

Playing with the Betrayer: Riegl's *Kunstwollen*, Fanfiction Reimaginings, and the Aesthetic Dimensions of Recent Depictions of Judas

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Introduction¹

Judas Iscariot is both central to sacred Christian narrative and comes with a deeply malignant reputation. Since the late nineteenth century, however, there have been increasing attempts to 'play' with his canonised role in order to seriously problematise his role in revelation. This article examines the creative and aesthetic dimensions that slowly let creative thinkers move this figure away from his defined role of infamy and betrayal towards something far more complex and humanistic. Against the 'original' texts of The Gospel of Matthew and The Gospel of Judas, three case studies will be considered here. Each maps a part of the re-imagined arc of this figure: Jorge Luis Borges' 'Three Versions of Judas' (1944), Nikos Kazantzakis' novel (1961) and Martin Scorsese's cinematic version (1988) of *The Last Temptation*, and Norman Jewison's *Jesus Christ Superstar* (1973), based on the Tim Rice/Andrew Lloyd Webber musical of 1970. These interpretations and transformations of Judas will be considered using Alois Riegl's theory of *Kunstwollen*, which helps chart the social and intellectual conditions of how art progresses. I argue here that Riegl's methodology is insufficient on its own. Instead, it will be augmented through a fanfiction methodology, which I have developed in relation to the work of Karen Hellekson, Kristina Busse, and Francesca Musiani. The theory of *Kunstwollen* will structure the following investigation into why re-interpretations of the Judas character did not emerge until the late nineteenth century and only truly flourished in the twentieth. This rests on a new attitude to biblical literature, one that is conditioned by a Protestant

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milieu that sees the deep investigation of sacred texts in an increasingly secular light.

As early as 1853, challenges to the received story of Judas began to emerge. De Quincey's 'Judas Iscariot' appeared in that year and was soon followed on the continent by Petruccelli's *Memoirs of Judas* in 1867. These two works appear to be the first of their kind for several centuries to boldly reimagine this canonical figure. The Gospel of Matthew (composed c. 75CE) will be used as the primary indicative text of Christian attitudes to this character. However in itself, this canonicity was never completely monolithic. Reference to The Gospel of Judas (composed second century CE) demonstrates that even in the very early life of the Christian tradition, there was a certain narrative openness to sacred narrative in some part of the Christo-Gnostic world. Because I will be focusing on twentieth century readings, predominantly in the Anglosphere, I will use here the King James Version. This is also the version most commonly used by Protestants, whose tradition was the first to allow for 'play' with Biblical narratives. Finally, the Bible will be treated here as a work of literature and its figures as literary characters. This is not intended as a statement on the validity of faiths associated with the text; rather, this is a necessary framing for the context of the methodologies used, especially in fanfiction theory.

The Gaps in Methodology

Any discussion of interpretation owes its foundation to the discipline of hermeneutics. While this branch of analysis has roots as far back as Aristotle, the methodology as it exists today is generally considered to have been fortified by Johann Gottfried Herder and Friedrich Schleiermacher over the turn of the nineteenth century.² Schleiermacher in particular turned the focus of interpretation away from scripture and towards communication and text in general; he argued that it was only once language was understood within a framework of interpretation that Biblical texts could be studied using these methods.³ Indeed, in a view greatly influenced by Protestant traditions, Schleiermacher's hermeneutics took sacred texts to

² Paul Ricoeur, 'Schleiermacher's Hermeneutics', *The Monist*, vol. 60, no. 2 (1977), p. 183.

³ Yong Huang, 'The Father of Modern Hermeneutics in a Postmodern Age: A Reinterpretation of Schleiermacher's Hermeneutics', *Philosophy Today*, vol. 40, no. 2 (1996), p. 251.

have the same limitless bounds for interpretation as any secular work.⁴ Thus, it is in the spirit of hermeneutics that biblical and gnostic works are interpreted into diverse narratives starring Judas. Of course, hermeneutics is only the most basic of modes through which to discuss these case studies: in order to create a more comprehensive view of them, it is necessary to consider Riegl's discussion of the social angle of creativity, as well as modern analyses of fanfiction and its role in interpretation.

Creative ideas do not develop in a vacuum and this is the starting point of Riegl's theory. In order to be successful, they must be accepted by their audience. It is this latter fact that Riegl grapples with in his theory of *Kunstwollen*. He describes the concept thus:

All human will is directed toward a satisfactory shaping of man's relationship to the world, within and beyond the individual. The plastic *Kunstwollen* regulates man's relationship to the sensibly perceptible appearance of things. Art expresses the way man wants to see things shaped or coloured, just as the poetic *Kunstwollen* expresses the way man wants to imagine them. Man is not only a passive, sensory recipient, but also a desiring, active being who wishes to interpret the world in such a way... that it most clearly and obligingly meets his desires. The character of this will is contained in what we call the worldview.⁵

Kunstwollen refers to popular artistic culture that manifests the desires and values of artists – experienced both individually and collectively – living in a particular period. Elsner argues that the theory goes beyond even this and that it encapsulates all expressions within a period, not just those of artists.⁶ Additionally, it must be noted that the creative possibilities of *Kunstwollen* are rarely completely distinct: rather, they transmute into one another in a fluid evolution.⁷ The content of these periods varies depending on historical context, but each of them contains unwritten indexes of what is considered acceptable in a creative pursuit.⁸ As creators conform to this, it inevitably influences their audience, who become unwilling to accept concepts that are not contained within the *Kunstwollen* of their time period. Dissenting ideas are outcast by the will of the society. In order for this to change, there

⁴ Huang, 'The Father of Modern Hermeneutics', p. 251.

⁵ Jaś Elsner, 'From Empirical Evidence to the Big Picture: Some Reflections on Riegl's Concept of *Kunstwollen*', *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 32, no. 4 (2006), p. 753.

⁶ Elsner, 'From Empirical Evidence to the Big Picture', p. 752.

⁷ Elsner, 'From Empirical Evidence to the Big Picture', p. 752.

⁸ Allister Neher, 'The Concept of *Kunstwollen*: Neo-Kantianism, and Erwin Panofsky's Early Art Theoretical Essays', *Word and Image*, vol. 20, no. 1 (2012), p. 43.

must be social adjustment such as a paradigm shift, although it may be less drastic than this.

The shift relevant to analysing interpretations of Judas came about with the increasing popularity of individualism in the mid to late nineteenth century. This shift can be described as a collective revelation of individual experience. Specifically, it required commitment to the breakdown of institutions and collectivism. Part of this can be attributed to the growing influence of Protestantism across Western countries.⁹ Focusing on individuals and the moral worth of each unique person, artists who subscribed to this concept used their lives as experiments.¹⁰ Jackson describes this as “a widespread concern for the correct – the most effective, most powerful, most righteous – mode of living.”¹¹ This experimentation inevitably led to a shift in the period’s *Kunstwollen* as morality came to be understood as less black and white and more subjective. Two people could live wildly different lifestyles and both be fulfilled; such new understanding of individuality allowed for more complex understanding of lived experiences and interpersonal comprehension.¹² This also extended to religion. Prior to this shift in worldview, spirituality was a communal phenomenon, but the rise of individualism allowed it to be considered on a personal level, taking into consideration subjective religious experiences and interpretations of the sacred texts. The influence of Schleiermacher’s removal of sanctity from hermeneutics encouraged these studies. Indeed, new interpretations of works of literature using an individualistic methodology allowed for further, low-risk experimentation of lifestyle and morality, and transformative works proved a useful form for these investigations. From here, interpretations of the Judas narrative emerged.¹³ These began with De Quincey and Petruccelli, whose works were seminal in transforming Judas. Possibilities only broadened from there. However, while *Kunstwollen* explains how these interpretations came about, they still have an obscured motive. In order to understand the *why* of

⁹ Irene Backus, ‘Protestantism’, in Sarah Knight and Stefan Tilg (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Neo-Latin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 251-260.

¹⁰ Regenia Gagnier, *Individualism, Decadence and Globalization: On the Relationship of Part to Whole, 1859-1920* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 1.

¹¹ Gagnier, *Individualism, Decadence and Globalization*, p. 1.

¹² Gagnier, *Individualism, Decadence and Globalization*, p. 3.

¹³ Judas had, of course, previously been depicted in art and culture, but these depictions were normative and did not question the Biblical narrative. For instance, Dante’s *Inferno* has Judas being eaten by Satan at the centre of Hell, a punishment for only the most heinous of traitors.

transformations of the Judas narrative, it is necessary to look to another methodology in combination.

In analysing creative interpretations of text, one of the most useful methodological frameworks available is that of fanfiction. A central form to the idea of transformative works, fanfiction is described by Hellekson and Busse as, "... the imaginative interpolations and extrapolations by fans of existing literary worlds."¹⁴ In other words, fan writers may consume an existing source and find themselves dissatisfied with the nuance offered, and so they create their own content, often shifting elements or creating new ones along the way, including exploring various interpretations of characters. The concept has existed for over a century, with fans of Arthur Conan Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes* series being notable for the volume of content produced by its fans. However, the term 'fanfiction' itself has only existed since the 1960s, following the popularity of *Star Trek*.¹⁵ Fan culture steadily grew in scope during the twentieth century, aided largely by 'zine' communities, and the advent of the internet in the latter part of the century saw an even larger expansion as fans were able to interact with one another more easily than ever.¹⁶ Since fan culture and fanfiction have moved online, both have seen entry into the mainstream; despite critics often viewing it as unrefined, the form itself is inarguably more popular than ever.¹⁷

Due to its increasing prevalence, a not insignificant amount of academic work has been written about the style and function of fanfiction, particularly within the last decade. Through examining the methodology of the format, some scholars have attempted to contextualise it within pre-existing frameworks within the study of language and culture. In particular, Fathallah discusses fanfiction in terms of Foucault's ideas of discourse. She explores how discourse is "language without fundamental Truth" and explains that it consists of subjective cultural codes and understandings that form the cogs of a society.¹⁸ This is ongoing and ever-changing, often allowing for the exploration of several possible branches of progression before its evolution is complete. The widely accepted conditions of a discourse are described as "statements", with certain governing statements acting as a foundation for the

¹⁴ Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse, *The Fan Fiction Studies Reader* (Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press, 2014), p. 6.

¹⁵ Hellekson and Busse, *The Fan Fiction Studies Reader*, p. 5.

¹⁶ Hellekson and Busse, *The Fan Fiction Studies Reader*, p. 5.

¹⁷ Hellekson and Busse, *The Fan Fiction Studies Reader*, p. 6.

¹⁸ Judith May Fathallah, *Fanfiction and the Author: How Fanfic Changes Popular Cultural Texts* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017), p. 17.

entire body of a discourse.¹⁹ In relating this conception to fanfiction, Fathallah takes the source text(s) of a fan community as the governing statements of that group's discourse, since the subsequent transformative works could not exist without it.²⁰ Fathallah's book argues that, despite being a relatively new form of literature, fanfiction fits comfortably into a framework of discourse; however, her work does not include an examination of the function of transformative works. To supplement this, Musiani investigates motivations behind the production of fanfiction. Her work examines a case study of the television show *Earth 2* and its fan community's creativity following the series' cancellation. She discovers that fan exploration of the source's world and characters was largely a matter of filling gaps, with works delving into topics that "beg to be explored" by the show's universe.²¹ This conclusion is corroborated by the analysis of Hellekson and Busse on fan work in general. They state that, "Much of the interest of fans and their texts for cultural studies lies precisely in the ways the ambiguities of popularly produced meanings mirror fault lines within the dominant ideology, as popular readers attempt to build their culture within the gaps and margins of commercially circulating texts."²² Fanfiction exists to fill gaps in a source text that leave fans dissatisfied, and through filling these gaps writers inevitably explore possibilities for interpreting the source – or, as Foucault would have it, the governing statements of the community – and evolving the discourse of the culture surrounding it. This application of transformative works is largely discussed in terms of modern sources; however, as its accordance with Foucault's model demonstrates, it is a form that is not necessarily limited to modern fan communities.

In the nineteenth century, both Renan and Strauss produced works transforming the gospels into a more cohesive literary format; both of these were titled *The Life of Jesus*, in French and German respectively. While neither text notably transforms Judas' antagonistic role, they did set a precedent for interpretations of the Bible, building on what had already been established by Schleiermacher. Renan corroborates Schleiermacher's sentiment that in interpretation, nothing is sacred, and biblical texts should be treated in the same way as secular texts. Strauss' work is even more specific in its views on interpreting the Bible: he believed that it should be treated historically to an

¹⁹ Fathallah, *Fanfiction and the Author*, p. 18.

²⁰ Fathallah, *Fanfiction and the Author*, p. 18.

²¹ Francesca Musiani, "May the Journey Continue": *Earth 2* Fanfiction, or Filling in Gaps to Revive a Cancelled Series', *Transformative Works and Culture*, vol. 5 (2010), p. 1.

²² Hellekson and Busse, *The Fan Fiction Studies Reader*, p. 31.

extent, but that some aspects – such as Jesus’ miracles – are the stuff of myth and should not be taken literally. This emerging trend of novelising the gospels strips them of their boundaries of sanctity and allows individuals to access the core of their narratives. This was and still is relevant to a version of Christianity that allows for greater personal connection between the individual and their faith, particularly the texts that form the cornerstones of belief. They are able to critique the content and fill in gaps where they emerge in subjective reading. Of course, before we examine the transformations that emerge from these interpretations, it is first necessary to examine the texts on which they are based.

Early Sources and the Original Judas

The originality of the Gospels is widely disputed. Similarities between the language and structure of different accounts has led to arguments regarding the chronology of the books; in particular, the Synoptic Gospels possess resemblances to one another that imply the influence of one or more on the other(s). Discussion on this matter has led to the two-source theory. In this model, Matthew and Luke were written significantly after the original documentation of the narrative, and they borrowed their content from two authorities: Mark, and an unnamed, lost source referred to as Q.²³ While the legitimacy of this theory is hotly debated, it is vital for our purposes to acknowledge that the Gospel of Matthew cannot be considered a wholly original source, if it is itself an interpretation of earlier works. However, this gospel serves as the basis for the case studies to be discussed later, and so in this case Matthew is considered a source text for these interpretations. However, the hypothetical existence of the Q source also gives legitimacy to other texts recounting the Jesus story, including the gnostic text the Gospel of Judas. Both of these ancient texts are likely interpretations of earlier sources, which could include Q or another gospel, and thus both possess equal value as interpretations.

The Gospel of Matthew’s framing of Judas Iscariot creates a black and white narrative of betrayal. Judas is first introduced amongst Jesus’ disciples, coming at the end of the list with the additional information that he would eventually be the one to betray their master. From his initial appearance in the text, he is marked as singularly treacherous.²⁴ Despite this specific attention in

²³ Christopher M. Tuckett, ‘The Existence of Q’, in Ronald A. Piper (ed.), *The Gospel Behind the Gospels* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), p. 19. Q references the German *quelle*, meaning ‘source’.

²⁴ Matthew 10:4.

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his introduction, little individual focus is paid to Judas as Jesus' life and miracles are documented. In fact, the next mention of him comes with his betrayal, as he approaches the chief priests and makes a deal to guide them to Jesus in exchange for thirty pieces of silver.²⁵ Later on, at the Last Supper, Jesus announces that one of his disciples will betray him. Judas asks if it is him, and Jesus replies, "Thou hast said."²⁶ Soon after, authorities come in search of Jesus, and Judas signals their target by kissing him; the resulting arrest directly leads to Jesus' crucifixion.²⁷ Upon seeing Jesus' state after the trial, Judas becomes distressed and repents. He returns the silver to the chief priests, crying that he has "betrayed the innocent blood."²⁸ He leaves the temple and immediately hangs himself.²⁹ While Judas' presence in the text is infrequent, his actions are pivotal and intense. His entire character revolves around his betrayal of Jesus, and even after he repents, his suicide is presented as just due to the severity of his crime. He is framed unambiguously as a villain, his seemingly mindless deference to the high priests acting as a contrast to Jesus' pure devotion to God. Little detail is offered about him aside from his sins because no other information is relevant to the intended understanding of his character.

The Gospel of Judas is a text that offers an account of Jesus' life from the perspective of his alleged betrayer. The work has been dated to around 280CE but was only rediscovered in the 1980s and classified as 'gnostic'. It expands upon the relationship between Jesus and Judas, detailing a number of conversations that took place between the two men shortly before the events leading to the crucifixion. It opens with a judgement from Jesus on the disciples, claiming that they will never understand his true nature or his relationship with God; this proclamation angers his followers, except for Judas, who acknowledges Jesus' divine heritage and submits to him. Due to his reverence, he is singled out by Jesus to learn "the mysteries of the kingdom", which involve seeing God's true form and being taught the realities of damnation and salvation. Most significantly, Jesus gradually reveals to Judas his cosmic role. He begins by telling him that, "It is possible for you to reach [heaven], but you will grieve a great deal. For someone else will replace you, in order that the twelve [disciples] may again come to completion with their god." Judas is troubled by this prophecy but continues to participate in their

²⁵ Matthew 26:14.

²⁶ Matthew 26:25.

²⁷ Matthew 26:48-49.

²⁸ Matthew 27:3-4.

²⁹ Matthew 27:5.

private discussions. After many inquiries on Judas' part, including recounts of dreams wherein he is punished by his fellow disciples, Jesus tells him "... [Y]ou will sacrifice the man that clothes me." This phrasing references Jesus' spirit and the idea of the divine transcending the physical form. Judas trusts Jesus and so despite his concerns about his fate, he follows his master's command and gives the high priests information on his whereabouts. The Gospel of Judas conforms to the basic narrative details of the Synoptic Gospels but offers an alternate interpretation of the relationship between Judas and Jesus. It strongly opposes the black and white roles presented by Matthew. Ultimately, however, both works are assumedly cut from the same cloth, presenting the same story with different outcomes.

Judas' role in both of these texts has been widely discussed, although Matthew's work has attracted far more attention due to its great prevalence and some interpretive issues with its black and white presentation of Judas. It provides little to no nuance of his personality, especially when it comes to motivation. The latter gap has been particularly discussed by academics in analyses of the narrative of the Jesus story, a fact that holds significance of its own. Bissell comments that this particular fixation is an attempt to retroactively construct a version of Judas who is complicated and significant enough to justify his pivotal role in Jesus' fate.³⁰ Such a statement is certainly accurate to scholarly hypotheses of Judas' character. For instance, in De Quincey's 1853 essay 'Judas Iscariot', one of the first pieces of discourse defending the character, he envisions Judas as a revolutionary frustrated with Jesus' inaction against oppression, with his betrayal meaning to serve as motivation for Jesus to "get moving" with the revolution.³¹ In another example, Walsh conceives of the character as a sacrifice for the sake of message: Judas' moral and mortal downfall positions the spiritual over the material (signified by the silver he receives) and demarcates an opposition between insiders and outsiders.³² For Walsh, it is not the intent of the character that matters, but that of the narrative. Judas' role is existentially and morally significant, which makes up for the lack of nuance given to him in the text itself.³³ The Gospel of Matthew leaves a gap in Judas' significance outside of

³⁰ Tom Bissell, 'Looking for Judas', *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, vol. 85, no. 3 (2009), p. 40.

³¹ Thomas de Quincey, 'Judas Iscariot', in James Hogg (ed.), *Hogg's Instructions* (Edinburgh: James Hogg, 1853), p. 337.

³² Richard Walsh, 'The Gospel According to Judas: Myth and Parable', *Biblical Interpretation*, vol. 14, no. 2 (2006), p. 38.

³³ Walsh, 'The Gospel According to Judas', p. 38.

his treachery, dissatisfying the reader. This omission is not immediately present in the Gospel of Judas; however, it certainly leaves room for further analysis of Judas' character and the background his relationship with Jesus. The filling of these gap by academics and other creative agents is not at all dissimilar to the way Musiani describes fans seeking to expand upon missing details in the source, or governing statement, of their fandom. The creative endeavours that result from these sources (bearing in mind that they themselves are likely interpretations) constitute the fanfiction that aims to build on this narrative and reach clarity in its nuances.

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Borges' short story 'Three Versions of Judas' offers, as its title implies, a series of interpretations of the Judas character. It follows a fictitious academic called Nils Runeberg who writes on Judas and his motivations for the betrayal. His first interpretation is based on De Quincey's 'Judas Iscariot' essay, which speculates that Judas' actions were an attempt to force Jesus to reveal his divinity and lead an uprising. Runeberg does not take the exact same view as this but agrees with the thesis that "the most precious event in history" (Jesus' sacrifice) could not have been set into motion by a random decision.³⁴ Instead, he posits that the betrayal was predetermined.³⁵ Here, Judas is a pawn, sacrificed for the good of God's plan. Runeberg's first paper is deeply unpopular with theologians, who are resolute in their view of Judas as a villain, and so it is rewritten, retaining its line of thinking but going further with its interpretation. He dismisses his previous work, claiming that God would in fact have no need for a human to help carry out his plan. Instead, Judas is an autonomous figure whose act of betrayal is a moral sacrifice.³⁶ In order to achieve purity and salvation, Runeberg's paper explains, some individuals may renounce sex or material possessions; it is in this spirit that Judas makes the decision to renounce Heaven itself. In an ultimate deed of humility, Judas conceives of happiness as a divine attribute and thus rejects it. Additionally, through betraying Jesus, Judas also renounces his reputation, a further element of deprivation to render him morally pure.³⁷ This reading proves even more unpopular than the first, and so Runeberg constructs a final version of Judas.

³⁴ Jorge Luis Borges, 'Three Versions of Judas', in *Fictions*, trans. Andrew Hurley (London: Penguin Books, 1998), p. 133.

³⁵ Borges, 'Three Versions of Judas', p. 134.

³⁶ Borges, 'Three Versions of Judas', p. 135.

³⁷ Borges, 'Three Versions of Judas', p. 135.

Here, he claims that in order for God to redeem the human race, he must have become a man.

It is commonly assumed that God embodied humanity in Jesus, but Runeberg asserts that this is wrong, even blasphemous.³⁸ As God is the ultimate of everything, it follows that every form of him will be the extreme of its kind; thus, as mankind is inherently sinful, God as man must be the worst sinner of all. Runeberg claims, “God was made totally man, but man to the point of iniquity, man to the point of reprobation and the Abyss.”³⁹ Jesus is understood as the messiah, but it is not he who embodies God. Instead God inhabits Judas, the most flawed man. This is by far the most controversial of all Runeberg’s papers, and the resulting backlash leads him to financial and social ruin. The bitter writer attributes this misfortune to God, believing him to be angry that Runeberg discovered and spread his terrible secret.⁴⁰ At the end of the story, Runeberg is dying, and as he imagines himself going to Hell he hopes to share the Inferno with “the Redeemer,” implying that God – in the form of Judas – is in Hell for his crimes.⁴¹ ‘Three Versions of Judas’ delves into the relationship between God and Judas and reaches a conclusion that could hardly be further from traditional conceptions of the character. It borrows little narratively from the Gospel of Matthew besides the Judas figure and his betrayal. There is some similarity to the Gospel of Judas in that Judas is presented at first as part of a divine plan, but after that it totally diverges from the gnostic interpretation. Unlike other texts, Borges’ work does not transform Judas’ interactions, but focuses solely on his motivations and existential nature, leading to the final connection between Judas and God. It is a statement on both characters and heavily ties Judas to faith in a way that is not present in the Gospel of Matthew, but which is reminiscent of the Gospel of Judas. Indeed, the relationship between Judas and his religion is expanded upon in all three case studies, contextualising the betrayer within the beliefs that have come to despise him.

Scorsese’s *The Last Temptation of Christ* presents a highly sympathetic and heroicised view of Judas (played by Harvey Keitel in the film), while still maintaining his human flaws. It presents the same narrative as Kazantzakis’ original novel in a more accessible and concise medium; for this reason, we will largely analyse the story in reference to the film version with some references to the original text where prudent. Judas’ relationship with

³⁸ Borges, ‘Three Versions of Judas’, p. 136.

³⁹ Borges, ‘Three Versions of Judas’, p. 136.

⁴⁰ Borges, ‘Three Versions of Judas’, p. 137.

⁴¹ Borges, ‘Three Versions of Judas’, p. 137.

Jesus starts out somewhat contentiously: Judas attacks him for constructing crucifixes for the Romans, accusing him of being complicit to oppression. Here, Judas is a revolutionary and no stranger to violence, contrasting the peaceful Jesus and his other, mild followers. He takes orders to murder Jesus early on, although he does not follow through. Instead, he hears Jesus' claims of divinity and decides to follow him until he finds evidence (or lack thereof). Of course, he is impressed by Jesus' power and character and becomes the first disciple. In the novel, Judas' interest in Jesus is further motivated by the possibility that Jesus will lead the revolt against Rome. Although the narrative tracks Jesus' interactions with all of his disciples, his relationship with Judas is by far the closest and most prominent. Judas defends Jesus to the other disciples when their confidence in him appears to waver, protecting him more than once from physical assault. In return, Jesus guides Judas to be less harsh. Kazantzakis has Jesus reflecting, "[Jesus] knew that Judas's heart was hard and that for it to soften, time was needed - time and skill and much love".⁴²

Eventually, after Jesus experiences stigmata before an intended revolt against Rome, he tells Judas about his knowledge of his own death. Judas tells him that he will not let him die, but Jesus reveals that Judas must be the one to betray him and gives him specific instructions on doing so. This is, of course, similar to the Gospel of Judas, and it is assumed that Kazantzakis took inspiration from the gnostic text. Jesus acknowledges the pain of the situation and tells him that God gave Jesus "the easier role" of dying because Judas is stronger than him. Judas' faith in Jesus is mutual, and Jesus understands him to be his equal as a hero. After executing his role in the divine plan, Judas returns later in the film, at the end of Jesus' life of temptation. Despite other changes in the timeline, this Judas remains singularly unchanged amongst the disciples: he is still fierce and passionate about his cause, and his disappointment in Jesus stems from the great love he held for him. He is again pivotal as he is the only one who correctly identifies that Jesus' "guardian angel" is in fact Satan. This leads to the return of Jesus to the cross, ensuring the salvation of humanity; in this way, Judas plays a vital role in the redemption not once, but twice. This work follows the basic narrative of Jesus, but greatly expands on it. Little to no mention is made of Judas being conceived of as a villain, and he is in fact presented as having a stronger character than even Jesus. In many ways, he is the true hero of the piece, ensuring the salvation of humanity and saving the saviour from temptation. Judas no longer acts as a one-dimensional sinner; instead, he is complex and layered, motivated by both his love for his

⁴² Nikos Kazantzakis, *The Last Temptation* (London: Faber and Faber, 1961), p. 254.

homeland and his faith in Jesus. His displays of violence and disdain for Jesus' other followers is unique to this work; although the Gospel of Judas places him in a similar way narratively, that version does not have the harshness present in *The Last Temptation*. Scorsese and Kazantzakis allow Judas a full-fledged character arc in order to answer the question of his motivation, both in the betrayal and in his devotion to Jesus in the first place. Despite his edge, he is sympathetic in his passion and loyalty.

The Judas of *Jesus Christ Superstar* (portrayed by Carl Anderson) is notable for his dramatic and highly sympathetic departure from the traditional version of the character. Directed by Norman Jewison and based on Andrew Lloyd-Webber's musical of the same name, the film is a rock opera that follows the last days of Jesus' life and his relationships with those closest to him.⁴³ Here, Judas is arguably the protagonist and is depicted as having once been close to Jesus and admiring him greatly. However, he has since become disillusioned with him and his message. In contrast to *The Last Temptation*, this Judas is distinctly non-revolutionary, with a fear of Jesus' group becoming part of the uprising and being targeted by Roman authorities. Much of the film involves his questioning and criticism of Jesus. By the time Judas approaches the Pharisees to betray Jesus, he feels as though he has no other option, as Jesus' movement is growing further from its original ideals and the potential consequences are becoming more serious. He tells the Pharisees that "I really didn't come here of my own accord" and initially rejects payment for his information, only taking the silver upon being told he could use it to help the poor. Following this, Judas attends the Last Supper, where he has a final confrontation with Jesus. This concludes with Judas threatening to not turn Jesus in and "ruin [his] ambition," while Jesus tells him to go.

Judas does betray Jesus, tenderly kissing him, and he is taken to trial. Judas reappears later and sees Jesus beaten and bloody, at which point he comes horrified at what he has done and begins to repent. As he returns to the Pharisees and throws their money at them, he attempts to pray to Jesus, looking for forgiveness; he states, "Christ I know you can't hear me/But I only did what you wanted me to." He runs off in distress, angry with God, realising that he knew all the time that Judas would play a role in his plan. The guilt quickly becomes too much and Judas hangs himself, telling God, "You have murdered

⁴³ It should be noted that this film is a cinematic adaptation of the stage musical *Jesus Christ Superstar*, which was first performed in 1971. The film and the play are similar enough to warrant an exclusive focus on the film here; however, the stage performance did lead the way for other biblical interpretations in the theatre. Examples include *Your Arms Too Short to Box With God* (1972), *Cotton Patch Gospel* (1981), and *Southampton Passion* (2011).

me.” *Jesus Christ Superstar*’s Judas is full of doubt and torment. His motivation for the betrayal stems from a fear of the consequences of Jesus’ popularity in the politically unstable Jerusalem. It is later revealed that this was not in fact a choice made purely by Judas. God is heavily implied to have manipulated him into the role. Some justice is afforded when it is revealed at the end of the film that Judas has gone to heaven and become an angel, but the trauma he suffered at God’s hands remains palpable as he berates Jesus for the flaws in his plan. This Judas is a tragic pawn and his God is a cruel chess master. Despite these details, the events of the film are accurate to the Gospel of Matthew, with little connection to the Gospel of Judas, and very few scenes are added to the narrative. The transformative nature of the work rather comes from the framing of characters and their interactions with one another. The relationship between Judas and God opens an avenue for various wider understandings of the betrayal. Judas is motivated by fear and a duty to protect his people from the potential anger of the Romans. This anxiety is preyed upon and manipulated by God. Indeed, alongside the other two case studies, *Jesus Christ Superstar* explores Judas’ relationship with his spirituality and his role as a disciple in a manner not present in the Gospel of Matthew, and only tangentially in the Gospel of Judas.

The Implications of Interpretation

Investigations into Judas’ relationship with his faith reveal ideas about the nature of not only Judas, but also of God himself. While nothing specific is said about Judas’ spirituality in the Gospel of Matthew, the Gospel of Judas demonstrates some connection between Judas and the religious as Jesus reveals cosmic truths to him. However, he is more a recipient of the experience, leaving plenty of room for interpretations to discuss his faith and his role as a disciple. The latter two of Borges’ ‘Three Versions of Judas’ is highly concerned with spirituality. The second is so humbled by his religion that he renounces Heaven as an act of faith, and the third is the very embodiment of God on Earth. In both cases, his connection to the divine is at the forefront of the text, exploring an avenue largely unconsidered by the ancient interpretations. Kazantzakis and Scorsese’s Judas also has a distinct perspective of faith, although it differs to anything suggested by Borges. His relationship with religion comes from his revolutionary motivations, and his dedication to Jesus originally forms due to Judas’ hope that Jesus will lead the movement against Rome. The fact

that it is rooted in politics does not seem to dilute his faith; if anything, it strengthens it, with the narrative stating multiple times that Judas is the strongest and most dedicated of the disciples. Indeed, it is implied that his connection to the spiritual is greater than even that of Jesus, as Judas is the only one who immediately sees that the “guardian angel” is in fact Satan manipulating Jesus. This theme of divine manipulation is shared with *Jesus Christ Superstar*; however, in the latter case, it is God who is exploitative. Judas spends the first two thirds of the narrative at odds with his religion, having lost faith in Jesus. These complications are later revealed to have been the influence of God, as his plan necessitated Judas betraying Jesus. This is framed as cruel and unjust due to the consequences suffered by Judas, and Judas later criticises the plan as a whole for its flawed choices in method and time period. *Jesus Christ Superstar*’s version of Judas is alienated from his faith through no fault of his own; the betrayer is betrayed by God. Each of these case studies offers a different interpretation of Judas’ relationship with religion, but ultimately they come to similar conclusions regarding its role in his motivations for his various actions through the narratives.

These versions of the Judas story fill gaps in motivation and character left by the gospels of Matthew and Judas. They solve ambiguities not addressed in the ancient works’ focus on Jesus, but in this they do not depart from the fundamental aspects of the narrative offered by the two source texts. The “governing statements” theorised by Foucault are the cornerstones of how Judas exists in the Jesus story. Details such as Jesus’ position, the betrayal, and implications of the crucifixion are left untouched by all of the interpolations because without these there would be no context in which to ‘play’ with Judas. In addition to the fanfiction model being key to the versions’ understandings of Judas, their diversity in interpretation necessitates a social precedent for such subjective possibility for the character. This is, of course, the individualism of the late nineteenth century and the *Kunstwollen* that resulted from the shift. In order for this kind of analysis of Judas to become so widespread and accepted by society, that society must be open to the ideas contained in the examination. The interpolation is only successful if its audience is ready to accept it. This is further evidenced by the circumstances of the source texts themselves. Both were composed within the first three hundred years of the Christian faith, and both are possibly adaptations of the hypothesised Q source. However, only The Gospel of Matthew was accepted into the emerging tradition, with

The Gospel of Judas largely overlooked until the twentieth century. Divergent views of Judas have existed for centuries, but the dominant culture of the time was unwilling to admit versions of the Jesus narrative that did not conform to their dogmas. This reveals an unwillingness to entertain diverse views of religious narratives in general: multiple versions may have existed, but they all reached the same consensus. In contrast, the twentieth century largely welcomed the complicated conceptions of religion created by 'play' with Judas and his role. The fanfiction method is nothing new, but the *Kunstwollen* allowing it certainly is.

Conclusion

Hermeneutics have long encouraged 'play' with texts of all kinds, and fanfiction continues to follow this tradition in new, emerging ways. Indeed, since the beginning of the twentieth century, fanfiction has revolutionised textual transformations by making it accessible to all consumers, rather than restricting it to academics. This spread of interpretation presented a perfect platform for the Protestant fixation on "playing" with Biblical texts. This revolution of hermeneutics coupled with the rise of individualism created a specific atmosphere of *Kunstwollen* that allowed for radical interpretation of formerly untouchable sacred texts; keeping in mind, of course, that these texts are themselves ancient works of interpretation. The new opportunity for transformation quickly took hold of Judas and created works, presenting a range of different takes on his character and actions. From these interpretations, we can not only ascertain a clearer view of how Judas may become sympathetic, but also of how writers and filmmakers view the religious context that villainises the character in the first place. Judas' relationship with his faith is uncovered by the three case studies examined here, and through this process we also discover depictions of God and his plan that are not reverential, but critical. These observations and judgments are interpretations that could not have been widely discussed prior to the late nineteenth century due to a culture of sanctity and conformity. In the modern environment allowing for seemingly limitless interpretation of any text, sacred or otherwise, the question is not whether a transformation will take place, but rather, when, and with what results.