

Sincerely, Judah

An Excerpt from an Epistolary Novel

by [Jeffrey Burghauer](#) (July 2025)



Man Writing at the Table (Jozef Israëls)

to Bishop Kupferschmied

Your Excellency:

I'm a Jew seeking your intervention in a tangle of matters currently preventing me from marrying a Catholic: Ms. Agnes Moore—a faithful, long-time parishioner at Saint Hubert of Liège.

I'm obviously unbaptized, and was once married to an

unbaptized woman in a secular ceremony. Our annulment process has been beset with complications. While I seem to have convinced the Tribunal of my own non-baptism, the Tribunal appears unconvinced of my ex-wife's status. They want to solicit testimony from my former in-laws, which is concerning. Although their distaste for the Church is nothing *like* as fervent as my own family's (owing to outrages wreaked by your syndicate before, during, and after the War), it's not inconsiderable. Further reducing the chances of my erstwhile in-laws providing reliable testimony is the fact that (simply put) they dislike me. Tough to imagine, I know.

Despite your Church's record of abuse against the very race that gave you your messiah, I have committed to the Catholic upbringing of any children that my union with Ms. Moore might produce. In fact, your Church has given me many of my heroes, including Gerard Manley Hopkins and Evelyn Waugh—both converts, as it happens. And I wouldn't be surprised if conversion is somewhere in my own future.

But first things first. Within living memory, your Church signed a concordat with Adolf Hitler. Indeed, your Church's entire history has been, *vis-à-vis* my people, a howling, windswept cataclysm. I do not love your Church. But I'd like to. Your Excellency: please do what's absolutely, unambiguously within your power to make your Church lovable to me. Please sign whatever document is necessary for me to get on with my life. That would be a very decent and reasonable thing to do.

I thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Judah Errante

to Karen Ashridge

Dear Ms. Ashridge,

Thanks so much for your letter. Of course, I'd be honored to participate in your lecture series.

The ideological atmosphere being what it is, however, I feel duty bound to disclose that I publish largely in conservative-leaning magazines. Although I'd like to think that I don't hold any especially unsanitary views, the Twisted Trails Collective seems like a wholesome community initiative, and I'd hate to be the occasion of any social-media-related difficulties for you. I'm hardly a firebrand, but not being a firebrand is no guarantee of safe passage through the rocky shoals we all variously find ourselves navigating.

Let me know your thoughts.

Best,

Judah Errante

Statement Appended to a Financial Aid Application

Due to my position on the Academy faculty, I already receive a generous tuition discount for my daughters. This past November, however, my divorce was finalized, thereby throwing my finances into disorder. Lawyers aren't cheap. And last month, a water main beneath my front lawn managed to explode, which (the City refusing, for complicated reasons, to pay) required a distressing sum of money to repair.

Although it's gauche to claim financial hardship (money is itself a vulgar subject), I'm humbly requesting tuition assistance to cover an additional 10%. I so dislike requesting

tuition assistance that (one hopes) this very request will testify to its legitimacy.

to Alison Melangeur

Dear Alison,

Let's discuss the girls' health insurance. Their coverage costs \$399 per paycheck, or \$798 per month. How shall we divide this? Even before the kids switched plans, I was negotiating the knife's edge of insolvency. My bank account resembles a rank of organ pipes that's just sustained a direct hit from a bowling ball.

Yours, at least in a few lingering respects,

Judah

to Miklós Colosseum, CPA

Dear Miklós,

I've attached a document that arrived this afternoon from the Tax Man. I wondered if you could please decrypt it, and tell me what would propitiate the relevant gods. Can a hecatomb be arranged on credit?

Piously yours,

Judah

to Agnes Moore

Dear Agnes,

It's about what every post-marital tiff is about: money. Ducats. Florins. Wampum. Schüsselphennigs. It's really quite simple. I need a new job. Or a winning lottery ticket. Or access to a jewelry store with conspicuously lax security. You, my dear, are engaged to a Poor Jew. I'm like an albino bale shrew—the rarest version of a rarity. Although there aren't many of us, I suspect that we outnumber those Jews who (without the extrinsic motivation supplied by bebies of brand-wielding friars) consider the advantages of Holy Mother Church. The Gospel speaks of “the deceitfulness of riches,” which is nothing to dismiss lightly. But I'm willing to risk it.

Impecuniously yours,

Judah

from THE COMMONPLACE BOOKS

Romans 15:13: “Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.”

*

Philippians 4:19: “But my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”

to Amélie Sage

Dear Amélie, My Brightest Former Student,

You'll recall that I lent you some books a few months ago; I'd be appreciative if I could have them back—especially that Nabokov edition, which is rare (and not inexpensive). I've been unsuccessfully trying to text you for some time. Is everything okay?

Hoping to hear from you soon,

Judah

to Dearbhforghaill Ó Gallchobhair, PhD

Dear Dr. Ó Gallchobhair,

I read with lively interest your recent piece on nineteenth century tailoring manuals. I'm writing to direct your attention to my own (rather more modest) contribution to the subject. See attached.

Sincerely,

Judah Errante

P.S.: Has anyone ever told you that your name looks like a poorly-executed anagram?

to Ellwood Power tools

To Whom It May Concern:

I've been using my Ellwood orbital sander regularly for about a year, and I've been highly satisfied with it. Just today,

however, it elected to stop working. How can I invoke the warranty to obtain a replacement?

Splintering about the edges,

Judah Errante

from THE COMMONPLACE BOOKS

Moshe Isserles: "If you see a Jew who apostatized neither because of love nor through compulsion, you may know that he or his parents engaged in sorcery."

*

John Donne, "To Sir Henry Wotton":

"Be, then, thine own home, and in thyself dwell;

Inn, anywhere. Continuance maketh hell.

And seeing the snail which everywhere doth roam,

Carrying his own house still, still is at home.

Follow (for he is easy-paced) this snail.

Be thine own palace, or the world's thy jail."

to Yitzchak Errante

Dear Yitzy,

Yes, my weekend is going well. I went to the park today with my girls. While they were frolicking, I sat reading at one of

those municipal tables of rubberized iron, and couldn't help but eavesdrop on the conflux of young suburban mothers. And I found myself wondering: What Walmart, air hangar, stadium, container ship, or piece of Roman civic architecture is ample enough to accommodate all of the Eros that isn't here?

Thinking about container ships got me thinking about the import-export business, which (in turn) got me thinking about you, my favorite cousin, the Cashew and Hazelnut King of the Eastern Seaboard. I hear that you're preparing to involve yourself in some sort of Himalayan chestnut. What exactly does one *do* with a Himalayan chestnut?

Apropos of the House of Errante, I'm heartened to see that, once again, you've proven your exquisite tact in declining to submit an update to the family newsletter—even though your accomplishments are more than sufficient to provoke a clan-wide ecstasy of *kvelling*. That Uncle Dov has financed the construction of yet another piece of Manhattan real estate, or that his firstborn is (in recognition of whatever) having his name attached to a roundabout in Be'er Sheva, or that Avi is responsible for maintaining the serotonin levels of three-quarters of Hollywood's A-listers...it's all very impressive, of course. But it's vulgar to boast—nearly as vulgar as it is to beg. The younger ranks of Errantes don't need my face or yours hovering spectrally before them just to inspire feelings of inadequacy. Of course, we offer such guidance and resources as we can. But anything more than that is just shabby.

May your nuts continue to grow. Send my love to Rivkah and the kids.

Judah

to Dearbhfhorghaill Ó Gallchobhair, PhD

Dear Dr. Ó Gallchobhair,

Thanks for directing me to your monograph. Although it arrived only yesterday, I've already read a substantial chunk of it—so far, bracing stuff. How has it been received?

Best,

Judah Errante

P.S.: I confected an anagram on your name: “Adolf Bohr Highball Cholerrhagia.” I hope you'll admit that it sounds only *slightly* more implausible than “Dearbhfhorghaill Ó Gallchobhair.” Be grateful you aren't Welsh.

to Bishop Kupferschmied

Your Grace,

Thanks for your undeservedly generous response to my note. On rereading my note, I'm struck by its low-pH-ness. The intelligence and buoyancy of your reply testifies to your superior temperament.

Contritely yours,

Judah Errante

—

from the notebooks

If (a) I convert, and (b) an Asian priest officiates, I'd like to select as my baptismal name whatever shall prove most amusing to hear him struggle to pronounce: Aicepsimas of Hnaita? Antanansio Bazzekuketta? Barhadbesciabas? Hegesippus?

Zygmunt Szczęsny Feliński?

from THE COMMONPLACE BOOKS

Eusebius: “[Hegesippus] adduces some things from the Gospel according to the Hebrews and from the Syriac Gospel, and particularly from the Hebrew language, showing that he himself had believed from among the Hebrews, and moreover, he records other things as if from unwritten Jewish tradition.”

from THE COMMONPLACE BOOKS

Joseph Roth: “[Assimilationist Jews] had just about enough willpower not to repudiate the thousand-year tradition of their forefathers[.] [...] Because they didn’t have the courage to convert, they preferred to have the entire Jewish religion baptized.”

to Josiah Rumors

Dear Josiah,

Good luck with Saint Pyran’s. If that’s where you think Alex will thrive, the theological details will seem incidental. It’s so tough to find a decent education for one’s kids that, sadly, the best that one can expect is to find somewhere that satisfies 75% of one’s requirements. The rest must be tolerated with as much good cheer as one can plausibly manage.

You ask about the Papist annulment process, in which I'm perineum-deep at the moment. It's a type of ritual divorce—but not. Since Catholics don't recognize divorce (rather as revolutionary leftists don't recognize soap), they've invented a loophole that's positively Talmudic: if you can't *end* a marriage, you must prove that it never really *began*—that some decisive impediment, unbeknownst to everybody involved, prevented you from contracting a valid union from the get-go. You must establish (to the satisfaction of a Tribunal of celibate pencil-pushers dressed in high-end window treatments) that, when you squawked "I do," you were under some misapprehension about marriage's fundamental nature. The union's breakup gets backdated to before it actually began. I've been called upon to prove that neither I nor Alison is baptized, since being a heathen apparently prevents one from having the discernment to understand what one was agreeing to.

The problem, however, is this: while one can prove that a given thing has happened, one cannot prove with any dialectical panache that a given thing has *not* happened. I sent them some documentary bits and bobs, mostly in Hebrew, which nobody on the Tribunal can actually read. Furthermore, the Tribunal gives no sense of how long this process will likely take. Documents must sometimes be sent off to the Vatican in order that they may be studied by *other* celibate pencil-pushers dressed in high-end window treatments (...our own celibate pencil-pushers dressed in high-end window treatments somehow being unequal to the mission).

Anyhow, I'll write later, when there's uplifting information to relay. Let's hope that's soon. Please send my regards to Stephanie and the boys.

Best,

Judah

from THE COMMONPLACE BOOKS

Sophocles, *Antigone*: "Now don't, please, be quite so single-minded, self-involved, or assume the world is wrong and you are right. Whoever thinks that he alone possesses intelligence, the gift of eloquence, he and no one else, and character, too...such men, I tell you, spread them open; you will find them empty. No, it's no disgrace for a man—even a wise man—to learn many things, and not to be too rigid. You've seen trees by a raging winter torrent, how many sway with the flood and salvage every twig. But not the stubborn. They're ripped out, roots and all. Bend or break. The same when a man is sailing. Haul your sheets too taut, never give an inch, you'll capsize, and go the rest of the voyage keel-up and the rowing-benches under. Oh, give way. Relax your anger. Change! I'm young, I know, but let me offer this: it would be best by far—I admit—if a man were born infallible, right by nature. If not [...], it's best to learn from those with good advice."

from the notebooks

If anything, King Henry VIII *UNDER*reacted.

to Headmistress Dr. Dina Plugs

Dear Dina,

I'll be out tomorrow morning on account of some workmen coming over to fix a water service line that decided to explode underneath my front lawn—my front lawn now appearing as though

it has recently hosted a halfhearted spell of trench warfare.

Actually, the workmen are coming over to fix it *again*. The first time, I yielded to their sales pitch for copper piping, which, while significantly more expensive, was allegedly somehow better. I'll have no way of verifying the lofty claims made for copper piping, since it wasn't in the ground for three days before a pack of third-world-style scavengers exhumed every last inch of the stuff, with the apparent objective of selling it on the black market. Who says the enterprising American spirit is dead?

If my understudy opens my top-left desk drawer, he will find the relevant lesson plans.

With gratitude for your flexibility,

Judah

to Detective Gehirn Ironwood

Dear Detective Ironwood,

But I don't want the unlawful removal of my plumbing to be investigated as *theft*—it's a clear case of *burglary*, which (according to my admittedly slipshod understanding) involves a sterner penalty. Theft is played in a natural minor scale; burglary, in G double harmonic minor.

Pentatonically yours,

Judah Errante

to Detective Gehirn Ironwood

Dear Detective Ironwood,

Indeed, I understand the distinction—quite a bit better than you, it seems. “Burglary” is the unlawful carrying away of someone else’s property when said property is secured; “theft” is the unlawful carrying away of someone else’s property when said property is *unsecured*.

Please note that my type-K, $\frac{3}{4}$ inch was buried *underneath* my lawn, and not, as you phrased in, simply “on” (or even “in”) it.

Allow me to explain an essential principal of rabbinical hermeneutics called *kal v’ḥomer*, which is apparently not taught at the Police Academy. It’s the Aramaic analogue to what classical logicians call a *minore ad maius* argument. It posits that *if* a certain thing is so, then a greater instance of that same thing is *also* so. For example: *if* it’s unlawful to touch a woman’s bosom without her consent, it stands to reason that it’s *also* unlawful to violate her behind a hedge.

You might be curious as to how *kal v’ḥomer* potentially illuminates some of the facets of the matter at hand. Allow me. Let’s pretend that my piping were locked in a shed. If my piping were to be stolen, it would constitute an unambiguous case of burglary, perhaps even with a bit of breaking-and-entering thrown into the mix. *If* it’s burglary when the malefactors breach a half-inch of waterlogged plywood, it must *also* be burglary if they had to breach three feet of stony soil.

Sincerely,

Judah Errante

from THE COMMONPLACE BOOKS

Watson Davis: “When the earth is robbed of its copper treasure, a void is created that must be reckoned with.”

from the notebooks

Just as one should never drive while drunk, one should never meditate upon Big Questions (economics, Malthusianism, Nature versus Nurture in human development, immigration policy, first principles in public education, the proper role of digital technology in civilized life, the ultimate knowability of the Other, the plight of the individual in postindustrial western societies, the hierarchy of the races, *etcetera*) while waiting at a DMV.

to Eitan Leitner, Esq.

Special Assistant to the President for Land Use

My Dear Eitan,

I'm heartened to see that, once again, you've proven your exquisite tact by withholding an update from the alumni newsletter—even though your accomplishments are more than sufficient to squeeze a sustained paroxysm of envy from everyone back home.

Since you're an authority on land use and the laws pertaining thereunto, I'd appreciate your thoughts on a dispute I'm having with my local constabulary. I've attached my correspondence with one Detective Gehirn Ironwood. What do you make of it?

Please send my love to Deborah and the girls.

With fraternal regards,

Judah Errante

to PAS SHACHAR, M.D.

My Dear Pas,

Attaboy. The Alumni Ball will also have to do without my attendance.

While I have you, I wondered if I could ask a quick medical question. Is there any alternative to the standard-issue vasectomy that leaves no visible scar whatever? It doesn't even matter if it's less reliable than the usual procedure. If a normal vasectomy is 99% effective, our hypothetical patient might be willing to accommodate something closer to 60%, as he's facing a female reproductive capacity that, on account of advancing mid-life decrepitude, has been reduced to 50% of peak fertility, which, to the best of our patient's knowledge, might never have been all that lavish to begin with. Even the Arabs could win a war if they were facing the Italians.

Happy Passover. Try not to let the matzah make you too constipated. All my love to the family.

With fraternal regards,

Judah

from THE COMMONPLACE BOOKS

J.E. Chavarro, et al: “The intake of 15 soy-based foods in the previous 3 months was assessed for 99 male partners of subfertile couples who presented for semen analyses to the Massachusetts General Hospital Fertility Center. Linear and quantile regression were used to determine the association of soy foods and isoflavones intake with semen quality parameters while adjusting for personal characteristics. [...] There was an inverse association between soy food intake and sperm concentration that remained significant after accounting for age, abstinence time, body mass index, caffeine and alcohol intake and smoking.”

—

from THE COMMONPLACE BOOKS

Tamar Fox: “In 1527, King Henry VIII was desperate to divorce his first wife, Catharine of Aragon. So when his Catholic advisors denied him annulment, Henry sent messengers to the Jewish community in Italy instead, hoping that a little money might win them over to his side. (He would have asked England’s Jews if his predecessor King Edward hadn’t expelled them in 1290.) Henry figured anything the Jews told him would have solid enough biblical grounding for him to persuade the archbishop. He even ordered a complete copy of the Talmud for England, hoping it would help his case. It’s unclear who would have helped him with all that Aramaic. Henry’s messengers managed to find a few rabbis and scholars in Italy willing to accept bribes and give the king the answer he wanted, including Marco Raphael, a rabbi who converted to Catholicism. Raphael and two others argued that the king’s marriage to Catharine was null because she’d been married to Henry’s deceased brother and there’s a biblical prohibition against sleeping with one’s brother’s wife—though there’s a separate biblical commandment to marry one’s brother’s wife[.]”

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Jeffrey Burghauser is a teacher in Columbus, Ohio. He was educated at SUNY-Buffalo and the University of Leeds. He currently studies the five-string banjo with a focus on pre-WWII picking styles. A former artist-in-residence at the Arad Arts Project (Israel), his poems have appeared (or are forthcoming) in *Appalachian Journal*, *Fearsome Critters*, *Iceview*, *Lehrhaus*, and *New English Review*. Jeffrey's book-length collections are available on [Amazon](#), and his website is www.jeffreyburghauser.com.

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