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THE WANDERING JEW IN SLOVENIAN LITERATURE WITHIN THE EUROPEAN LITERARY CONTEXT

This paper examines the complex anthropological background of “Ahasver” or “Wandering Jew” symbolism. The motif extends back to the Middle Ages, with the source of the name stretching back to classical antiquity. Research reveals that European, and thus also Slovenian, poets and writers have penned an innumerable number of works based on the medieval Ahasver legend. The motif became a popular one in Germany, France, England, Denmark and Sweden, as well as in Czech and Slovak lands. Moreover, James Joyce’s *Ulysses* (1922), which includes the motif, ranks among the most influential of modernist works. Among Slavic poets, the theme was written into literary history by the Croatian poet and writer Vladimir Nazor (1876–1949), who wrote the long poem *Ahasver* (1945).

Among Slovenian poets and writers, Anton Aškerc (1856–1912), Ivan Cankar (1876–1918) and Andrej Hieng (1925–2000) were drawn to the Wandering Jew motif. The exceptional breadth of the motif can be properly explained only when placed in the broader context of the motif of foreignness as an existential concern. This is also how Anton Aškerc used the Wandering Jew motif – in some of his poems Ahasver symbolizes a restless spirit. It was in this sense of man as a restless and unhappy “pilgrim” that Ahasver seems to be used in Cankar’s story “Življenje in smrt Petra Novljana” (The life and death of Peter Novljjan). Among contemporary writers, Andrej Hieng makes especially interesting use of the motif in his novel Čudežni Feliks (The wonderful Feliks). This literary analysis of selected literary works sheds light on the many meanings of the figure as well as on the many ways poets and writers have linked themselves to the Wandering Jew, seeing him as being symbolic of their own fates.