

Jesus and *Kerygma*: Retellings of the Jesus Myth in Four First Person
Narratives

by

Sarah Joy Freedman

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of
The University of Manitoba
in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of English, Film and Theatre
University of Manitoba
Winnipeg

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FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

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For my mother, whose hard work, patience, and encouragement has helped me to succeed

and

For my father, for introducing me to the author that started it all

Acknowledgements and Thanks

This thesis would not have been possible without the hard work, dedication, and support of my advisor, Professor D. Lenoski. His enthusiasm, knowledge, and patience helped me at all stages of the thesis. Our endless discussions were intellectually stimulating and insightful, as well as produced a friendship I will always treasure. I would also like to thank Professor R. Smith and Professor E. Grislis for their willingness to participate in the execution and defense of this thesis. Their various backgrounds applied fresh eyes during the culmination of this thesis resulting in illuminating feedback, and presenting ideas that may not have otherwise been found. Thank you Max Leonov, Hayley Erdman, and Erin Westbrook, your love and friendship helped me through the difficult times in the creation of this thesis, and I thank you, when at the best of times, you fondly listened to me talk excitedly about the thesis. Thanks are also due to Allegra Levy and Joshua Freedman, two wonderful people who never doubted the success of this thesis. I am also grateful to Ruth Levy, whose role as an incredible guide through Jerusalem helped me to affirm and cement the conclusions of this thesis. Lastly, let me express my gratitude to my friends at the University of Manitoba who were always willing to listen and discuss a thesis that was not their own.

Abstract

“Jesus and *Kerygma*: Retellings of the Jesus Myth in Four First Person Narratives” is an investigation into the rhetorical methods and figurative language that are used to dispense Jesus’ *kerygma*. The thesis discusses the following novels: Norman Mailer’s *The Gospel According to the Son*, Leonard Wibberley’s *The Seven Hills*, Morley Callaghan’s *A Time for Judas*, and Nino Ricci’s *Testament*, and argues that when dealing with the Jesus myth authors will inevitably mythologize Jesus because his *kerygma* requires the language of myth in order to be understood by listeners and readers. By departing from the criticisms of Rudolf Bultmann and Northrop Frye, the thesis concludes that authors are confined/liberated by the literary methods employed by, but not exclusive to, the Bible when retelling the story of Jesus Christ.

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INTRODUCTION

A Comparison Between Bultmann's Theological Theory and Frye's Literary Theory on the Topic of *Kerygma*

In English literature, especially in the four novels which this thesis examines, Jesus is at various times constructed in two different ways: as Jesus of Nazareth the man and Jesus Christ the Messiah. The two names for the same character equally represent the enigma behind the Jesus myth.¹ Since the figure Jesus has two names he immediately becomes a figure that is malleable for literary purposes as the names refer to a man who is both human and divine. Recasting Jesus' character is nothing new as can be seen in the Canonical Gospel tradition and in the gospels that did not make it into the New Testament (Mary, Judas, Thomas, Philip). Study groups such as the Jesus Seminar have even made it their mission to research all the gospels that can be found in order to discover, from a historical perspective, Jesus' true nature.² The fact that Jesus' character has been reconstructed several times throughout literature and within the biblical tradition means that an accurate portrayal of the real Jesus is almost impossible because there are no narratives that agree completely about who Jesus was or what he did.

Though Jesus is an excellent character canvas for contemporary fiction writers, an important aspect of his character that will always remain consistent, despite any form of

¹ The word myth in this thesis is defined in its literary context, yet slightly beyond. Jesus is not a mythical, insubstantial being as are the gods of Greek and Roman mythology. He operates within myth with a larger spiritual and religious context. Jesus is both a man and the Messiah (not to be confused with a mythological character like Hercules) within this myth; a larger than life figure that needs the literary elements of a mythology to be even slightly comprehended. Myth, in the case of this thesis, moves beyond the literary idea of myth as a story which recounts the events and history of a people.

² In his article, "From the Humanity of Christ to the Historical Jesus," William P. Loewe quotes Bob Funk, co-chair of the Jesus Seminar, who elaborates on the mission of the Jesus Seminar: "'the need to set Jesus free...from the scriptural and creedal and experiential prisons in which we have incarcerated him [a] reinvention of Christianity' that would replace traditional faith and practice with a faith constructed 'on a more rational and historically accurate view of the life and teachings of Jesus'" (Loewe 317).

retelling, is his *kerygma*. *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines *kerygma* as “preaching [or] proclamation of religious truth” (OED). As simple as the definition of *kerygma* may be, it is also accurate. The actions, parables and speeches attributed to Jesus in the Canonical Gospels all move towards proclaiming God’s religious truth to everyone who has ears to hear. Nevertheless, *kerygma* is a word that is more complex and can be defined in many ways beyond the OED’s simple definition. According to *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, *kerygma* is used “some 61 times [in the New Testament] to describe the proclamation of the kingdom of God and of the ‘gospel of God’” (NCE 157).³ Northrop Frye and Rudolf Bultmann (academics whose work is invaluable to this thesis) both maintain that *kerygma* is a process by which truth is dispensed, but both believe that the method is through largely different means. They differ in that Frye takes a literary approach to *kerygma* whereas Bultmann’s approach is to demythologize the Bible since he prefers to base his understanding of Jesus on historical facts.⁴

Regardless of how Frye and Bultmann critically view *kerygma*, they both cannot deny the conclusion that is drawn in *The Bible as Literature*: the dual purpose of the Canonical Gospels is to proclaim the news Jesus preaches; and Jesus, as God’s messenger dispenses *kerygma* to teach readers/listeners about God’s words (Gabel 214). *Kerygma* works through proclamation, either orally or through a written narrative, and is often dispensed with

³ There are several examples of *kerygma*’s mention in both the Canonical Gospels and the other texts in the New Testament. One example occurs in the Gospel of Mark: “Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God” (Mark 1:14). In the quote preaching is the way Jesus dispenses *kerygma*.

⁴ In addition, it must be said that this thesis departs from Theodore Ziolkowski’s book, *Fictional Transfigurations of Jesus*, which seeks to establish a unique literary genre to account for novels about Jesus, or novels that reflect Jesus’ story through characters, plot structure, and symbolism. Ziolkowski’s definition of the critical genre he is creating falls loosely into a Bultmannian avenue of thought. Ziolkowski writes that “The fictional transfiguration, in sum, differs from the fictionalizing biography and *Jesus redivivus* to the extent that it introduces a modern hero and not the historical Jesus himself. And it is distinguished from the *imitatio Christi* and the ‘pseudonyms of Christ’ to the extent that its action is specifically based on the life of the historical Jesus as depicted in the Gospels, and not loosely inspired by the conception of the kerygmatic Christ as it has evolved in Christian faith” (Ziolkowski 29). Thus it is quite evident in this definition that this thesis and Ziolkowski’s thoughts depart largely on the ground of the mythical and on the issue of Jesus’ *kerygma*, an issue that is integral when retelling the Jesus myth from a first person narrative perspective as do the novels in this thesis.

rhetorical constructions, such as metaphor, to manipulate language in order to reveal complex messages. Although *kerygma* is concerned with proclaiming religious truth, such truth is often dispensed through stories or parables which is why the specific novels, all written retellings of the Jesus myth, were chosen for this thesis. They each give the reader some *kerygma* through a unique fictional narrative. *Kerygma* is the central focus of this thesis and we will look at how *kerygma* is expressed through literary methods in Norman Mailer's *The Gospel According to the Son*; Leonard Wibberley's *The Seven Hills* (previously published as *The Testament of Theophilus*); Morley Callaghan's *A Time for Judas*; and Nino Ricci's *Testament*.

Before I give a more detailed analysis of *kerygma*, it is important to note that this thesis will use *The King James Bible* as the authoritative theological source on the Canonical Gospels. *The King James Bible* is a necessary source as it is arguably the most influential English translation of the Bible on English Canonical Literature. Consequently, the issue of interpretation and retellings finds its roots in the fact that the biblical text most often employed is itself a translation, and therefore like all other translations *The King James Bible* is an inevitable retelling of the original (Greek and Aramaic) stories in the New Testament. David Jasper even notes that the separation between the Bible as a religious text and literature is not that different because "for Christian Europe the Bible has always been a translated book. Almost every line of its text serves to remind us that it is about the people of another time and place who belonged to other kinds of societies from our own and who spoke different languages from ourselves" (*The Bible and Literature* 3). It is therefore not surprising that two of the novels examined in this thesis (Mailer and Wibberley) rely heavily on *The King James Bible* (the language it uses, certain symbols and metaphors) in their reconstruction of the Jesus myth, yet they also include what could be described as popular

Christian ideas;⁵ only Callaghan and Ricci stray from retelling the Jesus myth with popular Christian undertones.

Three of the novels are written in the first person from the perspective of a character whose life has been touched by Jesus. Mailer's novel is the exception. It uses first person narrative, but allows Jesus to tell his own story. First person narration in these novels is important because it can have two effects on how readers interpret the novel. The first person narration provides readers with intimate knowledge of the character's mind while he/she has experiences with and around Jesus. Simultaneously, first person narration allows the reader to be aware of the construction of Jesus through these various retellings as characters/narrators often recognize that they are part of something larger (history and the construction of the Jesus myth).

This knowledge which characters have because of what they have witnessed ties into the language of testimony and its connection to first person narration. Regardless of whether the narrator is Jesus, or a character randomly assigned by the writer, all four novels are written as first person testimonials/narratives (not to be confused with confessionals) where narrators grapple with describing Jesus as a man and with creating an accurate portrayal of the historical period and region in which they and Jesus lived. One must recall that the language of testimony is supposedly based on the facts that a witness experienced or saw, but regardless of these testimonial facts, the narrator's testimony, in these retellings of the Jesus myth, is altered by the fact that Jesus, whether depicted historically or as a divine being, is an extraordinary and enigmatic character. Consequently, when one testifies to Jesus' actions the language of metaphor is needed to explain what he does. Additionally, while the first person

⁵ It is common knowledge now that Mary Magdalene was not a prostitute. Such a misconception, that has made its way into the popular tradition, that she was a prostitute was developed by Gregory the Great who lived between (c. 540-604 CE) and developed Mary Magdalene's new identity by combining "'Mary of Bethany, Lazarus' sister, Mary Magdalene, the witness

testimonials allow the writers/characters to construct and recreate mythical stories about Jesus, from the subjective point of view of the witness and his time, the language of testimony is also subject to the same biases in the author. Conversely, a first person narrator can also make mistakes or deceive and manipulate readers through the story told. Each narrator perceives Jesus and his actions differently and the narrator's point of view regarding Jesus' actions are influenced by the narrator's relationship to/with Jesus, as well as the narrator's cultural and religious background. For instance, pagan narrators that appear in some of the novels explored, for example Wibberley's *Theophilus* and Callaghan's *Philo*, see Jesus quite differently in comparison to narrators such as Judas in the Ricci and Callaghan novels.

Such use of first person narration can be best understood when analyzed with mytho-critical tools that Frye uses in his notebooks, lectures, and three books written during the latter part of his long academic career (*The Great Code*; *Words with Power*; *The Double Mirror*). In *The Great Code* and *Words with Power* Frye takes the idea of *kerygma*, from theologian Rudolf Bultmann, and revolutionizes the term.⁶ *Kerygma* is a word which cannot be overlooked when criticizing Western Christian literature. The emphasis on Western literature is important to keep in mind as Frye believes that generally it is the Christian Bible, specifically *The King James Bible*, "that is important for English literature and the Western cultural tradition" (*The Great Code* 7).⁷ Frye's mytho-criticism is also rooted within a Western literary canon that acknowledges the influence of the Bible on specific works. When using Frye as an academic source, it is crucial to keep in mind the impact that Western

of the resurrection' and the sinner'" found in Luke 7 (Thompson 4-5).

⁶ Fabiny comments that "the word *kerygma* is associated mainly with the theology of Bultmann and in Bultmann's view *kerygma* is opposed to myth, which he regards as an obstacle to it...I shall give my reasons for saying that myth is the linguistic vehicle of *kerygma*, and that to 'demythologize' any part of the Bible would be the same thing as to obliterate it" (Fabiny 89).

literature has on his literary criticism. Consequently, Frye's view of Western literature impacts his use of *kerygma* and its relation to the issue of retellings, and revealing truth through several literary methods. The four novels show how the Jesus myth has traveled from ancient Israel into the transformed literary forms of the North American writers that this thesis explores. Therefore, it is appropriate to use Frye's Westernized literary criticism when examining Western texts and the presence of *kerygma* within them.

For Frye, in contrast to Bultmann, *kerygma* is deeply rooted in myth. Frye's understanding of *kerygma* is based on what he calls, "the existential metaphor" (Harris 151). In *Words with Power* Frye defines the existential metaphor best when he relates it to Heidegger's use of the word 'ecstatic'. "The word ecstatic means, approximately, standing outside oneself: a state in which the real self, whatever reality is and whatever the self is in this context, enters a different order of things from that of the now dispossessed ego" (*Words with Power* 82). The existential metaphor helps to explain all the complexities of religious truth that are beyond human understanding through the use of comparison and specific biblical imagery. Frye believes that "the ecstatic [or existential] metaphor [(terms which he uses interchangeably hence why *kerygma* is so loosely defined in his criticism)] is transformed into *kerygma*" through the narrator's/orator's "capacity to communicate with others" (Harris 151-152). All of the narrators discussed in this thesis have the ability to communicate Jesus' *kerygma* simply through the literary manner by which they retell their involvement in his story. Mailer's novel is an exception to this rule as it is Jesus (the narrator) that uses literary language to express his *kerygma*.

Metaphor is not present in Bultmann's understanding of *kerygma*. Though Bultmann's

⁷ The thesis will not focus on original Hebraic texts, nor the Babylonian or Greek translations, as these form a part of an entirely different religious tradition and may not directly impact the novels that the thesis investigates.

ideas about *kerygma* now possess less prestige among academics,⁸ his influence on the foundation and understanding of *kerygma* as it relates to Twentieth Century religious interpretation (and consequently Frye's literary reaction and revaluation of the term *kerygma*) is rooted in his theology. Bultmann's conclusions about *kerygma* may be partially dismissed now because his call to demythologize Jesus is unconvincing, but to ignore his influence regarding the complexities of the term *kerygma* would be a gross error. Ricci's *Testament* specifically reflects Bultmann's theology, further demonstrating that the importance of *kerygma* is still a contemporary issue in Christian literature, and the term needs to be accurately defined. Before the contemporary research on *kerygma*, in Frye's mytho-criticism *kerygma* remains nothing more than a vague idea which is alluded to in several passages of Frye's later texts, but is not explored deeply enough. Readers are told how they can receive Jesus' *kerygma*, but not what exactly *kerygma* is. Such a description is too vague and accounts for *kerygma*'s lax definition. It is a complex word that can be found in various forms of literature and under varying circumstances. Moreover, depending on the novel in which it appears, *kerygma* can be delivered in different ways to readers or characters. For instance, in the novels selected for this thesis *kerygma* is often either dispensed through Jesus' own mouth, or it can be preached by his disciples, and furthermore can be presented unknowingly through a third party.⁹

The research I have done has led me to the conclusion that *kerygma* proclaims the truth that God is the ultimate creator. It reveals the truth behind his religious doctrine which is preached or acted out by Jesus or any other third party. Most importantly *kerygma*, because of its undeniable connection to literary methods in order for these truths to be known, cannot

⁸ See Michael D Gibson's article "Does Jesus Have a Say in the Kerygma? A Critical Remembrance of Bultmann".

⁹ In the case of this thesis that third party is often a pagan, someone who has yet to be, or never actually becomes one of Jesus' followers.

be separated from myth, nor can it exist exclusively in historical time (meaning based on facts without any connections to the unexplainable).

Through such a clarification regarding *kerygma*, one can already distinguish the key differences between Frye's understanding of *kerygma* and that of Bultmann. Bultmann does not believe that any of Jesus' *kerygma* can be found outside of those events that can be proven by fact. He states that "[a] blind acceptance of the New Testament mythology would be irrational, and to press for its acceptance as an article of faith would be to reduce Christian faith to the level of human achievement," especially when it is seen as a literary work (*Kerygma and Myth* 4). For instance, Bultmann disregards Jesus' miracles and visions because he argues: that "to defend their historicity by recourse to nervous disorders or hypnotic effects only serves to underline the fact" that the miracles are not miraculous (5). In this case, the experiences that Jesus had on the mountain when he encounters God are not valid, nor are the descriptions of Jesus being tempted by the Devil in the wilderness, and certainly not the resurrection.

The only moment which Bultmann believes Jesus dispenses *kerygma* is in the historical act of him crucified on the cross because the act of crucifixion is something which believers experience alongside Jesus Christ (36). To elaborate, Bultmann states that "the cross is not just an event of the past which can be contemplated in detachment, but the eschatological event in and beyond time, for as far as its meaning—that is, its faith—is concerned, it is an ever-present reality"; the crucifixion is part of history, but also moves beyond history because of the spiritual truth which the act represents (36). For Bultmann the act is manifest in the Easter celebration because for him "[t]he real Easter faith is faith in the word of preaching which brings illumination [*kerygma*]. If the event of Easter Day is in any sense an historical event additional to the event of the cross, it is nothing else than the rise of faith in

the risen Lord” (42). At first it may seem that Bultmann contradicts himself, for is not the acceptance of a resurrected Christ a myth as well? But Bultmann gets around his own contradiction by stating that the *kerygma* is manifest as the believer accepts faith in Jesus when he is on the cross being crucified to bring forth God’s truth, not the fact that he may have reappeared after being placed in the tomb.

In contrast, Frye’s overall criticism concludes that *kerygma* cannot exist without myth or metaphor, and though he does not state such a view specifically his thoughts are implied in Alvin Lee’s introduction to Frye’s *The Great Code*. Lee outlines some of Frye’s chapters in *The Great Code*: “the language called *kerygma* [i]s the linguistic vehicle of what traditionally has been called revelation; the realization that the primary narrative lines of the Bible are myth ... and are not concerned with scientific, casual history; critical recognition that the Bible’s imagery is implicit metaphor rather than description of the natural world” (Lee xiv). Accordingly, *kerygma*, as Frye sees it, cannot exist without metaphor as the way characters/narrators dispense *kerygma* is only through the literary methods employed by the Bible. Some of the literary methods which are confined in myth are the typological use of water, deserts, gardens, light, and historical references as a means to place the myth within a designated time. Furthermore, since *kerygma* is an abstract term, it tends to be a truthful tenor constructed through the vehicle of parables (Jesus’ favorite method of proclamation), the belief in Jesus’ miracles, and through the story of Jesus’ life, in all its contradictions. Even if authors attempt to tell a story about the historical Jesus, they are inadvertently dispensing his *kerygma* as the language of retelling a story about Jesus is still confined by the narrative in the Canonical Gospels with its mythological undertones.

Whether or not a novel is historical, or entirely fantastical, *kerygma* transcends the genres because the objective is not to educate the reader about the historical Jesus, or the

divine Jesus, but about the truth that can be found by following Jesus' teachings and adopting his exemplary life. Each novel reveals *kerygma* in its own way, whether through a personal gospel (Mailer), myth (Wibberley), rediscovered manuscript (Callaghan), or historical narrative (Ricci). Nevertheless, the *kerygma* that Jesus spreads within the specific novels examined in this thesis is seen mostly through his actions, subtle rhetoric, and the narrators' reinterpretation of their experiences with Jesus as they are illustrated through a variety of literary techniques which are unavoidable when retelling the myth of Jesus Christ or that of Jesus of Nazareth.

Though Jesus undergoes many difficulties in each of the novels, in a variety of plots he is inevitably crucified, resurrected and seen by someone whose life he influenced after death. Moreover, Mailer, Wibberley and Callaghan go through great literary difficulty to bring all the Canonical Gospels together in a unified fashion to tell the story of Jesus and to bring about the *kerygma* in a smooth narrative flow. These three authors try to amalgamate all the Canonical Gospels and then Ricci, author of the latest of all four novels, takes parts from the Canonical Gospels, but then breaks the Jesus myth up into four gospels yet again, dispensing the *kerygma* in a revamped New Testament style, as the title of his work, *Testament*, indicates. Therefore, the question remains why any of these novels are of remote importance to the larger Religion and Literature field of literary studies, and the answer lies in their differences which are uncovered through a focus on the concept of *kerygma*, which has been redefined for the purpose of this thesis. I attempt to examine how the writers discussed in this thesis are aided/confined by literary methods used by, though not exclusive to, the Bible. Thus, Jesus' *kerygma* is inevitably revealed and mythologized in Norman Mailer's *The Gospel According to the Son*; Leonard Wibberley's *The Seven Hills*; Morley Callaghan's *A Time for Judas*; and Nino Ricci's *Testament*.

CHAPTER 1

Norman Mailer's *Kerygmatic Gospel* by Jesus Christ: Retelling the Myth of the Canonical Gospels

Norman Mailer's *The Gospel According to the Son* inspired the idea for this thesis. His attempt to write in the first person from Jesus' perspective was too intriguing to ignore. In *The Gospel According to the Son* Jesus has a strong voice throughout his own gospel,¹⁰ while in the other novels that this thesis will explore Jesus' voice is muted in favor of another first person narrator's voice. In fact, in Mailer's novel, Jesus effectively establishes his presence when he asserts that he will tell his own story to the best of his ability (Mailer 4). Mailer has already fulfilled Paul Ricoeur's call that "kerygma must include Jesus' past in Christ's present, for if not, it runs the risk of interpreting the latter in the gnostic sense or in that of a Hellenistic myth" because Jesus' gospel is written after he becomes Christ and focuses on how he came to embrace his divinity ("From Proclamation to Narrative" 502). Since Jesus readily admits that he has faults as a narrator, he becomes admirable to readers because of his humility and honesty; Jesus' quest is for truth, but he is nonetheless imperfect.

In addition, Mailer works with the knowledge that readers have difficulty doubting (whether they subscribe to Christianity or not) Jesus as a narrator simply because of his stature in Western literature. Accordingly, Mailer has Jesus recognize that his own narrative may have gaps, while clarifying that the Canonical Gospels are imperfect as well. Jesus' correcting technique is both an attempt by Mailer to remythologize Jesus' narrative the way he recalls it, while also clarifying his own history. Readers can expect a version of truth from Jesus as he even states, "[He] would like to

¹⁰ This thesis will be working with David Jaspers understanding of the word "gospel". He writes that "the term 'gospel' itself has two applications: either to the basic message about Jesus Christ, 'the gospels,' which can be communicated by word of mouth without recourse to documents, or to the four documents, 'the gospels,' which carry that message" (*The Bible as Literature* 214). It is for the above reasons that when this thesis does not capitalize "gospel" it is because I am referencing either the fictional documents created by the authors in this thesis, or because I mean specifically Jesus' own message; a difference which will be clear in the individual sentences.

remain closer to the truth. Mark, Matthew, Luke and John were seeking to enlarge their fold” whereas he does not identify the latter as his objective (Mailer 4). Only here does Mailer remain at all close to Bultmann’s criticism.¹¹ For Bultmann “regards the New Testament texts as being ascriptions from the early Church to the character of Jesus, in order to accommodate their message and their faith,” an argument that most would agree with (Gibson 92). Jesus’ claim is not that he can provide the ultimate truth of his own narrative, but that he will attempt to tell all that he feels is relevant in his gospel without having a specific denominational objective. Consequently, Mailer’s Jesus is an unreliable narrator because readers see him as a flawed human being and a divine man. Readers still feel inclined to trust and be connected to Jesus simply because he recounts his narrative in a genuine tone. Moreover, he acknowledges that he has faults due to his struggles to reconcile his divine and human natures. Mailer creates a small community between his readers and Jesus as they experience a historical Jesus who becomes divine. The novel seems to argue Tracy and Johnson’s position which is that “the historical Jesus’ is not the basis of Christian faith. Faith, as Tracy argued, is response to Jesus encountered through the mediation of community and tradition as God’s self-communication in the present,” and those who are part of the Christian tradition after the resurrection become witnesses to “Jesus in his religious significance as the Christ” (Loewe 329).

However, Jesus’ quest for truth is intertwined with his *kerygma* in Mailer’s novel in that his written words, and those of God, proclaim the true story of Jesus’ life, ministry and God’s teachings. Jesus is also a strong character in Mailer’s novel because as the protagonist his character is more well rounded. In the other novels, it is Jesus’ impact on the narrator(s) that the main character (often the narrator) records, and Jesus’ character is at some points flat or the novel only focuses on one aspect of his being (human/divine). The other three novels in this thesis present point-of-view

¹¹ While Frye and Bultmann are on opposite sides of the spectrum (the former being a literary critic and the latter a theologian), they are nevertheless in conversation with one another because at the root they are concerned with the same issue: Jesus and his *kerygma*.

testimonials, but not from Jesus' vantage point as in *The Gospel According to the Son*. Here readers encounter Jesus' testimony on his life. Much of the information Jesus provides his readers about himself is rooted in his own memories and what he has gathered from stories told about him in the Canonical Gospels so he may refute or confirm statements about his life and ministry. Mailer, like Frye, "treats the Bible as a totally unified book, disregarding the scholarly agreement that it actually was written by dozens of writers [(including redactors)] in three different languages over a period of a thousand years" (Marx 164). Since Mailer devotes much effort to creating a Jesus with whom readers can identify, Jesus' voice is powerful, and his struggles and successes seem real. When Jesus recounts his own discovery and acceptance that he is the Son of God, readers may find themselves persuaded and affirming the same conclusion.

Furthermore, *kerygma* is close to the surface of the narrative because of the biblical language Jesus uses. It is up to readers to acknowledge the religious truth he preaches or not. Acceptance of Jesus' message does not create *kerygma*, it is ever-present and must simply be recognized. Paradoxically, it is Jesus' distinct human aspects, which Mailer constructs, that make him relatable, and also highlight his divine dimension. Unlike Bultmann, Mailer does not radically separate "'the actual Jesus who lived' from 'the confessed, witnessed Christ'" because he understands that Jesus' duality is central to *kerygma* (Loewe 322). This is a duality which Jesus recognizes in himself as well: "I had to wonder whether it was wise for a modest man to work with gold [in carpentry]. All the same, I was ready. And for what, I did not know. I felt as if I were a man enclosing another man within" (Mailer 26). Jesus' words reflect both his knowledge of his own potential and his readiness to accept, and project, the divinity within his humanity.

What distinguishes Mailer's Jesus from the Jesus of the other novels is the unique access readers have to Jesus' thoughts, and the belief that Jesus is equally human and divine. Mailer's decision to create such a well rounded Jesus recalls the decisions at the Council of Nicea in 325 to

create the *Nicene Creed* which stripped away the controversy of Jesus being human or divine and firmly stated that Jesus was divine and also human.¹² Mailer follows the Orthodox and Roman Catholic traditions displayed in texts like the *Nicene Creed* and the *Apostles' Creed* and thus he constructs a Jesus who is distinctly human and divine. His focus on Jesus' duality is what allows for a stronger connection between the readers and Jesus.

Due to his literary tact, Mailer demonstrates that one does not have to be Christian to be affected by the story of Jesus. For instance, Mailer was born and brought up as a Jew, and from his detailed conversation about God with Michael Lennon,¹³ Mailer claims that he finds the character/literary aspects of the Judeo-Christian God interesting but he does not identify himself as Christian, nor proclaim himself to be part of the religious movement *Jews for Jesus*.¹⁴ Mailer neither denies nor accepts Jesus as the Son of God, but he acknowledges that Jesus could be “a principle of love, compassion, forgiveness, and mercy [which] is something we can all comprehend” (Lennon 11). In fact, Mailer believes that when “Jesus was tortured [and crucified, the Devil won]. At this point, God in His brilliance came up with an answer to the Devil [after] a crushing defeat[; Jesus died for our sins.] That makes more sense to me: God was rewriting the depths of what had happened after the events ensued—which is exactly what humans do all the time” (175). Certainly Mailer is aware that he also falls within this habit of restructuring stories. Mailer's novel both retells Jesus' story, and has Jesus recording his own story from his perspective.

In fact, what Mailer does is rather daring. Though he does not rescind his Judaism, Mailer still writes a personal gospel from the perspective of the Son of God. In addition, Mailer identifies his

¹² The Nicene Creed: “We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen. We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one being with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven.”

¹³ See *On God: An Uncommon Conversation*.

¹⁴ According to the *Jews for Jesus* official website they label themselves as “a Jewish evangelistic agency dedicated to bringing the Gospel into places where a significantly Jewish testimony is needed,” otherwise rephrased as converting Jews to a belief in Jesus as the Messiah (<http://www.jewsforjesus.ca/aboutus.aspx>).

Jesus as part of a Jewish sect called the Essenes who merely preached a different variety of Judaism.¹⁵ Mailer's Jesus also claims that he will be preaching a different form of Christianity. On the first page of his gospel Jesus claims that he will be telling a different kind of story, unlike the exaggerations in the Canonical Gospels: "I would not say that Mark's gospel is false, it has much exaggeration. And I would offer less for Matthew, and for Luke and John, who gave me words I never uttered and described me as gentle when I was pale with rage" (Mailer 3-4). Readers sense at first that they will be getting a rather blasphemous Mailer novel that reshapes Jesus' divinity and provides a historical account of Jesus' life. However, towards the end, despite small bumps in the gospel's narrative road, Jesus ends up confirming some of what the Canonical Gospels state about his life and miracles, and Jesus' life even conforms, for the most part, to the popular Christian tradition.

In the end Mailer's novel largely conforms to mainstream Christianity because *The Gospel According to the Son* begins as a rebellious novel. The novel quintessentially depicts how the modern era is still unable to distinguish between the written words in the Bible and the popular Christian tradition. Mailer's literary decisions are precisely those which Bultmann speaks out against. Bultmann blames most of Jesus' mythologization on the Church: "The Church, in other words, has contrived a false understanding of Jesus in its formulation of the kerygma of Christ ... the Church has created of Jesus, a mythology folk hero, where 'central and peripheral motifs [have been] taken over from popular and even perhaps literary miracles stories... The process of transferring some available stories to a hero (or a healer or even god) is frequently to be found in the history of literature and religion'" (Gibson 94-95). Comments, like the above from Bultmann, serve to solidify the arguments of this thesis that authors who, like Mailer, decide to retell Jesus' story will inevitably fall into the same literary patterns that were uniformly established through the

¹⁵ Before Paul and others transformed it into a distinct *Christian* religion.

construction of a bound biblical text like *The King James Bible*. For example, Mailer's decision to depict Mary Magdalene as a prostitute (Mailer 177), despite academic and theological research to the contrary (a fact that Mailer probably knew), demonstrates that Jesus' story is specifically that, a story: one which authors can manipulate and recast to best describe Jesus as the character they believe him to be.

However, there are moments while reading *The Gospel According to the Son* when readers may temporarily feel as though Mailer mocks the Jesus myth. A most significant moment occurs where Jesus is instructed by God to climb the mountain and has visions of the prophets in the Old Testament. In one part of his vision he also sees the prophets of the Canaan fertility god Baal and they are "lacerat[ing] themselves with knives to show their devotion to Baal, yet the god Baal could not speak ... Baal was silent in [Jesus'] presence" (42). The difference between the above and what occurs in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke is that Jesus only sees the prophets Moses and Elias in his mountain vision (Matt 17:3; Luke 9:30). On the surface it seems as though this vision of Baal asserts Jesus' divinity and his supremacy over other gods, which it does. Nevertheless, the fact that Jesus dreams of Baal in the first place, and sees him, certainly demonstrates that not only the Christian God exists, but other gods as well, a conscious undermining on Mailer's part. However, despite this one incident Jesus remains a model figure and continues on his path of self-discovery and dispensing his *kerygma*.

Mailer's novel has more direct *kerygma* than the other three novels because Jesus narrates the entire novel and thus, on some level, he never stops preaching God's religion. A speaking and active God (and Devil) appear in Mailer's novel which adds a more mythical and miraculous flavor to the novel as readers directly hear the voice of God. Hence *kerygma* is dispensed to readers on two levels: once through God and again through Jesus. However, even though God speaks, his words are still dispensed second hand through Jesus in the Son's gospel. Generally *kerygma* is concentrated

through preaching by a second Christian party, whether it be Jesus, his disciples, or an authority within an established church, distinctly a preacher whose job it is to transmit “the living proclamation of the word of God,” otherwise known as the *kerygma* (NCE 158). Such methods of revelation appear in *The Gospel According to the Son* as well as in the other novels in this thesis.¹⁶

Mailer, though not a clergyman sanctioned by any church per se, functions as a medium by which a fictional Jesus and God reiterate *kerygma*. Mailer felt “that being a Jew just might make him an appropriate interpreter for the story of Jesus” (Broadway, *Washington Post*). Readers are no longer simply learning about *kerygma* through a priest or pastor, but from Mailer’s fictional God and Jesus. For instance, God orders Jesus to proclaim his word by reminding his Son of His comments to Ezekiel, “you will speak My words unto them”¹⁷ (Mailer 36). Here God affirms his supremacy, but also gives the words and their theological meaning to Jesus so that His Son may preach it to the Jews. In the previous quotation readers see that God directly instructs Jesus to proclaim his own words; however, what Jesus will proclaim is of more consequence than what God had previously told Ezekiel, as God says, “You are My son, and therefore you will be mightier than a prophet” (36). There are many more conversations between Jesus and God, each of which are key to readers’ understanding Jesus’ *kerygma*. Mailer reestablishes the importance of Jesus’ *kerygma* through meaningful metaphor and the use of simple language in his new, perspective-enhancing gospel.

Readers watch as Mailer follows the Canonical Gospel tradition faithfully, despite Jesus’ early criticism of the Canonical Gospel authors’ motivations. For instance, Jesus confirms that when he was a child he went to the temple and spoke to the rabbis: “According to Joseph and Mary, my words were worthy of a prophet: a miracle” (10). Mailer follows the story as stated in the Gospel of Luke where the young Jesus supposedly said, “How is it that ye sought me? Wist ye not that I must

¹⁶ Nevertheless, *kerygma*, as will be explored in more depth in the subsequent novels, can also be dispensed by a third party who does not already subscribe to Jesus’ teachings.

¹⁷ See Ezekiel 2:1-4 for Mailer’s biblical reference.

be about my Father's business?" (Luke 2:49). In both versions of the story Jesus is engaged in an act of *kerygma*. Before he even knew what and who he was (in both Mailer's novel and the Canonical Gospels) he was already a vehicle for *kerygma* to those most concerned with Jewish law: the rabbis.

The Gospel of Luke goes no further in explaining what Jesus preached to these rabbis, but Mailer does. In the preceding quotation, Jesus' use of metaphor is striking, as metaphor is a crucial element in *kerygma*, opening the imaginative avenue in the mind to be more receptive to metaphors that can "disclose a greater reality which we will know to be true" (*The New Testament and the Literary Imagination* 101). Mailer's Jesus frequently uses metaphor to explain theological ideas: "I could recall telling these learned elders that the Word had lived first in water even as the breath that carries our speech comes forth from our mouths in a cloud on a cold winter morning. Yet clouds also bring rain, I had said, and so the Word lives in the water of our breath. Thereby we belong to God. For all the waters, we know, are His, even as all the rivers go down to the sea" (Mailer 10-11). Through metaphor Jesus confirms the truth in the statement that the Gospel of John begins with: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). The difference between the two is that Jesus' *kerygma* is distinct and implicit in Mailer's novel through such literary methods as metaphor, whereas for John, Jesus is the Word and not just the proclaimer of the Word. In the novel Jesus relates the Word through a simple act of breath, one that everyone experiences and can connect to. It is in this manner that Mailer's use of the Word transforms itself into our critical understanding of *kerygma*. The entire purpose of *kerygma* is to bring the reader to God's truth in a relatable way. Mailer recognizes that *kerygma* is not meant to baffle, but to educate, and what better method to educate readers than through relatable comparisons which essentially function as mini parables.

Thus far this thesis has described both an oratorical form of *kerygma* and a textual one. Jesus proclaims religious truth to those who will listen, but the *kerygma* is likewise transmitted through

texts, written words. Mailer makes *kerygma* explicit when Jesus describes to readers his education up until his visit to the “Great Temple. Like other children, I had started school before the age of five ... By the age of eight, I could even read the language of the old Israelites, and I knew the Commandments, which came down from Moses, and the laws derived from the Commandments”, a substantial amount of Jewish thought (Mailer 20). *Kerygma* is associated as much with the biblical tradition prior to Christianity as it is with Jesus’ own opinions and perspectives. Even Frye remarks that the New Testament only cares “about comparing the events in their accounts of Jesus with what the Old Testament, as they read it, said would happen to the Messiah,” because the New Testament is operating within a specific Old Testament tradition, one which Mailer also draws on substantially (*The Great Code* 63). Jesus communicates *kerygma* through parables and figurative language that invites readers to interpretation, just as readers have access to *kerygma* through their own interpretation of Mailer’s novel, a novel which reinterprets the Bible.

In fact, Jesus goes so far as to comment upon and interpret what he believed, early on in the novel, to be his inspiration for his wisdom and his need for *kerygma* based on the facts of his life: “following our visit to the Great Temple in my twelfth year, I decided that if I had been given wisdom enough to speak to the wise men, that must have come from the spirits of those infants who were killed because of my birth” (Mailer 21). Jesus does not feel that God is his only inspiration. Jesus identifies himself with the memory of the children who lost their lives, because of Herod’s command to kill all the newborn sons, in order that he may fulfill his destiny and dispense *kerygma*. Of course, his belief recalls lines in the Gospel of Matthew: “Verily I say unto you, except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 18:3-4). Readers need to become children captivated by Jesus’ *kerygma* while also recapturing their youthful innocence if they expect to get into his version of heaven, just as Jesus

announces to God once he is reborn after the baptism, “Lord God, I am like a child”; reborn, innocent and ready to preach (Mailer 34).

Oddly enough, Jesus is captivated by the *kerygma* which he reveals to himself, and consequently to the readers, while he grows and becomes aware of his two natures. A decisive moment in *The Gospel According to the Son* occurs when Jesus meets John the Baptist, his cousin. As the ritual baptism takes place, Jesus and John have the vision of the dove descending over Jesus¹⁸ which then leads Jesus to feel “as if His finger blessed my mouth even as the beak of the dove touched my lips. His Word came into me like the burning fire in my bones when I was twelve and sick with fever” (34). God is the one who touches Jesus’ lips through the tangible symbol of the dove and the moment brings with it the prophetic knowledge to dispense *kerygma*, a Mailer addition. Mailer describes God’s act of delivering *kerygma* to his Son through metaphor, but the typological images he chooses, those of the dove and fire, are not new to the biblical narrative of the Old nor New Testament. Mailer operates within the Judaic tradition as it comes down to Jesus, therefore affirming what Frye asserts about the typological relationship between the Old and New Testament. Frye provides the examples about how “[t]raditionally man lives in four elements—earth, water, air and fire—and in Christian typology we have seen something of the imagery of resurrection in connection with the first two ... Deliverance out of fire comes into the references to Egypt as a ‘furnace of iron’ (I Kings 8:51 and elsewhere)” (*The Great Code* 234). Much as Moses was inspired by God to preach to the wandering Jews out of Egypt through a burning bush, a similar miraculous technique is used to inspire Jesus. Mailer recalls such fiery symbolism to establish the very Christian parallels between Jesus and Moses. When the dove touches Jesus’ lips he recalls the forgotten moment when God first gave him the *kerygma*, the moment when he was on fire because of the religious truth he was gaining from God which transformed him into the human/divine vehicle for

God's *kerygma*. However, even despite these two strong moments of revelation, Jesus still needs to accept and have faith that the *kerygma* God transmits to him is real and not inspired by the Devil. Only when Jesus is able to accept his duality does the *kerygma* flow.

The readers see Jesus' struggle with his divinity most prominently when Jesus interacts with the Devil. While being tempted on the mountain by the Devil, Jesus feels self doubt. The Devil commands him to "'feel free to leap! Cast yourself out. Your Father's angels will carry you.' I felt a temptation to jump. But, most suddenly, I did not feel as if I were the Son of God. Not yet!" (Mailer 54). As Jesus narrates his gospel here he describes his own doubt about who he is, but also confirms to the readers directly that even though he had this moment of doubt, now he knows without a doubt that he is the Son of God through his forceful "not yet". However, it is Jesus' reconciliation with his duality that allows him to understand why God chose him to dispense *kerygma* to all he came in contact with. Jesus writes: "I had to suppose that God had chosen me for His son because I had been born and had lived in the midst of common people rather than like a king. Thereby I could understand many small virtues and weak habits of others. If I could increase my powers (and I knew that He would pass on my powers to me), perhaps the world of men might multiply in virtue with me" (57). Mailer consciously works with the language of the Bible in the above quotation. Not only does Jesus acknowledge his divinity, but he also presents his own story as a second creation myth. Jesus' act of dispensing *kerygma* will spread the truth among men, and instead of multiplying populations of plant and animal life, this multiplication will be a conversion to a new religious outlook, one that is not just meant for Jews. The parallels to the biblical language of Genesis 1:22¹⁹ in his statement are unavoidable. The world is being reborn through the Good News Jesus manifests.

This is not to say that Jesus' struggle with his humanity and divinity diminishes as the novel

¹⁸ See Matt 3:16; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22; John 2:32 for the biblical references which Mailer is drawing on.

¹⁹ Genesis 1:22, "Be fruitful, and multiply".

progresses. In contrast to the Canonical Gospels, Jesus' humanity is ever present in *The Gospel According to the Son* and is intertwined with his experience of dispensing *kerygma*. Jesus starts to feel more powerful when he preaches, "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me; for I am meek and lowly in heart and you will find rest for your souls ... —and saying this, [I] felt as if new powers had again been granted to me" by God (Mailer 71). Here we discover a human Jesus who is humbled by the action of serving his followers, but who responds with confidence and strength as his relationship develops with those who need his help. Simultaneously, Mailer shows Jesus' human side when Jesus is in the synagogue of Nazareth and he feels shamed by the rich Jew who cautioned him about curing people on Shabbat. At that moment he "had shamed me. My powers left. Once again, and in my own synagogue, I was without strength" (102). Jesus' human weakness is his need to have personal confidence and dignity in order for his powers of eloquence to appear. His evolution as a proclaimer of *kerygma* evolves from having more confidence in the words he preaches (112) into the loss of his distinct voice in favor of God's: "I could hear the voice of the Lord coming forth from me without errant thoughts of my own" (167). At such moments Jesus' duality diminishes and he begins to become the singular Divine vehicle of *kerygma* until he reaches the pinnacle of proclaiming himself as "the way, the truth, and the life" (Mailer 203/John 14:6). Towards the novel's end Mailer has Jesus cease to be merely a man and become more of an abstract entity for God's purposes.

God plays a strong role in actualizing Jesus' *kerygma*. What is most noteworthy is that God is the means by which Mailer makes typological connections between Jesus and the Old Testament. Mailer's novel is unique from the other novels in this thesis because he appropriately (as if he had been reading Frye) relies on Old Testament typological images when reconstructing his version of

Jesus.²⁰ He is a Jesus who tends to be much more immersed in Judaic culture in comparison to his portrayal in the novels by Wibberley, Callaghan, and in Ricci where he seems more Greek than Judaic.²¹

As suggested above, Mailer often aligns Jesus with Moses²² (another Messianic figure) when God wants Jesus to preach for him, but Jesus says, "I am lacking in eloquence" (Mailer 65). God then replies, "so did Moses say: 'O Lord, I am slow of speech and with a slow tongue.' I told him as I tell you: 'Who made man's mouth? Am I not the Lord?' Therefore, go, and I will be with your mouth and I will teach you what to say. Your words will not fall on the ground ... Words are also My creatures, and they travel by many roads" (65). Here Mailer's Jesus undeniably functions as God's vehicle for *kerygma* as Moses did. Frye's work highlights the significance of such parallels between Moses and Jesus (a pattern which resurfaces in the other novels) by comparing the plot structures of their biblical stories: "Moses organizes the twelve tribes of Israel; Jesus gathers twelve disciples. Israel crosses the Red Sea and achieves its identity as a nation on the other side; Jesus is baptized in the Jordan and is recognized as the Son of God" (*The Great Code* 210). Frye highlights the typological parallels between Moses and Jesus when he lectures about how both were concealed at birth and spent parts of their early childhood in Egypt (*Frye Lectures* 484-485). Mailer's novel, therefore, aptly demonstrates that Mailer is confined, yet creatively liberated, within the biblical tradition when retelling the Jesus myth because, as discussed above, the New Testament is itself

²⁰ Notice Frye's discussion of Messiah prototypes: "This is a sequence of *mythoi*, only indirectly of historical events, and our first step is to realize that all the high points and all the low points are metaphorically related to one another. That is, the garden of Eden, the Promised Land, Jerusalem, and Mount Zion are interchangeable synonyms for the home of the soul, and in Christian imagery they are all identical, in their 'spiritual' form (which we remember means metaphorically, whatever else it may also mean), with the kingdom of God spoken of by Jesus. Similarly, Egypt, Babylon, and Rome are all spiritually the same place, and the Pharaoh of the Exodus, Nebuchadnezzar, Antiochus Epiphanes, and Nero are spiritually the same person. And the deliverance of Israel—Abraham, Moses and Joshua, the judges, David, and Solomon—are all prototypes of the Messiah or final deliverer" (*The Great Code* 209).

²¹ Jesus' education and religious methods are often compared to the Greeks.

²² In *The Great Code*, Frye continues to illuminate the theological similarities between Jesus and Joshua: "Moses dies just outside the Promised Land, which in Christian typology signifies the inability of the law alone to redeem man, and the Promised Land is conquered by Joshua. The hidden link here is that Jesus and Joshua are the same word,[sic] hence when the Virgin Mary is told to call her child Jesus or Joshua, the typological meaning is that the reign of the new law is over, and

working within pre-established types and metaphors found in the Old Testament.

Furthermore, God's language and use of metaphor in order to teach lessons to his Son are similar to the ones Jesus will use when dispensing *kerygma* to his disciples and followers (and now in written form to his readers). Words become creatures in the novel, and readers are able to see God's words evolve throughout the novel because Jesus becomes more eloquent and the *kerygma* he preaches is more intellectually intense. Jesus assertively responds to a scribe who asks him, "'Are you saying that you would give a light to the gentiles?' ... 'Yes,' I said. 'That would be for the salvation of all'" (Mailer 165). The intensity of Jesus' preaching becomes more apparent when he begins to explain his own sayings, realizing that further explanation is needed because of their complexity: "I recalled the hour when I had broken bread in the desert and five loaves had fed five hundred. In that hour I had lived in the miracle of God's favor, so I said now: 'Eat of me, for this is my body.' And what I said was true. In death our flesh returns to the earth and from that earth will come grain. I was the Son of God. So I would be present in the grain" (198). It is now Jesus who becomes the miracle for the people through the nutrients in the life sustaining grain. Mailer's Jesus has also just aligned nature with the religious practice known as the eucharist. Nature and *kerygma* commingle because God's essence, located in the earth, is strongly connected, states Frye, to God's desire "to communicate with man," as evidenced by "[t]he emphasis on 'word' in the Bible" (*Words with Power* 110).

After Jesus concludes his conversation with God on the mountain he travels to the Sea of Galilee where Mailer expands on a well known passage from the Bible. The passage serves to demonstrate how the sea is connected to Jesus' search for worthy disciples. While Jesus walks down the shore he sees the fishermen and thinks, "If by one skill he captures the fish, by another does he prevent losing them. And without caution, as my voice carried across the distance it would take to

the assault on the Promised Land has begun (Matthew 1:21)" (*The Great Code* 211). Ricci will also invoke these parallels

cast a small stone, I said, ‘Come with me and I will make you fishers of men’” (Mailer 67-68/Luke 5:10/Matt 5:19/Mark 1:17). Above, Jesus hopes to convert these men and also use their skills to captivate listeners. Mailer shows his dependency on the Canonical Gospels by integrating word for word the passages in *The King James Bible* and replants them in the mouth of his own Jesus. In addition to recalling both the parable of the mustard seed and the parable of the sower, these words echo what God said about words in the previous quotation as Jesus’ request to these fishermen to become his disciples traveled its own little stones’ throw distance.

Jesus only relinquishes his strong role in dispensing *kerygma* when his death is close at hand. He says to his disciples, most of which Mailer quotes directly from Matthew 10:16, “I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves. Try then to be as wise as serpents and as harmless as doves ... Yet take no thought of what you must say, for it will be given to you in that hour of trial. It is not you who will speak but the Spirit of your Father” (Mailer 204). Here, just as in the Canonical Gospels, Jesus’ disciples are an intrinsic part of spreading *kerygma* after his death.²³ Still, because it is Jesus who narrates Mailer’s novel, and not his disciples and followers as in the other novels in this thesis, their disciple role is greatly diminished. Moreover, the novel does not continue after Jesus’ death. Thus, in typical fashion Jesus transfers the responsibility of dispensing *kerygma* to his disciples (just as God had done to him) by drawing on animal imagery that is used most often throughout the Bible (the serpent and dove). Mailer makes it easy for readers to make the connections between his reconstruction of the Jesus myth and the traditional biblical literary methods which aid him in the

between Jesus and Joshua as investigated in chapter four of this thesis.

²³ David Jasper, in his book *The New Testament and the Literary Imagination*, discusses why Jesus instructed his disciples to preach a certain way after his death, for these are ways that will maximize *kerygma* to listeners: “The point of the preaching was to challenge and to draw a response, and as the first disciples were sent out two by two (Mark 6:7-13, Luke 9:1-6), they were told not to instruct or explain, but to proclaim the kingdom of God and to act it out in healing and exorcism. I believe that the continuing power of the New Testament will be revealed afresh time and again in the close attention to the literary imaginations which first gave utterance to the *kerygma*, no doubt first orally, and then in the written word which we have received. In diverting our minds from all secondary concerns of explanation and temporary application, such attention will recall us to the primary Christian task of preaching and proclamation, of issuing a challenge and forcing a response. It will remind us that Christian doctrine is, in principle, only an attempt to systematise the *kerygma*, and that a theology which cannot be preached is no theology” (*The New Testament and the Literary Imagination* 102).

retelling. When Jesus urges his disciples to be as wise as serpents and as harmless as doves, he is metaphorically touching their lips with the wisdom and purity of God as God had done when he was baptized. Mailer's use of these biblical images creates the biblical tone of Jesus' gospel. These interchanges between the Old Testament and what will become the New Testament generate the mediums by which *kerygma* is dispensed. Readers are then absorbed by *kerygma* whether they are willing or not, especially in a distinctive moment when readers follow along with Jesus in a prayer laid out on the page (114). The prayer functions as a typographical landscape, among natural landscapes, to promote mythic images in readers.²⁴

Nature functions as another form of figurative language which Mailer uses to promote Jesus as the mythic homilist.²⁵ He purposefully draws on the natural imagery of the Bible to facilitate his authorial agenda. This is true especially when Mailer uses imagery of wood and sea, causing the natural landscape to function as a means for readers to understand, and for Mailer to show, Jesus' character. Recall that readers do not simply encounter *kerygma* when Jesus preaches, but when followers emulate his life. Mailer creates strong parallels between Jesus as a carpenter and his future role as Jesus Christ. When Jesus was a young apprentice he felt a strong connection between working with the wood and God: "we would split the trunk again, and still again, until many rough planks were obtained. And it took a good apprentice to guide the wedge, after which our boards were shaped by much trimming" (5). In order to be a great apprentice one must have patience, a quality essential for faith and a characteristic which Jesus exhibits and sees in himself. Moreover, the parallels between cutting a good piece of wood and guiding the wedges sounds like a metaphor for conversion because of Jesus' diction. When Jesus starts to preach he uses parabolic figurative

²⁴ Mailer's novel is the only one in this thesis which uses this technique. The others are more concerned with recounting a story about Jesus than actively/consciously writing about Jesus' teachings as will be seen in chapters two, three and four.

²⁵ Nature is used as an equilibrium between pagan and Gnostic faith of the time: "The ambiguity in the Biblical conception of creation is a very deep-seated one, and in the New Testament period those who pressed the issue hardest were the Gnostics" (*The Great Code* 143).

language to guide his hearers so that they may be molded, or shaped like the wood, into better people.

Mailer's Jesus draws upon the Old Testament's use of trees and wood as imagery to explain his own mission and ministry. Frye points out that the same kind of typology and imagery repeats "throughout the Old and New Testaments—e.g., the tree, the ocean, the tower, the garden, the sheep and shepherd. Such repetitions of plot and image tie the many books of the Bible together and also create a sense of *déjà vu* and premonition, hinting that discreet events have some greater symbolic significance" (Marx 164). They also distinctly tie Jesus to the Old Testament and thus fertilize the significance of his words and actions because of their roots in the literary past. It is not surprising then that Mailer's Jesus is drawn to wood. Jesus recalls that it was not "easy to find communion with wood. None of us could forget that apples from the tree in Eden had possessed knowledge of good and evil ... Still, there was wisdom to be found in doing good work. When the task went well, I was at peace. The scent of a well-made chest cheered me, and I could feel a fine spirit between the grain and my hand" (Mailer 5-6). Working with God's materials creates a connection between Jesus and God, for that spirit of which Jesus speaks could arguably be a tiny morsel of God's essence found in the wood, much like within the Tree of Life²⁶ or even possibly the tree/cross on which Jesus is crucified. Again, Frye comments on such recurring figurative connections between the two olive trees mentioned in Zechariah 4 and the two thieves that flank Jesus when all three are crucified on olive trees (*The Great Code* 218-219). While wood will later be the agency of his demise, Jesus repeats again that woodwork soothes him: "I seemed to have no greater wish afterward than to propitiate all bad feelings (and good ones) by working with care. My life was devoted to the practice of carpentry" (Mailer 22). Mailer's affinity for trees roots him within typical myths that originated from primitive "[l]ocal deities of rivers, trees, [and] mountains" which later translated into myths

²⁶ Frye discusses in a lecture, "The 'world tree' is sometimes the same thing as the tree of life, and as such, it belongs to

found in the Bible (*The Double Vision* 59).

Again, the way Jesus comports himself as a carpenter and artisan indicates important aspects of his character. As a human being, he is devoted, conscientious and hardworking. Mailer is careful to underline the didactic myth of his story when he has Jesus recognize these parallels because when he is being tempted by the Devil he tries to remain calm and pure by saying to himself, “I will not serve God as a brave son but as a modest one.’ That was just. Had I not spent more than half my life working carefully with many small movements, equal to equal, with the small mysteries of wood?” (Mailer 55). Jesus accepts the fact that his role is not to be brave but humbly to serve his people through his suffering and so he rarely acts rashly in the novel when it comes to dispensing *kerygma* to his followers or educating his disciples. They respect him because of his ability to remain calm, an ability he owes to his connection to nature.

Jesus often seeks open natural spaces to calm his soul in order to ready himself as a medium for *kerygma*. When Jesus finds he was unable to heal people he recalls in a cadenced tone, “I know I had need again of the sea, or of a lake as large as the Sea of Galilee, so that I could free my breath of thoughts as heavy as these” (92). It is no coincidence that a sea journey recalls a baptism as Jesus describes that the “waves beat upon our vessel. Some washed over the bow. If others were terrified, I knew nothing of their panic. I was sleeping peacefully. Such peace had been given to me by the rocking of the ship” (92). The water figuratively washes over Jesus which allows him to feel cleansed and soothed out at sea. The boat is a large cradle that God may push with the waves. Having a connection to nature is not pagan in Mailer’s version of Jesus’ gospel, but a way to feel connected with God. The incident also recalls that while Jesus may not feel brave at certain points in the novel, he is not a coward, for he knows that the sea does not mean to harm him.

Jesus’ awareness of the natural world around him continues to be the way that Mailer

illuminates Jesus' connection with God. One of Jesus' strongest early epiphanies about God comes after he is absorbed in contemplation of the substances of soil and rock. "Such knowledge led me to think of the wisdom of the Lord, who knew the earth so well that heavy soil thrown far from its home by a volcano could find a new nature for itself ... Often would I ponder on the substances of His Kingdom that we worked upon with our hands" (25). Jesus is able to recognize the versatility of nature and, thus, God through nature.

Additionally, the way Jesus ponders the substances of the earth which God creates shows his devotion to God's world and, of course, to the future words that God will command him to preach. It therefore comes as no surprise that when Jesus tries to explain the voice of God he resorts to describing it through the landscape around him: "The scrolls I had studied since childhood were not as close to me as the words of this high Lord my God, yet now that He was near, I could only fear Him. For the sound of His voice can be heard in the echo of great rocks when they fall" (36). The scrolls of Jewish scribes have less influence on Jesus (or so he states despite Mailer's ironic repeated use of the Old Testament). Mailer has Jesus use Mosaic law where it suits him in order to explain more explicitly God's new, and increasingly compassionate, law. God even instructs Jesus that in order for him to become strong and ready for his future *kerygmatic* task he must "[g]o now. In that wilderness, fast among the rocks. Drink the water that is beneath the rocks" (37).

Mailer's repetitive use of rocks/stones is an effective metaphor for understanding *kerygma* because individual stones are primitive and useless, but once it is understood how to mold and shape their substances they can yield many things. Similarly, *kerygma* is only grasped once the listener or reader is able to comprehend how a parable, metaphor, or symbol functions or correlates to their own experience. For instance, some readers may infer that the image of water and rocks recalls God's command to Moses to ask the rock for water, using words to access God's natural substances instead of striking the rock with force (Numbers 20:7-13). In Christianity, unprovoked "[w]ater gushing

from the rocks signifies the waters of baptism and salvation pouring from the Church. Christ is the rock, the source of living waters and the pure river of the Gospels” (Cooper 140). When Mailer has God tell Jesus to drink the water beneath the rocks Jesus has yet to become the mythological figure associated with rocks. In the novel Jesus needs to understand himself and the Divine gifts he has within (beneath the rocks) before he can dispense *kerygma*. Furthermore, rocks are also a symbol of permanence. If Jesus and God’s words are among the rocks or like rocks, this means that Jesus’ *kerygma* is everlasting. Mailer may also be intentionally using the rock metaphor to invoke another biblical passage, Matthew 16:18: “And I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church”. Jesus and his *kerygma* are connected to God’s earth.

Beyond Jesus’ use of metaphors to dispense *kerygma*, in Mailer’s novel as in the Canonical Gospels, Jesus also depends on his miracles and parables to transmit *kerygma* to his followers, in addition to the readers. Mailer depends on biblical parables and miracles to retell the Jesus myth. What is different about Mailer’s Jesus is that when he dispenses *kerygma* to those around him he is himself discovering God’s *kerygma*. A unique example occurs in Mailer’s novel when Jesus heals the servant of a Roman centurion, an event which also occurs in Luke 7. The centurion says to Jesus, “Lord, I am not worthy for you to come under my roof. But if you will speak the word, my servant can be healed. I am a man to command a soldier to go and he will go. To another, I say ‘Come,’ and he comes. So my sick servant will do what needs to be done if you give me the power to tell him” (Mailer 78). Much occurs in the centurion’s reply to Jesus. Most noteworthy is the strong belief that the centurion has in the power of Jesus’ words. The centurion admires Jesus’ ability to proclaim words as the substance of truth. Jesus, aghast that this centurion has more faith in his *kerygma* than his followers tells the man his “servant will be healed” (78). The point of such a passage is to remark that a Gentile demonstrates more faith in Jesus than any of his Jewish followers, an incident which is extremely important throughout the rest of the Canonical Gospels. In Mailer’s novel this moment

causes Jesus to realize that he should spread his *kerygma* not only to the Jews, but to everyone (including those who are marginalized and homosexuals), for God's words are for everyone. Mailer has underlined the universality of the message found in Jesus' life more explicitly than do the Canonical Gospels.

When Jesus discovers that he is able to heal the Roman servant, a Gentile, he enthusiastically comments: "I could send God's powers to others, even if they were not Jews. I felt elation at this ... Many paused to greet me, and the mouths of such men were painted red" (78). Readers are not left long in suspense about these men with painted lips. They are indeed homosexuals. Simon Peter explains to Jesus that the city "was favored by men who did not know women but other men" (78). Despite Jesus' awareness that these men are homosexual, a sexual practice that was rejected in the Abrahamic tradition, he confesses, "I felt affection for my new followers. They were tender in spirit, and would congregate beneath a tree, because they were not welcome in the temple. I was gentle with them" (78-79). Certainly Jesus can relate to these men. He too is often cast out of synagogues because of his difference. Accordingly, Jesus' act of dispensing *kerygma* has now changed to include both Gentiles and homosexuals, just as homosexuality is now accepted by several modern Christian factions. While following the Canonical Gospels, Mailer's Jesus is distinctly modern in his opinions.

Mailer's modern novel dispenses *kerygma* that transcends time because he creates a Jesus who is more tolerant than his Canonical Gospels' counterpart. Mailer actively creates new parables to account for these changes. Such an evolution in Jesus' thoughts questions Bultmann's criticism when he rhetorically asks, "when we preach the Gospel to-day, we expect our converts to accept not only the Gospel message, but also the mythical view of the world in which it is set. If not, does the New Testament embody a truth which is quite independent of its mythical setting? If it does, theology must undertake the task of stripping the Kerygma from its mythical framework, of 'demythologizing' it" (Bultmann 3). It is impossible to strip away *kerygma* from its mythological

roots as it is embedded within the confines of a certain typological and metaphorical language.

Bultmann's thoughts on *kerygma* are more perplexing when he writes that *kerygma* is almost beyond the understanding of modern man, for modern man no longer has a mythical view of the world but a scientific and historic one (3). Certainly his belief does not reflect the findings of this thesis thus far considering that Mailer's novel functions within a mythological framework.

Retelling parables in the novel is not used as a method to discredit Jesus, or even the Church, as Mailer is very compassionate and fair in his portrayal of Jesus' divine/human struggle. However, as Mailer retells these parables they reveal *kerygma* in a more relatable way to readers. Jesus' gospel is a tool of illumination whereby readers see both his human and divine side, and possibly can have a firmer grasp on what the parables, taken from the Canonical Gospels, are saying. *Kerygma* is powerful in that even when Mailer adds on to the parables of the New Testament, or slightly alters the miracles, *kerygma* is still present as it confirms past proclamations from the Canonical Gospels, and subsequent religious and/or theological positions held by the Church. Mailer builds upon the narrative which contains *kerygma* without diluting the *kerygmatic* message. For instance, in the novel when Jesus heals the man with the wounded hand in the synagogue on Shabbat, the Jewish elders disapprove. In the Canonical Gospels the man's hand is healed and the Pharisees try to find a way to subvert Jesus (Mark 3; Luke 6). In both the Canonical Gospels and the novel, Jesus is described as restoring the man's hand "as whole as the other," yet Mailer's Jesus says: "Yet I also felt anguish. Most of the Pharisees left in outrage. I had to conclude that a time might come when I would go to war with some of my own people" (Mailer 86). Jesus is conflicted. He wants to preach to his people, but is aware that acting against the grain of the Jewish tradition will inevitably alienate him.

At the same time, while Mailer changes the emphasis of the Canonical Gospels parables, he is ultimately confined by the literary methods of the Bible because he cannot write his novel without

resorting to looking back on Jesus' past deeds as they are described in the Canonical Gospels. A prominent example occurs when Jesus recounts the story of walking on water. In the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and John, the purpose of recording the miracle of Jesus walking on the water is to reveal to the disciples that Jesus is the Son of God. He can conquer the elements by walking on the waves, and pushing away the storm. When Peter in the Gospel of Matthew (and Mailer's novel) "comes down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus. But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid: and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, 'Lord, save me'" (Matt 14:29-30). Peter's faith is tested, as Jesus "stretched out [his] hand and caught him and said: 'Why did you doubt?'" (Mailer 118). Jesus will not let you sink if you have faith, but more importantly in the novel is the lesson Jesus derives from walking on water. In the following quotation Jesus describes his shock when he discovers he can walk on water. "I was up and above the waters! I was walking!" (117). When Jesus walks upon the water he starts to recall lessons from the Old Testament where God reveals information to Job. Almost in shame Jesus thinks: "For I had concluded too quickly that there was no extravagance in His miracles. I had forgotten how in the Book of Job, our Lord had trampled upon the back of the sea" (117).

Frye, too, references the similarities between what Job and Jesus experience with their God: "the deliverance of Job is a deliverance from his own story ... Much the same thing would be true of the relation of Jesus to the Passion narrative, which is the kernel of the Gospels" (*The Great Code* 240). As Frye's criticism states repeatedly, and Mailer's novel demonstrates aptly, the Old Testament and New Testament are bound in a u-shaped mythological construction, where what occurs in one, will occur in the other. As Frye says, "this U-shape pattern of loss and return and deliverance is found all the way through the Bible" (*Frye Lectures* 429). These typological dependencies are what confine Mailer within biblical language in order that he may have his Jesus, and then the readers, see some glimmer of God's truth: "When young, I had read these words [from

the book of Job] many times, and now the waves beneath my feet had become a path ... now I knew the true extent of His domain” (Mailer 118). In *The Gospel According to the Son* Jesus’ understanding of God does not come through God proclaiming the truth to Jesus, but through Jesus’ reflection on his own lessons.

It is ironic that the entire gospel which Jesus writes is a form of *kerygma* as he writes and preaches simultaneously through words on the page. However, when Jesus finally understands why God allowed him to walk on water he uses the power of deduction, a process which he wants all his followers to be able to do, hence his use of parables to teach: “I had come to learn that all of us, having been created by the Lord, possessed much of the Lord’s pride. One learned best when free from the yoke of a preacher. It was better to feel full of His spirit by one’s power to solve a riddle” (134). Incidentally, Jesus does not realize that when he uses parables he still functions as a prophet/preacher; he is not talking *at* his listeners, but asking them to have faith, and accept/attempt to understand the *kerygma* within the parables, as he had done through the living miracle (and later a parable) of his walking on water.

Jesus also undermines the effort that some of the Canonical Gospels make to record his parables and miracles by stating blatantly what is true in each Canonical Gospel, and what is simply exaggeration. He never discounts miracles attributed to him in the Canonical Gospels, but highlights their spiritual nature instead of making himself out to be a magician or charlatan. According to Jesus “[e]xaggeration is the language of the Devil, and no man is free of Satan, not even the Son of God (and certainly not Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John)” (117). Satan’s use of exaggeration is mentioned in response to Jesus’ annoyance that in each Canonical Gospel the number of followers’ he fed with fish and bread while in the wilderness continued to multiply. Though Jesus may diminish the wonder of the miracle, he does not remove its miraculous nature. He relates how he “would lay one flake of fish and one bit of bread upon each tongue. Yet when each person had tasted these fragments, so do I

believe that each morsel became enlarged within his thoughts ... this was a triumph of the Spirit rather than an enlargement of matter” (116). Therefore Jesus’ reiterations of his own miracles are in themselves another act of *kerygma*. He would rather that readers believe that it was the followers’ faith in God that enlarged the bellies of the followers, than faith in his “magical” ability to multiply food before their very eyes. Jesus continues throughout his own gospel to dispel stories written in the Canonical Gospels as well as to affirm oral retellings of stories. What Jesus agrees with the most are the hodgepodge, and apparently truthful, facts of his life from the time he spent in Jerusalem up until his death. These stories are now part of a semi-historical narrative on Jesus’ later life that few do not know.

However, despite his agreement with what readers may have already assumed about Jesus’ life because of popular Christian tradition, Mailer’s Jesus is extremely bitter about what has been written about him. His defense of his own gospel against the others is his last attempt at affirming the truth of his narrative, and consequently the *kerygma* that he delivers throughout his gospel. He strongly objects to the exaggerated myths in his stories, especially about what occurred after his death (235). What is remarkable is Jesus’ ironic tone in the final chapter of his gospel. He writes that in “the lifetime of those who came after me, pious scrolls were written by those who had known me. Gospels were set down by those who had not. (And they were more pious!) These later scribes—now they were called Christians—had heard of my journey. They added much”; perhaps an intentional poke at Paul on Mailer’s part (235). Here he tries to affirm what is present throughout his entire gospel, his humanity within his divinity that can be discovered in the truth of his gospel. Jesus acts as a dedicated historian since readers encounter *kerygma* from Jesus through all the hindsight he applies in his gospel. He is even angrier that those who were close to him exaggerated his story: “not one had believed in the Son or in the Father sufficiently to say no more than the truth, which, as you have seen, was much. Therefore I, like Daniel, would now seal my gospel and hope that its truth is

everlasting” (236). Nowhere within *The Gospel According to the Son* is Jesus clearer about how important truth is to him. Mailer looked back to the Old Testament, and amalgamated different versions of several stories within the Canonical Gospels to conclude which lines and metaphors he felt aptly represented Jesus’ *kerygma*. Certainly Mailer falls into Frye’s school of thought because his Jesus is intensely mythical, least subtly through the fact that Jesus asks readers not to logically deduce how his gospel came to be. It simply is “a small miracle” (4). *The Gospel According to the Son* embraces the biblical narrative mythological structure and biblical literary methods to which it is confined in order that *kerygma* may forcefully be dispensed in an amalgamated, yet unique, gospel.

Through a biblical excavation process Mailer has historicized Jesus by reproducing the Son of God’s gospel as a written document, and affirmed Jesus’ mythological status through figurative language that is unavoidable when exploring and recreating Jesus’ life story as Mailer has done in *The Gospel According to the Son*. Mailer’s description of Jesus’ character is the most complete due to Mailer’s understanding that when dealing with Jesus Christ, and his *kerygma*, an author must depict the mythological evolution of Jesus of Nazareth; the struggle of a man turning into God.

CHAPTER 2

Theophilus Fumbles Between History and Myth in *The Seven Hills*: Grounding Oneself in

Jesus' *Kerygma*

Leonard Wibberley's *The Seven Hills*²⁷ written in 1973, is the earliest novel concerning Jesus to be discussed in this thesis. Wibberley's novel is in a category of its own as it reflects the contemporary United States, an overt political parallel that is non-existent in the other three novels. Wibberley does exactly what Jasper says of some other authors, that they refigure "the Bible within the immediate political, sociological or ideological concerns of the twentieth century" (*The Bible and Literature* 46). In his insightful foreword, Wibberley even writes, "My model for ancient Rome will not astonish the thoughtful reader. It is modern America" (Wibberley ix). *The Seven Hills* is an intensely political novel as seen through the eyes of the average businessman, and former slave, Theophilus, who narrates his rather extraordinary adventures through ancient Judaea, Rome, Greece and Egypt.

Much of the history that Theophilus provides his readers has nothing to do with Jesus, demonstrating how far removed Theophilus is from Jesus' following. At the beginning of the novel Theophilus uses several pages to discuss his opinions on different types of people found in various countries.²⁸ Readers learn that Theophilus is a very dedicated and thorough historian. Often he stops the narrative to explain crucial points, such as the reasons, in his time (the dawn of Christianity)

²⁷ Wibberley is probably the most conscious of the authors when consideration is given to integrating biblical images, metaphors, types and symbols into his novel. While he originally published the novel as *The Testament of Theophilus* he may have changed it to *The Seven Hills* because of what the seven hills symbolically represents in the Bible. Frye divulges that "Babylon the Great, the Mother of Harlots ... is associated with seven mountains which are clearly the seven hills of Caesarean Rome, so that Babylon and the Rome of the persecuting Caesars are symbolically the same demonic city, where the power opposed to that of Christianity is established" (*Frye Lectures* 453). Through Theophilus Jesus is constantly working against this opposition in an attempt to begin Christian communities there.

²⁸ Many of Theophilus's comments would seem racist today, but here is one example of how he describes Germans: "Everybody knows the Germans are the best bodyguards. They are stupid and loyal and quite without fear. As treachery is bred into the Greeks through learning, so loyalty is bred into the Germans through ignorance, and they believe that they can

Jesus' followers broke from Judaism and started Christianity.²⁹ While Theophilus is detailed when it comes to early Christian history, he also devotes whole chapters³⁰ to discussion of³¹ the emperors Tiberius and Caligula, for, as will be seen throughout this chapter, Theophilus's involvement in the Roman political sphere functions as a tool through which Jesus repeatedly becomes a subject of interest.

History and retellings are an integral part of *The Seven Hills* (not to mention the entire thesis). Theophilus is the first example of a narrator (who is not Jesus) who tells the story of his own life and the impact that Jesus had on him after rising from the dead. As a scribe/historian, Theophilus affirms his own authenticity: "What I have put down is true and may be relied upon. I have seen and heard these things which I record myself, or I have received them from others who themselves were witnesses and whom I knew from long acquaintance to be trustworthy" (15). One of these is Luke. Readers tend to trust Theophilus because he only provides his readers with first hand experiences that he hears from the witnesses, such as the two brothers who saw the angel the night Jesus was born. Furthermore, though Theophilus's indecisive belief in Jesus' miracles and divinity is known by readers, he still presents all sides of the Jesus debate, his need to be truthful taking precedence over his own beliefs.³²

go to their heaven (which they call Valhalla) only if they die in battle. If they desert their chief or master, they certainly will never reach that happy place" (Wibberley 35).

²⁹ Theophilus says: "I have given you this account to show what was the cause of the break between the Christians and the Jews of the Temple party. It was first: that the Sadducees did not believe in life after death and so abominated the story that Jesus had risen from the dead. Second: that the Pharisees (of the Temple only, for many others supported Peter and John and believed in them) having put Jesus to death for claiming to be the son of God or God himself, could not confess that they had done wrong, however many miracles and wonders they were confronted with. I have already pointed out that in this respect Caiaphas was in a very uncomfortable position and had my sympathy" (Wibberley 111).

³⁰ See pages 243-275.

³¹ Theophilus also spends so much time narrating other people's lives, like Paul (229-243), that often he forgets the details of his own life.

³² Page 97 shows how what Jesus preached had a different impact on who he says it to, and how he directs his *kerygma*. Theophilus shows readers how Romans react to Jesus sayings as opposed to his Apostles: "Not even John of Zebedee, his closest friend, had been there when Jesus had plainly told Pilate that his kingdom was the Kingdom of Truth and not of this world. It certainly seems strange to me that he couldn't have plainly said to his own Apostles what he said without reserve to Pilate. Luke explained this, saying that the minds of the Apostles, fixed on a military deliverer, were not ready to receive such a denial of their expectations. To Pilate, after all, it meant little. But to Peter, John, James, and the other Jews it meant a complete reversal of the meaning of their scripture" (Wibberley 97).

At the same time, Wibberley stresses that as a narrator Theophilus can be unreliable because he is human and therefore may not recall his life too accurately. Readers are then asked to “[r]eflect also how much you have remembered incorrectly regarding public affairs of your own lifetimes, and how many judgments you have made on people and traditions of which you know nothing. Then, in the humanity which is common to us all, be merciful to Theophilus” (xii). Acknowledging Theophilus’s humanity in *The Seven Hills* is important given the gravity of some of his comments (several of which are anti-Semitic) and his constant struggle between his loyalty to the pagan gods of Rome and Greece and his interest/connection with Jesus. Theophilus is a narrator who is unsure where his allegiances lie.³³ He only knows that he wants to survive and live a prosperous life.³⁴

Because he is ordinary Wibberley’s Theophilus is an example of a first person pagan narrator who dispenses Jesus’ *kerygma* despite the fact that he does not ultimately and obviously subscribe to Christianity. He also mythologizes Jesus’ character through the stories he retells. In addition, Theophilus acts as a human balance to the rather mythical and divine (and not very human in comparison to Mailer’s) Jesus of the novel because he constantly questions the Nazarene. A major consequence of the gradual mythologization of Jesus in *The Seven Hills* is that Theophilus forgets the human side of Jesus (a man whom he pitied). Thus, the myth becomes stronger and less relatable from a human/readerly by perspective. His action allows Theophilus simply to look upon Jesus as another mythological character in a wide range of deities, resulting in his failure to recognize the fact that Jesus’ *kerygma* is constantly evoked by his own mouth.

Theophilus, as a character and narrator who dispenses *kerygma*, is demonstrative of a great divergence between my understanding of *kerygma* and Frye’s. In *Words with Power*, Frye writes that there is a type of “ideological rhetoric that persuades and the proclamation [another form of rhetoric]

³³ For instance, he loves being a Roman but does not always cooperate with the state.

³⁴ These turn out to be ultimately contradictory goals. By the end of the novel his entire merchant fleet is destroyed.

that takes one out of oneself" (*Words with Power* 111). That is, the novels examined in this thesis contradict Frye's notion of *kerygma* because he believes it must be a consistently active process. Nevertheless, dispensing *kerygma* to readers (who may actively or passively digest it) does not have to be active because the rhetoric is rooted in biblical language and therefore constantly present. Frye expands on the relationship between preachers and readers: inspiration, in this case religious, appears when "active speech and reception of speech merges into unity. At this point we are in a genuinely kerygmatic realm" (118). Therefore, the reception Frye speaks of can be passive since the word 'reception' can be both active and passive. Readers can passively receive Jesus' *kerygma* but it is what they do with it that makes the process active. Thus, to grasp *kerygma* readers do not need to have the sort of religious experience (hallucinations, dreams, out of body experiences) outside of themselves that Frye calls for. Frye's critical error in his understanding of *kerygma* is most prominent when encountering a narrator like Theophilus whose narrative does not try to persuade readers to believe in Jesus' teachings, but may subsequently cause that reaction in some because of the biblical and mythical language that he and Wibberley use to cope with the mythological and historical life of Jesus.

The Seven Hills is both a historical and a mythological novel. Wibberley incorporates considerable historical detail about ancient Rome to authenticate the places and events described in his novel. Moreover, he does not shy away from the miraculous and the unexplainable. Theophilus records miracles that happen right before his eyes, and he encounters magical/mythological creatures and people that are beyond a human realm (Jesus, the pythoness, Tutmoshe). Wibberley's novel demonstrates unequivocally that Jesus is a mythological character who cannot be separated from myth even when surrounded by a narrative that is steeped in history.

Moreover, Wibberley does not attempt to separate Jesus from his mythological roots in order to speak of him as a historical figure. His novel demonstrates that history is an intrinsic part of

dispensing Jesus' *kerygma* because while Jesus' *kerygma* is revealed beyond a factual historical narrative, it is still important to understand and ground Jesus' teachings as they originated in that specific time. Though Wibberley does this, he still roots his novel within the typological and mythological language of the Bible. Such a balanced view is especially appropriate to an understanding of Christianity according to Elizabeth Johnson. She believes that while current criticism is leading to hermeneutical concerns, it is important that "full justice [be] done to the full nature of the classic Christian texts and the tradition which produced them" (Loewe 322). Johnson points out that while examining the historical Jesus there is a need to keep a balanced perspective between understanding Jesus of Nazareth and Jesus Christ of the Canonical Gospels. Wibberley's novel is located in between the criticisms of Bultmann and Frye because he uses myth and history interchangeably as his way of telling the story of Jesus. Frye's argument that the "imaginative in itself cannot provide a 'myth to live by,'" is correct because the "kerygmatic grows out of social recognition, and the Bible is kerygmatic at least partly because it has been recognized as such for so long. The teachings of Jesus are kerygmatic for Christians, but Jesus himself thought of them as confirmed 'scriptures,' the Old Testament as it came to him" (*Words with Power* 117). In the novels explored in this thesis various characters accept the gospels and testimonies that deal with Jesus' *kerygma*. Moreover, the readers become part of the social group who can either acknowledge the *kerygma* within the novels or dismiss it. Readers can embrace the *kerygma* they receive in the novel by accepting Jesus' mythical roots despite attempts to demythologize him.

To return to the issue of history and myth, one can argue that Bultmann's critique discussed in the introduction, and as applied to this thesis, is faulty because even though most of Wibberley's novel takes place after the crucifixion (the moment where Bultmann believes *kerygma* is most apparent) Bultmann bases his argument only in the factual account of Jesus' crucifixion and nothing beyond. Though Theophilus witnesses Jesus' resurrection, Bultmann would dismiss the moments

when Theophilus witnesses Jesus' resurrection because they exist only in the realm of myth.

Kerygma is only dispensed to the readers in this novel because of Theophilus's fictional, under the guise of the historical, sightings of the resurrected Jesus (which cannot be confirmed with historical proof), moments which spark interest about Jesus in Theophilus and are, therefore, the catalyst for his investigation of Jesus' life and ministry.

Wibberley takes a literary approach similar to the other three authors explored in this thesis as he is actively retelling the Jesus myth in order to provide a unique perspective on Jesus and his legacy. Like Mailer's Jesus who writes his gospel after the creation of the New Testament, Wibberley finds the writings in the New Testament "inspiring, consoling, convincing—and lacking. What they lack ... are explanations of the circumstances in which Christ preached and died ... This book is an attempt to fill that lack—to place all this divinity among the workaday affairs of men, and to view the Christians and the Jews as a pagan might perhaps have viewed them" (Wibberley x-xi). His comment suggests the Canonical Gospels lack an adequate portrayal of Jesus' human/Divine split because Wibberley wants to make Jesus relatable to average men. Hence, Wibberley acknowledges the importance of the strong part myth plays in shaping Jesus' character because he is a man with two natures. Jesus is not part of Greco-Roman culture, and thus the stories told about him after his death become larger than life; filled with metaphor to explain his deeds. Wibberley may give the readers the perspective of a layman, but ultimately such a perspective further serves to re-mythologize Jesus to the Romans, and ultimately the readers. Theophilus dispenses Jesus' *kerygma* through the retellings of significant moments in Jesus' life, his encounters with the resurrected Jesus, and his interactions with Jesus' followers while Christianity takes form.

Most of the novel is located in the realm of the Acts of the Apostles and Paul's Epistles because Jesus' trial, death, and resurrection all take place by page 41. Nevertheless, there is still constant movement backwards to the realm of the Canonical Gospels as Theophilus learns more

about Jesus' life and ministry. Through Theophilus the readers get a first hand look at how Jesus is mythologized and the impact his story has on the wider Roman empire. For example, Jesus becomes such a renowned figure in ancient Rome that both the Emperors Tiberius and Caligula feel threatened by Jesus' divinity. They both seek as much knowledge about Jesus as possible in order to maintain their own false divinity and totalitarian regime. Though Jesus is no longer alive and preaching in the majority of *The Seven Hills*, his presence and *kerygma* are persistent through characters who consistently want to know about Theophilus's interactions with him. Jesus all but takes on the appearance of a celebrity magician to the Romans, and Theophilus is the man whom the emperors believe has a connection with Jesus and can reveal the magician's secrets. Caligula specifically believes that Jesus "has shown himself to [Theophilus]" and that Theophilus is "a favorite ... of Jesus of Nazareth" (274).

Additionally, *The Seven Hills* elaborates the beginning of a common contemporary Christian Evangelical belief in the United States, which is the idea of "a personal Jesus," as exhibited through Theophilus's connection with Jesus. Believing in a personal Jesus means that a Christian firmly has faith that he/she has an intimate relationship with Jesus which impacts the believer's life. Such is his impact on one's life that in *Jesus and Yahweh: The Names Divine*, Harold Bloom reflects that "[t]he American Jesus has usurped Yahweh," or God (Bloom 13). Bloom's comment is certainly true for some Evangelical groups in the United States, and in *The Seven Hills*.³⁵ The personal Jesus is also highly mythologized in that he can be everywhere at all times and play a hand in the believer's fate because he is God's seed. For example, early in the novel Theophilus offers wine to Jesus, out of pity,³⁶ while Jesus is being interrogated by Pilate. Jesus "refused it saying, 'It is not from the cup of

³⁵ Bloom's argument does not apply to *The Gospel According to the Son* since the Judeo-Christian God is active in Mailer's novel and not passive as he is in the other three novels explored in this thesis.

³⁶ This pity which Theophilus expresses for Jesus starts the dual nature of his testimony as discussed in *Essays on Biblical Interpretation* by Paul Ricoeur: "At the same time we also understand that testimony, at the human level, is dual: it is internal testimony, the seal of conviction, but it is also the testimony of works; that is, it is modeled on the passion of Christ, the testimony of suffering" (142). Theophilus's testimony begins and is mostly concerned with his interactions with Jesus

comfort that I must drink now.’ Then looking me full in the eyes, his face painted red with blood, the lips split and the nose half off, he said steadily and gently, ‘I will be your friend, Theophilus. I will never leave you. Remember that,’” and Jesus is true to his word (29).

As if by God’s Design,³⁷ Theophilus cannot get rid of his thoughts about, nor avoid seeing, Jesus. Theophilus will see Jesus three times after the resurrection, and his journeys are henceforth connected to the Nazarene, the name he often calls Jesus.

It is slight differences like these in Jesus’ character that demonstrate the diverse impact the Jesus myth can have on literature. On one hand, Jesus can be Mailer’s Jesus who is wholly human/Divine and struggles consistently with God and the Devil in order to dispense *kerygma*. On the other hand, as depicted by Wibberley, Jesus can both be personal and highly mythical in that he is constantly associated with the miraculous. Yet, Wibberley’s Jesus, because he is described by the scribe Theophilus, is integrated into a historical narrative more than a reinvented gospel. Furthermore, Theophilus is identified as the individual for whom Luke wrote his Gospel on the life of Jesus.³⁸ “it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, that thou mightest know the certainty of those things wherein thou hast been instructed” (Luke 1:3-4).³⁹ Throughout the novel Jesus consistently appears to Theophilus and Theophilus is often a witness at sign post events in Jesus’ story (trial and resurrection). *Kerygma* is displayed through discussion of Jesus’ miracles, teachings, and sightings after the resurrection. It is through literary and narrative techniques such as these that

and what he learns about Jesus as the novel progresses. Simultaneously, readers get a subtextual narrative on Christian works through Theophilus’s actions.

³⁷ The issue of Divine Design in connection with Jesus’ *kerygma* will come up again in *A Time for Judas* and *Testament*.

³⁸ *The Bible as Literature* provides interesting information on the construction of Luke’s Gospel: “Luke’s gospel is actually the first volume of a two-volume work, the second of which is Acts. If the two volumes were originally united—and we cannot be sure of this—they became separated at some early stage in the formation of the canon. Each is dedicated to a certain Theophilus with a short preface which, alas, tells us much less than it seems to, although the mere existence of a preface is itself significant. Theophilus might have been an actual person—perhaps a wealthy patron of Luke—but he might also have been a literary fiction, standing as his name suggests, for all the ‘God lovers’ to whom Luke’s gospel is addressed. Luke himself tends to recede from us as we attempt to pin his name to an identifiable historical figure” (*The Bible as Literature* 225).

kerygma is introduced into the text despite the fact that Jesus is hardly seen.

Theophilus is not only the reader's guide throughout the novel, but also a guide to understanding Jesus' *kerygma*, despite the fact that he never definitively accepts Jesus' preaching in the end,⁴⁰ a path some readers may choose to follow as well.⁴¹ Alternatively, though Theophilus is a pagan narrator who is skeptical about Jesus and often thinks logically about who Jesus was, Theophilus never presents Jesus in a negative light. While Theophilus is standing as a witness (at Pilate's request) at Jesus' trial he hears Jesus speak sensibly about his place in the world: "Wisdom loves truth. Truth is my kingdom. It is a kingdom which has not yet come but will come, and will endure forever. I came into this world to establish the Kingdom of Truth and all those who seek truth are of my kingdom and I am of them" (Wibberley 24). Jesus is just as clear in *The Seven Hills* as he is in *The Gospel According to the Son* about how his goal is to proclaim the *kerygmatic* truth. Theophilus is also unknowingly seeking the truth that Jesus proclaims in his efforts to satisfy his curiosity about the Nazarene.

Wibberley makes his point about Theophilus's connection to Jesus through the obvious riddle that the pythoness (Tabitha) recounts to Theophilus when he visits her. In the opening of book two⁴² Theophilus reflects on her prophecy: "I would know all I wished to know by going through the red door in the seven hills" (95). His search for the red door is at times pushed into the background of the novel and forgotten by Theophilus, but readers who take Wibberley's foreword seriously where

³⁹ Theophilus introduces how he met Luke on page 33 of *The Seven Hills*.

⁴⁰ Theophilus is unable to let go of his merchant vices. However, at the end of the novel Wibberley states that neither the Jews nor Christians preach against being a business man. Nonetheless, it is Theophilus's actions throughout the novel, not the epilogue in relation to his being a business man that shows his vices. Readers remain conflicted by Theophilus's actions for he both indulges in the material world and abandons business when morals sometimes become an issue.

⁴¹ Luke Ferretter, in a chapter devoted to investigating Ricoeur's hermeneutics, discusses the link between readers making sense of and relating to the Bible. Just as in the novels, readers can either identify/accept the path of Jesus' *kerygma* or not: "it is addressed by someone to others, and that it has both sense and reference, that is, that something is said about something. The play of signification within the Biblical texts, therefore, is only one aspect of their reality. The event in which a reader makes sense of the Biblical texts, appropriating their meaning to his own situation, is another aspect, and it is at this level—given to 'semantic' rather than to 'semiotic' analysis—that his or her choice to believe in their truth-claim can be understood" (*Towards a Christian Literary Theory* 124). Readers may choose to believe in the *kerygma* or simply be intrigued by it as Theophilus is at the end of *The Seven Hills*.

he states that he is an avid Bible reader, would make the following biblical connection. The red door that will enlighten Theophilus is tied to the well known passage from the Bible where Jesus says, "I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture" (John 10:9). In order to understand properly Wibberley's choice of the red door as a typological symbol for his novel, it is important to break down some aspects of what Jesus says in John's Gospel.

What is of particular importance is the emphasis that Jesus places on the fact that man can enter the door and be saved, but man may also go out through the same door. While Christians often receive entry into the kingdom of heaven because of their spiritual contract with Jesus and God, apparently some may also leave from the same heavenly door. Therefore, some may understand the *kerygmatic* message of heaven and perhaps the intricacies of Jesus' parabolic life when they pass through the door. Such a specific detail is important because Theophilus is a man who "shall go in and out" of the door. It is only when Theophilus is in the gladiator arena that he realizes the red door which the pythoness spoke of was the one where "the dead or dying were dragged on grappling hooks" (Wibberley 323). He realizes that the red door is his fate, but as is usual with Theophilus, he fails to see where Jesus is present in his fate.

The color red on the door suggests martyrdom and the blood of Christ. Theophilus is going to enter through the door that is metaphorically Jesus Christ. Moreover, Theophilus is one of the few pagans/semi-Christians whose life is saved (literally, he is stabbed in the belly) by Jesus and lives to retell his story. He writes of how for "many weeks I lived halfway between this earth and the next," after recovering from his wounds, (328) and often "spoke in tongues" (334). As the pythoness predicts, Theophilus learns all he needed to know because he was reiterating it in tongues which is commonly seen as proof that the speaker is Divinely inspired by the Holy Spirit (the third person of

⁴² Interestingly, the novel is divided into four books which is reminiscent of the four Canonical Gospels.

the Trinity; God as spiritually active in the world) (OED). Nevertheless, such an appreciation for his gift of traveling through the door leads to nothing because when he finds his words are copied down by Philip (Theophilus's Macedonian servant), in order to be deciphered later, Theophilus orders that the document be destroyed "without even looking at it" (Wibberley 334). The opportunity to understand more about the Kingdom of Truth is lost, suggesting that though *kerygma* is presented in various forms to Theophilus, he continues to be apprehensive about Jesus' *kerygma* and does not always grasp his sanctioned role as dispenser of *kerygma*. Nevertheless, in a clever twist of Divine Design Wibberley has Philip copy down Theophilus's words, the same Philip the Evangelist who later preaches Jesus' *kerygma* in Samaria in Acts 8.

Theophilus is contradictory in his quest for knowledge of Jesus because he constantly refuses to accept what he hears about the Nazarene and his message. Theophilus cannot give up this world for, as he keeps saying to the readers of his text, "I do not need to remind you that I am a businessman," meaning that he will always see the world in terms of earthly possessions that he may buy and sell to others, mostly for a profit (340). Nevertheless, it must be said that Theophilus does use some of the money he makes to take care of people like Philip and Tabitha (the pythoness) because he "was once a slave," and does to others what he would have liked done to himself in that situation (16). However, up until the last page of the book he continues to question why God and Jesus are interested in him. Why did they force him through the terrible baptism of hell after he is stabbed in the arena and then reborn, in Philip's view, as "a child of the true God"? (341). Theophilus's final question in the novel reveals much to the readers, but little to himself: "Compared with all the treasure poured into the Temple of Jerusalem, and all the beasts sacrificed there daily, what was my offering of a cup of wine? Again I ask who, after all, am I, Theophilus, that God should be so concerned about me?" (341).

The answer lies in the name Wibberley gives him, which when split in Greek is *theo* (god) and

philos (loving), meaning “god loving” (OED). Wibberley employs his narrator as the biblical metaphor by which Wibberley may proclaim Jesus’ *kerygma* through the narration and testimony that Theophilus preaches. Theophilus may be god loving, but he never recognizes his strongest characteristic⁴³ because he does not examine his own life as thoroughly as he does those of others. Wibberley demonstrates through Theophilus that what is important is the act of offering Jesus something and not how much or how expensive the offering is. Theophilus misses the goodness in his act and still only thinks in terms of values and quantities. Nevertheless, he is unconsciously led to humility and sacrifice, unknowingly exhibiting Christian virtues, through the divine design that is integrated throughout his life.

Theophilus is too strong minded to know that he is dispensing *kerygma* when the events are actually taking place. Several other characters (like his servant Philip) try to reveal Jesus’ truth to him, but the character who comes closest, without receiving angry criticism from Theophilus, is “Tutmoshe, one of the remaining secret priests of Aten” the Egyptian sun disk deity⁴⁴ (Wibberley 112). Tutmoshe is a fascinating character because he is surrounded by the mythological and the magical. Readers learn that he is 180 and will live until he is 200 because a “sacred beetle which he had saved ... promised him as many years of life as he wishes, but he had decided that two hundred was enough” (112). It is through Tutmoshe that Theophilus learns of the connection between the Phoenix and Jesus; a correlation between Egyptian myth and the Jesus myth. Such a parallel between myths is not the only one, for what makes Tutmoshe such a trustworthy and insightful character lies in the roots of his name as well. Tutmoshe’s name can be divided into two words, Tut⁴⁵ and Moshe. Moshe is the Hebrew word for the name Moses, meaning “is born”. As Tutmoshe’s name suggests,

⁴³ Similarly, Callaghan’s protagonist is also named Philo, a shorter rendition of Theophilus, further demonstrating the influences New Testament names have upon these authors and subsequently the means by which biblical language dispenses Jesus’ *kerygma* by altering the myth of his life.

⁴⁴ Wibberley must have been aware of the connection he was making between Tutmoshe as a priest of the sun god and the Christian God that is the sun in John’s Gospel.

like Moses, he will be able to aid the renewal of God's religion by revealing some aspect of God's truth to Theophilus, just as God revealed his ten commandments to the Jews through Moses at Mount Sinai.⁴⁶ Tutmoshe exists within the novel as a teacher figure to Theophilus, but he is also perhaps the only man whom Theophilus truly looks up to.

Theophilus visits Tutmoshe to seek answers about the Phoenix. Being an Egyptian priest, Tutmoshe is well versed in the history of the Phoenix, a bird who is born, dies, and reborn. Tutmoshe reveals to Theophilus that the rare occasion when a Phoenix dies and is reborn marks "[t]he beginning of a new age ... The bird god dies and is reborn every fifteen hundred years" (115). Wibberley, like Mailer, but with far more subtlety, connects the Old Testament with the New Testament. Moses, who is often paralleled to Jesus, is himself part of a new era, perhaps not in Egyptian mythology, but certainly in the Abrahamic tradition. Moreover, Tutmoshe tells Theophilus that the Phoenix died and was reborn over the land of Judaea at the same time Jesus was crucified. Unlike Jesus in his parables, Tutmoshe feeds the answers to the parables to Theophilus by making them obvious when he identifies the parallel that Jesus and the Phoenix both "died and [were] reborn alone and unseen," and that Jesus said he was the King of Truth (119). While Theophilus struggles to understand Jesus' *kerygma* on his own, he still learns it through the help of companions like Tutmoshe. What is most significant about Theophilus's learning process with respect to *kerygma* is that readers go through the same mental exercises, interpreting, questioning, recognizing and absorbing Jesus' *kerygma* and then accepting/believing it or not. Wibberley shows the readers that Jesus is a mythological character in that his birth and resurrection are not a unique myth, but a symbol of a new era dawning that may be rooted in the Phoenix. Moreover, the Phoenix is a bird that dies and is reborn through fire, much like Jesus who is "consumed in the fires of the Passion and rising again on the third day" (Cooper 130). The Phoenix's connection to fire is evocative of the

⁴⁶ No distinct significance could be found for "Tut". Tutmoshe together simply means "Tut is born".

natural elements' figurative place in the Bible. Fire appears often in the Bible, as does water.

In the novel the sea is a particularly strong repetitious literary technique used to connect characters to the unexplainable, and to Jesus as a mythic character. *The Seven Hills* is consumed with voyages since Theophilus travels vast distances by boat to engage in his merchant work, much like Jesus travels by sea to preach to different communities. When Jesus traverses the Sea of Galilee to illuminate peoples' minds, Theophilus's mind is likewise enlarged, both because of all he has seen, and because he has also begun to navigate spiritually his own mind. Both Jesus in the Canonical Gospels,⁴⁷ and Theophilus have a strong connection to the sea. Theophilus views the sea as a place where he can be free, a fact readers learn on the second page. The sea appears frequently as figurative language in the New Testament, but Theophilus seems again to miss what readers might often see (the *kerygma*), and wonders how he can best use the sea to his own advantage in order to increase his profits. To illustrate, when he hears the parable about Jesus walking on water his reaction is unlike that of the disciples who, upon seeing Jesus walk on water, realize that Jesus is the Messiah. In contrast, Theophilus understands the whole story differently, to the point where readers may slight Theophilus for missing Jesus' message. Theophilus argues to Philip: "you could not have failed to note that Jesus had a power of particular concern to me—power over the seas and the winds ... Now is it wrong that I should seek this power? Is it really a crime—something unholy to make a profit? Is it really unworthy to wish to save my ships and my seamen and feed the hungry of Rome? ... Propound to me the uses of magical powers. Are they rightly used when a man turns a stick into a snake, and wrongly used when a man saves a fleet from destruction?" (Wibberley 195). Nobel and selfless are words that could be applied to Theophilus's passionate questions, but the fact that his first argument to Philip is that he wants to make a profit, and then subsequently mentions his concern for his sailors reduces the readers' admiration and agreement considerably.

⁴⁶ Like Moses, Tutmoshe also lives to be older than 100.

The quotation also demonstrates how much myth permeates Theophilus's everyday language. There is only one biblical figure who changes a stick into a snake, and that is Moses. One sees again the mythical parallels that are created between Jesus and Moses. While Theophilus argues that he deserves the power that Jesus has he reaches out to the Old Testament to show that such powers can be used trivially.⁴⁸

In such examples Theophilus functions as a foil to proper Christian moral behavior. Jesus' *kerygma* is therefore revealed through Theophilus in many different ways. Whereas in *The Gospel According to the Son* readers saw Jesus' deep connection to nature and thus a connection to God, for Theophilus nature does not necessarily establish such a connection. Wibberley uses Theophilus to work somewhat against mythological types in order to make them more prominent to readers. However, because Theophilus is a vehicle by which Jesus may dispense his *kerygma*, whether Theophilus knows it and/or accepts it, he still at times reveals an appreciation for nature itself as God's creation. Theophilus argues that "[m]an is not comforted by magic. Man is comforted by what is natural and therefore unmagical. The blossoms on the tree were natural, not magical. And as I am natural and not magical they could speak directly to me about life and death in terms I could readily understand and which were soothing. What they seemed to say to me was that death does not triumph. Life will persist. There would be plum blossoms a thousand years after I died. There was comfort in that" (268). In essence, he hits all the right notes. But, the fact that Jesus proclaimed that death is not the end for there is a kingdom in heaven, is a promise too abstract for Theophilus to understand. Philip, the exemplar of Christian faith and Theophilus's "Sunday School teacher," tries to modify Theophilus's conclusions by retorting that "faith [in Jesus/God] gives eternal life" (269). Theophilus has faith in the naturalness and permanence of nature, for there is something eternal in it,

⁴⁷ Paul in the Acts of the Apostles is likewise attached to the sea.

⁴⁸ However, had Theophilus taken the time to learn more about Moses' reason for turning the staff into a snake he would recognize that the act was significant as well as miraculous and would not think it a trivial use of "magic".

but he does not see the concrete imagery of nature as relating to the mythical/magical/unexplainable⁴⁹ creation of the earth, thus distancing him slightly from a full understanding of Jesus' teachings.

Theophilus feels a connection with nature most significantly when he is about to face his death in the arena, at which point Seneca asks Theophilus: "what most moving memory remains with you now?" and Theophilus replies, "A twisted, gnarled plum tree blooming on the Appian Way" (313). The image of the plum blossom stays with Theophilus throughout *The Seven Hills*. It is an interesting symbol because in Christianity the plum "fruit depicts independence [and] fidelity", not to mention the eucharist (Cooper 133). The gnarled tree itself may recall the cross. Though Jesus says he will always be with Theophilus, certainly, through such an image, Theophilus, despite his inability to engage totally with Jesus' *kerygma*, is himself faithful to Jesus' memory.

His connection with Jesus is always in the back of his mind because when he is about to fight in the arena, his punishment for telling Caligula of Jesus' greatness, Theophilus sees a merchant selling trinkets to the fighters before they enter the arena; one last purchase before death. "Another talisman offered to gladiators was a small cross on a piece of string to be worn around the neck. On one side of it there was a crude drawing of a fish [The huckster says to Theophilus,] 'It is the best of them all ... Wear this and even if you fall, you will rise again'" (Wibberley 320-321). Jesus is already being commercialized as a mythological god, whose symbols drive away evil. Theophilus comments to himself, "That is how widespread the belief in the Nazarene was already. Crosses, symbolic of his death, were being sold ... I bought it because of the fish. You well know how I have always loved the sea ... To have ignored the cross with a fish on it—so queer a thing to find carved on such a shape—would certainly have been to invite bad luck" (320-321). Theophilus, though blatantly confronted with his connection to Jesus, still misses the significance of the talisman he is

⁴⁹ In his time creation myths would have been the only form of understanding how the world came to be.

about to wear. Wibberley is acutely aware that the fish⁵⁰ is an old symbol depicting Jesus, as it recalls Jesus' fishermen disciples and the loaves and fishes miracle. Even now the "Jesus fish" (a popular ornament) can be seen on the bumpers of automobiles. In fact, Jesus is always with Theophilus. This idea is demonstrated more completely because the fish symbol can be seen everywhere in Rome. Moreover, the huckster promises that Theophilus will rise after death if he wears a miniature version of the crucifix with its small fish symbol. His promise foreshadows cleverly what Theophilus announced only a few pages earlier. On these pages Theophilus regrets having ever met the Nazarene and does not see how Jesus acted as his friend. While Theophilus wavers in his opinion of Jesus, he hopes that Jesus was serious when he called Theophilus his friend, and that if ever Theophilus was to be killed he hopes Jesus "would entertain the thought of raising [him] from the dead" (314-315). Jesus proves himself to Theophilus on some level, perhaps as a reward to Theophilus for his leap of faith when he wears Jesus' cross for protection. He has come to accept the Divine Design that is entering his life. Symbols such as the above are figurative language used to proclaim Divine truth through both written and concrete mediums. They also occur frequently through Theophilus's retellings of the miracles and parables which he hears from people like Luke, Paul, Peter, amongst others.

In *The Seven Hills* Theophilus talks about Jesus' ascent into heaven and his followers' belief that Jesus will "walk among the people again. All this, I warn you again is from Luke's account, and you must certainly be aware that the Greeks are an imaginative people and love myths and wonders. However, Peter, and John have also assured me of the truth of Luke's statements, and it was from them that he got his story" (98). Theophilus wants to make clear to his readers that he is quoting from sources and has not been overcome with religious delusions about Jesus, and he tries to remain as impartial throughout the rest of his narrative. The echoes of these New Testament names suggests

⁵⁰ Jesus became associated with the fish because of an acronym on the cross which stands for Jesus Christ, Son of God,

why Theophilus's testament is fecund with mythological symbols, typological images, and mythical connections belonging to differing systems of belief.⁵¹ Thus Jesus will always remain a mythological character, supported by Theophilus's fictional research, because even the available sources on Jesus' life are themselves dependent on figurative language, consequently, these are the sources that will become the foundation of the New Testament. Myth and history merge in *The Seven Hills* when Theophilus indicates that Luke and John are actual people⁵² and when his narrative describes events that are extraordinary, particularly in connection with nature.

In *The Seven Hills* Wibberley steeps Jesus in mythology even without the help of the historical writings that Theophilus depends on, but through nature. Recall that Theophilus is also a witness to Jesus' miraculous nature; he recognizes that Jesus has some connections to the gods. On the day Jesus is sentenced to crucifixion there is a strong mythological correlation between his divinity and nature: "the sun was darkened; and there was an earthquake ... The first tremor was only slight—just enough to awaken me. The next was worse. The third was like a wave passing under the building" (27). The three earthquake tremors recall how three is a typological symbol in the New Testament (and literature in general), and later in Christianity seen most prominently in the Trinity (Father, Son, Holy Spirit). The fact that there are three tremors announces that something sacred is about to occur, and gives credence to Jesus' divinity. Wibberley follows the Bible in associating sacredness with triads. Theophilus will see Jesus three times after he is crucified: once on top of the tomb where he was buried (60); again at the inn when he is the only one who sees a third man (Jesus) eating dinner with the other two guests (69-70); and finally, towards the end of the novel when Theophilus sees Jesus at his mother Mary's house (291).

Though fascinated by Jesus and seeing him after death, Theophilus is still unwilling to believe

Saviour hyos theou, Soler.

⁵¹ For example, the previous analysis that was done on the comparison between Jesus and the Phoenix.

⁵² Modern scholars know them to be fictional names given to personalize the Canonical Gospels.

in the Christ story. He is unsurprisingly skeptical about seeing a man after death that he met alive once. For example, while speaking with Cleophas and Thaddeus (the two men he sees at the inn eating with Jesus) he asks them if what he saw at the inn ““was an apparition then, a spirit?” Cleophas shook his head. ‘Sir, a spirit cannot eat bread and drink wine ... No, sir. He was no spirit but flesh, bone, and blood as are you and I”’ (78). Still not convinced, Theophilus joins the two brothers in a common meal of bread and wine over which Cleophas says, “Let us eat this bread and drink this wine in memory of him” (79). In reenacting the last supper, the three of them are in effect performing the mass, but Theophilus only half believes in what he is doing. He took part in their ritual because, he writes, “I needed a charm against the disasters which my terrible dreams seemed to forecast” (79). The word charm is disappointing and brazen; when he eats and drinks the wine, he only thinks of it as a superstition that will protect him. Furthermore, to show his lack of sincerity Theophilus asks them directly after participating in the eucharistic meal⁵³ if they would sell goods to him, “for marvels should not so occupy a man’s mind that he neglects profit. That way lies ruin” (79). Of course readers are aware through Jesus’ preaching that it is the path of profit which leads to being perhaps unable to squeeze through the eye of the needle.⁵⁴ Theophilus only partially learns his lesson, despite all the *kerygma* that is dispensed to him, but as Frye comments, “truths of the gospel kind cannot be demonstrated except through personal example” (*The Double Vision* 20). In *The Seven Hills* readers may learn from Theophilus’s failures and his insight; yet he is not exactly a prodigal son.

Most interestingly, Theophilus fulfills his role as an unknowing vehicle of *kerygma* (for both Jesus and Wibberley) directed by Design when he goes to the pythoness who is possessed by

⁵³ The Eucharist is symbolic of the union between the natural and human world, and the Divine essence, a mythological tie that occurs throughout the thesis that is present within the Bible. Frye says in *The Great Code*: “The Eucharist is, among other things, the antitype of the covenant of blood between Israel and God (Exodus 24:6-8), and the provision of manna in the desert (see John 6:49-50). Identifying wine and blood unites animal and vegetable worlds; identifying wine and water (John 2:9) or blood and water (1 John 5:6) unites both worlds with the paradisaal” (*The Great Code* 189).

horrible devils, shouts obscenities and reveals prophecies. Theophilus recounts that the devils that possessed the pythoness “left when they learned that Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified had risen from the dead” (Wibberley 91). In fact, it is Theophilus who provides the *kerygma*. Plainly, Theophilus is a vehicle of Jesus’ *kerygma* because even the small announcement of Jesus’ name and the news that he was resurrected is enough to heal the poor girl of devils who was yet to be cured by the “exorcists at the Temple” (91). The pythoness/Tabitha is another character whom Theophilus saves, probably simultaneously saving himself when he takes her into his home.⁵⁵ Some readers may believe and submit to the power of Jesus’ words through Theophilus’s retelling. However, since the moment is relatively early in *The Seven Hills* Theophilus’s spirituality is still dwarfed because he has yet to have an epiphany that will push him to become a Christian.

Despite the large and obvious Design at work in Theophilus’s life, he continuously fails to be observant of the signs of Jesus’ work. A prominent example occurs when Theophilus is almost flung to his death off a cliff by the Emperor Tiberius. Miraculously, Theophilus is saved because of claps of thunder. Theophilus explains its significance when he calls it “heat thunder” and nothing to worry about (153). However, Tiberius does not see the thunder as trivial: “Tiberius who, like all the other Claudians, believed himself descended from Jupiter, feared only one thing in the world and that was thunder. In a thunderstorm, he was always seized by panic, believing the great god was about to destroy him” (153). Accordingly, Theophilus is released.

Finally, when Theophilus is released he decides to make sacrifices “to Jupiter; I did that just in case that god had saved me but I think it was just luck, for what god would ever be interested in me, Theophilus?” (154). Of course, readers know the answer to that repeated question, because of Wibberley’s repeated construction of similar earlier scenarios. It is Jesus, or God, who has saved

⁵⁴ Mark 10:25; Matthew 19:24; Luke 18:25.

⁵⁵ Once the pythoness loses her ability to announce prophecies, and reverts to plain Tabitha, she is no longer useful to the man that was providing for her.

Theophilus because readers are constantly reminded of the promise that Jesus made to Theophilus, that he will always be there for him. Often it is difficult to apprehend Theophilus's humility (a Christian virtue) because he is, to be blunt, a rather dense character. More informed readers can grasp Jesus' *kerygma* through such serendipitous events as this thunderstorm, which may seem like natural phenomena to Theophilus, but are obviously the constructions of clever authorial intervention to increase the presence of Divine Design in the novel.

Readers also encounter Jesus' *kerygma* along with Theophilus when he sits and listens to stories about Jesus. While followers are transmitting the information to him orally, he later transmits it to readers through the page. Frye comments *vis-à-vis* the convergence between oral stories and the reappearance of *kerygma* through the page that "The Gospels are written mythical narratives, and for casual readers they remain that. But if anything in them strikes a reader with full kerygmatic force, there is, using the word advisedly, a *resurrection* of the original speaking presence in the reader" (*Words with Power* 114). Following Frye, we might discover a unique example of this when Cleophas and Thaddeus recount the story of Jesus' birth. Cleophas and Thaddeus tell Theophilus how "in the middle of the night the sky became as light as day [and] a voice bade us raise our heads and we saw an angel of God standing before us" who announced that the Messiah was born today (Wibberley 75). Jesus' extraordinary birth takes place through the *kerygmatic* language of myth. Wibberley follows the Canonical Gospel tradition regarding how and where Jesus was born as an attempt to correlate the Jesus story of the New Testament with what is described to Theophilus as an historical event witnessed by the brothers' own eyes. Certainly Wibberley must want his readers to experience Frye's *kerygmatic* force as he continuously places Theophilus in a narrative where he becomes more receptive to *kerygma*. Theophilus respects the story enough to want to record Jesus' story directly from witnesses like Cleophas and Thaddeus. His purpose is to remain impartial, like a researcher, since each storyteller (i.e: different witnesses to Jesus' life) emphasizes different points

of a tale depending on the intended audience. His impartiality is what might lead to the solidification of the biblical myth in the readers' minds. Theophilus recognizes that his sources may have an agenda which is why he seeks various sources when he begins to record his retelling of Jesus' life because it "is best, after all, to get a story from more than one source," as he does from Peter and Luke (187).

One can already see Theophilus leaning towards a mythical retelling of Jesus' story, first from his earlier admission that Greeks love myths, and second when he talks about the writing process of his testimony. Theophilus and Philip are following, listening, and recording what Cleophas and Thaddeus are recounting about Jesus. In Theophilus's account he writes that the "shadow of my horse and myself made a pleasing pattern on the road, and even the sound of the hoofs had a soothing and consoling rhythm. Philip tells me it is disgraceful and contrary to all literary rules to record these things, since they have nothing to do with what was said. If I wish to achieve elegance in my writing, he insists, I should stay rigidly with the facts and firmly throw out all that does not concern them ... Do not the circumstances in which a story is told lend credibility to it?" (74). Theophilus's descriptive nature inclines him to depend on metaphor and imagery to depict that which is extraordinary, in this case, stories about the Nazarene. Furthermore, Theophilus's literary style of recording each detail is what illuminates the Divine Design in the history he records. Theophilus's absorption of all the apostles' stories makes him better able to tell Jesus' story, and consequently he mythologizes Jesus all the more.

Moreover, Theophilus's inclination to write his testimony in this way demonstrates that despite the fact that he never clearly accepts Jesus as his Savior,⁵⁶ as Philip does, Theophilus still dispenses *kerygma* by relying on literary methods which are themselves part of the stories which he hears from

⁵⁶ The Epilogue does not make clear what kind of Christian Theophilus is. The narrator wonders whether Theophilus was "ever tempted, when restored to complete health, to get into business again, for, Christian or quasi-Christian, he was certainly a business man" (Wibberley 343).

others and then reprints. Each time Theophilus retells a story about Jesus, the Nazarene's story is mythologized and re-mythologized. Theophilus, though a reluctant believer, is open to myths about saviors, for he knows that myths of Divine saviors are part of a nation's tale.⁵⁷ Earlier Theophilus explains to Herod, "But you know that every nation has a story of a great deliverer whose coming is always expected when national fortunes are low ... In short, deliverance by a Divine champion is the common hope of mankind and you should not therefore take such tales [as those about Jesus] seriously" (47). Theophilus is not trying to prove to Herod that he does not believe in Jesus, but in reality he does display his own doubt about Jesus early on in the novel, consequently raising similar doubts in readers' minds about Jesus' credibility as the Messiah.

To Theophilus, Jesus is simply another magician whom he recalls less clearly as time passes. When speaking with Tutmoshe, Theophilus tells him how he had "offered [Jesus] a cup of wine because he was a fine young man and because I have seen so many flogged slaves ... But I scarcely remember much more of what he said. It was cold. And I had not had my breakfast" (120). From such a moment readers recall that Theophilus has had very limited communication with Jesus, and truly his mind is filled with more trivial memories, such as a lack of breakfast. It was simply that one compassionate moment of giving Jesus a cup of wine that bound the two of them together and launched Theophilus in his role of dispensing *kerygma* to Gentiles. Theophilus becomes a character with whom non-Christians (whether characters or readers) can identify. Frye writes, *kerygma* says "‘You are what you identify with.’ We are close to the kerygmatic whenever we meet the statement, as we do surprisingly often in contemporary writing, that it seems to be language that uses man rather than man that uses language" (*Words with Power* 116). The language of the Bible

⁵⁷ Theophilus gives several examples of Divine saviors in different parts of the world. The preceding is the expanded version of the passage quoted above: "The Macedonians still look for the return of Alexander, or at least his father Philip. The Persians are convinced that Darius will come one day thundering out of the hills in his war chariot with his bowmen launching arrows of fire and behind him four lions, their manes dark with blood. The Germans look for the appearance of a great champion who will lead them to the conquest of the world, and you are well aware that all the rebellions among the Gallic tribes recently took place because they thought their one particular champion had returned" (Wibberley 47).

continuously resurfaces to retell the Jesus myth, both when Wibberley uses it, and when Theophilus is also forced, over time, to use language to record his experiences in a manuscript as they relate to Jesus, as well as to search vocally the language of myth, metaphor and biblical tradition to explain his interactions with Jesus to others.

Whether Theophilus wants to or not he is always talking about Jesus, spreading the truth of his word, as well as constructing him as a mythological character in that Jesus does things beyond human ability. Theophilus's role, or what he may deem a curse, is that two of the Roman Emperors within *The Seven Hills*, Tiberius and Caligula, demand that Theophilus tell them all he can about Jesus. Wibberley's Divine plan has forced Theophilus into a homilist's role. To his own horror, when Tiberius questions Theophilus if he believes that Jesus rose from the dead, Theophilus puts his life at risk when he replies in the affirmative. He admits this is contrary to the reply he wanted to give: that he never saw the resurrected Jesus because such an admission would seal his own death. Nevertheless, his lips unintentionally reply: "I have seen him twice alive, since he was crucified" (Wibberley 152). His unwilling honesty reveals to Tiberius that Jesus is Divine and indicates that Theophilus cannot deny the truth about Jesus because he has become Jesus' pagan vehicle of *kerygma* after the resurrection. Like Mailer's Jesus, whose words are lost in favor of God's, Theophilus's words are also no longer his own. Readers may understand quite clearly that Theophilus was not placed at Jesus' trial to be "an impartial witness [for Pilate and] to those proceedings—someone utterly strange with no bias on one side or the other," but to speak and learn about Jesus (150-151). Moreover, Theophilus's placement at the trial and his own actions are what consistently force him to be called upon by the Roman Emperors. They believe Theophilus is one of Jesus' followers and consequently part of a plot to bring down the Roman Empire, when readers know Theophilus is none of these things. His role as a witness for Pilate consistently makes him a witness of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection even though the "last thing in the world [he] wanted to

talk about was the Nazarene. How malicious of the gods, I thought, that they should have thrown me and this Jew together—two people who had nothing whatever to do with each other and nothing in common” (160-161). Here Theophilus is aware that some form of Divinity is placing him in these dangerous positions with the Romans.

Before he follows Tiberius as Emperor of Rome, Caligula also questions Theophilus extensively about Jesus. He does so not to become one of Jesus’ followers, but to learn what mythological elements are associated with the Nazarene in order that he may re-appropriate them to himself as a means of declaring his “divinity” (161). Towards the end of the novel Caligula, to prove that he is greater than Jesus and to proclaim his Divinity, attempts “walking on water” as Jesus had done (273). Caligula uses the knowledge about Jesus’ extraordinary deeds in order to replicate them and prove that he is more powerful, more divine, unlike Theophilus who uses his knowledge about Jesus to get a better understanding of him.

Furthermore, relatively late in the novel Wibberley has Theophilus reveal how much Jesus has been mythologized after his own death. Theophilus believes that “[c]ertainly the Nazarene dead had more power than the Nazarene alive and had already converted many of his enemies to his doctrines. But so it was too with Caesar,” a fact which Theophilus believes is true in his own time (260). His point is that humanity has the tendency to mythologize figures that they may not have understood at the time, but upon reflection these men were extraordinary compared to the regular population. Philip, however, is again the voice of reason to Theophilus’s flawed argument and functions as the voice of Christian doctrine in the novel. For though Jesus and Caesar may both have become greater after death, “Jesus fell from Heaven to the gallows, and to the worst death it is possible for a man to die. Surely in all of history, through all time, there can be no greater fall than that, nor a triumph greater than to come back from death to life, and not merely to mortal life but to eternal life” (260). Jesus’ greatest Divine and mythic attribute is the fact that he rose again after death. Philip again

argues with Theophilus on the topic of the immortality promised with Christian belief. His question to Theophilus effectively makes his point: “Did you not see Jesus risen from the dead yourself?” (270). Theophilus resists Philip’s attempts at conversion, even more when Philip brings up these mysterious sightings because it is a return to the argument of “magic to prove what [Philip] asserted is unmagical,” a method of mythologization used in order to grasp Jesus’ complex *kerygma* (270). Theophilus dislikes that Philip swiftly moves from an argument based on logic to one that is not. While Theophilus sees Philip’s method of argumentation as faulty, readers are nonetheless given the opportunity to decide for themselves.

Moreover, Theophilus’s judgment is constantly questionable when it comes to Jesus as he repeatedly fails to see, as Luke asserts, that Theophilus is “under the spell of the Nazarene ... He is calling you to come and be one of his followers ... You will not be able to resist him” (285). Luke is correct as Theophilus is unable to resist the vocational call. Theophilus has been called, but also chosen by Jesus, thus he is constantly retelling Jesus’ story, continuously searching for answers relating to the life of Jesus, and always finds himself thinking of Jesus throughout the narrative. Theophilus’s own role in the Jesus myth takes on a mythological element of its own because of the grace involved in his chance meeting with Jesus at Pilate’s court. Luke even says to Theophilus, “You do not deceive me any more than you deceived the Nazarene, who knew of you before you met him ... Your secret thoughts were known to him then as they are known to him now. He knew before you met him that though you drive a hard bargain you will not cheat; that your nature is truthful and that you have mercy on your fellowmen” (286). Here Theophilus is even described slightly as a Jesus-like figure because of his honesty, integrity, and the kindness he feels towards humanity.⁵⁸ Theophilus’s life is itself a parable of the life of Jesus.

⁵⁸ He saves Tabitha who was the pythoness. As well several of the servants who work for him are those whom he saved under different circumstances; but he also did these things, because as a human, he figured he could help them as well as help himself.

CHAPTER 3

"A Time for Judas"'s Story to be Told: Demythologizing and Remythologizing Jesus Christ

As the title *A Time for Judas* indicates, Callaghan's novel is less about Jesus than it is about Jesus' most controversial disciple, Judas. Callaghan took a different literary route than Wibberley or Mailer in his effort to reinvent the Jesus story. Nevertheless, like *The Seven Hills*, *A Time for Judas* contains a narrator who is a pagan named Philo of Crete.⁵⁹ Philo's story runs parallel to that of Jesus and both characters interact with one another without Philo being one of Jesus' followers. Moreover, since Jesus is not the main focus of *A Time for Judas*, the readers learn about Jesus' *kerygma* through his teachings which are reflected in the various narrative layers of the novel (Philo and Judas are both first person narrators). Despite Judas' centrality to the novel, his story is directly intertwined with that of Jesus through multiple first person narratives that overlap one another (each with a unique perspective). Consequently, each narrator employs different mediums whereby *kerygma* is dispensed with varying degrees of credibility. The credibility of history and the issue of storytelling and retelling are central to *A Time for Judas*. Readers may often struggle with whose narrative to trust.

Most of the *kerygma* which is dispensed in the novel occurs through the stories Judas tells about Jesus, and the new truth he reveals about Jesus. However, what readers (us and those of the fictional world) receive in the novel is the narrative in a manuscript authored by Philo, and found by an anonymous scholar, but that narrative is itself a copy from Philo's memory of an original document containing a story narrated by Judas and recorded by Philo,

⁵⁹ Philo is less captivated by Christianity which is why it is no accident that his name lacks "Theo" in front of it unlike Wibberley's narrator, Theophilus.

a document which Philo later burns at Judas' request. Hence, the document and thus Judas' never before heard story is already tainted by retelling. Despite the sincere tone of all the first person narrators in this novel, readers receive a less credible narrative due to the many channels of this story's production. The mythical and historical aspects of the texts thus become questionable to readers, but, as it is with *kerygma*, in the end readers control what they choose as authentic to the story. Callaghan's approach further demonstrates that though Frye and Bultmann have appeared on opposite sides of the *kerygmatic* debate, history and myth are inevitably and conclusively intertwined, creating a unique and ambiguous vehicle for *kerygma*.

Part of that uniqueness is linked to the understanding that in literature the Jesus myth changes and adapts (only fixed by specific moments like the crucifixion and resurrection), a phenomenon which originates with the New Testament and continues with newly discovered gospels (i.e: of Mary, Philip, Judas, Thomas). In both the Canonical and non-canonical Gospels, parables that Jesus preaches differ and there are specific omissions from narrative to narrative. *A Time for Judas* comments on the impact of retelling stories about Jesus on theology and history. Since Philo's story runs parallel to that of Jesus, readers are consistently aware of breaks between Callaghan's story and the Canonical Gospels. The merger between history and literature is also captured through the literary technique of having Philo's experiences correspond with the same sign posts of Jesus' life and ministry as are found in the New Testament. At the start of *A Time for Judas*, Jesus is identified mostly as "the storyteller" in contrast to the other novels where Jesus either retains his status as the Son of God, or is described as a gifted human being. As though anticipating Frye's critical theory, Callaghan creates what Frye calls the true Jesus: "The true Jesus ... is the uniting of the divine and the human in our own minds, and it is only the active Jesus, the teacher and

storyteller, who can be recreated”” (*Frye and the Word* 31). Frye implies that a true Jesus is one who is neither prophet nor artisan, but a storyteller, one like Callaghan’s Jesus who creates his own narrative and speaks in parables to his followers. His novel is different from the others in this thesis because through a highly convincing creative plot he shows how Jesus changed from an individual and more human character (whose roots begin in the story-making process) into the mythologized Jesus Christ. However, Callaghan consistently remains within the mythical *kerygmatic* tradition as even early in the novel Jesus is the type of mystical man who can visit women in their dreams, calling them to join his following (Callaghan 98). Other than the above specific description, and his resurrection near the end, Jesus is not depicted as performing miracles in the novel.

In addition, Callaghan’s Jesus, as readers will learn through Judas’ testament, is constantly aware of his place in history merely through the conscious act of creating his own mythical narrative. Jesus is the creator and actor in his own myth. Moreover, he knows that if he wants to impact the wider Jewish and Gentile community, he needs to be part of a story that people will remember and in which they find meaning. That is why Judas is important to Jesus. According to Callaghan’s Judas, Jesus loved him the most, and it is for this reason that Jesus knew he could count on Judas to play the antagonist role in his story. Callaghan’s method of having Jesus construct his own life is not far fetched since the majority of the New Testament is based on a retelling of the Old Testament. Even Frye writes that “The New Testament, in short, claims to be, among other things, the key to the Old Testament, the explanation of what the Old Testament really means. Jesus’ disciples could not understand even the Resurrection until Jesus had explained its relation to Old Testament prophecy (Luke 24:44)” (*The Great Code* 106). Jesus merely works within a theological/literary tradition that has already been established in Judaism, especially in relation to the many scriptures which

interpret Jewish law and traditions.⁶⁰ *The Bible as Literature* points out that such self-justifying reinterpretation is part of the biblical tradition: “the writers of the Bible ... selected material concerning the past and shaped it according to what they felt were the needs of their own present-day audience” (Gabel 62). Reinterpretations and retellings of history and myth are typical of the Bible in general, especially in the Jesus myth and the Judeo-Christian tradition. It is these universal mythical visions that create and encourage “diverse levels of never-ending interpretation” (Coulson 151). Such a phenomena in interpretation is sponsored by the language of myth that stimulates the imagination and leads readers to discover Jesus’ *kerygma* in their own ways through the given narrative.

Nevertheless, *kerygma* is not as easy to distinguish in *A Time for Judas* as it was in *The Gospel According to the Son* and *The Seven Hills*. The reason is that readers of Callaghan’s novel are engaged in a narrative which constructs various levels of meaning before their eyes and thus leaves less room for any form of imaginative interpretation about the Jesus myth not already provided by Callaghan. Since Jesus is a remote character in *A Time for Judas* (a creative decision by Callaghan that alienates Jesus from readers by making him less human/more abstractly Divine), the rare times that he is described preaching come mostly from Judas. There is only one moment when readers actually encounter Jesus speaking (from Philo’s perspective). It occurs when Jesus tells Pilate, “I am the truth,” and never quite explains to those present what he means (Callaghan 144). To reiterate, when Jesus discloses that he is the truth, and talks about the truth, it is the only moment in the novel where he distinctly reveals his own *kerygma*. Nevertheless, the proclamation of religious truth is still disclosed most clearly through Judas.

Oddly enough, it is only when Judas secretly tells Philo the covert narrative plot

⁶⁰ For example, the Midrash is a theological text in Judaism which is a commentary on the Torah (the Hebrew Bible).

between himself and Jesus that a historical and religious truth begins to emerge. Had an additional author in the novel not found Philo's secret scroll (what is now *A Time for Judas*) and subsequently revealed it, such a distinctive expression of Jesus' *kerygma*, though ultimately preaching the same message as in the Canonical Gospels and the other novels, would have been lost like Theophilus's mysterious tongues revelation that was discussed in chapter 2. Judas only comes to terms with his role as Jesus' betrayer and a vehicle of *kerygma* in the Jesus myth when he says to Philo, "It's all right with me. I can stand it, as long as I know the truth is written and hidden somewhere—for a time to come" (97). Here Judas' comment reveals how history is connected to truth, and also shows that history (in this case the Jesus myth and the place of Jesus within history) is only as accurate as the contemporary sources. Judas can come to terms with being perceived as evil in history, so long as somewhere, somehow, his name is vindicated, as it later will be in Philo's hidden scroll. Thus, the real truth about Judas' role in the Jesus myth will be known at a time where it can do minimal damage to Jesus' persona and theological sayings.⁶¹ All that is important in Judas' constructed act of betrayal is his role as the catalyst to propelling Jesus into the role of martyr and savior in the Jesus myth. Once the idea of Judas as an evil traitor is diminished, by Philo's witness testimony, Christians are not going to stop following Jesus' teachings but may conversely classify Judas' betrayal in the New Testament as a misinterpretation of history.⁶²

Callaghan, under the guise of a fictional academic, gives his readers a gift by

⁶¹ Oddly enough, Callaghan's belief that Judas will be vindicated later in history reflects the content of *The Gospel of Judas*. Though the Coptic (language having roots in ancient Egypt) manuscript version was not discovered until 1972, and not available in English until 2006, some of the contents of the gospel have been known to scholars since before the middle ages. *The Gospel of Judas* had been originally written in Greek before 180 A.D. and translated into Coptic and lost for 1700 years ("Lost Gospels Revealed" *National Geographic*). The text has Jesus revealing to Judas, after Judas recounts to him a dream he had about being stoned to death by the disciples, "'You will become the thirteenth, and you will be cursed by the other generations—and you will come to rule over them. In the last days they will curse your ascent to the holy [generation]'" (*The Gospel of Judas* 4).

presenting them with Judas' narrative because it is Judas who uncovers the importance and intricacies of *kerygma* in Jesus' self-prophesising myth. It is not Judas' betrayal that results in Jesus' *kerygma*; the betrayal was preordained because the act of Jesus' death needed to be part of a tragic story (rooted in a trusted friend's betrayal) which would captivate listeners/readers sympathy, respect, and faith. Until the novel's conclusion readers are left questioning if this compelling narrative was Jesus' construction because of a messiah complex, or the result of God's Design.

Jesus required something dramatic to happen to himself for future Christians to have the same reaction to his parables, after his death, as Judas had before it. The following quotation is the first description of an active character, Judas, (within the novels explored in this thesis) who is seen actively receiving Jesus' *kerygma*. He contrasts sharply with a more passive character like Theophilus: "he was such a good storyteller he had me bemused by the story's implications. [I was d]rawn to him" (108). Though readers are not told what message was of particular interest to Judas in Jesus' story, the fact remains that Judas describes Jesus' ability to construct a story which captivates listeners in order to convey deep religious meaning. Callaghan's Judas then explains what this thesis has argued in the first two chapters, that Jesus' *kerygma* is dispensed through relatable figurative and rhetorical methods using the language of myth. Even though Judas does not specifically describe Jesus' *kerygma* in terms of the biblical metaphorical types that were present in Mailer's and Wibberley's novels, such rhetorical methods are implied because of "all those little stories" that Jesus "loved to tell dealing with people in their personal relationships" (112). Judas even comments "[h]ow enchanted [he] was by [Jesus'] little stories. Ah, Jesus and his storytelling! And yet I saw he was always saying the same thing in a hundred ways" (113). Judas has

⁶² This is a tactic which Ricci applies repeatedly with Judas. In *Testament* Judas does not really betray Jesus but is accused

recognized that *kerygma* proclaims the ultimate truth and so it needs to be dispensed in alternative ways, such as the use of figurative language, in order that certain people may hear Jesus' message one time, and others the next. *Kerygma* is usually derived from Judas' gospel which temporarily takes narrative control away from Philo, a control that he as the author of the scroll gives up in order to record a fuller truer picture of the Jesus myth.

Much like Jesus, Philo is a master storyteller, but his skills are linguistically artistic. He has "the golden tongue, the gift of words," and is able to present to the readers an intriguing story through proper plot structure (cleverly paring Simon and Jesus' story). Nevertheless, his skills remain in the realm of art and not religious truth so Philo is often unwilling to acknowledge that anything is truly fantastical; nor does he recognize the deep theological meaning behind the words (36). Philo never tries to define clearly who or what he thinks Jesus is. In front of Philo others call Jesus a storyteller, a revelation which creates no substantial reaction in Philo, perhaps because he himself is a storyteller (54). He has certainly made the judgment that Jesus has magical powers, but he describes him as a sorcerer: "I could see that this Galilean could have the power of casting spells, turning fantasies into spells, and then I felt a wrench at my whole being as if things were being torn from me" (56). Instead of seeing Jesus' powers positively, Philo reacts negatively, hence his unwillingness to listen to the good stories that Mary of Samaria and Judas tell him about Jesus. Still, though he may not listen to them, he still records what they say, giving readers room for interpretive choice.

Callaghan is actively retelling Jesus' narrative through Judas, Philo, and the other characters in *A Time for Judas*. Whereas *kerygma* was revealed through Jesus' preaching in *The Gospel According to the Son* and *The Seven Hills*, in *A Time for Judas* the *kerygma* is

as such because of miscommunication between a Roman and a Jew (Ricci 425).

further located in the story that is reinvented as myth. In fact, Callaghan suggests that Jesus' story inevitably tends towards the mythic. *Kerygma* exists in myth because as Judas says, "It's the story—only the story that lives, Philo—if people like the story. Jesus knew this better than anyone" (105). What is paramount is that the story be good. If the narrative is moving, the message/*kerygma* will be dispensed regardless of whether the characters are flat, lack emotional depth and individuality as is apparent in the New Testament. Such a literary failure on the Canonical Gospels authors' part by not imbuing their characters with thoughts and depth occurs because they were unconcerned with secondary characters. Character development is not imperative for proclamation to weave out of the text, but literary rhetoric is. Their concern lay with developing Jesus' message within the story through such elements, rather than with the development of character and historical data.

Callaghan takes the opposite approach. He develops new backgrounds and characters in order to fill in historical gaps within the Jesus myth to then reconstruct a mythic story that has more character and *kerygmatic* depth. His tactic can best be appreciated through an analysis of how Jesus is constructed as a mythological figure in the novel. Callaghan is the sole author discussed in this thesis who is able to show the transition from what could have been parts of the historical Jesus into the recognizable mythical Jesus of the New Testament. He does this by first showing that Jesus is an ordinary young man in his relationship with women.

Before Callaghan attempts his weave of a historical and a mythological Jesus, he begins by debunking the popular Christian misconception of Mary Magdalene as a prostitute. He replaces her with a fictional prostitute named Mary of Samaria (14). As the narrative moves forward, it becomes evident that Mary of Samaria, the prostitute, is re-appropriated and recast as Mary Magdalene. In *A Time for Judas* Mary of Samaria implies to Philo that

she had slept with Jesus when she affirms that “Judas let [her] to [Jesus]”; the word “let” implies that Judas has the power to lend Mary of Samaria out for sex to the men he pleases (54). While she confesses to Philo her admiration for Jesus, she also reveals that Jesus and Mary Magdalene have an intimate relationship, what is described in the novel as a historical fact that is part of Jesus’ human life before he is mythologized. Readers learn that Jesus “kisses [Mary Magdalene] publicly, he kisses her on the mouth” (55) and intimately strokes her earlobe (114). Here Callaghan is drawing on a non-traditional version of Mary Magdalene’s relationship with Jesus, one which may have its origins in the Gnostic Gospel of Philip. There the narrator depicts Mary Magdalene in much the same way Callaghan does: “And the consort of [Christ is] Mary Magdalene. [The Lord loved Mary] more than [all] the disciples, and kissed her on her [mouth] often. The others too...they said to him ‘Why do you love her more than all of us?’” (Willson 39-40). The word “mouth” appears in brackets because translators, as with other portions of the text, could not decipher the word. However, the text implies that Jesus had some sort of intimate relationship with Mary Magdalene. Similarly, *A Time for Judas* suggests and shows Jesus as a sexual being and implies a more human/Divine split in Jesus’ character.

The novel further reveals how Mary Magdalene might have been mythologized into a prostitute in popular Christianity. Callaghan expands on the sparsely described Mary Magdalene in the New Testament and transforms her into a historical figure whose role in the story changes from lover/wife into a harlot by the end of the novel. According to Philo it was Mary Magdalene’s beauty “that prompted men in the countryside, and women, too, to decide with satisfaction that she, not Mary of Samaria, was the one who had been the whore before she took up with her Galilean lover. She was the woman all men wanted when near her; all men were willing to believe she could have a hundred lovers, yet offer each one of them

serenity and ecstasy” (Callaghan 215). By these words Mary Magdalene has become mythologized even while she is still alive. From such hyperbole in the minds of readers, not to mention the characters in the novel, she takes on aspects of the female archetype Aphrodite. Such conclusions near the end of the novel are balanced out by Judas’ earlier testimony which reveals the true dynamic between Jesus and Mary Magdalene.

The way Judas describes Jesus’ relationship with Mary Magdalene is in itself a part of *kerygma* as Jesus’ actions are in stark contrast to popular Christian conceptions of him. Most people believe Jesus was celibate, though there is no concrete biblical proof of this and though Catholic theology admits that his human nature made him capable of sexual activity. According to Andrew Greely, “human love between the man and woman is a sacrament, a hint, a revelation, a sign, a metaphor for Jesus’ love for His Church and for God’s love for His people” (Greely 56). When in *A Time for Judas* Callaghan portrays a sexually aware Jesus, he makes the character more human and relatable. Judas gives Mary Magdalene the title of Jesus’ companion (as the narrator of *The Gospel of Philip* calls her his consort) in his secret gospel and describes how “she shared secrets with Jesus that he never revealed to them [(the disciples).] She was a woman, and he needed her in his company” (Wilson 111). Jesus appreciates Mary Magdalene because she loves him more fully than the disciples, as Jesus implies when he asks the disciples, “Why aren’t you more like her?” (111). Here the suggestions of love between a man and a woman is significant, and also implies that Mary Magdalene has more faith in Jesus than his disciples.

Furthermore, Mary Magdalene is an especially distinctive character because of her secret relationship with Jesus. Callaghan could have been influenced by the Gnostic Gospel of Mary, a text which depicts Jesus revealing information to her that the other disciples did not know. This is especially indicated when in *The Gospel of Mary* “Peter said to Mary, you

were greatly loved by the Savior, as no other woman” and by the new messages Jesus confided to Mary Magdalene in the gospel (King 15). Similarly, in the novel Judas mentions that Jesus reveals to her what others never learn: “the other things, the secret things, the night things, the whispered things or the silent things—I know this side of him,” says Mary Magdalene (Callaghan 216). One can hazard a guess that their pillow talk ranged from simple talk about himself to concerns about the new theology he was spreading. For Mary Magdalene, Jesus is more than her spiritual teacher. They are connected on a different spiritual level that is outside of his ministry, and part of his human and non-mythological side. Regardless of what secrets they may have shared together, the fact that such a deep connection is apparent in the novel reveals who Jesus was, and perhaps manifests *kerygma* in relation to how husbands and wives should behave with one another. Even the Messiah needs a companion from whom he can seek unconditional comfort and love, for Mary Magdalene is one of the few biblical characters (unlike several of his disciples), both in the novel and the New Testament, who never abandons Jesus. However, since Callaghan makes Jesus a mythologized character, he must have recognized that Jesus’ romantic story with Mary Magdalene coupled with Jesus’ *kerygma* is not nearly as tantalizing and unique a story as Jesus’ subsequent death for the words he preaches.

Jesus’ mythologization only becomes apparent after readers sift through the historical moments which Philo describes. It is important to understand the history that creates the background for the myth, something which can be explored by examining the parallel stories within the narrative, and a detailed discussion of Judas’ testimony. In this respect Bultmann is correct, as *kerygma* is understood based on the factual accounts provided by Philo about the events that transpired up to, and around, Jesus’ death because they transcend history. Philo’s narrative emulates the merger which Callaghan’s novel creates between the two

critical theories of Frye and Bultmann because Philo is a character who both records actual historical accounts and the subsequent mythologization of Jesus of Nazareth into Jesus Christ. Callaghan remains different from the other authors discussed in this thesis thus far because while Jesus transforms into a mythical character in the other two novels, he is not an agent in his own mythologization. Callaghan makes him accomplish that by revealing how Jesus and Judas constructed and even manipulated narrative elements and events in order to portray Jesus as the Christ, the very same story that today is found in the New Testament.

Philo is a character who is caught up in the web of lies he creates for himself throughout *A Time for Judas*. He is manipulated into working for Simon the Zealot, a political revolutionary and a noble thief who hates Roman rule and seeks to liberate the Jews. Simon's and Philo's plot to rob a caravan is the beginning of the parallel tales of Simon and Jesus, who will be crucified together on the Mount of Golgotha (151). These two stories merge at a critical point where history meets myth. Before Callaghan deals with the mythical aspects of the tale, he first confronts the historical through Philo's relationship with Simon and his interest in Jesus.

Part of the reason Callaghan creates the parallels between Simon and Jesus is to qualify why Philo is attracted to both of them despite their strong differences. Philo felt a kinship with Simon. "I wondered," Philo comments to himself, "if I felt this way because I was a Greek. Had I long felt secretly that I was a Roman captive? ... I wondered too, if this was why the Jews, another captive people, fascinated me" (39). Philo is drawn to the Jewish community because of his sense of the parallel between the history of captivity of his own people (Greeks) and that of the Jews. While Simon's actions are criminal and Jesus' virtuous, both men follow a similar path. Their lives converge when they subsequently are arrested by the Romans on the same day (63; 65).

As the two stories converge, Philo becomes increasingly interested in the celebrated storyteller, Jesus. When Philo expresses his desire to “listen to him preach and find out what the man [Jesus] was up to,” Jesus and Simon’s separate arrests are revealed (63). After the arrest Philo, like Theophilus in *The Seven Hills*,⁶³ is asked to be a witness to Jesus’ trial. Before it begins Philo does his research on the case and describes how he went over the documents against Jesus which thoroughly showed how the Sanhedrin “had kept track of [Jesus]. Yet the name of Judas was not given; he wasn’t named as an accuser, he wasn’t named at all, and I sat back from my work table frowning, wondering if I was caught up again in another world of wild Jewish fantasy. They were proving that they had kept track of everything the Galilean had said and done, and yet people are supposed to believe they had to pay money to a man named Judas to tell them where the Galilean was, and which one he was” (77). Rightfully, Philo questions the authenticity of Judas’ betrayal, recognizing the narrative flaws. Moreover, Philo’s sense that he is stuck in a wild Jewish fantasy is indicative of the convergence between history and myth in this novel, but also demonstrates that history is only as accurate as the evidence provided, and the popular conceptions of the time.⁶⁴ People were more willing to believe that Judas betrayed Jesus, simply because, as Jesus in *A Time for Judas* recognizes, the betrayal would make for good conversation and a more compelling story (42; 62; 103).

Philo’s suspicions about the credibility of Judas’ betrayal are about to be confirmed when a wild eyed Judas comes to beg him for a “scribe, neither Roman nor Jew” to take

⁶³ The parallels between the protagonists of *A Time for Judas* and *The Seven Hills* are uncanny. They both have the same name, Philo; both are Greek scribes who have become noteworthy Roman citizens; both are concerned with making money; both are the witness to Jesus’ trial; both see Jesus resurrected; both are somehow connected to Jesus and the events of his life. An explanation for these coincidences is uncertain. Callaghan may have read Wibberley (his book appears exactly one decade after the release of *The Seven Hills*) or they may have both been working from the same ancient source, which I could not locate. Callaghan could also just have been comparing his Philo of Crete to the Jewish philosopher, Philo, who would come later and subsequently record historical accounts in Jesus’ time.

⁶⁴ We are reminded of the fact that ancient Egyptian records claim that they had never lost a war, simply because they must

something down for him (93). What Philo will subsequently take down is a historical account of Jesus through Judas' eyes; one that is distinct from the mythical tale that is being created before the readers' eyes in *A Time for Judas*. Before Philo writes Judas' account of his relationship with Jesus, Judas must first convince Philo to do it for him. Judas is aware that his story could be of historical importance as he tells Philo it is the "real story ... For a time—no one [will want to hear my story]. But later on—at the right time—everybody. The love in the story—if the story's written down it'll exist somewhere. And as long as I know it's there...then some time...at the right time—" (94). What Judas attempts to say here is that his true relationship with Jesus will be revealed. So long as Judas has his story written down, he feels comforted despite his act of betrayal. Callaghan spares no dramatics when Judas tells his tale. Without forewarning the typeface of the text is changed, as though readers were looking at an authentic historical document, and the narrative voice switches from that of Philo to that of Judas.⁶⁵

While Judas tries to create a historical account of his relationship with Jesus, he nevertheless mythologizes Jesus, further indicating the inability to separate the two when dealing with Jesus' *kerygma*. Jesus is described as a man who "loved life" (115). However, on the same page Judas sees Jesus as more than a man who loved life and wanted to heal people. In words that anticipate those of Ricci and contain similar imagery to *The Gospel of Judas*, Callaghan's Judas says: "I saw Jesus in each bright star as the canopy came down around me, and heard him in the deep night's silence like a majestic music, and felt him in a soothing, orderly rhythmic motion all around me, and he was in the earth under my feet, and in the cry of the night bird and each beam of moonlight on the low hills" (115). Jesus is incarnate in everything tangible and intangible for Judas and described through heavenly

have burned any documents that recorded their failures in battle.

light imagery. Such devotion to Jesus is evident, and even articulated: “I wept and would have done anything he asked me” (115). Love is enough for Judas to do anything for Jesus, hence his “secret acceptance of what was in [Jesus’] look” when he handed Judas the cup of wine, symbolically marking Judas as his betrayer and solidifying his treacherous role in the fabricated myth (118).⁶⁵ Unlike Theophilus in *The Seven Hills*, and Philo, Judas, the betrayer, is the paragon of Christian faith. He loves Jesus so much that he is willing to become an outcast, and also die alone as Jesus does, covered in shame. Towards the end of the novel he even changes his mind about having Philo record and preserve his story because “he did not want to be cleared; it was the last thing in time he wanted; he was where he wanted to be, he was where the Galilean needed him to be in the story—where he had agreed to be” (231). Part of the decision Callaghan has Judas make to record his own side of the story is to show Jesus’ true nature, but also to humanize himself. The famous kiss that Judas marks Jesus with, in his version of the story, possesses all his love for Jesus (119). In this historical record Judas cannot help but reach out into the language of myth to explain all the complexities of the moment.

Judas also questions why none of the other disciples have harmed him, and why it was so easy for them to abandon Jesus. His words also serve to rescue the apostles from the shame of their desertion and lack of faith in Jesus presented in the New Testament. For instance, after Peter slashes the Roman’s ear “Jesus told him to put down his sword, Peter fell back into the frame of mind of the others which I can only call a trance. I felt we were all

⁶⁵ Judas’ testimony appears from pages 108-122 in *A Time for Judas*.

⁶⁶ Interestingly, *The Gospel of Judas* also slightly indicates Judas’ complacency in betraying Jesus. Towards the conclusion of the gospel Jesus says to Judas, “‘Look, you have been told everything [meaning Judas has received all the *kerygma* Jesus had to give]. Lift up your eyes and look at the cloud and the light within it and the stars surrounding it. The star that leads the way is your star’. Judas lifted up his eyes and saw the luminous cloud, and he entered it” (*The National Geographic Society*). After this moment the gospel briefly concludes, “They approached Judas and said to him, ‘What are you doing here? You are Jesus’ disciple’. Judas answered them as they wished. And he received some money and handed him [Jesus] over to them” (*The National Geographic Society*).

making rhythmic motions, a pattern, a kind of dance, a ritual dance, and now it was completed, and all the others could run away, deserting him—even as they were doing now and will go on doing till they see the sign” (119-120). Judas realizes that Jesus’ death and resurrection are imminent, as is his role and those of the others in it. Judas never definitively states it, but again, readers see Callaghan, like Wibberley, weaving Design into the events of Jesus’ life. What Judas is recording is a mythical orchestration on Jesus’/God’s part. The event which Judas calls a ritual dance is part of a well plotted pattern in a myth falling into place. The other disciples are passive in their mythological role, as it seems that Jesus has placed them all under a spell in order that they may leave him unprotected, in comparison to Judas who actively agrees to his role in the myth’s creation. According to Judas’ testimony, Jesus has recognized what his story will be, and it is not one that is historical, but mythic.

After taking down Judas’ story, Philo becomes more aware of the historical being appropriated by the mythical when he sees Jesus at Pilate’s court. During his beatings Jesus “told his acceptance of things that had been written” (148). Philo then questions, “Was this his magic? Making them all act out a story?” (148). The answer is that Jesus is operating within a biblical tradition of countless rabbis and learned elders who likewise preached and used God’s Word “as it was written”. Philo is aware of such theological language as it frustrates him, all this “poring over the meaning of the word, the meaning of the meaning, then the meaning behind the meaning” (148). Callaghan’s Jesus is trying to create his own meaning and write his own story according to a biblical paradigm so that it can subsequently be discussed, examined, and debated as *kerygma* gradually reveals itself. Such wording by Philo even suggests the Design within Jesus’ story where events and situations are created and manipulated to bring into being what will be known, and recorded as, the Jesus myth. Still, Philo, because he is an outsider, remains rooted in the historical though his pagan and

human roots have been shaken. When he sees Jesus dragging the cross he pities him, “not just for this suffering, but for being in the grip of all those fantasies that had put him here, that had even convinced him that he could raise the temple. Yet now, falling, he could not even lift his cross” (153). To Philo Jesus is simply another Jew suffocated by his own mythological grandeur, and consequently, because of Philo’s cynicism, he is unable to apprehend the *kerygma* within the story. His mind is logical, and factual, which makes his account of what happened after Jesus’ crucifixion all the more believable.

Near the end of *A Time for Judas* the Jesus story is created in earnest and through artfulness, tact and Design comes to fruition. After Jesus’ death Callaghan provides a plausible historical reason for Jesus’ resurrection. Philo, because of his greed and desire to make money throughout *A Time for Judas*, is easily persuaded to steal Jesus’ body from its tomb in order to ransom it (179). When the time comes to uncover Jesus’ body and rebury it, Philo and the other men create Jesus’ new shallow grave behind three stones (188). The symbolic three stones are perhaps why readers are not surprised when three nights later Philo encounters the risen Christ. Philo swears he saw a man wearing a dark coat like that of Jesus who “came three steps closer, almost into the firelight, and I heard one of those quick whispers I can never recognize, but always trust ... he came closer and stood there as calmly as he had stood before Pilate in the judgement hall, his face friendly, waiting for me to speak” (200). Though the fearful Philo does not directly identify the man as Jesus, his identity is obvious to the reader and to Philo as he remembers his experience of seeing Jesus at Pilate’s court. Philo and his collaborators try to make it look like Jesus had risen from the dead by moving his body, when in fact Jesus has risen on the third day anyway as he had promised. It may seem odd that Callaghan demythologizes Jesus’ resurrection only to re-mythologize it, but the answer can be found in the construction of his novel. He deliberately

intertwines history and myth. Thus, while the actual facts about how Jesus had risen from the dead have been distorted in the New Testament in comparison to Philo's hidden scroll, the mythological and divine element of Jesus' resurrection still occurs. Readers are reminded again that the minute historical facts, overall, come to have no bearing on the key moments within the Jesus myth. All that matters is that Jesus did rise from the dead on the third day, inspiring faith and delivering *kerygma* to the world.

The examination of history in *A Time for Judas* demonstrates that regardless of how hard the characters, readers, and Callaghan try to uncover a historical Jesus, or even his human nature, they still feel constrained and obligated to mythologize him. The story of the historical Jesus becomes the story of the *kerygmatic* Jesus. Whether it is through Judas' touching discussions about Jesus, or Philo's final sighting of a resurrected Christ, myth permeates historical accounts within the novel. Jesus and his *kerygma* cannot fulfill their theological function without myth. According to Judas, Jesus may have feared that "people wouldn't go on believing in him unless he fitted into the great myth of death and resurrection" located in the Torah (116).

Nevertheless, though readers may not learn very much more about Jesus' own human nature in *A Time for Judas* than in the Canonical Gospels, he is certainly depicted as someone that is aware of human nature. Jesus tries hard to fit into the mythical structure of the Messiah who "would die, and on the third day rise from the dead, as it had been written" (116). Stories like those in the Old and New Testament are a popular avenue of learning, as Judas says; Jesus "did his teaching with stories because people like retelling good stories" (116). This is certainly evident today when we attend the weekly Saturday or Sunday sermon by our rabbi, priest, or pastor to hear them quote parables from scripture year after year, to relay *kerygma* to their congregation. Judas' words above practically sum up the entire thesis,

as stories/myths are the only means by which Jesus dispenses his *kerygma*, whether writers portray him as a distinct historical figure or not. Jesus is nonetheless mythologized along with his stories. Callaghan and his Jesus are employed in the same act. Ricoeur comments that it “is the artisan who sustains and shapes imagery using no means other than language,” for without the images constructed in Jesus’ parables and Callaghan’s narrative, there would be no myth to describe Jesus’ life (*The Rule of Metaphor* 211). Callaghan is therefore not so much influenced by the biblical mythological types of the Bible, as by its mythological narrative structure and the inevitable language that follows with it.

Callaghan even makes Jesus aware of the biblical literary implications in mythologizing himself. Throughout Judas’ testimony the readers discover that Jesus has a specific literary intent. He says: “Someone must betray me. The story requires it” (Callaghan 116-117). Ricoeur reiterates in his article “Proclamation to Narrative” that “Jesus’ words do something. They create the crisis that leads from the announcement to the story of suffering. Controversy provides the mediating occasion that leads from the one to the other” (“Proclamation to Narrative” 509). The “crisis” is what Callaghan’s Jesus tries to achieve through his collaboration with Judas. One must understand that Judas’ betrayal of Jesus becomes the ultimate parable of all of Jesus’ teachings, the *kerygma* which is located within the majority of his parables. Judas unclutters for readers the parable of which he is himself the lesson, while he deconstructs what Jesus asks of him: “flashes of perception seemed to enlarge my understanding of the word ‘betrayal’. The story as it had been written, yes, his followers needed it. The law, its codes. But he himself had said, ‘Judge not.’ For him there was only one law—love. Then maybe only one course of all evil—betrayal. The whole inner world swinging between love and betrayal—always first in a man’s own heart. It was time now for him to be betrayed, he would cause ‘betrayal’ to be remembered with horror forever

as the death of love” (Callaghan 117). Contrary to what Tutmoshe might have said in *The Seven Hills* about the era of love in Egyptian times, Jesus, though he brings with him the Truth, also preaches love, especially towards the enemy.⁶⁷

Judas’ analysis serves to demonstrate two important points about his betrayal of Jesus. Firstly, in the mythical Christian world Judas is the archetype of evil,⁶⁸ because of his betrayal, and stands for everything Jesus is against, yet Jesus, showing that he can love his enemy, never chastises Judas for his mistakes. Secondly, beneath the mythical construction that Callaghan presents to readers lies Judas’ deep love for Jesus. It is the type of love that Jesus would want his followers to emulate because Judas is willing to sacrifice himself in order that Jesus’ story be remembered and told, with its strong moral implications. *Kerygma* is revealed through the myth that has been canonized in the New Testament, and again through the creation of that myth as fictionally narrated in Callaghan’s novel. Jesus needs to mythologize himself through the divine resurrection, which can only come about through Judas’ betrayal, because without it, the resurrection would not have been the natural conclusion of the myth, and Jesus’ followers would not have seen the sign (resurrection) that would be recognizable enough for them to have complete faith in what he stands for (138).

On the third day when Jesus’ body is not found in the tomb (the sign), after readers find out that Philo moved the body and buried it elsewhere, and before his actual sighting of Jesus that evening by the real grave-site, Jesus’ followers are already beginning to come out of hiding and say: “it’s proof he’s the Son of God” (191). Even Mary Magdalene is beginning to spread the story that she saw Jesus that morning: “Coming closer, he called her, then called again, and she knew him, and when he was beside her, he did a thing only he could have done; smiling, he touched the lobe of her left ear, and at the intimate touch, she was suffused

⁶⁷ Luke 6:27, “‘But I say unto you which hear, love your enemies, do good to them which hate you’”.

with warmth and joy. He talked to her. He told her to gather the disciples together so they could see and talk to him” (194).⁶⁹ Philo believes that Mary Magdalene is making up the story because he knows the “true facts” about where Jesus’ body is and what actually happened. At that moment Philo realizes what Mary Magdalene is doing, “How quickly she had realized the possibilities in the situation. And I was the one who had given her this golden opportunity to promote her dead magician” (194). The myth is coming full circle.

The lines between history and myth are very subjective in this novel. On the one hand, Philo knows he moved the body and then later sees Jesus. Readers are inclined to trust what he has seen because he was a doubting Thomas throughout the narrative and seemed so aghast when Mary Magdalene started to mythologize Jesus after his death. All his feelings change, however, after he sees the risen Jesus, though he knows the true story through Judas: “the way things were working out began to appeal to [his] heart and [his] imagination” (206). Philo is the perfect example of a character who prefers the mythologized story about Jesus over the facts in his recorded tale. Where he had little sympathy for Jesus while the man was alive and preaching, his heart, more open to loving as his name implies, now takes in Jesus and recognizes his *kerygma* towards the end of the novel.

Without a doubt characters do not want to know the factual story of Jesus, but prefer the myth. One of Philo’s concluding remarks is as follows: “I pondered, and the more I did so the easier it was to see that the Galilean could not possibly want it to be revealed that Judas was the loving servant who only did his bidding, loving the Galilean to the end. Both in on it—complicity! Nor could the Galilean want it to be revealed that Judas, talking to me,

⁶⁸ Judas’ betrayal recalls similar acts within the Old Testament: Cain and Abel; Joseph and his brothers.

⁶⁹ Mary Magdalene’s sighting perhaps is validated as authentic to readers (that is if they trust Judas’ testimony) because Judas describes how he saw Jesus “sitting by a swiftly running brook with Mary Magdalene. Having taken off their shoes, they were sitting with their bare feet in the water. The sun was shining on the white pebbles in the brook as they splashed their feet and Mary Magdalene was laughing, and Jesus, laughing too, touched the lobe of her left ear with his finger, I withdrew”; an act which both shows Jesus’ intimacy with Mary Magdalene, and is also confirmed by Judas because he felt

had cleared himself. Oh, what a new light that would put them both in. But it was the truth. And I had it,” but he realizes no one at the time would have wanted to hear it (229).

The new light that Philo speaks of shatters the mythological construction of Jesus and his preaching. The truth only serves to paint Jesus negatively; a man so consumed by his own new theological ideas that he is willing to manipulate others to profit himself and his words (what modern readers would classify as a cult leader). The novel, however, does not end on such a bleak note. It is because of Philo’s acceptance of the story, and Judas’ willingness and desire that all he confessed be burned, that Jesus is reinvented and redeemed as a messianic figure. Judas’ love for Jesus is what makes the Jesus myth, in all the twists that it took to be achieved, acceptable. Philo’s acceptance of Jesus at the end of the novel is surprising when Philo revisits his experiences with the natural landscape of Judea which are the cause for all his inhibitions regarding the Jewish faith.

Callaghan uses the landscape as metaphorical imagery to modify and explain Philo’s thoughts and feelings. Philo’s skepticism, as amplified through the landscape, demonstrates how he has grown as a character into accepting Jesus’ *kerygma*, and also how the landscape, myth, and Jesus’ *kerygma* all correlate. Philo’s contradictory nature can be reflected through the sun light which Callaghan tactfully places throughout the narrative. On the one hand light is embossed with heavenly language, while in others, such as when he is in the desert (his least favorite place) “the sun here is like no other sun around the great sea. It comes straight at you, straight, hard, and cruel” (45). For Philo sunbeams are like a punishment in the desert as he trudges along in that “cruel hard sunlight that is peculiar to this land” of Judea (167). His disdain for the sun is connected to his utter hatred for the desert and his alienation in understanding Jews. Not only is the desert horrible to him, he classifies it as the reason for

he was watching something private (114).

what he terms “Jewish fantasies,” in relation to their ideas of chosenness⁷⁰ and Jesus’ idea that he is the Son of God and will rise again. In Philo’s mind it is the overbearing desert that creates myths (bastardized historical facts in his opinion).

Philo’s alienation and lack of understanding of the Jewish people is also suggested through his reaction to the desert. To Philo the desert is nothing more than dying and dead imagery; he is appalled by the “jutting barren crags, low cliffs, great rocks, dead things ... the lonely glare of desolation, but Marcellus cried out ... ‘This wilderness is their sanctuary’” (20). Some of the important elements within this quotation alone are the security that the desert brings for the Jews, and paradoxically the loneliness they feel when walking in it. In different parts of the novel Philo, Judas, and Jesus are all seen as extremely lonely characters.⁷¹ It is not surprising then that Philo, while in the desert, at first feels as though the sand were “warm like a light blanket and keeping out the sudden awful cold, and then the blanket became so heavy I thought I would be smothered. My sense of isolation from the world was so bewildering I felt a terrible need to touch someone else, bring someone close to me” (21). Philo consistently feels lonely in connection with the desert, an emotion which quite clearly foreshadows the loneliness that Judas feels after he betrays Jesus, and the loneliness Jesus feels when he is abandoned by his followers and crucified. Philo characterizes this loneliness by comparing the Jewish mind to the desert: “the Jewish mind ... always turns inward. It’s land-locked. Its hungers and satisfactions are born of desperate desert thirst: a mind from the beginning locked too long in the desert, a spirit molded in isolation” (132). Such recurring loneliness in the desert, and isolation from other people, is

⁷⁰ Philo speaks extensively of the Jews’ idea of chosenness and the desert in *A Time for Judas*: “So the minds of these men have to have a Yahweh; they have to find him in their own minds, not in the sand. So they can nurse in the desert a sense of preferment, so they can have a feeling of being chosen even in their desert isolation. For just as the cruel desert is against them, aren’t all the world’s people to be against them? Why? Their sacred sense of preferment. All this drilled into them in the desert by ruthless chieftains, the priests who hold the power” (Callaghan 133).

⁷¹ Philo lacks love and family; Judas is an isolated felon; Jesus is a deranged preacher (to some Romans and Jews).

reminiscent of the Jews' exodus from Egypt when they wandered in the desert for 40 years (Deut 8:2). Because of such biblical language Jews have an attachment to the desert (a mythological biblical type). As Judas comments: the "desert is in all of us, hidden somewhere in the heart" (Callaghan 21). Even Philo agrees that the desert is a part of the Jewish people as they had been affected by the desert this way "even before the tribes came" to Judea (176). It is the desert that produces "fantastic mirages ... The mind playing tricks. Illusions. The tricks coming from shifting light blazing on rocky crags, creating illusions. Light on an eye turned inward, giving isolated lonely men grand mirages so beautiful they thirst, then they kneel down and put out their hands. But what do they have in their hand? Sand" (133). Despite all of Philo's earlier comments about the illusions of the desert and the tricks of the mind because of such isolation (and perhaps dehydration), near the end of the novel he never doubts that the man he sees in the desert on the third night is Jesus.

Philo too has become like those who are attached to the loneliness and sacredness of the desert (Jews/Christians). He becomes connected to the desert that Jesus is connected to. Judas' comment that the desert is in a Jew's heart is reflected the moment Jesus faces Pilate and Philo at the trial. Philo describes "the Galilean's bearing, the sense of terrible isolation he conveyed ... the Galilean now fitted so perfectly into the desert picture I had drawn. Looking at him against myself, I, too, saw all those ancient wilderness figures behind him. I saw him sharing with them here the desolate loneliness of bare cliffs, crags, and strange lights on dust storms, flaming mirages floating ahead on swirling dust. Mirages, beckoning and bringing him here where his hand reached out—and now—just sand. Sadly, oh so sadly, just the sand of this judgment hall" (141). Jesus' loneliness culminates at the moment before he dies on the cross when he utters "a loud cry," a cry so horrendous that Philo, who sees it, shudders and says: "Never in my life have I felt so lonely, or been in a place so desolate as this place in the

deepening darkness” (158). Such a cry of loneliness is undeniably connected to the desert and the land. Since Philo is affected by Jesus’ cry, it is plausible to conclude that he is beginning to get in touch with that part of himself which is connected to Jesus and, consequently, Jesus’ *kerygma*.

The desert can also be linked to Frye’s discussion of “the furnace” as it appears in the Bible. Whereas the furnace can be symbolic of hellish types, it can also be “the refining process of the furnace [which] portrays the purgatorial pain of constructive effort that is part of the creative process. The ordeal is suggested by a difficult journey, like the Israelites’ travel through the furnace of Egypt and the waste of Sinai before reaching the promised land or like the climb of penitents through the flaming barrier on the way to salvation” (Marx “Northrop Frye’s Bible” 171). All of the pain that Philo encounters in the desert is connected with Frye’s biblical idea of the furnace as well as a divinely mediated quest to hydrate his spiritual dryness. Like Jesus and Judas, Philo must move through the hellish desert where, in the end, he begins to glimpse aspects of Jesus’ *kerygma*. Though it takes Philo a long time to recognize these mythical patterns, he ultimately accepts Jesus’ *kerygma*, not through the desert, but through water, a natural element distinctly associated with Jesus as we have seen in the two previous chapters. Philo will hydrate his barren soul through a spiritual baptism.

Philo undergoes several baptismal moments in *A Time for Judas* before he recognizes Jesus’ *kerygma*. Though he sees Jesus in the desert, it is water and bodies of water that more personally connect him to Jesus. The reason is not astounding since Philo finds the desert stifling and the sea liberating both to his body and his mind. When the rain falls lightly, and then “sudden light made the wet air sparkle,” Philo feels purified and rejuvenated (Callaghan 52). However, Philo is a character who is deeply affected by nature and Callaghan often uses the landscape to reflect Philo’s mood and so when Mary of Samaria ends their sexual

relationship he goes out into the soaking rain (59).

The rain no longer purifies but burdens him. His loneliness, like Jesus and Judas', is reflected through the natural phenomena around him, but simultaneously, being forced away from Mary of Samaria brings him closer to Judas and thus Jesus. While the rain both drowns and liberates Philo, rivers and the sea are symbolic to him; their nature recalls all sorts of ideas to his mind. Unlike the desert that isolates the mind, Philo feels that water widens and frees, "walls seemed to close in on me till the narrow street was an open window on the night sky; the sky a sea" (61). Like his namesake Theophilus, Philo also sees the sea as granting a new, and perhaps more diverse, perspective on the world. What Philo relates to in Jesus is the love he preaches to everyone; hence he is open like a body of water and is not only confined to the isolated desert. Judas, again, is the one to provide such insight into the mission of Jesus: "I felt the boundless, timeless vast sea in him" (114). Like a gigantic body of water Jesus can reach out and touch everything, a clear metaphor of his *kerygma* and obvious connection to the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden which is said to water all the rivers in the world (*CWNF* v.13 438). Moreover, Frye puts into critical context what Judas says about the connection to water and Jesus: "the water of life that is being talked about here is not quite the same thing as ordinary drinking water. In other words, the suggestion is that man could live in water like a fish: there would be a state of existence in which water does not necessarily drown, in which man can live in water as one of his own elements" (v.13 440). Man, through faith in Jesus, can be connected to everything just as water is a universal and metaphorical connector. These water images reveal Philo's connection to Jesus and Judas and his sacred role in the construction of the Jesus myth.

Philo also takes on the characteristics of the river as his nature alters during the novel after he is confronted by the resurrected Jesus: "a man's life was like a river, a constantly

changing river of adventures in freedom of choice and compassion” (Callaghan 115). In his parable Jesus always preaches to his followers to make the right and compassionate choice. Pondering by the river gives Philo clarity, almost as if a voice was speaking to him from it. Often when Philo is troubled he thinks of “the ever-changing river” (231). “Then again I thought of Judas as if he belonged to a river that had carried him into the great sea” (231). The image of Judas flowing through a river is a metaphorical purification of his name and character as Jesus’ betrayer. Truth was proclaimed to Jesus when he was baptized in the Jordan. Similarly, the truth of Judas’ role in the famous Jesus myth is proclaimed over again to Philo whenever he “looked at the sea, or stood by a river” because it reminds him of Judas’ story (223). It is the seamless body of water that convinces Philo to preserve Judas’ story, so that one day, when the time is right, a new purifying rain will fall and Judas’ true role in the Jesus myth and the story of Jesus’ *kerygma* will be revealed.

CHAPTER 4

A Testament to the Inability to Demythologize Jesus Christ

Nino Ricci's *Testament*, the most recent of the four novels examined in this thesis, moves far beyond the others in retelling the Jesus story. For instance, Ricci's text appears to follow the Bultmann school of thought since he attempts to recount the story of Jesus by minimizing, if not removing, all elements of the remarkable and miraculous, consequently leaving readers with a story of the historical Jesus. Ricci certainly follows Bultmann's criticism because Bultmann believes that the "kerygma, then, is the proclamation of the Christ that transcends the historical record, to be the existential Christ" (Gibson 87). What Bultmann means by "transcends the historical record," is that the events of Jesus' life are indisputable facts of human history; Bultmann is concerned with what is literally true since he rejects "the incarnation, the virgin birth ... the resurrection, the ascension, and the second coming" (90). The problem with such a definition of *kerygma* is that it removes the central aspects of the Jesus myth (the literary methods) that help to dispense *kerygma*.

In addition, when an author such as Ricci subscribes to Bultmann's understanding of *kerygma*⁷² there is a greater danger of even more fabrication, and if not myth making, than reinventing history. The reason is that Ricci tries to place Jesus within a historical bubble in an effort to create a historical Jesus. The key word here is "create", simply because there is not enough information available to create a full, accurate picture of Jesus of Nazareth; nor do the gospels "contain enough data on which to build a real biography, and efforts to flesh out their sketchy accounts simply require too much guesswork" (*The Bible as Literature*

⁷² The elements of truth are still present in the text because of *kerygma*'s close association with story through parables. Whether Bultmann acknowledges it in his criticism or not, literary methods, a practice which opens the mythic gateway, are inevitable when Jesus' *kerygma* is involved.

216). Ricci's *Testament*, though a "historical" account, bases its factual narrative on scholarly findings by groups like the Jesus Seminar. They are findings that could lead, as Harnack had previously warned, to "an attempt not merely to correct the [Christian] tradition but in effect to replace it with historical-critical reconstruction of the message and person of Jesus" (Loewe 319). For example, Ricci's decision to use the idea that Mary was raped by a Roman soldier as a substitute for the Immaculate Conception already destabilizes the biblical image of Christ. The way Ricci tries to reinvent the historical Jesus is by drawing on the Pantera story (a rather questionable source) (Ricci 1). Andy Lamey, in his review article on *Testament* for the *National Post*, places Ricci's story of Jesus' birth within a historical context by naming the possible source of Ricci's inspiration for his rather daring version of the Immaculate Conception: "when [Jesus's mother Mary] was pregnant, she was turned out of doors by the carpenter to whom she had been betrothed, as having been guilty of adultery, and that she bore a child to a certain [Roman] soldier named Pantera" (Lamey, *The Newest Testament*). The source of this quotation is Origen, an early Christian theologian (185-circa 253), who quotes the pagan Pantera story in order to refute it (Lamey, *The Newest Testament*). Even by drawing on the old story Ricci's attempt at being historical still leads to fabrication. Similarly Bultmann's *kerygma* cannot be separated from Frye's mytho-critical approach to *kerygma*, because inevitably a story is reinterpreted and retold and, in the case of Jesus, drags with it a lot of biblical sediment.

Nevertheless, in *Testament* Ricci tries to present Jesus as simply a man who is troubled, but with a gift for healing and, as with Mailer and Wibberley, he is a man who is not sexually indulgent. Moreover, any cures that Jesus does perform are through an acute observational sense and awareness of how the human body works. One example is his cure of the Pagan's daughter by "draping her in a dampened cloth to bring down her fever and cooking up a

pungent brew” (Ricci 107-108). Another occurs when he notices that a ranting girl is pregnant by rape as opposed to her mother’s theory that the young girl was possessed by demons (29). Judas comments as he records Jesus’ observational skills: “There had been nothing miraculous in any of this, yet the whole incident affected me deeply” (29). While Jesus is no magician in these quotations, he still retains that biblical aura of a man capable of instilling awe because of his good deeds and his insight.

In contrast to the other authors in this thesis, in his text Ricci adopts the same format as the New Testament by presenting four gospels, each being “written by a single author ... meant to stand on its own” (*The Bible as Literature* 215). None of these has very many similarities to the Canonical Gospels, and all are written by figures whose voices are barely heard in the New Testament: Judas, Mary Magdalene, Jesus’ mother Mary (the Blessed Virgin Mary), and Simon of Gergesa (a Pagan) not mentioned in the New Testament).⁷³

The novel’s structure presents to readers an a-historical view of Jesus, from often controversial positions. Judas is type cast into the role of Jesus’ betrayer though he has nothing but love and admiration for him (as in *A Time for Judas*). The two Marys in *Testament* are very unattractive figures. Each seeks to divert Jesus from his true path in different ways. Mary stifles her son’s intellect, turning him into a runaway whom she barely sees again, while Mary Magdalene (not a prostitute) seeks to possess Jesus and becomes vengeful when she is “excluded” from his life. Ironically, it is Simon of Gergesa who describes Jesus in the most unbiased fashion, which is fitting considering that Jesus’ *kerygma* is better appreciated by Gentiles than Jews. Simon’s narrative function also parallels those of

⁷³ Before going any further it must be mentioned that this thesis, for the sake of consistency between the chapters, has retained the popular Christian names of the characters within the New Testament. Ricci, in his attempt to maintain a historical narrative, has retained the equivalent Hebrew names of the characters in the New Testament. I have decided to do away with these Hebrew names for the sake of clarity but will acknowledge them when needed. The following is a glossary of the Hebrew names employed, which are the most important to this thesis, followed by their Christian names: Yehoshua/Yeshua = Jesus; Yihuda of Qiryat = Judas Iscariot; Miryam of Migdal = Mary Magdalene; Miryam = Jesus’

Theophilus and Philo because all three interact with Jesus, and these brief interactions, in all three cases, eventually leads to them all understanding the *kerygma* Jesus embodies. Simon is most like Theophilus in that he recognizes what Jesus preaches but does not openly become one of his followers after Jesus' death. Both also retain their own life apart from the Christian movement. Each gospel within *Testament* is unique, presenting both a diverse array of historical portraits of Jesus and the other characters.

The individual gospels within *Testament* overlap one another revealing other parts of a story or stories that the other character could not have possibly known.⁷⁴ In this narrative act alone, Ricci demonstrates the problems of his fictional gospels (and those in the New Testament) which is that they cannot be accurate, but merely representative of what the individual writer saw, felt and chose to relate.

Ricci certainly destabilizes readers' popular understanding of Christianity. Jesus is described as having a terrible relationship with his siblings and Joseph.⁷⁵ He is ejected from the temple not because the Romans are overtly threatened by his group of followers, but because of his false association with Judas' rebel group. Jesus, in another subplot, is also banned from the temple because as a bastard he contaminated the temple, a trespass which on its own could have led to his crucifixion. Oddly enough, though Ricci attempts to dispense with mythology, he still relies on the parables and main sign posts of the New Testament in his reconstruction of the Jesus myth. It is because he retains a New Testament structure that *kerygma* still manages to be dispensed to readers. From its origins, the Jesus myth is something that is permeable, not easily fixed or limited. It is through the mythological aspects of the Jesus story, and the need to retell the story over again, that readers experience

mother Mary; Yehoceph = Joseph; Shimon = Simon/Peter; Yohanan = John the Baptist; Elazar = Lazarus.

⁷⁴ Such discrepancies are important to keep in mind when reading Judas' and Mary Magdalene's gospels.

⁷⁵ This is just one more biblical form of fraternal friction (Cain and Abel; Joseph and his brothers).

Jesus' *kerygma*. Ricci's reliance on mythology aptly and conclusively proves Frye's point about the impossibility of consciously or unconsciously breaking away from *kerygma* and mythology when retelling the Jesus myth. Frye comments: "[a] kerygma without the full support of mythology soon becomes a rhetorical vacuum, and a vacuum is something that consciousness, like nature, abhors" (*Words with Power* 117).

Since Ricci's apparent main literary goal with *Testament* appears to be to present a historical Jesus, the chapter will begin with an analysis of what Ricci deems plausible historical accounts within Jesus' life. Much like Wibberley in *The Seven Hills*, Ricci submerges his characters in detailed history. During Judas' testimony readers learn much about the rebel group he is part of, an association which will later be the cause of the unfortunate error that labels him as Jesus' betrayer. Ironically, Judas is part of a group that is alienated from the regular population, which demonstrates how he could easily have been attracted to Jesus' group: "I had never been certain in the several years of my own involvement with it how far its network extended. The truth was that we were not encouraged to know one another, against the chance of capture and betrayal" (Ricci 6). Moreover, Jesus already offers something Judas' rebel group cannot; a sense of community, togetherness, and emotional connection. While Judas consistently remains outside the group of Jesus' followers because of his higher education, he maintains a close and intellectually stimulating relationship with Jesus. From Judas readers learn much about Jesus' background before he formed his ministry based mostly in Migdal and Kefar Nahum.

Ricci, like Mailer, also freely expands the sparse historical information in the Canonical Gospels. Everyone knows that Jesus went to see John the Baptist before he earnestly started on his prophetic journey. In *Testament* Ricci expands the story to include the idea that Jesus "had been an acolyte of the prophet Yohanan" and a follower of his

teachings (21). Readers learn that Jesus is the only remaining acolyte, as all the others were killed when John the Baptist was arrested by Herod. Such information is crucial as it gives an element of Design to the narrative. Though Ricci tries hard to avoid mythologizing Jesus, he still brings myth into history. Jesus coincidentally is the last remaining follower of a religious sect and Judas just as coincidentally finds him in the square of En Melakh in time to nurse him back to health. Ricci has allowed a Divine plan to permeate his narrative.

Of the four fictional gospels which Ricci creates, Judas' gospel is a good way to begin *Testament* because his writing is clear and emotional. Readers are told that Jesus speaks Greek (25), an educational trait that is confirmed in the gospel of Mary mother of Jesus when she talks about Jesus' Greek teacher Artimidorus⁷⁶ (244). Judas is blunt and factual in his narrative, focusing on little details that may seem trivial but have meaning behind them just as do the words Jesus preaches. Thus, Ricci has Judas analyze Jesus' name for readers in *Testament*. For the first few pages of the novel Judas calls Jesus by the elongated version of his name, Yehoshua (which translates to Joshua). Only after he meets some of Jesus' followers does he begin to call him Yeshua (which will later translate to Jesus) which is how they "addressed their master ... which made him seem common. But later I learned that that had been his given name and it was only the prophet Yohanan who had named him more formally, when he had purified him, as was his practice" (26). Most striking is how Judas sees the name "Yeshua" as common. Jesus' name, though not common anymore, allows him to relate to many whom he encounters on his journeys. He is no longer the elite acolyte of Yohanan.⁷⁷ Moreover, even though John the Baptist renames Jesus, Jesus returns to his given name—his true path with its humbled and scarred beginning. While Ricci adds nuanced

⁷⁶ Ricci may perhaps be drawing on the Greek scholar Artemidorus, who lived in the second century since their names are so similar.

⁷⁷ This is clearly John the Baptist because of the description that he is a famous prophet who baptizes people in water.

details to *Testament*, he nevertheless retains some of Jesus' characteristics as emblemized in the New Testament through his actions and religious practices.

A topic often discussed in the New Testament, in the novels of this thesis, and by Ricci's Jesus is the issue of money. How Jesus tells his followers to deal with money highlights aspects of his character. In *Testament* Judas records how he was one of the few in the group who carried a money pouch, though Jesus discouraged the use of money because without it "the usual barriers between people" were stripped away (45). Such practices resulted in Jesus and his followers living off charity. Jesus' motives reveal how he believes there should be no distinct class system. However, the rules go further because not using money strips away his followers' attachment to the material and natural world in favor of a non-material, non-secular kingdom. While this moment occurs rather early in the novel, attentive readers may grasp the *kerygmatic* subtext within Judas' comment. Even with such a minute comment, the historical is still surpassed by the mythological through the unavoidable subtextual biblical language tradition. Ricci's Jesus is always trying to mold his followers into worthy heavenly candidates.

In order to subdue his use of biblical language Ricci historicizes the narrators beyond their recognizable New Testament characteristics (Simon of Gergesa being an exception because he is not in the New Testament). Judas, Mary Magdalene and Mary are nothing like their biblical counterparts. When Ricci historicizes these characters he fictionalizes. Ricci's Judas is more willing to challenge Jesus and is often quite critical of him (something Judas never is in the New Testament). Early on in his gospel he recognizes certain faults in Jesus' preaching: "Yeshua had gained a reputation as a rabble-rouser, though in his teachings he counseled disarming one's enemies with kindness and forgiving even those who flogged you" (51). Quite clearly Judas points out Jesus' contradictory nature, an act which questions

the validity and plausibility of putting Jesus' teachings into practice as it demonstrates Jesus' imperfect human nature: he preaches kindness but himself has difficulty achieving it. Partly it is Jesus' contradictory nature which causes Judas to doubt Jesus' cause in the beginning.

Judas writes, "I knew that to follow him to the logical end of his reasoning must lead where I could not go, for if I must love even my oppressor, then how could I ever muster my forces against him" (53). As with Philo and Theophilus, Judas is too logical to let go completely and embrace the *kerygma* even when it seems clear and emphatic.

Nevertheless, Judas is strong enough to admit what aspects in Jesus' teachings he can and cannot accept. For instance, Jesus reawakens Judas' empathetic side. When Judas sees Jesus sleeping in the street he wants to help him: "I wavered a moment over tending to him—it was always my instinct then in situations of that kind to err on the side of indifference, as the way of drawing the least attention to myself" (5). Judas is not accustomed to being charitable, but feels compelled to be when he sees Jesus. Fortunately for the entire narrative Judas does give alms to Jesus. Otherwise, his narration might have ended—as would have Jesus' story. It is the compassion that Judas offers to Jesus that reawakens Jesus' spirit, one which at times is desolate, lost, and lacking in motivation. Jesus even acknowledges Judas' influence on his life in Simon's gospel. In the following quotation the man Jesus speaks so highly of is Judas. Jesus tells his followers parts of his life and recalls how he wanted to die along with the other acolytes, "But that was a mistake. There was a man I met there who showed me that. He said to me that if I was alive, it was so I might do some good in the world, and I saw then I'd forgotten what John had told us, that we had to carry on his word ... his example, and that was what helped me carry on" (369).⁷⁸ At times Ricci has Jesus and Judas reverse their archetypal roles. In *Testament* Judas comes close to acting like an angelic

⁷⁸ See page 22 where Judas says to Jesus: "'If you left him it was to save your life,' I said, 'so that you might put it to good

figure, reminding Jesus of his role in life, recalling to him the importance of the word of God that he must proclaim.

Moreover, Judas' supposed betrayal of Jesus in the novel is different from the event in the Canonical Gospels and the other novels examined as well. Readers learn through Judas' testimony what his mission is in the rebel organization: "I was to insert myself again amongst Yeshua's men and join them in their pilgrimage" (119). Judas is torn between two groups, both of whom want to be free from the Romans and regain religious freedom. His inability to make a decision about his allegiance is vocalized through his logical reasoning: "if I did nothing I would be killed, yet perhaps also if I fled; and if I said nothing to Yeshua he would march his own lambs into the slaughter, yet if I warned him, I still put him at risk" (119). On the surface the quotation shows Judas' struggle, one which is certainly not leaning towards the betrayal of Jesus since Judas seems to want to avoid bloodshed. However, Judas rightfully concludes that whatever decision he makes, the outcome will remain the same. Whether consciously or not, Ricci is confined by a narrative Design which replicates the same mythological structure of the Bible. Even though Ricci tries to avoid mythological language, he has difficulty preventing his narrative from plotting situations that will create a specific outcome.

Likewise, Mary Magdalene remains an important figure through her expanded role in Ricci's historical novel. In contrast with Mailer and Callaghan who highlight her beauty, Ricci deliberately has Mary Magdalene, in her own gospel, describe herself as plain (126). She also makes it quite clear to readers that she currently "had no suitors," though she had some in the past, and does not want to get married, debunking, yet again, the popular misconception that Mary Magdalene was a prostitute (126). Where Mary Magdalene is seen

use'" (22).

as devoted to Jesus, standing with his mother while he is being crucified in the New Testament, in *Testament* she is possessive, juvenile, unlikable, and untrustworthy, up until the end of her gospel where she understands her errors and becomes a true Christian. She has done what Ricoeur states is required for accurate and believable testimony: she attests to actions “outside of [herself], to the interior [woman], to [her] conviction, to [her] faith” (*Essays on Biblical Interpretation* 130). Her gospel is full of emotion in contrast to Judas’ logical and coherent gospel which precedes hers. Mary Magdalene is a temporarily untrustworthy narrator because she comes after Judas who, because he is the first witness to Jesus in the novel, becomes the narrator of stories that function as a foil against which all the other gospels are compared. The accounts she records differ vastly from his, and her actions, because of the incorrect conclusions that she draws, as we shall see later, cause readers to be distrustful of what she records.

It is useful, however, to look at Mary Magdalene’s faults in a more positive light. Much of what she does in the novel could be compared to the struggles a Novice might have before becoming a Nun or a Sister. Ricci likens Mary Magdalene to a woman who may be interested in monastic life because of what she says about marriage: “when I imagined myself as a mother or a bride, it seemed a sort of death, though I didn’t hate these things and couldn’t say what other future it was I intended for myself” (Ricci 126). Her future will consist of devoting herself to Jesus, and subsequently being spiritually married to Jesus as Nuns and Sisters are within the Catholic Church; hence the term “Bride of Christ.”

In *Testament* Mary Magdalene symbolically stands for and becomes the first “Bride of Christ”. She even writes that when she first met Jesus she “imagin[ed] him another suitor ... But Yeshua was nothing like the other men who had come” to seek her hand in marriage (126-127). Already Mary Magdalene is captivated by Jesus, and though he does not become

her husband, she mistakes him for a suitor who has come to ask for her hand. Instead, it is she who becomes symbolically betrothed to him; he is *her* bridegroom. She even describes her attachment to him, how he had expanded her mind and life which “had been sheltered until then. Rather it was as if a door had suddenly opened, or a passage been granted to a country you’d hoped might exist but had never quite dared to imagine. I could smell the air of this other place on him ... and felt inside me the sudden sure thought that I must travel with him” (126-127). The above is an illuminating quotation that confirms the idea of Mary Magdalene as a monastic figure. Her mere devotion to Jesus, not to mention the imagery of a new beginning in the above, already unveils the mythological in her otherwise historical narrative. One cannot deny that Mary Magdalene attempts to describe accurately her feelings and thoughts when she encounters Jesus, but the language she uses is mythological, and rooted in the Bible, especially when we encounter the familiar image of the door.

In *The Seven Hills* Wibberley used similar threshold imagery as the symbolic basis of his novel. The same can be seen in Ricci’s novel when Mary Magdalene explicitly states that Jesus opened a door to her mind, to a country beyond the one she knows. To make the leap of interpretation that this “country” is the new Jerusalem is not difficult, especially when she whimsically adds that it is “a country you’d hoped might exist but had never quite dared to imagine,” perhaps like heaven. Moreover, Mary Magdalene wants to accompany Jesus to this new country. She wants to join him in his heavenly kingdom. Nevertheless, while Mary Magdalene may accept Jesus and his *kerygma* more readily than the other characters, she is still a human character with faults who continuously does wrong despite what she believes to be right intentions, especially relating to her conduct towards Judas.

Throughout most of her gospel Mary Magdalene is regarded as less credible by readers because Ricci makes her a petty character. While her status within Jesus’ group makes her

feel elevated, when Judas is unable to remember her name, and then asks her to fetch him “some water to wash, as if [she] were nothing,” she becomes enraged (161). Her animosity is rather surprising when she even suspects that Judas is “an agent of the evil one” (161). Though her dislike for his patriarchal style is understandable to modern readers, she allows one form of rational dislike towards Judas to grow into irrational hatred. She feels that his control over the group’s funds is dangerous (162) and that Judas is not being kind to Andreas but “treating him like his slave” (163). Readers will recall that in his gospel Judas describes how Andreas took a liking to him and therefore let him behave this way because it seemed to please Andreas (36). In contrast, Mary Magdalene, blinded by her pettiness, says, “To my own eyes, it was clear that Yihuda had enchanted Andreas and that he stood in peril, yet somehow Yeshua was blind to this” (163). The only person that is blind is Mary Magdalene. Jesus even says that Andreas’ fascination with Judas “was a mark of Yihuda’s goodness that one so innocent should worship him” (163). Nevertheless, Mary Magdalene feels that her analysis of the situation is correct and, consequently, persists in ignoring Jesus’ wisdom, attempting to solve the problem of Judas on her own. In reality Mary Magdalene is simply jealous of the relationship between Judas and Jesus: “It hurt me then to see Yeshua smile or put a hand on Yihuda’s shoulder, as if he had not understood how Yihuda drove us apart” (166). Mary Magdalene sounds like a bitter and jealous lover.

Despite her pettiness, Mary Magdalene manages to vindicate herself as a character to readers. What is admirable about Mary Magdalene and pushes readers towards acceptance of the credibility of her gospel is that she is able to confess her mistakes. Seeing Judas as a threat, she writes, “it was clear to me by now that I couldn’t rest easy until I had found the way to rid us of Yihuda for good”; she speaks of her decision to use pagan magic and sorcery to cast Judas out of their group by any means necessary (167). Mary Magdalene must first

combat the world of magic and sorcery before she can help build the Jesus myth and move beyond her doubt.

Mary, Jesus' mother, is the character who most doubts Jesus because she knows Jesus' life history before his departure from the family and the commencement of his preaching. The son that she raised differs from the man that she hears about and sees later in life. Mary stubbornly adheres to the facts of Jesus' early life. Unlike Mary Magdalene, Mary feels that Jesus brings her nothing but shame, a word she repeats often throughout her gospel in relation to Jesus. She feels that every one of his actions drives a wedge into the family: "he came to me and said he had apprenticed himself to a shepherd. This was the lowest thing, good only for criminals and the simple-minded. You've done this to shame us, I said. Yet I knew it was wrong to talk of shame to him, when I was the one who had put him always in its shadows" (276). This quotation also reveals how the historical Jesus came to be a shepherd, but also a mythical figure since his shepherding fits into his theological persona. In each of the four narratives Ricci attempts to emphasize the narrators' place in history, and their gospels as historical documents used in order to grasp the historical and human Jesus before he is mythologized.

Similarly, when Ricci deconstructs the virgin birth of the New Testament to make Jesus a purely human character, he still inadvertently reconstructs Jesus as a mythological character. Mary's shame about Jesus' illegitimate birth is a huge weight on her, one with which she likewise burdens Jesus, never giving him the mother's love he desires. Mary's lack of affection for her son, and his recent knowledge that he is a bastard, instills in him low self-esteem and the result is that he takes a shepherd job though it is beneath him. However, his low birth becomes both a disadvantage and an advantage because it forges his connection with all the derelicts of society, consequently causing John to label him the good shepherd in

his Gospel: "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep" (John 10:11). Jesus does exactly that in all the novels explored in this thesis. It is because of his bastard status that all of the events in the novel transpire, a fact Mary recognizes when she finally confirms to Jesus, out of anger, that he is a bastard: "I understood he had only taunted me all these years from his own fear, and had hoped against hope, and perhaps all his life, from the days when Tryphon had first made clear to him his talents [(his strong knowledge of scripture)], wondered what thing it was that conspired against him, and kept him from the path of a normal life" (Ricci 281). Again an element of authorial Design emerges through a seemingly historical narrative. Ricci, by way of a well crafted historical plot and narrative twist, has turned the fact of Jesus' unfortunate birth into the root cause of his crucifixion and mythologization. It is a twist far more obscene than the theological reasons in the New Testament. Ricci bastardizes the theological meaning behind the crucifixion once he tries to take away all the embedded myth and *kerygma* in Christ's crucifixion.

Furthermore, Mary's purpose in *Testament* appears to be to reduce the growing hyperbole around Jesus' actions, the consequence being the demythologization of Jesus. Mary sees Jesus walking to the temple as a final defiance of her parenthood, as well as the ultimate way to make her shame known: "his meaning grew clear, which I saw now as the purest self-destruction, for he had wished to announce to the crowd exactly the thing I had wished to hide for his sake, which was his parentage ... I remembered how he had gone to the temple as a child and the trouble he had made for himself then, though without knowing the danger he was in, being a bastard. Now he knew, and still he put himself forward. Surely if the word went out of what he was, he might be arrested, or worse. Yet it seemed this was the very thing that he dared—to be discovered" (307). Not only does Mary think that Jesus gets himself killed because he enters the holy temple and is labeled unclean as a bastard, but

Ricci portrays Jesus' action as close to a deliberate suicide, one which will not occur directly by his own hands but through willful actions. Whatever Jesus' reasons were for entering the temple, the act produces a death with far reaching consequences in both theology and history.

Simon's gospel is most useful, in terms of historical content, towards the end of Jesus' life. With Simon's help readers are able to put together how aspects of the historical, which he recounts, could be muddled into the Jesus myth of the New Testament. Simon is the perfect witness to proceedings in Jesus' group as he is less biased than the other narrators so readers might be more willing to trust his testimony. As Ricoeur says in "The Hermeneutics of Testimony," faith in both a person like Simon's testimony as a witness and thus Jesus' *kerygma* occurs because the hearer, or in this case readers, make the leap to believe in the testimony "found in an intermediary position between a statement made by a person [(Simon)] and a belief assumed by another [(readers)] on the faith of the testimony of the first" (*Essays on Biblical Interpretation* 123).

Simon also acts as a witness to the truth of the events in the other three narratives. For instance, it is Simon who gives Judas justice in his gospel after Mary Magdalene's damaging narrative: "all I could gather from what Judas was saying was that he didn't want Jesus to go into Jerusalem, and that he was already risking his life telling Jesus the little he had" (Ricci 373). Such a conversation vindicates Judas, demonstrating that in the end Judas chose to warn Jesus of the rebellion, betraying all his oaths to his rebel group (374). Judas, as Simon demonstrates, chose friendship over betrayal. Moreover, Simon rehistoricises Judas, playing the same role as Philo does in *A Time for Judas*.

From Simon readers learn how Judas began to be mythologized into Jesus' betrayer. Simon, Jesus and some others, are all being held prisoner after violating temple law. Though Judas' name is cleared before the readers in his words quoted in the previous paragraph,

Simon's testimony demonstrates how storytelling and straying from the strict historical facts has created the dangerous situation that led up to Jesus' crucifixion and Judas' label as his betrayer: "Aram's tongue grew looser and his stories broader, and he made the mistake of mentioning Judas. [The examiner's] questions grew more pointed—what did this Judas look like, and where did he come from, and how did he and Jesus meet. Aram was seeming a little alarmed—he'd mentioned Judas in his same loose-tongued way, even boasting that he'd thought him a spy" (425). Aram, when responding to the temple guards, incriminates Judas and Jesus simultaneously, firstly by revealing that Judas is a spy plotting against Rome to regain sovereignty; secondly by incriminating Jesus as a collaborator in these rebel plots. Jesus "had associated with a certain Judas of Keriot, a suspected rebel" (432). In an ironic twist, readers see how meeting Judas gave Jesus back his life, but only so that Jesus could be part of a greater, more profound Design⁷⁹ in his death. Ricci's use of fictional history in the above quotes elaborates on the human relationships and their consequences amongst Jesus and his followers. A culmination of human imperfections in the novel created situations which ultimately led to Jesus' crucifixion. While those elements may be a benefit and advantageous to Ricci's historical fiction, the presentation of these incidents lacks an adequate discussion of Jesus' teachings. Such elements are discovered through focusing on storytelling and retelling history (and the New Testament) within the four gospels in *Testament* and not through hard facts.

The first part of this chapter discussed the new points of history that Ricci integrated into the recognizable story of Jesus resulting in a reinvention of Jesus the man and even Jesus

⁷⁹ Later in the novel Mary will also use the word "design". Following Jesus' rejection of his mother and brother in front of Mary Magdalene, Mary later sees Jesus on the side of a path in the road preaching, the same road he knew she would be taking to Jerusalem for Pesach. Mary writes, "we saw what had drawn the crowd together, for there in the midst of them, changed again from how I had seen him in the desert, fair and well groomed but also so manly in a way he had not struck me as then, stood Yeshua, preaching. So it seemed he had preceded us on the road, as if by design" (292). Mary is right about Jesus' motives as he wanted to see his family again in order to apologize for rejecting them in front of his followers.

Christ. The following is an examination of how Ricci reinvents biblical stories through a process of deconstructing the myth of Jesus as Christ and then subsequently reconstructing it (a narrative tactic similar to Callaghan's). *Testament's* four narrators retell different aspects of the same story, and they also reshape specific stories from the New Testament itself. Together each dispenses Jesus' *kerygma* through "the process of dialogue [within the narration] which has its origins in the history of the [Christian] community" (Montesano 164). Ricci's narrators are in the process of forming the early Christian community which would become the lifeline to Jesus' *kerygma* and his past. We have already discussed what a large influence John the Baptist had on Jesus in this novel. The implication of such a change in their relationship from the biblical narrative serves to diminish the idea that what Jesus is instructed to preach comes from God. Instead, Jesus becomes what Christianity will later be to Judaism: a break from another's theology that began as a small Jewish sect and became estranged. Judas describes how Jesus' ideas are re-appropriated from John the Baptist's: "In the beginning I often lacked the patience to follow him in this logic, particularly as regarded his talk of God's kingdom, a notion he had borrowed from Yohanan but had adapted to his own ends. He had developed many analogies and stories to explain the nature of this kingdom; yet each seemed as obscure as the next" (Ricci 46). Jesus operates within his own tradition of retelling because he "borrows" John the Baptist's theological ideas and re-appropriates them as he sees fit through the only method he can, storytelling. Jesus is unable to find one concrete way to explain the kingdom of heaven, which is understandable, hence his reliance on a variety of different stories. To Judas, Jesus' method is difficult to understand, but readers will grasp that Jesus merely tries to integrate his teachings into those of the biblical tradition (with Ricci's authorial guidance). Jesus converts these teachings into story form in order to dispense *kerygma* that he inherited from his teacher John the Baptist.

Jesus, as John the Baptist's disciple, was destined to succeed him, a situation which differs from the divine revelation that Jesus received from God through John the Baptist's (his cousin) mediation in the New Testament.

It may be because of characters' difficulty in grasping Jesus' *kerygma*, as it evolves from John the Baptist, that Ricci places much more emphasis than the New Testament on the story of Jesus and the leper colony. Instead of the one story given about Jesus and the leper in the New Testament,⁸⁰ a large portion of Judas' gospel is devoted to describing Jesus' actions within the leper colony. Such an expansion of a well known story starts to have more meaning to readers of *Testament* after they learn that Jesus is a bastard. Just as isolation was a large issue in *A Time for Judas*, being an outcast from society is always in the foreground of *Testament*.⁸¹ Jesus likes being with the lepers because they are sensitive to his *kerygma* and his presence "brought an air of hope to the place" (57). He seems to understand the struggles that the lepers go through and uses their pain as a living parable in contrast to his very human pain about his unnoticeable bastard impurity; whereas they are scarred on the outside, Jesus is scarred on the inside. Judas recognizes that Jesus brought him to the leper colony to give him a more direct *kerygmatic* education: "Yeshua did a most simple and amazing thing: he sat himself down amongst these lepers and conversed with them as if their affliction counted for nothing in his eyes. This was no doubt what Yeshua had wished me to witness—the utter contrast in these people between the outer person [(their rotting flesh)] and the inner one, a theme he returned to again and again in his teaching" (58-59). In this case Judas is brought to the leper colony because he consistently feels ineffectual about a similar parable Jesus preaches, that "of the pious man and the sinner who went to the temple to pray"

⁸⁰ Matthew 8:1-4; Luke 5:12-16; Mark 1:40-45.

⁸¹ All the first person narrators in the novel are outcasts. Mary Magdalene calls her family outcasts (127); Judas is alienated from the group; Mary, because of Jesus, she has to leave her family and go to another country with a man she does not love;

(59). When that story was told Judas “always felt sorry for the poor pious man, who was stuck with the rigor of his discipline and self-denial while the sinner was left free to sin again. But sitting among the lepers I did not feel quite so cynical” (59). Readers can see that it takes an expansion of the original parable (the above quotation) retold through a living example (history) to finally open Judas to Jesus’ teachings. Ricci allows readers to skip the biblical difficulties of interpreting and analyzing the meaning of the leper parable in the Bible by giving them a concrete historical example with an explanation to follow. Even though Jesus is retelling his own parables through the lepers’ example, he is still dispensing *kerygma* to Judas.

Ricci’s use of fictitious historical examples in his novel, as exemplified in the previous pages, is a method which oftentimes moves between the intentional and unintentional. These living parables are just one way that Jesus’ *kerygma* is dispensed to readers and followers. Taking the example of the woman who is about to be stoned for adultery in the New Testament (John 8:3-9), Ricci changes the woman’s crime from adultery to sorcery.⁸² Mary Magdalene describes the vicious stoning, which she “had the misfortune of seeing [it] with [her] own eyes” (Ricci 138). As in the Bible, Jesus protests the event and argues, citing examples, that everyone has broken Judaic law at one point or another and “it was clear from the looks of his listeners’ faces that not one of them was guilty of less. In this way he made people think in a manner that hadn’t occurred to them before, and see how the law must be tempered with mercy or not one of us would be spared” (140). In this way Jesus marks his separation from Jewish law. Though his argument is rational at its core, he inevitably portrays himself as destabilizing the entire Judaic code, as all rules can be broken in certain

Simon is a pagan and cast out from his own home because of the problems between his brother and his brother’s wife.

⁸² Such a change is an important one as this comparison will link Mary Magdalene’s mother (who was a pagan and never adopted Jewish ways, subsequently partly bringing Mary Magdalene up with pagan beliefs) to the stoned woman,

circumstances, particularly the one he wants to break the most, entering the temple in Jerusalem though he is a bastard. Jesus' new theology is apparent in this quotation as it is in the New Testament. However, on the same page Mary Magdalene discusses the consequences of the Jewish elders' opposition to Jesus' words. Quite casually Mary Magdalene writes, "the elders issued an order condemning Yeshua's teachings and barring him from the town. But the Lord worked to turn adversity to Yeshua's favor, for there were many who hadn't heard of him before or taken him seriously who suddenly paid him attention" (140). Mary Magdalene even recognizes that there is Design in and around Jesus' life. Retelling the story of his defense of the dead stoned woman allows his divine word to spread, bringing more people to hear and follow his *kerygma*. Ricci, despite the historical course of his novel, is still drawn to the mythic power within Jesus' stories.

Jesus' separation from what he sees as the rigid nature of Jewish law is common to both the New Testament and the novel. In *Testament*, however, Jesus' concern about Judaic legal codes is connected both to his *kerygma* and his illegitimate birth. This becomes apparent when readers encounter another retold biblical story: the entry of Jesus as a young child into the temple (Luke 2:46). In the Bible the event is seen in a positive light, but in the novel the rabbis (who in the New Testament praised Jesus' abilities) within the temple accuse Jesus of being "a blasphemer, since he claims there is more wisdom than what is written in the Torah" (Ricci 267). Thus, even at a young age Jesus has already begun to challenge Jewish law. Likewise, the moment foreshadows his impending destruction, as he preaches words that go against the Jewish faith, but as Mary writes, "by law, bastards were prohibited from the temple precincts, on pain of death. ... For with a word, if the truth of him was known, men such as these could ruin his life" (267-268). Both consciously and

consequently making her understand Jesus' *kerygma* on a deeper level.

unconsciously Jesus challenges Jewish law. Mary's observation also shows the inevitability of Jesus' death, for even though he actively preaches modifications of Judaic law, he will inevitably suffer at the hands of Judaic law, both because of his theological challenges, and the nature of his birth, an impure label he cannot avoid. Jesus is being metaphysically tossed around by Ricci in these retellings.

Another story which Ricci reconstructs is Lazarus' resurrection in Simon's gospel. Since Simon is an outsider, and still deeply attached to his pagan heritage, he retells the story with a subtle miraculous undertone. His narrative already possesses the hint of a retelling from the very beginning because once his gospel begins he only calls Yeshua, Jesus, the name with which he will be mythologized (323). Simon has immense faith in Jesus, for even though Simon thinks that Lazarus "was already dead. Jesus, though, didn't balk at any of this. ... I had the feeling he could save the man, that he could bring him back" (400-401). There is no one after Simon to contradict his narrative. From what the readers learn, and what he believes, Lazarus is dead, and Jesus has the power to bring him back from death.

In *Testament* the entire event surrounding Lazarus' resurrection is real and magical in the same instant as Jesus heals Lazarus. Conversely, in the Gospels Lazarus' resurrection is much more dramatic and tangible through the commands Jesus speaks (John 11). In the Bible Jesus calls for Lazarus to walk and rise again, and Lazarus does, in contrast to what happens in the novel where Jesus does surgical work on Lazarus' head. While Simon watches Jesus' deft movements, Jesus' hands are on Lazarus' head the entire time. "There was a strange moment then, the light from the fire dark and red and making shadows so I wasn't sure anymore what I was seeing—it looked as if Jesus had put his fingers right down inside the man's skull, right through the bone like that, and after he'd felt around in there for a bit, something gushed out from the fellow's head into Jesus's hands, dark and alive ... thinking it

was some devil that had come out of him ... because when Jesus tossed the thing into the fire it sizzled and squealed there like something dying” (Ricci 401). Although this “thing” remains a mystery, Simon’s retelling further establishes the inevitability in the novel that the historical Jesus will be reinvented into a mythological figure.

There are only three prior gospel retellings of Jesus’ life explored in this chapter and the final gospel in *Testament* serves to mythologize him the most. Ricci is falling into mythical biblical patterns, especially with the exaggerated imagery of the fire and the color red as Jesus works on Lazarus. Simon’s retelling only serves to mythologize Jesus even more. Ricci even has Lazarus jokingly say to Jesus, “‘You must be the son of god himself, if you brought me back from the dead.’ And there was a pause and then everyone laughed, even Jesus” (402). Despite the triviality of the joke, the readers, like the characters, are dramatically affected by Simon’s retelling of the Lazarus story. Ricci has hypothetically demonstrated how Jesus could have been exaggerated from the gifted Jesus of Nazareth into the mythological Christ, the Son of God.

Ricci uses the concerns raised by narrators like Judas and Mary about the exaggerated stories being spread about Jesus (by people like Simon) in order to question the credibility of the Jesus of the New Testament. Since Judas and Mary are mostly with Jesus, they feel that their accounts are the most accurate, and that exaggerations of his ministry (and consequently his mythologization) are dangerous. They are not alone in their apprehensions. Part of what makes Jesus a historical character is his own unwillingness to allow people to exaggerate his actions. For example, in *Testament* Simon believes that he sees Jesus ascending the mountain with the help of angels. Ricci is careful to have Jesus immediately discount Simon’s exaggerated story: “‘I assure you I came up here entirely on my own’” (102). Nevertheless, Simon’s mythological tale does not fade, especially since Simon is so firm in his beliefs: “it

was Simon's version of things, being the most fantastical, that seemed at once to gain currency," comments Judas (103). Ricci points out how people are strictly unable to tell the literal truth. Such an idea is supported by Judas who records how Jesus' followers often told him fantastical/exaggerated stories of Jesus' cures (33). Moreover, Ricci questions the validity of Jesus as a miracle worker, as opposed to an exceptional human being, by blatantly drawing readers' attention to their own real personal flaws. He is constantly revealing how hyperbole distorts fact in the real human world of history. These actions in exaggeration show readers that people only have a tendency to absorb Jesus' *kerygma* through a mythological narrative. Generally these narratives are interesting, ones that people can retell with all the fantastic elements included.

Even Mary supports the above claims of exaggeration, though she does not believe them herself when she writes, "the tales of [Jesus] were spread around, and grew more fantastical with each retelling" (296). In her gospel she continues to say that Jesus "had gained a reputation as a healer and even a worker of wonders, though I imagined he did little more than apply ointments and salves, which because they did not kill his patients, so made him seem much superior to the charlatans and thieves who passed for doctors in those parts" (296). At the same time the reader is aware of Ricci's diction. Mary's use of the words "charlatans" and "thieves" begins to elicit justifiable doubts about Jesus himself in readers. While Jesus is no charlatan in the novel, Ricci presents him, through Mary, as nothing more than a lucky and gifted healer. Yet, Mary also admits in this passage how the story of Jesus constantly approaches the fantastic. Ricci uses Mary to bring in the point of view of the skeptic, but he is still unable, apparently unintentionally, to prevent *Testament* from breaking the historical reins on the mythological. The story of Jerubal functions in the novel (even further than Mary's gospel) as a way of questioning the credibility of several of the most

famous of Jesus' miracles, while at the same time incidents surrounding Jerubal highlight the legitimacy of Jesus' good deeds in the novel as opposed to Jerubal's fraudulent ones.

In the final gospel of the four in *Testament*, Simon records, in much detail, his adventures in collaboration with Jerubal.⁸³ Jerubal is the worst of what some suspect Jesus to be. He is a magician, false prophet, and a healer. Ricci uses Jerubal to create rationales for some of the miracles attributed to Jesus in the New Testament. Jerubal and Simon often travel with the future Christian group, but never hesitate to wander away from time to time. Ricci uses Jerubal as the character in the satiric story to discount the myths within the gospel, forcing readers to become witnesses to how exaggerated stories about Jesus might spread. Simon meets Jerubal by chance and then begins to tell Jerubal stories about Jesus that he had "only heard second hand as if I'd seen them with my own eyes, how he cured lepers and walked on water and the like" (336). Unfortunately for Simon, Jerubal is a con-man and liar (337). Ricci uses Jerubal to suggest that Jesus' "miracles" may be suspect. The historical accounts of Simon and Jerubal serve to diminish Jesus' grandeur because of the factual way Simon recounts what transpired between the two. One unsettling moment occurs when Jerubal, who had previously hidden that he knew much about Jesus, starts "talking with people about what [Jesus had] done and the stories that were told of him. ... he'd cured cripples as well, and even a blind man, once" (340). He recounts the familiar story of Jesus restoring the blind man's sight. However Jerubal is clearly an unreliable witness and, thus, the credibility of the story of the blind man in John 9:1-7 is placed in question.

Similarly, Ricci uses Jerubal to create doubt about Jesus' miracles in the story of the loaves and fishes. A story that at once calls to mind Jesus' miraculous nature and connection

⁸³ Jerubal and Simon's adventures occur parallel to those of Jesus, much like those of Philo do in *A Time for Judas*. Nino Ricci had read Callaghan's novel. He wrote the foreword for *A Time for Judas* when it was republished: "*A Time for Judas* is as much about storytelling itself, about the stories we make and the stories we need, as it is about Jesus" (Callaghan viii).

with God, turns into a spur of the moment con. In Ricci's version of the story, the fish which were supposed to feed Jesus' followers had become rotten and caused some to be ill with food poisoning (Ricci 356). Seeing an opportunity to make a profit, Jerubal persuades Simon to take the bad batch of fish that the group had now left behind, and sell it to a nearby small town. Simon records:

The way Jerubal had it, those fish we were carrying were part of a miracle we'd seen. He had the whole story plotted out, how he and I were simply walking along the river when we came on Jesus, the holy man of Galilee, on his way to Jerusalem with his followers. They'd run out of food, and hadn't money, and thought they'd have to turn back and miss the feast. But Jesus said to his men, 'Cast a net into the river,' and it came out teeming with fish. And they'd been able to eat their fill ... 'I saw it with my own eyes,' Jerubal said, 'and my servant here [(meaning Simon)], who's never told a lie in his life, will tell you the same (357).

The suggestion of the novel is that the loaves and fishes story in the Bible may be the result of a similar fabrication. In fact, Ricci later has Jerubal say "the bigger the lie, the more people fell for it in the end" (359).

Jerubal is such a convincing and conniving storyteller in terms of all the stories he makes up about Jesus that even Simon "couldn't tell the difference any more between things that had actually happened and what we'd made up"; such are the consequences of bearing false witness (360). These tales of fraudulent myths test readers' faith and understanding of Jesus' *kerygma*. Ricci wants readers to doubt the mythological, and consequently the *kerygma*, by providing an example of how a cunning storyteller can take advantage of a gullible audience. He suggests that myth may be full of hyperbole and even falsehood, not

kerygma. He provides us with what we might call reasonable alternatives to the miracles in the story of Jesus. On the other hand, despite the deconstructive effect of the Jerubal story on miraculous incidents in the Canonical Gospels, like the loaves and fishes story, most readers inevitably realize that Jerubal is no Jesus. The contrast between them also emphasizes the significance and uniqueness of Jesus. Ricci's novel, then, proceeds in the direction of myth by revealing that Jesus' *kerygma* cannot be separated from the mythological and narrative aspects of the Bible and so in Ricci's novel the reader is torn between fact and fiction.

Another important story that is reinterpreted by Ricci from the New Testament is the one about Jesus and the centurion's servant (Luke 7:1-10). Ricci's version of the story ultimately delivers the same message; that Jesus heals both Gentiles and Jews, but he alters the social dynamic of the story. The man who comes to see Jesus is a wealthy pagan whose daughter is ill. Jesus heals her and the man suggests some compensation for Jesus' actions. Being the man that he is, Jesus requests that the man build a temple dedicated to Jesus' god. "The man laughed. 'Now your price is too steep'" (Ricci 108). While Jesus may not have been successful in his conversion, he angrily yells at his followers (recall that readers are dealing with a human Jesus) after they ask why he wastes his time helping pagans: "'Do you think our god looks after only the Jews and doesn't concern himself with the rest? Is he just some little wood nymph to make an idol of, who lives in his little cave?' ... Yeshua's anger had surely come from his own divided mind: he seemed both to resent the help he gave to the heathens and yet unable to find the way, within his own philosophy, to refuse it" (108). Judas' eloquence in the above quotation is marvelous. Though he may not exactly understand what his statement has done, he has nonetheless begun to mythologize an aspect of Jesus' being. Jesus is of a "divided mind," he struggles with his human disgust at the disrespect he receives, and with his need to dispense to all the *kerygma* that he has chosen to live his life

by and proclaim. Moreover, while the quotation demonstrates a division within Jesus' own nature, it also reveals the effect of Jesus' *kerygma* on others. His actions may have been unmiraculous when he healed the girl, but his words and struggle reveal an aspect of his soon-to-be mythological self.

Mary Magdalene, whose gospel follows that of Judas, is witness to far more cures because of her closeness to Jesus' group. In Mary Magdalene's gospel Ricci reinterprets the story of the leper whom Jesus heals. The Bible reads: "And Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth his hand, and touched him, and saith unto him, 'I will, be thou clean'. And as soon as he had spoken, immediately the leprosy departed"; Jesus' words make the leper clean (Mark 2:41-42). Unlike the previous parable, when Jesus cures the leper in *Testament* the act remains hidden to the readers as Mary Magdalene never witnesses it. All she sees is a man whose "skin was spotted with sores, festering and red" (Ricci 143). Later that same man appeared: "When we recognized him, we stood amazed: it was the leper from Arbela, cured ... Those of us who'd been at Arbela were in awe at the sight of the man—it was as if some invisible hand had come down and wiped him clean. Had I not seen the change with my own eyes I would hardly have believed it possible" (144). Her personal awe at Jesus' accomplishment is itself full of the miraculous and mythological. The invisible hand is assumed to be God's hand. Even Jesus does not deny it could be. Defending himself against the charge of sorcery, he tells his followers, "Sorcery appeals to the devil, who only makes things worse. So if the man is better, it must be the will of God" (144-145).

Jesus' words are validated in the novel because his good deed reflects the help he receives from God, whereas Mary Magdalene's indulgence in sorcery creates an avalanche of negativity towards Jesus and his disciples. Because of her paranoia regarding Judas she seeks the help of a sorcerer. It is an action, she writes, "that brought danger not only to me but to

all of us, and that went against the teachings of the scriptures and of Yeshua himself" (167). Since Mary Magdalene is not able to deal with Judas on a rational level, she seeks the sorcerer's help in order to drive him away (169). Readers then learn why Judas suddenly feels alienated from the group. Mary Magdalene describes how "in the following days it happened that Simon's [(the sorcerer not the pagan)] measures took effect ... these changes, however, caused such tension and disorder among us that whatever good they might have promised was quickly belied" (170). The event hurts Jesus. He tells his disciples, "so my own poverty is revealed to me, Yeshua said, if he who understands [(Judas)] is the one who leaves and you, who do not, remain" (171). Mary Magdalene, with the help of a pagan sorcerer, has driven away the disciple, Judas, upon whom Jesus' *kerygma* had the most impact. From Jesus' comments readers can infer the harm Mary Magdalene's sorcery has done because it occurred with devilish power in contrast to Jesus' actions, which were sanctioned by God, and cured the leper. Unlike the positive deeds of Jesus, Mary Magdalene's deed was not the will of God.

Though Mary Magdalene realizes her crime in hindsight, it is evident that she is often not able to understand Jesus' teachings that "were too often in riddles" (288). In contrast, later in the novel Simon is pleased to see that Jesus preached with a variety of different stories as it made him feel that he, a pagan, could join Jesus because he could relate to some of them (353). Unlike Mary Magdalene, Simon recognizes the openness that is within Jesus' *kerygma*. He accepts Jesus as both a man and a mythological figure more completely and easily than any of the other narrators. Simon is the final bridge between a factual account of Jesus' life and myth. Thus, the miraculous and mythological is present within Jesus' parables despite Ricci's attempts to demythologize Jesus in Bultmann's manner. In comparison, Ricci's narrators continuously record, whether they are aware of it or not, Jesus'

mythologization through the world of nature, in much the same way as the other three novels discussed in this thesis.

Jesus' *kerygma* and extraordinary abilities are expressed by the narrators of *Testament* when they use nature to tell us about him. As it was in *A Time for Judas*, the desert is a prominent focus within *Testament*. Ricci's Judas also has a connection to the desert which fosters a connection between his Judas and Jesus. *Testament* contains a strong and positive reaction to the land. Judas shows he is very sensitive to the landscape around him when he writes of how he "immediately felt [his] blood quicken at stepping back onto native soil" (34). Judas' words recall the comment Jesus makes to his mother when he is still a child after the family decides to leave Egypt (34). Mary says: Jesus "said to me that if he was a Jew, he should see the land of the Jews, and so know himself" (266). Not only does Jesus cross Judea several times to preach God's word, but Judas also endows him with mythic characteristics. If Judas records how the Jews tamed the desert, he also acknowledges that Jesus tamed the land with *kerygma* (34). Jesus' connection with God's earth is integral to his preaching and mythologization.

Jesus is first truly mythologized on the mountaintop in Judas' gospel. Unable to demythologize Jesus, Judas describes how he follows Simon to where Jesus is on top of the mountain bathed by the dawn: "Soon we had risen above the fog into brilliant morning light. It was as if we had entered the heavens: at our feet the fog stretched, a great cloud spread out as far as the eye could see; then, before us, bathed in light, the snow-covered peak of the mountain. At the very peak we could make out the figure of Yeshua, alone" (102). This is the same moment discussed earlier in this chapter where Simon claims to see angels. Even though the angels are not apparent in Judas' description, the mythologization of Jesus still occurs through the biblical language associated with nature and through the echoes of the

Neo-Platonic images of the Canonical Gospel of John. Jesus is part of the bright light, being perched on the top of the world. Not once in any of the other texts explored in this thesis has Jesus been more connected to the sun, the image glowing behind his head like a halo as he is depicted in many paintings of his 'likeness'. For an author who attempts to demythologize Jesus, Ricci has his first narrator describe an almost fantastical vision of Jesus, in which Jesus is so much above the rest of the world that he can look down on everything in his heavenly light like a sun god.

In *Testament*, just as in the other novels and the Bible in general, Jesus' mythic and divine side, as opposed to his human persona, is also often revealed through water imagery. Both Judas and Simon describe how Jesus looks when he walks on water. Though Ricci uses Judas to provide a logical explanation for what he sees, the incident still suggests that Jesus is more than an ordinary human being. Judas writes: "He had walked out along the breakwater there, which sat low at that time because of the rains, so that he seemed to hover on the surface of the lake" (96).

More than once in all four gospels of *Testament*, Ricci's attempt to demythologize Jesus is countered by his narrators' inclination to reinstate Jesus' divinity. On the first page of Simon's gospel Simon writes how Jesus preached on the beach:⁸⁴ "he'd take them to the beach and go off in the shoals a bit to preach at them, and I'd swear then he was standing right on the lake, which some said he could do" (319). Ricci has, perhaps unintentionally, remythologized his Jesus, an inevitability forced upon him because he is reworking the biblical tradition. Not only has Ricci just countered the non-mythological description that Judas had given, but he has written a novel which progresses from a very logical and accurate portrayal of the historical Jesus, to one where readers still have a convincing

⁸⁴ Both a common place for his preaching and a refuge from his followers in *Testament*.

narrator as a witness to Jesus' mythological side. After over four hundred pages and four gospels, readers are still left with Jesus as a mythic character for Ricci's narrators demonstrate that there "is therefore no witness of the absolute who is not a witness of historic signs, no confessor of absolute meaning who is not a narrator of the acts of deliverance" (*Essays on Biblical Interpretation* 134).

Though Simon gives the most mythic portrayal of Jesus, Jesus' subtextual mythic connection to the sea is constant within *Testament*. Another character who is deeply connected to the sea is Mary Magdalene. Readers learn through Ricci's detailed geography of ancient Judea that Migdal is a fishing village. She has spent her whole life living by water and fish, synonymous imagery that would later become symbolic of Christianity.⁸⁵ Mary Magdalene recalls, "As a child, I would watch [the fishermen] from the porch and imagine that the lake they plied was the world entire, with its depths and its distant shores. But now the lake seemed small, since Yeshua had come" (Ricci 163). For Mary Magdalene, Jesus' *kerygma* and his presence are larger than anything she can imagine. Readers see her evolution and understanding of his *kerygma* when she recalls how he spoke about the kingdom of heaven: "When will the kingdom come, people asked him, and he always replied, It's here. He said, Look at the trees or the birds or the lake ... Even those closest to him didn't always understand, and I among them, but that was our own hardheadedness, because no one before had ever said to us, Open your eyes and see" (137). Her eyes have been opened, for when she muses about the smallness of the lake, she has come to understand, through Jesus' *kerygma*, that she is part of something larger in God's creation;

⁸⁵ Frye notes in *The Great Code* that it now becomes obvious "why there should be so much about fishing in the Gospels, and why Jesus himself should be so often associated in later legend with a fish or dolphin. The identification of Jesus with a fish has been traditionally assisted by an acronym: the initial letters of 'Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour' in Greek spell out the word *ichthys*, fish. In any case the theme of redemption out of water follows in the sequence that includes the story of Noah's ark, the crossing of the Red Sea by the Israelites, the symbolism of baptism in which the person baptized is separated into a mortal part that symbolically drowns and an immortal part that escapes, and such occasional uses of the image as the

Jesus will not allow her to be stunted spiritually.

Jesus' connection to and mythologization through water is confirmed even by himself. Once Lazarus has finished telling everyone what he had seen while he was dead, Jesus speaks of a similar experience when he has a near death experience as a child. Simon writes about:

when [Jesus had] been knifed during a riot as a boy. But he'd seen a lake instead of a cave, and had thought, I should walk off into the water, though he knew it would kill him to do it. In the end he'd actually set off, and had walked under the waves seeing all sorts of things he'd never have known were there, fish and rocks of amazing colours and shapes. And when he came to again he didn't know if his god had been saying to him that that was what his heavenly kingdom was like or just that he should open his eyes, since most people looked at the world and all they saw was grey like the surface of the lake, but some people saw underneath (403).

In Simon's gospel Jesus is recounting a spiritual baptism that he went through upon being stabbed just as he is later stabbed on the cross. The incident operates in the novel on a level far beyond the physical. Readers are invited by the novel into the mysteries of Jesus' psyche. We see how he received *kerygma*. This moment, for both Jesus and Simon, is the experience (whether lived or heard) that produces an understanding of *kerygma*. For readers, the novel may subsequently become a similar *kerygmatic* parable.

The divine narrative Design reveals itself to Simon, the reader, and to Ricci (by way of his own narrative construction) towards the final pages of Simon's gospel when he hears a man in the marketplace recounting a similar story to the one Jesus has just told in the above

paragraph (455). This familiar story emphasizes the *kerygma* which Jesus preached to his followers and to Simon when he described his own vision of what he imagined was under the sea: “But I remembered the vision that Jesus had told us about after he’d raised Elazar. And for a moment it was as if some curtain had been pushed aside in my head and I had a glimpse of something I understood but couldn’t have put into words, like some beautiful thing, so beautiful it took your breath away, that you saw for an instant through a gateway or door, then was gone” (455). These concluding words mythologize Jesus even further. Jesus is connected to the mythological types of the Bible through nature, but he is also myth.

However, what Simon’s above words demonstrate is that even through Ricci’s historical investigation of Jesus as a human figure, the narrators in each of the four gospels end up mythologizing Jesus in the end. Each is drawn to do so despite the tension in the other direction that Ricci forces; his historical depiction consistently swims against a stronger mythic current. Frye usefully suggests that an author like Ricci fails in his historical depiction of Jesus because Jesus is “a figure who drops into history from another dimension of reality, and thereby shows what the limitations of the historical perspective are” (*The Double Vision* 16). Frye’s words leave little room for an understanding of Jesus as a historical figure, but as this chapter has pointed out, characteristics of historical fiction can be ascribed to Jesus. Inevitably, though, when dealing with Jesus as a religious figure, and his *kerygma*, myth will always prevail. The darkness is always and inevitably being enlightened.

The first hint that Jesus operates within a myth is the way his words which contain his *kerygma* are described. The *kerygma*, as in the other three novels in this thesis, appears most vividly through gateway and door imagery that the narrators often use. Since what Jesus preaches is beyond direct understanding, Ricci’s narrators are obliged by what was previously established in the Bible, to record what they hear and feel in terms that begin with

the concrete and move far beyond it. What happens is exactly as Ricoeur says: “the ‘witness of the resurrection’ will be less and less eyewitness to the extent that faith will be transmitted by the hearing of preaching. The ‘voice’ truly refers back to the ‘seen,’ speaking is no longer seeing; faith comes by hearing” (*Essays on Biblical Interpretation* 136). The encounter with the *kerygma* exists through the transmission of the witnessing rhetoric in *Testament*. First it is Judas who records his observations and interpretation of Jesus’ words. He discusses how he admires that Jesus “did not condescend to his pupils, or consider anything above their understanding ... it often seemed to me that not Hillel himself could have followed the nuance of his thoughts” (Ricci 49). While Jesus may preach without discrimination, his preaching is on the same level as an influential theologian’s. After some criticism and reflection, admiration for Jesus and his preaching grows within Judas. At first he sees Jesus’ description of the kingdom of heaven to be complex (49). For Judas, Jesus’ explanation is too abstract, and he believes that since Jesus “did not put the thing more clearly, [it may be] a sign that he himself had not worked it through,” and then comes Judas’ revelation through hindsight,⁸⁶ “But over time I came to see a wisdom in his approach, and the folly of putting into words notions that by their very nature, like God himself, must exceed our understanding” (49). It is precisely for that reason that *kerygma* cannot be separated from the mythic and is intrinsically dependent on literary rhetoric. These elements heighten language and words beyond their specific definition and are the only means by which human beings can have a tangible understanding of something that is far beyond the ordinary.

In light of the above, Mary Magdalene records early on in her gospel her own feelings about her relationship with Jesus. Jesus treats her without the formality of gender of the times, as though she were part of a religious order where all subjects may be broached. She

⁸⁶ Judas draws this conclusion after duly reflecting and pondering on the meaning of Jesus’ life and ministry—*kerygma*.

reflects how he “talked to me in such a way as no man had ever spoken to me before, as if every subject was permitted; and though I could hardly recall afterwards what it was that we had discussed, still it seemed to me then that he had reached inside me with his words to touch the inmost part of me” (128). *Kerygma* is present within their conversations, though Mary Magdalene is not aware of it until later.

The beauty of these gospels is that the way they are written reveal that the narrators have accepted Jesus because of how they chastise themselves for missing Jesus’ *kerygma*. For instance, Jesus as the abstract door again opens before readers. Mary Magdalene describes how Jesus taught them that the law “was a gateway ... it was we who had to choose, who stood before the gate and had to open it. Somehow I hadn’t understood this simple thing, that choice was exactly what couldn’t be forced on me,” the choice to either accept Jesus’ *kerygma* or not (136-137). *Kerygma* in all its complexity will not be absorbed and comprehended by only listening to a few parables; a personal experience, like Mary Magdalene’s, by the readers is needed, an experience which they can correlate to something within the abstractness of *kerygma* and which will make them understand it. These experiences are what Ricoeur speaks of when he discusses symbols and metaphors, two rhetorical elements used within the Bible that help to decode complex theological thought through available comparisons and correlate the theology to an element or moment that resembles something familiar via metaphors and figurative language. “In symbolizing one situation by means of another, metaphor ‘infuses’ the feelings attached to the symbolizing situation into the heart of the situation that is symbolized. In this ‘transference of feelings,’ the similarity between feelings is induced by the resemblance of situations” (*The Rule of Metaphor* 190). This is the way metaphor functions for the narrators in Ricci’s novel, but also the others in this thesis. Metaphor, as it fuses with feeling and understanding, opens the

kerygmatic gateway.

Mary, Jesus' mother, is one character who cannot connect any of her feelings or experiences to the words Jesus preaches. However, she does acknowledge that her son is a revolutionary in the ideas that he preaches, but she still seeks to stifle his gift and harden herself to his *kerygma*. Jesus even asks her, "Why do you try to silence me ... when I merely tell the truth" (Ricci 281). Before Jesus becomes an active preacher he has already earned himself a reputation for the things that he said "because he always had an answer ready, which often enough showed some truth" (278). Mary describes a young Jesus who is only just beginning to hone his *kerygmatic* craft. Despite her skepticism, she is still "drawn by his words" (293). Likewise, Simon at first does not understand what Jesus says, but it made him "feel better just to listen to him" speak (330). Here Simon is subconsciously internalizing Jesus' *kerygma*. Each narrator, therefore, does have some compelling attraction to Jesus when he preaches. They may not all recognize the mythical aspects of his words at first, but they all come to a closer encounter with *kerygma* towards the conclusion of each gospel, especially in the concluding pages of each.

Judas, without even realizing the implications of his own prolific statements describes Jesus in messianic terms at the conclusion of his gospel. He writes that "when I considered what it was in Yeshua that had held me to him, it seemed exactly the hope of something new: a new sort of man, a new way of seeing things. I thought, If there was a single person who had found the way to speak the truth, perhaps the rest was worthwhile" (121). Judas has moved far beyond associating Jesus with only the literal world. To Judas, Jesus becomes a figure of hope and truth, the exact emblematic elements which Jesus represents in the New Testament, elements which are intangible. Judas' last paragraph is the most revealing. He believes that Jesus can make the world over, change it from its horrible circumstances,

perhaps create a new kingdom: “in Yeshua that quality that made one feel there was something, still, some bit of hope, some secret he might reveal that would help make the world over. Tell me your secret, I had wanted to say to him, tell me, make me new. And even now, though I had left him, I often saw him beckoning before as towards a doorway he would have made me pass through, from darkness to light” (122). It is almost astonishing that these words are coming from the same logical narrator within *Testament*. If Ricci had any hope of demythologizing Jesus he has sabotaged his own narrative at the end of his first section. Not only is Jesus holding open a door for Judas to walk through, but that door will make him pass from the darkness that is his understanding of *kerygma* now, to the baptismal light of accepting Jesus as a *kerygmatic* figure.

Mary Magdalene has a similar epiphany at the end of her gospel. She acknowledges that Jesus has become like a mythological character as she writes, “I who was among those closest to him, who’d been embraced by him and had walked with him by the lake, could not say what it was that formed him, and indeed as the days passed and the weeks and the years, only knew him less” (223). For the readers and the four gospel narrators, Jesus slowly changes from a human character who lives in history to a man with a prophetic mission. Because he is embracing his divine side he becomes less knowable to humanity.⁸⁷ Moreover, Mary Magdalene even compares him to a god, for as she began to know him less as a man, “he seemed like a glimpse I’d had of something that I could not put a name to, and which always slipped from my gaze before I had a chance to know it” (223-224). He has become the mythological figure of the Bible that people continuously see and hear, but do not grasp entirely. That attempt to grasp and understand shows that Mary Magdalene has grown to accept the reality of Jesus’ *kerygma*.

Jesus' mother Mary comes to a similar position as that of Judas and Mary Magdalene when at the end of her gospel she says of Mary Magdalene: "when Mary spoke of my son the wonder I heard in her voice was not so different from what I myself had felt, that sense of a doorway Yeshua stood before, to some new understanding. Except that she had passed through it, and saw things in a different light, and who was I to say that the miracle she had witnessed had not occurred, for those who had eyes to see it" (314). Because she is Jesus' mother, Mary is unable to let go of his human side and allow him to be the mythological character that he is. She recognizes in herself that she has yet to understand his *kerygma*, but she is also beginning to acknowledge that he possesses the power to open a mystical door.

In addition, the figurative language used by and about Jesus as the way to a superior level of being is found at the conclusion of Simon's gospel as he muses, I "wonder what further realm there might be that we see nothing of, and that seemed to call for me there in the glow that comes off the fields" (456). Readers see Simon acknowledging that there is something beyond his immediate life that beckons him. For Jesus' followers, Jesus was unlike anyone you'd "ever met before, and when he talked you had to listen, and the things he said made you feel all of a sudden as if you'd been sleeping all of your life until he had told you, Wake up" (421). Each narrator has experienced "the Call". Readers learn that as the narrators mythologize Jesus his "bastardy never seemed to have come out—maybe that was the difficult thing," Simon continues, "It wasn't for me to say he did anything wrong not to let out the truth, when often enough it happened that a truth of that sort, that didn't mean anything, stood in the way of one that did" (453). Simon recognizes that it is Jesus' prophetic truth, his *kerygma*, that will transcend history, for theological, spiritual, and religious truth is much more powerful and worth preserving than a historical narrative which describes the

⁸⁷ Recall the passage in chapter two where Theophilus also writes how he remembers Jesus less and less.

accidental parentage of a great man. Undeniably, Ricci, perhaps reluctantly, has proven that Bultmann's theory to believe only in a Jesus without myth is impossible. Moreover, *Testament* finally demonstrates that when discussing Jesus' *kerygma*, myth is inevitable because authors, like Ricci, are continuously restrained by the biblical context which they are reconstructing. Truly—the extraordinary cannot be exemplified and hammered down by the rigidity of history.

CONCLUSION

Metaphor + Figurative Language + Bible + Myth = *Kerygma*

While working on the conclusion of this thesis I was fortunate enough to travel to Jerusalem and see first hand the places where Jesus was rumored to have preached, prayed, and died. The effect of standing in these tangible places that had only existed in my imagination was overpowering. This was especially so since the places now before me forced my mind to return to those contrived and confining images of my imagination conjured by the narratives of the New Testament and the novels explored in this thesis. Even in the land where Jesus walked, an individual must still close her eyes and imagine what this land looked like before it was partitioned into four quarters. Even in Jerusalem Jesus is once more mythologized.

It was the books in this thesis and the New Testament that enabled me to understand what I was looking at, for every place that people visit is overgrown by churches and markets, transforming the landscape of one's imagination into the architectural landscapes that are now the interior and exterior of these Jesus sites. Instead of climbing up the mountain of Gergesa where Jesus was crucified, I walked up a flight of stairs; instead of being out in the open amongst olive trees and the sun, I was inside, gazing at magnificent shrines dedicated to Jesus Christ. For reasons such as these, it was while I stood in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre that I mentally affirmed to myself what this thesis has argued profusely: when dealing with Jesus' *kerygma* and the Jesus myth, authors are constrained to using the rhetorical devices of the Bible in their unique effort to recreate the Jesus myth, simply because there is no other way to do it. Regardless of religious beliefs or personal opinions, even in Christianity's most sacred places Jesus must be mythologized when we are

confronted with his story, because otherwise one is simply looking with detachment at colorful mosaics and cathedral ceilings that form a compound around these well known places. Bultmann's call to demythologize Jesus is still a difficult and perhaps futile task even when we can feel the Jerusalem sun that bathed Jesus, touch the stone he touched on the *Via Dolorosa*, and walk the road he walked.

Because of their rhetoric and powerful reconstructions of the Jesus myth the novels explored in this thesis became my guide while in Jerusalem. All of the authors of the novels in this thesis took liberties in altering the biblical narrative about how Jesus ended up in Jerusalem and eventually was crucified, but they took no liberties with the conclusion. In each novel Jesus walked the *Via Dolorosa*, climbed the same mountain, and was killed in the same fashion. Parts of the myth may be altered, but the conclusion remains intact, for that, as argued in *A Time for Judas*, is the most sensational and captivating part of Jesus' story as well as an integral part of the spread of his *kerygma*. Jesus' story is evoked by numerous types of biblical imagery (doors, desert, light, sun, sea, water, tree) several of which were mentioned in this thesis.

While in Jerusalem I remarked something that had an enormous impact on me. Each station of the cross is marked on a wall, and underneath each one, spreading out into the cobblestones is a distinct image of a rising sun which persistently reminded me of the comparisons between Jesus and the sun, and consequently made me recall other aspects of the myth. Ricoeur's statement that "One metaphor, in effect, calls for another and each one stays alive by conserving its power to evoke the whole network" took on greater meaning for me as a result of this architectural light (*Interpretation Theory* 64). The thesis has attempted to evoke such a network through the investigation of four novels (*The Gospel According to the Son*; *The Seven Hills*; *A Time for Judas*; *Testament*), which on the surface deal with the

events and character of Jesus, but all through unique forms of narrative, yet united by common figurative language and rhetoric that can be traced back to the Bible.

Authors like Mailer and Wibberley do not attempt to hide the fact that their novels are in close conversation with the rhetorical and figurative techniques of the Bible. Mailer's novel demonstrates, through the fictional voice of Jesus himself, that metaphor, symbolism, and all the rhetorical language that laces literature and speech is an essential part of Jesus' diction and these words inevitably carry his *kerygma*. *The Gospel According to the Son* faithfully follows the New Testament tradition, even follows in what *The Bible as Literature* believes to be the purpose of the Canonical Gospels. According to Gabel *et al* one should "think of each gospel as a particular author's attempt to give permanent shape to his conception of the career of Jesus and its meaning" (*The Bible as Literature* 216). Such an attempt is the new way, after Jesus' death, of transmitting his *kerygma* in the written word. Mailer amalgamated all the Canonical Gospels and created a unified "official" gospel, the like of which is not found in the New Testament. His recreation of the Jesus myth attempts to be faithful to the stories in the Bible, as well as acknowledging the human/divine split within Jesus and Jesus' struggle with certain aspects of Judaism. Interestingly, because of the intensity with which Mailer uses myth, in addition to his being the only author in this thesis to have given Jesus, as well as God, a new voice, *kerygma*, in its proper sense, is dispensed to readers because they encounter the metaphors and other literary language to describe this new *kerygmatic* truth both from God and Jesus.

Chapter two also focused on the mythical language around Jesus' ministry, but *The Seven Hills* is different from Mailer's novel because of its treatment of how Christianity started to take shape after Jesus' death. Wibberley is the only author in this thesis whose novel does not end after Jesus resurrected. Because of his treatment of early Christianity,

Wibberley does not write what Jesus may have preached, but evokes Jesus' *kerygma* through the experiences of Theophilus (and other characters) and by demonstrating Theophilus's increased knowledge about Jesus and his ministry. Chapter two demonstrated that while Theophilus never confirms or denies his affiliation with Christianity, in the overall structure of the novel he still transmits and perpetuates Jesus' *kerygma*. He does this through his own recreation and narration of Jesus' life and with the use of rhetorical and figurative language to explain the fantastical events of the time and place of Jesus. Moreover, Wibberley's novel was useful in foregrounding the problems of Rudolf Bultmann's argument concerning *kerygma* as investigated in the introduction. Wibberley used both history and myth to uncover and deliver aspects of Jesus' *kerygma*, making it one of the most useful novels in this thesis for demonstrating the convergence between history and myth. Because of the meticulous records Theophilus kept of this time he grants readers the opportunity to accept or reject that which he still struggles with at the conclusion of the novel: Jesus' *kerygma*.

Similarly, *A Time for Judas* challenges readers either to affirm their belief in Jesus' story or affirm their skepticism. Callaghan's novel is an excellent bridge between two key ideas in this thesis as demonstrated in chapter three: the argument, through the comparison of history and myth, that even when Jesus' story is recreated in historical fiction, he will be refashioned from Jesus of Nazareth into the mythic Jesus Christ. While Callaghan's novel also mostly takes place after Jesus' death, the narrative does not move as far into the future as Wibberley's does. *A Time for Judas* is more a historical novel, because readers see Jesus creating his story, in contrast to *The Seven Hills* that is more mythic than historical. Moreover, not only does Callaghan investigate the creation of the Jesus myth in his novel, he also challenges the authenticity of Jesus' *kerygma*. He pulls readers into the historical scroll that Philo hid and confronts them with a Jesus who is wholly aware of the story he is creating

in an effort to assure that his *kerygma* will spread after he dies. Readers are given plausible reasons about how the metaphors and parables relating to Jesus and his ministry originated. Though Callaghan may seem to doubt the validity of the New Testament, in the end, like Mailer, he affirms the myth because Jesus is resurrected in *A Time for Judas* as well, an act which also validates Judas' testimony about the magical and mystical occurrences that seem to take place around Jesus. Callaghan may have briefly historicized Jesus, but Callaghan merges back into the world of Frye's criticism when after transforming Jesus into a man in his novel, he remythologizes him.

In contrast, Ricci in *Testament* remains persistent in his quest to keep his Jesus in a historical realm. Though he may follow in Callaghan's footsteps, he never truly dives into the realm of myth as does Callaghan. Ricci's novel remains partial to Bultmann's criticism because the resurrection is only affirmed by one narrator at the end of the novel. He therefore aligns himself with the Bultmannian idea that *kerygma* only exists in what can be affirmed by history, and the resurrection is something too intangible within the factual confines of history. However, as chapter four demonstrated in much detail, as much history as there is in *Testament*, each of Ricci's narrators in their own individual gospels affirm what the thesis argued in the first three chapters: myth, through rhetorical and figurative language (specifically biblical metaphors and symbolism) is essential when dealing with Jesus' *kerygma* in these recreated works on Jesus' life and death. All four narrators in *Testament* scrupulously record what really happened to them and their relationship with Jesus, but as each gospel progresses, and their relationship with Jesus grows, they become more dependent on the use of metaphor and figurative language to explain what they are seeing, feeling, and use these methods in an effort to understand what Jesus preached; the complexities of his *kerygma*. Despite attempts at remaining historical, *Testament*, whether deliberately or not,

flows into the language of myth. The Jesus myth involves the act of dispensing *kerygma* and Ricci, like the other authors, relies on the biblical tradition and its use of figurative language to tell his story.

Both my experiences with these novels in this thesis, and my experiences in Jerusalem, have revealed to me the power of the Jesus myth. His character and narrative continue to captivate peoples' spirituality, as well as authors' creativity. While the story alters because of new found historical evidence and fictional authorial liberties, it still remains that, when dealing with Jesus, it is his *kerygma* that is of decisive importance. This unique *kerygma* with its elevated spirituality and religious complexities, can only be understood through the comparisons that we make by way of the rhetorical and figurative language that ebbs out of the Bible.⁸⁸ Whether the authors within this thesis share this point of view or not, they have nonetheless recreated a redux Jesus myth with all its lessons, parables, and everything in between. Jesus' *kerygma* will remain as vital as the myths that unite us, and by which we live. His myth remains one that cannot help but be retold, and when it does—one must reach into the depths of the Bible's literary well and pluck from it the metaphorical gems that are a gleaming guide his *kerygma*, just as the city of Jerusalem lights up in a golden hue when the sun rises and sets over the ancient limestone which encases its history, and its myths.

⁸⁸ Even Theodore Ziolkowski comment briefly, for the "purpose of discussion [, if] we accept the 'sequence of modes' that Northrop Frye outlines in his *Anatomy of Criticism*, then the 'ironic' adaptations of the 'sacred book'—the Fifth Gospels in our sense of the word—ought to be succeeded by a return to myth" (Ziolkowski 268). Indeed this thesis has proven Ziolkowski's brief comment to be true, for the novels in this thesis have all been written in the gospel style, and each one has been unable to escape the remythologization of the Jesus myth.

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