

MODERN GOSPELS OF JUDAS: CANON AND BETRAYAL

Hugh S. Pyper

Abstract

Contemporary versions of the Gospel purporting to be written by Judas Iscariot are surprisingly common. This paper reviews some examples of this genre and argues that they are symptoms of a wider reversal which sees the canonical gospel writers as the real betrayers of Jesus and Judas as the representative of the modern reader as the one excluded from the text. This is examined in the light of wider arguments over the effect of any recognition of a canon. The recovery of gnostic texts has fuelled such arguments. In this regard Harold Bloom's championship of the Western canon from an avowedly gnostic position is intriguing. The argument presented here is that the reaction against the canon which champions Judas is a symptom of a reaction against the Christian notion of election. Though this reaction uses a rhetoric of equality, its effect can be to defend elitism. The paper ends by positing a link here with the modern repudiation of resurrection in favour of survival as the ground of hope.

IN HIS *Against the Heretics*, written around 150 CE, Irenaeus of Lyons trawls through the increasingly bizarre varieties of Valentinian gnosticism, eventually arriving at the real lunatic fringe, by his way of thinking:

Still others say that Cain came from the Absolute Sovereignty above, and Esau, Korah, and the men of Sodom, along with every person of this sort, have the same origin. They were hated by the Creator because though attacked they suffered no harm, for Sophia took to herself what was her own in them. The traitor Judas was the only one of the apostles who possessed this knowledge. For this reason he brought about the mystery of the betrayal; through him all things on earth and in heaven were destroyed. They provide a work to this effect called the 'Gospel of Judas'.¹

Here Irenaeus testifies to the existence of a work which apparently epitomised Gnostic resistance to the God of the Old Testament. It is a gospel attributed to the man who the canonical New Testament writers depict as the instrument of betrayal and who is vilified by subsequent Christian tradition as the epitome of human sinfulness and treachery. For its Gnostic readers, however,

Judas was the champion of suppressed truth in a treacherous creation and the true bringer of salvation.

Given that this Gnostic gospel of Judas was lost long ago, it might come as a surprise that a by no means exhaustive bibliographic search turned up a number of books which claim to contain the text of this lost gospel. These are not simply novels which tell Judas' story or give his version of events, though a number of such works exist,² but books which purport to offer transcripts of an original gospel, some explicitly claiming to be the text referred to by Irenaeus.³ It is the existence of these works which prompted the writing of this paper. A brief survey of three of them may give a flavour of their variety.⁴

The Polish novelist Henryk Panas published his version of *The Gospel according to Judas* in 1973.⁵ His well-nigh centenarian Judas looks back and recounts with a dry, intelligent, sometimes pedantic, cynicism his version of the gospel events to an interested inquirer cast rather in the mould of Luke's Theophilus. Judas, and to that extent the author, shows a wide knowledge of contemporary Greek philosophy and of the various cults active at the time and is an educated foil to the intuitive and unlettered Jesus. Panas draws heavily on the Dead Sea Scrolls and uses the expectation there of two messianic figures, one priestly and one kingly, in his exploration of a pact between Jesus and Judas based round their common understanding of Isaianic prophecies. Judas as a descendent of the High Priest Onias III comes to understand himself to be the priestly messiah whereas Jesus is to take the role of the kingly messiah, the suffering servant destined to die, though the elderly Judas can only bewail his own youthful suggestibility. Panas manages to side-step the crucifixion by having Jesus disappear during a general riot in the temple. Judas offers several possibilities for his subsequent fate, but leaves the question unresolved. The book is a meditation on the human capacity for self deception, something Judas acknowledges in his own history.

The Irish writer Michael Dickinson's *The Lost Testament of Judas Iscariot*⁶ purports to be the text of an *apologia* addressed by Judas to Peter. Dickinson accounts for the betrayal in an interesting conflation of several familiar moves. Jesus himself asks Judas to hand him over, confident that he will be released when Pilate invites the people to nominate a prisoner, and Judas consents to undertake this task despite the public revilement to which he will be subject. However, when he meets Jesus and his followers in the garden, he gives the pre-arranged sign of the kiss not to Jesus but to his disciple Darius. This Darius is the rich young man whom Jesus sent away to sell all he possessed. In Dickinson's version, Darius actually fulfills this command and then returns to become Jesus' follower. He also happens to bear a striking physical resemblance to Jesus and it is his suggestion that Judas should perform the switch. Darius is arrested and crucified. Judas, who had already arranged Lazarus' resurrection by the use of a drug, talks Jesus into taking advantage of the

situation to stage his own resurrection. Jesus, while he consents, and insists that Judas make the marks of the nails in his hands, refuses to forgive Judas for his betrayal which consisted in *not* betraying him to the authorities. The last words of the book are scribbled by Judas as he waits inside the now empty tomb of Lazarus for Peter to come and read the confession, only to find that someone—Peter himself?—has rolled the stone back over the tomb mouth to seal him in.

Ernest Sutherland Bates' *The Gospel of Judas*⁷ is particularly interesting. Bates is perhaps best known today as editor of *The Bible Designed to be Read as Living Literature*.⁸ He was both a biblical scholar and a professor of English and draws on these two areas of expertise to produce a gospel which, apart from a few rather well-turned pieces of irony, reads more convincingly as a text produced by a first century Jew than its rivals in the genre. His Judas is an Essene who turns against Jehovah and the first part of the book consists of a counter-reading of the Hebrew Scriptures in which Satan explains Jehovah's origins as the most evil of the gods which men have created. Judas is drawn to Jesus' radical new message of universal wisdom, but in the desert, Jehovah induces Jesus to preach weakness and spiritlessness despite Judas and Satan's best efforts. Judas plots to betray Jesus in order to make him realise that Jehovah will not lift a finger to save him, and indeed tells Jesus that this is his intention. Jesus consents to Judas' plan in full confidence of Jehovah's loyalty. Judas has arranged with the priests that he can buy Jesus back for the same thirty pieces that he has been given to betray him but is betrayed in turn by the priests who have bribed the crowd to demand Jesus' crucifixion. At the end of the novel, Judas dies resignedly knowing that his death is no more or less meaningless than Jesus'.

What these very different texts share is a reading of Judas as at least as much the betrayed as the betrayer. He is betrayed by a Jesus who does not conform to his expectations and betrayed by the authorities who use him to further their own devious assault on Jesus. These betrayals are compounded by the malice or ignorance of the canonical gospel writers who misrepresent Judas's motives and actions in the interests of their particular theology. The gospel writers become villains of the piece, confirmed in their partisan reading by the verdict of the church. Such readings appeal to, and feed on, the modern public appetite for rumours of conspiracy particularly in ecclesiastical circles. The scope of this can be seen in the publicity given to the accusations of concealment and dissembling that have grown up around the genuine discoveries of Dead Sea Scrolls and the Nag Hammadi documents. The present-day church authorities are seen as allied with their predecessors, such as Irenaeus, in the preservation of an ideological structure by the suppression of truth.

This conspiracy theory itself provides material for novels, some directly engaged with the Gospel of Judas. Daniel Easterman's *The Judas Testament*,⁹

Peter van Greenaway's *Judas*¹⁰ and Cecil Lewis's *The Gospel according to Judas*¹¹ are all heady concoctions of Vatican conspiracy, archaeological adventure and international crime built round the rediscovery of the manuscript of Judas' gospel and the reaction of the church and the international criminal fraternity to this potential bombshell.

The declaration and defence of a closed New Testament canon is thus seen as the exercise of arbitrary power in defence of a self-regarding institution. Irenaeus could be arraigned as a prime instigator of this move. An express purpose in his writing *Against the Heretics* was to set bounds to the proliferation of gospels and speculative systems. The fact that his own writings survived while the Gnostic gospels were suppressed and lost is testimony to the power of the canon. He is one of the first to argue that four and only four gospels are to be accepted as authoritative. The defence he adduces for this conclusion is that there are only four zones of the world, four principal winds and four faces to the cherubim described in Revelations chapter 4. The causal link here is unclear to say the least, and the suspicion that similar justifications could be found for any chosen number must be strong.

For those who are irked by this seeming arbitrariness of the canon of scripture, Irenaeus' arguments seem all too typical. The case for what will count as valid evidence is decided before the trial, leaving the accused deprived of any possibility of defending himself. Judas' gospel is a victim of the process of canonisation which enshrines those texts which cast him as the betrayer. Ironically, it is only through Irenaeus's attempt to discredit the gospel of Judas that its existence is known to us. It is ousted just as Judas himself was expelled from the company of the disciples. Why was Judas marked out as the one who would have to bear this burden of guilt in the outworking of the drama of redemption? Is human destiny dependent on something as arbitrary as the choice of four rather than three or five for the number of gospels?

This question is behind the developing interest in the character of Judas and his rehabilitation in nineteenth and twentieth century literature. As Judas himself remarks in the Irish poet Brendan Keneally's prize-winning book-length poem *The Book of Judas*¹² 'All kinds of scribblers find me an absorbing theme'. In his major study of this resurgence, Jean Paillard¹³ traces it back to Klopstock's *Messias*. Thereafter, Judas' cause was taken up by De Quincey and D.F. Strauss and the radicals of the nineteenth century enlisted him as a fellow revolutionary. Later he became a Promethean hero in Nietzschean circles.

This interest in Judas, so Jean-Pierre Jossua contends in his review of Paillard's work,¹⁴ began before the Second World War and continued after it, fuelled by a new empathy in European literature with the situation of Palestine as an occupied territory at the time of the gospel. This went along with a renewed sense of how the awful dilemmas of war lead people to agonising choices or to discover that their actions are overtaken by the cruelty of events.

The testimony of Dietrich Bonhoeffer in Nazi Germany bears this out: 'There is hardly one of us who has not known what it is to be betrayed. The figure of Judas, which we used to find so difficult to understand, is now fairly familiar to us.'¹⁵

In the light of this, Judas the betrayer is reread as Judas the misunderstood, or Judas the one who misunderstands. Rather than the demonic figure of the gospels driven by greed and envy, the new Judas is represented either as choosing himself to bear the blame for handing over Christ in order to serve the higher good his actions may enable, or else as the victim of misunderstanding. His story becomes a tragedy in which he is cast either as a Promethean figure defying the God who dupes Jesus or else as a hapless yet conscious Kafkaesque pawn of an incomprehensible doom.

It is as the power of the church lifts, so Paillard argues, that Judas becomes a focus for anticanonical writing. To read the gospel story from Judas' point of view is the ultimate exercise in revision of the central canonical texts of Christianity. The furthest development of this is to be found in Jorge Luis Borges' short fiction 'Three Versions of Judas' where he outlines the fictional career of the Swedish theologian Runeberg who argues that God did not just take on flesh in the incarnation but went to the extreme of becoming 'man to the point of infamy'. He chose to play out the vilest of all human destinies, that of Judas.¹⁶

As Kierkegaard wrote in his Journals, 'One will get a deep insight into the state of Christianity in each age by seeing how it interprets Judas.'¹⁷ Those who feel that truth has been betrayed by the impositions of the church and its definition of the canon adopt Judas as a figurehead and fictional spokesman. This is made explicit when Pierre Bourgeade, whose own *Mémoires de Judas* offers a complex multi-layered version of the story, writes, 'Isn't Judas modern man *par excellence*? Responsible for murder, he retains his nostalgia for the sacred.'¹⁸ Bourgeade here finds modern humanity in a post-Nietzschean world where God is dead because human beings have murdered him, yet where the idea of the sacred remains as an impossible memory.

There is a note here which is well caught by Peggy Rosenthal: 'At the Nietzschean proclamation that God is dead ... modernism doesn't celebrate; nor does it gloat cynically over the corpse as postmodernism will do. Modernism goes wistfully to the wake.'¹⁹ Judas here comes to stand proxy for the modern reader on the boundary between the 'faithful' and 'faithless' reading of the text. There is a yearning for the religious vision which the text upholds and yet an anger that somehow the modern reader feels excluded from it, cast out from the company of those who can believe because the critical integrity which constitutes the modern identity is spurned by texts and institutions which rely on revelation and authority. This is epitomised in Frank Kermode's *The Genesis of Secrecy*,²⁰ his thought-provoking study of the

poetics of Mark's gospel. It is, amongst other things, a masterly lament over his sense of exclusion from the canonical texts of the New Testament. The dedication of the book 'To Those Outside' makes the point explicitly.

Such ambivalence is also revealed in the fact that in recreating this gospel modern writers are not simply contradicting the New Testament. On the contrary, they are following a line which begins in the New Testament itself. Kermode argues this, suggesting that the character of Judas develops by narrative necessity from a plot line which hangs on the act of betrayal. It all stems from Paul's account of the origin of the Eucharist in which the scene is set as occurring 'on the night when he [Jesus] was betrayed' (1 Cor 11:23). In Kermode's words, for the later gospel writers 'Betrayal becomes Judas'.²¹ The canonical writers wove together Old Testament material to fill out a character made necessary by the act of betrayal, but that character itself generates new narrative, which in turn generates new narrative gaps. The canonical gospels and Acts diverge noticeably in their characterisation of Judas, inscribing in the canon this process of the narrative development of character. To re-write his story is not simply then to impose alien notions on a fixed character but follows canonical and extra-canonical trajectories. The canonical Judas is a character in formation and the interest he arouses is in part a consideration of this process.

This consideration illuminates the link between betrayal and canon. Kermode's phrase can be reversed: for the writers under discussion 'Judas is betrayal'. Judas allows the modernist resentment of the betrayal perpetrated by the Christian tradition to be expressed, the tradition that holds out a hope epitomised in the resurrection which it either fails to deliver or for which it demands too high a price. The contemporary Gospels of Judas differ in their view of Jesus' resurrection, although most account for it either as delusion or deception, often engineered by Judas. In all of them, however, Judas is the one untouched by this resurrection, the one who the canonical New Testament writers see as doomed to death and as the awful example of eternal punishment. Judas is the despairing or defiant voice of those who see the proclamation of resurrection as a deceitful ploy or a cruel taunt in the face of human mortality. Judas becomes the suppressed, oppressed voice of 'modern man' in Bourgeade's sense, the voice of sceptical bewilderment and existential crisis, of the loss of hope in meaning which is silenced in the canonical texts but which now can speak in a secularised literature. It is the inscription of death in literature and in the canon which brings him into writing.

This relates to a parallel phenomenon in the modern literary treatment of Lazarus. Almost without exception the case is made that Lazarus's restoration to life was a cruelty, condemning him to all the agonies of continued existence and the unique horror of a full awareness of what his second death will entail. The link between this Lazarus material and the deathliness of literature is made

explicit by Blanchot in his essay significantly entitled 'Literature and the Right to Death'.²² What literature wants, he declares is 'Lazarus in the tomb and not Lazarus brought back to daylight, the one who already smells bad and is Evil, Lazarus lost and not Lazarus brought back to life.'²³ Judas, then, the man without hope, the man for whom redemption is excluded, epitomises this vision even more clearly. The work of the literary canon, it would seem, is to pile stones on Lazarus' tomb, to prevent disruption of the strategies of survival which are generated by and designed to mask the inexorability of death.

In exploring this link between the notions of canon, betrayal and death further, the work of Harold Bloom is illuminating. His controversial championing of the 'western canon', most notably in his work of that title,²⁴ goes along with an increasing attachment to gnosticism. Indeed, in his *Omens of Millennium*²⁵ he makes much of the very Valentinian Gnostics whose work Irenaeus preserves by condemning. Bloom writes of the liberation that comes through the understanding of one's inner nature and its profound alienation from the realm of the created and the creator God. He says explicitly that, 'If gnosis makes us free, it can only be that it teaches us a resurrection that precedes death, even as the uncanonical gospel of Philip tells us of the Christ that "he first arose and then died".'²⁶ Bloom refers here to Oscar Cullman's distinction between immortality and resurrection, illustrating this with the contrast between Socratic and Christian views of death. Where Socrates hails death as a friend, secure in the knowledge of his soul's immortality, for Christ it is the last enemy. Christianity's vision of resurrection gains its force from its insistence on the need to undergo the real extinction of death. Resurrection is not survival.

For Bloom, the canon is precisely an 'instrument of survival', a phrase he quotes from Kermode. According to Bloom:

A poem, novel or play acquires all of humanity's disorders, including the fear of mortality, which in the art of literature is transmuted in the quest to be canonical, to join communal or societal memory ... the rhetoric of immortality is also a psychology of survival and a cosmology ... All the Western Canon can bring one is the proper use of one's own solitude, that solitude whose final form is one's own confrontation with one's own mortality.²⁷

In this view of the canon he is countered directly by Cynthia Ozick in her striking essay entitled 'Literature as Idol: Harold Bloom'.²⁸ She argues that Bloom's gnosticism is idolatrous and in that sense anti-Jewish insofar as she defines Judaism negatively as the repudiation of idols, the legacy of Abraham in contrast to his idol-making father Terach. Ozick speaks for the voice of normative Judaism, which, she claims, eschews the modernist view and Bloom's *agon* of the belated. 'In Jewish thought there *are* no latecomers,' she

says;²⁹ all generations stood together at Sinai and the Jewish liturgical experience is one of identity affirmed, not of identity wrested from a precursor. This is, she claims, the essence of the Second Commandment.

Yet the more true this is for Judaism, the more belatedness becomes the gentile's dilemma when confronted with Judaism. Western Christian culture is rooted in this sense of belatedness; its agonistic and often appalling relations to Judaism can well be described in terms of the revisionary ratios Bloom expounds in *The Anxiety of Influence*.³⁰ This reaction is what is epitomised in the figure of Judas whom western culture has worked out its anxiety over mortality, election and rejection. George Steiner in his typically baroque but pregnant essay 'The Two Suppers',³¹ where he compares Plato's *Symposium* with John's account of the Last Supper, comments on the verse in the fourth gospel that follows the account of Judas going out on his fatal errand: 'And it was night'. 'Judas,' he writes, 'goes into a never-ending night of collective guilt. It is sober truth to say that his exit is the door to the Shoah. ... That utter darkness, that night within night, into which Judas is dispatched and commanded to perform 'quickly', is already that of the death-ovens. Who, precisely, has betrayed whom?'³² Hyam Maccoby has written passionately of the dark antisemitic shadow the story of the traitor Judas, the archetypal Jew, has cast over Western culture.³³ In his canonical manifestations, Judas, the Jew, Judas who inscribes death, epitomises the mystery of election and in particular its dark side of rejection. The responsibility for murder alluded to in Bourgeade's description of modern man takes on an ominous concreteness in the conscience of the post-holocaust Gentile mind.

The irony is that when gnosticism turns to Judas to repudiate election in the name of freedom and human dignity, it enshrines Judas, the rejected Jew, as the great opponent, not of Christ, but of Yahweh, the God of the Jews. Contemporary 'gospels of Judas' are a particularly pointed example of the use of biblical stories and the gospel characters in modern literature to rewrite resurrection as *apophrades*, to use the name which Bloom gives to the ultimate achievement of the strong writer. Bloom defines it as that power of revision whereby the successor can seem to be 'imitated by their ancestors'.³⁴ It is, so he puts it,

the triumph of having so stationed the precursor in one's own work that particular passages in *his* work seem not be presages of one's own advent, but rather to be indebted to one's own achievement, and even (necessarily) to be lessened by one's greater splendour. The mighty dead return, but they return in our colors, and speaking in our voices, at least in part, at least in moments, moments that testify to our persistence, and not to their own.³⁵

The gospels of Judas seek to allow us to have Christ return on our terms, and Judas, 'modern man *par excellence*', to have the final say. But this falls to

nought in a cataclysmic sense if it turns out that what we display as the painted corpses of the carefully reanimated dead are in fact very much alive, and that by invoking them, we bind, or free, ourselves to operate on *their* terms.

As readers of any narrative, we have to acknowledge that we stand outside the story, unable to affect its unfolding, excluded both from the part of the hero and the role of villain. Here again, the arbitrariness of election conflicts with the Gnostic vision. In the light of this, the remaking of the tale becomes an assertion of freedom, or at least the conscious defiance of arbitrary exclusion despite the absence of hope that it can be rescinded, or else of an affirmation that the exclusion has no force because there is no real boundary to the tale.

There is a resentment here characteristic of neo-gnosticism in Bloom's sense.³⁶ It is a repudiation of election, the sense of arbitrary exclusion of the belated. It finds its apotheosis in the resentment of the unchosen Gentile against the inexplicably chosen Jew. Gnosticism puts its stake in knowledge which in principle is available to all. However, the consequence of this is not equality but elitism. Election and elitism are two categories often conflated but which are actually tangential to one another. It is that confusion which, far from solving the problem of election, actually builds resentment. Election becomes misconstrued by both the elect and the rejected as the possession of a secret, of a jealously guarded key. What more sure-fire source of resentment could there be? Bloom's *Western Canon* is at least as much a text of resentment as any of the schools whom he berates in his own work. As with the novelists who speak for Judas, for Bloom the gospel writers become the great betrayers, the suppressers of the truth of Judas, which is ultimately the truth of death.

Yet Kermode's own analysis of the generation of character from act shows the limitations of this Gnostic approach. Any story carries its own life. Its characters are not consulted as to whether or not they wish to make a free decision to be included; they have no existence as characters outside the story but are generated by it. There is no 'strategy of survival' here, no gnosis which can give an infallible key to enable a character to join the story, and that in itself sets at defiance our instincts. Like children not picked for a team, readers who choose to do so may smoulder with resentment for those who are chosen or else declare that the game itself is meaningless.

The good news of the gospel according to Judas is that resurrection precedes death—but this gives death the last word. Literature then comes to being in the space between enlightenment and annihilation. The good news of canonical Christianity, however, is the prospect of death, a Jewish death what is more, as the final answer to that which cannot be evaded or postponed. A Christian literature writes out of death with hope in the ungraspable prospect of eternity.

*Department of Theology and Religious Studies,
University of Leeds, Leeds LS2 9JT*

REFERENCES

- ¹ Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, I.31.1 as translated in R.M. Grant, *Irenaeus of Lyons* (Routledge: London, 1997) pp. 104–5. Both Theoderet and Epiphanius also testify to the existence of this community, whom they call the Cainites, and of its gospel, but their dependence on Irenaeus is clear. The Swedish novelist Lars Gyllenstein provides a fictional account of this community and their texts in *The Testament of Cain*, trans. K. Bradfield (London: Calder and Boyars, 1967).
- ² These include, for example, F. Yerby, *Judas, My Brother: The Story of the Thirteenth Disciple* (London: Heinemann, 1969) which tells the gospel story through the eyes of Nathan, Jesus's brother-in law and double, and brother of Judas. It comes with an explicit 'health warning' to the devout reader and includes notes on the scholarly backing for various conjectures. Judas here is a cowardly cheat. Nathan's opinion of the gospel writers is uncompromising and often expressed. A typical outburst comes after the explanation that Judas did not stay around to kiss Jesus: '... your gospel writers were lunatics, surely, men who couldn't even manage to tell convincing lies, because their addled pates held no seat of memory' (p. 384). Yerby's own views as expressed in the Notes are less intemperate but hardly less scathing. Similar in conception if not in style or content is M. Callaghan, *A Time for Judas* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1983) which purports to be the reworking of a manuscript of Philo, a Cretan scribe working for Pilate. He befriends Judas and takes down his version of the events, in which Jesus chooses Judas to carry out the betrayal because of his fidelity, knowing that Judas will faithfully carry out this awful act where others would flinch (pp. 115–31). At the end of the book, Philo buries his account in the hope that 'the unbearable loneliness of Judas in the minds of all men on earth' (p. 247) will be brought to an end when it is found and read. T. Caldwell and J. Stearn, *I, Judas* (New York: Atheneum, 1977) is the autobiographical account of a rich young Pharisee who betrays Jesus on the understanding that all charges of treason would be dropped and to force his hand. W. Rayner, *The Knifeman: The Last Journal of Judas Iscariot* (London: Michael Joseph, 1969) offers the variant of a Judas who, having betrayed Jesus in the belief that this will inaugurate the Kingdom, does not immediately kill himself but is offered a new identity by the authorities which, in his disillusionment, he accepts. They spread the rumour of his death so that he can infiltrate the new Christian church which has grown out of the rumours of Jesus' resurrection. Judas himself meets the risen Jesus and is converted, only to be told by a group of conspirators that Jesus had unknowingly been drugged on the cross and deludedly believes himself to have been resurrected. He is now proving a potential threat to the movement that has begun to grow and Judas is commissioned to kill him. When it comes to the point, however, Judas kills his accomplice and allows Jesus to go unharmed, but is himself murdered by the agents of the church.
- ³ In this connection, see the intriguing discussion in T. Ziolkowski, *Fictional Transfigurations of Jesus* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1972) of the novelist Gerhardt Hauptmann's plans in the 1890s to write an *Evangelium Judae* in the light of his New Testament teacher's suggestion that the gospels give no evidence that Judas was an evil man (p. 107). Ziolkowski uses the term *evangelium judae* to designate a subset of what he calls 'fifth gospels' in chapter 7 of his book (pp. 225–69), but in his usage it describes a group of novels where the narrator sees himself as a betrayer. His 'fifth gospels' are explicitly *not* purported reproductions of ancient gospel forms but tellings of a recognisable parody of the gospel story in modern terms.
- ⁴ In addition to the three examples discussed in the text, G. Page, *Diary of Judas Iscariot*, reprinted (Kila, MT: Kessinger, 1912) provides a rather homely and homiletic

reading of the story. Other titles of which I am aware include M. Savelle, *The Gospel of Judas Iscariot* (New York: Exposition, 1967); A.D. Baldwin, *The Gospel of Judas Iscariot* (Chicago: Jameson-Higgins, 1902); C. Schafer, *The Sanhedrin Papers including the Gospel of Judas* (New York: Vantage, 1973).

⁵ English translation by M.E. Heine (London: Hutchinson, 1977).

⁶ Dingle, Brandon (1994).

⁷ (London: William Heinemann, 1929) published in the United States in 1928 as *The Friend of Jesus* (New York: Simon and Schuster) but in England under Bates' original title.

⁸ (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1936).

⁹ (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1994).

¹⁰ (London: Victor Gollancz, 1972). Greenaway's novel contains extracts of the rediscovered gospel in which it appears that it was in fact Peter who alerted the authorities, driving Jesus to his death to fulfil the messianic prophecies, a conceit played out in the machinations of the Pope as Peter's successor to suppress the truth (pp. 72–80).

¹¹ (London: Sphere Books, 1989). Lewis includes a translation of a supposed fragmentary gospel which seems to show that Judas agreed to take the 30 pieces of silver in order to learn of the priestly plot against Jesus. On the night of Gethsemane he tried to decoy the troops away from the garden until he gave Jesus away under torture, but was embraced by Jesus who knew this moment was foreordained. This is allied to the rather more unusual idea that an actual sharing of portions of Jesus' body took place at the Last Supper as the necessary preparation for the disciples to bring about the miracle of the resurrection. This version of the story is given in the context of the wider narrative of the journalist Jude Heddon who becomes involved in the discovery. At the beginning of the book he is found hanged, and we learn from his diaries that he has committed suicide, having succumbed to the temptation to sell the manuscript to the agents of the church, thus betraying the true story once again (pp. 66–74).

¹² (Newcastle: Bloodaxe Books, 1991), p. 372.

¹³ See his *Broder Judas: Om en marklig upprättelse av Iskariot* (Stockholm: Libris, 1995).

¹⁴ 'Pourquoi Judas?' *Revue de sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 79 (1995), pp. 549–51.

¹⁵ E. Bethge (ed.), *Letters and Papers from Prison*, enlarged edn (London: SCM Press, 1971), p. 11.

¹⁶ *Collected Fictions*, trans. A. Hurley (London: Allen Lane/Penguin, 1998), pp. 163–7.

¹⁷ H.V. and E.H. Hong (eds), *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Paper*, vol. 2 (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1970), p. 512.

¹⁸ The quotation appears on the back cover of *Mémoires de Judas* (Paris: Gallimard, 1987).

¹⁹ Taken from the introduction to R. Atwan, G. Dardess and P. Rosenthal (eds), *Divine Inspiration: The Life of Jesus in World Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998), p. xxxvii.

²⁰ *The Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1979).

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

²² *The Work of Fire*, trans. C. Mandell (Stanford CA: Stanford UP, 1995 [1949]), pp. 300–44.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 327.

²⁴ *The Western Canon: The Books and Schools of the Ages* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1994).

²⁵ *Omens of Millennium: The Gnosis of Angels, Dreams and Resurrection* (London: Fourth Estate, 1996).

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 251.

²⁷ *The Western Canon*, p. 30.

²⁸ *Portrait of the Artist as a Bad Character* (London: Pimlico, 1996), pp. 137–59.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 154.

³⁰ *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York: Oxford UP, 1973).

³¹ In his *No Passion Spent: Essays 1978–96* (London: Faber and Faber, 1996), pp. 390–419.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 417.

³³ See his *Judas Iscariot and the Myth of Jewish Evil* (New York: Free Press, 1991).

³⁴ *The Anxiety of Influence*, p. 141.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

³⁶ The use here of the term 'resentment' recalls Nietzsche's account of *ressentiment* in *On the Genealogy of Morality*. In that text Nietzsche notoriously denounces the New Testament as the epitome of the vengeful, self-lacerating literature of the weak and the product of the *ressentiment* that constructs a general morality out of their petty injuries (see K. Ansell-Pearson (ed.), *On the Genealogy of Morality*, trans. C. Diethe (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994), pp. 21–37, 201). In *Nietzsche's Case: Philosophy as/and Literature* (New York: Routledge, 1993) Benth Magnus, Stanley Stewart and Jean-Pierre Mileur relate this concept to Susan Sontag's essay 'Against Interpretation'. They suggest that the limiting authoritative claim of interpretation in the sense which Sontag denounces is the 'revenge of the reader' against a strong text (p. 201). The New Testament, in literary terms, could be read as a revenge against the power of the Old Testament. In this sense, what is at stake in the present discussion is the strength of the canonical text. Which reading of Judas, the canonical one, or the Gnostic

one, is the stronger reading, and which is the reading of resentment? One could construct an account (perhaps Kierkegaard provides material for one in *Sickness unto Death*) where the Nietzschean *Übermensch*, as an example of what Kierkegaard calls 'the despair that in despairs wills to be itself', is the one steeped in resentment, resentful of the spiritual strength of the saint and therefore decrying as weakness what he desires but cannot attain. Frederic Jameson, quoted in Toby Foshay's essay 'Resentment and Apophasis: The Trace of the Other in Levinas, Derrida and Gans' in Philippa Berry and Andrew Wernick (eds), *Shadow of Spirit: Postmodernism and Religion* writes that '*ressentiment* is always the product of *ressentiment*' (*Fables of Aggression: Wyndham Lewis, the Modernist as Fascist* (Berkeley: California UP, 1979), p. 131). In this present paper, however, resentment is not simply a reaction against strength, but a reaction against betrayal. It does not arise simply from the brute facts of inequity and impotence, but from a sense of exclusion from a promised possibility of equality of power.