Dear colleagues,

I am currently working on a book about Jews and fantasy literature. It's taking the form of a series of interconnected ramblings divided into three parts:

Part One: Representation. Representation of Jews and Jewish things in fantasy literature.

Part Two: Identity. How work by various Jewish writers of fantasy is shaped and inflected by their Jewishness. My published essays on Peter Beagle, Guy Gavriel Kay, and other writers will find a home here, as will my discussions of cultural and ideological differences between fantasy produced by American Jews and fantasy produced by Israeli Jews.

Part Three: Theology. Since the project arises out of my acute case of Jewish Inklings envy, this is where I'll discuss the Christianity of Lewis and Tolkien and talk about what Jewish modes of fantasy might be like. Lately, I'm really stuck on the idea of Story, which John Clute holds to be central to the definition of fantasy, and which also seems central to the Christian understanding of the Christian life—in a way that doesn't hold for Judaism, which contains lots of stories, but doesn't see the life in the form of Story. Kind of like the *Zohar* reads like a quest-romance but without a quest. Farah Mendlesohn got here a decade ago in her *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, in which she says in passing that quest fantasy is a Christian mode and a Jewish fantasy would probably look different. I'm hoping to develop the point.

I'm currently focused on part one, which has the most academic trawling (but honest work). I'm dividing the part into seven tropes or topics: 1) Occult Jews, 2) Golems (I'm against them), Lilith, and other monsters 3) Solomon (from the Arabian Nights to H. Rider Haggard to Jonathan Stroud), 4) Wandering Jews, 5) The Jewish Question (Victorian antisemitism and philosemitism, responses to Jewish nationalism, exiled nations, writers from Nesbit to Chesterton to Tolkien to Joan Aiken), 6) Weird Jews, 7) Disenchanted Jews (anti-fantastical fantasy).

What follows here is:
--most of the Occult Jews section-in-progress, leaving off before I get back to Rowling and Co.
--the Wandering Jews section, and
--some thinking about Faerie and Zion (for part three, if it holds up).

Thank you for helping me organize my closet and telling me what to throw out.

Michael

Occult Jews

As millions of readers know, the first Harry Potter book turns on a search for the fabled Philosopher's Stone. This artifact grants immortality and was created by the alchemist Nicholas Flamel, an old associate of Harry's wizarding school headmaster, Albus Dumbledore. Unlike Harry, Dumbledore, and the other characters in the novel, though, Flamel is a real-life figure, a fourteenth-century Parisian scribe long associated with esoteric legend, kabbalistic secrets, and abstruse knowledge—in short, the traditions of the Western occult.

Indeed, the massive success of J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter books and films signals the twenty-first century return of the occult to popular fantasy. Not in the sense meant by some fundamentalist Christians concerned about witchcraft and devil-worship. Rowling's series is quite benign, her moral framework recognizably Christian, and it is for the most part the trappings of the occult rather than its content that she offers. But the trappings are important, for the Potterverse presents magic as a learned discipline, involving Latin formulae, dusty tomes, and references to medieval alchemists.

This is a shift from the model of fantasy shaped by J. R. R. Tolkien and his use of Celtic, British and Norse mythologies. The wizards in the latter tradition tend not to be scholars like Dumbledore, but embodiments of divine or elemental forces, like Tolkien's Gandalf. Magic is something inherent in them, not something they go to schools like Hogwarts to learn.

Modern fantasy is most strongly identified with the "high" or "epic" conventions of Tolkienesque romance. Despite the occasional occult novel written by a fantasy writer, the tropes of the occult were, by the middle of the twentieth century, generally displaced into other genres such as horror, or picked up in post-modern ways by more "literary" writers with less certain associations with the fantasy genre. Twentieth-century materialism and secularism weakened the allure of the occult, making it less obvious territory for the imaginative freedom sought by many fantasy readers.

Nevertheless, the occult has always been part of modern fantasy's DNA, if a recessive gene, present but infrequently explicit. Modern fantasy draws on a range of nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century writing—historical romance, Gothic horror, adventure novels, weird fiction, supernatural thrillers—frequently intertwined with the occult, and in some cases written by practitioners of ritual magic and members of secret mystical societies. Modern fantasy writers have periodically turned to occult motifs and ideas. And since the advent of the Potterverse, the occult is back in popular fantasy and seems here to stay.

This occult tradition trails behind it a store of representations of Jews. Western esotericism from the Renaissance on has been fascinated with symbols and secrets thought to derive from Jewish tradition. The use of Hebrew letters, kabbalistic terms, Solomonic legends, and various blendings of Jewish elements with other magical systems are prominent characteristics of the modern occult.

The legend of Flamel is a good example of the intersections between Jews and the occult in the Western imagination. Records indicate Flamel was a notary living in fourteenth-century Paris, who evidently came into money when he married a well-off widow named Perrenelle. Some scholars have speculated that the couple may have made money benefiting from the expulsions of Jews from France during that period.

Nicolas and Perrenelle commissioned a sculptural frieze, since demolished, at the Holy Innocents Cemetery in Paris. The frieze's imagery is the subject of a seventeenth-century text attributed to Flamel, and which is the main source of the legend on which Rowling draws: that Flamel was an alchemist who discovered how to create gold, and that he and his wife became immortal.

The most curious part of this text is the portion in which the author (scholars doubt it was the historical Flamel) claims to have derived his alchemical secrets from another, earlier book. This other book, he writes (in the 1624 English translation), may have "beene stolne or taken from the miserable *Jewes*; or found hid in some part of the ancient place of their abode." It was "a guilded Booke, very old and large." It contained a series of images with text written in a mysterious language which our pseudo-Flamel says he was unable to read, though, he says, "they might well be *Greeke Characters*, or some such like ancient language." And the author's name, written in gold on the frontspiece, was one "ABRAHAM THE JEW, PRINCE, PRIEST, LEVITE, ASTROLOGER, AND PHILOSOPHER."

We then get a story about Flamel's determination to unlock the secrets of this Jewish book. As he says: "no man could ever have beene able to understand it, without being well skilled in their *Cabala*." He therefore makes a pilgrimage to Spain in order to find "some *Jewish Priest*" who would interpret the "*hyeroglyphicall figures*." He manages to find a Jewish convert to Christianity, a merchant "who was very skillful in Sublime Sciences," and who explained the meaning of the images before dying of illness. Flamel returns to his wife and they begin to apply the alchemical procedures depicted in the allegories.

It is obvious that the book described, if it even existed, was not a Jewish work. If its christological content and New Testament focus, described by "Flamel," are not enough to raise doubts about its provenance, the author referring to himself as "Abraham the Jew" is a bit of a giveaway that a Jew did not write it. Yet spurious references to Jewish mysteries and kabbalistic secrets were common in esoteric writing in the early modern period—and since, as we shall see.

Not only did the legend of Flamel inspire a flurry of other alchemical works attributed to him, but the seventeenth century also gave rise to manuscripts purporting to be the mysterious book of Abraham the Jew. This grimoire, sometimes titled after an Egyptian mage named Abramelin who the book describes as passing on his magical secrets to Abraham, includes an intriguing account of its author's travels throughout Europe and the Near East in search of magical instruction. The book contains patterns of Latin letters arranged in squares with instructions on how to use them for divination, reviving the dead, flying, and other useful purposes.

It is, however, no more Jewish than the description in the Flamel chronicle. Its roster of supernatural entities bear clumsily faux-Hebraic names (Necramay! Gerevil! Lagasuf!), and the author Abraham dedicates the book to his son, Lamech. Although Lamech is a character from the

Old Testament and may have sounded "Jewish" to Christian ears, it has never been a normal Jewish name choice, and is even an insult in its Yiddish form, equivalent to "loser."

Nevertheless, the Abramelin book was taken very seriously by modern occultists such as Aleister Crowley and S. L. MacGregor Mathers. Mathers, crediting the author's claim to have used his powers to benefit emperors, popes, and kings, informs us that Abraham the Jew possessed great "political influence" and was "a dim and shadowy figure behind the tremendous complication of central European upheaval." Crowley used the book in his drug-fueled rituals. Even today, afficionados of the occult take the work for authentic Jewish magic.

The Third Inkling

To see that a more occult-focused fantasy than the Tolkien model might have implications for the representations of Jews we need look no further than Tolkien and C. S. Lewis's friend Charles Williams. Williams was a poet, a popular speaker on literature, the author of works on Christian theology and witchcraft, a religious dramatist, and an influential editor at the Oxford University Press. He was a member of the Inklings, the circle of writers that gathered around Lewis to drink, smoke, argue, and share works in progress. Like Lewis and Tolkien, Williams was a man of deep Christian faith who brought that faith into his fictions.

Yet unlike Lewis and Tolkien, Williams was deeply interested in the occult. He was a member of the Fellowship of the Rosy Cross, a mystical society founded by the scholar and mystic Arthur Edward Waite and that was an offshoot of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn (more on which below). The charismatic Williams had his own acolytes, a series of young women with whom he carried out mildly sadomasochistic if unconsummated relationships based on spiritual-erotic teachings that strained normative Christian doctrine. Lewis and Tolkien evidently did not know the full extent of their friend's peculiarities yet, when someone remarked that Williams ought to be burnt at the stake, Lewis and Tolkien agreed that their friend was, in Lewis's words, "eminently combustible."

Williams remains best known for his supernatural thrillers. These novels, with their combination of supernatural terror and quirky Englishness, have been characterized as a combination of Dante and P. G. Wodehouse. Lewis, with some reservations, was a fan; Tolkien found them "distasteful" and "ridiculous." All take up occult themes, and Jewish themes too.

In *War in Heaven* (1930), the first of these thrillers to be published, the Holy Grail turns up as the property of an English village church. The Grail is coveted by Gregory Persimmons, a satanist and wealthy London book publisher. His firm's catalog runs, we hear, to "what you might call occult stuff. Mesmerism and astrology and histories of great sorcerers, and that sort of thing."

Persimmons has allies in a pair of fellow black magicians, Dmitri and Manasseh, introduced to the reader as "the Greek" and the "the Jew." Persimmons embodies evil as the will-to-power. Dmitri represents a more nihilistic stage of evil as the will-to-nothingness. The Jewish Manasseh

represents evil as the will-to-destroy. Persimmons wants to exploit the power of the Grail; Manasseh would simply smash it:

> "Because it has power," the Jew answered, leaning over the counter and whispering fiercely, "it must be destroyed. Don't you understand that yet? They build and we destroy. That's what levels us; that's what stops them. One day we shall destroy the world. What can you do with it that is so good as that? […] To destroy this is to ruin another of their houses, and another step towards the hour when we shall breathe against the heavens and they shall fall."

With his sneers, mutterings, and seething hatred, Manasseh seems to have stepped out of some antisemitic passion play. *War in Heaven* even gestures toward the blood libel, though it is Persimmons, not Manasseh who plans to abduct a four-year-old boy, and not to murder the child but rather to corrupt his soul by teaching him the ways of black magic—a spiritual murder. The Jewish villain is not the instigator of this particular crime, though he is an accomplice and arranges for the boy to be taken out of England to "the East."

Nor is Manasseh the only instance of the Jew as occult figure in Williams's novels. In the 1945 *All Hallow's Eve*, the villain is a Jewish sorcerer named Simon (the name alludes to the heretic Simon Magus from Christian tradition) who tries to incarnate in himself the anti-Christ by having the Tetragrammaton spoken backwards in a magical ritual. "Only a Jew," we are told, "could utter the Jewish, which was the final, word of power."

Simon's unholy sorcery is presented as the inversion of—and, from his persective, improvement upon—an earlier work of Jewish magic: the birth of Jesus. In Simon's telling, the New Testament's Joseph was a "sorcerer . . . a Jew, a descendant of the house of David," who "had compelled a woman [i.e., Mary] of the same house to utter the Name, and something more than mortal had been born." Unfortunately, the result of this ritual "had perished miserably" and it would be "two thousand years before anyone had dared to risk the attempt again." Now Simon's goal is the domination of humanity rather than Jesus's atonement for its sins.

In exposition that slips between Simon's views and Williams's authorial voice, we are told that the purpose of the Jews was to produce Jesus. When that messiah arrived, and the Jews unwittingly condemned to death their own God in human form, they sealed their doom: "the race which had been set for the salvation of the world became a judgment and even a curse to the world and to themselves." For two thousand years the Jews would be alienated from God and humanity both. Meanwhile, Christian Gentiles would resent the Jewish familial connection to their savior, an envy expressed in anti-Jewish persecution. "Bragging themselves to be the new Israel," Christians "slandered and slew the old, and the old despised and hated the bragging new."

This would be the history of Jewish-Christian relations until Nazism, when "there rose in Europe something which was neither, and set itself to destroy both." Yet Hitler, just defeated when

Williams's novel was published, was not the anti-Christ. "Oh, the war!" says Simon contemptuously. "The war, like Hitler, was a foolery. I am the one who is to come, not Hitler!"

The real anti-Christ can only be brought by a Jew, just as two thousand years ago it had been Mary, "a Jewish girl who . . . uttered everywhere in herself the perfect Tetragrammaton." Simon, at the end of the novel, though, fails to bring about this "second climax" of Jewish magical potential. His most successful work of sorcery in the novel is, appropriately for a Jewish magus, the creation of a golem (though not named as such). Combining ordinary dust with his own saliva and animating breath—a parody of God's creation of Adam in Genesis—Simon fashions a grotesque homunculus: "It was faintly repellent, as an actual doll might be if it were peculiarly deformed or ugly." Meant to assist Simon's ascension, the golem, though, is finally undone, becoming "damp mud" and finally "only a lump" dissolving in the London rain.

Williams was not known to be anti-Jewish in his personal behavior. His Jewish villains seem not to reflect animosity toward actual Jews but rather his fascination with the occult and with esoteric forms of Christianity. In a number of places in his novels he sounds a critical note about antisemitism, mocking a Jew-baiting mob in *Shadows of Ecstasy* (1933) and having the iniquitous heel Sir Giles Tumulty give voice to anti-Jewish snobbery in the two novels in which that character appears. Moreover, as we have already seen, Williams frequently focuses on the fact of Jesus's being a Jew, while the heroine of the novel *Many Dimensions* (1930) has a mystical vision that includes benign sages with "boxes fastened to their foreheads and wrists . . . . Their faces were Jewish, and mostly very old and lined with much thought . . . but astonishingly full and clear and happy."

At the same time, the only Jews in Williams's novels who are not directly connected with magic or the supernatural are the decidedly unpleasant Ezekiel and Nehemiah Rosenberg in *Shadows of Ecstasy*, described as fanatics with "old, bearded, and violent faces" and who "abominate the Gentiles of London." Otherwise, Williams's Jews are all occult creatures, linked to objects and persons of mystical power, whether the Stone of Solomon, the Holy Grail, or the anti-Christ.

[Even the "gipsies" of Williams's Tarot novel, *The Greater Trumps* (1932) possess hints of Jewishness, with the main antagonist bearing the more Jewish than Romani name of Aaron Lee and having an ancestor who "had fled to England from the authority of the King of Spain."]

Jews and Magic in the Western Imagination

The association of Jews with occult knowledge has cultural roots going back to the middle ages. To sketch its development requires a bit of a detour into history before we get back to fantasy.

Medieval and early modern Christians accused Jews of abducting, torturing, and using the blood of Christians, especially children, for their rituals (i.e., the blood libel); of stealing and desecrating Christian sacraments; of causing plague and disease by poisoning wells; and of being servants of the Devil. Sorcery is predictably included in this anti-Jewish lexicon.

Because such anti-Jewish vilification was pervasive in medieval Christian culture, it can be difficult to draw out the specific trope of the Jew as occult figure from all the other calumnies directed at Christendom's most reviled minority. The attribution of magical power, while providing material for modern figurations of Jews, may have less to do with Christian perceptions of Jewish magical ability than with their general attribution to Jews of inhuman depravity. Other groups in the medieval and early modern periods were also linked with black magic, including lepers, heretics, priests, popes, and women and men accused of witchcraft.

Irrespective of what Christians thought about them, Jews, like other groups in the pre-modern world, held magical beliefs. Despite biblical constraints on its practice, magic was generally not considered by Jews to be a problem in and of itself, so long as its use did not flout the famously capacious structures of Jewish law. Yet neither the ancient Greeks nor the Romans after them saw Jews as particularly given to magic, even if Jews, Christians, and other rival sects in antiquity regularly accused each other of sorcery and charlatanry.

With the rise of Christianity, magic became an important theological, legal, and social category that separated valid Christian beliefs and practices from illegitimate ones. Medieval Christian demonization of Jews therefore connected magic with a range of concerns about Church authority, communal boundaries, and bodies of knowledge derived from pagan antiquity, Jewish and Islamic writers, and other sources outside the Christian world.

An example of this is the Theophilus legend, widespread in medieval art and literature. In this story, Theophilus, a Church official, makes a pact with the Devil in order to secure a promotion. His meeting with the Devil, which takes place in his town's Roman amphitheater (a symbol of pagan culture), is effected by "a certain wicked Jew, a practicioner of all sorts of diabolical arts." Different versions of the story vary in their imputation of magical power to the Jews, who are sometimes reluctant intermediaries between Theophilus and the Devil, sometimes active agents in his perdition. But all versions juxtapose the illegitimate supernatural forces of the Jew and the Devil with legitimate, Christian ones: in this case the intercession of the Virgin Mary, who saves Theophilus's soul.

In a similar story told by the twelfth-century abbot Guibert of Nogent, a monk who went to a Jew for medical advice repeatedly demanded that the Jew also teach him witchcraft, until the Jew agreed to set up a meeting with the Devil. The Devil commanded the monk to renounce Christianity and offer a gift of his own semen, which the monk then had to taste, after which he gained sorcerous powers which he used in order to seduce a nun. As in the Theophilus legend, the Jew in Guibert's story is a go-between, not clearly a source of magical power himself, though his medical knowledge makes him both compelling and suspect. Elsewhere in his writings, Guibert attacks Jews not for sorcery but for their unbelief and their challenging of Christian doctrine. Sorcery here seems to be less the framing concern than was heresy, though the two were linked.

During the middle ages, Christian perceptions of the relationship between Jews and magic were further influenced by encounters with texts and ideas from the Islamic world. Yet the real incorporation of Jewish mysticism and symbols into the Western occult dates from the

Renaissance. It was in the fifteenth century that Christian thinkers such as Marsilio Ficino, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, and Johannes Reuchlin, with the help of Jewish scholars such as Elijah del Medigo and Johannan Alemmano, developed a Christian Kabbalah that was understood by its practitioners as the recovery of a primal tradition, lost to Christendom but preserved in Jewish texts and teachings. This ur-tradition was associated with various figures from antiquity: Pythagoras, Moses, Hermes, Zoroaster, Plato, Enoch, and others.

This development reflected cross-cultural encounters between Jews and Christians. Rather than a vindication of Judaism, though, this Renaissance Kabbalah was understood by its Christian expositors to demonstrate the antiquity of Christian ideas, and therefore to have polemical use for the conversion of Jews. Reuchlin, for instance, was the first in a series of Christian esotericists to alter the Hebrew spelling of the Tetragrammaton from YHVH to YHShVH so that the name of God would become the name Jesus. (Sort of: Reuchlin's interpolation produces the equivalent of "Jesas.") This cross-fertilization meanwhile sparked Jewish reconsiderations of their own traditions—for instance, that of the golem, which we'll discuss later on—newly influenced by Christian writings.

In the wake of the Renaissance, attacks on Jews reflected the new Christian awareness of kabbalistic texts and traditions. Charges of sorcery against Jews became more common rather than less as the medieval period gave way to the early modern. Yet such accusations were not all of a piece. Martin Luther, whose diatribes against the Jews are a landmark in early modern Jew-hatred, did emphasize the connection between the Jews, magic, and the Devil. Yet rather than warning against the efficacy of Jewish sorcery, he expressed his contempt for what he saw as the absurdity of Jewish magical superstitions.

In his 1543 tract *Vom Schem Hamphoras*—the title is meant to mean "Of the Ineffable Name of God" but Luther has mistransliterated the Hebrew—Luther denigrates the gullibility of Jews and their reliance on what he calls "empty, void powerless letters." If Jewish kabbalism is so potent, he asks, "How is it possible that during fifteen hundred years of misery they did not use the art and power of the Shem Hamphoras" to triumph over their enemies?

Luther presents Jewish magic not as something to fear, but to revile. This was in part because the very challenges to Church authority that Luther was fomenting made Jewish textual traditions look enticing to some Christians. Rather than Jews moving toward a Protestant understanding of Christianity, as Luther once expected would take place, he saw the danger that Protestant Christians might move toward Judaism. In fact, he compares Jewish superstitions to Catholic ones ("we reject the Pope together with his whole church, for he filled the whole world with similar tricks, magic, idol worship, for he too has his particular Shem Hamphoras") while emphasizing that the sacraments of Protestant Christianity are not magical in nature.

Not that this explains the furious, scatalogical register of anti-Jewish hatred to which Luther gives voice. He is particularly fond of images of Satan and the Jews eating each others' feces and vomit, and his overall judgement on the Jews is that "they are the devil's children damned to hell." But he emphasizes that Jewish magic, kabbalistic or satanic, is no more than stupidity and

backwardness: “a Jew is so full of superstition and magic as nine cows have hair, that is, untold and infinite, like the devil their God, full of lies.”

Luther shows that Christians during the early modern period could deny that Jews had any particular magical potency, yet still see them as dangerous and malignant. On the popular level, Jews were still accused of ritually murdering Christian children, and various other depredations, sorcerous and non-sorcerous, were attributed to them. But anti-Jewish hatred and magical belief were not inextricably bound. One could hate Jews without thinking them magical; less commonly, one could think them magical without hating them.

As we move into the age of enlightenment, we see a growing split between perceptions of Jews as supernatural and perceptions of them as all-too-worldly. This reflects stances toward modernity itself, regarding which the Jews were Europe’s object of most intense uncertainty and fear. Jews might be seen as a link to irrational, pre-modern forces, or they might be seen as agents of the negation of those forces in a disenchanted world. Both one and the other could be either praised or reviled or some combination of both.

These modern tensions find literary expression in the Gothic novel. With its foreboding, horror, and pitches of emotion, the Gothic novel uses tropes associated with the middle ages to create sensational effects and dramatize contemporary European anxieties. Its terrors are invited, they are psychological experiences cultivated by readers who are for the most part safely removed from the medieval worlds these novels portray.

When Horace Walpole published the first Gothic novel (*The Castle of Otranto*, 1764), there was an actual Jewish magician living in London. Haim Samuel Falk (sometimes known as Doctor Falckon) had made a name for himself on the continent with such feats as causing objects to float through the air, and uncovering buried treasure. Accused of witchcraft, he moved to England in 1742 and continued to perform his wonders. While some doubted his conjurings—and he was attacked by some rabbis as an alleged follower of the Sabbatian heresy—Falk was nevertheless visited by admirers and praised for his charitable contributions. A portrait by John Singleton Copley made before his death in 1782 shows Falk with intense gaze, dressed in a wizardly robe and turban, and holding a mason’s compass.

By contrast, Jews appear rather less mystical in Walpole’s political memoirs. Walpole, who mixed easily with wealthy British Jews, approved the removal of barriers to Jewish citizenship, He recalls the vociferous opposition to the so-called “Jew Bill” of 1753 that would have allowed Jews to be naturalized as English citizens. Opposition to the Jew Bill was, he wrote, an unfortunate reminder of “how much the age, enlightened as it is called, was still enslaved to the grossest and most vulgar prejudices.” Walpole based his support for Jewish citizenship not on any sorcerous imaginings, but on an assessment that Jews constituted “a body of the most loyal, commercial, and wealthy subjects of the kingdom.” Opponents of Jewish naturalization at the time also framed their arguments in political and economic terms. Magic, black or white, was not part of the controversy, which was quickly forgotten after the bill was repealed in 1754.

These two faces of the Jew, Falk’s wizardry and Walpole’s commercial and political assessment, the occult and the anti-occult, are brought together in several Gothic novels. Charles Maturin’s

Melmoth the Wanderer (1820), for instance, features two Jews, Solomon and Adonijah, whom the Christian narrator assumes to be practitioners of black magic before being disabused of the notion. Entering Solomon's home, the narrator sees "a book, into whose pages I looked, but could not make out a single letter. I therefore wisely took it for a book of magic, and closed it with a feeling of exculpatory horror." A moment later and we learn that it was no grimoire but "a copy of the Hebrew Bible." Adonijah's underground lair is even creepier, stocked with skeletons and weird taxidermy:

> At the end of the table sat an old man, wrapped in a long robe; his head was covered with a black velvet cap, with a broad border of furs, his spectacles were of such a size as almost to hide his face, and he turned over some scrolls of parchment with an anxious and trembling hand; then seizing a scull [sic] that lay on the table, and grasping it in fingers hardly less bony, and not less yellow, seemed to apostrophize it in the most earnest manner. All my personal fears were lost in the thought of me being the involuntary witness of some infernal orgie.

Monçada fears for his life, yet Adonijah turns out to be quite hospitable. "Thou art in my power," Adonijah tells him, "yet have I no power or will to hurt thee." Sure, the Jew's home is cluttered with macabre items, and in the past he has trafficked with "Egyptian sorcerers." Yet the odd decor pertains mainly to Adonijah's interest in science and medicine.

Maturin's conjuring and dashing of sorcerous expectations suggest the poles between which Jews oscillated in the fantastic imagination as we move into the nineteenth century. In chapters that follow we will consider a series of fantastical tropes that tell this story. Much nineteenth-century literature strips Jews of any magic or supernatural mystique, more often presenting them as criminals, parasites, villains, and clowns. The Jewish mystique, such as it is, that intensifies during this period is national, and the threat or promise ascribed to Jews is political and economic rather than sorcerous—though it is at times hard to tell them apart. Yet the nineteenth century also saw the emergence of a new occultism that featured its own mystifications of Jews.

Jews and the Modern Occult

Until now, I've been using the term "occult" without offering much in the way of a definition, and probably giving historians of religion hives. I use the term in three overlapping and progressively more specific ways. The first is the general meaning of secret knowledge and hidden forces acting in the universe. The second meaning refers to different traditions of Western esotericism such as alchemy, hermeticism, and scholarly magic, and that flowered most fully and with greatest scholarly and scientific reputation in Renaissance and early modern Europe. The third meaning designates a range of occult trends that emerged in the nineteenth century, in some cases building on earlier modes of the occult, but drawing as well on European fascination with the Orient, on modern scientific and archeological developments, and including such modern trends as Spiritualism, Theosophy, parapsychology, and neo-paganism. This third category of the occult attracted the interest of a number of writers of the fantastic.

One such writer was Arthur Machen, who recalls in his memoirs how he assembled a publisher's catalogue in the 1880s entitled *The Literature of Occultism and Archaeology*. His description of an attic library he combed through for this task is a good survey of the territories of the modern occult:

> Occultism in one sense or another was the subject of most of the books. There were the principal and the more obscure treatises on Alchemy, on Astrology, on Magic; old Latin volumes most of them. Here were books about Witchcraft, Diabolical Possession, "Fascination," or the Evil Eye; here comments on the Kabbala. Ghosts and Apparitions were a large family, Secret Societies of all sorts hung on the skirts of the Rosicrucians and Freemasons, and so found a place in the collection. Then the semi-religious, semi-occult, semi-philosophical sects and schools were represented: we dealt in Gnostics and Mithraists, we harboured the Neoplatonists, we conversed with the Quietists and the Swedenborgians. These were the ancients; and beside them were the modern throng of Diviners and Stargazers and Psychometrists and Animal Magnetists and Mesmerists and Spiritualists and Psychic Researchers.

Machen's tone is flip, but when he was ensconced in that London garret such topics were part of a popular occult revival in which he participated. Machen was, for instance, a member of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, an occult fellowship founded in the 1880s and known for its dramatic rituals, celebrity membership, and penchant for bitter schisms.

The most infamous initiate of the Golden Dawn was Aleister Crowley, and the most esteemed literary figure to join was William Butler Yeats. But the Golden Dawn and the wider Victorian occult feed into the nineteenth- and early twentieth century development of fantasy literature through a number of other literary channels. Machen, as mentioned, was a member and with the supernatural horror writer Algernon Blackwood joined a split-off group directed by his friend, Arthur Waite, as did Charles Williams (noted above). The children's fantasy writer Edith Nesbit is sometimes alleged to have been a Golden Dawn member. Other Victorian writers of significance to the development of fantasy, such as Edward Bulwer-Lytton, Bram Stoker, and H. Rider Haggard, were apparently not members but moved in orbit around such groups as they too engaged with the subjects of Machen's attic.

Victorian occultists were preoccupied with Jewish symbols and the secrets of a notional Kabbalah. Initiates of the Golden Dawn, for instance, were required to learn the Hebrew alphabet and the names of the ten kabbalistic sefirot, as well as the symbolism and divinatory potential of the Tarot, which they believed was linked to the Kabbalah. Much of this "Jewish wisdom," though, was imaginary. The use of Tarot cards to predict the future, for instance, was an eighteenth-century development, and their connection with Kabbalah was the invention of the nineteenth-century French occultist Alphonse-Louis Constant, better known as Eliphas Lévi.

Constant's adopted name indicates the importance of a perceived Jewish flavor to the modern occult. Lévi presented himself as a source of kabbalistic wisdom, calling Judaism "the oldest, the

most rational and the truest of religions." But what he meant by Judaism had little to do with the beliefs, texts, and practices of actual Jews. Instead, he argued that the Freemasonry of his own day was an "eclectic, independent Judaism" and should be supported by Jews and Christians alike, who together will build Solomon's true Temple—the scientific and spiritual edifice of modern occultism.

The sefirotic tree of the Kabbalah was a particular fascination of modern occultists, at least as a set of motifs. In France, occult societies such as the Cabbalistic Order of the Rosicrucian assigned members titles such as "Commander of Tiphereth" and "Commander of Geburah"—those being two of the ten sefirot. In England, the Golden Dawn used sefirotic terms for their visualizations and rituals. Waite developed the practice further in his own group, with ceremonies in which members were symbolically crucified "on the cross of Tiphereth" and the celebrant sported, in addition to robes and wands, "a large pendant bearing the Hebrew letter *yod*."

The Jews involved in these occult circles do not seem to have possessed much in the way of Jewish literacy. The writer Victor Neuburg, for instance, came from a Jewish family. He was a close associate of Crowley and joined him in sex magic rituals in the North African desert that would be decisive for Crowley's subsequent elaboration of sexual magic. Yet Neuberg's Jewishness does not seem to have been of significance for himself or Crowley, except when Crowley mocked it on a few occasions.

Somewhat better known today is Israel Regardie, born to Jewish immigrants in London's East End. Regardie got to know Crowley in the 1920s and later published a number of rituals and documents connected with the Golden Dawn offshoots that he joined. Regardie was fascinated with kabbalah but, like most of his fellow initiates in these secret orders, mostly got it at second- or third-hand. He managed to learn some Hebrew from a tutor at George Washington University during a sojourn in Washington, D.C., and advised students of the occult to learn how to write the letters of the Hebrew alphabet properly: "enquire at a local university where Semitic languages are taught to be put in touch with a senior student who can then show you how to write the letters. Failing this, contact a local synagogue. […] They may know less about [kabbalah] than you, but at least they may be able to teach you how to write the letters correctly and that is half the battle won."

Antisemites exploited the modern occult for its suggestion of secret Jewish organizations conspiring to overthrow the Christian West. Jacob Katz, in his study of the historical connections between Jews and Freemasonry, notes that the fantasy of Jewish-Masonic collusion to destroy Western civilization became an increasingly widespread antisemitic trope in the second half of the nineteenth century. Katz cites an 1869 tract that uses Lévi's occult writings as "proof that the Cabalists, the Jewish guardians of mystic secrets from ancient times, sat in the secret councils of the lodges and presided over the insidious plot to destroy Christendom." The *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* makes Jewish control of Masonry to enslave the world one of its claims, and this

notion would be taken up by Hitler in *Mein Kampf* and Nazi policy. In the United States it was disseminated in an English translation of the *Protocols* promoted by Henry Ford, and it is still considered a reputable notion in much of the Islamic world today.

In reality, the kabbalistic mash-ups of the modern occult can sometimes come across as silly. The enthusiasms of an Eliphas Lévi and his similarly Hebrew-illiterate disciples sometimes make one think of a group of conspiratorially-minded people with shaky knowledge of English getting a hold of a U. S. Constitution. They begin dubbing each other "Commander of Massachusetts" and "Commander of Virginia" and are soon raising each other up on trinities of the holy Executive, Legislative, and Judicial branches of the Tree of Life.

The founders of the Golden Dawn took with great seriousness an obvious satire such as the seventeenth-century text known as the *Comte de Gabalis*. This manual of "kabbalistic wisdom" is an extended joke in which a portentous "count of the Cabala" tries to convince a potential initiate that esoteric knowledge really comes down to having sex with elemental spirits. The count's young interlocutor is not persuaded to join this august tradition. "If I escape from this adventure," he tells himself at one point, "No more Cabalists for me!"

Or consider satanist groups today that chant the Hebrew phrase "shem hameforash" repeatedly in their rituals, as a means of flouting divine authority and religious propriety. They believe that they are pronouncing and thereby profaning the holy name of God. "Shem hameforash," however, is not the name of God but means, literally, "the explicit name," i.e., a reference *to* the unpronouncable or mystical name. Satanists who chant it are a bit like confused rappers who think that they are offending people by saying the phrase "explicit lyrics."

Gershom Scholem observes that the "Kabbalah," as understood by the modern occult, is usually detached not only from Hebrew and Aramaic literacy but from its Jewish content and even its basic meaning. "[I]t became," Scholem writes, "a kind of banner under which the public could be offered just about anything."

This is not a brief against so-called "cultural appropriation." Mystical ideas and magical techniques, like all forms of culture, travel and are transformed as they are taken up in new contexts and to new ends. The *Zohar* is very much a product of religious syncretism. And Scholem himself noted that some of the most insightful explicators of Jewish mysticism in the modern period have been "Christian scholars of a mystical bent."

Of these Christian scholars, Scholem mentions Waite in particular, and one can see why. Waite was an early and admiring reader of German articles on Kabbalah by the young Scholem. Like Scholem, he recognized the biases of nineteenth-century Jewish rationalist scholarship. In his magnum opus on Jewish mysticism, *The Holy Kabbalah* (1929), Waite expresses a frustration with the nineteenth-century historian Heinrich Graetz who, writes Waite, "may be taken to represent at his period all that is most acrid and uncompromising in hostility to Jewish Mysticism"—a line that Scholem could have penned.

Nor did Waite hesitate to point out the impostures of Eliphas Lévi or the gullibility of Lévi's disciples. Lévi's supposed quotations from Hebrew are likened by Waite to what the poet Southey said of a certain Russian name: something "no one can speak and no one can spell." While he granted Lévi's attraction as "the Magus of a world of fancy," he warns: "I do not think that Lévi ever made an independent statement upon any historical fact in which the least confidence could be reposed."

Waite joined the Golden Dawn twice, the second time coming to the conclusion that its garbled use of Jewish symbolism might be extricated, ironed out, and made the basis of a new set of contemplative, Christian-oriented practices rather than the more magical aims of that organization. He was particularly infatuated with the *Zohar*—at least to the extent he could access it in French translation, which he was aware was not ideal. Waite found in the Zohar's language of mystical eros a potential model for transformative marriage, sexuality, and procreation. If Zoharic marriage were carried out in a living community, he writes, "I think that the world might be changed."

Whether Waite's Rosy Cross group took any concrete steps in the direction of mystical procreation I cannot say. Waite had earlier explored, more as bohemian than mystic, a notion of "hermetic marriage" with women, as part of the nighttime frolics of a drinking club organized by Machen. He and Machen privately printed a lyrical-symbolic chronicle of their revelries, describing their female companions as "children of the elements, queens of fire and water, full of inward magic and of outward witchery." The object of Waite's attentions in the chronicle was the sister of his wife and long the focus of his romantic passion, while Machen's love-interest in these escapades was an actress he refers to as Lilith.

Reflecting some decades later on the turn-of-the-century occult craze, Machen was no longer as enamored with Jewish mystical symbolism. He even mischievously proposes what he calls an "Aryan Kabbala" that might complement the Jewish one, explaining that his Gentile "sefirot" will consist of the numbers one through ten. He spins out some increasingly inventive symbolism derived from this "Tree of Life", and then concludes: "It is all nonsense, of course, but . . . does that matter?"

Machen's dismissal notwithstanding, the occult and its kabbalistic books and symbols, recurred frequently in the early twentieth century. Occult novels were written by the ritual magicians Alesiter Crowley and Dion Fortune. Crowley's *Moonchild* (1917) is about a group of magicians who try to infuse a pregnancy with cosmic spirits in order to bring about the birth of a magical messiah. This "moonchild" concept is in some ways similar to Waite's Zohar-inspired notion of mystical procreation, and to Williams's Tetragrammaton-birthed anti-Christ in *All Hallows' Eve*. Crowley was also the inspiration for a number of characters in other works of fiction, including the titular adept of Somerset Maugham's 1908 novel *The Magician*. Maugham's book includes an erudite disquisition on "the most wonderful, the most mysterious, of all the books that treat

the occult science," which turns out to be the *Zohar*—though the character who recounts the legendary story of the *Zohar*'s origin admits that he doesn't believe a word of the story.

Dion Fortune's magical system shared the late-Victorian fascination with the Kabbalistic sefirot, but her novels are mostly expressions of neo-paganism and incipient New Age spirituality. Their plots often concern practical, bourgeois concerns with real estate, as in *The Goat Foot God* (1936) in which the main character wants to purchase a house on a mystical ley line in order to turn it into a functional temple to the god Pan, or *The Sea Priestess* (1935), in which a reincarnated Morgan le Fay needs to do a similar home remodel in order to revive the rites of Atlantis.

With a few exceptions, early twentieth-century occult novels did not usually feature magical Jewish villains along the lines of the ones in Williams's novels. But beginning in the 1930s, the occult Jew in his more unsavory form got a new lease on life in the bestselling potboilers of Dennis Wheatley, remembered today for novels that feature the occult as part of their improbable cloak-and-dagger plots. In his best-known novel, *The Devil Rides Out* (1934), the heroic Duke de Richleau, a Russian-born aristocrat and occultist loyal to his adopted country of England, has to rescue his friend, the Jewish financier Simon Aron, who has been seduced by a group of evil occultists. Simon is to be corrupted in a Black Mass and renamed Abraham, after "Abraham the Jew" from the Flamel manuscripts discussed above.

Based on a real friend of Wheatley's, Simon is by far the most positive of his Jewish characters. In *The Devil Rides Out*, Simon voluntarily faces down the evil occultists alone, in order to keep his friends out of danger and to rescue a kidnapped child. At the same time, he is described in terms of Semitic racial features such as his "full, sensual mouth" and "the beaky nose, the bird-like head, the narrow-stooping shoulders." More significantly, he is the weak link in de Richleau's inner circle because of his stereotypically Jewish character traits. Simon fell into the company of the evil occultists because he became interested in the possibility of using alchemy to create gold. Subsequently, he tells the Duke: "I discovered that the whole business is bound up with the Cabbala so, being Jewish, I began to study the esoteric doctrine of my own people," including "the *Sepher Ha Zoher* [sic]." Furthermore, the leader of the black magicians is the sinister Mocata, who though not specified to be Jewish, shares a name with England's prominent Jewish Mocatta family.

Three decades later, in Wheatley's World War Two thriller *They Used Dark Forces* (1964), the British spy Gregory Sallust undertakes a series of dangerous missions inside Nazi Germany where, in order to bring down Hitler (who makes an extended appearance in the novel), he is forced to work alongside a Jewish sorcerer. This Polish Jew, Malacou, has sold his soul to the Devil and rapes his own daughter in satanic rituals. Wheatley describes Malacou's "big dark hook-nosed face with its sensual mouth and clever, slightly slanting eyes." Yet desperation makes strange bedfellows, and Sallust teams up with Malacou, even allowing the Jew to forge a telepathic bond with him that allows the two to survive and escape imprisonment in a

concentration camp and, with the help of a kindly Hermann Goerring, to finish off Hitler and bring down the Nazi regime. As Sallust reflects: “Malacou might be guilty of murder, incest and practising the Black Art, but his blood made him a deadly enemy of the Nazis and he possessed powers which, although their source might be evil, were granted to few.”

As the century went on, occult Jews became more rare and, when they do appear, they and their kabbalistic magic are more likely to be presented as benign. Katharine Kurtz, whose Deryni series of historical fantasy novels was first launched under the Ballantine Adult Fantasy imprint in the 1970s, later turned to occult novels. Her *Lammas Night* (1983) contains a cameo by Fortune as one of the adepts using magical powers to thwart Nazi Germany in World War Two. (The real-life Fortune claimed to have used magical visualizations to protect England from the Luftwaffe.) Kurtz’s novel emphasizes the kabbalistic sefirot and culminates in an occult ceremony in which a member of England’s royal family is mystically crowned as “Kether,” the highmost of the sefirot (and Hebrew for “crown”).

Fortune also shows up briefly in *Twin Peaks* co-creator Mark Frost’s 1993 occult thriller *The List of Seven* as a disciple of Theosophist guru Helena Blavatsky, who advises an equally fictionalized Arthur Conan Doyle in his dealings with an evil secret society. The book’s sequel *The Six Messiahs* (1995) turns on the theft of a rare edition of the Zohar, and Frost introduces a kindly rabbi named Jacob Stern as one of the multicultural band supporting Doyle against the forces of the dark.

The Occult and Fantasy Literature

The fantasy genre emerged from the same Victorian and early twentieth century literary matrix that included occult themes, occult novels, and the occasional occultist author, and there is much cross-influence and entanglement. Yet important differences already make themselves felt in the interwar period. The fantasy novel as it developed in the early twentieth century tended to be set in a secondary world, not the modern, urban landscapes of much occult fiction. Fantasy was far more likely to draw inspiration from Arthurian romance, European fairytale, and Norse and Celtic myth than the occult systems of the Renaissance or Victorian periods.

Tolkien and Lewis, with their love of secondary worlds and northern mythologies, were an important factor in the separation of fantasy from the occult. In addition to their robust, mostly normative Christianity, their expertise in medieval and Renaissance texts and languages surely made dabbling in second-hand hermetica less interesting to these dons. Lewis seems to have been somewhat more intrigued by the esoteric and outre than Tolkien, and moves into occult territory in his “Ransom Trilogy,” especially *That Hideous Strength* (1945). In the case of Tolkien, though, it is significant that Middle Earth’s sole “Necromancer” is a false identity—Sauron’s cover in *The Hobbit*—as if to suggest that enthusiasts of the occult are missing the point.

The American mid-century fantasy writers who made the transition from pulp magazine to paperbacks either kept the occult separate from their fantasy work, or used some of its motifs in new contexts. Fritz Leiber's early novella "Adept's Gambit," which he sent to H. P. Lovecraft in 1936, featured his famous anti-heroes Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser, and was set in a semi-historical pre-Christian Mediterranean world soaked in esoteric cults and mysteries. In the original version, Leiber's sword-and-sorcery duo even face off against an apparently Jewish sorcerer named Isaiah ben Elshaz. (At least, I think they do: the original version only exists in a limited publication of 100 copies, and so I am drawing my conclusions from Lovecraft's remarks in his response to Leiber.) Yet when the work was finally published in 1949, the sorcerer was reduced to a passing reference to his "obscure treatise, 'The Demonology of Isaiah ben Elshaz.'" In all of Leiber's other Fafhrd and Gray Mouser stories, this historical setting was eliminated in favor of Leiber's fantasy world of Lankhmar, its creepy wizards and magical monsters detached from the historical occult.

Leiber occult interests found expression not in his fantasy stories but his horror novels. His 1943 *Conjure Wife* is a marvelous exploration of mid-century relations between the sexes, and of the fate of the occult in rational modernity. The main character is a sociologist who has built his academic career on social scientific study of magical beliefs and folk cultures, not realizing that he owes all his good fortune to his wife's witchcraft, which protects him above all against the machinations of malicious faculty wives. In *Our Lady of Darkness* (1977), Leiber took up the late-Victorian occult and its relation with early twentieth-century Lovecraftian pulp writers. A dead but still quite dangerous magician who founded a rival group to the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn has laid a curse on the author's alter-ego in 1970s San Francisco.

Jack Vance's Dying Earth stories draw on the occult motifs of scholarly magic. The adventures of Vance's amoral Cugel commence when he breaks into the home of a wizard to raid his "vast collection of thaumaturgical artifacts, instruments, and activants, as well as curiosa, talismans, amulets and librams." But the tales take place a far future in which sorcery and technology co-exist. Unlike mathematics on the one hand and space travel on the other, magic in the Dying Earth, while much sought-after, is a sign of the civilization's decadence and stagnation.

Twentieth-century rationalism, scientism, materialism, and secularism compromised the occult as a ready vehicle for metaphysical exploration. In the second half of the twentieth century it migrated, first, to the horror boom where, following Ira Levin's *Rosemary's Baby* (1967) it narrowed to a concern with satanism. Slightly later it would be taken up by various Borgesian writers whose books, while sometimes fantasy-adjacent, draw on esoterica primarily as a means of exploring and ironizing human systems of meaning. If horror writers focused on the Devil, then books as different as Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*, Umberto Eco's The *Name of the Rose*, John Crowley's Aegypt series, and Neal Stephenson's Baroque cycle [which I need to read!]—focused conspiratorially on the details.

The fantasy genre, then, from the Tolkien boom of the 1960s until the advent of the Potterverse generally ignores or minimizes occult themes, favoring magic that is linked to gods, elves, and the landscape. There are a few notable exceptions, though. One is Avram Davidson's Vergil Magus trilogy, which transplants the alchemical Virgil of medieval legend to an alternate-history ancient Mediterranean setting in which the Christ is not Jesus of Nazareth but the biblical Daniel. We'll look at these books in part two.

Here I'll mention John Bellairs' *The Face in the Frost* (1969), one of my favorite fantasy novels. Though the novel shares with other fantasies of the time a medievalesque ambience with magic and trolls, its two heroes, both kind-hearted wizards, bear names drawn not from northern European legend but from the medieval and early modern occult.

One of the wizards is named Prospero—"and not the one you are thinking of, either," writes Bellairs, which of course makes him the namesake of Shakespeare's magus, whom some say was inspired by the Elizabethan court magician John Dee (see the following chapter on Golems). Bellairs's Prospero is accompanied by his friend, the wizard Roger Bacon—the name of the celebrated thirteenth-century monk, metaphysician, and scientist. William Godwin in his *Lives of the Necromancers* calls Bacon "one of the rarest geniuses that have existed on earth." Centuries after his death, legend attributed to him magical feats, including an attempt to surround England with a brass wall to keep it safe from invasion. (Bellairs's Bacon once attempted such a task, but got the spell wrong and wound up surrounding England with a fragile wall of glass.)

Prospero's teacher, we are told, was the great Michael Scot, the name of another real-life churchman from the middle ages whose reputation was similarly surrounded with magical legend after his death. The very fact of a teacher is important here. The wizards in *The Face in Frost* are scholarly types. Magic is not something inherent in them, but is studied and learned by determined, usually eccentric, and quite fallible human beings. Bellairs explains in the prologue: "They knew several different runic alphabets, could sing the *Dies Irae* all the way through to the end, and knew what a Hand of Glory was. Though they could not make the moon eclipse, they could do some very striking lightning effects and make it look as through it might rain if you waited long enough." In fact, the plot of the novel concerns the frightening and unprecedented powers acquired by an evil sorcerer from studying a rare grimoire. Books are the key to both good magic and bad.

Most significant for our purposes here is that, at a critical point in the tale, Prospero is aided by a Jewish magus named Millhorn. When they first meet, Prospero is awed to find Millhorn "unconcernedly thumbing" through a "huge untitled tome with the Seal of Solomon stamped on the side" and that is "full of black, shaded Hebrew characters." Prospero asks: "The Kabbala?" and Millhorn confirms it. Bellairs may or may not have known that the Kabbalah is not the title of a book, but rather the word for Jewish mystical tradition in general, but it doesn't matter. The point is that, in *The Face and the Frost*, it takes a kindly, yarmulke-wearing Jew and his mysterious letters to stand up to powerful black magic.

Wandering Jews

In Diana Wynne Jones's 1981 children's fantasy *The Homeward Bounders*, the 12 year old main character Jamie meets the Wandering Jew. A homeless man with filthy clothes and hair, he shows up sprawled out in a city park. "His watery black eyes gleamed with a mad light," we read, "and his nose stuck out from below them, sharp and long and starved." He rants to Jamie about a cabal of powerful beings who control the world.

The Wandering Jew is a rather more grim and, shall we say, culturally loaded figure than one expects to encounter in a late twentieth-century children's fantasy, though the scholar Farah Mendelsohn notes that *The Homeward Bounders* is "one of Jones's most frightening books." Jones, moreover, is considered one of the greatest writers of children's fantasy partly because she so often defied the expectations of the genre. Mendlesohn calls her career "a sustained metafictional critical response" to fantasy literature.

Jamie's story begins in his English home town in the late nineteenth-century, when he inadvertently witnesses *Them*. *They*—the italics are used to designate *Them* throughout—are sinister beings who run Jamie's world and hundreds of other worlds besides. The Wandering Jew was telling the truth. It turns out that each of these worlds is one of the games *They* play. And not just any games, but ones that resemble the newly popular Dungeons & Dragons and table-top wargames of the early 1980s. *They* even play these games with the assitance of machines that sound a lot like personal computers, circa 1981.

Jamie sees *Them* at play when he peeks through a window in *Their* nondescript headquarters. *Their* secret discovered, *They* turn Jamie into a "discard," doomed to wander from one gameworld to the next until he can find his way home. Luckily, he makes some allies on his quest, including similarly accursed figures from legend: Prometheus, chained to his rock by *Them*, and the crew of the Flying Dutchman also consigned by *Them* to endless punishment. When Jamie arrives in a world much like Jones's own contemporary one he meets another one of *Their* victims: Ahaseurus, the Wandering Jew, who tells Jamie and his fellow "homeward bounders" how to free themselves from *Them*.

Jones offers a twist on a figure that has long fascinated writers and readers. A Christian legend, the Wandering Jew story emerges in the thirteenth century: a Jew, often named Ahasverus or a variant thereon, who refuses to let Jesus rest on the way to the crucifixion is punished with endless wandering until the Second Coming. The popularity of the tale dates from sixteenth-century Germany where it was used as a viciously anti-Jewish motif connected with end-of-the-world speculation. In the seventeenth-century it spread througout Europe and has never lost its allure—or its ability to take on new meanings.

Hundreds of stories, novels, poems, and works of art and music feature the Wandering Jew. By virtue of "the intelligence of his beggardom and long life," writes Edgar Rosenberg, "each age recreates the Wandering Jew in its own image." In the eighteenth century, the character's longevity let him give voice to the Enlightenment's historical and cultural relativism. The

romantics loved cursed immortals, and so the Wandering Jew, a defiant revolutionary in Shelley's poem *Queen Mab*, for instance, found affinity with other early nineteenth-century figures such as Charles Maturin's creepy Melmoth the Wanderer, Bulwer-Lytton's ageless occultist Zanoni, and, the most famous of the romantics' undying outcasts, Mary Shelley's monster.

Lionel Trilling observed that in the nineteenth century the Wandering Jew becomes more heroic but less Jewish, though in George Croly's historical novel *Salathiel* (1827) he is a Jewish freedom fighter in the time of Jesus. In *David Copperfield*, published a few years after Eugene Sue's widely read *Le Juif errant* (1844, The Wandering Jew), Charles Dickens never directly mentions the legend yet makes the motif of eternal wandering a mark of devotion and goodness, suggesting the figure is much on his mind. In a French chronicle published around 1830, the Wandering Jew reaches the North Pole, while in an 1846 German vignette he is condemned to endless bouncing after devising a rubber suit.

The character makes his first literary appearance in English in Matthew Lewis's lurid gothic novel *The Monk* (1796). In a novel that juxtaposes the Protestant light of reason with Catholic obscurantism, the Wandering Jew is an in-between figure, a kind of occult detective who assists the party of light with his knowledge of darkness. He uses the relics of the past—a crucifix, saints' bones, and possibly the blood of Christ—to exorcise a ghost of the Catholic past. As we saw in a previous section, this combination of the magical and the demystifying marks other gothic novels and their Jews.

The character's relativism was pushed to its nineteenth-century extreme by Paul Féval, a French writer whose recent recovery in English we owe to the translations and literary-historical excavations of Brian Stableford. In *The Wandering Jew's Daughter* (1867), Féval responds to the Wandering Jew vogue of his time not by ironing out the contradictory iterations of the legend, but by assembling a Doctor Who-style convention of Wandering Jews. One of them sounds the jaunty ecclecticism that shades into total skepticism:

> I'm an orthodox disciple of Voltaire, but fundamentally, you understand, I know too much not to be a good Catholic. As far as philosophies go, in 1,800 years I've seen those of every shade. Here's the general formula: at the bottom of every schism, as at the bottom of every revolution, there's some bold fellow who has done something silly and is biting his fingers about it, or an imbecile who's nobody and wants to be somebody.

The Wandering Jew meets the modern occult in Gustav Meyrink's 1916 novel *Das grüne Gesicht* (The Green Face). Set in Amsterdam in the apocalyptic atmosphere of the World War, the novel's characters experience visions of the Wandering Jew, a green-faced "ancient wanderer who will not taste death," and who represents the destruction and uncertain transfiguration of humanity in the modern world.

Searching for the source of these visions, the characters attend a meeting of a heterodox mystical society whose members have all taken on "spiritual names" in the manner of occult groups such as those of Waite and Crowley. These include a caftaned Russian Jew who goes by "Simon the

Cross-bearer," a Salvation Army worker dubbed "Magdalena," and a butterfly collector named "King Solomon." They debate kabbalah, psychology, and war.

Meyrink is particularly interested in the upheavals of modernity as they are experienced by his Jewish characters (that is, apart from the Wandering Jew). Such experience is particularly awful in the case of "Simon the Cross-bearer," whose wife and children were murdered, and eldest daughter raped and burned alive in front of him, in a pogrom. In the novel he is wrongly charged with a murder, possibly an echo of the 1913 Beilis affair in Russia. Yet because he has studied kabbalah with the Wandering Jew, who he associates with the prophet Elijah, he attains a state of dispassion beyond grief and despair. A second Jewish character, Dr. Ishmael Sephardi, is told by the Wandering Jew to create a Zionist state in Brazil, where the language will be "an international language that would gradually come to be used by all peoples," a reference to Esperanto.

George K. Anderson concludes his 1965 survey of the legend by observing that "the outlines of Ahasuerus are steadily becoming fainter," and that "the godlessness of the twentieth century . . . bids fair to annihilate him." The figure is, he reflects, surely inadequate to the reality of Jewish suffering in the Holocaust. Yet Anderson does not expect the figure to disappear permanently: "He has died before and come back to life."

Indeed, the same year that Jones published *The Homeward Bounders*, the East German writer Stefan Heym published *Ahasver* (English translation *The Wandering Jew*, 1983), in which Ahasverus is one of the rebel angels who, as in Jewish midrash, protests God's decision to create man. Lucifer seeks to prove humanity's worthlessness and is expelled to Hell, though he shows up in the novel's present day as a professor at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Ahasverus thinks mankind can be reformed through earthly means—a commentary on the socialist project—and is exiled to earth as the Wandering Jew.

Two highly praised novels featuring female Wandering Jews were published in 2018. In Sarah Perry's *Melmoth* (the name is borrowed from Maturin), the figure is an eternal witness to human cruelty with none of the consolations of religious belief. The subjects of her visitations are bystanders, and sometimes worse, to genocides, religious persecution, misogyny, and the deportation of illegal immigrants. A kind of progressive gothic novel, *Melmoth* asks: Why go on when humanity is so ugly? Why go on when each of us is so implicated in the injustices of the world?

Dara Horn's *Eternal Life* also asks: why go on? By which she means: why continue the Jewish story through our children and children's children? More than any other Wandering Jew novel, Horn's wrenches the myth out of its Christian context, turning it into a story of Jewish compassion. Unable to die, Horn's protagonist struggles with the pain of seeing her loved ones grow old and die, knowing she will forever outlive them. Yet she always decides to remarry, start a new family, and raise more children—she has mothered hundreds—before inevitably moving on, phoenix-like, to a new body and another life.

Prior to *The Homeward Bounders*, modern fantasy literature had not made much of the Wandering Jew. There have been a number of cursed immortals, like Michael Moorcock's

Eternal Champion, and a prominent Wandering Jew or two in science fiction. The rather Jewish Shmendrick the Magician of Peter S. Beagle's *The Last Unicorn* (1968) is punished with immortality, though there isn't much connection to the legend otherwise. Avram Davidson and Ward Moore's *Joyleg* (1962) features a Tennessee backwoodsman whose immortality allows satire of contemporary American pieties, as the Democratic and Republican politicans who try to claim him as a party spokesman discover. Though both Davidson and Moore were Jewish, their character is not, and he gains his immortality from bathing in whiskey.

When the Wandering Jew has been taken up in fantasy it has brought with it the question of what to do with the legend's anti-Jewish background. One approach is seen in James Blaylock's *The Last Coin* (1988), which gleefully plunders the props of Christian legend while avoiding literal fidelity to the creed. The novel is built around the thirty silver coins for which Judas betrayed Jesus, yet it departs wildly from the biblical narrative. We learn that the infamous pieces of silver are prehistoric talismans ("old when the Cities of the Plain had burned") and that the episode of Jesus and the moneychangers was really an attempt to thwart the coins' evil influence, since anyone who comes into possession of all thirty gains immense magic power. Judas, having once possessed all thirty, became immortal but is contrite, transformed into "the Wandering Jew whose penance for the sin of betrayal was the two-thousand-year task of keeping the coins apart."

Charles Williams's occult thrillers are clearly an influence on Blaylock's alternately madcap and frightening tale, part of a series of occult fantasies Blaylock built around Christian artifacts. But in keeping with the southern Californian setting, the moral framework of these books is less Christian than Californian. *The Last Coin*'s goofball hero Andrew is motivated not by faith but by his own charming and genial idiocy. The villain is a temperamental cousin of Williams's nefarious Persimmons, and also a fan of corporate waterfront development. And while the Jesus of the gospels chose fishermen as his apostles for the fishing up of souls, Blaylock uses the motif as an expression of the fundamental weirdness of the universe. Andrew recalls how the prehistoric coelacanth, thought to have been extinct for millions of years, had been netted by fishermen on the African coast beginning in the 1930s. "That's how Andrew felt," writes Blaylock, "as if nothing at all would surprise him: aliens landing in saucers, pigs bringing around a spoon early in the morning, the discovery that the Wandering Jew was at work tinkering with the earth as if it were a clockwork mechanism."

In contrast with Blaylock's footloose approach to Christian myth, Susan Shwartz's somewhat turgid 1992 fantasy romance *The Grail of Hearts* is literal in its Christianity. It adheres closely to the gospel narrative, which it retells from the standpoint of the Wandering Jew, and to Christianity's claims for Jesus as messiah and son of God. Blaylock, by loosening the connection to Christian myth, allows the Wandering Jew and even his Judas some freedom from, or at least indifference to, the tradition of Christian antisemitism. Shwartz reinforces it.

Shwartz has said that the novel grew out of her fascination with Wagner's opera *Parsifal*. Her protagonist is the opera's Kundry, a Jewish woman from the time of Jesus who is cursed to live forever because she mocked the crucifixion. Shwartz enlarges this role by giving us the familiar Christian tale of the Jewish woman, oppressed by the cruel legalism of Judaism, liberated

through Christian love—and the love of a Christian man. Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* is the best-known example of this plot.

Anti-Jewish stereotypes abound. While Jesus and his Jewish followers are kindly, the other Jews of the novel are obsequious and greasy, representations of Old Testament brutality or Pharasaic hypocrisy as per the Christian polemical tradition. As in Wagner, the sorcerer-villain of the story is not identified as Jewish, but is bound up with enough anti-Jewish motifs to make the association felt. In Shwartz's most significant departure from the gospel narrative, the Jews are not directly responsible for the execution of Jesus—this is the sorcerer's doing—but they are still accursed and only to be redeemed through Christ, as Kundry is at the novel's conclusion.

Shwartz has Kundry travel through time between the antiquity of Roman Palestine and the novel's "present" of legendary Broceliande, an enchanted Christian realm of knights who serve the Holy Grail. This Arthurian-Wagnerian setting liberates the Jew from the dead law of Judaism into the living myth of Christianity. For Shwartz, Arthurian fantasy is where the Jew can finally shed her accursedness, find her Christian lover, and be saved.

Departing from both Blaylock and Shwartz's approaches, Jones reveals that the Wandering Jew legend is a deception created by *Them* to cover up their cruel torment of Ahasuerus and keep him from spilling *Their* secret. *They* will not allow him to express himself clearly, but here is what he manages to tell Jamie:

> *They* put a lie in my mouth, so that I may not tell the worlds about *Them*, but must say that I sinned against God. But this is a lie […] I saw the gaming-board of *Them* and I saw the game *They* played with the nations. And I went out to preach and warn my people of *Their* coming ploy. And, for that reason, *They* took me, Ahasuerus, and hung chains upon me, and sent me forth with lies in my mouth, and I am called the Wandering Jew.

The Wandering Jew is not a sinner against God, but someone who, like Jamie, has caught a glimpse of the puppet-masters pulling the strings of our world. The legend itself and its antisemitic content, Jones implies, is an intentional distraction from real power arrangements.

> "*They* gave me to hope," Ahasuerus said. "*They* hung me in hope as one in chains, and put a goal before me and set me on my way. But that goal always retreats from me, as mirage in the wilderness or star from star. I am weary now, and hope is a heavy burden.

As Jamie comes to understand, Ahasverus is telling him that, to defeat *Them*, one must give up hope, the "heavy burden." In the context of the novel, this means that while *They* present Jamie and his fellow "homeward bounders" with a set of rules that promise a chance at a future victory and homecoming, he needs to realize that the game is rigged and no such victory is possible as long as he plays by *Their* rules.

This critique of hope as an opiate is clearly meant to have political resonance. Though it is doubtful Jones had this in mind, I am reminded of the words of Gershom Scholem about the messianic idea in Judaism. "There is something grand about living in hope," writes Scholem, "but at the same time there is something profoundly unreal about it." Scholem cautions that hope "diminishes the singular worth of the individual, and he can never fulfill himself" since his is

necessarily "a *life lived in deferment"* (Scholem's emphasis), waiting for the game to be won. Scholem saw the Zionist project, a political, thisworldly homecoming for the Jews, as an alternative to messianic hope.

Jones points more towards 1980s Cold War concerns. "What worries me," says a boy Jamie befriends in the contemporary world in which he finds Ahasverus, "is that this world—my world—has to be a game […] And when *They* start playing *Their* next war, it's going to be a nuclear one." Ahasverus's remark that "there is power in numbers," and the novel's conclusion, suggest a politics in which the dispossessed, no longer distracted by false hope, unite to overthrow the powerful who game with their lives.

The most unsettling aspect of Jones's novel, though, is that victory over *Them* comes with a price. Because of the nature of the gameworld universe, one discard must remain forever homeless, must see all realities as both potential and imaginary, in order that everyone else can live in them as real worlds.

Jamie takes on this burden. "As long as I don't stay anywhere long," he explains, "as long as I keep moving and don't think of anywhere as Home, I shall act as an anchor to keep all the worlds real. And that will keep *Them* out." As a discard, Jamie is unable to die, and we learn at the end that although he looks twelve years old, he is really over a century old because of his travels among the worlds.

In other words, Jones turns her book's boy-hero into a Wandering Jew. His friends will grow old and die, and he will keep circling around the various worlds, a sacrifice for our well-being. "You can get on and play your own lives as you like, while I just keep moving," Jamie tells us, and concludes the novel: "But you wouldn't believe how lonely you get."

This chilling ending reminds one that, just as the book reflects the 1981 ambience of gaming and computers, and of nuclear disarmament politics, another period aspect is the academic vogue for Rene Girard and the French sociological tradition concerning the centrality of sacrifice. Girard saw all human societies as based on a scapegoat mechanism, the need for a sacrificial figure whose elimination allows the society to cohere. Girard's book *Violence and the Sacred* was translated into English in 1977 and was reaching the peak of its influence at the time Jones published her rather Girardian children's book.

If this seems especially bleak for a fantasy novel, we should remember Jones's own love for Tolkien, whose lectures she attended at Oxford. In her 1983 essay on narrative structures in *Lord of the Rings*, Jones notes that Tolkien's hero Frodo cannot remain part of the happy ending he has enabled for others. He has "widowed himself from history, just like the Elves"—and, we may note, like Jones's Wandering Jamie—"and must now go off upon the Sea like the rest." Jones writes: "This kind of equivocal ending where winning and failing amount to the same . . . is exactly what should have been expected. You Were Warned. For good measure, you knew that life never comes round to a happy ending and stops there." The searing gloss to Tolkien's sad wisdom added by Jones's improbable children's fantasy is to remind us how lonely it gets.

The Functions of Faerie

> "A Pharisee?" sayz Mr Aubrey, "What doe you meane, child?"
> "They live on Lickerish Hill," sayz I, "Or under it. I doe not know which. They pinche dairymaides blacke and blewe. Other times they sweepe the floor, drinke the creame and leave silver pennies in shoes." […]
> "Oh!" sayz Dr Foxton, "'Tis *Fairies* she meanes."
> "Yes," sayz I. "That is what I sayd. Pharisees."
>
> Susanna Clarke, *The Ladies of Grace Adieu and Other Stories* (2006)

I wish there were a more substantive connection between fairies and Pharisees than a quirk of Sussex dialect that, doubling the plural ending of some words (think of Tolkien's Gollum grumbling about "hobbitses"), produced a body of rural English Pharisee lore. In his 1854 book *Contributions to Literature Historical, Antiquarian, and Metrical*, the historian M. A. Lower reproduces in local dialect an account in which a farmer reports: "de Pharisees used to come dere a nights and thresh out some wheat and wuts for him, so dat de hep o' threshed corn was ginnerly bigger in de morning dan what he left it overnight." I love the idea of kindly rabbis sneaking into English farmhouses at night to thresh wheat, as well as the mental image I get from a popular harvest song that proclaims "We'll drink and dance like Pharisees."

The formulation passed into modern fantasy in Rudyard Kipling's 1906 children's classic *Puck of Pook's Hill*, which at one point recounts the departure of the fairies from England in the sixteenth century. In Kipling's tale, "the Pharisees just about flowed" down to the boat that would bear them "with their wives an' childern an' valooables, all escapin' out of cruel Old England." A bit later, the influential mid-century American fantasy and science fiction writer Poul Anderson uses the term in his novel *Three Hearts and Three Lions*, informing us, via a friendly dwarf with a Scottish accent, that "Pharisees canna endure broad daylight" and "Pharisees canna endure the touch o' cold iron." And more recently, Susanna Clarke, the author of the brilliant 2004 novel *Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norrell*, plays on the term in her story collection *The Ladies of Grace Adieu* which, as seen above, includes an intentionally archaicized retelling of "Tom Tit Tot," the English version of Rumpelstiltskin.

Quirk though it be, I want to take the conflation as an invitation to think about Jews and fairies—or more specifically about Faerie, that is, the space of fairyland. Faerie is the setting of many works of modern fantasy, from Hope Mirrlees's 1925 masterpiece *Lud-in-the-Mist* and Lord Dunsany's *The King of Elfland's Daughter*, to John Crowley's novel *Little, Big* and Neil Gaiman's *Stardust*, and the idea of Faerie is an important influence on the fantasy worlds of Tolkien, Lewis, George R. R. Martin, and others.

Fairies are popularly thought of as tiny beings, mostly benign or at least harmless, and having to do with flowers and butterflies. (A children's novel published a few years ago in Israel, Ronit Dintsman's *Lev ha-ya'ar* [The Heart of the Forest] recounts the adventures of the sprites who protect the flowers and insects in the woods of the Carmel near Haifa—though they get inducted into a fairy army for military service rather along the lines of the IDF.) The imagining of fairies as tiny comes into play with Shakespeare and is reinforced in Victorian England's children's literature. But it leaves aside darker, more dangerous, and powerful understandings of fairy folk.

Fairyland has its earliest roots in the idea of wilderness, the borderlands on the edges of human society, a zone of uncertainty, wildness, wonder, and danger. In his classic essay, "The Wilderness in the Medieval West," Jacques Le Goff identifies the forests of northern Europe as the imaginative template for the space outside of the norms and rules of human culture. It is a place of external threat and allure, and also a place where the boundaries of the self can be violated and shattered. This is the zone of passion, desire, madness, exultation, the extremes of emotion and the encounter with the transcendent. With the Christianization of Europe, it becomes the realm outside Church authority, where folk beliefs and pagan traditions persist.

Faerie may be linked to wilderness, but it also comes to stand in for the exotic and the new. C. S. Lewis identifies this dynamic as one not limited to Fairyland but a broader impulse that runs from the traveler's tales of antiqutiy to interplanetary space operas. In his essay "On Science Fiction," Lewis writes "The less known the real world is, the more plausibly your marvels can be located near at hand. As the area of knowledge spreads, you need to go further afield: like a man moving his house further and further out into the country as the new building estates catch him up." And so it should not be surprising that, at the time of the Crusades, Faerie gets relocated to the Orient. Oberon, the king of the fairies that we know from Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, first appears in the 13th century French romance *Huon of Bordeaux*. In that epic poem, Oberon's magical forest is located between Jerusalem and Babylon:

> they lyft up theyr sailes & sayled nyght and day, so that 28 they aryuyd sauely at the port of Jaffe; than they tooke lond and drew out theyr horses, and rode forth; so the same day they came to Rames / & the nexte day to ye Cyte of Ierusalem […] Whan Huon had harde Gerames / than he demaundyd forther of hym yf he coude go to Babylon / 'ye, syr,' quod Gerames, 'I can go thether by ii wayes / the most surest way is hense a xl iurneys, & the other is but xv iurneys. But I counsell you to take the long way / for yf ye take the shorter way ye most passe throwout a wood a xvi leges of length; but the way is so full of ye fayrey & straunge thynges, that suche as passe that way are lost, for in that wood abydyth a kynge of ye fayrey namyd Oberon.

We see a third function of Faerie indicated in a prequel to *Huon*, written around the end of the 13th century. This *Roman d'Auberon*, or Oberon Romance, traces Oberon's lineage back to his great grandfather, who is none other than Judah Maccabee. According to the Oberon Romance, Judah Maccabee marries the daughter of a king he defeated in battle. The couple have a

daughter, who in turn gives birth to Julius Caesar. Julius Caesar is raised by his grandfather Judah Maccabee and then marries King Arthur's sister Morgan le Fay. Julius Caesar and Morgan le Fay have two sons, one of whom is Oberon. The other is England's patron Saint George who meets up in the poem with Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. Got it?

In this case, Fairyland is an imaginative space in which different literary and historical traditions can be combined and reconciled. Europe in the middle ages became acutely aware of its multiple narrative traditions. The twelfth century poet Jean Bodel famously refers to them as the three Matters: the Matter of Britain (centered on the legends of King Arthur), the Matter of France (or the French epics of Charlemagne), and the Matter of Rome (by which he means classical heritage of antiquity). Bodel leaves unspoken but surely includes a fourth Matter, the narrative tradition of the Hebrew Bible, which after all also contains kings and empires, epic battles and betrayals, magic and giants, national history and heroes, and which we might call the Matter of Israel. Faerie is a place where these different Matters can be held in equilibrium.

So in book two of Edmund Spenser's *The Fairie Queene* we find the knight Sir Guyon, who comes to us from French epic, in a magical library reading side by side with King Arthur from the Matter of Britain. Arthur peruses a history of Britain that combines English history, Celtic legend, Roman epic, and biblical chronology. Guyon reads a genealogy of Faerie titled "*Antiquitee* of *Faery* lond," which probably nods to Josephus's *Anitiquities of the Jews*, and is a fantasy version of the Tudor history that produces Queen Elizabeth, figured in the poem as Gloriana, the Faerie Queene, daughter of Oberon—who, as we now know, is the great-grandson of Judah Maccabee. Faerie becomes a space of cultural synthesis in which different narrative traditions, from Arthurian legend and the Bible, to Greco-Roman mythology and English royal history, can be reconciled in the poetic imagination.

It seems to me that these different functions of Faerie have parallels in Jewish literary tradition. (Consider the historically promiscuous mode of rabbinic midrash in relation to Spenser's Matter collider, for instance.) I want to look at a more modern parallel, though, having to do with fantasy as it emerges in the nineteenth century. In particular, I want to consider a book that is often considered to be the first, or at least one of the first fantasy novels written in English: *Phantastes*, by the Scottish writer George MacDonald.

MacDonald was born in 1824 and died in 1905. He was a devout Christian, and led a brief and unsuccessful career as a minister. Where MacDonald achieved fame was as a novelist. He published many well-received novels in a realistic if somewhat didactic mode, what we might call Christian inspirational books, a kind of C. S. Lewis of his time. He also published now-classic children's fantasies such as *The Princess and the Goblin*. He was a Victorian luminary, on close terms with fellow writers, including Lewis Caroll, Matthew Arnold, John Ruskin, and Mark Twain.

MacDonald also wrote two pioneering books that are set in fantasy lands, but were not written for children. One was his late novel, *Lilith*, published in 1895, that makes use of the figure from

Jewish folklore to tell a story of Christian redemption in a fantasyland. Much in that novel was anticipated in the earlier *Phantastes,* first published in 1858. *Phantastes* enjoyed multiple printings in the nineteenth century, and was recognized in the twentieth century as a milestone in the emergence of the fantasy genre. It was included in the series of paperback fantasy novels published by Ballantine Books in the 1970s, a series that helped define the fantasy genre ever since. C. S. Lewis adored the novel *Phantastes* and describes reading it as a major spiritual event in his life. Lewis even includes MacDonald as a character in his own metaphysical novel *The Great Divorce*.

Phantastes has many admirers, though even some of its most passionate fans have admitted that it's a strange and unwieldy book. Lewis writes that "If we define Literature as an art whose medium is words, then certainly MacDonald has no place in its first rank—perhaps not even in its second." But Lewis argues that MacDonald offers, not Literature but myth. Comparing him to Kafka, Lewis writes that MacDonald "gets under our skin, hits us at a level deeper than our thoughts or even our passions, troubles oldest certainties till all questions are reopened, and in general shocks us more fully awake than we are for most of our lives."

Phantastes tells the story of a young man with the odd name of Anodos (it's a Greek word that can mean going upward, or having no path). On his twenty-first birthday, Anodos enters Fairy Land when his bedroom changes (kind of like in Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are*) into a wooded area with a footpath leading into a forest. The path leads him into Fairy Land (MacDonald's spelling) where he wanders through various landscapes, undergoing a series of transformative adventures before returning to our own world. He meets fairies and witches, falls in love with a beautiful woman made of marble, is attacked by demonic figures that appear as trees, is tormented by his own shadow, explores the great palace of Fairy Land, joins a fight against evil giants, interrupts a human sacrifice, is killed by a monstrous wolf, and magically returns to life, and to the real world.

If this sounds like children's literature, we immediately learn otherwise from the novel's subtitle, which is "A Fairy Romance for Men and Women." One of the novel's chief characteristics is its acute literary self-awareness. Anodos knows immediately that he has entered the realm of the fairy tales that he had been reading, to his little sister, not long before. When he takes shelter in a cottage in the fairy wood, he finds a book there that "contained many wondrous tales of Fairy Land, and olden times, and the Knights of King Arthur's Table." He later meets the knight Sir Percival, who is one of the characters in that book. When he visits a farm house, not only is the farmer's daughter reading a classic collection of French fairytales, but her mother explains that they're descended from one of the characters in the collection. This concern with books continues when Anodos arrives at the grand palace of Fairy Land and finds that it's equipped with an extraordinary library in which you have the sensation of experiencing personally whatever story you read.

Moreover, each chapter of MacDonald's novel starts with an epigraph from a range of works that together form a kind of library of the literary source material from which much modern fantasy would emerge. He quotes from medieval romance, British and German romanticism (especially Novalis), Renaissance pastoral and epic, and folk ballads. And Anodos as narrator makes use of literary references from the Arabian Nights and Greek mythology to Shakespeare and Dante.

The power of *Phantastes* resides to a great extent in its mix of the idiosyncratic and the universal. Much of the novel's symbolism and structure is familiar and decidedly Christian. We have struggles with sin and atonement, baptismal water, figurations of heaven, and a hero who undergoes death and resurrection. Yet these elements are at the same time defamiliarized and shot through with details that seem extremely signficant but also private and mysterious. The protagonist falls in love with a marble woman and spends much of the novel coming to the slow acceptance that his rival for her affections, Sir Percival, is is the better man for her. He experiences a long torment by his shadow, which comes to life and devours light and happiness, a powerfully literalized depiction of a struggle with depression.

Above all, *Phantastes* affords a reading experience that democratizes romance. MacDonald suggests that each of us is the king or queen of our own private Fairyland, which must be somehow instantiated in the real world. His hero Anodos asks at the end: "Could I translate the experience of my travels there into common life? This was the question. Or must I live it all over again, and learn it all over again, in the other forms that belong to the world of men, whose experience yet runs parallel to that of Fairy Land? These questions I cannot yet answer. But I fear."

Now, let's juxtapose this with another novel, also first published in the 1850s, also a literary landmark pivotal in its cultural influence though not widely read today, and that also invited its readers to become transformed through imaginative engagement with a landscape. The novel I'm talking about is Avraham Mapu's *Ahavat Zion* (Love of Zion, 1853), widely considered to be the first modern novel written in Hebrew.

Mapu was born in 1808 in Russia in a traditional religious family. He taught himself European languages and worked as a teacher, soon distinguishing himself in the Haskalah or Jewish enlightenment movement in eastern Europe. He wrote and published textbooks, as well as the first modern novels in Hebrew. His first novel, *Love of Zion*, was a literary sensation. I won't go into the details of the plot, since it's complex and improbable, about separated lovers, lost children, arson, poisoning, war, and finally joyful reunions and restorations. Set during the reigns of King Ahaz and King Hezekiah in the 8th c. BCE., the book astounded readers with its cliffhanger romantic plots, written in vivid Biblical Hebrew. Its numerous nineteenth-century reprintings testify to the electrifying impact it had in its time. It helped pave the way for the flowering of modern Hebrew literature by using the linguistic resources of the Bible to fashion a European-style melodrama. Just as decisively, it was a crucial imaginative spur for the emergence of modern Zionism, because it portrayed embodied Jewish characters in the ancestral

Jewish homeland. Even though the landscape in the book is biblical and idealized, it still conveyed to its readers a contemporary vitality.

Both George MacDonald's *Phantastes* and Mapu's *Love of Zion* are self-consciously engaged with the genre of romance. Mapu's hero, Amnon, is repeatedly described as a courtly knight, as in the passage where his beloved Tamar sees him:

> ותרא והנה אמנון, הדור בלבושו, רוכב על סוס מיוזן כגיבור הודו במלחמה, חגור חרב, לבוש שריון וכובע, ויושב בהדר וגאון על גב סוסו, המכוסה בעור האריה, ומראה סוסו כערוך לקרב.

> And look, for here is Amnon, splendid in his gear, riding his war steed like a hero glorious in war, girded with sword, in armor and helm, sitting with prowess and splendor atop his mount, saddled with lion's pelt, and his steed looks ready for battle.

It was Dan Miron in his early monograph on Mapu who first made the case for understanding *Love of Zion* in terms of romance, and the work of Annegret Oehme reminds us that romance was a notable genre in both medieval and early modern Hebrew and Yiddish literature.

Yet Miron also notes that the literary characteristics of *Love of Zion* are only partially assimilable to romance. I want to suggest that we might better understand Mapu's novel in terms of modern fantasy literature and its self-conscious exploitation of the materials of romance in response to modernity. Like MacDonald, Mapu ties the elements of romance to a more contemporary and tactile sense of reality. Though by today's standards, Love of Zion appears very much idealized and pastoral, when you compare it to an predecessor work of Hebrew romance such as Luzzato's *Migdal Oz,* which has a lot of plot elements in common with *Love of Zion* but is far more abstracted and fairytale like, you see how sensuously realized *Love of Zion* is by comparison.

Like *Phantastes,* Mapu's novel also has to do with magic, only this is a point of difference. *Love of Zion* features an important plot line involving witchcraft, with extensive descriptions of the evil enchantments and demonic summonings practised by two witches in the book. Yet this witchcraft is revealed to be a lie, a slandering of two good women in the book by one of the villains. Mapu's enlightenment sensibility reveals itself here: his witchcraft plot is used to attack gullibility and deceit, not to portray any actual supernatural power, which in the book belongs only to divine providence.

Where *Love of Zion* finds more affinity with *Phantastes* is that both are novels about desire. This of course includes romantic desire between its characters. When the witchcraft plot is exposed and the lovely Peninah, who had been accused of black magic, meets up with the noble Teman, he says to her, rather suavely: "Are you really the witch? It is true, your lips are bewitching."

Yet while both *Phantastes* and *Ahavat Zion* have their human objects of desire, the central erotic attraction in both books is to a territory: Faerie in one case, the Land of Israel in the other. MacDonald describes the palace of Fairy Land, first at night, "glimmering ghostly in the moonshine," with fountains of porphyry "throwing up a lofty column of water, which fell, with a noise as of the fusion of all sweet sounds," and "paved in diamonds of red and white marble." In

the day time: “The whole palace shone like silver in the sun. The marble was partly dull and partly polished, and every pinnacle, dome, and turret ended in a ball, or cone, or cusp of silver. It was like frost-work, and too dazzling, in the sun, for earthly eyes like mine.” Here is one of Mapu’s descriptions of his magical capital, Jerusalem during the holiday of Sukkot:

> The city was alive with merriment of the feasters: Some were singing on Mount Zion; others were singing in the streets, accompanying themselves on their tambourines. On the piazzas, young men and women were dancing funny dances; jugglers were performing their very best feats for those who did not take an active part in the merrymaking. The city was lighted with thousands of lamps, which outshone the stars in their brightness. Even the moon shone in full splendour upon this festal night, as though she, too, would take part in the rejoicing. The large Tower of David and surrounding towers looked as if they were set in precious stones.

Mapu offers a landscape that his contemporary readers couldn’t experience in reality, but through the imagination could visit and so inspire and restore their healthy desires: for God, for nation, for virtue, for eros. Like *Phantastes*, *Love of Zion* responds to the condition of modernity by harnessing the power of the imagination to bring its readership to a landscape that is both spatial and spiritual. The Jewish reader journeys to Mapu’s Zion in order to return to the real world and ask what MacDonald’s protagonist asks at the end of *Phantastes*: “Could I translate the experience of my travels there, into common life?” Or in Mapu’s case, Can we translate the experience of our imaginative travels to the land of Israel into common life? This is the question to which Herzl responded: If you will it it is no dream. (And, we should remember, in Herzl’s original German, the word rendered in English as *dream* and in Hebrew as *agada*, is “*Märchen*,” or fairytale.)

Both novels express a passionate yearning for a landscape of meaning, for a territory that is both drawn from the past but resonant for the modern age. Much of the project of modern fantasy literature as we see it in MacDonald and his descendents is to find a means of escape from the disenchanted world of industrial and post-industrial modernity, holding out hope that this world might be reenchanted, if only in a provisional or private way for the individual reader. The project of the modern Jewish imagination that we see in Mapu and his descendents is similar, but it is collective and national. And it’s an escape *into* the modern world. Out of the ghostworld of Jewish powerlessness, into a reality that is transfigured and made significant not primarily through enchantment, but through sovereignty.

Sovereignty, which is so central to the Biblical and post-Biblical Jewish idea of redemption, is also a signal feature of a number of medieval and early modern Jewish otherworlds such as the realms encountered in the account of Eldad Ha-Dani or the Hebrew Alexander Romance. These are not fairylands, but exotic locales where Jewish kingdoms get to rule themselves and fight to protect their sovereign borders.

Jewish sovereignty is also a theme in a different kind of modern fantasy forerunner, published in 1833 by the future prime minister of England, Benjamin Disraeli. Disraeli's novel *The Wondrous Tale of Alroy* imagines the *im*-possibility of Jewish sovereignty. The main character, who is clearly a stand-in for Disraeli, is the medieval messianic figure David Alroy. In the novel, Alroy is torn between, on the one hand, conquering the world and ruling as a cosmopolitan and universal leader, or on the other hand ruling only the small, Jewish corner of the world in the Land of Israel as an ethnically particularist and religiously traditional ruler. Disraeli was unable, in 1833, to imagine a Jewish identity that was cosmopolitan and worldly. And so his Alroy opts for the cosmopolitan world empire, much as the baptized Disraeli would become Her Majesty's Prime Minister of the British empire. But in doing so Alroy loses his magic powers, which derive from his loyalty to Jewish tradition, and so at the end the messiah is deposed and dies.

Mapu, by contrast, opens a different and more promising avenue for the modern Jewish imagination, one that directs desire toward sovereignty, and that doesn't force Jews to choose between worldly significance and Jewish tradition. He offers, in other words, a fantasy that is capable of becoming collective reality.

The comparison I've offered between MacDonald and Mapu may offer a partial answer to the question that a number of Israeli writers and critics have asked, which is why modern Hebrew literature is relatively poor in the fantasy genre—at least until the last two decades, which have seen significant growth in Hebrew genre fiction. Often it's claimed that the Zionist project and the exigencies of Jewish political life didn't leave room for fantasy, that the Jewish state was too committed to hard-headed realism. But a different way of seeing it is that Jews had long been relegated to the role of Europe's spooks and spirits. What the modern Jewish imagination desired and imagined was entry into the modern world rather than escape from it.