that could only be in the hands of one whom it had already overtaken.

SUBTLE EX. "Weapons," up to and including--?

WJ. You mean--?

(The SUBTLE EX. nods.)

Oh, possibly a leap or two into a volcano or two. More in a spirit of clarifying the terms: you know--how would the Miraculous Escape be handled this time? After a while, it grew to be an amusement with me--whereupon I dropped it. I already had enough amusements.

THE SYMPATHETIC EXAMINER. But--that's horrible!

WJ. Oh--I'm not sure I'd put it among my top eighty-nine grounds for complaint. You know what does get to be a bit of a strain, though? Fighting against the impression that other death has been in my stead.

SUBTLE EX. Do you fight against that impression also in the case of Our Savior?

WJ. No one has ever yet accused me of resisting my impressions of Him.

(Roar of mob offstage, cresting and subsiding.
The SYMP. EX. goes to the rose-window, and looks out the shattered central panel.)

SUBTLE EX. There we touch on an area I should very much like to--

IMPATIENT EX. What about all the superstitions? You know: that he may only rest his head where two elms have grown into a Cross-shape; that he is not permitted to go past a chain-harrow that has been left standing teeth downwards; and the like. I suppose they can't all be true?

WJ. They... become true.

IMPATIENT EX. Pardon?

WJ. It is a peculiarity of the Jew's fate that anything once posited of him henceforth becomes a part of it.

IMPATIENT EX. Really? That's very interesting, now, in light of a certain prophecy we have here in Rouen concerning--

SUBTLE EX. (a diversionary move) So, for example, the storm that drove you upon our coast--that, I suppose, would be the tempest that follows him everywhere, marking him out as a harbinger of trouble.

(The WJ does not answer.)

Correct, Mr. Laquedem?

WJ. My career is guaranteed to trouble anyone who thinks about it for ten minutes.

IMPATIENT EX. Career! To go drifting around in an open boat taking potshots at irreplaceable artifacts?
(points to rose-window)

SYMP. EX. (turning back from the window) Colleague--

IMPATIENT EX. (gesturing toward the offstage mob) Try telling them about your "career"....

SUBTLE EX. Do you pursue a career, Mr. Laquedem?

WJ. I have been a potter. But these days my sympathies tend to be all with the pot.

SUBTLE EX. I mean: is it necessary for the Wandering Jew to work in order to survive?

WJ. You know what I'd be more interested in discussing: is it necessary for him to survive?

SUBTLE EX. In what sense do you "survive," Mr. Laquedem?

WJ. This hand has rested on the railing of a Crusader galley; set down a stylus in the Great Library of Alexandria; handed Pontius Pilate back the soap. Obviously, whatever has to be done is being done.

SUBTLE EX. Yes, but the mechanics of it.... Is the Wanderer born anew in every generation, with no recollection of all that has gone before?

WJ. I don't remember anything like that....

SUBTLE EX. Do you attain a certain span, and then wake up the next morning rejuvenated?

WJ. I can't recall a single morning when I've woke up even particularly what you'd call refreshed.

SUBTLE EX. Is the Wandering Jew, then, always the same age?

WJ. I always seem to be the age the situation calls for.
At the moment I feel about a hundred and nine.

SUBTLE EX. Mr. Laquedem, I am not wise enough to know how to ask a question that cannot be turned to lightness. If you want us to believe that you're the Wandering Jew--

WJ. But I don't want you to believe it. I mean, it won't save me a step whether you believe it or not.

(Roar of mob offstage, cresting and subsiding.
The SYMP. EX. goes to the window and looks out through the shattered central panel.)

What is that noise?

SUBTLE EX. Some of our townsmen who would like to proceed to more direct methods against--

WJ. Against the Wandering Jew?

SUBTLE EX. Against a Jew who has defaced one of the great splendors of Christian art.

WJ. What have you done with my ship?

SYMP. EX. It's...undergoing repairs.

IMPATIENT EX. (to WJ) What's the hurry? Some place you have to be

WJ. (sourly) The men's room of the 42nd Street Library,
Holy Saturday, 1954.

SUBTLE EX. Mr. Laquedem seems to be losing patience.

WJ. Where is this place? Who are you?

IMPATIENT EX. We are a Commission of the Faculty of the University of Rouen--

SUBTLE EX. Think of this, Mr. Laquedem, as a Chamber of Curiosity. To curiosity the Wandering Jew can surely be no stranger?

WJ. What do you want from me?

IMPATIENT EX. (pointing at the rose-window) You've desecrated a very valuable piece of church property. We want to know why.

SUBTLE EX. Although, of course, our interest in the Wandering Jew, unlike that of our compatriots in the courtyard, goes far beyond his activities as a vandal.

WJ. Does it? I wonder if your whole conception of the Wandering Jew goes much beyond the figure of a vandal. How do you ever think of him but as lobbing in the brick through the edifice? The primordial vandal, first and only defacer of the Christian world-picture--wouldn't that be about more or less your view?

SYMP. EX. (turning back from the window) We have no "view," Mr. Laquedem; we sit at your feet. Allow us to participate in your wisdom.

IMPATIENT EX. Yes, you must have picked up quite a little collection of tidbits over the centuries.

(The SYMP. EX. makes a gesture of exasperation.)

WJ. Oh, god, I hope I've held it down! I've tried!

(The EXS. look puzzled.)

All my energies are directed toward not using everything up. And even then.... I once carried around an impenetrable mathematical treatise--"The Geometry of Iterated Loop Spaces"--for nearly three centuries, figuring: "Well--always that...." Now I had never even particularly shone at carrying-the-twos. But one day I flung the volume from me in horror: I found I was beginning to understand. So much for the wit and wisdom of the Wandering Jew. If you've been imagining him as a kind of wandering encyclopedia, you've been confusing him with someone else.

SUBTLE EX. Ah, now that opens a field....

IMPATIENT EX. You mean, with the other one?

WJ. } (together) { The other...?
SYMP. EX. } { Other one...?

IMPATIENT EX. Aren't there two? Brothers or something? One crisscrossing the earth, the other circling a basement pillar in Jerusalem.... Am I getting this mixed up?

WJ. I can only tell you what I tell myself: Mine is a truth of which there can be but one illustration. If it could happen twice, it could never have happened in the first place.

IMPATIENT EX. Then how do I come to be under the impression--?

SUBTLE EX. (aiming this at the WJ) Oh, because it is a story that so easily shades into others like it. No more than one Wandering Jew, to be sure, but no end of figures that--as on our "Panel of Outcasts," here--

(indicates the rose-window)
converge upon the Wanderer from every side.

(He runs a hand slowly around the circumference of the rose-window. At each name he mentions, he brings the hand to rest on a different outer pane--which he then, by a sudden radial sweep inward, joins to the smashed, gaping center.)

A betrayer of the Divine Confidence at a crucial moment--isn't that the red beard of Iscariot I see swimming into focus? A voyager over endless waters in a spectral ship--wasn't that the Flying Dutchman just flew by? And on and on: Cain and Faustus, the Demon Huntsman and the Man in the Moon--all figures that parcel out his significance between them,

(now running his hand outward from the smashed central pane to one after another of the outer panes in turn)

each carrying some off in a different direction....

WJ. (shortly) Very different destinies.

SUBTLE EX. Oh, no doubt, in substance, in essence. But the layman must be forgiven if he can never feel quite confident of having put his finger on just this or just that one of these shifting, echoing, melding--

WJ. Well, of course we run into each other from time to time. I mean: we're all out there. The Demon Huntsman and his crowd come charging across my landscape every so often. The Flying Dutchman will give me a lift if his nowhere happens to lie on a route with mine. As for Faustus--well, now, that relationship has had its good times and bad times. He used to be forever conjuring me up, until one time I pointed out he belonged on the other side of that circle: he was one of us himself. I don't hear nearly so often from him since then. Cain I brush past: you can have some tense moments entering a town with that one. But the Man in the Moon--well, he's up there on a religious violation himself, so that gives us a basis, as we go about the craters picking up sticks.

And do you know what the talk at one of these reunions invariably turns to? Similarities and differences--but especially

differences. There isn't one of us who couldn't let you have ten thousand words on the subject of all his points of divergence from all the rest: "He... whereas I..."--that's how the conversation runs.

SYMP. EX. Can you feel pain?

WJ. What can be said for a definition of pain that excludes what I feel?

SYMP. EX. There is something about your way of speaking which suggests that pain, with you, is a thing of the past.

WJ. I have no past.

(Roar of mob, offstage, cresting and subsiding.
The SYMP. EX. goes to the window and looks out the shattered central panel.)

SUBTLE EX. Surely history--or what by us is experienced as history--has in some sense become a personal past for you?

WJ. I don't respond to history. I'll be in an event. A hundred years later, they inform me, "That was the Early Middle Ages." "You mean that, back there in...?" Furious nodding of heads: "Did it not feel like the Middle Ages?" "It felt like something!" I'll say one thing for history, though: It's not happening any faster.

SYMP. EX. (turning back from the window) You are impatient of the future, then, Mr. Laquedem?
(The WJ is silent.)

SUBTLE EX. Naturally, since every hour that passes brings Mr. Laquedem that much nearer his salvation.
(The WJ is silent.)

You are confident of your eventual salvation, are you not, Mr. Laquedem?

WJ. I... believe I'll be dealt with again.

SYMP. EX. You stand in no fear of the Day of Judgment?

WJ. It is not easy, is it, to imagine a sense in which "judgment" has not already taken place.

IMPATIENT EX. Well, if you're not worried about the past or the future--then what's your problem?

WJ. Nothing at all! If there's one thing I'm looking for, it's a problem. The problem is: I can live like this. On my little boat. In my little sea.

IMPATIENT EX. Do you consider yourself an instance of the Divine Justice or the Divine Mercy?

WJ. I consider myself an instance of having to ask that question.

SYMP. EX. Let's return to the time before--

SUBTLE EX. Let's take a break.

(He motions to the WJ to step outside. Exit the WJ.
Loudest roar yet from the offstage mob.)

SUBTLE EX. We're not asking the right questions.

IMPATIENT EX. Why don't we just out and ask him why he broke the window?

SUBTLE EX. But that's of no importance!

IMPATIENT EX. (with a nervous glance in the direction of the offstage mob) Maybe not to you....

SUBTLE EX. Nor to them--least of all to them--if this turns out to be the Wandering Jew.

SYMP. EX. And you feel the answers he's given so far bring us no nearer certainty on that point?

SUBTLE EX. His answers...are like nothing I ever heard.

SYMP. EX. Mightn't that in itself be a pretty fair indication---?

IMPATIENT EX. You mean because the prophecy warns us to be prepared for the unexpected?

SYMP. EX. I mean: that he rings true.

IMPATIENT EX. To what? Certainly not to the figure as traditionally portrayed in--

SYMP. EX. To the absence of every preconception one ever had on the subject.

SUBTLE EX. The question Mr. Laquedem raises is whether it may be possible to possess a knack of ringing true, in the absence of all other qualification. And then, I wonder whether we have given him an opportunity to ring anything but true. These questions we've been showering him with: how it works, how this or that difficulty is surmounted....

SYMP. EX. Questions that could only be answered from inside the experience.

SUBTLE EX. But from inside what experience?

IMPATIENT EX. (to SUBTLE EX.) What sorts of questions should we be putting to him?

SYMP. EX. Should we be putting questions to him at all?

IMPATIENT EX. You mean you think he's an impostor?

SYMP. EX. I mean, this is no way to treat the genuine article or an impostor.

(The IMPATIENT EX. looks puzzled.)

I mean: it is he who makes a question of us.

IMPATIENT EX. (reflectively) We could just toss him in the slammer and see....

SYMP. EX. What!

SUBTLE EX. That could be disastrous.

SYMP. EX. (to IMPATIENT EX.) What's the matter with you? Suppose it turned out to be the wrong man.

SUBTLE EX. Ah, yes, well, that would indeed be unfortunate. But the disaster to which I refer--

IMPATIENT EX. Now wait a minute. The prophecy states--well, or implies, anyway--that so long as we can hold onto the Wandering Jew, it will bring the town certain benefits. There's nothing about holding onto the wrong person bringing disaster.

SUBTLE EX. And suppose word gets back to the real one that we dish out a lifetime in prison to anyone claiming to be him? You can say goodbye to your "benefits" then: the Wandering Jew would never set foot within a hundred miles of here.

(shakes his head emphatically)

There must not be so much as a hint of what is really at stake in this inquiry!

IMPATIENT EX. Well, if we have to stay off the whole subject of the prophecy--

SUBTLE EX. But we don't have to stay off it. We can't stay off it. And I think possibly our whole mistake thus far has been to assume we could. The part about perpetual imprisonment had better be downplayed, yes....

IMPATIENT EX. But what does that leave?

SUBTLE EX. Why, only the whole substance of the thing: what is meant by the words: "When the Wandering Jew is near, the Savior is not far"? Is the reference to overlapping stays? To a collaboration of some sort? Or just possibly, by "savior" are we to understand--?

IMPATIENT EX. You know what I'd like to clear up? Who the stiff on the ship with him was.

SYMP. EX. You know, in a way, we're as bad as them.
(gestures toward the offstage mob)
I mean, here we've got this Figure of the Ages with us, and the only aspect that seems to interest us is the tie-in with our little, local--

SUBTLE EX. Pardon me, but that, I feel, is precisely the attitude that has hobbled our inquiry thus far: that sense of now's our moment... here's our chance....

(shakes his head emphatically)
No. One's question to such a Figure... is what it is.

IMPATIENT EX. What is it?

SUBTLE EX. "What do you have to tell us on the subject of Our Savior?"

IMPATIENT EX. But since we don't know if he is the Figure--

SUBTLE EX. Here is the one line of questioning that offers any prospect of finding out.

IMPATIENT EX. You're going in circles....

SUBTLE EX. I am on the track of the Wandering Jew. Show me a better way to go.

IMPATIENT EX. But to make it all ride on some one particular thing that can't possibly--

(to SYMP. EX.)
Tell him.

SYMP. EX. (to IMPATIENT EX.) No. I think he's right. "Relations with the Savior" ought to be one subject on which the Wandering Jew is unmistakable.

(The IMPATIENT EX. throws up his hands.)

SUBTLE EX. Well! Support from an unexpected quarter! I cannot help but wonder, though, at my colleague's motive in offering it, since his enthusiasm for these proceedings seems far less than total.

SYMP. EX. Perhaps I believe this is the quickest way to make you of my opinion.

SUBTLE EX. Oh-ho! That had the unmistakable ring of somebody! Well, let us see what will be the teaching of the Wandering Jew in these matters.

(calls)

Mr. Laquedem!

(Re-enter the WJ.)

Roar of offstage mob, cresting and subsiding.)

Well, sir, we find ourselves still unable to decide.

WJ. I know. It took me a while myself. However, I had to know.

SUBTLE EX. We, also, "have to know."

WJ. (the thought just occurring to him) Why?--if you don't mind my asking.

SUBTLE EX. The kind of question the Wandering Jew asks is also evidence for the Wandering Jew.

WJ. Is that what your friends in the courtyard are up to-- gathering evidence?

SUBTLE EX. Their anger at a vandal would soon give place to something quite different if the "vandal" turned out to be the Wandering Jew.

SYMP. EX. You see, there's a prophecy he will one day visit our town--

WJ. And make his presence known by taking out a church-window or two?

SYMP. EX. The prophecy states that our conception of him will not survive his coming.

(The WJ looks blank.)

That the actual Figure will "shatter the image" we possess of him.

WJ. Oh, and so when I...
 (throwing gesture)
 then you...
 (putting-things-together gesture)
 Isn't that slicing it a little fine?

SUBTLE EX. We can't afford to leave any stone unturned. A visit from him would be of more than casual interest to us; for our prophecy goes on to declare: "When the Wandering Jew is near, the Savior is not far."

WJ. What can possibly be the meaning of that?

SYMP. EX. We were hoping you might be able to tell us.

WJ. (throwing up his hands) How do these things get started?

IMPATIENT EX. Tradition assigns the origin of the prophecy to the Wandering Jew himself, who, it is said, in the course of an earlier visit he paid our town--

SUBTLE EX. But perhaps Mr. Laquedem would welcome an opportunity to display his familiarity with the events in question.

SYMP. EX. Have you visited our town before?

WJ. I have been over and over this ground....

IMPATIENT EX. Several visits, then. And on which of these earlier occasions did you give utterance to the prophecy that has come down to us?

WJ. I? I am the source of nothing about myself. I pass, and leave no trace.

SUBTLE EX. Now there, Mr. Laquedem, you create a doubt. Legend has it that the figure on the wall behind you was incised there by none other than the Wanderer himself.

(The figure on the wall. By a slight change of lighting, the figure emerges from the texturing of the flat behind him.)

WJ. (stares for a moment at the figure) It's possible. Whenever I have a moment free, I lay out that image and lose myself in it.

SUBTLE EX. Really? And what gives this hieroglyph such interest in the eyes of the Wandering Jew?

(WJ silent)

Mr. Laquedem? Will you explain the nature of your interest in this figure?

WJ. (after a moment) No.

SUBTLE EX. You cannot?

WJ. It... shouldn't be necessary. I am before you. You have me here.

SUBTLE EX. But if you refuse to answer our questions--

WJ. I am the answer I refuse to provide.

IMPATIENT EX. In other words, we're welcome to try and guess why he sent the brick through the window.

WJ. Oh, that window!

SUBTLE EX. We gathered you did not think too highly of it from your brick.

WJ. It's an inadequate conception.

SUBTLE EX. Who would have supposed the unmasking of inadequate conceptions of himself to be a matter of such concern to the Wandering Jew?

WJ. Perhaps his principal occupation.

SUBTLE EX. Is not that itself rather an inadequate--

WJ. (anticipating him) Starting at home.

IMPATIENT EX. But what's inadequate about our window? It shows the whole story. You see the Savior struggling along under His Cross. You see the Jew come running up to Him--

WJ. What it shows never happened.

IMPATIENT EX. The Jew never sought to grab the Cross for himself?

WJ. What?

IMPATIENT EX. I understood you to be saying--

WJ. For himself? That's not what's on your window!

SUBTLE EX. Now, Mr. Laquedem, every man woman and child in that courtyard could reel off the contents of that panel. It clearly shows--well, or did show, until you put a brick through it--the Wandering Jew wresting the Cross away from Our Savior.

WJ. Yes. Wresting it away. From the other. Not for himself.

IMPATIENT EX. (checking) You wrested the Cross away from the Savior, rather than for yourself?

WJ. Me! I didn't touch a thing! We're talking about the scene on your window. You don't suppose any of all this ever happened!

IMPATIENT EX. Well, then, what difference does it--

WJ. Because your way makes it sound as if the Jew had ... well, some ideas of his own.

SUBTLE EX. Is that such an impossible suggestion, Mr. Laquedem?

WJ. The Wandering Jew as Savior?

SUBTLE EX. The Wandering Jew in a view of himself as Savior?

WJ. Some of the earliest opposition, hadn't you heard?

SUBTLE EX. I had also heard he regards himself as the bearer of a certain flame.

WJ. And if he did, it would be entirely a matter between him and the flame. You may expect nothing from him.

IMPATIENT EX. That's not what our prophecy says!

WJ. That prophecy of yours certainly contains a thought for every occasion.

SUBTLE EX. It does contain a reference to certain...benefits which the Jew, by his presence, would confer on the town.

WJ. What benefits can possibly be imagined as flowing from such a source?

SUBTLE EX. There, interpretation varies. Some favor a reading of "safe from attack," on the grounds that carnage cannot come near him.

IMPATIENT EX. Others understand the sense to be: "safe from disease," since infection must surely pass him by.

SYMP. EX. And some, less literal-minded than the rest, look for no happier outcome than a mystery penetrated, an essence grasped.

SUBTLE EX. In short, on the exact nature of the benefits, our text is not altogether clear.

WJ. The surprise of the afternoon.

SUBTLE EX. But benefits there will be--that much is clearly foretold.

WJ. By the Wandering Jew.

IMPATIENT EX. By the prophecy.

WJ. Which you--

SUBTLE EX. Which we attribute to the Wandering Jew.

WJ. Who is also the subject of the prophecy.

SUBTLE EX. Well--

WJ. And the author of the benefits.

IMPATIENT EX. I suppose it does all come across as a bit, uh... self-sustaining.

WJ. How is the Wandering Jew supposed to find his way into this closed circle of expectancy?

IMPATIENT EX. You'd have to check the details with him. All we know for sure is: he will make a difference to our lives.

WJ. The Wandering Jew?

SYMP. EX. Or that's the story we tell ourselves.

WJ. He least of all! None less than he! Oh, if there's one thing the Wandering Jew does not do, it's "make a difference"! What I choose defines the fruitless course. Where I stand becomes the outside.

(Low murmur of discontent from offstage mob)

SUBTLE EX. Well, that is perhaps your interpretation of the Figure--

WJ. Interpretation! There's no need for interpretations! What is there to interpret?

IMPATIENT EX. Are you suggesting that the Wandering Jew is a figure without significance?

SUBTLE EX. More to the point, can one imagine the Wandering Jew plumping for a view of himself as without significance, pointing nowhere, exemplifying nothing...?

WJ. What were you thinking he might "exemplify"?

SUBTLE EX. But there has never been any lack of suggestions! The a-historical consciousness...

IMPATIENT EX. The Jewish experience...

SYMP. EX. The cosmopolitan sensibility...

WJ. The a-historical consciousness? Listen...! The Jewish experience? Listen...! The cosmopolitan sensibility? Listen...! Being the Wandering Jew isn't a fate that symbolizes other things, it's the kind of thing things symbolize.

IMPATIENT EX. Got to be more to it than that!

SYMP. EX. You must see yourself as epitomizing something!

WJ. Perhaps: a way it might have been for human beings--but wasn't. Perhaps... a discarded alternative.

IMPATIENT EX. I don't see how Rouen is going to be any better off for the presence of a discarded alternative.

WJ. Oh, my curious friends! Don't you suppose if there were some difference I might have made all this while, I wouldn't long since have been making it?

SUBTLE EX. Really, Mr. Laquedem, your failure to elicit the full potential of the Figure is hardly a reason why others should give over the attempt. Yet in a sense you are right: any interest which such a Figure arouses must be far less on his own account than by virtue of the extraordinary relationship he enjoys with Our Savior--a relationship to which we might perhaps now--

SYMP. EX. (to the WJ) Would you do it again?

WJ. Pass me another brick!

SYMP. EX. No, no, I mean: would you commit your original offense against the Savior again?

SUBTLE EX. I don't think we ever established what Mr. Laquedem's original offense was.

WJ. (lifting his eyes toward the ~~α~~ diagram on the wall)
To have looked... at a situation... in a certain light. To have made a selection of elements. To have allowed myself a perception.

IMPATIENT EX. Doesn't exactly sound like the crime of the century to me.

SYMP. EX. (to WJ) Well, and would you allow yourself this perception again, now, knowing who He really was?

WJ. What makes you think I didn't know who He was?

SYMP. EX. There is, of course, the tradition that Savior and Jew had been schoolmates together....

WJ. Yes, as a matter of fact, we were.

SUBTLE EX. Yet in all that time you were granted no glimpse-- not so much as a single miracle--?

WJ. I seem to recall sitting through a couple of those, yes.

IMPATIENT EX. No kidding?

SYMP. EX. (to WJ) Then how could you ever, possibly--

WJ. (shrugs) How does one explain a failure to be impressed-- especially to others who so obviously are?

SUBTLE EX. It is a long road finding something that impresses you, Mr. Laquedem. Perhaps now--

IMPATIENT EX. Wait a minute! Let him tell us about the miracles.
(to WJ)
Is it true Our Lord never had to be taught the letters of the Hebrew alphabet?

WJ. Yes, I believe that's so.

SUBTLE EX. Ah, well: being Himself the Word, and so forth....

WJ. I don't think it was anything that mysterious. We're a letter-conscious people, and examples of the script were everywhere. Most of us knew our alphabets by the time we got to school.

IMPATIENT EX. Is it true that angels used to come down down into the schoolyard and join in your games?

WJ. Well, He had some pretty strange friends....

IMPATIENT EX. And that even as a child, Our Lord was accustomed to pronounce judgment in the disputes of His fellows?

WJ. You know how ready children are with a judgment....

SUBTLE EX. Is it possible that from time to time you found yourself on the receiving end of one of these judgments?

WJ. Much I have received, but an end I have not received.

SUBTLE EX. You don't seem to derive unmixed pleasure from the recollection of a childhood spent in company with the Prince of Peace.

WJ. Funny, isn't it, how schoolboy grudges persist....

IMPATIENT EX. Are you implying a childhood grudge may have played some role in the encounter you had with Our Lord that first Good Friday?

WJ. I think about that....

SUBTLE EX. Would you care to speculate how this ill-feeling between yourself and the Fount of Reconciliation chanced to arise?

WJ. It could well go back to the day we were allowed to handle the sacred writings for the first time. As I watched the scroll moving between my two hands, something suddenly became clear to me: they were on scrolls because a scroll was the form of their meaning: its slow unrolling equalled... was it history's slow unrolling?--I'm afraid at this distance in time, I no longer remember exactly the equivalence I saw: something parallel to something. Anyway, I was bursting with my discovery--and in particular I was longing to share it with Our Little Lord, who, I may just mention, had always been quite receptive to my brainstorming up till now. The first moment we were alone, I set forth my idea to Him. He did not seem to understand. I explained more fully. He said it were better I confine my thoughts to the meaning of Holy Writ, and no matter about the form it came to us in. But the form was the meaning, I said --more harshly than I had intended, no doubt; but really! He--He opened His eyes in that way of His so that they included you--no one ever argued with Him after He did that. But a few days later, when my thoughts felt like they belonged to myself again, I hit on the perfect way to bring my insight home to Him. The next time it came His turn to recite in class, I substituted for His scroll one which I had fashioned out of an old sheepskin--with not a word on it. He undid the ties in that grown-up-little-boy way of His, opened His mouth to read, and --there was nothing to read! He blinked, rolled out a little more--still nothing. Now He turns the spindles faster and faster, the inches of empty sheepskin flash by, until finally --after what must have seemed like an eternity even to Him-- He reaches the extreme inner margin of the scroll where in tiny letters I had written: A truth in a form.

IMPATIENT EX. And what was Our Lord's reaction to this infantile prank?

WJ. He put the scroll down without a word and held out His hands to be beaten for an ignorant boy. Oh, but I should have known then!

IMPATIENT EX. Known what?

WJ. That He'd find a way of getting back at me eventually. That one day He'd hand me something I couldn't get to the end of.

IMPATIENT EX. Just a minute. Are you suggesting that the one paying back a grudge on that Jerusalem streetcorner was --not you, but Him?

WJ. (jabbing at his breast with his thumb) Who is here?
WHO IS HERE?

IMPATIENT EX. You are asking us to believe that Our Lord paused in the midst of ransoming mankind to...avenge a snub?

SUBTLE EX. Indeed, you know, Mr. Laquedem, that is rather the weak point in this entire legend of yours. Here is Our Savior--He has calmly borne every torment, meekly endured every slight, found forgiveness in His heart for those who are in the very act of murdering Him--and then, out of nowhere, He goes and slaps this unimaginable sentence on someone who has... made a remark.

(pause)

Mr. Laquedem?

WJ. You're not waiting for me to justify it, I hope. It's enough to have to live this bedtime story of a destiny without being called upon to sing the praises of its moral architecture.

SUBTLE EX. As a matter of fact, that is often considered a highly suitable occupation for the Wandering Jew. But you, I take it, see a rather different relation as obtaining between yourself and the Divine Justice.

WJ. You know what I sometimes think--leaving aside the 90-or-so percent of the time I know you aren't going to appreciate, and confining myself to the rest? I sometimes think that maybe "punishment" was the furthest thing from His mind; that from His perspective it may have had far more the character of... entrusting me with a job.

IMPATIENT EX. What "job"?

WJ. (shrugs) Perhaps to illustrate some further sense He had of Himself: as in motion toward the end, as well as withdrawn into the end.... He, to withdraw; I, to wander.... Between the two of us....

SYMP. EX. "When the Wandering Jew is near, the Savior is not far."

SUBTLE EX. (rapping on the smashed central windowpane) Ah, Mr. Laquedem, you are still trying to wrest that Cross away!

IMPATIENT EX. I told you there was nothing wrong with our image.

SUBTLE EX. On the contrary. Our image...lies shattered. Shattered it lies. You have shattered our image, Mr. Laquedem. I think perhaps my colleagues and I are ready to appear before our friends in the courtyard and announce--

IMPATIENT EX. Hey! You don't mean--?

WJ. (to the SUBTLE EX.) Then it appears I have conferred the one benefit that is mine to bestow.

IMPATIENT EX. That was the benefit? Wait a minute. What was?

SYMP. EX. "Safe from--misapprehension."

IMPATIENT EX. That's it? What about all the terrific things he was supposed to do for Rouen?

SUBTLE EX. I think we may expect the flow to commence once Mr. Laquedem is safely under--

(The SYMP. EX. tugs at his sleeve, whispers something in his ear. The SUBTLE EX. seems annoyed, but yields.)

However that moment will have to be deferred briefly, since, as my colleague reminds me, we have omitted a small but essential preliminary. Mr. Laquedem, would you mind translating the Hebrew word--

(turns again to the SYMP. EX., who prompts[†] him)

zomemim.

WJ. Isn't it a little late in the day--?

SUBTLE EX. Be that as it may, I must ascertain your command of the Hebrew language.

WJ. What was the word again?

SUBTLE EX. Zomemim.

WJ. (thinks hard; then:) I'm afraid I don't know.

SYMP. EX. (produces a small scroll and reads from it)
Zomemim: "A person who, having brought false accusation against another, must now himself suffer the very punishment he would have called down upon the other's head."

WJ. Hm. That's one I certainly should have known.

(Mob noise offstage, beginning as a murmur and building to a roar by the top of page 25.)

SUBTLE EX. (tightlipped) Well, Mr. Laquedem. We came so near.

IMPATIENT EX. Do we necessarily have to--

SUBTLE EX. Let it all slip away on a technicality? Yes, that is precisely what we now have to do.

IMPATIENT EX. But--he "shattered the image." You said so yourself.

WJ. Never came near!

IMPATIENT EX. What?

WJ. (gesturing toward the smashed central panel of the rose-window) You see what you always see! Your image of the Wandering Jew... continues intact.

IMPATIENT EX. (to the SUBTLE EX.) But he said so much that--

SUBTLE EX. Yes, a most elusive mind; quite fascinating. One feels positively bumped down to earth on learning that the Wandering Jew hasn't all those plucky, vivid, sensitive things to say. But a Wandering Jew neither plucky nor vivid nor sensitive is yet a possibility; a Wandering Jew without a knowledge of basic Hebrew is not.

IMPATIENT EX. Then why didn't we check on that first?

WJ. I don't suppose you'd be interested in hearing--

SUBTLE EX. Mr. Laquedem, you have "interested" us quite enough already.

WJ. Have I? I don't get the feeling I've interested you for one minute. I'm not sure that I've so much as... attracted your glance.

IMPATIENT EX. Listen, you ought to be thankful things went no further than they did. You might have wound up exchanging your ship for a cell.

WJ. Ah.

IMPATIENT EX. (claps his hand over his mouth; to the other EXS.) Damn! Sorry.

WJ. The Chamber of Curiosity, it appears,... locks from without.

SYMP. EX. You don't sound particularly surprised.

SUBTLE EX. Perhaps it had already occurred to Mr. Laquedem that holding onto the benefits would involve holding onto the ~~benefits~~ Jew.

WJ. (low) Do you suppose you are the first?

IMPATIENT EX. Really? I didn't know there were other towns with Wandering Jew prophecies.

WJ. This is every town I have ever visited! This is the one situation in which I ever find myself! You are every questioner I shall ever face!

SUBTLE EX. He is a pleasure. Your less subtle claimant, now, might well have taken the line: "Never in all my days!" But--as it has no doubt occurred to Mr. Laquedem to suggest--what has the Wandering Jew "never"?

WJ. At every dot on the map--the prison prepared. What do they know, any of them, but to make ready the prison! But he'll not be held!

IMPATIENT EX. Hm! I'd have thought he'd find it rather a relief, being held.

SUBTLE EX. (to WJ) Ah, yes; the "no longer may he tarry" aspect. But the question is: no longer than what? Till sundown? For thirty days? A lifetime? One hears such differing accounts....

IMPATIENT EX. We figured it was worth a try.

WJ. To whom has it not been worth a try? All seek to imprison the Wandering Jew in a conception, to halt the development of the Figure just at the point of their own need of him....

IMPATIENT EX. Well, listen, naturally, what interests people is going to be what interests them. What did you expect?

(The mob-roar suddenly subsides.)

WJ. (looks toward the wall-diagram) What did I expect? I expected...to come across... for it to be sufficient... not to have to say. What was I thinking of?

(suddenly rounding on them)

No more questions!

SUBTLE EX. Indeed, I don't believe any of us have any further--

WJ. What I am, no question will elicit. Respond to a question, and you are only consenting to respond to a need not your own. All the questions they can ask come down to this: "Would you mind moving the mirror a little closer?"

SUBTLE EX. Enough, Mr. Laquedem.

WJ. No, it has precisely not been enough--much as I might have liked it to be. It seems I must set about my value--if I do not wish any and all values set upon me; advance the argument I thought I was; swing--of all the unlikely trajectories--into something like action.

I would now be prepared to explain the meaning of that wall-diagram to you.

IMPATIENT EX. Thanks anyway, but--

WJ. (pointing first to the Cross, then to the circle) A clash--but meanwhile, subsisting beneath--

SUBTLE EX. Mr. Laquedem!
(The WJ turns.)

The inquiry is over.

WJ. You're not interested?

IMPATIENT EX. You're not him!

WJ. I am only now consenting to take up what I am!

SUBTLE EX. I don't think my colleagues or I have any interest in further revelations. The charm of a conversation on the true nature of the Wandering Jew with a false Wandering Jew is starting to wear a little thin.

(At this signal, the EXS. rise.)

WJ. Dismissed?

SUBTLE EX. Your shipwreck...awaits you.

WJ. Then the Wandering Jew...must entirely elude you!

SYMP. EX. (to SUBTLE EX.) You can't just let him walk out into that--
(gestures in the direction of the offstage mob)

SUBTLE EX. We shall hold off announcing the results of our inquiry until Mr.--whatever-his-name has found his way to the back door.

IMPATIENT EX. And what about--?
(gestures toward the rose-window)

SUBTLE EX. The defendant will of course be expected to replace the image he shattered.

WJ. Oh--fine: that gives me my field. Fine--in that case, forget about the wall-diagram.

(The EXS. exchange puzzled looks and file out. At the last moment, the SYMP. EX., after a quick check to be sure his colleagues are really gone, turns back into the room.

The WJ has gone over to the rose-window and is examining it in an assessing, professional way. Only after a moment does he become aware that the SYMP. EX. is still with him.)

WJ. I'm going to give them a whole new conception. Maybe I'll even throw in a new prophecy to go with it. Where do they keep the stained-glass?

SYMP. EX. Why, Mr. Laquedem?

WJ. Because it is impossible they should ever arrive at me, unaided. I was a fool to expect it. If they could read off the value from the manner, they would understand me already--for to have understood how a truth can be in a form is precisely to understand me.

SYMP. EX. I mean: why do you impersonate the Wandering Jew?

WJ. I have not yet begun to impersonate him!

SYMP. EX. Not that I can't see the attraction, for a certain class of mind. But every word you spoke seemed to argue you superior--

WJ. Then you recognized--?

SYMP. I recognized the Wandering Jew! I stood with the Wandering Jew--only to see him at the last moment detach himself from-- Who are you?

WJ. (shakes his head sadly) Not even to the eye of sympathy--

SYMP EX. Yes, but--Zomemim! Zomemim!

WJ. Is that what this is all about?

SYMP. EX. How can you explain not knowing--

WJ. A word! A single Hebrew--! What is one word against the whole accumulated weight of--

SYMP. EX. "Most of us knew our alphabets by the time we got to school."

WJ. Does it really--?

SYMP. EX. I trusted you!

WJ. (shuts his eyes in weary resignation and recites as if by rote) As a special mercy, the Wanderer is permitted to forget all but the language of the country he is passing through at the moment. For example, when, leaving here, I cross the border into--where is this, again? France?--

(The SYMP. EX. nods non-committally: "let's say.")
--into the Low Countries, then--I won't remember a single word of
(with exaggerated accuracy)

le frannnnn-cais.

SYMP. EX. (low) It is you!

(A cry of rage from the mob)

WJ. What's happening?

SYMP. EX. (looking out the window) My colleagues have come out on the balcony. The mob doesn't like what it's hearing: no Wandering Jew after all--and their "vandal" slipped through their fingers.

(Sound of breaking glass)

Come on. We've got to get you out of here.

WJ. Wait! I can't leave now. What about my commission?

SYMP. EX. Commission?

WJ. For the window. "The defendant will be expected to replace the image he shattered"--wasn't that how your colleagues--?

SYMP. EX. But--

WJ. Oh, I know: stained-glass, it's a difficult process--not something one picks up in an afternoon. Still, with my background as a skilled craftsman--

SYMP. EX. But--I'm afraid all they meant was that you'd be expected to bear the cost of a new image.

WJ. Oh? Really? No more than that?

SYMP. EX. I'm sorry....

WJ. Well...it doesn't matter. There'll be other opportunities.

SYMP. EX. I'd like to know how --

WJ. Because from now on, I intend to construe situations as opportunities.

SYMP. EX. No, no, I meant--

WJ. The only thing I don't understand--

(Explosion offstage)

What was that?

SYMP. EX. (looking out the window) The mob is kindling torches and setting off in the direction of the ghetto. I'm afraid the Jews of Rouen are going to pay dear for ~~the~~ ~~safe~~ ~~passage~~ of the Wandering Jew.

(Another explosion)

Come on!

WJ. And the new one?

(The SYMP. EX. looks blank.)

The new design. For the window. Where is it going to come from, then?

SYMP. EX. Mr. Laquedem, I doubt very much there's going to be any "new design."

WJ. You can't mean they're just going to run up another of those?
(points at rose-window)

How did everyone ever become so sold on that fantasia, anyway?

SYMP. EX. It is said that the Wandering Jew himself, his prophecy once delivered, now took colored chalk in hand--

WJ. Oh, no! Not this time! If anyoody's interested in a Wandering Jew Original, the moment is now!

(awkward pause)

Well, what do you--?

SYMP. EX. I? I hang on your every word!

WJ. But you hang alone....

SYMP. EX. Tell me your idea!

WJ. I think maybe my business in this place is at an end....
(starts to leave)

SYMP. EX. I'll see to your ship, I'll see to everything.
Share it with me!

WJ. (winces) My ship, my deathly vehicle.... No more that way!
Any taste I ever had for the voyage of a corpse.... I make this
town a gift of my ship.

SYMP. EX. The town?

WJ. They look, do they not, for a communication of sorts from
the Wandering Jew? Perhaps this will say something to somebody....
(starts to leave)

SYMP. EX. But what about--
(The WJ turns; the SYMP. EX. points to the window.)
Fill me in. Enlighten me. At least let me hear your concept!

WJ. My concept?

(goes over to the rose-window, covers the broken
pane with his two flattened palms, then slowly
draws his hands apart.)

Transparency.

(The SYMP. EX. looks puzzled.)

Clear glass.

(Deafening explosion. More sounds of shattering
glass. Explosions continue during the scene change.)

Scene *ii* The Wandering Jew the World
Has Been Waiting For

(In the darkness before the lights come up, explosions are heard--and continue to be heard, sporadically, throughout the scene.

At rise, the WJ is sitting in a Jewish cemetery by the side of a road, listening to the explosions. In the distance, the outline of the city of Rouen, with its ghetto in flames, is visible on the horizon.

Enter the OLD MAN. Here is the Wandering Jew the audience has been waiting for: huge staff, swirling robe, rope belt, sandals, snowy beard--and tormented expression. He strides onstage purposefully, but once on, loses his impetus and drifts about the stage aimlessly, either not seeing or not registering the WJ until the latter speaks.

An explosion. Another. A rapid series of explosions.)

WJ. It goes on and on.

OLD MAN. (in a strange voice) It shows no sign of ever abating! A powderkeg went off under my shop. How it got there I couldn't tell you; but when the mob started flinging their torches in....

(He gestures an explosion.)

But that is the life of the Jew: the unsuspected charge, silent for years, all the while under everything, answering to a spark--and one is upon the road again. Three of my children were killed.

WJ. (touches his arm) My friend. And yourself?

OM. (smiles) I?

WJ. (with an embarrassed, "strike that!" gesture) Stupid of me....

OM. I only... behold injury.

WJ. Yes, I've been watching all morning myself.

OM. (ironically) Ah. Really? All morning?

(Explosion)

WJ. They put one foot out the city gates; look off into the distance toward Strasbourg; then back toward their burning houses in Rouen. They don't know what to do with a road.

OM. Oh, the Jew understands the road. It's not so terrible for him. Unless, of course, there's the special dimension....

(Explosion)

Look, in the dust, how they bled as they went: here a step; and here; and here a step to the right. Blood makes it possible to follow. As if they were showing me a way of blood....

WJ. What will you do?

OM. Oh, I'll just... commence another circuit--although right at the moment it's a little difficult to--
(starts to sit)

May one rest here who may nowhere rest?

WJ. As long as you like.

OM. (immediately springs up) Oh, no! That's forbidden him. Not till Judgment Day.

WJ. (startled) Why do you answer me in this manner?
Who are you?

OM. Do not be afraid: I am the Wandering Jew. So long as the waves roll, I wander. So long as the stars shine, I pass.

W WJ. (aside) Is that what it sounds like? But then no wonder...! All those glazed expressions and funny looks--it's not false-coming-from-him, it's just false: the claim that cannot be laid claim to; the thing there is no way of saying right.

(to OM)

So we're the Wandering Jew, are we?

OM. I have been cut from gallows, and yet lived. Tossed in a red fever, and yet lived. Fled with the raging mob behind me, and yet lived.

(hands the WJ an awl, handle first, and bares his chest)

Try and stop me.

WJ. (his hand instinctively closing on the awl) I can't--

OM. See?

WJ. Yes, but not because--

OM. No, never simply for "that" reason.

WJ. Now listen. You're not the Wandering Jew. You live here in Rouen. I've seen you.

OM. You have seen the guise in which I appear before this generation. Never without his guise! For years at a time the robe and staff lie folded away and forgotten, until one day--
(lurches forward as if shoved from behind)
The Divine Will thrusts me on!

WJ. Now look, friend: what "thrust you on" was a mob and a powderkeg--as you've just finished telling me.

OM. In what form do you suppose my dismissals come to me? As great bolts from the blue? In a resonating voice? This is just the sort of signal I get: things go wrong, pressures accumulate....

WJ. (startled) Where did you learn that?

OM. On my way down a century. Human means, human skies-- the surface never breaks. You didn't see any hand from the clouds turn aside your dagger, did you?

WJ. (looks at the awl, which is still in his hand) This isn't a dagger. It's a shoemaker's tool. I know you. You're Schetzel the Cobbler. I saw you working in front of your shop last night. You haven't even got the right occupation. The Wandering Jew is a potter, not a shoemaker.

OM. Oh, no, no, no, no, no, no--a shoemaker. All the versions of the legend agree on that.

WJ. True, but--

OM. --but, what do they know? Not much, I grant you. The "literature"...!

(contemptuous gesture)

To understand him, be him.

WJ. This is crazy. You're exhausted. The fate of the ghetto, the losses you've sustained--

OM. I pass through siege and storm! Loss is my element. In the end, everything converts to loss.

WJ. That is anybody's story! By that token--I could be the Wandering Jew.

OM. Think so if you like, it takes nothing from me.

WJ. For all anyone knows, I have had children and home snatched from me....

OM. Children and home! Children and home!

(He grabs the awl out of the WJ's hand and makes as if to stab himself. The WJ arrests his hand, and the OM comes up smiling.)

You see? As always.

WJ. You can't be him, you're just starting!

OM. The Wandering Jew starts whenever a Jew starts wandering.

WJ. I'm the Wandering Jew!

OM. You say you're him...

WJ. The one, the one who--

OM. ... but in that case, you just pushed off one morning, as I now do. You would then have been the most recent instance; today it is I. Let go, friend; don't be grasping.

WJ. But--

OM. Anyway, it's not a matter of chronology. You take things a certain way, you're the Wandering Jew.

WJ. Wait a minute! I happen to agree with that!

OM. Of course you do.

WJ. But at the same time--

OM. (begins to sing) "Good people, give ear--"

WJ. At the same time, it's a single, irreducible--

OM. Oh, no. You said so yourself: it's anybody's story. A big enough charge under any life, and the Jew is on his way.

WJ. And you would actually be prepared to take it off me?

OM. I'm prepared to take it up.

WJ. But where would that leave me? I mean, if I'm not the Wandering Jew--where do I go with the information? What life do I lead?

OM. That I couldn't say. If you're looking for a vacancy, you might give Schetzel the Cobbler a try. There is one empty, empty pair of shoes,...

WJ. There'd be time to deal with that....

(The OM brings the hood of his robe up over his head and, singing the following little song to himself,



Good peo-ple give ear, at-tend to me, Who jour-ney From clime to



clime. A wan-der-er 'tis my lot to be Up-on the Road Time.

moves off unsteadily: stumbling, rising, setting forth again, etc. The WJ watches, and as he watches, he speaks; so that it is not entirely clear whether the WJ is commanding or only describing the movements the OM makes.)

Up you get! Off you go! Back already? Leaving so soon? No, don't look round: Jerusalem and the turning wheel are already left far behind. And it's just the two of us now.

(The lights go down, except on the OM and the WJ. The OM is now enclosed in dim blue light; his realistic stumbling, rising, etc. have given way to a fluid, dream-like "wandering-in-place"; the drawn up hood of his robe completely veils his face --in short, it is the FIGURE of the "Wandering Jew" on which the play opened.)

Oh, I could keep this up for centuries! The sight of you there, spinning along down a road, each step guaranteed to be only the last one before the next one--show me another pleasure like it!

(The OM's pace flags: i.e., his "wandering-in-place" movements become broader and more extended.)

Oh, no! On your feet! We can continue this little conversation en route.

(The OM resumes his former pace.)

What?--what do you mean, "why you"? Why anything? So as to keep that question humming in the air, of course--why else? You had better understand, I take that helplessness of yours absolutely personally. You're going to pay for having nothing to pay for. You're going to see what it's like seeing what it's like. I can; therefore, why not? NO! WAIT!

(The OM freezes in mid-step.)

What am I--? One moment of willing it on another and, for one moment, I have willed it; mine is the impulse behind me; I become... the Creator of the Wandering Jew.

(to OM)

Get back! Just as you were!

(The lights return to normal. The OM resumes his singing and realistic stumbling about.)

All right, that's enough; I'm going to have to ask you--

OM. Ah. I was wondering when we'd get around to this part. Ask away!

WJ. What?

OM. Any questions you care to put--the Wandering Jew doesn't shrink from an inquiry.

WJ. No, no, you misunderstand; I--

OM. (waving it away) Delicacy not called for. One doesn't expect to make it out the door without being questioned blue. Fire away!

WJ. Me ask you--?

OM. Why not? This is the subject everyone considers himself an expert on.

WJ. But there's nothing you could possibly--

OM. Oh, ho--you're telling me! But, listen, it's part of the job. You may as well vent the impulse.

WJ. But--

OM. Look. You've got the Wandering Jew here. What do you want to talk about--other things?

WJ. (aside) Well--why not? It's the one recreation ever likely to be tossed my way: a brief... vacation in otherness; a gorgeous sensation of being over here to it for a second....

OM. First one! First one!

WJ. (thinks; then:) It's amazing how the banalities come crowding in. I owe the Chamber of Curiosity an apology.

OM. First==

WJ. How long can you stay?

OM. (with a bow) I'm at your disposal.

WJ. No, no, I mean: What is your maximum allowable--

OM. I'll tell you when I have to leave. Meantime, ask ahead.

WJ. But--oh, never mind. Tell me about the "irresistible urge" that drives him.

OM. At one time I set great store by that. You know: I got tired of the wallpaper, that was the "irresistible urge" driving me. But was it, really, always actually all that irresistible?

WJ. I've wondered that!

OM. Of course you have--how could one not? True, in the end, one always wound up kissing the place goodbye. Still, the question remains--

WJ. Yes!

OM. --Upon what terms? After all, to find oneself in the path of the cyclone--

WJ. --To happen by the seashore the afternoon of the Saracen raid--

OM. --Is anything more really involved in such cases beyond a tendency to hang on and let the new context come up around you?

WJ. The sense that the situation has gone wrong itself gradually becoming the new situation....

OM. (with a nod) You have it. You ~~know~~ know your Wandering Jew.

WJ. You sound... so different from when we first--

OM. The Wandering Jew knows his audience!

WJ. Listen, we have to talk. I have to ask you some things.

OM. We are talk----

WJ. How is it there are so few memories?

OM. Memories?

WJ. What did I at one time regard as the compensations?

OM. Well--

WJ. Is it really getting easier, or only less noticeable?
 (The OM opens his mouth to reply.)
 Can he be made happy? Why don't people understand? Where have I been?

OM. Hey! Slow down! Now, as to your first question: compensations--

WJ. Do you ever... wish it had been someone else?

OM. Sometimes I think I was designated at the foundation of the world. Other times, that it would be as easy as kicking off a shoe.

WJ. (looks up quickly) Would you like to be rid of it?

OM. I'd like... to come to an understanding with it: so much for me, so much for Simon Laquedem. I realize this is not possible.

WJ. Suppose you saw an opportunity to unload it... somewhere else?

OM. Fine!

WJ. "Fine"? And with no more qualms than that--?

OM. But qualms about what? "Qualms...!"

WJ. Well, for one thing, about starting some other poor slob lurching off toward the horizon.

OM. They'd be beating down the doors!

WJ. Yes, but how could you be the one--? I mean, to have spent centuries deploring the destiny of clay-between-hands--and now suddenly to find oneself with hands full of clay....

OM. (shrugs) You can't be the Wandering Jew with your hands in your pockets.

WJ. But the question is--

OM. Look, what do people want? They want to be The One--yes?

WJ. That's certainly--

OM. Believe me, there'd be lines round the block.

WJ. And you could actually bring yourself to accept such an arrangement as... basically just?

OM. Basically just what?

WJ. (aside) Why not let him have it? Would anyone care? Would anyone notice? On the contrary, this is the Wandering Jew the world has been waiting for, with ^{his} rope belt and his sandals and his air of having suffered, [^]suffered.... How do I know when I'll have another chance like this? How do I know

I'll have another chance? Maybe they changed the rules on me, maybe I misunderstood: This could be the Promised Release--and I could stumble right on by, only perhaps on Judgment Day realizing--

(turns and sees the OM practicing a melodramatic "wandering" stride)

But--I can't just drop it in his lap and run. What if he goes and takes it out along lines altogether at odds with--I mean, if it can just have a meaning, and then another--what does that leave for all my centuries of meaning it a certain way to have meant?

(to OM)

There's still something I feel I have to--

OM. "One more time" is my middle name.

WJ. It is said the Wanderer attaches great value to a certain emblem or hieroglyph....

(He looks around for something to draw with; can find nothing; dips his fingers in the blood on the road; draws the figure ~~of~~ on the back of his hand; and holds his hand out toward the OM.)

Now, can you--

(looks up and sees that the OM is trembling with outrage)

What's the matter?

OM. In blood?

WJ. I'm only using it to illustrate--

OM. It's the blood of the Jews of Rouen!

WJ. And what is some blood to the Wandering Jew, who has passed this way and will pass again?

OM. And with each passage, lived the agony of that passage, as if it were not given him to pass.

WJ. (aside) Is that his idea of the Figure? I can't give it to someone like that! An outsider has to have some affinity for the outside. You can't go about the world as the Wandering Jew in a spirit of undifferentiated fellow-feeling. You wouldn't last a week!

(to OM)

Come, you still haven't answered my question. Why is there so much significance for the Jew in this simple diagram?

(indicates the ~~at~~)

What do you get from it?

OM. You draw in blood! What does it take to...?

(The WJ raps insistently on the diagram.)

That smear?

WJ. (aside) That smear? What was I thinking of? Too late in the day for transactions like this! Too much of me gone up into the Figure by this time! Part company now--and what might I not be parting company with in myself?

(to OM)

Well, friend, as you can imagine, it's been an incomparable privilege talking with the unique, genu-ine, tragic Wandering Jew. But now I'm afraid--

OM. Wait!

(The WJ turns.)

I've decided to let you have it.

WJ. What?

OM. I mean, have it to yourself. At least for the moment. Until you're ready to go on to something else.

WJ. What in the world--

OM. Because, it's all you can handle right now. A person who draws circles in blood is my nomination for All-Time Neophyte in Suffering. What would he do with Schetzel the Cobbler's grief? Let him play around with the Wandering Jew for a while....

WJ. Are you seriously proposing--?

OM. To spare you what I see lies beyond you.

WJ. You're going to spare me? If you had the slightest idea of what I've just done for you--

OM. Opened my eyes; you've simply opened my eyes. Thanks to you, I can feel I've had the Wandering Jew experience--such as it is. Now I can go back to being the father of three dead children without that refuge.

WJ. So you've realized you're not up to it?

OM. But it is so easy being the Wandering Jew! What has he lost but everything? For him, the whole world has fallen away, leaving no place to be sad. It is harder to lose one roof.

WJ. All right, this has gone ~~of~~ far enough. Now you listen to me. I have made the supreme sacrifice on your behalf; I have saved you--

OM. --from cheapening my grief--yes; I thank you. I came perilously near.

WJ. Man! What is your meager personal sorrow against the Jew's endless centuries on the roads of the world?

OM. The roads of the world are easy maundering; I leave them to you. There is more agony along the little path that runs between a memory and a grief. Centuries go by in a moment; a lifetime... lasts a lifetime.

WJ. I...! You...!

OM. But for beginners, beginnings are suitable. Have your aeons and distances. Then see if you can live a life.

(Exit the OM. The WJ reaches into the air for words. A final, distant explosion.)

END of PART TWO

PART THREE

Scene i The Hochhimmelfahrt Passion Play

(Hochhimmelfahrt; the Passion Play Theatre, of which the entire (actual) stage is taken as being the stage. The only object onstage at rise is a large, circular, openwork stand. The purpose of this stand does not become apparent until the HOCHHIMMELFAHRT CHRISTUS, having played the opening episode, uses it as a base on which to set down the (matching) Cross he carries in that scene.

At rise the HOCHHIMMELFAHRT WANDERING JEW is cobbling a pair of sandals, trying to get them exactly the same length. He sands a little off one, holds them both up to the light, sands a little off the other, etc. The HOCH.WJ is, in appearance, intonation and manner, an antisemitic caricature.

Enter the HOCHHIMMELFAHRT CHRISTUS, unconvincingly pretending to stagger under the weight of a huge Cross. He pauses for a moment to rest.

At first, the HOCH.WJ does not notice the HOCH. CHRISTUS. When he does become aware of him, an expression of malicious joy spreads over his features.)

HOCH. WJ. Hey! De Messiah from Hotzeplotz¹! Was ist neues², Messiah? Eppes³ a Messiah! In de synagogue, a macher⁴; in de politics, a macher; in de end--a mishegoss⁵. Dis vas de boychick vas comingk already vid a coupla dozen enchels in his left hand, and a coupla dozen enchels in his right hand, and maybe de blessed Pruffit Elijah in his toches⁶, I don't know vhat narrishkeit⁷; and dere he stands--mechuleh⁸!

(The HOCH. CHRISTUS shoulders the Cross again, and begins to move on.)

What's de hurry, shmegegge⁹? Got maybe a pressingk appointment? Nu, go, go: wouldn't vant to kip de enchels vaitingk, wouldn't vant to kip de pruffits vaitingk. Vee can conteenue dis convuhsation at a latuh date. You shall find me here at your retoin.

-
1. Hotzeplotz. Podunk; the middle of nowhere. (The pidgin Yiddish in these speeches sounds enough like what it means for the actor to put the sense across through intonation and gesture. These footnotes are for his guidance.)
 2. Was ist neues? What's new?
 3. Eppes a Messiah! Some Messiah!
 4. Macher. Bigshot.
 5. Mishegoss. Craziess.
 6. Toches. Backside
 7. Narrishkeit. Foolishness
 8. Mechuleh! Washed up!
 9. Shmegegge. Jerk; dummy.

HOCH. CHRISTUS. (straightening up too easily, and with a stagey gesture of condemnation) Yea, truly, I shall find thee here at my return; for till that day thou shalt wander unceasingly, and nowhere shalt thou take refreshment.

(He continues on his way. THE HOCH. WJ is stunned for a moment, but shakes it off.)

HOCH. WJ. (calling after him) Yaaaaaahhh! Bubkes¹⁰!
A frosk in piskll! Momzer¹²! Tsetummelter¹³! Draaaay-kopfl¹⁴!
(starts to exit)

THE DIRECTOR OF THE HOCHHIMMELFAHRT PLAY. (sticking his head on from the wings, right) I don't see what the problem is, Herr Burgermeister. The scene plays as well as ever.

THE BURGERMEISTER OF HOCHHIMMELFAHRT. (sticking his head on from the wings, left) It is not, Herr Director, as well you know, a question of dramatic effectiveness.

(From the moment the DIRECTOR interrupts them, the two Players drop their characters and any pretense of an exit. The HOCH. WJ mills about one side of the stage. The HOCH. CHRISTUS, after replacing the Cross on its circular base, sits down on the floor, leaning against it.

The BURG. and the DIR. now enter and continue their conversation. Their costume is turn-of-the-century.)

DIR. Of course, it's full of anachronisms...

BURG. Nor of historical accuracy. Politics, my good sir, politics pure and simple. That little interlude is anathema to every educated Jew in Europe.

DIR. "Educated Jew"!

BURG. Of course, natürlich. But "educated Jew" is another way of saying "creditor of the Duke"; and that is a brand of Hebrew our noble Sovereign can ill afford to antagonize.

10. Bubkes! Baloney!

11. A frosk in piskl! The back of my hand to the front of your face!

12. Momzer. Bastard.

13. Tsetummelter. Lamebrain.

14. Draykopf. Finagler.

DIR. And to such considerations the 800-year-old festival drama of Hochhimmelfahrt must accommodate itself!

BURG. Ah, well, now as for that--what has our play ever done but accommodate itself? In fact, the whole course of its development might be described as one long bow to considerations.

DIR. Of course I realize certain changes have had to be introduced from time to time....

BURG. Certain changes! There's scarcely a scene or a line that hasn't been rewritten twenty times in deference to somebody or other. We have upgraded the bearing of the mob in response to Social Democratic pressures, de-emphasized Old Testament parallels at the behest of Liberal Theologians. Only last festival the Temptation in the Wilderness began to be understood as a parable of isolated consciousness. And if the new work in Viennese brain-science comes to anything, the Casting Out of Demons episodes will not be as they were.

DIR. All the more reason to leave the Wandering Jew-scene alone. It's one of the few segments that haven't been tampered with.

BURG. I presume you mean: not recently. In the original script one reads only: Enter Laquedem: "Get away from my shop." Exit Laquedem.

DIR. (goes over to the Cross and rests his hand on it) This Cross-and-base assembly is over 200 years old. The blood-ejector at the end of the Centurion's spear has a release mechanism that one also finds in flintlocks of the seventeenth century. The table off which the Last Supper is eaten bears the imprint of a cabinet-maker who flourished in the High Renaissance. The furnishings of the stage, it seems, come down to us unaltered--but beyond that? Here is a play that has been performed continuously for over 700 years--but what exactly has continued?

BURG. (after a moment's thought) You know the folklore of this town is full of stories of Archdukes sleeping on floors when there were no other accommodations at festival time; of cast-members being invited back to châteaux, and lionized; of wonderful parcels arriving in coaches with heraldic crests on the doors--
(calling over to the HOCH. CHRISTUS)
Zelber, was it the Queen Mother of Belgium who sent you that piece of faience for a wedding-present?

HOCH. CHRISTUS. Of Pomerania.

BURG. (to DIR.) Well, now: how do you account for this fascination which our play seems to exert on the titled heads of Europe?

DIR. I'd like to think it was the high artistic standards--

BURG. My friend, when have you ever known an Archduke sleep on the floor for high artistic standards? No. These gentry see themselves as constituting Europe--and only from our play can they discover what, at any given moment, this Europe which they constitute is--in other words: who they are. You ask: what has remained constant in this ever-varying show of ours. I reply: the shapes in the mirror continue to change, but the mirror continues to mirror. Only think: anyone who knew the script in its original form, and were to attend a performance of it today, would be able to reconstruct the whole subsequent course of Western Civilization from that one source alone! Our play reveals the European mind to itself. Its changes are Europe's changes; its nistory,--well, history. What a destiny for a small-town religious pageant! What a source of honor and distinction to the town!

DIR. If it's the town you're thinking of, allow me to point out that while people may be picking up all kinds of pointers in advanced thought from the Wedding in Cana or the Raising of Lazarus, it's the oldfashioned comic bits, like the Wandering Jew episode, that pack the house. And I need hardly remind you how dependent the economy of this town is on--

BURG. Indeed, I require no reminding of that or anything else that concerns the welfare of the town. Just give me a Wandering Jew-scene that preserves the robust charm of the original while eliminating all possible offense, and leave the welfare of the town to me.

DIR. That's easy enough to say....

BURG. I have every confidence that you and the other artists of the Passion Theatre will rise to the challenge.

DIR. Well, we have worked up several alternate versions....

BURG. No doubt at least one of them will prove acceptable to the Jewish Inspector.

DIR. "Jewish Inspector"!

BURG. I, too, wince at the phrase, but--
 (change of thought)
 But he'll be here any moment.
 (going to the HOCH. WJ and putting his arm
 around him)

Rindl, that was very nicely played; I think I can practically promise you the part. At any rate, the Committee is giving you the very closest consideration.

(puts his other arm around the HOCH. CHRISTUS)
 Zelber, we are all grateful to you for coming out of retirement on this occasion. After all, with a demonstration to give, and the new Christus not yet chosen--I don't know how we should have managed without you.

(His arms around the shoulders of the two Players, the BURG. conducts them offstage. The DIR. starts to follow; notices that the Cross is out of alignment with its base; rather fussily straightens it; and exits. Enter the JEWISH INSPECTOR and the WJ, both dressed in turn-of-the-century style.)

JEWISH INSPECTOR. I am greatly obliged to you, Mr. Ash, for interrupting your journey to render me this service.

WJ. It can't go on as it has. The Jew enters the Modern World--and it is not the Jew at all, but a phantom that resembles him better than he knows how to resemble himself. Driven off by a few bold strokes, his own broadest outline his own worst enemy--it is time he stood forth! Here is a world, I think, ready for the Jew of reality. Let them look upon a face! ; draw (since nothing will dissuade them from drawing) a portrait from life!

INSP. You give voice to the sentiments of every forward-looking Jew in Europe. It is no less a hope than this that brings us to Hochhimmelfahrt.

WJ. Imagine there being such a place! Imagine a civilization so much as having the impulse. A Temple! A Holy City!, where they assume the roles and that's all they assume; where to come into one's own, one has only to come forward. Oh, Inspector! This is no interruption of my journey. On the contrary: I only now discover what I have been a journey toward. Lead on!

INSP. But... we're here.

WJ. This is it? But this is just a second-rate provincial playhouse. Am I missing something?

INSP. What did you expect?

WJ. You spoke of a "mirror of Western thought"....

INSP. A mirror... is where an image is sought. A mirror is where the little modifications snow up first. A mirror reflects change--and Hochhimmelfahrt is nothing if not reflective. In periods haunted by hellfire, they wheeled out the smoke-machines. When the age was more inclined to laugh at such things, the only devil on hand was the one who reels out Judas' entrails in the form of a string of sausages. From the scripts of the Counterreformation period, any remark that could be construed as remotely anti-hierarchy has been excised. Whereas, when anti-clerical feeling ran high, Caiphas began to resemble the archbishop of a certain nearby cathedral city. And the final Cry from the Cross has been in or out depending on the changing status accorded subjective feeling in one era or another.

WJ. And before this wretched mirror, the celebrated Western Mind contentedly sits?

INSP. Ah, well, as for that, the Western Mind has never been too nice in its choice of mirrors.

WJ. But why should it matter to anyone how some remote Alpine village stages its local religious pageant?

INSP. There's a sort of agreement that it matter. Like gold-- as a kind of indicator. If you can once get a view promulgated from up here, it will spread--

WJ. Like the plague.

INSP. I was going to say: everywhere.

WJ. And what makes you so sure there's a place in all this for me?

INSP. There's a place in all this for the silent will of our community, which you seem to me to embody much in the manner of an Unknown Soldier.

WJ. Hm.... Am I, then, so typical?

INSP. Well, of a certain elderly median stratum of respectable European Jewry--yes, I should say so, if I might without offense.

WJ. None in the world. Only--

INSP. I felt, from the moment of our first meeting, that I could hardly do better.

WJ. Short of the Figure himself.

INSP. Ha, ha, I'm afraid we can't very well afford to let it all ride on him.

WJ. I wonder what you expect will be the consequence of letting it all ride on me.

INSP. Why, Mr. Ash, I'm surprised at your having to ask. I expect you will lean toward the portrayal that does Israel the maximum possible good.

WJ. You mean the one that shows the Wanderer in the noblest, most sensitive--

INSP. I mean the one that shows as little of him as possible!

WJ. You... you want to eliminate him?

INSP. Eventually, yes.

WJ. Wait a minute. Do you mean, from the play, or the actual Figure?

INSP. I mean: from human memory! Time that mirthless stereotype took a load off his feet once and for all! Were you not yourself only just now speaking of a "phantom"--

WJ. --that has displaced the Figure, yes. But--

INSP. But the Figure himself you still want to see as a "noble image" of "tragic Israel"?

WJ. How is it possible my view of him should be altogether a negative one?

INSP. But we cut our own throats when we assent to this mascot! To us he may appear the very type of heroic endurance; but in accepting a victim, however noble a one, for our national symbol, we must seem to be acquiescing in our own victimization!

WJ. Well, how do you want to see him?

INSP. I told you: I want to see him disappear!

WJ. But I mean, what do you take the real essence of the Figure to be?

INSP. That is a subject on which I have no opinion whatever.

WJ. But... you must!--or what made you so sure I could serve as the model for him?

INSP. Model for him?

WJ. The way you swooped down on me...! --don't tell me you hadn't some idea in mind! Although, in light of all you've said since, I hardly know whether to feel--

INSP. But, my dear Mr. Ash, there's been some misunderstanding. I didn't ask you here to serve as a model for the Wandering Jew. The staff of the Passion Theatre has got up several new versions of the scene he figures in: your role is to help me choose among them. My dear sir, I need you as a representative of contemporary Jewish feeling, not a... tailor's dummy.

WJ. Then you hadn't recognized...? You didn't...?

INSP. A thousand pardons. I thought I'd made everything clear on the train. And here you've been anguishing over the suitability of your profile.

WJ. Room, room for the phantom!

INSP. Well, of course, it's true--in no version from their hand is he likely to emerge as much more than a phantom. But that needn't bother us.

WJ. How should it not--?

INSP. Because, as I say, all we have to do is pick the phantom that best serves our aims.

WJ. But if our "aim" is to get rid of him--

INSP. Yes?

WJ. Then what difference does it make which version I choose? You don't want this version or that--you want him out!

INSP. Well, of course, if I thought I could get an excision straight off, I'd go for it. But they'd never agree. No, our strategy must be to try and sneak some watered-down version past them: say, a Wandering Jew-scene that didn't actually show the moment of encounter with the Nazarene....

WJ. No, that's indispensable. If things are ever going to make any sort of sense, that moment is going to have to be included.

INSP. Well, you're probably right: they'd never accept it. But the point is to get them to go along with something they won't be happy about, so that eventually they'll want to give it the axe themselves. You know: it's all a question of applying pressure, jockeying for position....

WJ. And suppose all this should fail to...awaken his interest?

INSP. What?

WJ. Suppose that he is less than ever content that others should pick and choose for him--or even to make his own selection from among alternatives which others lay out? Suppose he should turn out to have... some suggestions of his own?

INSP. Him? Who? Who are you talking about?

WJ. The Wandering Jew.

INSP. What difference does it make what he wants?

WJ. You are more dependent on him than you know!

INSP. Are you suggesting we sit down at the feet of our myths and let them dictate their terms to us?

WJ. I cannot imagine what other posture to assume in the presence of a myth.

INSP. Well, let me tell you, that's not how we do things here. This is Hochhimmelfahrt--but beyond that, this is the Modern World! Here we tell the myths what to mean; the symbols come to us for their instructions....

WJ. I'm sorry, I'm afraid I'm not going to be able to help you after all.

INSP. What!

WJ. I'd never have gotten involved in the first place if I'd known the ultimate target was the Wanderer himself.

INSP. But Mr. Ash---

WJ. Because, you see, the one whose interests I find myself identifying with in all this--is him.

INSP. Well, all right! That's a possible position--in fact, not an uncommon one among the elder members of our community. It had better be taken into account. Stay and represent it.

WJ. I will make no effort to "represent" anything.

INSP. Mr. Ash, you will not have to make an effort.

WJ. I'll speak my mind freely--

INSP. Israel will speak freely through you.

WJ. And what if, at moments,... the Wandering Jew should seem to speak through me?

INSP. Then, for once, he would speak with Israel's voice.

WJ. Am I still running so typical? Do you still want me for your Unknown Soldier?

INSP. Mr. Ash, what could be more typical of our people than to speculate wildly among ourselves--but the moment the stranger enters the room--

(Enter the BURG., the DIR., and the two Players.
The HOCH. WJ carries three folding chairs.)

BURG. Herr Inspector--a pleasure. May I present the Director of the Passion Theatre, and the two citizen-actors who will be performing for you today: Burgher Rindl, young hopeful, role of the Wandering Jew; Burgher Zelber, Master Player, Retired, role of Our Lord.

(The two Players click their heels and bow in unison to the INSP.)

INSP. Herr Burgermeister, Gentlemen: I bring greetings from the Jewish citizens of our Duchy. But beyond that, I stand before you here an emissary of the European Jewish community. Allow me to introduce Mr. Solomon Ash, a representative of all that is eldest and finest in our traditions, who has kindly consented to assist me in my deliberations.

BURG. Mr. Ash--a pleasure. Rindl, another chair for Mr. Ash.

(The HOCH. WJ begins to shuffle out. But as he crosses in front of the WJ, the WJ touches him on the arm.)

WJ. I can stand.

(The WJ scrutinizes the HOCH. WJ's face intently, but without seeming to find what he is looking for. The HOCH. WJ submits to this scrutiny for a moment, but then brusquely turns away. During the following speech, he goes around setting up chairs behind the INSP., the DIR. and the BURG. Having once set up a chair, he waits beside it insistently until the intended occupant has taken a seat. The WJ remains standing throughout.)

BURG. Gentlemen: let us not misconstrue the nature of the present occasion. What confront each other here today are not the bastions of tradition and the forces of change, but rather, a just demand and a ready acknowledgment. Indeed, if there is any "tradition" one may speak of in connection with this festival, it is precisely one of responsiveness. Hochhimmelfahrt has always moved with the times! For this, some have rebuked us, pointing out that the subject-matter which has been entrusted to our care is not for a season or a day. True--yet what these well-intentioned critics forget is that the drama we enact is not that of Our Savior's suffering and Death per se, but rather: the endless struggle of the European mind to come to grips with that material--and this, while a perennial theme, is a perennially changing one. Therefore be assured--Herr Inspector, Mr. Ash: we not only shall not oppose your well-founded demand for change, we wish to associate ourselves in it. At this point, I should like to turn the proceedings over to the Director of the Passion Theatre.

DIR. My staff has prepared several new versions of the famous Wandering Jew sequence of the Hochhimmelfahrt Passion Play. We are prepared to insert whichever one seems to you to strike the most satisfying balance between dramatic artistry and, uh... other considerations. First the actors will present the scene as currently performed.

INSP. Herr Director, our community is well acquainted with the scene as currently performed. That is why we are here. You may proceed directly to the first variant.

DIR. It was only for purposes of comparison, Herr Inspector. However--

(He signals the Players to begin.)

The HOCH. CHRISTUS goes over and gets the Cross. Holding it daintily between two fingers, he trails it out languidly behind him as he makes his way to his initial position. Once arrived, he flips it effortlessly up onto his back. The HOCH. WJ, meanwhile, has turned away to get into character.

On a scarcely discernible cue, the scene begins: the HOCH. CHRISTUS becomes suddenly "weighed down" by the Cross, and the HOCH. WJ starts raining down badly faked punches on him.)

HOCH. WJ. (a little too loudly, as if for someone else's benefit) Heretic! Faker! Scum!

HOCH. CHRISTUS. Friend, wherein have I--

HOCH. WJ. (under his breath) Must talk to you. It's urgent.

HOCH. CHRISTUS. Why do you seek me out in this, my hour of--

HOCH. WJ. Never been able to get you to myself before. They don't let me anywhere near....

HOCH. CHRISTUS. Yes, but--

HOCH. WJ. (aloud) Enemy of Israel and her ways!
(under his breath)
I have to pretend to be abusing you.

HOCH. CHRISTUS. What do you want of me?

HOCH. WJ. Eternal life.

HOCH..CHRISTUS. The way to heaven--

HOCH. WJ. I'm not talking about heaven. Here. On earth. In the flesh. Surely you can understand wanting it that way?

HOCH. CHRISTUS. You mean: simply... stay on?

HOCH. WJ. (aloud) Lunatic! Swindler! Clown!
 (under his breath)
 Not simply "stay on." Enrich consciousness. Endow memory.
 Accrete; unify; grow!

HOCH. CHRISTUS. You would soon grow weary of this.

HOCH. WJ. Man is inexhaustible. He grows with his opportunities.
 The infinite is in man--who shows it more clearly than yourself?

HOCH. CHRISTUS. Your faith is strong....

HOCH. WJ. My faith in man is strong. Shall God's faith in him
 prove less strong? Master of Life: give me eternal life!

HOCH. CHRISTUS. Beyond Judgment Day I cannot undertake--

HOCH. WJ. Fine! We'll say till then.

HOCH. CHRISTUS. Then, till Judgment Day go wander--

HOCH. WJ. I am in motion already. To have refused the tie
 with Transcendence is to be already en route.

HOCH. CHRISTUS. Then why--?

HOCH. WJ. Ah, but I needed to hear you say it.
 (loudly)
 Perverter! Betrayer! On your way!
 (under his breath)
 And I--on my way!

(The HOCH. WJ and the HOCH. CHRISTUS start to exit,
 but drop it before reaching the wings, and hang around
 the edges of the stage.)

~~BURG. Very nice. Stirring. A little intellectual, perhaps, but--~~

INSP. That's your idea of an improvement? Way, you as much
 as say: the Jew got what he was asking for!

DIR. Well? And what was he asking for? A new range of
 consciousness. A new depth of feeling....

INSP. Gentlemen: for 1800 years the Jewish people have regarded the Wandering Jew as the very type of a monstrous injustice perpetrated upon them. And do you now expect us to embrace a view of things by which the entire situation is made out to be --not only his own doing, but--gottenyu!--his deepest wish?

DIR. But you haven't understood at all! The idea was to show the Wanderer as a heroic voyager, pushing past the limits of mortality--

INSP. Israel makes not virtue of pushing past the limits of mortality, for she remembers by Whom they were set. Death is the law of life, and we are the people of the law. The last thing you have to do with here is a nation of Fausts!

BURG. But--

INSP. Totally unacceptable, gentlemen. Not even a step in the right direction.

(tense pause)

WJ. Besides, it wouldn't have occurred to him.

(The INSP., the DIR. and the BURG. all turn, startled.)

BURG. Eh?

WJ. That whole aspect.... Not until--no, not even then.

INSP. I think Mr. Ash may be reminding us that Faustian stirrings are not likely to have been part of the mental baggage of a first-century Palestinian tradesman. Isn't that it, Mr. Ash?

(The WJ gestures non-committally.)

A valuable reminder!--though, of course, historical factors can hardly be our prime concern in these deliberations. Gentlemen, the next version, please!

DIR. Well, this one is going to have a lot less sweep to it....

(The DIR. nods to the two Players. The HOCH. WJ takes a moment to strap on a flamboyant cardboard sword. Then, as before, on an almost imperceptible cue, they go into it.)

.. HOCH. CHRISTUS. You here? I little thought to meet you upon this way.

HOCH. WJ. I'm risking my neck, but that's not important. Now listen. We've moved our entire force down from the hills; there'll be men stationed every hundred or hundred and fifty yards all the length of the---

HOCH. CHRISTUS. You wouldn't be planning--?

HOCH. WJ. Don't worry, your martyrdom won't be interfered with.

HOCH. CHRISTUS. Then why--?

HOCH. WJ. Because it's a heaven-sent opportunity to stir up anti-Roman feeling. In death, at least, you will earn a place in the history of your nation.

HOCH. CHRISTUS. My kingdom is not of this world!

HOCH. WJ. All kingdoms are of this world. All meaning is in history.

HOCH. CHRISTUS. Ah, history! How it absorbs those it absorbs.

HOCH. WJ. Oh, you disdain history. But history, you see, does not disdain you: thus it ends.

HOCH. CHRISTUS. It ends as it was meant to end.

HOCH. WJ. If I had thought that for one moment--

HOCH. CHRISTUS. But what can you have been thinking? You surely did not suppose you had been issued a call to the barricades?

HOCH. WJ. I heard a voice speak out against the oppressor. For a moment, social change seemed near. Then the voice ceased.

HOCH. CHRISTUS. The voice did not cease. But you no longer cared for what it was saying.

HOCH. WJ. I have no care but for my people, for history.

HOCH. CHRISTUS. The Son of God has other cares. But perhaps you did not realize--?

HOCH. WJ. Oh, I realized. I felt: there could be no truer work for a Son of God.

HOCH. CHRISTUS. (indicating Cross) Here is my work. Where is yours?

HOCH. WJ. Abroad. At home. In the cities. In the hills. Where I am sent.

HOCH. CHRISTUS. By the new master whom you serve.

HOCH. WJ. He will not finish by climbing a Roman hill.

HOCH. CHRISTUS. We all finish by climbing a Roman hill.

HOCH. WJ. That is precisely the sort of defeatist talk--

HOCH. CHRISTUS. History...is defeat.

HOCH. WJ. Inevitably--for some.

HOCH. CHRISTUS. For all. That's what it's the history of.

HOCH. WJ. Not with proper organization.

(The HOCH. CHRISTUS opens his mouth to speak.)
I know--"Organizer, organize thyself." That's another thing I like about history as opposed to you: It's so unpredictable.

HOCH. CHRISTUS. What does it take to convince you--?

HOCH. WJ. By history only can I be convinced. And nothing short of history in its entirety carries total conviction.

HOCH. CHRISTUS. Your own lips have spoken it. Go,
(with a stagey gesture of dismissal)
pursue history to its conclusion, and you shall find--

HOCH. WJ. Opportunities everywhere.

HOCH. CHRISTUS. Emptiness at the core.

HOCH. WJ. Emptiness is also an opportunity. This empty death of yours, for example--

HOCH. CHRISTUS. Ah!

HOCH. WJ. --in itself, futile; yet destined to be a source of consequences that will reach to the end of time--

HOCH. CHRISTUS. Yea, truly; for--

HOCH. WJ. --for by this final action, you set in motion a power for social change among generations yet unborn! Sentenced to history! All I could ever ask for!

(As before, the HOCH. CHRISTUS and the HOCH. WJ drop their characters before reaching the wings, and remain on opposite sides of the stage. The HOCH. WJ unstraps his sword.)

WJ. But--

INSP. Ash! Don't say a word! It's a trap.
(to INSP. and BURG.)

A moving tribute to the dramatic talents of the Secret Police.

BURG. and DIR. (together) Secret Police!

INSP. Oh, come gentlemen: it's not difficult to see how this was meant to go. An official Jewish representative is cajoled into endorsing a view of the Jew-as-revolutionary; there follow mass arrests, confiscations, cancellation of all debts outstanding to Jewish creditors--including, of course, any that may happen to be owed by His Grace the Duke--

DIR. What's he talking about?

INSP. "A power for social change among men yet unborn"--translation: any time there's trouble, you know who to thank for it. "This new master whom you serve"--translation: it's a foolish prince who puts his confidence in them. I anticipated a certain amount of foot-dragging, but this out-and-out attempt to subvert my mission--

BURG. Herr Inspector, I assure you, that suspicion is--

WJ. (speaking out of a line of thought of his own) Exactly wrong!

DIR. (to INSP.) Ha! There you have it, from the lips of your own associate.

WJ. Unrecognizable, that way....

INSP. Ash! Keep out of this. You don't understand--

BURG. Please, Mr. Ash, if there's anything you can say to persuade your colleague of his error--

INSP. Ash!

(takes him aside)

Don't be a fool. You don't suppose I actually believe these mountain-goats are capable of such a trick? I'm just building a bargaining position.

WJ. (to BURG. and DIR.) The Jew as champion of the historical? --the Jew, who has never been able to rise above a view of history as the kind of thing that happens to other people; who ducks into a doorway when the March of Events turns down his street?

BURG. I don't follow that.

WJ. And "social change"--what should he know of such a thing? In what light can he ever be expected to view society but as an enormous refuge taken against the thought of him?

INSP. In other words, Mr. Ash feels, as I do, that ~~the~~ the Jew is far more likely to be history's victim than its perpetrator, and that any attempt to represent him as disposing of the very forces by which he suffers is nothing more nor less than--

WJ. (again out of his own line of thought) An out and out reversal!

INSP. Precisely.

WJ. Your Jew... is far closer to Him!

BURG. Wait a minute. Are you saying Our Lord was a revolutionary?

INSP. Careful, Ash!

(to BURG.)

I warn you, these crude attempts at entrapment--

WJ. (to BURG.) But on the side of history, surely; of a mind with history. I mean, who came wafting down intoⁿ when He didn't have to? But you associate the Jew with all that--while your Christus associates with sentiments the Jew was bumped out of history for so much as daring to entertain in His presence. You've turned Him into him--that is; the Jew--that is: you've turned the Christus into--

INSP. In short, the Israelite of today can find nothing of himself in this scurrilous cartoon, and demands its withdrawal.

BURG. Consider it withdrawn. But Herr Inspector, these suspicions of yours--

INSP. --will not survive the insulting caricature that provoked them.

BURG. Say no more, it's out.

DIR. But--

(The BURG. waves him into silence.)

INSP. (aside, to WJ) You see? It's all a matter of catching them with their guard down....

WJ. All the elements there, but... other way round, so to speak --as if in a mirror. It's strange--stranger in some ways than not having come anywhere near....

INSP. Next version, please!

DIR. Well, this isn't likely to set anyone's thoughts running on the Secret Police, anyway.

(The DIR. signals the Players to begin. The HOCH. WJ faces upstage to get into it. The HOCH. CHRISTUS begins staggering along under the Cross, takes a few steps, and collapses.

The HOCH. WJ "enters" (i.e., faces around), sees the HOCH. CHRISTUS, starts angrily toward him--and then has a better idea.)

HOCH. WJ. (calling) Wife! Leah! Come out here! There's something I want you to see.

HOCH. CHRISTUS. No use calling for help, friend; I cannot tarry long. Here may I repose me?

HOCH. WJ. (calls) Leah!
(to HOCH. CHRISTUS)
I'm not calling for help. "Here may I repose me"....! Since when are you in the habit of asking permission?

HOCH. CHRISTUS. Friend, I have never entered these walls.

HOCH. WJ. Maybe not on your two feet, you haven't. But you have entered these walls.

HOCH. CHRISTUS. Ah, then I see I am among those on whom the spirit has fallen.

HOCH. WJ. It hasn't fallen on me, thanks very much. The lady of the house, though....
(shakes his head in exasperation)

HOCH. CHRISTUS. Then, for her sake--

HOCH. WJ. It's her I'm thinking of.
(calls)
Leah!
(to HOCH. CHRISTUS)
I want her to see you this way. I think it just might cure her.

HOCH. CHRISTUS. Friend, my ministry of healing is long since past. Nonetheless, bring the woman to me, and I will one last time assay--

HOCH. WJ. Oh, we're terribly helpful, aren't we? There's just one little thing: it's you she needs to be cured of.

HOCH. CHRISTUS. Me?

HOCH. WJ. She fell for you hard. Even had some idea about leaving me and signing on as one of your... "handmaidens," I think is the polite expression. Of course, since you've been under lock and key, the light has started to dawn. One good look at you like this....

HOCH. CHRISTUS. If I have awakened faith in this woman--

HOCH. WJ. Oh, you've awakened her, all right. "Lord!" she cries, when we make love--"Lord!"--in a tone that leaves no doubt who the conversation isn't with. I should say: when we used to make love.... Come to think of it, maybe it's better she not see you. --All right! On your feet! Come on: up!

HOCH. CHRISTUS. Friend, if the woman's faith is wavering, I must speak with her. Perhaps we may be a comfort to one another in this hour of--

HOCH. WJ. That's what's worrying me. Suppose, instead of the scales falling from her eyes, she should be...struck. I want you out of here right--

HOCH. CHRISTUS. Man, let her come forth to me! Would you stand between the woman you love and eternal life?

HOCH. WJ. It is you who stand always between! "Eternal life" --do you hear anyone asking ~~me~~ for anything like that? Hard, ordinary life, with a woman, under a roof, that's what's wanted here, what would you know? Go on, get away! Leave us to our life!

HOCH. CHRISTUS. But--

HOCH. WJ. (shoves him across the stage) Out from between!

(The HOCH. CHRISTUS falls dramatically to the floor. When he rises, there is a stage-terrible look in his eyes.)

HOCH. CHRISTUS. This day your wife shall sup with me in Paradise.

(The HOCH. WJ makes a contemptuous gesture.)
As for you.... I shall not intrude upon your "ordinary life" again. From henceforth till Judgment Day, you may... proceed without interruption.

(The HOCH. CHRISTUS shoulders the Cross and begins to stagger off.)

HOCH. WJ. (when the HOCH. CHRISTUS is almost offstage)
In other words: if you can't have her, neither can I.
(shakes his fist)
I'll remember this!

(As usual, the Players drop their exit before reaching the wings.)

INSP. Yes, I should say that's all right.

WJ. All right?

INSP. Well, a bit coarse, perhaps; but on the point of the basic injustice--

BURG..(to DIR.) You will be dismissed! What do you mean trying to smuggle an outrage like that into the town play?

DIR. (in a tone that begs the BURG. not to let their differences show) Herr Burgermeister, please, as you know, it's only one possible variant--

INSP. And a perfectly satisfactory one from our point of view --eh, Ash?

WJ. But it's nothing to do with--

INSP. (to BURG.) What's the objection?

BURG. Why, it very nearly.... It almost seems to.... It as much as implies Our Lord was capable of a... love affair.

INSP. (amused) Anyone's capable of that, Herr Burgermeister.

WJ. (struck by this in another sense than intended) Anyone....

BURG. (to INSP.) Perhaps in the view of a people that lacks an adequate ideal of purity.

INSP. This is the Modern World, Burgermeister. Sexual motive is always an acceptable explanation.

WJ. But that's just it!

INSP. Ash--

WJ. You're putting on anybody's story! You have nothing to say about him!

DIR. Are you saying the Jew couldn't have had a wife who had a feeling that took the form--

WJ. I'm saying, nobody's eye is on the Jew! I'm still waiting for my first interpretation of him.

DIR. What are you talking about? We've given you the Jew-as-Faust, the Jew engagé, the Jew in love---

WJ. Oh--consciousness, politics, sex. Those aren't interpretations--just so many expansions of what you mean by the term; reflexes of interpretation; the channels down which the impulse flows....

INSP. (aside to WJ) Good, Ash! Give it to them! Soften them up.

DIR. (to WJ) If you're trying to say we didn't give adequate time or thought to this--

WJ. I'm trying to say you followed your noses. What noses! What an age! How is the Figure supposed to take his first step forward in such an atmosphere? Who here is ready in the smallest degree to let him emerge? He seems more than ever thrown back upon himself. More than ever, the whole labor of significance seems to devolve on me.

DIR. If you think you can do any better than we've done, you're welcome to add your version to the pile.

WJ. I'm no artist. I once saw a form in an event and I've been paying for it ever since.

INSP. There aren't going to be any "additions to the pile." As far as the Jewish delegation is concerned, the problem is solved. This last "eternal triangle" one will do fine.

(The WJ starts to protest.)

If it can be anybody's story, it can be the Wandering Jew's.

BURG. Well, it can't be Jesus Christ's story. Next version!

INSP. (testily) The trouble is, you want to keep the Christus storybook clear, while the Jewish character goes through every ~~shade~~ shade of lunacy in turn.

BURG. Absolutely unacceptable!
(to DIR.)

Next version!

INSP. (giving in, with an exasperated shrug) Next version.

DIR. But--that was the last.

BURG. That's it?

INSP. I must say, if those three playlets represent the sum total of your efforts to comply with our demands--

WJ. What did you expect? If one's resources are one's preoccupations, one is soon at the end of one's resources. It would have to come... from somewhere else....

DIR. Other possibilities were discussed....

BURG. Perhaps we'd better have some of those back out on the table.

DIR. Well, for example, there was one version where we had the Jew a former paralytic, who has been cured by Christ, and consequently hates Him.

INSP. Why should he hate Him for that?

DIR. Well, because... he now has to cope.

INSP. I find that deeply objectionable. In the first place, it lays far too great a stress on your man's "miraculous powers."

BURG. Great heavens, you can hardly expect a Passion Play to pass over in silence the matter of Christ's miraculous powers!

INSP. It could only be an improvement. And then, it represents Jews as ungrateful for efforts made to help them.

BURG. Now where would anyone ever have picked up that idea?

DIR. We also experimented with showing the Jew as sympathetic to Christ.

BURG. But in that case, why would he have driven Him away?

DIR. Well, out of sympathy. You know: "If you kept moving, you wouldn't get hit so much."

BURG. But that implies the Savior would be capable of a misunderstanding!

DIR. I'm telling you, this is one we scrapped. And finally, there was a scene where the Jew challenges Christ to repeat the miracle of the Burning Bush with a figtree in his doorway.

INSP. No Jew would ever have dreamt of bringing forward such an impious request.

BURG. And if one had, Our Lord would never have dreamt of refusing it.

DIR. (throwing up his hands) Well, then, gentlemen, the Staff of the Passion Theatre thanks you for your attention!

BURG. You know what the trouble is? We're moving too far away from simple, recognizable human situations. Suppose we make the Jew one of the moneychangers Christ drove out of the Temple--

INSP. We're supposed to be striking down insulting stereotypes, remember? Suppose, as the Crucified slinks by, we let the Jew suddenly have a vision of all Israel is destined to suffer in future times from those calling themselves His followers.

BURG. We're supposed to be improving Jewish-Christian relations, recall?

INSP. We're also supposed to be mirroring the course of the European mind.

BURG. Not every twitch of your skullcap is a movement in the European mind.

(The INSP. and the BURG. are eyeball to eyeball.)

WJ. I... have some thoughts on what may have happened.

BURG. Representative Jewish thoughts?

INSP. Ash, the point is hardly "what may have happened"...

DIR. The point is to find some way of staging this scene. Mr. Ash has been pretty quick with his criticisms. Let's see if he can create as well as criticize.

WJ. There was a time that word would have silenced me forthwith: the Wandering Jew was a "creation"; what share could one wish to have in creation after that? But in a world where "creation" seems to mean, at most, "creating an impression"---

INSP. In an issue of this magnitude--

BURG. Look, he's supposed to be ~~the~~ representative of Jewish feeling, isn't he?

INSP. Yes, but--

BURG. Well, then, let's hear from him.

INSP. I cannot allow--

BURG. Then what did you bring him for?

(tense pause)

WJ. (suddenly excited) Let me show you! What should you know, any of you, of letting the material speak for itself? When have you ever been in the presence of the material? But now I'll show you. Give me a minute alone with the actors, and we'll show you.

(All look toward the INSP.)

INSP. Very well, Ash, go ahead. Anything that will help.

(The two Players approach the WJ.)

WJ. (to the HOCH. WJ) Thanks, but I think I'd better handle your part myself. It would be too much to explain.)

(The BURG., the INSP. and the DIR. exchange looks. The HOCH. WJ shrugs and exits.)

The WJ takes the HOCH. CHRISTUS aside, and during the subsequent dialogue between the BURG., the INSP. and the DIR., they go through the following sequence of actions:

1. The WJ mimes giving instructions to the HOCH. CHRISTUS, who nods slowly, but without seeming really to understand.
2. The WJ sends the HOCH. CHRISTUS over to get the base of the Cross/base assembly.
3. On the HOCH. CHRISTUS's return, the WJ mimes giving him further instructions, which seem to concern lighting-levels and blocking.)

BURG. A very curious old man, Herr Inspector, this Mr. Ash of yours. A trusted member of your community, no doubt.

INSP. On the contrary, I never saw him before this afternoon.

BURG. and DIR. (together) What!

INSP. He materialized in my compartment on the train up here. I had a sudden impulse to bring him along.

DIR. You mean we've gone and placed the future of our play and town in the hands of--

(The BURG. motions him to be silent.)

BURG. Might one inquire as to the origins of this "sudden impulse"?

INSP. It was a story he told on the train. Conversation in our compartment had turned to a recent archaeological find, the so-called Living Statue of Augstadt--

DIR. You mean that late-antique torso of a prophet that's said to weep and flinch and give off a kind of toneless hum?

INSP. You've heard about it, then, up here?

DIR. We're working it into the script now.

INSP. The debate hinged on whether one might legitimately speak of a statue as "living," no matter what tricks it might be able to perform. After all, as one lady put it, could a statue die? And if not-- At this point Mr. Ash asked permission to tell his story.

DIR. This was quite a conversation. I've never heard the passengers on that train discuss anything more exalted than the ski-conditions.

BURG. (to INSP.) It must have been quite a story, to have produced this... burst of confidence in a complete unknown.

INSP. I felt... it spoke to the moment. It seems that once, in a moment of despair, the Wandering Jew sought the services of a famous assassin. "The Talmud speaks of nine hundred and nine ways to die," he told the fellow. "You will have to come up with

Nine Hundred and Ten." The assassin, recognizing the challenge of a lifetime when he heard it, forthwith accepted. Well--I'll spare you the ropes, I'll spare you the guns, I'll spare you the heated needles and amber phials. Suffice it to say, that every attempt came to nought. And then one day, just when all hope seemed lost, the murderer announced success. Splendid, cried the Jew: was he to bare his throat, hold forth a vein, prepare to swallow a draught? "No, no," said the assassin, "nothing like that. The Wandering Jew can be killed simply by tightening the definition of what it means to be alive."

(shrugs)

I felt I had found the ideal companion for Hochhimmelfahrt.

BURG. But how could you, solely on the basis of that--? No, never mind, I can see how you could: it's the most quintessentially Jewish episode I can imagine. But tell me: now that your anecdotist seems to have developed ambitions as a dramatic author--does he still retain your confidence?

INSP. Gentlemen, there is scarcely a page of your play that is not calculated to bring out the dramatic author in any Jew.

DIR. (to BURG.) I knew it! I told you they'd never be satisfied with a few touch-ups. They want to destroy the play!

INSP. While that is not our object, it is certainly true that the world could get on very nicely without your play.

BURG. Where, then, would Western Civilization find a mirror?

INSP. Where has Western Civilization not found a mirror? You'd better not build any hopes for the future of your town on that.

BURG. If it were a question only of the future of our town.... Are you familiar with the origins of the Hochhimmelfahrt dramatic festival?

INSP. Something to do with a vow undertaken in a plague-season....

DIR. (half to himself, as if repeating a litany) The Pestilence rages; nothing is any use; they cry out that they will perform a passion play once every ten years forever, if the Lord will but spare them. From that hour, the Pestilence abates....

INSP. But Europe no longer stands under the threat of plague.

BURG. Oh, you are wrong! A fearful strain of plague now menaces Europe. Appearing first in the form of a stiffening or dryness, in its final stages-- But I imagine the celebrated doctors of Israel have some experience of this malady. Is there a people in the Modern World that has not been plagued by the refusal of its images to mean? In Hochhimmelfahrt, however, Europe possesses the antidote. Here the ailing symbols are restored to life--at the comparatively small price of its being some other life they are restored to.... No, Inspector, there is no dispensing with our play. For if Hochhimmelfahrt were ever once to grow slack in performance, who can say but what the plague might return?

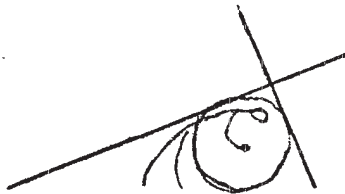
INSP. (shrugs) Oh, well, if you chose to make a cultural glory of a health-measure....


(The BURG. and the DIR. are both about to reply, when the WJ calls over:)

WJ. All right; we're ready here.

(The BURG., the DIR. and the INSP. reluctantly let it drop, and return to their seats.

The HOCH. CHRISTUS comes center. As in the earlier versions, he assumes the "staggering under the Cross" position, in profile to the audience. But this time he holds the circular, openwork base tucked under the branches of the Cross which enclose him--a circle inscribed beneath perpendiculars:



The WJ takes up a position diagonally downstage from the HOCH. CHRISTUS, and fixes his gaze on the Cross/base assembly. The BURG., the DIR. and the INSP. lean forward expectantly--but neither the WJ nor the HOCH. CHRISTUS moves or speaks. All that happens is that very gradually the lights go down almost to blackout. The two beams of the Cross and the circumference of the circular base have been treated with luminescent paint, so that now, as the lights fade, the pattern  gradually emerges, glowing in the darkness.

The WJ stares at the pattern with deepening concentration. Meanwhile, the HOCH. CHRISTUS, still faintly visible behind the luminous pattern, backs slowly out of the Cross/base assembly--and continues backing away until he is offstage.

The DIR., whose impatience has been growing visibly, snaps his fingers for light. The stage returns to glaring brightness--brighter than before.)

DIR. But that's not a scene! Your Jew doesn't do anything!

WJ. No, well, in my opinion, all the Jew did was... suddenly see!

BURG. See? See what?

WJ. (shaping the air vaguely with his hands) A sort of configuration... into which the moment... seemed to resolve....

INSP. Ash, for goodness' sake--

BURG. Are you saying the sin against the Holy Spirit is art criticism?

DIR. (to WJ) Sorry, but that's not theatre. One character stares, the other exits. Where's the action.

WJ. Actually, the exit wasn't planned; your actor put that in. And yet, when you come to think of it--what a touch!

BURG. There's no need for sarcasm, Mr. Ash. Our actors are very dedicated people. However, if they're not given anything to work with--

WJ. But--I'm not being sarcastic. I'm telling you: it made the scene.

DIR. A scene is precisely what it does not make. Look: a man goes into an encounter a small-time artisan; he emerges from it a timeless archetype. All right: the scene has got to show how it happened.

WJ. And what if it was choosing to go with the timeless pattern that landed him outside time? After all, to be the Wandering Jew is to see that way: perhaps to see that way is to be the Wandering Jew!

DIR.. Seeing doesn't change anything!

WJ: Then what are any of us doing here?

BURG. How's that?

INSP. I think Mr. Ash may be alluding to the high value which Jewish thought traditionally sets on the role of witness--

DIR. (rounding on the INSP.) Are you saying this tableau is satisfactory to you?

INSP. Well--

BURG. Of course it's not satisfactory! It's nothing! To stumble into the midst of the greatest event in human history, and do no more than see it in a certain light--

WJ. --exactly describes this whole enterprise of yours!

BURG. } (together) { Eh?
INSP. } { Ash--

WJ. What could be more in the spirit of this place? What is this festival of yours all about if not seeing in a certain light--and then in another; getting all one's action into seeing; having an impact as having a look. Well--that's the very quality I'm pointing to in him. To me, the Wandering Jew appears a kind of one-man Hochhimmelfahrt. I see him as--
doing what you do.

BURG. But he "did" nothing!

WJ. Why is it suddenly nothing when he does it? You don't set such a low estimate on your own efforts along these lines--oh, no: you're "charting a course for Western Culture," and so forth. Respect for a predecessor!

BURG. Our predecessor?

INSP. Him?

WJ. Surely this cannot be disdain I'm hearing? He is not disdainful of you--oh, no: he advances upon the Modern World with arms flung wide; he knows when he is among his own.

BURG. That folktune has no connection with us!

DIR. Beyond figuring as a minor character in our play.

INSP. To be changed and emended at will.

WJ. He is the life and spirit of your enterprise--however little it pleases you to think so. Why cannot you recognize his impulse as your own--or rather, why does your own impulse become unrecognizable, returning to you in him?

DIR. Our impulse?

BURG. Are you comparing the Hochhimmelfahrt Passion Play to that...

(gestures at Cross/base assembly)
geometry lesson?

WJ. Your gaze, like his, is fixed--

BURG. Yes, but we're looking for significance, we're not just looking. There's a little more to seeing the pattern of meaning in an event than, uh... seeing a pattern.

WJ. All the meaning the event can ever know stands in that pattern!

(The following speech must be played as the moment of intellectual hysteria--the false dawn--it is, and not as the "breakthrough," "culminating insight," etc. which the character so obviously believes it to be. How is this disparity to be conveyed? For one thing, by a dissonance between the actor's movements and the sort of language he is coming out with. In contrast with the manic "lucidity" of the words he addresses to the Cross/base assembly, his actual bearing toward that prop is heavily, even grossly, physical--and becomes more so as the speech progresses. He is all over the thing, pressing it, stroking it, engulfing it, moving in, around and through....

Even his most abstract remarks about its form (X), he simultaneously translates into specific physical grapplings with it, the general thrust and direction of which are suggested by the arrows in the diagrammatic "footnotes." Images for the actor to keep in mind: tearing up the woodwork for emeralds, moving over a body from which one expects everything....

The BURG. and the DIR. react to this behavior

on the part of the WJ with mounting dismay.
 The INSP., on the other hand, seems unaccountably
 delighted by it--though he is careful to put on
 an air of stern disapproval any time the DIR. or
 the BURG. look his way.)

Look here: the circle--perfection, yes; but further:
 perfection ¹brought within limits--and ²itself sustaining
 those very limits: the Jew is looking at the Incarnation!,
 its inmost meaning suddenly before him in the hang of its
 final moment! What if for this it was necessary that He
 --as your actor, by his exit, knew so well how to suggest--

(backs stealthily away from the Cross/base)

ceased to be present to me? Was it that I fled out of His
 presence--or was it not rather that presence, shamed by a
 truer contact, withdrew and left us to ourselves?
 Shrank from the encounter? Missed my moment? I tell you,
 no one ever drew nearer to Him than that! In such an
 apprehension, I virtually

(passes upstage behind the Cross/base and peers
 out from behind)

enter the image.

1. 

(starts back out of the Cross/base)

Wait, though....

(comes out from behind the Cross/base)

There's someone else there!

(He circles the Cross/base once, inspecting it from every angle; then again, more quickly; then several more times, more quickly still. Each time around, his orbit becomes a little more obsessive and mechanical.)

Now who can that be? What other existence is an ³unbroken circling beneath the Christian sign, experienced as a limitation? Who else has ⁴gone up against constriction from so many different angles that his outbreaks sum to an orbit? Where have I laid eyes on that configuration before--or rather; where have I not? The Jew is looking at his life! The form that gave the Savior to consciousness, now gives consciousness to itself. Savior and Jew meet in the adequacy of this one image to both of them. That image is their meeting. Their meeting is ⁵what it's an image of.

(passes his hand over his brow)

My god! To think of its having been all this while out before one, and only now...! Oh, but what's this? Already smoothing down the skirts, drawing in the radiance, seeking to be excused, trying to... close! Oh, no! You shall not slip back into suggestiveness once more. Having commenced to mean, you are going to mean. Always did go around with an air of "Oh,-if-I-chose"....well, nothing less than everything--all you ever withheld while holding me rapt--I now

3.



4.



5.



require of you--now that I know! Oh, yes, I'm afraid you let the cat out of the bag there when you went and let it be seen you had a little something to say on either hand. A single image could never have sufficed for Christus and Jew unless a single image... sufficed. How could it pertain to both of us and not be endlessly pertinent; hold the key to that opposition without opening every door in sight; mean Him, mean me, and not go on meaning indefinitely? You didn't seriously suppose you could get that rim of glare on the horizon accepted as broad day? I know what is gone from me--how should I have escaped the knowledge?--and I know where it went. Come on! Dawn as the rest! Empty! Give!

(He suddenly thrusts himself into the midst of the Cross/base assembly, and using hands, feet and head, pushes out against the circumference of the base with all his strength.)

I will hold those jaws open until they have given forth all that has disappeared down them.... There we come; that's better. It's starting--I can feel it. Image opening! And--

(The Cross/base assembly shatters into pieces: the two beams of the Cross come apart at their juncture, and fragments of the circular, openwork base fly off in all directions. The WJ is left holding an arc-shaped fragment in either hand.)

There! Nothing lost! Still mine! All there! All returned to me in the image: a form instead of a life amply compensated by the life now streaming out of the form....

(He faces around upstage toward where the Cross/base had stood, at the same time bringing the two arc-fragments together over his head.)

And still the image is opening! It will always be opening now....

(Embarrassed silence)

BURG. That is the typical Jewish reaction?

INSP. I'll tell you the typical Jewish reaction. Cut it.

BURG. and DIR. (together) Cut it?

INSP. If it can lead to that, it can lead to anything. It goes out. The entire episode.

BURG. You're going a little beyond your authority, Mr. Jewish Inspector.

DIR. You don't tell us what to do with our sacred festival play!

INSP. You refuse, then?

BURG. It's the high point of the show! Europe would never forgive us!

INSP. So I shall inform the banking interests of our community: His Grace the Duke I leave you to inform yourselves.

(He starts to leave. The BURG. frantically tries to detain him.)

BURG. Herr Inspector! Please! It's true we seem further than ever from a solution--

INSP. On the contrary. The solution is obvious.

DIR. (hostile) Maybe to you--

BURG. (saving it) --but we are not so quick-witted. Surely you will not refuse to explain your position to us in a little more detail? And we--we in turn will try and make ourselves better understood of you. Let me prevail on you to accompany us to the Rath Haus; there, over luncheon--

INSP. To what end--?

BURG. (desperately) A new angle. A fresh start. We cannot have exhausted the possibilities!

(The INSP. keeps them dangling for a moment; then:)

INSP. Mmm....well, all right; perhaps one final session....

BURG. Gott sei Dank! I breathe again. Gentlemen--

(He takes the DIR. and the INSP. each by the arm to lead them off.

The WJ whirls around. With the two Cross-fragments still raised above his head, he makes a rather menacing-looking figure.)

WJ. Why do you turn away?

BURG. (sweeping by; determined not to let him become a problem again) Thank you, thank you, much obliged, Mr. Ash. You see, those... thought-provoking remarks of yours have prompted us to take a whole fresh look at--

WJ. But--look there!

(He points into the air; then, recalling that the Cross/base now lies scattered over the stage-floor, adjusts the gesture downward.)

BURG. Here, there, everywhere--search every cranny, leave no avenue unexplored....

(directing a glance of appeal toward the INSP.) So much has been accomodated, it is unthinkable we should now be reduced to a simple: Out he goes!

WJ. Out?

BURG. (to INSP., insinuatingly) After all, with the resources at our command for revising a figure past recognition--

WJ. Cut... the Jew... Now?

BURG. (continuing to address the INSP.) Believe me, here in Hochhimmelfahrt we know a way or two of making our difficulties disappear besides, uh...making them disappear.

WJ. Disappear? Just at the very moment when it is all only now for the first time--

INSP. (to BURG.) The last thing I'm in the mood for is another paeon to Hochhimmelfahrt. If you're ready to talk business--

DIR. Meaning: if we're ready to go along with this hatchet-job you propose.

INSP. Meaning--

WJ. (holding forth the Cross-fragments) The image has opened! I saw. You saw. It opened....

INSP. Ash!

(lays a firm hand on the WJ's arm)

Mr. Ash, you have definitely made your contribution.

(under his breath)

Ash, that was brilliant! The leverage you've given me! They'll be putty in my hands. If our grandchildren want to know who the Wandering Jew was, they're going to have to look him up in the encyclopedia!

(aloud)

All right, gentlemen; come on, then; to it!

(Exit the BURG., the DIR. and the INSP.)

The WJ flings the two arc-fragments to the floor.

Re-enter the HOCH. CHRISTUS and the HOCH. WJ.

The HOCH. CHRISTUS seems to be comforting his grieving colleague. But after a moment it becomes clear that the HOCH. CHRISTUS is merely coaching the other Player in how to look grief-stricken: he makes small adjustments in the angle of the HOCH. WJ's head, repositions his arms, etc. The net effect is to transform what had been a credible posture of grief into a stiff parody of one.

On catching sight of the stage littered with Cross/base fragments, the Players abruptly leave off their work. The HOCH. WJ sets about picking up the mess. He experiences some difficulty in holding onto all the awkwardly shaped pieces of wood at once; and during the dialogue that follows, he tries several arrangements. (The HOCH. CHRISTUS goes to the WJ.)

HOCH. CHRISTUS. What happened here?

WJ. An image that had been before consciousness ever since when suddenly gave.

HOCH. CHRISTUS. Snapped under the strain, did it?

WJ. What?

HOCH. CHRISTUS. Something like that happened to me once. And during an actual performance, too. The arm-band broke.

WJ. Pardon?

HOCH. CHRISTUS. Right in the middle of the Crucifixion scene, the strap supporting my left arm suddenly gave. I had to hold my arm out there by sheer will power. The Crucifixion scene is over ninety minutes long! Of course, that couldn't happen nowadays. In the present Christ-as-vegetation-deity version, there is no Crucifixion scene, just some winter-planting pantomime with a Cross-shaped tree in the background.... Well! So what was the verdict on that performance of yours?

WJ. They understood nothing.

HOCH. CHRISTUS. Well, as far as that goes, I must admit--

WJ. You alone understood.

HOCH. CHRISTUS. Me?

WJ. To be understood of Christus alone... that's rich--though whether in promise or ironies....

HOCH. CHRISTUS. But--

WJ. Meanwhile, they're off scuttling the scene.... Well, let them! Cut away! As if it were any less the image that cuts them, that renders this whole immense vaudeville of theirs ~~superfluous~~ superfluous by already containing every possible departure for thought. Let them try and turn their backs on it: the very space through which they turn, it has made available to them.... Listen, I don't suppose you'd be willing to-- Oh, what's the use? If you couldn't reach them through your performance, if not even that superb ending you came up with had any impact--

HOCH. CHRISTUS. Listen, I want to explain about that. I hope it didn't look like I was walking out or anything. What happened--

WJ. But what are you apologizing for? You found a way to make the very look of the action speak my meaning: the withdrawal of immediacy in a moment of comprehension expressed by--a withdrawal: that endlessly suggestive exit you improvised....

HOCH. CHRISTUS. But... I just assumed I wasn't needed any more.
(The WJ smiles: "Sure, sure.")
I thought my part was over.
(The WJ starts to brush it off again, but suddenly
feels a misgiving.)
Well, you certainly did seem to be "taking it from there"!

WJ. What's this, now?

HOCH. CHRISTUS. You had something going with the prop.
I felt in the way. --You know, your acting instructions were
none too clear on the point of what one was to do after--

WJ. Who told you to say these things to me?

HOCH. CHRISTUS. No one, I just--

WJ. Why will they not... leave me in the possession of
my moment?

HOCH. CHRISTUS. It was only a rehearsal!

WJ. (just now catching sight of the HOCH. WJ, who is staggering
off under his burden of Cross/base fragments) Hey! Where do
you think you're going?

HOCH. WJ. Just... picking up the pieces.

WJ. You don't want to leave now! We're discussing the future
of the role.

HOCH. WJ. (shrugs) It's nothing to me.

(Exit the HOCH. WJ. The WJ turns, puzzled, to
the HOCH. CHRISTUS.)

WJ. What's going on here? I thought he was an aspirant.

HOCH. CHRISTUS. He is--but not to the role of Wandering Jew.
He wants to be me. I mean: Christus.

WJ. Then hadn't he better keep far away from the Wandering Jew?
Won't it kill his chances?

HOCH. CHRISTUS. Oh, no; on the contrary. It's one of the things you have to be willing to do. It's the usual route.

WJ. Oh, no, it's not!

HOCH. CHRISTUS. I assure you--

WJ. Was it your route?

HOCH. CHRISTUS. Oh, well, of course, now in my case, you see... I was subject to these feelings of, uh...being Him.

WJ. Really? Wouldn't still by any chance--?

HOCH. CHRISTUS. Only insofar as the situation warrants.

WJ. Who are you?

HOCH. CHRISTUS. (in a kind of wail) I am only Joseph of Arimathea now!

WJ. What?

HOCH. CHRISTUS. Well, you can't go on playing a thirty-three-year-old forever. Eventually, the Committee votes it away, and back you go, down to one of the minor roles again.

WJ. Repeating in reverse your original ascent until at length you arrive back at that infamy of infamies, the Wandering Jew....

HOCH. CHRISTUS. Oh, I don't think a Christus is ever going to pass that way again.

WJ. One hadn't allowed oneself a hope. Yet, for a moment there, face to face in the image, it almost seemed as if.... However, back here on the ground it is only...distance as usual. Christus: why? How came there to be ever and always that distance between Savior and Jew?

HOCH. CHRISTUS. You want to know what my guess would be? He wasn't thinking?

WJ. The Jew?

HOCH. CHRISTUS. The Savior. "Tarry till I come..."--I don't think He meant anything by it. He was suffering, exalted; His mind was on other things. It slipped out. And the poor fellow goes and takes Him at His word.

WJ. Yes, but would taking Him at His word be enough to... make it happen?

HOCH. CHRISTUS. (shrugs) You know how these things are. We had a lad here playing Judas once, got so caught up in the role that at one performance he actually hanged himself and had to be cut down. And it's not at all unusual for the girl who plays Maria to enter a convent afterwards.

WJ. And you think the Wandering Jew may have been one of these ... suggestible types?

HOCH. CHRISTUS. I'm only speculating...

WJ. But if you were doing the role, that would be your interpretation?

HOCH. CHRISTUS. Ah, but, now, you see, one can't just independently fix on an interpretation of him. I mean, one can't start there. In practice, how he's played has always been entirely a function of how I--sorry: of how the Christus--is being done. When the emphasis was on Christ-as-Judge, the Wanderer stood in the dock. Whereas, in Christ-as-Mercy-Seat periods, we were treated to the spectacle of Simon Laquedem, Beaten Chest. And now that Christus has passed over into an emblem of integrated selfhood--guess who gets to sound the note of neurotic demand. An ever-changing Christus means an ever-changing Jew. So long as I haven't finished meaning, neither will he.

(Re-enter the BURG., the DIR. and the INSP. It is clear at a glance that they have settled their differences.)

BURG. It's so obvious, I can't think how we didn't hit on it sooner.

DIR. (with a glance at the WJ) Perhaps there wanted a change of scene.

INSP. Well, Ash! It appears that, contra all odds, we've come up with a solution. A Wandering Something they feel they must have. But there's nothing says it has to be a Wandering Jew. So what we're going to do is, let that be the part that varies.

WJ. (with a look toward the HOCH. CHRISTUS) Vary till I come!

INSP. "Vary till I come"--ha, ha, that's good.

BURG. But in a strictly topical sort of way, you see. A Wandering Turk years when the Duke is receiving unfavorable trade terms from the Emirate....

DIR. A Wandering Pole, at times of tension on the Eastern frontier....

INSP. A Wandering Jesuit!

BURG. A Wandering Free Silverite!

DIR. A Wandering Anarcho-~~syn~~icalist!

WJ. A Wandering Shadow!

BURG. Pardon?

WJ. No--not even so much. A shadow, at least, is cast by the thing that comes between the light and itself. With the impulse to belabor him, we were still in the realm of impulses toward him--but this! A Wandering Suitcase, packed and ready, let who will pick it up and run with it....

BURG. Well, I must say! After the exhibition you've just given of "picking up and running with it"....

DIR. Besides, we're artists; it's our business to pick up on things....

WJ. But--I had it for you there! I gave you--

BURG. You gave us some highly personal impressions--

DIR. Talk about "belabored"! At least we're aiming for a topical tie-in. That Wandering Crypto-Aesthete of yours doesn't come out of anything or go anywhere.

BURG. (with an anxious glance at the INSP.) However, we need hardly debate the merits of this interpretation or that one, seeing that from now on, each shall have its day.

WJ. The day has dawned!

DIR. Look. You've had the opportunity to stage your version; now step aside and let others do the same.

WJ. But I wasn't "staging a version," I was showing you how it is for the Figure himself!

BURG. But, my dear Mr. Ash, the whole assumption on which this festival rests is that there is no such thing as "the Figure himself"

DIR. (facetiously) Of course that's going to come as something of a shock to him, if he ever decides to favor us with another visit.

WJ. What!

DIR. There's a legend that the Wandering Jew once came to Hochhimmelfahrt to see the play.

WJ. I don't remember ever.... Wait a minute. How did they know it was him?

DIR. It seems that at the very moment when the Wanderer is supposed to laugh--this was during his Rationalist Mocker period--there was this wild outburst of laughter from somewhere in the audience.

WJ. Yes? And?

DIR. And so they knew it was him.

WJ. Maybe it was just someone else it struck funny.

DIR. I guess they figured, anyone it struck funny must be the Wandering Jew.

WJ. But that's absurd!

DIR. (realizing it is) Well... how did they know it was the Wandering Jew that first time, in Jerusalem, except by his reacting in his characteristic way?

(The BURG., the DIR. and the INSP. start to leave.)

WJ. (aside) Why is it when people are forced into a corner and have to say something ridiculous, that's the moment they seem to become capable of giving me the truth of my existence? I should think about that. I really should.

(notices that the BURG., the DIR. and the INSP.
are on their way out)

Hey! Where to now?

INSP. We just have to initial the agreement. Then you can be on your way.

(under his breath)

You see? It was just as I told you: putty in my hands. Bravo, Ash! You have won yourself a place in the imagination of your people this day!

DIR. Oh, Inspector! How would you feel about starting off with a Wandering Nihilist? They say Nihilism's the coming thing.

INSP. I understand the Dowager Duchess is up to her dewlaps in the occult. Suppose we get the ball rolling with a Wandering Swedenborgian?

(Exit the INSP., the DIR. and the BURG.)

HOCH. CHRISTUS. What doesn't seem to have occurred to them is that they're opening up twenty quarrels as the price of settling this one. We'll now be playing the scene for Turkish Inspectors, Polish Inspectors, Customs Inspectors--

WJ. I had it! I had it for a moment there! But then I... went past it. It turned out to be just one more of the things I go past.... But that's not to say I never had it! That's not to say there was nothing to be had! Christus! What is to be done about the Wandering Jew?

HOCH. CHRISTUS. The best thing would be to cut him....

WJ. Have even those eyes caught a glimpse of the end of the line?

HOCH. CHRISTUS. Oh!--not for any reason like that. Just that, if he were cut, we could move directly from Pilate's chamber out onto the Hill. It'd be a far more dramatic scene-change.

WJ. And to a mere formal consideration--
(hears himself, stops)

HOCH. CHRISTUS. It's just one more episode in a part of the play that's littered with them already. The Savior's story is complete without it.

WJ. What about the Jew's story? To him, that meeting is not just "one episode the more," but the one hint he gets; the sole reference-point by which he might ever hope to orient himself; something approaching an origin. His every hope centers upon that moment; his only thought is of enacting that moment--

HOCH. CHRISTUS. Yes, well it still doesn't do the scenic rhythm any good.

WJ. (giving him a long look) It is you, isn't it?

HOCH. CHRISTUS. Pardon?

WJ. That rendezvous in the image was signalling your arrival, since--here you are--and upon my own ground--and after how long a denial that I so much as stood upon ground.

HOCH. CHRISTUS. I'm afraid I--

WJ. "Doesn't do the scenic rhythm any good"...! A Christus after my own heart? But I wonder what you mean by it, though. Mockery, most likely: "See how it feels!" But I'm going to give it a chance to be more than that. I'd like to think the formalism of a Savior might be His way of announcing: "Of that impulse, too, I am the salvation."

(The HOCH. CHRISTUS suddenly snaps his fingers.)
Yes? I've got it?

(The HOCH. CHRISTUS strikes his forehead.)
No? I'm deluding myself?

HOCH. CHRISTUS. I've just remembered, I've got to see about the Last Supper.

WJ. WHAT!

HOCH. CHRISTUS. The "Last Supper"--that's what we call the banquet that's held at the close of every season. They're supposed to be joyous occasions. Maybe for some they are. But for me, the prospect of having to lay aside the Divine Nature and go back to my carpenter's tools again.... Hard enough when it's a matter of saying goodbye till next festival. Imagine when it comes time to part with it all for keeps!

WJ. I've never doubted that the role of Christus, too, has its calvaries....

HOCH. CHRISTUS. Hard to get, harder to hold--but hardest of all to take leave of! I don't mind telling you, I cried like a baby. Of course I knew I was getting too old. But in spite of everything, I had allowed myself to hope.... Well. It's a painful moment.

WJ. And what about taking leave of the Wandering Jew? Is not that, also, a "painful moment"?

HOCH. CHRISTUS. But as I've just explained to you, the "Wandering Jew" is merely preparatory. One only passes through it on the way to better things.

(The HOCH. CHRISTUS produces a watch.)

WJ. Let me hear again what it was supposed to be the preparation for! To me it seems so conspicuously to be going nowhere!

(The HOCH. CHRISTUS consults the watch and turns on his heel.)

But don't now you be the one to "put a distance between" us! I thought the eye for the eye was your particular aversion. Doesn't that rather rule out the recourse to irony?

HOCH. CHRISTUS. I'm afraid I can't possibly get out of--

WJ. Well, all right, then!--a distance, a great gulf fixed, no use denying it. But the distance between you and me is as a ~~net~~ net which we have dragged through the waters of history together: will you not now sit down beside me and examine the catch? This is no casual invitation, nor one likely soon to be repeated. Has it not long since been apparent to you that we are the sole relief provided, each for other; that only one of us can penetrate the solitude of the other? For you, too, this is the unrepeatable opportunity: think carefully before you pass on your way.

(The HOCH. CHRISTUS starts to leave.)

Shall it have been only... "one afternoon in Hochhimmelfahrt"? Shall we not... meet again?

HOCH. CHRISTUS. Look, I'd like to continue this. But I really do have to run now. Could I possibly ask you to wait here till I return?

(The WJ nods absently, preoccupied. The HOCH. CHRISTUS exits. Only then does the WJ hear the HOCH. CHRISTUS' parting words. He does a huge take, and looks after the HOCH. CHRISTUS.)

Offstage cries of "Last Trumpet! Last Trumpet!"
Re-enter the INSP., slightly tipsy, with a half-emptied glass of champagne in his hand.)

INSP. Ash, one more small delay. As long as I'm here, they've asked me to have a look at their Last Judgment sequence, to be sure the Reconciliation of the Jew is tactfully handled. Could I possibly impose on you--?

(The WJ waves him away, preoccupied.)

My dear fellow! You are the very soul of patience.

(Exit the INSP. More offstage cries of "Last Trumpet!")

WJ. (only now reacting to the cries and the INSP.'s words)
Last Judgment sequence? A Passion Play wouldn't go up as far as--

(Enter the TRUMPET ANGEL, hastily pulling straight his robe and adjusting his wire halo, as he crosses the stage in response to the offstage summons. His "trumpet" is a battered post-horn with a red tassel tied around it.)

He stops short on seeing the WJ. The two look at each other for a moment.)

WJ. Not here! Not here!

(He jerks his head in the direction the INSP. has exited. The TR. ANG. smiles--though not quite the smile of polite acknowledgment one would have expected.)

I have never allowed my thoughts to run too much upon the Last Judgment. As a solution in personal life, it has always appeared to me somewhat... outsized. However---

(A cracked horn-blast offstage)

INSP. (offstage) Gottenyu!

(The INSP. storms on, followed by the BURG. and the DIR.)

INSP. Prophet Elijah! Is that your idea of a reconciliation?

BURG. Herr Inspector! Please! You haven't understood!

DIR: But what's the objection, exactly?

(The INSP. storms off with the BURG. and the DIR. in frantic pursuit.)

Re-enter TR. ANG., far upstage, unperceived by the WJ.)

WJ. ---I begin to have had enough.

(The TR. ANG. raises the post-horn to his lips and draws in breath....)

END of PART THREE

PART FOUR

Scene i The Woman Who Loved the Wandering Jew

(Left of center, the WJ and the WOMAN are asleep upon a bed. The bed, which is angled toward the audience, is a perfectly plain black box. The WOMAN's nightgown is white and also perfectly plain, reminiscent of no particular time or place.

Over each of the corners of the bed, part of a post hangs suspended in mid-air. All four post-sections start down from the same height in air over the bed, but each breaks off jaggedly at a different distance from the bed's surface. Painted black, and dusted with silver spangles, these lengths of hanging wood suggest at once bedposts and slit-like glimpses into the night-sky.

Light comes up slowly around a figure, down-right. It is the TRUMPET ANGEL. He still carries the battered, red-tasseled post-horn, as at the end of the preceding scene. He is polishing the horn with his sleeve.

The WJ sleeps on. The WOMAN tosses and turns, pushing her arms out in front of her face as if the light coming up around the TR. ANG. were being shone directly in her eyes. Suddenly, she comes fully awake and sits bolt upright in bed.)

WOMAN. Oh, it's you. He told me we might be expecting you any time now. Oh, yes: I know who you are. I recognize you by that.

(points at post-horn)

He's described to me how, if he should ever overstay himself, this trumpet appears and begins to--

(suddenly sits up and covers her breast with the sheet)

No, wait a minute. He said: like a trumpet... going off in his head. He never mentioned an actual angel or instrument. How do I know you're actually-- But even as I ask that, I realize I don't have the slightest doubt, any more than I did with him, that first morning by the riverside.... There stood this... figure, advancing no claim, making no particular effort to appear anything.... there was just something about him that seemed to rule out the other possibilities. No, you're not a burglar or a dream. I know who you are. And knowing that, I know the magnitude of what I'm about to ask: Let him stay.

You've made exceptions before, I don't doubt, when he was in pain or behind bars or had some suffering to finish up. Then I imagine everyone was falling all over themselves to-- I'm sorry, I'm getting off on the wrong foot. Who am I to be bitter on his behalf? It's just... when I see... what the effects have been. He has been on the strain with significance. He can't any more-- not just now. He's not such a special case as you all seem to think--as no doubt he likes to think himself. That great, unspeakable crime of his--you're not going to tell me you don't understand the impulse? Go on! We all do--angel, woman or child. Especially, perhaps, child--for if ever there was a childish impulse.... It's even picked up in the punishment: "No supper for you, young sir; not until--" Ah, but there... what child ever had to stand in the corner for two thousand years?

(The TR. ANG. raises the horn to his lips.)

Wait! I know--there's this whole cosmic drama going on, why should anyone pay any attention to me? But I'm not trying to hurl myself before the wheels. I'm not sure I'd even describe the position I find myself in as opposition. It's quite possible that what you want for him and what I want are, in all essential respects, the same. Your aim-- let me be sure and state it accurately, now--is to point him facing round toward life again--would that be a fair summary? Well, let me ask you a question: what way do you think I want my lover to face? But this sending him off down the road into more of the same won't accomplish anything. History, for example, of which you make such a point--but he doesn't retain history, however much you rub his nose in it. Or threats of hell-- he was once granted a vision of hell. Do you know what his response was? He couldn't recognize it as hell! All that fixity... it looked like heaven to him. He once claimed to want a child with me--but I refused: I knew all he really wanted was the--for him--unbearably luxurious sensation of feeling a tie. You have to spurn the obvious, you have to remember who you're dealing with. Special arrangements only confirm him in feeling special--in fact, start him feeling special all over again at the city limits. You're going about it all the wrong way! You'd do far better to turn him over to me!

(The TR. ANG. partially lowers the horn-- then stops.)

I know--I know what you're thinking: "This is just some woman who wants more time with her lover." But would it even be a question of love, especially? I've never cherished any great illusions of "what a woman might do." Don't come buzzing around here with your Eternal Feminine: I force my moles on his attention! This isn't going to slide off into "The Wandering Jew in Love" if I can help it! No, it wouldn't be love so much

at all, as the promise of ordinary life I hold out. What have I ever sought to be to him but an uncompromised source of common life. Oh, and it shakes him, believe me. It's the only real challenge his view of himself ever receives. If what they want is that he should feel the extent--leave him to me! With me, one feels! I'm the lesson they want him to learn in the one form he might be capable of absorbing it. Surely you must be able to understand that--you, who've gone about with him from the start.... You do! I can see it in your eyes. But, at the same time, you're helpless, your orders read such-and-such, you don't quite see.... Listen. Here's what you've got to do. Go back. Have it out with them; make them understand. They'll listen to you, you know the situation better than anyone. Say whatever is necessary. Suggest expedients. Dwell on technicalities. They ask about me, I'm a good Christian woman, plenty worried about what could be in store for the woman who loved the Wandering Jew--and not only in the area of emotional disappointments. They've got to understand: no one's even mentioning the word "pardon": just, if he could set down during my lifetime, we're talking on a scale of years and months--

(The TR. ANG. raises the horn to his lips.)

Wait! Perhaps he dreams sweetly! But then, you would know his dreams: you've walked in on enough of them. Is that any work for an angel? Is this

(inclusive gesture)

any work for an angel? Is he an angel who does such work? How do I know you're an angel? You could be a demon. You could be someone he gets to dress up like this when he's had enough of the girl. I mean, how do I know? You certainly haven't gone out of your way to convince me. In fact, you haven't spoken a word. Now I find that pretty strange behavior on the part of a "Divine Messenger." In fact, it's much more the kind of thing I'd expect from him.

(indicates the WJ)

In fact, there's something about you altogether-- I feel the way I do with him: you know--as if my words were somehow building the silence they met with. He told you to take that tack with me, didn't he? You're acting under direct instructions from him! You and he--in this together! Cohorts! Yates! I've been addressing a plea on behalf of common experience to one of his own! And I never even noticed! One gets used to things like this; pre-dawn conversations with hobgoblins come to seem quite the usual course. Did I have some idea about putting him back in touch with what's simple and ordinary?

The truth is, he's lifted me out of all relation I ever stood in to ordinary life. There's no way of being a woman with him-- no way of getting close to him at all except by plunging headlong into that preoccupation of his that starts three paces past the point where human problems end. I once thought I could divert that fascinated gaze my way. But it's no use: any attempt to substitute yourself for his dilemma, and you become the latest instance of it. "The latest instance"--listen to how I talk! I've picked up all his little intonations. I open my mouth to speak, and--what is this unrecognizable stream? It might as well be his own thoughts ringing in his head. I don't even have a language for wanting my life back! How do I convey to him what he's done? How do I tell him it's got to stop? What do I do to make him go away?

(it suddenly coming over her who she is speaking to)

No, wait! Wait a minute, I didn't mean--"

(The TR. ANG. draws in breath.)

Wait!

(As the TR. ANG. (soundlessly) blows, the WOMAN cries out:)

Waaaaa...iiiiit!

(At this moment the lights go down on the WOMAN and come up around the TR. ANG., so that the WOMAN's cry is heard as the trumpet's blast.

The WJ wakes instantly. In this same instant, the lights go down on the TR. ANG. and come back up around the WOMAN once more.)

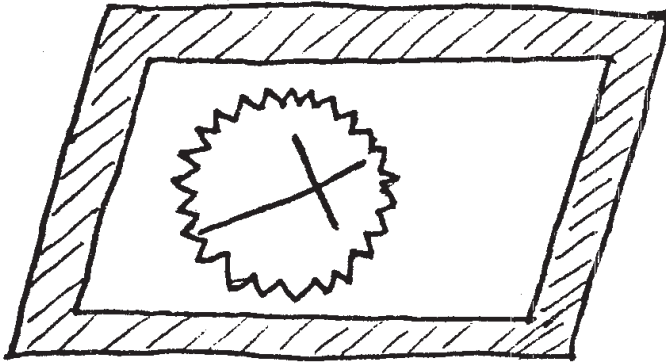
WJ. I must go.

(The WOMAN whirls round in the direction of the TR. ANG. There is no one there.)

Scene ii The Curtain Rises on the
End of the World

(In the darkness a trumpet blast is heard, followed by a tremendous crash of thunder. The lights come up on the following scene:

High in the air above up-center hangs a rhomboid-shaped, black-bordered projection screen. At the center of the screen is a small glowing disc. As the scene progresses this disc will grow steadily larger and brighter, taking up more and more of the screen. As the disc grows, a cross-shaped flaw lying diagonally across it--which at this point is scarcely visible--will come into greater and greater prominence:



Right-center, the Messiah's Throne, an enormous rococo structure of red cushions and gilded wood. Each of its two armrests, and each of the two side-columns of its backrest, culminates in a different heraldic beast's head.

Down-left, the WJ's "Throne Prepared," a plain wooden chair perfunctorily wreathed with streamers of green crepe paper.

At rise, the WJ is sitting on his "throne." Two high-ranking angels--the MANAGING ANGEL (=the BURGERMEISTER) and the ASSISTANT MANAGER (=the DIRECTOR)--are busy about final preparations for the Last Judgment. The ASST. MAN. is fussing over the Messiah's Throne: straightening it, dusting it, fluffing its cushions, etc. Above all he seems concerned that it be angled just so to the overhead projection screen: he positions it, steps back to see the effect, makes a minute adjustment, steps back again, etc. The MAN. ANG., meanwhile, is occupied in receiving messengers (the four COURIER ANGELS) and in checking the details of their reports against some sort of master-list on a golden clipboard which he carries.

Each of the four COURIER ANGELS arrives bearing a small scroll which, on entering, he touches to his forehead in salute and proceeds to unfurl. But then,

instead of reading from the scroll, the COURIER ANGEL delivers his report as if he were even at that moment viewing from afar, and simultaneously describing, the events he tells of. Throughout the scene, until their final dialogue with the WJ, the COURIER ANGELS maintain this air of being focussed far away. They are in touch with, and respond to, the unfolding stage action, but seem to behold it occurring at a great distance, in some other space.

Enter COURIER ANG. 1)

COURIER ANG. 1. The time is at hand! Apocalyptic stirrings everywhere; sign-and portent-levels running 60 to 90 percent above normal in most areas. The Angels of the Seven Final Plagues have been issued their scattering-bowls, and stand by to rain down; troops are reported massing in the wintry skies above Armageddon-- and this just in: the hook has been fixed in Leviathan's jaw. The Chariot of the Messiah--

ASSISTANT MANAGER. (pointing to the glowing disc on the screen) Look! There it is!

COURIER ANG. 1. The Chariot of the Messiah has separated itself from the Heaven of Heavens and moves outwards.

ASST. MAN. (to WJ) Hey! Have you forgotten what today is? Whip off those sandals!

(The WJ looks at his sandals, but doesn't touch them.
Enter COURIER ANG. 2.)

COURIER ANG. 2. "From the Messiah on board the Chariot to all Angels, Martyrs, Saints, Prophets and support personnel--Greetings! The Apocalypse is hereby officially declared on go-status. I have set before thee an open door, and no man shall shut it. I come, I come quickly."

ASST. MAN. (to WJ) Hey!

(The WJ looks up.)

The sandals! Boy, I wouldn't think you'd have to be asked twice.

(The WJ takes off one sandal--then stops and stares at the foot he has just bared.

Enter COURIER ANG. 3.)

COURIER ANG. 3. Great strides forward in the destruction of Nature! The sun has been taken down four orders of magnitude; the moon is at a coppery red, and holding. With the Beast's tail still sweeping the sky, we have a loss of one-third stars--and they're still rattling down. Loss of life in the sea also put at one-third. The Chariot of the Messiah is reported on course and advancing full steam ahead.

(Enter COURIER ANG. 4.)

COURIER ANG. 4. Babylon the Great is fallen, is fallen-- correction: is tilting, is tilting. The Kings of the Earth drink of the cup of God's indignation--effects looked for momentarily. Woe, woe to the inhabitants of Earth! The Chariot--advances.

(The MANAGING ANGEL makes a final huge check-mark on his clipboard and tears off the page.)

MANAGING ANGEL. That's it. We're all set.

ASST. MAN. We would seem to be. Only I have the feeling there's still something....

(casts his eye around the stage)

MAN. ANG. Well, let's get on that! This is the Apocalypse. This is the Final Coherence. The Messiah

(gestures toward the red-and-gilt Throne)

doesn't want to spend eternity gazing out at a... tangle of loose ends

(The ASST. MAN. catches sight of the WJ and lets out a yell.)

ASST. MAN. It's the Wandering Jew! He still hasn't kicked his other sandal off!

MAN. ANG. (to WJ) Come on, man. We can't have the End of the World with the Wandering Jew still on the hoof. Flick it off.

(Slowly, reluctantly, the WJ raises his still-sandalled foot and places it on his other knee.

The TRUMPET ANGEL appears at the side of the stage.

The WJ starts to reach out for the sandal, then stops, and puts his foot back down on the floor.)

WJ. "End," in what sense?

(With a smile, the TR. ANG. withdraws.)

MAN. ANG. (stopped in his tracks) What?--in what "sense"?
The end. The end of the world. The end of it.

WJ. It's just that... I can't think of a sense of "end" that would apply to me. I... think. And I don't get anything.

ASST. MAN. You don't have to "get" anything, things will just stop.

WJ. I'm not sure what "stopping" would mean in my case.

COURIER ANG. 1. Hey! What's the problem over there?

COURIER ANG. 4. Let's go!

WJ. (to ASST. MAN.) Stop doing what?

MAN. ANG. At a time when every dust-mote is full of the spirit of cooperation--

WJ. I know. I seem to have a genius for slinging in the wrench at cosmic moments. I mean, here's this whole enormous thing ready to roll--and I've got a question. It's terrible.

COURIER ANG. 3. We're falling behind schedule.

COURIER ANG. 1. Get on with it!

COURIER ANG. 4. Let's go!

WJ. And yet... what I'm asking for can't create any huge problems for anyone, or hold things up very long.
A way-for-it-to-be-so--that's all. The merest... sense-in-which.

MAN. ANG. (patronizingly, as if to a child) The world isn't going to be there any more.

WJ. What if I have to go on having my perspective without it?

MAN. ANG. Perspective on what?

WJ. Do you suppose at this stage I still require materials?

ASST. MAN. You can't walk away from what's happening to the entire world!

WJ. There's nothing I can't walk away from!

MAN. ANG. Look: you have a definite but small role to play in this event. You can't seriously expect the entire created universe is going to hover overhead while you... contend with a scruple.

WJ. I think maybe it's time my feelings were taken into account. I've certainly been through as much as any created universe.

COURIER ANG. 2. There's an attitude!

COURIER ANG. 1. This is incredible.

COURIER ANG. 4. Let's go!

MAN. ANG. I'm sorry, I'm afraid we've got to get this straightened out first.

ASST. MAN. (to WJ) How can you even think of stumbling on when everything else is finished?

WJ. You don't suppose I'm exactly overjoyed at the prospect? I need it to be over more than anyone! I've had enough! I want it to stop! I can't stand any more! I long for the end--but in my case this has got to include longing for a sense of "end" that might bear some relation to what my experience has been.

MAN. ANG. (to COURIER ANG. 4) Get over to the Central Radiance. Tell them we've got a problem. Wait for an answer.

(Exit COURIER ANG. 4.)

ASST. MAN. (to WJ, pointing) Look up on the screen. That's the Messiah's Chariot. This is His destination. That's his Throne.

WJ. Still up there! Oh, I was so right about Him; I had Him pegged from the start. There He hangs--and it is just as that Jerusalem intersection gave Him up to view: a pure form, that leaves earth far behind; a flight of abstraction.

ASST. MAN. It's the Messiah's Chariot and it's headed our way!

WJ. Have you really persuaded yourselves that patch of glare is going to suffuse the scene?

ASST. MAN. He's getting nearer by the minute!

WJ. Oh, they'd like us to think so! They'll kill themselves trying to give that impression--follow you around for centuries, whispering their promise, begging for their chance: nothing so much as to share it all with us, to leave their mark, to be there. And it does seem so plausible: hovering there, so poised, so luminous, but above all: so... set. They almost seem to be under way already: any second now... practically just...pausing only so long.... But for all that---

ASST. MAN. He'll be here any moment!

WJ. I've tried all their moments! An image... will not be joining us. There's nothing going on here--take it from one who knows all the signs.

(The TR. ANG. appears at the side of the stage.)

ASST. MAN. (points to the TR. ANG.) Then what's the Last Trumpet doing here?

WJ. That's the--? Wait a minute. He's not-- I know him from somewhere....

MAN. ANG. (calling over to TR. ANG.) Sorry. It looks as if there's going to be a slight delay.

(The TR. ANG. smiles non-committally and exits.)

COURIER ANG. 2. You don't seriously mean to tell us the coming of the Messiah is going to have to be adjusted around this... piece of scaffolding?

MAN. ANG. I don't see how we can go forward without his cooperation.

COURIER ANG. 3. Yes, but--we're the Apocalypse. This is it!
(points at WJ)
Is he creating a difficulty? Cut him!

COURIER ANG. and ASST. MAN. Yes! Get rid of him! Out! Pffttt!

COURIER ANG. 1. He's just apocryphal anyway.

WJ. Oh, no! He can be laden with the extraneous and interpreted twenty miles out to sea. But not cut. He wanted me out, He tried: "Such an inartistic episode; really, we'd all be better off"-- oh, now He tried! Because, you see, it was beginning to dawn on Him that He was running a very real risk. But it's no use!

Whatever "end" means in regard to the Wandering Jew, it means more than that. He is not just on the peripheries of everything; he changes everything. He changes everything by being on the peripheries of it. Everything is differently related to everything else because he is unrelated to any of it. What happens to a world with a Wandering Jew in it is not what happens to a world, period.

(COURIER ANG. 4 staggers on, pale and shaken, looking as if he has been set upon. His costume is disheveled; his scroll has had its lower half torn away.)

COURIER ANG. 4. ("reading" from the scroll as before)
Installation of the New Heaven and New Earth suspended indefinitely. The Beast that Rises from the Abyss keeps falling back in again. Leviathan has snapped his line and makes for the open sea once more. As a result of these and other unforeseen snags--
(drops his official manner for a moment)
"Snags"! It's a nightmare out there: people separated from their units, nobody willing to give you the time of day--and just overhead, the one crystal corner of the Heavenly City that did make it through, poking down out of a cloud into the middle of everything....

(The MAN. ANG. coughs; COURIER ANG. 4 resumes his formal delivery.)

The Chariot

(squints into the distance)

has been forced into a holding-pattern over the far approachways to the New Jerusalem.

(Pause.)

ASST. MAN. (to WJ) Who would have thought that, in sending that little episode your way, He was letting in the element that was one day to keep the entire program from getting off the ground?

WJ. I was ever the flaw in the conception. And time, which has always given the impression of bringing me somewhere, seems to have been bringing me to light.

COURIER ANG. 1. (to MAN. ANG.) Look, is it happening or not? I can't stand too much more of this.

COURIER ANG. 3. We have laws of nature that expire within the hour

COURIER ANG. 2. To say nothing of a rather sizable emotional investment in this being it.

COURIER ANG. 4. Do we stand by for a revised schedule or...?

MAN. ANG. (to WJ) You talk as if all this concerned no one less than you. As I recall, the Wandering Jew has some small stake in whether the world ends or doesn't end. With no "Last Day" for him to be saved on, what form is it possible to imagine his salvation as taking?

WJ. No definition leaps to mind! Easy enough to say: "salvation would be not to be the Wandering Jew any more" --but what is salvation for the Wandering Jew? What can you let him have when having-been-let-have is all the trouble already? He has gone past whatever you've got for him in the course of going past absolutely everything. You're all wondering: "why doesn't he grab it while he has the chance?" But one has got to be able to feel some confidence as to what might constitute it for one--and where would I have picked up such a thing? I just don't have a way of having this experience!

MAN. ANG. Is that your final word?

WJ. (passing a hand over his brow) How has it come to be...?

MAN. ANG. You absolutely will not let that other shoe drop?

(For answer, the WJ straps back on his first sandal, and plants himself firmly on both feet.)

MAN. ANG. You leave me no choice....

(Tense pause. Then the MAN. ANG. snaps his fingers in the direction of upstage. The glowing disc on the screen diminishes to a point and snaps off.
Howls of protest.)

COURIER ANG. 1. For him?

COURIER ANG. 4. Whose party is this, anyway?

COURIER ANG. 3. Wandering Bigshot.

COURIER ANG. 2. Formalists, 1...

COURIER ANG. 4. ...Judaeo-Christian world-picture, nothing.

COURIER ANG. 1. (to WJ, sardonically) Sure there isn't any other little thing?

ASST. MAN. (to MAN. ANG.) You mean... just pack up everything back in the box?

MAN. ANG. What can I say to you? We're going to have to take this back to our people. Responses will be weighed. A course will be charted....

ASST. MAN. Yes, but... you seem to be forgetting, we have commitments to people. What do I tell the Technical Branch to do with all that liquid fire they've been accumulating? Where is the Design Staff supposed to dump the mountains of semi-precious stone that were laid in for the New Jerusalem?

MAN. ANG. Look, this is at most a temporary setback. Options will be explored. A way will be found. Teams are already at work....
(His voice trails off.)

COURIER ANG. 1. But in the meantime--?

(Embarrassed silence. Then suddenly:)

MAN. ANG. In the meantime--don't you Courier Angels have some trumpeting abroad to do?
(exits hurriedly)

ASST. MAN. All right, people: take a moment to collect your thoughts, and then--get out the word!
(exits)

COURIER ANG. 1. Oh, great.

COURIER ANG. 3. All one's plans... gone up in smoke!

COURIER ANG. 2. Or rather: not gone up in smoke.

COURIER ANG. 1. And look who gets stuck with the job of telling everybody about it.

(Exit COURIER ANG. 3.)

COURIER ANG. 4. (to WJ) So. The world--continues. What an accomplishment. Now it is free to go on--going on.

WJ. That's not so simple!

COURIER ANG. 4. Oh, pardon me! I forgot I was talking to someone who has parleyed "going on" into an entire destiny.

(Exit COURIER ANG. 4.)

COURIER ANG. 1. (to COURIER ANG. 2) I can tell you, I for one am not looking forward to coming out on a cloud and screeching: "False alarm! False alarm!"

WJ. (taking COURIER ANG. 1 and 2 by the arm) Listen, I want you to tell Him
 (jerks his head toward the screen)
 something from me: that on some level I regret--well, or, no, not so much "regret", exactly, as--

COURIER ANG. 1. (disengaging himself from the WJ) Don't you think you've already sent Him the message?

(Exit COURIER ANG. 1.)

WJ. (to COURIER ANG. 2) He's got to understand, it was never my intention--

COURIER ANG. 2. Oh, come on! Don't tell me you aren't a little pleased that suddenly the prospect for the entire cosmos has come to seem a reflection of your own?

WJ. I came here expecting to be set free of my "prospect"!

COURIER ANG. 2. Well? And aren't you free of it when you push it off onto an entire cosmos?

(The WJ seems struck by this.)

Exit COURIER ANG. 2.

The TR. ANG. appears at the side of the stage.

The WJ only notices him after a moment.)

WJ. Hey, what are you--? Oh, don't tell me! It's not possible that you simply haven't--you, of all people, I'd have thought-- But apparently not. Well, then, look who it falls to to inform the Last Trumpet that his services are not, at present, required; that, indeed, at the moment, it looks more like a question of "whether" than "when."

(The TR. ANG. stands motionless.)

That's right. Fell through! No Apocalypse today! Sorry to have to let you just have it between the eyes, but--there you are. You may as well turn in your trumpet, you're going to have to make other plans!

(The TR. ANG. stands motionless.)

You don't quite seem to-- Well, listen, it takes a minute, I can imagine. You might not think I'd be able to feel my way into a situation at every point so-- But you'd be wrong: I'm with you every step of the--

(The TR. ANG. raises the post-horn to his lips.)

It's off! There was no way! Nothing can jolt the mechanism back into life: the advance has been halted! You seriously expect something will happen if you give a puff on that thing? Tell me some of the effects you hope to produce. Tell me one. Just who do you imagine is waiting on your call? No one's listening to you! You don't speak for anybody any more. I sent them all on their way! What had been made of me, I now made of an entire world! You may as well toss your trumpet over the side, what can you realistically hope to accomplish on a par with that? But the realities of the situation I suppose are the last thing-- All you know is: you're the Last Trumpet, you play. It's a reflex, totally unexamined; I doubt you've ever even so much as-- And yet there are plenty of other courses open to you! Nothing stands in your way but that--instrument; why don't you set it down?

(TR. ANG. motionless)

Go on, set the trumpet down.

(TR. ANG. motionless)

Set it down!

(TR. ANG. motionless)

Put down the trumpet!

(TR. ANG. motionless)

Put the trumpet--

(The TR. ANG. draws in breath.)

All right, then--play away! No, I mean it: you're so bent on giving your recital--fine! it's a decision that concerns no one but yourself. Only, don't expect me to stand still for-- I don't know you! I don't want to hear any more--do I make myself clear? I am fully prepared... to take myself out of the picture. That's right: You play, and I'm leaving. Now---

(Suddenly the TR. ANG. thrusts the post-horn out toward the WJ, whose hand closes on it instinctively.

The TR. ANG. exits abruptly. The WJ looks at the horn. Suddenly his grasp on it tightens. He slowly raises the horn to his lips, closes his eyes, hesitates--and sounds a note. He is immediately sent hurtling forward, as if shoved from behind. He whirls around to see who pushed him. Finding no one, he looks back at the horn.

Again he sets the instrument to his lips and blows--and again he is thrust sharply forward.

Thoughtfully, he lowers the horn, tucks it under his arm, and starts to exit. But the first step he tries to take brings him to a startled awareness that he is pinned to the spot.

In panic, he flails about trying to free himself. Then he has the inspiration of sounding the horn again--and is instantly free to move one of his feet one step forward. To release his other foot for the next step, he must blow again. And again for the next....

In this manner--each blast on the horn precipitating him one stumbling step onward--he makes a laborious exit.

The stage is empty. From offstage, the sounds of the WJ's noisy progress can still be heard, growing fainter and fainter:

A horn-blast, and a stumbling...

A horn-blast, and a stumbling...

A horn-blast---

Long pause over an empty stage.

Suddenly the lights go down.)

END