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ABSTRACT

**THE MOTIF OF THE WANDERING JEW IN THE
ROMANTIC LITERATURE OF GERMAN EXPRESSION**

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The Wandering Jew, Ahasverus, cursed to never find peace and rest until the second coming of the Christ, has lit the creative imagination of countless artists –writers, composers, painters. The number of adaptation of this literary motif has increased in the 19th century, with the aggravated perception of the "Hebrew problem."

The purpose of the present research paper is not only a simple literary analysis of the literary works presenting the myth of the wandering Jew, not just a mere observation or breaking traditional patterns mirroring the mythical traveler; not just a positivist, descriptive presentation, but a research on the origin of the myth, a diachronic analysis of the motif in the Romantic German language literature, reflecting the way in which anti-Semitism (unconscious and passive) has influenced the intellectual anti-Semitism (conscious and active).¹

Social-historical approaches to literature and sociology literature examine it closely in the development of society (political, economical, and cultural), as their expression and their product. Bringing the literary work into its social-historical context is necessary in its analysis and understanding of its impact. Essential here is not to determine weather a particular author expressed anti-Semitic or philosemite ideas, given the fact that the fine border between them in the 19th century was not so clear as in our post-Holocaust century. Essential is to place the literary work in the cultural and historical social context, understanding the motivation and image components wandering Jew. It is important to find out who and what behaviors, attitudes or events were contested under the image of the Wandering Jew. Starting from the idea that popular literature always reflects the social-historical and cultural horizon of a community, its social structure and its Weltanschauung, the paper examines also the image of the Wandering Jew the folklore of the German language population in Germany, Austria, Luxembourg, Switzerland and in Transylvania and Banat.

A short introductory chapter is dedicated to the history of the Jews in the countries studied: Germany and the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, including Transylvania and the Banat. The Austrian-Hungarian Empire, a melting pot of

¹ Oisteanu, Andrei: *Imaginea evreului în cultura română: studiu de imagologie în context est-central european*, Humanitas, București 2001, p. 45.

nationalities, has not perceived the Jewish minority with its peculiarities and differences as such menacing as the Germans, a fact reflected in literature as well.

The next chapter studies Ahasveros „literary brothers”: The Flying Dutchman, Tannhäuser, Jack O’ Lanterns, Kundry, Wodin, the gypsies.

The changes that legend has suffered throughout the ages, the comments in the numerous literary or theoretical writings which it has inspired, reflect in some way the very evolution of the Jewish -Christian relations in the last five centuries. Ahasveros' original myth has morphed and has meanwhile been cleaned of some of the resentment produced in one era or another. The present paper contains a subchapter dedicated to the motif of the Wandering Jew in the Romanian literature as well, to illustrate the popularity and the omnipresence of the motif, as a reflection of the social problems of the period.

Romanticism is characterized by dreaming and longing, the journey becomes becoming one of its central themes. The eternal wanderer exerts a magical attraction on Romantic artists who see in him not just the stern warning of the Middle Ages, the need of returning to God and to "the true Christian faith", but an amazing opportunity to gain experience, knowledge, and life. Ahasverus was metamorphosed, becoming the hero of epic lyrical poems and travel novels, a perfect mobile to present history (as with R. Hamerling *Ahasver in Rom*, Goethe's ambitious unfinished project *Des Ewigen Juden erster Fetzen* or Julius Mosen *Ahasver. Ein Episches Gedicht*).

As a literary genre perfected by Romantic writers, the fairytale also reflects the figure of the Wandering Jew, this time devoid of any political or social satire or criticism, focusing on the religious aspect of the legend.

The Romantic literature of German expression has embraced the Wandering Jew and has provided it with the same characteristics as the other universal literatures, depending on Ahasveros' attitude towards the Divinity and his own curse and destiny:

1. Ahasverus as a rebel hero, daring and profane, addressing insults, profanity and defiance to God, maintaining its fierce fighting attitude, unwavering. (Bodnărescu S., E. Furtună, C.F.D. Schubart, Julius Mosen).
2. Ahasverus who, after a crisis of pride and rebellion, repents and asks for mercy and grace of God (von Arnim);
3. Ahasverus forced to endure immortality among mortals crossing earth as an exile from his earlier human condition (H. Winterhalder, Baronzi G., C. Gh. Filipescu, R. Hamerling);

4. Ahasverus endowed with supernatural powers, representative of the metaphysical world and a "transcendental homeless" or "Anima Mundi" (M. Eminescu, Mircea Eliade, Culianu I. P., G. Meyrink, B. Auerbach);

5. Ahasverus as a cultural representative of the Hebrew community (I. Voronca A. Goldfaden);

6. Ahasverus as the alter ego of the artist (N. Lenau, Schubart);

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