The name of Judas is synonymous with betrayal. But the nature of his betrayal has proven difficult to grasp, since, in the Biblical accounts, Judas is what Susan Gubar has described as “an absent presence.”vi As Kim Paffenroth notes, although Judas came to be seen as a villain or was used in anti-Semitic propaganda, there have been positive portrayals of Judas as well, “a curious and constant part of the tradition.”viii This duality arises out of the idea, present already in the early days of Christianity, that without the betrayal, as Irit Kleiman states, “Jesus would not be crucified and salvation would remain unrealized.”ix The question of how we should understand Judas remains to this day. Is he suffering in the grotesque manner Dante portrays in the final circle of Hell, or, as Thomas de Quincey and others argued, was Judas a devoted revolutionary, heroically martyred for the cause? Judas’s act resists easy definition and retains a terrible ambiguity, one that has continued to inspire writers to reinvent both Judas’s crime and his punishment.

Although not mentioned in many cultural studies of the “tradition,” in 1907 the Russian writer Leonid Andreev and in the 1960s the Yugoslav author Borislav Pekić tackled the problem of Judas. In this paper, without arguing for a direct influence, I will compare and contrast their two depictions of Judas, both of which focus on the psychology of the traitor. In turn, through Judas the author’s views on revolution, religion and the human condition are reflected.

Both Judases stand somewhat outside of the traditional depiction of the disgraced apostle. Paffenroth notes the dominant motifs of red hair, the money purse and a yellow robe in Western pictorial representations of Judas.iv Andreev’s Judas has red hair, but this detail is not what makes Judas stand out from the other Apostles. Although Arsent’eva has argued that there is “a constant duality” in Judas, v Innokentii Annenskii has gone further and stated that the tragedy of Judas lies in his bezobrazie.vi Andreev’s Judas has a skull that appears to be “split with a double sword-blow and then stuck together again.”vii His face is divided, the one side a living and mobile with a “black, sharply peering eye,” and on the other “deathly smoothness,” a face “flat and frozen” with an unblinking blind eye covered with whitish film.viii Judas’s exterior chaos matches his inner thought processes, as “beneath such a skull there could be neither calm nor harmony.”ix

Andreev’s Judas is also dehumanized throughout the work. On the very first page Judas is compared to a scorpion.x He laughs like a hyena, is compared to a mongrel, and self-deprecatingly says his father was a goat. Judas is also compared to an insect-like creature: when he moves it seems he has a dozen legs, and when frightened “everything about him – eyes, arms, legs – [seems] to start scurrying in different directions.”xii Peter jokingly labels Judas an octopus early on, and this becomes the dominant association. Judas often retreats into the shadows of rocks and cliffs, hiding in the darkness. After Pilate washes his hands of Christ’s blood, he feels “something squelching softly” at his feet and feels lips kissing his hand, “adhering to it like tentacles, sucking its blood, almost biting,” and sees the “great, writhing body.”xii The grotesque split in Judas’s face actually masks his deeper, non-human nature.

Where Andreev’s Judas is dehumanized, Pekić’s Judas outwardly represents firm, fanatic devotion. He is “bony, knobby, angular” and has a “pale, ascetic face” with a scraggly coal-black beard.xiii He wears a plain coarse robe and dirty undergarments, and “if naked he might have been mistaken for one of the savage disciples of John.”xiv His “greedy and violent eyes” reflect his passion for the cause. Rather than an inhuman creature, the fanatic eyes of Pekić’s Judas mark him as something more than human, as they have “a certain gloomy beauty from unknown and dangerous forces.”xiv Both Judases, then, have connections with chaos; Andreev’s through his physical depiction, Pekić’s through his eyes, windows to the soul.
In choosing Judas, both authors create tensions between Biblical narrative and the “true history” they offer the reader. Pekić first identifies this conflict through his title; “The Time of Miracles” hearkens back to a mythic age. In the 1990s, Pekić wrote “a myth is one form of estrangement;” although he liberally uses familiar Biblical topoi and personages, Pekić cuts the reader free from familiar readings to reconsider the Gospel narrative through Judas’s eyes. Where Pekić uses estrangement, Andreev nearly cuts the reader off from the Biblical narrative, creating a sense of a “closed world” that Stephen Hutchings has identified as a typical feature of Andreev’s prose. Andreev provides few place names or familiar scenes; instead, as James Woodward writes, Andreev uses the Bible “as a reservoir not of ideas, but of characters and situations, as a framework on which he could weave his philosophical patterns.” It is this quality that caused Annenskii to write that Andreev’s Judas “has nothing to do with Judea or Galilee.”

For Andreev, Judas is the hero of his tale, as evidenced by the title, “Judas Iscariot.” The original title, though, contained “i drugie,” playing on the duality of Judas: are there other traitors in the story, or is Judas contrasted to the others? Although there are hints of the former interpretation, the latter is dominant. Throughout the tale Judas is portrayed as unique and alone, desperately seeking what Alexander Kaun has called “his antithesis as a complementary counterpart.” Woodward defines this counterpart as “the existence of a higher truth beyond himself.” Thesis and antithesis meet in a clash Rita Spivak has identified as between Judas’s free, creative reasoning and faith and authority in the form of Jesus.

As Angela Richter notes, Pekić also “handles [Judas] with great care.” Judas is one of the few characters to prominently appear throughout the novel. In addition, Pekić’s Judas tells his own story, and the chapter devoted to him deals at length with “his inner turmoil and conflicting emotions.” At heart, this conflict occurs for the same reason as in Andreev’s story, the clash between reason and faith. For Pekić’s Judas this unrest occurs due to the clash between his zealous faith in the Scripture and his rational, egotistical doubts as to his place and purpose within it, as well as doubts in his fellow Apostles to fulfill the “prophecy.”

Although both works make a wide-range of literary allusions, for Andreev, writing in the Russian context in 1906, the split between reason and faith would hint at a familiar theme of Dostoevsky’s. Indeed, many commentators note the influence of Dostoevsky’s Brothers Karamazov, specifically Ivan Karamazov’s poem “Legend of the Grand Inquisitor” on Andreev’s story. Pekić’s Judas, on the other hand, has more in common with Dostoevsky’s Demons. Allusions to these works can help us better understand Judas’s role in the respective stories.

Like Ivan Karamazov, Andreev’s Judas seeks rational truth on earth. Judas comes to Jesus after wanderings of his own, and although we do not learn the details, he has come away from the experience with a profoundly skeptical and pessimistic view of humanity, much like the Grand Inquisitor after his years in the wilderness. All about him Judas sees deception: “Everyone he knew had at some time in his life committed an evil act...‘good people’ [was] the name given to those who knew how to conceal their deeds and thoughts.” Judas tells a parable about a dog: when he pets it, the dog bites him; when he beats it, the dog looks at him “like a daughter;” having killed it, he cannot be sure it is not more alive than before. Life, as Woodward suggests, yields only falsehoods and evil for Judas. Kaun argues that Judas’s faculty for “merciless analysis, of seeing far and deep beyond appearances” does not mean he can acquire an absolute truth.
Unlike Ivan Karamazov, Andreev’s Judas does not seem interested in justice. This Judas has a highly-developed sense of self. He thinks himself more handsome, better, and stronger than the other Apostles and more deserving of Jesus’ love. He wants to prove to Jesus his superiority, but instead Judas feels rejected by him. For example, after Judas saves the Apostles from a stoning, the very next day “[Jesus] always seemed to be speaking against Judas.” The idea of betrayal appears to Judas as a way to achieve his aims. In doing so, Judas will demonstrate that only he is willing to make the ultimate sacrifice: himself.

The scene that draws the most comparisons to the “Legend of the Grand Inquisitor” is the night when Judas goes to betray Jesus. Like Ivan’s Christ, Andreev’s remains silent in the face of a challenge; Jesus’s silence is of the same form as in Dostoevsky’s work, in that both use molchanie. Andreev’s Judas tells Christ: “I go to betray Thee into the hands of Thine enemies,” asks “Dost Thou command me to go?,” but hears only silence “enormous, like the eyes of eternity” in response. When he finally begs “Suffer me to remain” and declares his love for Jesus, Judas hears only “a last silence, bottomless, like the final glance of eternity.”

However, while the scene is similar to that of the Grand Inquisitor, the two are not entirely equal. Molchanie is the dominant motif of both scenes: both the Grand Inquisitor and Judas finally reveal what they have been silent about for so long, and Christ is silent in response. But Ivan Karamazov’s Christ differs in two respects. First, as the Grand Inquisitor notes, Christ in Seville is in some respects trapped communicatively by appearing before the designated time. Secondly, Ivan Karamazov’s Inquisitor needs to relieve his soul and confess aloud his secret. Christ’s molchanie allows for this moment of confession, as he kenotically gives up his word to make space for the other. Mikhail Epstein argues that behind molchanie lies an unspoken “o chem-to,” and in many cases this is true. The kenotic silence of Ivan Karamazov’s Christ empties him, making him an icon-like window to the divine and inviting the Inquisitor into a dialogue on a different level. Although retaining an ethical passivity by earthly logic, Christ’s kiss signals both his “higher” morality and his compassion for the old man.

By contrast, Andreev’s Jesus, free to respond, chooses not to answer. His molchanie offers Judas freedom of choice while also voluntarily accepting the results of that choice. Unlike Judas, Jesus believes the best about man. But, in this story, Jesus proves limited and unable truly see into a person’s heart. Judas’ thoughts are protected “with the dull molchanie of secrecy.” After the infamous kiss “[Jesus’] gaze illuminated the monstrous heap of watchful shadows that was Iscariot’s soul – yet could not penetrate its bottomless depths.” Jesus’s molchanie is not an active invitation to a different type of dialogue, but a passive acceptance of his fate.

The Jesus of Andreev’s story also differs from Dostoevsky’s. The freedom Christ offers in Dostoevsky’s novel is in Andreev’s story undercut by the authority he wields over the Apostles. As Peter states, “Whosoever disobeys Him shall go to the fiery pit.” A mere glance from Christ later proves enough to subdue the Apostles when they discover Judas stealing from the money-purse. Christ and the Apostles are also associated with the sun, through their tanned skin, the heat of the afternoon and their wanderings along sunlit roads; this clarity is reflected in Thomas’s clear blue eyes as well. The harmony of the group is reflected in the tishina that defines their world. Christ speaks in a soft voice, sits quietly and laughs softly. Where Dostoevsky’s Christ offers freedom, Andreev’s offers what Bulgakov’s Woland later fears, a lifeless world without shadows and, as Rita Spivak puts it, “no room for mystery.”

For Andreev’s Judas, his betrayal both affirms man’s evil nature and confirms that he alone loves Christ. The Apostles, in Judas’ view, are the true traitors for not aiding Christ: “Where were ye when they
crucified your friend on the tree?...Whoever loves asks not what to do. He goes and does all.\textsuperscript{xxxv} Kaun argues that for Judas there can be no spontaneous truth in a life lived by an established code;\textsuperscript{xxxvi} caught in their hierarchy and obedient to the will of one who does not truly know humanity, the Apostles create a situation of “suffering for one, shame for all.”\textsuperscript{xxxvii}

After Christ’s death, Judas feels victorious. He has accomplished an extreme act of self-will and has become a Man-God: “Limitlessly and joyfully alone, he has proudly felt the powerlessness of all the powers that act on earth, and all of them he cast into the abyss.”\textsuperscript{xxxviii} Nature and Peter now sense in Judas “one who could command.”\textsuperscript{xxxix} Even time submits to Judas, moving “neither before him nor behind; humbly it moves along with him, in all its unseen mass.”\textsuperscript{xl}

But, in his triumph, still Judas has not united with the truth as he so desires; while feeling powerful, he suffers from wounded pride. Jesus again has rejected him and is now beyond reach of his arguments. Andreev offers this as the reason, Judas chooses suicide. Judas threatens, Satan-like, that if rejected again in the afterlife he will “forge iron and destroy Heaven.”\textsuperscript{xli}

If in Andreev’s conception Judas’s betrayal was a profoundly personal event, enacted by a unique figure, Pekić’s story falls more in line with the idea of Judas as a revolutionary devoted to his cause. In this regard, Pekić’s Judas resembles Dostoevsky’s Petr Verkhovenskii. Like Verkhovenskii, Judas needs a Stavrogin to lead. This role is filled by Jesus, who in Pekić’s novel seems at best indifferent, at worst afraid to fulfill his role. Judas has brought the group to Jerusalem each year for the last three years, but Jesus each time delays fulfilling the Scripture. Jesus also shows little initiative in the novel: it is Judas who plans many of the miracles and selects many of the recipients of these “blessings.” Jesus’s miracles cause only suffering: the healed blind man sees only ugliness, the possessed lose their insanity but also their creative vision and Lazarus becomes a victim of dueling ideologies, trapped in a cycle of resurrection and murder.

While Jesus may be the figurehead, Bogdan Rakid has aptly compared Judas to the Apostles kommissar.\textsuperscript{xlii} In addition to planning the miracles, he spies on Thomas and other Apostles, he threatens Lazarus’s servant to keep is owner under control, and he is in charge of the treasury. He is also the chief of ideology; Judas displays an extensive knowledge of the Scriptures. Jesus is forced to fulfill each point as if by a checklist. Judas acts as a speechwriter, telling Jesus the words he must speak at points and designing the Eucharist scene. Each point must be fulfilled in order to make the prophecy come true, and Judas has devoted his whole life to this cause.

Like Petr Verkhovenskii, Judas applies a new morality to his situation to achieve his aims: everything is permitted to achieve the goal. Judas finesses the Scriptures when it suits his needs, as he “cannot allow his painstaking work to be frustrated because of a donkey shortage.”\textsuperscript{xliii} In his effort to get Jesus to go to Jerusalem this year, he also lies about the time the Scriptures appoint for the crucifixion. Judas sees his idea as beyond normal morals: “Perhaps I am crazy. But I won’t discard my madness, my madness is beautiful.”\textsuperscript{xliv} To that end, he is willing to do anything to fulfill the Scriptures.

Like Verkhovenskii, Judas has little interest in the world to come after the crucifixion, only the revolution, and he is impatient with his figurehead. In response to his demands, Judas hears only silence (čutanje/molchanie): “Kada Juda citira Isaiju, On čuti, ništa s njegovih usana; Kad Juda opominje, prigovara, nagovara, On opet čuti; Kad Juda preklinje, odlazi On čuteći.”\textsuperscript{xlv} Christ’s silence acts as a rejection of Judas’s words. But Judas is just as tired of Christ’s words: “Besede, besede, besede. Reči, reči, reči.”\textsuperscript{xlvi} Rather than silence or utterance, Judas longs for the symbolic deed: “The gesture must
seal must seal the discourse; blood must spurt from every word the speaker utters.”³⁵⁷Only then will the masses follow him, “a downpour which obediently follows the drops.”³⁶⁸

Judas would gladly take the burden from Christ. Like Andreev’s Judas, Pekić’s knows that none of the other Apostles are willing to “drain the same cup” as Jesus. Pekić’s Judas feels himself a partner in the sacrifice: “Lovers and enemies who keep pace step by step... Judas and Joshua are bringing the sacrifice which will redeem all mankind except themselves.”³⁶⁹ Indeed, Judas even thinks he is the true prophet: “Jesus isn’t a prophet. Jesus himself is only the utterance of a prophet.”³⁷⁰

Judas’s blind devotion to the Scripture leads him to underestimate his fellow men. He is caught unawares when Jesus unexpectedly chooses him to fulfill the Scriptural role of traitor. Judas feels “if he really loved me, he wouldn’t force me to carry out the filthy obverse of his Task and keep its pure face for himself.”³⁷¹ After the deed, Judas is surprised when the Apostles turn on him, asking the traitor to kill himself to fulfill the Scripture. Like Pekić’s Christ, Judas proves unwilling or unable to take this necessary step; caught in the clutches of ideology, he wishes to be free and tries to escape. In a manner similar to Petr Verkhovenskii’s revolutionary cell, the Apostles bind themselves through blood, lynching Judas when he refuses to commit suicide.

Andreev and Pekić not only provide nuanced motivations for Judas’ actions, they also offer implications for humanity. In the final lines of Andreev’s work the reader is left with the impression that the power of Judas’ self-will leads to his merging with the flow of history. Judas’ ignominy is presented as eternal “since time has no end there will be no end to the tales of Judas’ betrayal.”³⁷² However, due to the Christian subtext, Andreev’s story contains an alternate view. Judas sacrifices another to achieve his goals, tainting his act. Christ’s self-sacrifice, in this view, represents a “higher” act born of compassion; it stems from a morality beyond human reason. Judas’s fame, then, will not be eternal, as the Biblical subtext implies that a day will come when “time will be no more.”³⁷³

Because of Jesus’s altruism, there remains hope for his Resurrection. The grand myth is not totally destroyed as it will be in Pekić’s work. Voloshin criticized Andreev for this failure in the Judas story, saying that the author “opens doors but fails to step through them.”³⁷⁴ This may be due to Andreev’s own belief in the power of revolution; although not a Bolshevik, he did support the Social Democrats and regime-change in Russia; perhaps he could not free himself entirely of the myth of a brighter future.

Pekić destroys the foundational myth entirely; as Bogdan Rakić puts it, Pekić “[exposes] the moral hypocrisy, cruelty and futility of modern myths, especially those build around the Communist ideal of their own promised land.”³⁷⁵ Pekić also undermines the Christian narrative, challenging Messianism in all ideologies.³⁷⁶ Jesus, taking advantage of Simon’s offer to carry his cross to Golgotha, melts into the crowd and disappears; the innocent Simon dies while Jesus escapes to “Pontic lands.”³⁷⁷ As Pekić’s Judas had repeatedly reminded the Apostles, “if a single word [of the Scripture] isn’t fulfilled, then it’s as if nothing’s fulfilled.”³⁷⁸ Judas’s personal sacrifice is therefore devoid of meaning, and, even worse, there is no hope in a Christian sense; escaping the consequences of his calling, Pekić’s Jesus denies the world a higher truth. Rather than revolutionary or damned sinner, in these two works Judas seems a victim, one to his own pride, the other to the machinations of ideology.
REFERENCES


