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Reflections on Translating, Curating, and Collaging the Wandering  
Jew

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## Reflections on Translating, Curating, and Collaging the Wandering Jew

Anoushka Alexander-Rose

### Abstract:

This piece offers a review of the 2024-2025 travelling exhibition 'The Wandering Jew', collecting the author's reflections as translator and curator alongside ethnographic insights. Whilst this special issue considers the agency of minoritised groups as moveable and mobilised subjects, I play with these two characteristics to consider mythical itinerancy as both a punishment and an avenue for creative expansion. For this I draw on the benefactor figures of Georg Simmel's 'The Stranger' and Leonid Livak's 'The Helper'. Situated within a dominant narrative of European Christianity, the legend of the Wandering Jew exemplifies fundamental questions related to Jewish cultural heritage and how it may be seen through the immateriality of memory, drawing on the empowering potential of the literary and artistic imagination particularly via methods such as collage and erasure poetry. This article includes reflections on a workshop I hosted at Limmud Festival, a Jewish community event, in 2024. I invited participants to cut up existing textual and visual representations to remake the Wandering Jew, following a tradition of using artistic practices to beautify hateful images. I examine the potential of these reappropriative practices to invoke feelings of identification and ownership.

Key words: Wandering Jew, curation, diaspora, ethnography, reappropriation

### Introduction

There is something idiosyncratic about the legend of the Wandering Jew which, both in creative iterations and in colloquial reclamation, strays far and wide from its origins, crossing temporal, formal, and spatial borders. The myth, a product of medieval Christian oral tradition, depicts how an old Jewish man denied Jesus brief respite on his way to the Crucifixion. For this, the alleged and so-called Wandering Jew received a dual punishment: first, he must wander the earth without a home, and second, he will only find salvation at the Second Coming. He is thus cursed to itinerancy and immortality. This legend has been reproduced over centuries, with the Wandering Jew historically serving a didactic function 'as a living embodiment of the memory of the Passion, he is a Christian relic' (Lampert-Weissig 2024: 24; see also Hasan-Rokem 2009). In these origins and subsequent reincarnations up until the nineteenth century (as well as within Nazi propaganda and recurring again in the more recent rise of the far right), the Wandering Jew has traditionally been deployed to rationalise hostile attitudes against Jews as vagrants and degenerates, undergirded by their purported refusal of Christianity.

However, since then, countless painters, sculptors, and writers – particularly those of Jewish origin themselves – have divorced the Wandering Jew from these troublesome roots to reframe him as a paradigmatic nomad, a symbol for their own experiences of persecution. Simultaneously, Jews contemporaneously and dialectically associate with this cursed figure to relate their own diasporic existence (however comfortable or steady it may be) to a historic or even nostalgic legacy of exile and situate their Jewishness beyond national borders. In 2024 I curated a (fittingly) travelling exhibition on the literary and artistic history of the Wandering Jew which journeyed in 2024-2025 from Southampton to Birmingham, London, Huddersfield, Glasgow, and Bournemouth. I ran a series of public engagement events for various audiences at each venue (a combination of academic and community spaces) seeking to capture reflections and creative responses to the legend. This article combines autoethnography – outlining how and why I arrived at this project – with ethnographic reflections on a collage workshop I hosted at Limmud Festival in 2024. Between these, I also describe the exhibition itself and investigate some key theoretical and creative approaches.

### Defining the Wandering Jew

In the process of curating, I was led by the following questions: is it possible or productive to create a working and illustrative definition of the Wandering Jew? Any attempt at a comprehensive list of ‘Wandering Jews’ would prove futile, as the mythic figure resists typology: his name, physical appearance, age, behaviour, and even gender are constantly in flux. Thus, without an original or definitive source (since the myth was populated via the oral tradition, and only first recorded in writing in full in the sixteenth century), how can we measure whether subsequent adaptations of the legend should be included, and who gets to decide? Indeed, many iterations of the legend rewrite its historical roots, situating the Wandering Jew’s travels within specific Jewish temporalities as a product of ‘galus’ (the concept of diasporic exile, or waiting for Messiah, from the Hebrew Bible) rather than a Christian curse.<sup>1</sup> Can Jewish agents use this referent to merely describe their diasporic movements, be they forced or not, or must association with the Wandering Jew require itinerancy framed as punishment, melded with a crossing of temporal and historical borders? Is there space to facilitate innovative lenses, such as re-gendering or incorporating new geographical sites of non-Western (or non-Ashkenazi) histories and experiences, and would these reframe the Wandering Jew as a more inclusive figure representing Jewish movement beyond Christian Europe? Or does such modernising deviate too far from the origins of the myth, rendering it diluted and universalised?

1 Whilst the standard spelling is ‘galut’, I use the Yiddish/Ashkenazic variant ‘galus’ as this is the form communicated to me through my childhood and education and thus relates to my own particular diasporic epistemology.

Moreover, when a subject or agent relates to the Wandering Jew in its more contemporary and idiomatic guise (as a figure representing the general phenomena of Jewish migration), oblivious to its antisemitic roots, is there still an implicit capacity for radical reappropriation? Absorbing lessons from studying the myriad representations of the Wandering Jew, can we find other myths which possess the capacity for reclamation? These may include the Berber warrior queen Al Kahina (see Everett 2025) or the masked characters depicting ancestral spirits from the realm of Ginen in Haitian Vodou (see Gordon 2021). By which I mean, have similar figures embodying curses of immortality and exile emerged from comparative borderlands of religious or cultural tension, and how are these understood and utilised within their respective diasporic communities today? And, finally, in what ways can interactive and creative practices – such as translation, curation, performance, collage, and erasure poetry – negotiate painful legacies and initiate a kind of healing which prioritises empowerment over the need for apology and redress?

### Translating Vladimir Nabokov's Agasfer

My own journey with the Wandering Jew was equally divorced from its origins as situated in Jewish/Christian encounter, instead arriving from the direction of literary studies. Whilst I had been aware of the figure as a representation of Jewish nomadism as it is vaguely referred to from within community discourse (it is often used, largely uncritically, in the vernacular to describe any Jewish person who travels, whether forced or by choice), I encountered the legend in earnest through research for my undergraduate dissertation on Vladimir Nabokov and philosemitism. I investigated a passing reference to 'Agasfer', one of the names for the Wandering Jew, in a dramatic prologue Nabokov wrote under the pseudonym Vladimir Sirin (so as not to be mistaken for his then more famous father, Vladiminir Dmitrievich Nabokov). It was written in 1923, in the author's first years in Berlin, performed only once, and then published in the Russian émigré journal *Rul'*; it has not been reproduced since. I translated the text and wrote about it for my master's thesis, for which I undertook further research into the legend as wider context. Particularly surprising to me were the Christian roots of the Wandering Jew, who I had always assumed to be a Jewish character from some kind of Midrash,<sup>2</sup> and the extent to which non-Jewish writers had adopted the legend as a motif for universal themes of movement and memory. Although I did not realise it at the time, my translating Nabokov's 'Agasfer' – a romantic verse which follows the Wandering Jew across historical and geographical sites in search for his beloved – was a creative act of reclamation. Nabokov's version of the Wandering Jew is informed by Romantic era traditions which present a

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2 Rabbinic interpretations or exegesis of biblical text.

melancholy hero detached from his Jewishness (such as in works by Pushkin and Byron). Whilst I brought the legend back into, and through, the Jewish imaginary (situating myself in the good company of cultural disseminators such as the Yiddish revivalists), I also found myself excluded from the text. At a translation workshop where I had brought an early draft for peer review, my lack of cultural familiarity with references to the New Testament was exposing and even humiliating, as if my exclusively Jewish education deemed me unqualified for the role of textual mediator. Although allusions to Judas, Satan, and Mary Magdalene felt alienating, I recognised – as if transported back to my primary school *kodesh* classes<sup>3</sup> – God’s promise to Abraham invoked in the poem’s final lines. Like Agasfer, I felt a sense of triumph in rewriting these:

*I am Agasfer. One moment in the stars, next moment in the dust  
I wander. The whole chronicle of the earth  
is a dream about me. I was and ever will be.  
Let sounds pour out from all sides!  
I rise, I yearn, I grow stronger ... My love  
fills up the whole sky! ...  
O, music of my wandering, the waters  
and cries of centuries, come to me ... come to me ...!  
(Alexander-Rose 2020: Appendix)*

The palpable sense of triumph which I felt when rewriting and translating the text motivated my decision to develop a travelling exhibition which would facilitate further empowering creative agency within myself and others. I planned to track the evolution of the legend through literary and artistic representations across cultures and contexts and sought to reflect an emerging trend in scholarship related to the legend which, whilst relatively sparse, is keen to reclaim the Wandering Jew from its antisemitic roots. Noting that George K. Anderson’s formative work offers a largely non-critical survey study, prioritises non-Jewish depictions of the legend, and ends in the nineteenth century (Anderson 1967), a new monograph titled *Instrument of Memory: Encounters with the Wandering Jew* by Lisa Lampert-Weissig (2024) highlights and unpacks the ambivalence of Jewish representations into the twenty-first century. She is guided by the prolific work of Galit Hasan-Rokem who, in scholarship spanning from the 1980s until today, explores the legend as a product important Jewish-Christian co-production (see, for example, Hasan-Rokem 2016). I was inspired by these rejections of lachrymose narratives and aimed to educate, but not linger, on the medieval Christian

3 The term used to describe Jewish educational curriculum (which includes study of the Torah, religious practice, and history) in Jewish schools.

antisemitic context which fashioned the Wandering Jew. Instead, I used the exhibition to investigate how both Jewish and non-Jewish writers and artists have, over centuries, presented the figure as evidence of the richness of exilic cultural production and even as a model for intercultural understanding.

### The travelling exhibition

The exhibition consists of ten pop-up panels, each just over two metres tall, which can be erected in a series along a single wall or in a curved formation within a room. The panels include a combination of text and images under a themed header, as well as captions and footnotes for referencing purposes (Fig. 1). The first introduces the exhibition alongside an illustrative quote outlining the myth and the reproduction of 'Flight', a linocut which was commissioned specially from a Jewish London-based printmaker and sculptor, David Hochhauser.<sup>4</sup> The next eight panels follow the legend of the Wandering Jew chronologically and thematically. First, 'The Making of a Legend' situates the figure in its original Christian context and offers visual and textual explanation to the variety of names by which he is called – Wandering Jew, Eternal Jew, Agasfer/Ahasver/Ahaseurus. 'A Romantic & Gothic Hero' follows, drawing on eighteenth-century literary and artistic examples which adopted the Wandering Jew as a melancholic figure, divorced from his Jewish context. The exhibition then turns to its main focus, Jewish representations of the legend. 'The Eternal Jew' showcases how the Yiddish cultural revival, in poetry and drama, rewrote the myth's temporality, placing the Wandering Jew in the period of the Second Temple. Building on this, 'A New Wave' takes examples from the turn of the twentieth century when Jewish artists and writers imbued the legend with new relevance as they faced an onslaught of antisemitic persecution and forced migration across Europe. In 'Rewriting Origins', I focus on creative agents for whom the Wandering Jew was particularly resonant as it spoke to their own hybrid or ambivalent identities, for example following apostasy. Having focused on art and literature, 'The Wandering Jew on Screen' considers the legend as represented both in film and exhibition spaces. In particular, Joseph Goebbels' travelling exhibition 'Der ewige Jude' (1937–1938) motivated my own curation as a distinctly radical reclamation of his corruption of the legend for Nazi propaganda. 'After

4 For the exhibition, the artist offered the following commentary on the piece: 'The anthropologist Edmund Leach suggests that boundaries offer unique opportunities and scope for creative thought, representing critical moments of insight. The Wandering Jew of Europe has crossed countless boundaries in his centuries of exile and has become well acquainted with them. In 'Flight', the Wandering Jew is peripatetic, like a bird, and it is at the climax that his wings and his eyes open to look down on the landscape below. After a fleeting look at some novel insight into the cultural scenery that denies him space, he looks on for his next branch upon which to perch'.

the Holocaust’ displays how Jewish artists and writers have returned to, or reimagined, the Wandering Jew after rupture. Whilst some see the ghettos and camps as simply just one of many anguished experiences this figure is cursed to endure, other imagine the twisted reprieve of Nazi atrocities, which allow the Wandering Jew his long-awaited salvation.’ ‘An Evolving Legend’ presents new approaches to the Wandering Jew which respond to politics (in particular, Zionism) or re-gender the legend. The final panel, ‘Translating Agasfer’, offers an excerpt from my translation of Nabokov’s poem as a way of signalling the roots of the exhibition, in addition to a conclusion speaking to the wider project message.



Figure 1. ‘The Wandering Jew’ travelling exhibition at Limmud Festival, 23 December 2024. Photo by Richard Mukuze.

### Theorising the Wandering Jew

This presentation of the Wandering Jew is informed by various theoretical approaches. I was particularly drawn to Georg Simmel’s idea of ‘The Stranger’, who ‘comes today and stays tomorrow [...] the potential wanderer’, and enjoys the privilege of ‘nearness and remoteness’, a distant perspective on the society to which he does not belong (Simmel 1950: 402). Simmel understands that ‘to be stranger is naturally a very positive relation; it is a specific form of interaction’ and draws on the figure of the trader (classically a European Jew), who is required to import outside products (Simmel 1950: 402). ‘The Helpers’ from Leonid Livak’s ‘generative model of “the jews”’ play a similar role as ‘meek and defenseless do-gooders who persist in their secondary role of a

litmus test for the religious or secular virtues of the Gentile actor(s) playing the Subject' (Livak 2010: 11). The Wandering Jew is the exemplary 'Helper' in his proselytising potential as witness to Christ; according to Livak (2010: 50), his 'testimony [is] all the more valuable because it emanates from the enemy'. Both lenses demonstrate how the figure of the Wandering Jew may be framed as a positive interlocutor, an exemplary other or so-called 'model minority', yet Livak (2010: 38) warns against such Judeophilic 'wishful thinking'. In recognising a tradition of exclusionary and reductive imagery, Jewish reimaginings of the legend are emboldened with even greater semantic power, for example in presenting the Wandering Jew not as a witness to the Passion but as a chronicler of Jewish history. His itinerancy is not a curse but a fundamental element of collective Jewish diasporic experience and his salvation is not dependent on the Second Coming but instead reframed through national or religious aspirations. Moreover, Hyam Maccoby's (1982) theory of the 'Sacred Executioner' rewrites the temporality of the Wandering Jew as a descendant of Cain, both mythic figures who are punished for their sins yet afforded special privileges of divine protection and additional resilience.

More aptly for this special issue on cultural heritage, the wider notion of 'collective memory' can be applied to the Wandering Jew. First introduced by sociologist Maurice Halbwachs as a way to explore how memory is constructed, shared, and transmitted by groups, it was taken up by the historian Pierre Nora to build the concept of *lieu de mémoire* or 'sites of memory'. He outlines how these are 'simple and ambiguous, natural and artificial, at once immediately available in concrete sensual experiences and susceptible to the most abstract elaboration. Indeed, they are lieux in three senses of the word – material symbolic, functional' (Nora 1989: 18–19). Lampert-Weissig (2024: 11) applies Nora's theory to the Wandering Jew in that he becomes a site of memory, bringing together 'the biblical past, the messianic future, and the present day together in one figure'. Thus, in addition to historically playing the role of Christian relic, the Wandering Jew can express traditions of Jewish rebellion and lamentation, his dual punishment speaking to cycles of catastrophe and resilience.

The metamorphising and reclamatory potential of the legend means it can come to represent a borderless immaterial cultural heritage which suitably responds to transitory Jewish experience. Treatment of the Wandering Jew, a minoritised subject par excellence, can be mobilised through the fact of his geographical mobility to empower via the artistic and literary imagination. He may be resituated in the Second Temple period as a figure of rebellion, whose exile is naturally embedded in the Jewish experience rather than in punishment (as with the Yiddish poetry of Uri Zvi Greenberg [1896–1981] and Esther Shumiatcher-Hirschbein [1896–1985], and in the 2018 novel *Eternal Life* by Dara Horn), rewriting the temporal limitations of the legend. Others imbue the Wandering Jew with much longed-for agency, particularly

in his relationship to Jesus: Marc Chagall's 'White Crucifixion' (1938) depicts the Wandering Jew's escape as salvation; Boris Khazanov's 'Return of Agasfer' (2007) reunites the pair as they both meet their fates in the Holocaust; and Michael Sgan-Cohen fuses Biblical sources with Kabbalistic motifs and imagery of the Crucifixion in 'The Wandering Jew' (1983). Some writers see themselves in the Wandering Jew, as if he spoke to their own enmeshing of Jewish and Christian identities, such as with Mina Loy's 'Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose' (1923) or Heinrich Heine's 'Jehuda ben Halevy' (1851). Others identify absences in the legend which they seek to engage with through creative practice: Stephen Berkman uses glass-plate photography to imagine 'A Wandering Jewess' (2020), modernising Chagall's artistic legacy and re-gendering the legend. Looking outwards even more, Leah Gordon collects oral histories and photographs of the Jacmel carnival in Haiti, Kanaval, where a troupe performs the figure 'Jwif Eran' as a voice advocating for justice, resisting class structures, and speaking to the alienating experience of diaspora (Gordon 2021; see also O'Hagan 2010).

The travelling exhibition was jointly funded by the Jewish Historical Society of England and the German History Society and produced as part of my role as Outreach Fellow for the Parkes Institute for the Study of Jewish/non-Jewish Relations at the University of Southampton. The latter instilled this project with a distinct strategy both to appeal to Jewish audiences and to enhance the wider public's understanding of intercultural entanglement. Across the academic year 2024/2025, the exhibition has travelled from the University of Southampton to Limmud Festival (an annual cross-generational and cross-denominational communal gathering for British Jews), the German Historical Institute, the Holocaust Centre North, the British and Irish Association of Jewish Studies Conference in Glasgow, and the Bournemouth Hebrew Congregation. In addition, I hope to display the exhibition at Anglican sites in the United Kingdom as a way of confronting contested heritage. The figure of the Wandering Jew offers a unique avenue through which to critically and sensitively approach historic Christian antisemitism whilst highlighting interfaith rapprochement. My practice, and the exhibition itself, does not call for apologies or remedy in sites which may feel burdened by their association with past injustices. Rather, I actively seek to exhibit there to invite members of the British Jewish community into spaces from which they have been structurally excluded. That some of these sites were in part financed by anti-Jewish taxes, as with Westminster Abbey, further compounds ambivalence especially around feelings of belonging, whilst simultaneously making visible a legacy of cultural entanglement.<sup>5</sup>

5 In medieval England, heavy financial burdens were placed on Jews, including ever-increasing taxation and seizing of bonds. Licoricia of Winchester was an infamous Jewish businesswoman who was prolific and influential in English society until her murder in 1277. She has since been immortalised in a statue by Ian Rank-Broadly and is an object of much discussion regarding

## Creation and recreation

Having introduced the legend and my own journey to it, investigated theoretical approaches, and outlined the exhibition as a whole, I now turn to a particular case study and offer ethnographic reflections to showcase the potential of creative responses.

Limmud Festival is an annual event which describes itself as a celebration of Jewish life, learning, and culture, with over 2,000 attendees from within the British Jewish community and abroad.<sup>6</sup> In addition to having the exhibition on display for the duration of the festival, I contributed to the programme with a session entitled ‘Rethinking the Wandering Jew’. Beginning with a brief summary of the legend and an introduction to the evolution of artistic and literary representations, I addressed critical approaches to my own translation and the curation of the exhibition. Then, I explained how re-appropriation (‘to take back or reclaim something for one’s own purposes’, as defined in the Merriam-Webster dictionary) has been deployed in visual and textual art practice to ‘turn an artifact of hatred into something beautiful’ (Hawley 2019) or imbue formerly passive or marginalised subjects with creative agency. In particular, I drew on examples which use collage, erasure, and blackout poetry. Collage, from the French *coller* (to glue), was formalised as a modernist art technique in the early twentieth century, creating new work by assembling together different forms. Incorporating text, erasure is ‘the art of leaving out’ (Dillon 2006) in which found poetry is created by cutting out, marking, or covering (in the form of blackout) existing words. This literary version of collage was developed within the anti-art Dadaist movement that arose in response to the First World War. Both visual and literary practices continue to resonate in the contemporary art world in which assemblage increasingly inhabits non-establishment, political, and activist spaces.

For example, Faith Ringgold’s ‘Matisse’s Model (The French Collection, Part 1: #5)’ (1991) is a quilt painting in which her own alter ego, Willa Marie, is depicted in ‘bold and unapologetic visibility’ (as stated in the artwork label at the exhibition) as the courtesan from Edouard Manet’s 1863 ‘Olympia’, re-making this canonical image. In addition to rejecting the racial and gendered biases of the ‘white male modernist gaze’, the label suggested that Ringgold’s ‘stance takes on further conceptual weight by granting these often-anonymous subjects a meaningful personal narrative of their own’. Arthur Jafa’s ‘Ex-slave Gordon’ (2017) animates and humanises the infamous two-dimen-

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the contestation and representation of Jewish heritage in Britain. Following the death of her husband, David of Oxford, in 1244, Licoricia was forced to pay a high inheritance tax. This was collected to contribute to the construction of the shrine to Edward the Confessor in Westminster Abbey, a fact not addressed at the site itself. See Reva Berman Brown and Sean McCartney (2004: 16).

6 For an ethnographic investigation into Limmud, see Taylor-Guthartz (2025).

sional and voyeuristic photograph of escaped American slave ‘Whipped Peter’ by reproducing the image in relief made of vacuum formed plastic. Jafa (2020) describes that he was ‘forced to articulate the complexity of an image that is both horrifying and attractive’. Together, Ringgold and Jafa demonstrate models for reappropriating, reclaiming, or reworking formerly exclusionary or especially difficult subjects.

These artistic methods – collage and erasure – can also be situated in attempts to represent and navigate the Jewish imaginary. Such practices can be subversive, and even *chutzpadik*.<sup>7</sup> In *Judaism in Music*, Richard Wagner (1910: 30-31) criticised how the ‘Jewish composer makes a confused heap of the forms and styles of all ages and masters [...] [with] no passion of a nature to impel him to art-creation’. Amidst the accusations that Jewish creative practice is inherently unoriginal, lacking in artfulness, and reliant on the commodification and degradation of existing work, some may choose to deliberately enter this maligned position, working solely with the material of others to create a self-assured and emancipatory assemblage. Collage’s charge of degeneracy is not limited to Jewish artists, as with the example of Kurt Schwitters whose abstract works, which bring together found objects and mixed media, were included in the Nazi ‘Entartete Kunst’ (Degenerate art) exhibition of 1937. Understanding the semantic potential of collage and erasure as unashamed models of diasporic, or resistance, art informed my own approach in developing the exhibition which involved the selection, ordering, and assembling of a collection of material which included both derogatory and reclamatory imagery and text. As curator I was able to reconstruct and direct the narrative, rewriting the Wandering Jew fully cognisant of competing historical legacies (including one which deemed my creative practice ‘degenerate’).

Other pertinent examples of this include works by Rebecca Katz and Tom Phillips. Katz describes how ‘the physicality of finding images, tearing them out, and making something new with them feels very powerful’ (Vaynberg 2021), with reference to her collage ‘Anti-Jewish Laws in Medieval Europe’ (2021), which repurposes imagery from the Birds’ Head Haggadah. The Jewish figures in this fourteenth century manuscript are unusually drawn as birds with beaks: whilst established as a way of avoiding laws against aniconism, others have understood the illustrations to draw on Judeophobic tropes’, and Katz plays with this ambivalence to treat the subject of the exploitation of Jews.<sup>8</sup> Phillips’ *A Humument: A Treated Victorian Novel* displays how collage can be used alongside blackout poetry to navigate difficult subjects (Phillips [1980] 2016). The mixed-media altered book reconstructs

7 From the Yiddish *chutzpah* (audacity, confidence).

8 Other visual and textual invocations of the bird motif, particularly in reference to the Wandering Jew, can be found in Michael Sgan-Cohen’s mixed media ‘The Wandering Jew’ (1938), Bernard Malamud’s short story ‘The Jewbird’ (1963), and David Hochhauser’s commission ‘Flight’ (2024).

W. H. Mallock's 1892 *A Human Document*, in which the plot revolves around a love affair made excusable by the fact that the woman's husband is Jewish, fortified by historic tropes of male Jewish sexual perversion, effeminacy, and sterility. Rachel Hawley (2019) states how, '[f]or Phillips, Mallock's bigotry is key to the mission of *A Humument*. In reshaping the text and covering the rest with art, he is able to turn an artifact of hatred into something beautiful'. This is most explicit when Phillips revises the temporality of the novel, applying the imagery of the Holocaust in an act of eisegesis. Through blackout poetry, he constructs over a background of grey stripes and a yellow star the verses 'ask, and ask no longer to sing the lament of the Jews, wear a used star for the day had been killed; The theatre never again' (Phillips [1980] 2016: 87), and positions the lines 'at ten o'clock such awful news to be done. off with the children at Vienna death to the delicate! pleasant show ended, all burst into despondency, they could take over', in front of a bloody swastika (Phillips [1980] 2016: 153). Depicting instances of genocidal persecution and totalitarianism through blackout poetry, Phillips directly invokes the physical violence of cutting as well as the existential violence of covering up or, literally, blacking out the text and its historical reality.

### Collage in practice

Having presented these examples and explained the practical and conceptual elements of collage and erasure poetry, I invited attendees to engage in these practices inspired by their own reflections on the Wandering Jew. I selected and reproduced key sources from the exhibition, specifically focusing on traditional representations and images from Joseph Goebbels's 1940 antisemitic propaganda film and exhibition '*Der ewige Jude*', alongside a pile of old copies of National Geographic magazines (chosen for their focus on material which relates to adventuring, the environment, wandering, and the natural world). Whilst the creative part of the session was time limited, attendees produced a range of collages responding to the exhibition ephemera, stimulus from the National Geographic magazines, and their own interests.

One collage, titled 'We are all wanderers', used images of wild animals alongside the Wandering Jew, incorporating text from an article such as 'picked off ticks and other parasites', 'zigzagging the country', and ending with 'I still needed a powerful, hopeful image' (Fig. 2). Imagining the Wandering Jew as a migratory wild beast certainly resonated with how this cursed figure has been constructed and depicted as a threatening stranger (as well as more troubling traditions which animalise and dehumanise Jewish people). Yet the creator of the collage rejected the idea of the Wandering Jew as a lonesome character, instead placing him amidst a community which offers him resilience.

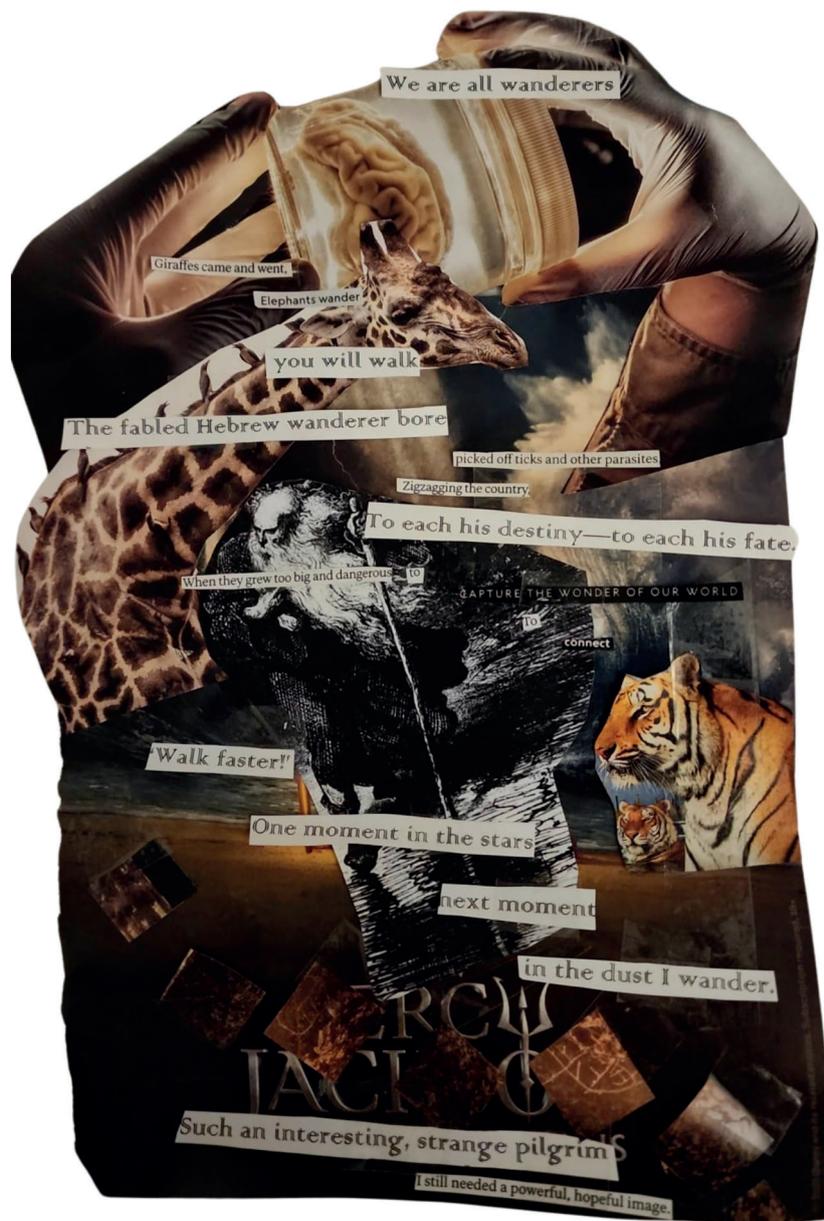


Figure 2. 'We are all wanderers', collage by Limmud Festival participant, 22 December 2024. Photo by Anoushka Alexander-Rose. Reproduced with the kind permission of the participant group.

Another participant took a comic approach, drawing a swastika on Goebbels' film poster and cutting it out in a way that it could be opened to reveal an

image of the Wandering Jew, using levity to work with troublesome imagery (Fig. 3). I found this example particularly potent as it aligned with my own strong feelings in reclaiming the exhibition space from Goebbels, and I appreciated the creator's *chutzpah* in taking control of this incendiary propaganda.



Figure 3. 'Der ewige Jude', collage by Limmud Festival participant, 22 December 2024. Photo by Anoushka Alexander-Rose. Reproduced with the kind permission of the participant group.

Another attendee was inspired to re-gender the legend, in a collage titled ‘Are We Born to Wander?’, which formed a set of fallopian tubes out of flowers (Fig. 4). This piece evokes explicit reproductive imagery, querying the traditional singularity of the Wandering Jew (as an older man) and situating the legend in a softer, even pastoral, setting. It also asks broader questions about artistic or mythic creation and recreation (recalling Wagner’s critiques about Jewish unoriginality), and about inheritance: is nomadism a natural and inevitable Jewish tendency, and if so, is the notion of curse made redundant?



Figure 4. ‘Are We Born to Wander?’, collage by Limmud Festival participant, 22 December 2024. Photo by Anoushka Alexander-Rose. Reproduced with the kind permission of the participant group.

These examples demonstrate how, from within an audience of Jewish attendees of mixed ages, there is rich and diverse capacity for a creative reclamation of the Wandering Jew. In addition to cutting up and using explicit antisemitic imagery, others indicated their interest in making the Wandering Jew applicable to their own experiences, showcasing the longevity and metamorphic capacity of the legend. Not only was the workshop empowering, but it was also enjoyable, and attendees were keen to continue producing their collages. It was key, too, that the audience was entirely Jewish, as this afforded attendees a comfortable space, particularly those who were interested in working with taboo, such as parodying Nazi propaganda. Nevertheless, I am keen to develop similar creative workshops which relate to wider myths with mixed audiences, to explore participants' responses and their artistic outputs.

### Future problematics

As evidenced throughout the ten panels of my travelling exhibition, creative depictions of the Wandering Jew seem inexhaustible, whether they adhere to, ignore, or challenge the origins of the legend. This collection of iterations tells a wide representational history of refusal, rapprochement, and reclamation. Panels four to eight illustrate how Jewish artists and writers have navigated their own captivation with the legend, both responding to its resonance and manipulating it to suit the particularities of their experience. Across all examples, the Wandering Jew remains enduringly malleable, the boundaries of the myth and the figure itself constantly redrawn to respond to new contexts, challenges, and needs. Certainly, the Wandering Jew can be utilised as a figure to encourage intercommunal cohesion as an exemplary of cultural entanglements, specifically amongst Jewish and Christian contexts. As evidenced by the Limmud Festival workshop, much more can be done to problematise and modernise the legend. Beyond simply informing audiences about the antisemitic roots of the Wandering Jew, it is possible to facilitate agential responses drawing from a variety of traditions of creative practice, a crucial link between academic study and public reception. These may adapt the Wandering Jew to suit contemporary experience or dispatch the figure to travel to neglected sites of heritage and history across the globe, challenging the imbalance towards narratives of European Jewry. What is clear is the vast capacity for the legend of the Wandering Jew to relate to Jews in the diaspora and, more widely, universal themes of migration, memory, and history. Drawing on my own experience as a translator and curator, I have found engagement with this mythic figure to evoke both personal and broader questions about Jewish art as embodying exile, resistance, and dynamic creative activity. In his immortality and itinerancy, the Wandering Jew can become a pillar of immaterial cultural heritage.

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The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

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