

YALE SCHOOL OF DRAMA  
YALE REPERTORY THEATRE

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THE CURTAIN RISES ON  
THE END OF THE WORLD

*From* The Moments of the Wandering Jew

Editor's Note:

The apocryphal legend of the Wandering Jew, of uncertain origin, tells of a Jerusalem artisan who refused the request of the Savior, staggering along under the weight of the cross, to sit down for a moment in the shade of his house. Because he would allow the Savior no rest, the Wandering Jew himself is condemned to wander the earth unceasingly until Judgment Day.

In David Cole's four-part "Chamber Epic" play, the Wandering Jew's "crime" is to have allowed himself a moment of distancing, aesthetic vision: for an instant, the figure of the Savior beneath the cross took on in his eyes the form of a circle inscribed below intersecting lines.

Having thus once distanced himself from this central event of human and cosmic history, the Wandering Jew finds himself for ever after "at a distance" from each of the many human and cosmic events through which he passes en route from Crucifixion to Last Judgment: in the biblical era, encounters with mythic figures like the Three Kings and Pontius Pilate; in the Middle Ages, an appearance before an inquisitional Chamber of Curiosity and a run-in with a "false" Wandering Jew; in the late nineteenth century, an incognito visit to an Oberammergau-like Passion Play that is updating its "Wandering Jew" sequence; and in our own time, a moment of intimacy with a woman who tries and who fails to detain him.

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In each of these situations the Wanderer seeks to reestablish some connection with the historical and the human. But he is driven on by the mysterious figure of the Trumpet Angel, until Judgment Day. In the final scene, which follows here, Judgment Day has dawned.

—E. F.

PART FOUR, SCENE TWO:  
THE CURTAIN RISES ON THE  
END OF THE WORLD

CHARACTERS

THE MANAGING ANGEL

THE ASSISTANT MANAGER

COURIER ANGELS 1, 2, 3, AND 4

THE TRUMPET ANGEL

THE WANDERING JEW

*In the darkness a trumpet blast is heard, followed by a tremendous crash of thunder. The lights come up on the following scene. Up center, high in the air, hangs a rhomboid-shaped, black-bordered projection screen with a small glowing disc in the middle. Over the course of the scene, this disc will grow steadily larger and brighter, taking up more and more of the screen. A cross-shaped flaw—scarcely visible at this point—will come into greater and greater prominence as the disc grows, extending diagonally across it and becoming more and more prominent. Right of center stage stands the Messiah's Throne—an enormous rococo structure of red cushions and gilded wood. Its armrests and backrest columns all culminate in different heraldic beast heads. Down left, THE WANDERING JEW sits on his "Throne Prepared"—a plain wooden chair perfunctorily wreathed with streamers of green crepe paper.*

*Two high-ranking angels, THE MANAGING ANGEL and THE ASSISTANT MANAGER, are busy making final preparations for the Last Judgment. THE ASSISTANT MANAGER is fussing over the*

*Messiah's Throne: straightening it, dusting it, fluffing the cushions, etc. He is especially concerned with angling it just so toward the screen: he positions it, steps back to see the effect, makes a minute adjustment, steps back again, etc. THE MANAGING ANGEL, meanwhile, is receiving messengers (the COURIER ANGELS) and is checking their reports against some sort of master-list on his golden clipboard.*

*Each of the COURIER ANGELS bears a small scroll which, on entering, he touches to his forehead in salute and unfurls. Instead of reading from the scroll, however, each delivers his report as if viewing and describing the events from afar. Throughout the scene, until their final dialogue with THE WANDERING JEW, the COURIER ANGELS remain focused far away. They are in touch with, and respond to, the action as it unfolds, but watch it as if it were occurring at a great distance, in some other space.*

COURIER ANGEL 1 (*Entering*) 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 book *has* been fixed in Leviathan's jaw. The Chariot of the Messiah—

ASSISTANT MANAGER (*Pointing to the glowing disc*) Look! There it is!

COURIER ANGEL 1 The Chariot of the Messiah has separated itself from the Heaven of Heavens and moves outwards.

ASSISTANT MANAGER (*To WANDERING JEW*)  
Hey! Have you forgotten what today is? Whip  
off those sandals!

*The WANDERING JEW looks at his sandals, but  
doesn't touch them. COURIER ANGEL 2 enters.*

COURIER ANGEL 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.

ASSISTANT MANAGER (*To WANDERING JEW*)  
Hey!

*The WANDERING JEW looks up.*

The *sandals!* Boy, I wouldn't think you'd have  
to be asked twice.

*The WANDERING JEW takes off one sandal—  
then stops and stares at the foot he has just bared.*  
COURIER ANGEL 3 *enters.*

COURIER ANGEL 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.*

COURIER ANGEL 4 *enters.*

COURIER ANGEL 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.

ASSISTANT MANAGER We would seem to  
be. Only I have the feeling there's still  
something . . .

*Casts his eye around the stage.*

MANAGING ANGEL Well, let's *get* on that!  
This is the Apocalypse. This is the Final  
Coherence. The Messiah (*gestures toward the  
Throne*) doesn't want to spend eternity gazing  
out at a . . . tangle of loose ends.

*The ASSISTANT MANAGER catches sight of the  
WANDERING JEW and lets out a yell.*

ASSISTANT MANAGER It's the Wandering Jew!  
He still hasn't kicked his other sandal off!

MANAGING ANGEL (*To WANDERING JEW*)  
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 WANDERING JEW raises  
his still-sandaled foot and places it on his other  
knee. The TRUMPET ANGEL appears at the side of  
the stage, carrying a post-horn. The WANDERING  
JEW starts to reach out for the sandal, then stops,  
and puts his foot back down on the floor.*

WANDERING JEW "End," in what sense?

*With a smile, the TRUMPET ANGEL withdraws.*

MANAGING ANGEL (*Stopped in his tracks*)  
What?—in what "sense"? The *end*. The end of  
the *world*. The *end* of it.

WANDERING JEW 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.

ASSISTANT MANAGER You don't *have* to "get"  
anything, *things* will just *stop*.

WANDERING JEW I'm not sure what "stopping"  
would mean in my case.

COURIER ANGEL 1 Hey! What's the problem over there?

COURIER ANGEL 4 Let's go!

WANDERING JEW (*To ASSISTANT MANAGER*)  
Stop doing *what*?

MANAGING ANGEL At a time when every *dust-mote* is full of the spirit of cooperation—

WANDERING JEW 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 ANGEL 3 We're falling behind schedule.

COURIER ANGEL 1 Get *on* with it!

COURIER ANGEL 4 Let's go!

WANDERING JEW 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*.

MANAGING ANGEL (*Patronizingly, as if to a child*)  
The *world* isn't going to *be* there anymore.

WANDERING JEW What if I have to go on having my perspective without it?

MANAGING ANGEL Perspective on *what*?

WANDERING JEW Do you suppose at this stage I still require materials?

ASSISTANT MANAGER You can't walk away from what's happening to the *entire world*!

WANDERING JEW There's nothing I can't walk away from!

MANAGING ANGEL 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.

WANDERING JEW I think maybe it's *time* my feelings were taken into account. I've certainly been through as much as any created universe.

COURIER ANGEL 2 *There's* an attitude!

COURIER ANGEL 1 This is incredible.

COURIER ANGEL 4 Let's go!

MANAGING ANGEL I'm sorry, I'm afraid we've got to get this straightened out first.

ASSISTANT MANAGER (*To WANDERING JEW*)  
How can you even *think* of stumbling on when everything else is finished?

WANDERING JEW 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* it 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.

MANAGING ANGEL (*To COURIER ANGEL 4*) Get over to the Central Radiance. Tell them we've got a problem. Wait for an answer.

*Exit* COURIER ANGEL 4.

ASSISTANT MANAGER (*To WANDERING JEW, pointing*) Look up on the screen. *That's* the Messiah's Chariot. *This* is His destination. *That's* His Throne.

WANDERING JEW 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*.

ASSISTANT MANAGER It's the Messiah's Chariot and it's headed our way!

WANDERING JEW Have you really persuaded yourselves that patch of glare is going to suffuse the scene?

ASSISTANT MANAGER He's getting nearer by the minute!

WANDERING JEW 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 —

ASSISTANT MANAGER He'll be here any moment!

WANDERING JEW 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 TRUMPET ANGEL appears at the side of the stage.*

ASSISTANT MANAGER (*Points to the TRUMPET ANGEL*) Then what's the Last Trumpet doing here?

WANDERING JEW *That's the —?* Wait a minute. He's not — I *know* him from somewhere . . .

MANAGING ANGEL (*Calling over to TRUMPET ANGEL*) Sorry. It looks as if there's going to be a slight delay.

*The TRUMPET ANGEL smiles noncommittally and exits.*

COURIER ANGEL 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?

MANAGING ANGEL I don't see how we can go forward without his cooperation.

COURIER ANGEL 3 Yes, but — we're the Apocalypse. This is *it!*

*Points at WANDERING JEW.*

Is *he* creating a difficulty? Cut him!

COURIER ANGELS and ASSISTANT MANAGER Yes! Get rid of him! Out! Pffttt!

COURIER ANGEL 1 He's just apocryphal anyway.

WANDERING JEW *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, *how* 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 ANGEL 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 ANGEL 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* MANAGING ANGEL *coughs*; COURIER ANGEL 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.*

ASSISTANT MANAGER (*To* WANDERING JEW) 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?

WANDERING JEW 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 ANGEL 1 (*To* MANAGING ANGEL) Look, is it happening or not? I can't stand too much more of this.

COURIER ANGEL 3 We have laws of nature that expire within the hour.

COURIER ANGEL 2 To say nothing of a rather sizable emotional investment in this being *it*.

COURIER ANGEL 4 Do we stand by for a revised schedule or . . . ?

MANAGING ANGEL (*To* WANDERING JEW) 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?

WANDERING JEW *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!

MANAGING ANGEL Is that your final word?

WANDERING JEW (*Passing a hand over his brow*) How has it come to be . . . ?

MANAGING ANGEL You absolutely will not let that other shoe drop?

*For answer, the* WANDERING JEW *straps back on his first sandal and plants himself firmly on both feet.*

MANAGING ANGEL You leave me no choice . . .

*Tense pause. Then the* MANAGING ANGEL *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 ANGEL 1 *For him?*

COURIER ANGEL 4 Whose party is this, anyway?

COURIER ANGEL 3 Wandering Bigshot.

COURIER ANGEL 2 Formalists, I . . .

COURIER ANGEL 4 . . . Judeo-Christian world-picture, nothing.

COURIER ANGEL 1 (*To* WANDERING JEW, *sardonically*) Sure there isn't any other little thing?

ASSISTANT MANAGER (*To* MANAGING ANGEL) You mean . . . just pack up everything back in the box?

MANAGING ANGEL 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 . . .

ASSISTANT MANAGER 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 semiprecious stone that were laid in for the New Jerusalem?

MANAGING ANGEL 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 ANGEL 1 But in the meantime—?

*Embarrassed silence. Then suddenly:*

MANAGING ANGEL In the meantime—don't you Courier Angels have some trumpeting abroad to do?

*Exits hurriedly.*

ASSISTANT MANAGER All right, people: take a moment to collect your thoughts, and then—get out the word!

*Exits.*

COURIER ANGEL 1 Oh, great.

COURIER ANGEL 3 All one's plans . . . gone up in smoke!

COURIER ANGEL 2 Or rather: *not* gone up in smoke.

COURIER ANGEL 1 And look who gets stuck with the job of *telling* everybody about it.

*Exit* COURIER ANGEL 3.

COURIER ANGEL 4 (*To* WANDERING JEW) So. The world—continues. What an accomplishment. Now it is free to go on—going on.

WANDERING JEW That's not so simple!

COURIER ANGEL 4 Oh, pardon me! I forgot I was talking to someone who has parleyed "going on" into an entire *destiny*.

*Exit* COURIER ANGEL 4.

COURIER ANGEL 1 (*To* COURIER ANGEL 2) I can tell you, I for one am *not* looking forward to coming out on a cloud and screeching: "False alarm! False alarm!"

WANDERING JEW (*Taking* COURIER ANGELS 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 ANGEL 1 (*Disengaging himself from the* WANDERING JEW) Don't you think you've already *sent* Him the message?

*Exit* COURIER ANGEL 1.

WANDERING JEW (*To* COURIER ANGEL 2) He's got to understand, it was never my intention—

COURIER ANGEL 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?

WANDERING JEW I came here expecting to be *set free* of my "prospect"!

COURIER ANGEL 2 Well? And *aren't* you free of it when you push it off onto an *entire cosmos*?

*The* WANDERING JEW *seems struck by this. Exit* COURIER ANGEL 2. *The* TRUMPET ANGEL *appears at the side of the stage. The* WANDERING JEW *only notices him after a moment.*



WANDERING JEW 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 TRUMPET ANGEL 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 TRUMPET ANGEL 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 TRUMPET ANGEL 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 anymore. 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?

TRUMPET ANGEL *motionless.*

Go on, set the trumpet down.

TRUMPET ANGEL *motionless.*

Set it down!

TRUMPET ANGEL *motionless.*

Put down the trumpet!

TRUMPET ANGEL *motionless.*

*Put the trumpet—*

*The TRUMPET ANGEL 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 TRUMPET ANGEL thrusts the post-horn out toward the WANDERING JEW, who closes his hand on it instinctively. The TRUMPET ANGEL exits abruptly. The WANDERING JEW looks at the horn. All at once his grasp tightens. He slowly raises it 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 is inspired to sound the horn again—and instantly finds himself 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 WANDERING JEW'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.*