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## THE HERODS

**1** Their next ride pulled over. In the front sat an old man, driving his grandson home. When he had to turn off, he turned to them asking if they are scared.

- Last week, a herodian from Jericho was going down from Jerusalem, when he fell into the hands of robbers. The zealots stripped him of his white clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. Only a Samaritan took pity on him, and bandaged his wounds.

His concern worried them. It seemed, they said, so much like an omen. He left them at the juncture, at the beginning of the highway, at the top of the road that goes straight down to the city, close to the bridge, where they say that sometimes one can see the white female devil. That too seemed like an omen. Then he flagged down a pickup for them. It looked like kindness but they didn't know how to take it. By now it was darker and getting cold.

They threw their staff in the back climbing in up front. Melhior first. Gaspar and Balthazar were going on their impressions - white pickup, spotless, six-pack on the floor, unopened. No signs of danger. But their sense of the driver in white overalls was confused by the old man's concern. It threw them off. They were thinking of him when they climbed in.

Balthazar leaned out the window into darkness toward the lights of the star. He thought he could touch it. It seemed to be up to him. He wanted to be rolling through outer space, holding the star in one hand. He wanted that to be possible, but Melhior shouted.

- Get your hand off.

She turned her head slowly like a reptile sensing heat and wanting to be sure of where to find it before she moved. She asked as he'd like to get out.

- Pull over!

She pulled over and let them get out. They are sure Melhior thought he'd be getting out too. She pulled away. They run grabbing the back of the pickup. Brushing off, walking to meet, they realized it wasn't over. She had stopped.

The white overalls had gotten out. We know what it's like out there. Nothing for miles to the eye of a visitor and they were visiting - had no idea where to get help, how to squeeze shade out of a stone, which way to run. The star looked like it might be able to help. It looked close enough to touch.

She was standing where she could see them and the truck. Waiting. They tried to figure out what was coming when she asked if they'd gotten their stuff. Just like that:

- Did you get your junk?
- No, we left in too much of a hurry.
- Well come on and get it.

Sure, they thought. Sure! Balthazar touched Melhior's arm, who told them it would be all right. They wonder how he knew. He asked her why she had done that, thinking words would help make sense of it but she never answered.

In an hour they had their next ride. Another pickup. The driver told them they were lucky.

- They never find bodies here, just bones and bits of cloth.

They leaned out the window searching the side of the road for signs of human passage.

- My name is Simon, the driver said.

After a detailed report on his pilgrimage of the precedent year to Qumran, an ascetic community on the north-western shore of the Dead Sea, he pushed back his shirt to show them a scar on his right shoulder. The evidence of an attack by zealots,

**2** The car swayed through rain ruts, past clumps of flowers that gave a wild yellow border to the driveway. After a couple of hours, the home appeared slowly behind a corridor of tall trees. In their long shade red cows rested. For a time he had kept sheep, but quit because killing lambs bothered him.

Simon stopped shy of the porch, hoping it wasn't another bad day, waiting at the front door, not the back, his palm pressed to his face.

- You have a son

They stopped in Simon's house because, that night, his wife also gave birth to a child. The magi gave him a gift. Fifteen coins.

Simon sat near them on a hard-back chair, talking of Jericho, where the king had another palace, gorgeous, of the admirable habits of people there, of his ambitions to find, in a year or so, permanent employment in southern France. Far from the king and the zealots.

Before the meal, Simon confirmed that when a ninth child had been born, after three had been carried away by the plague, and five more had died from one cause or another, he, Simon from Qarioth, on his father's demand and in the presence of her whole family, had pledged himself in writing never again to share the bed of his wife.

The Magi noted Simon's desire for a separation, and his wish to quit the palace and formally sever relations with the king, so as to be free for, and wholly available to, the Lord

Toward midnight, after the other members of the family had left, Simon grew tearful in recollecting the life of a king who rebuilt the temple of Solomon, believing that the priests will love him. They didn't. Therefore, he killed Mariamne, her children, and everybody else alleged to menace his throne.

- Vile, she said. You're vile. My God, how vile you are!

Herod, an Arab from Edom, had ten wives, one at a time. Antipater, his father, an adherent of Hyrcanus, one of the two princes who were struggling to become the king of Judea, served under Julius Cesar in Egypt. In the civil war between Pompey and Cesar, Hyrcanus sided with Cesar, and was rewarded. As the real power behind the throne, Antipater managed to secure the appointment of his young son to the important task of governor of Galilee. There he launched a crusade against the zealots, which made him very popular with the populace and unpopular with the patriots from Jerusalem

When Cesar was murdered, and the murderers fled to the East, and Judea was punished to pay tones of silver, Antipater had to take harsh measure to get the money, and, in the ensuing troubles, was killed, by a zealot. With roman help, Herod killed the zealot. When Antigonus, Hyrcanus' nephew, tried to obtain the throne, Herod didn't agree, and killed him.

Mariamne, the beautiful daughter of Hyrcanus, didn't know how unerringly passion can boomerang, especially when heated by innocence. At least that was her defense to her

father, and also to the female judges notorious in the city for curbing wayward girls. Herod was convinced that a good marriage will greatly enhance his claim to the throne. Dressed flashily, he began socializing on a certain street corner, sanctified by a temple that had once stood there. These developments cracked the heart of the mother. She too believed that the baby was fathered by him.

Then the war broke out between Iraq and the Romans, Hyrcanus was taken to Babylon, prisoner, Antigonus became king, and Herod escaped to Rome, where, with money kept in safe banks, persuaded the senate to restore him. He was brought back to Jerusalem by two legions, 6 Ferrata, and 3 Gallica, whose men had already fought in Gaul. They spread the news about the beauty of southern France, the promised land of those who want to retire.

This is how Jerusalem was besieged, and then captured, and Herod assumed the title of basileus. That simple. The detail not mentioned by the historians is that he knew in advance about his success. Menahem, the father of Nicolaus of Damascus, a famous Essen, and a distinguished sooth-sayer, predicted every detail of this trajectory, with well-turned phrases. This is why Herod loved him and his son, extremely loyal to him, making extraordinary predictions, preaching utter submission to the people in power, because this was the will of the heavens. The Sadducees and the Pharisees, with tentative cynicisms into their voice, called them herodians. The zealots called them betrayers and beat them.

**3** The Magi went to visit the temple, gorgeous, just built by the king, proud, had lunch in the palace, royal, and it was hard because the star disappeared. It was always hard with the king. He had an air of deprivation and a plainness that seemed obstinate - he was overweight and willing fully unpretty.

- The essenes love me the way I am. God poured out his Spirit on them. Their sons prophecy, their young men see visions, and their old men dream dreams.

Like the three magi, essenes from Iraq, who were reading the stars, asking all the time the same question.

- Where is the one who has been born king? We saw his star in the east and have come to give him the gifts.

And this is spoken as a provocation, a form of censure that has something to do with the star, which just disappeared, to puzzle the experts, gathered when Herod demanded an explanation.

When Herod asked about the child sought by the magi, he chanted this word, betray, with such complete absorption, and laughed so menacingly, that everybody shuddered, and covered their faces, and knew that, if found, will be doomed.

Always one to embrace completely any adventure, Nicolaus runs wild with the crowd of old experts whose imagination lacked the brakes of self-restraint. Following their tottering lead, he dared to test a debate. Some experts said that Messiah will come from Judea, and betted on Bethlehem, the city of David. There appeared other opinions too.

The idea of the coming kingdom implied a king, anointed by God. At Qumran, they spoke about two Messiahs. Simon knew that religion has to be separated by state, because there will be a Messiah of Solomon, who will lead the war between the sons of light against the sons of darkness, and a Messiah of Aaron, who will restore the purity of the Temple. They both will be helped by a prophet.

The consequence was an impassioned controversy. Not wanting to disturb them, the angels sat quietly in their corner, hoping that their discretion would help them solve their delicate problem, but nothing came of their discussion. Their speculative incompetence restricted the king to an imprecise sort of hatred. He was bursting with vanity. Drooling with rage, he whispered insults by the dozen.

In the photograph of Melhior kissing Herod's flat cheek, he does not return his kiss but stands there, accepting the homage of distant worlds. He does not smile, for at that moment the fate of the world, as he knows it, still hangs in the balance. But Melhior smiles. He knows the future. He read the stars. It was all right if he did, and the official photographer, whose job it was to photograph the wake of rumor he left behind, snapped a camera, and there it was.

Nicolas of Damascus, the best friend of the king, a philosopher who knew well the writings of Aristotle, first asked the magi about the real life of Therapeuts who lived in Egypt, a monastic community of essenes, milder than that of Qumran, where there were no women, and then invited them to bless his son, born the day before yesterday.

This scholar terrified by the idea of living alone, although he was not aware that it terrifies him, believed to be in full control of his existence. At the end, he zeroed in a bright, rather guarded girl, and devoted himself to winning her hand. It was a long campaign, and the odds were against him - her family disapproved vehemently, for unclear reasons.

He is older than she is, and ambitious in a way she is not. She is not afraid of living alone. Yet in the end he prevails. She capitulated over the phone, struck by the irony of the fact that more than half of his relatives were divorced.

Six years passed, and nothing happened. He wrote books about the assassination of Cesar, about plants, and about the habits of people. So, he remains a dreamer. The marriage that was to launch him into maturity serves instead to extend his dreams. Husband and wife, they remain children. They live together in good will, oddly sealed from the world. He dreams of people jumping out of windows, holding hands, in eerie accord. She has no idea what the dreams mean, or where they come from. She confesses that she never believed in his dreams. They are both frightened of powerful prophets, but they respond differently. She feels that what is out there is too dangerous to fool with. He feels that, however dangerous, it is only out there that strength can be found. In some vague, inchoate way, he knows he needs strength, because he travels to Rome to take care of the king's banking accounts.

Then, privately, without telling him, she will decide to have children.

Elijah was born with a full head of black matted hair. His eyes were squeezed shut with pain and screaming. She held him against her breasts and listened to his heart beating, while the husband sat beside her, beaming like a streetlamp and holding her hand. After a few hours of bloodless discussion, they named the baby in honor of the greatest of all the prophets, whose influence was so great that he was cast in the role of herald of the Messiah, because, without dying, was taken into heaven, to return before the final restoration of the kingdom of Solomon.

The Magi predicted a tumultuous future, and gave him a gift. Fifteen silver coins.

**4** Then the star went again before them till it came and stood over where they saw the divine child, with his mother. There they fell down and open their treasures - gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

- Get up, they said, and escape to the Therapeuts, godly prophets and healers, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him. Don't worry about us. The star will move westward, we will take a boat, to land in Italy, and go to Rome, just in time when Marcus Agrippa, the famous commander, and friend of Herod the king, will die.

When the day came to give names to the children, told by the angel before being conceived in the womb. Simeon, who was just and devout, with the Holy Ghost upon him, - who revealed unto him that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Messiah- took the Galilean in his arms, saying Lord, now let your servant depart in peace, according to your word, for my eyes have seen the light.

Simon, nervous and scared, didn't visit the temple. The essenes were convinced that its priests are sons of darkness. So nobody heard the prophecy telling that his son will be hanging out with the sons of light, the righteous remnant, the chosen ones, the elect, standing over against the mainstream, especially everything going on at Jerusalem.

- Far too much worldly darkness. The end of the present age, evil, is near us.

And they wanted to be on the right side when it comes, the day when the Lord will revisit the earth. And in this process they will establish the kingdom of Solomon. A return to the golden age. Not the end of the world. On the contrary. A beginning. Now when Herod is ready to die.

As he lay dying in Jericho, Herod revised his will to reflect the execution of his son Antipater, the child of Doris. Archelaus, the child of Malthace, the Samaritan wife, was given the best territory, Judea, Samaria, and Idumaea. Herod Philip, the child of Cleopatra, his fifth wife, was to rule the area northeast of the Sea of Galilee. Herod Antipas, another son of Malthace, was given Galilee and Perea. Shortly after completing this will, Herod will die of intestinal cancer, and will be buried with pomp and circumstance in the Herodion.

Greedy for more territory, Herod's sons went to Rome to ask for additional lands. A delegation from Judea, fed up with the Herod dynasty, also went to Rome to request that the emperor, Augustus, appoint someone else to govern them. While they were gone, people rioted in Jerusalem.

Why? Because they didn't like the roman eagles on the doors of the temple. With heavy hammers, and swords, they cut them.

The Roman governor from Syria, Varus, came with soldiers. Judah, a zealot from Gamla, seized Sepphoris and plundered the armory and the palace. Roman troops brutally put down the revolt. The protest faded away.

- Hey kids. Stop the nonsense. Come on, we'll have a couple of drinks at Mon Cher, or someplace...

But already the circle had closed. Snap! went the trap. The old, familiar script. In this movie there was no escape. The end was set in advance.

Jerusalem was reclaimed from the rebels, and thousands were crucified. Sepphoris was also retaken, and the inhabitants, those who survived, were sold into slavery. Finally Augustus made his decision. The land will belong to Herod's three sons. Archelaus was made an ethnarch, a position slightly higher than tetrarch, which his brothers received.

It was 4 BC, when the Holy Family, taking refuge in Egypt, learned this news in a dream.

Archelaus ruled in Jerusalem for ten years. He rebuilt the palace from Jericho and an aqueduct to bring water for the palm tree plantation of the essenes. He hunted down the delegation that had gone to Rome, executed them and their families, and confiscated their property. His reign was as bloody as his father's had been. In AD 6, another delegation of Judeans risked their lives and went to accuse him. Archelaus, summoned to Rome and exiled in Marseilles, opened a bank, to deposit his part, ten tones of gold he took from the temple made by his father, during the riots.

- The gold is mine. I earned it.

After that, life went on.

No letter came, only a postcard.

Marseilles was a shining fromagerie on a hill, serving as a beacon to left-wing radicals, who, after a career of mass-murder, want decent medical care, a good lawyer, and a fresh croissant.

Up and down, time and again, Archelaus was never humbled. When there was a tricky job to be done, Archelaus knew it. Without Archelaus nothing worked. He was a center for though he was sometimes harsh and sometimes brutal, he was always pious.

Unapproachable, withdrawn, legendary, canonized. The most important banker of the empire.

**5** Vivacious, obedient and intelligent, in some ways too intelligent - there was a suggestion of brilliance, even of genius, in his abilities - Elijah was sent at too early an age to the old grammar school. Here he was made to devote his life to scholarship and religion. Organized games were, of course, unheard of, and, as the boy was delicate, he would have been discouraged from taking part in any boyish pranks. It did not occur to his teachers that a curriculum which required to rise at six every morning and to pore over



their books (badly printed and hard on the eye-sight) for the rest of the day was unlikely to develop a strong and healthy body. In fact he was an ailing child, and has already shown symptoms of the chronic constipation. This was looked upon with alarm, for, in that era, constipation and masturbation were seen as visitations of the dark female devil.

But although the flesh was weak, the mind was active. The boy showed a remarkable talent for learning. There could be no doubt that he was a scholar in the making. This is how he discovered that the Bible begins with two distinct stories of Creation.

The first one divides time, from the first day to the seventh. The second one divides space, a garden from the world and two particular trees from the rest of God's arboretum. Their details contradict each another. Alert Pharisees did notice the contradictions, and tried to explain them. Those who knew Greek philosophy believed that the first Creation of man 'after God's image' was an ideal Creation in God's mind, whereas the second, from earth, was his Creation in the visible world. Some even believed that the first Adam had been a hermaphrodite, and that the division into the two sexes had been to wait until God's second attempt.

The idea of pre-Adamite people made brilliant sense of contemporary problems. It explained the conflict between the Bible's chronology for Adam and the much older and longer chronology of world events, which was given in Greek and Egyptian authors and was newly reported in Indian and Chinese texts. It explained why people other than Adam's family were mentioned in the story of Cain and his punishment. It also solved the origins of the indo-european, descended from the first Creation of multiple races. If scripture's story from Eden onwards was only the history of Adam's children, the earliest histories of other peoples could be reconstructed and criticized without detracting from the Bible's authority. If there were two Creations, one for the Gentiles, one for the Pharisees, it was natural to ask what Creation was superior.

Molded to and fro, the idea of two Creations helped the scholar, to walk in long robes, and love the greetings in markets, and have the most important seats in the temple, and get the best places of banquets.

This is probably one of the reasons that Judas was also curious, and wanted to see the predicted prophet. What was suddenly discovered through the fog was so amazing that, at first, he refused to believe it, but then, when they were face to face, he couldn't help laughing.

Seeing him right in front of them, he laughed like a fool.

The prophet's clothes were made of camel's hair, and he ate wild honey and locusts. But he could only laugh from the neck up, because of the constipation. His doctor, a genius, had done wonders in combating constipation in Jerusalem and elsewhere. He was well on his way to curing him, thanks to a very special diet and a miraculous medicine known to him alone.

The angels couldn't help it. They were fascinated by his nasty laughing. They were hoping he'd come to some conclusion before he had to leave. But laughing made him deaf.

The prophet told him that the ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. He baptized with water, but after him will come one who is more powerful, whose sandals he was not fit to carry.

- He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.
- How? asked the scholar.

The consequence was another impassioned controversy. Not wanting to disturb them, the angels sat quietly in their corner, hoping that their discretion would help them solve their delicate problem, but they made no progress. Nothing came of their discussion.

- You have a screw loose. We don't approve one bit of what you are doing. Go. Go right ahead! But we're warning you. You haven't got the right ideas. It's your fever that scrambles your brains!
- Brood of vipers. Do not think you can say to yourselves, we have Abraham as our father. I tell you that God can rise up children for Abraham out of these stones.
- Your fancy ideas will be the end of you!

And this was what happened.

Herod Antipas, arrested and bound him, and put him in prison because of his brother's wife, for John had been saying to him, it is not lawful for you to have her. He didn't kill him because he was afraid of the people. He waited for an occasion. On his birthday, the daughter of the beloved woman danced for them and pleased him so much that, being drunk, he promised to give her whatever she asked. Prompted by her mother she wanted the head of the prophet on platter, to carry it to her mother.

Tense, his venom spent the scholar Elijah rested in the shelter of shadows, invincible, shut up in his shell, pinched, ruminating plans for a still more embittered comeback. At the first opportunity, he will spew out all the angry, cutting absurdities he happened to know from other scholars. Scrapings of arguments aimed at nothing at all.

In the end the angels sat down, puzzled by the unceasing sound of his words. Like Judas who happened to be there, in the crowd.

**6** When the Nazarene became man, into the parts of Galilee, and met John, the prophet, and was baptized by him, in Judea, and a voice from heaven said this is my son,

in whom I am pleased, Elijah and Judas could recognize immediately the voice which evicted them from the Garden of Eden, the form of inflection and pronunciation the other people had escaped - that is the word, escaped - and understood that this man was sent to eliminate the fence planted in their mind by the white female devil who wanted to separate earth from heaven

She had a beautiful nose and wore her hair raked straight back and lived in a room and a half on the Upper West Side with things from his life still packed in boxes - just things, you know, stuff you carry with you and keep because it's a form of mind clutter that you are comfortable with.

This summer she was trying to put together financing for a documentary about the young Son of God. Through some odd form of hypnosis, this man, who lived in Galilee - this made him more controversial - opened his mouth, and taught his disciples saying, blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven, blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth, blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy.

They heard said that the Nazarene was led up of the white female devil into the wilderness, exactly where the Queensboro Bridge stands today, into an exceeding high altitude, where she showed him all kinds of kingdoms of this world and the glory of them, and said unto him, all these things will I give thee, if you wilt fall down and worship me.

So they went there. The sun was still low and the track would take him right into it for a time before veering gradually north. They heard the wing-whir of morning doves breaking out of the bush. They saw them doing slow-motion spirals. They heard the odd charged pause. They imagined how the angels came and ministered unto him. They even visualized how their mouth made a small smooth lonesome oval...

When, at dawn, the Son of God appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them, Elijah brought in a woman caught in adultery. In the Law, Moses commanded us to stone her. Now what do you say? He was using this question as a trap, in order to accuse him. But the Nazarene bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. When he kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said, if any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her. Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground. Those who heard began to retreat, one at the time, the older ones first.

- Woe to you hypocrite scholar for you shut up the kingdom of heaven in men's faces. You yourself do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to. Woes to you, scholars, for you compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, you make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves. You are the ones who justify yourselves before men. But God knows your hearts. For that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God.

Judas has the impression that this was the voice of the Teacher of Righteousness. A voice he knew very well. The same message, well known to him. The Nazarene's head and shoulders are visible, while the scholar, shorter, shows only his head. His face is solemn. Judas stares into his clear, intelligent eyes - so near - and waits, showing no expression, so as to draw the moment out. He feels a profound interest in this man.

The real proof came when he went into the temple, and began to cast out them that sold therein, and them that bought.

- It is written, my house is the house of prayer, but you have made it a den of thieves.

The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all these, and derided the Son of God. Judas, his face beginning to flash, can feel the anger starting. The anger mounted because he didn't like the Pharisees either. They and the Sadducees were persecuting the essenes.

As it was in the days of Noah, so it was also in those days. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all. Likewise, also, as it was in the days of Lot. They did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built. But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. Even thus it was in the day when the Son of God was revealed. In that day, whosoever sought to save his life lost it. And whosoever lost his life preserved it.

- Woe to you, blind guides, which say, whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing, but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath. You fool and blind, which is greater, the gold or the temple that makes the gold sacred?

**7** At first Elijah didn't pay much attention to this strange question. He somehow kept dragging himself from one prophecy to the other, but he'd become uneasy, beginning to sleep even worse than usual.

In short, this concept of Son of God, contrary to the logic of Aristotle, was hard to digest, and he seemed to be falling sick. With the misery painted all over his face, he felt he is bringing back a bad dream that he'd been unable to get rid of, driving him nuts.

They met in a small room upstairs.

- Nicodemus came at night and said, Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no man can do these miracles that you do, if God were not with him. He answered and said that unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

- How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother womb, and be born?

- Which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.

- Come on!

- The other scholars came, and tempting desired Him that He would showed them a sign from heaven.

- The perverse streak in his make-up often forced them to do things which they afterwards will regret. Of them it could indeed be said that the good that they would, they did not, but the evil which they would not, that they did.

- Take for instance the case of the man blind from birth. As the Son of God went along, his disciples asked him, Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind. Neither this and nor his parents sinned, said The Son, but this happened so that work of God might be displayed in his life. Having said this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. Go, he told him, wash in the pool. So the man went and washed and came home seeing.

- Did you see him?

- I did. He washed his face, and then rinsed by bending forward and lifting cupped handfuls of water. He blows and moans in the water, making noise, splashing. He rushes to the newly washed window, opens it, and tears the gauzy curtains and throws them aside. He can see. I flinch as the curtains are torn. The man moves from one window to the next, opening them and tearing away the curtains. Wind rushes through the room. Torn curtains rise from the floor and swirl about.

- And? What did they say?

- This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath.

- How can a sinner do such miraculous signs? Did they question the blind?

- The man replied, yes, he is a prophet.

The news spread with great speed. The other day, those who accepted his words, giving him the subtle tribute of faith, saw him standing up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written, The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach the good news, to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery for the blind. When he rolled up the scroll and sat down, the eyes of everyone were fastened on him and he began by saying to them, today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.

- He works with the black female devil.
- I attended his preaching and I witnessed his healings. Even the winds and the waves obey the Son of God.
- It's impossible!

**8** The previous year, around ten o'clock, John stopped talking and said, look, it's him, the man I was talking about. Andrew, the fisher, followed the crowd. They walked together, and there were others who left their nets, and followed them.

With them there were also some women, cured of incurable diseases, Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had come out, Joanna, the wife of the manager of Herod's household, Susanna, and many others, helping to support them out of their own means.

This is how they reached a big crowd, wanting to find him, to cure their diseases. The people tried to touch him. A healing power was coming from him.

They traveled from town to village and from village to town, to spread the gospel of the kingdom of heaven, not understood by the scholar.

Even that man, Judas the son of Simon, from Qarioth, followed the crowd.

They marched for a while, through small towns and big towns. There were villages and more villages, and they were all crowded with admirers and their wives, cheering them on, bombarding them with cheers. You never saw so many patriots in all your life. Sure, Messiah is going to save them. This is what everybody believed. In the best tradition of the successful electoral campaigns, the believers saw themselves as dignitaries of a prosperous kingdom.

Later, when he found out what is going to happen, what future is waiting for him, when he will understand that things will be different, that, instead of a world revolution establishing a kingdom of Solomon, God recommends a kingdom of heaven, patience and even crucifixions, and prescribes persecution and sufferings, Judas will have moments of hesitation. He will not understand these substitutions, the defeat before the victory, without too many cheers, or, anyway, less, and not a single flower, not one, at least for

three hundred years, up to the moment when an obscure roman emperor, never mentioned by licensed prophets, will build a friendly Constantinople.

And then there were fewer patriots, and then there were still fewer and fewer. Pretty soon there was nobody, and those left were strolling a garden, always the same, from an end to the other, on a hill covered with olive trees. Come to think of it, said Judas, when he saw what was what. There is no fun anymore! I'd better try something else. And he decided to take care of the purse. To become treasurer. No revolution can be done without money.

Just in time, because after euphoric beginnings, the apostles were sent, in pairs, to the lost ones from the house of the chosen, to drive out demons, without any gold or silver or copper in their belts, with no bag for the journey, or extra tunic, or sandals, or staff, wise like the snakes, mild like the doves.

**9** The investigator draws his chair closer. The informer, although afraid, doesn't blink. They speak almost whispering. The third person, the bulb hanging from a long wire, coming from a far away roof, like a microphone, looked like a witness or an accomplice.

- What did he say?
- Take heed and beware of the leaven of Herod.
- Leaven?
- Leaven means doctrine.
- Herod Antipas doesn't have any doctrine.
- His friends do. The essenes, the men from Marseilles, Jericho and Qumran, false prophets. They come to you on sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? A bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them. Not everyone that says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the new kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles? Then I will tell them plainly, I never knew you, away from me, you evildoers.
- Evildoers?
- The blind men - hordes of locusts, innumerable as insects - they fabricate fairy tales and pipe dreams from imagination. They prophesy the opposite of what God's Word proclaims. They tell of mightier kingdoms that are yet to rise. The false prophet licks the wounds of the frightened, sinful world, soothing the crowds by saying, it wasn't God who

caused this earthquake, and God will never kill these innocent people. If the blind leads the blind, both shall fall into ditches. He said into his disciples,

The investigator wrote in his notebook a short conclusion: Judas Iscariot believed that Messiah is a patriot, fighting for the Kingdom of Solomon. Now when he found out that he is fighting for the kingdom of God, is puzzled. He doesn't want to mix heaven and earth.

A bunch of angels, gathered close to the bulb, breathless, were feeling the coming disaster.

- Judas will send you there, will kiss his cheek, and you will take him.
- And what about his followers? We don't want riots.
- Comrade Colonel, what are you talking about, I know them. Their kingdom is an illusion.

**10** Two days before the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the patriots and the scholars decided that the dangerous Nazarene has to be caught, prosecuted, crucified, and terminated, once and for all. But not during the Feast, they said, or the people may riot. The occasion occurred during the last supper, when the twelve were separated from the others.

Two of the disciples left, went into the city, met a man carrying a jar of water, followed him, in a large upper room, and made preparations for the rest of them to eat the Passover, twelve Galileans and a Judean, to take the bread and brake it, to take the cup and drink from it, to find out that that there is a traitor.

- The Son of God will go just as it is written about him, but woe to that man who betrays him. It would be better for him if he had not been born.

Judas, possessed by a demon, left them and disappeared. The next day, it was Good Friday, he was reading Jorge Luis Borges, who, after nineteen centuries, will write about Nils Runeberg from the University of Lund.



This Nils, deeply religious, will opine that Judas betrayed Messiah in order to force him to declare his divinity, and thus set off a vast rebellion against the yoke of Rome.

Skillfully, Runeberg will observe that in order to identify a master who daily preached in the temple and who performed miracles before gatherings of thousands, the treachery of an apostle is not necessary. This nevertheless will occur. The treachery will not be accidental.

The Word, when it was made flesh, passed from ubiquity into space, from eternity into history. In order to correspond to such a sacrifice it was necessary that a man, as representative of all men, make a suitable sacrifice. Judas Iscariot will be that man. Only he, among the apostles, intuited the secret divinity and its terrible purpose. The Word had lowered Himself to be mortal. Judas, the disciple of the Word, could lower himself to the role of the informer, the worst transgression dishonor abides.

**11** Here is how it started. Two boys passed, sharing cashews from a white bag. Their gesture added to his sense that the world was disorderly and unbeautiful. Judas became acutely aware of the garbage on the street, stirred by the wind. A candy wrapper waved forlornly from its trapped position in the mesh of a public wastebasket. This was all horrible. He couldn't bear the flapping trash.

They met outside the theater.

First they talk at random of current events. Then they went back to the early days, when they talked about the thousands of Galileans whose blood the Romans had mixed with their sacrifices. The Nazarene didn't consider them worse sinners than all the others.

- He says that unless we repent, we will all perish. Like the fig tree, planted by a man in his vineyard. When he went too look for fruit on it, he did not find any. So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, cut it down. Why should it use the soil?

The scholar gets angry.

- He, like his Father, is destroying his people and the law he gave them from Mount Sinai. I have irrefutable proof in my hands. Judge without fear, or sorrow, or prejudice. Whatever you have to lose has long since been taken away. Until now, I've accepted everything, without bitterness, without reservation. I have told myself, God knows what he is doing, and I have submitted to his powerful will. Now I have reached my limit, and I decided to tell him, it is enough. Why should I bless his name? What had I to thank for, when the eternal, lord of the universe, the all-powerful and terrible, was silent?

It's all over. I cannot go on. If this time again you desert your people, if this time again you permit the slaughterer to murder your children and besmirch their allegiance to the covenant, if this time you let your promise become mockery, then know, o master of all that breaths, know that you no longer deserve your people's love and their passion to sanctify you. If this time again the survivors are massacred and their deaths held up to ridicule, know that I shall resign my chair and all my functions as guide, I shall fall to the ground, my forehead covered with ashes, and I shall weep as I never wept in my life, and before dying I shall shout as no victim ever shouted, and know that each of my shouts will tarnish your glory, and each of my gestures will negate you. Well, if in order to change the course of our history, we have to become God, we will.

Judas remembers the Second Book of Chronicles.

/- If you turn away and forsake my statues and my commandments which I have set before you, and go and serve other gods, and worship them, then I will uproot you from my land which I have given you. And this house which I have sanctified for my name I will cast out of my sight, and will make it a proverb and a byword among all peoples. And as for this house, which is exalted, everyone who passes by it will be astonished and say, He has brought this entire calamity on them.

This is for you, the scholar said and handed him a gold-foiled box. Inside were chocolate candies and a note that said, I have enjoyed knowing you this years, I hope you have a good life. Then it said, P.S. Remember this day. It is probably going to make you famous.

- Famous of what?
- I didn't decide yet.

They sat on the front steps of the pool, the scholar and Judas, and they ate all the chocolates. They sat shoulder to shoulder, the two of them, and looked across the street, and talked about what they might be doing a year from then. Finally, they finished the chocolates and stopped talking and allowed the darkness of that night to enter them.

**12** It was Peter and Andrew, who told him, yes, we found him. They met, not in the temple, because Elijah didn't use to go there, but on the banks of the Jordan, where the prophet used to baptize with water.

- Yahweh's will can be read in the scriptures. The pure in heart will win. The pure in heart is the Teacher of Righteousness
- The pure in heart is the teacher from Nazareth, answered Andrew.

Then they commented the book of Habakkuk:

- Regard, and wonder marvelously, for I will work a work in your days, which you will not believe, though it is told you.
- For, lo, I raise up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation, which shall march through the breath of the land, to possess the dwelling-places that are not theirs.
- They are terrible and dreadful, their judgment and their dignity shall proceed of themselves. Their horses are swifter than the leopards, and fiercer than the evening wolves. And their horsemen shall come from far. They shall fly as the eagle that has to eat.
- They shall come all for violence. Their faces shall sup up as the east wind, and they shall gather the captivity as the sand. And they shall scoff at the kings, and the princes shall be a scorn unto them. They shall deride every stronghold, for they shall heap dust, and take it. Then shall his mind change and he shall pass over, and offend, imputing his power unto his god.
- O Lord, you have ordained them for judgment, and, you have established them for correction

Judas said that the text speaks about betrayers who were with the Man of Lie, because they didn't believe the words of the Teacher of Righteousness. Andrew spoke about the betrayers of the New Testament, those profane men, who didn't believe anything. Only a string of profanities came from their lips.

Both of them believed that Habakkuk was empowered with the skill of prediction, and that they, the interpreters, were expressing what he saw through fog. In this way, with ability, they were able to penetrate his prophecy, to discover the history after the time of the prophet.

True, said Judas.

But just then, the other disciples came marching past the place where they were sitting, up front, looking nice and friendly, fine figures of men. I'll just go see if that's the way it is, he sings out to the scholar.

- Goodbye.
- Judas don't be an ass, he yells back.

And there he was with the disciples, marching behind the Son of God and his band. That's exactly how it happened. The scholar didn't agree with the enthusiasm.

- Go. Go with them. But we warn you that you don't know what you are doing. You will come back.

Judas was sick and tired of waiting. His new friends assured him that there is no need for more waiting. Messiah is with us, they assured him. He just came. Come and see him. We will be in the garden. He will recognize you as part of the band with a kiss

- Friends? What friends? You don't need their friendship. You will get tired of it. You don't know the Galileans. They live in a fantasy world
- You loudmouthed little halfwit, that's what you are. Go to hell. Your face is green. Out of envy. You will see what I a going to do. I cannot wait. Enough is enough.

Six days before the Passover, he arrived at Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom the Son of God had raised from the dead. Martha served dinner, and Mary took about a pint of pure nard, and poured it on his feet. The house was filled with the fragrance. Only Judas objected. Why weren't this perfume sold and the money put in the purse? He did say this because he was the keeper of the money bag, and what was put into it, and he was thinking how to fund the world revolution.

Judas knows what he is talking about. He is beginning to understand. Study changes a man, puts silliness in him. You need it to get to the bottom of hell. Without it you just skim the surface. You think you are in the know, but trifles throw you off. You dream too much. You content yourself with words instead of going deeper. That's not what you wanted. No more dreams. A man of character can't content himself with that. Now all he had to do was plunge straight into the heart of things. You've got to hurry, and while you're looking you've got to keep away from the others. It's hard. It's no picnic.

**13** During the morning, the patriots decided to kill Him. The whole assembly rose and let the young god off to the Roman governor. They did not enter the palace. It was the Passover and they did not enter. The procurator came out to them and asked what charges they are bringing against him. They answered that if he were not a criminal they would not hand him over. The procurator went back inside, summoned the Nazarene and asked

- Who are you?
- My kingdom is not of this world.
- You are still a king then.
- Yes. For this reason I was born and came to the world, to testify to the truth.
- What is truth?

We will start with the truth written with small t.

When they arrived before the judge, and swore to respect the truth, they promised an objective description of what they saw. The witness was supposed to show what he knew, and he offered what he was able to. Offer. To find all the truth, the judge was supposed to call other witnesses, who saw something else, in different moments, from different angles. To understand what was all about, or in a more formal language, to perceive the reality, a judge must assemble the truths of all witnesses. With few witnesses, the final truth is partial. Therefore, what is truth? A correspondence, a matching of the reality with its description, following a rule which puts into evidence a concordance, like that between a face and its image in mirrors. In mathematics, this rule has a name. It is called function. A vital concept in science, almost unknown to the essenes, and totally unknown to the patriots.

We will continue with the truth written with capital T.

Consider that before the judge are brought the righteous and the wicked. How can they be condemned? With witnesses? What kind of witnesses, and how many? Because nobody is able to bring all the witnesses, and the description, like the reality, is very complex, we have to find a new mode of evaluation. The New Testament recommends an advanced mechanism, called pullback. When you cannot do something alone, pull back towards somebody who is. Suppose that there is an omniscient judge, called God. Then, get in touch with him. This is what all the believers do. They are connecting to the Almighty. This association is also a function. Such a connection is not that easy. Therefore some believers can make mistakes. God wanted to help. He pointed his finger, showed him, and shouted, my son. In other words, look at him, because he is my portrait, and you'll see me. Don't try anything else. If you look like him, then you are a righteous. Simple. There is no need for witnesses, theories, Hegelians, Marxists, or who knows what. Don't waste your time with the scholars.

Good.

Now we reach the most interesting part. The set of declared righteous people, no matter how many, is defined also by a function, called characteristic, which is attaching a label

to every man: yes or no, false or true, wicked or righteous, bad or good, zero or one, premodern or modern. The correspondence between the subset of righteous people and its characteristic function can be perfectly described by a pullback diagram.

The subset of righteous people is determined pulling back the finger of God along the membership function, seen as an arrow. In other words, if you associate yourself with the Son, you are in touch with the Father, you know what he knows, you found the truth with capital T, you don't have to assemble anything, everything is assembled. If you look at the Son, visible, you will understand the Father, invisible.

When we say 'the truth, the way, the life' we use the terminology of the theory of categories, to be perfected in Chicago, two millennia after the moment when the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form, like a dove, around the Jordan. It will be utterly impossible for Pilate, who didn't know math, and didn't go to Chicago, to understand what a direct experience is, like Adam, the one painted on the Sistine Chapel, in Rome. Only the blinds will not see what the Father is doing.

**14** After he was rumored to give back the money, and commit suicide, by hanging himself, he disappeared, Judas just disappeared. He organized his papers, picked up his things from the shelves, took the luggage down from the top of the drawer, and put inside the new garments. The white ones. All the white towels. Two. Two belts, those with a wing at one of the ends. He will fold carefully, the white shirts, kept for special occasions.

He will go to the library.

He will say, I am in a rush.

He will listen to news, and he will write something

Names, numbers, circled numbers, a telephone number in Marseilles, small maps hastily drawn, Autun, and Vezelay, the names of two villages where Magdalena and Lazarus were living now. Travel was easy and safe on the Mediterranean. It was faster to go by boat.

He knows what happened. He knows that the Nazarene had risen and appeared in a different form to the disciples, and told them to go into the world and preach the good news.

He knows that after he had spoken to them, he was taken up into heaven and he sat at the right hand of God. Yes, he knows all of these, and decides to do something similar, to go straight down to hell, to position himself at the left hand of God.

- Hell is important.

He has a vision. A vision is always a fact. It is reality that is often a fraud. In his vision he finds a way back to hell that did not include the George Washington Bridge

There was a tunnel here and a tunnel there, and Don DeLillo, the author of *Underworld*, gives the directions. Judas nods, yes, although he knows he would retain none of this once he will be in the car.

He will drive along highways, seeing hell come and go in a smoky and golden sunset. The car will wobble in the sound booms of highballing tracks, drivers perched in tall cabs with food, drink, dope and pornography. He will drive past enormous tanks, cylinders arrayed across the swampland. He will drive into the spewing smoke of acres of burning truck tires, close to the airport, and will see billboards for Hertz and Avis and Marlboro and Goodyear. He will realize that all the things around him, the planes taking off and landing, the cars, the tires on the cars, the cigarettes that the drivers of the cars will douse in their ashtrays - all these will be on the billboards around him, as if the billboards were generating reality.

When he will past Newark Airport he will realize he'd overshot all the turnoffs. He will look for a friendly exit, untracked and rural, and will find himself some time later on a two-lane blacktop, webbed uncertainly through cattail mires. He will feel an edge of brine in the air and the road will bend and then end in gravel and weeds.

He will get out of the car and climb an earthen bank. The wind will be stiff enough to make his eye go moist and he will look across a body of water to a terraced elevation on the other side. It will be reddish brown, flat-topped, monumental. The hell. Real and man-made, swept by wheeling gulls. The Fresh Kills landfill on Staten Island.

Here he will meet Herod the Great, the surveyor of the three thousand acres of mountained refuse coming from all New York. The landfill will be full with loved and important objects, mourning for him. They will reflect on Mariamne, her life and her sons, who studied architecture in Rome, to be drawn in the swimming pool at Sebaste.

- That Mariamne was an ill-tempered bitch. By any standards she was beautiful. Her strength of will defeated the laws of nature. What she wished for happened came to pass. My troubles didn't interest her in the least, yet how quick she was to uplift the soul of every no-good Pharisee who appealed for her sympathy. Oh, how sensitive, how warm-hearted and wise she was when it came to appeasing the cares of the Sadducees. With her beauty she held aloof all the people, vexed because her sweet children were not always first in everyone's thoughts. She preferred to mingle with the zealots outside the temple,

where her girlish laughter could be heard above the din of the nearby. In the midst of these ruffraff she could be silly and giggly, merry, relaxed, and free. She was unfit for marriage. What else could she do but look for adultery. In her eyes I was nobody. No nonsense, she said, the kids got to know who their father is. When she run away from me, she sent me two girls, and by the time she came hobbling back, they had told her the whole story in every detail. Aren't you ashamed of yourselves? All this mating without father rights? This is how I married your mothers with two of my friends, Simon and Nicolas. To tell the truth, Judas, the action always revolved around me. I made messes and squirmed out of troubles with lies. I am to blame for everything. I and I alone am responsible. Here I stand, not damaged and not intimidated by history. Men should be allowed to choose their female partners . This promoted the strong tribe of the Herods. My son, it's your duty to speak out. I know how devoted you are to your brothers. You, forgotten children, have proved you existed, have really taken action, with a political murder you entered history. You set an anniversary, the Good Friday. Don't stand idly by while the glory goes to those barbarian bandits, the Christians. I advise you to buy more paper. Once you put it on writing, everything looks normal. Only written words matter. The written law wins out almost every time. Go and say to everybody aloud, we don't want the cross, our god is the dollar.

Looking at him, Judas will feel invigorated. He will see barges unloading, sweeper boats pocking through the kills to pick up stray waste, the maintenance crew working on drainpipes designed to control the runoff of rainwater. Other figures in masks and special suits will be gathered at the base of the structure to inspect the toxic content. Technology and history, garbage arriving twenty-four hours a day, hundreds of workers, vehicles compacting the trash, vents for methane gas, the gulls diving and crying, a line of trucks sucking in the loose litter of the largest city in the world, the new Herodion.

He will imagine he was watching the construction of the Great Pyramid of Giza - only this will be twenty times bigger, with tanker trucks spraying perfume water on the approach roads. He will find the sight inspiring. All this ingenuity and labor, this delicate effort to fit maximum waste into diminishing space. Bridges, tunnels, docks, all kind of tugs, will be there. And this thing will be organic, ever growing and shifting, its shape computer-plotted by the hour. In a few years this would be the highest mountain on the Atlantic Coast, between Miami and Boston.

Judas will feel the Enlightenment. He will look at all that soaring garbage and will know for the first time what his job will be all about. The engineering of garbage. He will deal in human behavior, people habits and impulses, their uncontrollable needs and innocent wishes, maybe their passions, certainly their excesses and indulgences.

The landfill will show him smack-on how the waste stream ends, where all the appetites and hankerings, come funneling out, the things you wanted ardently and then did not



Judas took a deep breath, to fill his lungs. This will be the challenge he craved. He will see himself as a member of an esoteric order of seers, crafting the future, planning the cities, a waste manager, who would build over them hanging gardens, make a park out of every kind of used and lost and eroded object of desire.

Then he will be arrested.

He will be arrested on charges of offering a free trip to Israel to a city employee evaluating his application to become a carting broker. He will be charged with giving unlawful gratuities, punishable by up to a year in jail.

- I was in the process of applying to become a licensed carting broker - someone authorized to help garbage haulers buy or sell commercial pick-up routes - and I offered the all-expense trip as a demonstration of my appreciation and gratitude.

## 15

In the following visions, the scholar Elijah will see how the fishers from Galilee will move, will convert the investigator, will blind him, will make him to change his name, from Saul to Paul, and together will take the road of Marseilles, towards Antioch, Ephesus, Corinth, and Rome, to baptize in the name of the Father, the Son, and The Holy Spirit.

Their blizzard blazing the trail will destroy the Roman Empire, only to build a new one, overseas; in a promised place they will call America, to be founded after the fall of Constantinople - when its people will spread out, in order to get rid of the Turks, and save a culture. This America will become the biggest power on the face of this planet, blending religion and politics. Like Byzantium.

After the First World War, when the Ottoman Empire will be terminated, and the conquerors will discuss its administration, at Versailles, in 1919, Lloyd George, after getting the mandate for Iraq, and its oil fields, will offer to President Woodrow Wilson mandates for Armenia and Constantinople, without any oil field. When you will quit the presidency, we will make you Grand Turk, will laugh the king of France, Clemenceau. The former president of the University from Princeton will not laugh, to the amazement of those who didn't know what to believe.

President Harding, in 1920, less educated, occupied with the return to normalcy, will not understand the link between America and Byzantium, and will refuse a confrontation with the Moslems. The heavens will not agree, and Harding will die sooner than usual, hit by a

heart attack, due, probably, to the scandal of the illegal leasing of government oil reserve lands at Teapot Dome, Wyoming, when the secretary of the interior Albert B. Fall will be prosecuted and convicted of bribery charges.

When President Calvin Coolidge will go to Paris, in 1928, to sign the Kellog-Briant pact, that condemned war as a means of settling disputes, as if there was no need for defense wars, the heavens will be more upset, and, in October 1929, will send the depression, a wrath, worse than the plague

Finally, when the knife will be close to the bone, the people will start thinking. One of those who will understand the will of the master of heavens will be Thomas Whittemore, from Columbia University, who, in 1931, will build the American Institute in Constantinople, meant to begin immediately the restoration of the church Holy Wisdom, transformed by the Moslems in mosque, and by Ataturk in museum.

Much later, president Jimmy Carter, a Baptist minister, with the eyes fixed on heavens, at the advice of the Greek senators, will ask Turkey to allow the orthodox patriarch to paint his residence. Shabby.

From now onwards, the fate of America will change. The economy will grow vigorously, the Trotskyites will become neoconservatives, President Reagan will win the war with the communist evil empire, costly, and, as a reward, and the Metropolitan Museum of New York will organize exhibitions.

In the spring of 2004, the museum will organize a big exhibition, immensely successful, entitled *Byzantium, Faith and Power*, with icons painted after 1261, the year when the Venetians pulled back. A more interesting exhibition, with older icons, was presented in 1985, with a more adequate title, *The Treasury of San Marco*, because the Venetians, when they will conquer Constantinople, in 1204, will steal almost everything.

The visitors, who will know almost nothing about the icons, about the robbery, and about the gifts sent to Athos by the Romanian kings, will examine the items with an amazement helped by song, which they will purchase at the exit, where, next to the reproductions of icons, they will find a compact disc, produced in Oregon by Capella Romana, artistic director Al Lingas, who recorded thirteen musical jewels kept in old monasteries.

The first piece will be a *kontakion*, a native Constantinopolitan form of hymnography perfected by Roman the Melod, added to the famous Akathistos Hymn in honor of the Mother of God, a relic of Byzantium's glorious past proclaiming the Virgin Mary's role as protector of the capital city, probably written in celebration of the deliverance from an Arab siege in the seventh century, grateful for the napalm weapons monopoly, which permitted the fire to walk on the water, and terminate the Arab fleet, made of wood.

No coincidence.

In the same spring, Wallach Gallery, at Columbia University, will host an exhibition entitled *The Restoration of Byzantium*, presenting Thomas Whittemore together with his students, on scaffolds, in the old Chora monastery from Constantinople, restoring the original frescos, the portraits of the Son of God, his mother, all the saints, and the most important angels, previously plastered with verses from Koran, the book that contains all that had and will happen.

The second piece will be an *Imperial Acclamation* for Constantine XI, the last emperor, enthroned in 1448. [The clergy in the sanctuary: May the king have more years. Choir: To Constantine Palaiologos, the most faithful king and emperor of the Romans, many years. First domestikos: Lord, save the king The second one: And hear us.]

The Wallach Gallery visitors will understand better the text, if they will participate at the annual meeting of the Romanian students on the east coast, where Professor John McGuckin will speak about the monasticism in Romania. Important, will be his conclusion. This country will be important. A kind of Byzantium. A visible proof that somebody up in the heaven is taking care.

The eleventh piece will be entitled *Lament for the Fall of Constantinople* [O God, the heathen invaded your inheritance. They have defiled your holy temple Lord. They have given your servants' corpses to be meat for the birds of the air, and the flesh of your saints to the beasts of the earth. They have shed their blood like water round about Jerusalem and there was no one to bury them. We have become a reproach to our neighbors, subjected to scorn and derision from those around us. How long, O Lord? Again, how long? Will you be angry for ever? How long shall your jealousy burn as fire? How long, O Lord? Pour out your wrath on the nations that do not know you, and on kingdoms which have not called upon your name. Do not remember our old sins, but quickly help us, with mercy.]

This time the Moslems will understand the role of technology, and will hire gunners from Hungary, good gunners, ready to repeat the collaboration with the Persians, when they conquered Jerusalem to steal the cross, proving the assassination of the Son of God, who died nailed.

The twelfth piece, will be entitled *Lamentatio Sanctae Matris Ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae* [The Choir: O most merciful fount of all hope, Father of the son whose tearful mother I am, I come to lay my complaint before your sovereign court, in that your power has allowed such grievous harm to be done to my son. Now I am bereft of joy, without anyone alive to hear my laments. To you, the only God, I submit my complaints, of the grievous torment and sorrowful outrage, when I see the best of men suffering without any comfort from the whole human race. Tenor: All her friends have dealt treacherously with her. There is nobody to comfort her.]

The fall of New Rome in 1453 will be an important event. Till the end of the world.

A Flemish composer, Guillaume Dufay, who early in his career had written music celebrating the wedding between an Italian noblewoman and a member of the Byzantine imperial family, composed four laments for the fall of Constantinople. Dufay wrote this one in 1455, as part of an effort to convince Pope Callistus III to mount a crusade against the Turks.

He won't do it. He won't move a finger.  
Because of the antipopes from Avignon, during the great schism.

- This the place. Let us go there.
- We will meet on the boat.

**16** As the boat pulls into the port, Judas discovers a crazy couple, whose anger and excitement come near to hysteria. They have just had, as they keep saying, a scrape with death. We could have been killed, she says, her voice sharp, abused. We've had a terrible scrape with death. She only pretends to speak to her husband. Actually she is addressing the scholar, and the couple in front of him, and the whole boat. Her eyes are glassy and wild and she goes on talking with small gaps and a shriek while her husband, glass-eyed too, and in shock, says, you're right, and wrestles a red plastic suitcase from the rack overhead. They are still exclaiming as they forge down the aisle, important and proud as being almost dead. They are relatives of the deacon Stefan, just killed, stoned under the strict supervision of the investigator.

Judas is waiting. He does not want to be near these crazy people when he greets Elijah. This will be a special moment and he wants it to be perfect. These years have made him ill at ease in public. He cannot stand the noise, the rudeness, the urgency in voices. Emotions spill out of people, they shout in public. Anger bristles everywhere, in everyone, in the street, the port, the boat. People chew gum. They belch. They push. He is revolted by the vulgarity, the nakedness of it all. In the school there is no emotion, no anger, and no urgency - at least not visibly. Everyone keep inside himself whatever it is he feels.

He returns to his book. He is also a scholar, with duties to theology, and to culture. But after another two pages he decides he does not have an obligation to Habakkuk and he puts the book in the briefcase. He decides to meditate. Essenes mediate for at least an

hour each day, usually on some incident, some moment, in the life of the Teacher of Righteousness, and he has never missed meditation once, not even when he lay for a week in the infirmary, with high temperature.

The infirmary meditation was a kind of mystical experience. He had been meditating on the Crucifixion, lying in bed with his scalding temperature. He saw them drive the nails through the wrists, through the bent feet, saw them lift the heavy cross to the correct angle, until the base thudded into the stone notch that would hold it upright. There was a groan and some blood splattered onto the seamless white tunic they had stripped from him and which now lay at the base of the cross. And then there was blackness. He felt asleep, and when he woke, he tried to see that white tunic beneath the cross. But he could not see it, he could see only the broad back of a soldier and he could hear the rattle of dice. Then the soldier moved and he could see the others, three of them, taking their turns with the dice, gambling for the tunic and sandals. And when the last had thrown, one of the soldiers scooped up the dice and held them up to him. His hand hung there, offering the dice in his open palm, and while they all stared the scholar put out his own hand and slowly, tentatively, took the dice. And then, with the small strength he could muster, he closed his fist around them.

So Judas stays in his seat until the crazy people have disappeared. Then he gets up, sets his face in a smile, a half-smile, and prepares to meet his friend. He smiles and comes to meet him and he will remember him this way, always. He will wake in the night remembering how he is now, what he does to him. Because as he goes to put his arms around him, as he lifts his face to kiss him, he says to him, with a smile made icy by his self-control, don't kiss me. And he bends to kiss him on the cheek, but stops because he has pulled slightly away. He has gone white, and the look of panic on his face is not nearly as terrible as the look of drowning in his eyes.

- Joseph of Arimathea is already in England, in Glastonbury, starting the church of the Celts. Herod Antipas, the fox, is already in Lyon, sent there by Caligula, because he returned the Son of God to Pontius Pilate, without passing judgment. Who knows, maybe he will start a church too. Hurry up! We are late.

**17** Near the sign pointing to the temple built for Diana, an area that is white on the map, this is where the protesters stood, seventy men and women, sometimes less, and they carried a sign stretched between wooden uprights, *Antipatriots, repent, the kingdom*

*of Solomon is coming*, and temple personnel taunted them, or just smirked, or were flattered by the sign, or felt sorry for the sign carriers because they were windswept and unattractive

Judas was one of the two grim figures clinging to the uprights, never saying a word as white pickups past, or bicyclists, the odd finger flipped their way.

The white places on the map include the temple, and its houses. In the houses that he visited now and then, the scholar though demanding refused to be taken for a spendthrift. He'd set them straight at the outset. I'm a roman citizen, dearie, and I know the score. I'm just a scholar, and I'm not in a hurry. That was his opening statement. The girls respected him for his well-regulated way of behaving.

He couldn't be fooled. He will take advantage of his vast knowledge, to explain his celibacy. He will say that a vestal, changing in time, unstable, cannot be priestess, and he will predict her future with accuracy. At 8, you take her to bed and tell her a story. At 18, you tell her a story and take her to bed. At 28, you don't need to tell her a story to take her to bed. At 38, she tells you a story to take you to bed. At 48, you tell her a story to avoid the bed. At 58, you stay in bed to avoid her story. At 68, if you take her to bed, that'll be a story. At 78, what story? What bed? Who are you?

- Yes, what you are reading is made up, fiction, and the woman you've fallen in love only a crude variation on the old harlot-queen figure that shows up as Helen in the *Iliad*, which Homer himself borrowed from an earlier epic, whose beginnings can be traced to a cycle of drinking songs popular in Ur, just before the Flood.

At the beginning, they just refused. Later, after a while, due to his erudition, he was accepted, and treated with reverence, they told him that, yes, the best place to read the future remains the writing of the future Borges, a series of ink marks on flat pieces of paper.

There, he will see why the scholar was selected to predict the coming of the kingdom of Solomon. A man whom God has thus distinguished deserves from us the best interpretation of his deeds. To impute his crime to cupidity, as some have done, is to resign oneself to the most torpid motive force. Borges will propose an opposite moving force, a limitless ascetism. The ascetic, for the greater glory of God, degrades and mortifies the flesh. Elijah did the same with the spirit. He renounced honor, good, peace, the Kingdom of Heaven, and his friend Paul, as others, less heroically, renounced pleasure

He sought hell, with a gigantic pride, because he thought himself worthy of something better, because happiness, like good, is not only a divine attribute.

God, will argue Borges, lowered himself to be a man for the redemption of all mankind. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the sacrifice offered by him was perfect, not

invalidated or attenuated by any omission. He could have chosen any destiny from the whole history. He could have been Caligula, or Herod, or Judas. He chose to be Elijah.

This moment, Judas stopped, and, thoughtfully, asked something. Then he renounced his claim. The black pickup started at the first switch of the key, and left a white smoke behind, Elijah wrote in his notebook: Judas has to be liquidated.

**18** When the scholar and his disciples went out to the neighboring villages, on the way, he asked questions about work, wages, number of children, school attendance, family planning, intestinal flora, latrines. The slum dwellers looked at him with amazement. He seems intimidated by their joy, by their unbelievable charm, by the whispering of the dressed down girls, who display their hips.

- Who do people say I am?
- The prophet who predicted the socialist world.
- But what about you? Who do you say I am?
- You are Messiah.
- Spread the good news

The message of the manifest will be clear. Be happy, the Son of God didn't die; he is here, with us, in southern France. With Magdalena who will become the mother of future kings, crusaders, ready to claim back their lands, who will start their crusades directly from Vezelay, where, on her tomb, they will build the greatest cathedral of all times

A gospel for the progressive religion. Creedless, Orphic, enthusiastic, proto-Gnostic, post-Christian, without Crucifixion, to make the Resurrection unnecessary,

In the first month the writers were not so sure. In the second month they argued about what he had wanted and not wanted, said and not said. In the third month the story will change, but the words will only repeat themselves. Exhausted, they will write off the following months. It's moving, they will say unmoved. In the seventh month they will quarrel about the third month. Only when the quarrel will become a fight -Don't shout. No. Wait - they will begin to worry. Stammering. In the eight month they will be sad,

because the words spoken in the fifth and the sixth will be still missing. Comments will come over the telephone, after the ninth month.

- Of course Paul didn't want to split off from the party (as he did later on, with dire consequences). Of course the radical son of a Pharisee didn't want to end up in the camp of the Son of God after an eccentric career. He was blinded

- Unfortunately, there are some things that no one can foresee. For all the jokes about sons of darkness, Judas had held the brilliant investigator in high esteem: his liberal scientific attitude, his colorful style. While with Messiah of Aaron, Judas reliability and even disposition had become a soothing habit. Traitors have their special charm. Even in his betrayal, Judas always managed to speak respectfully of the Nazarene.

- If Judas should some day present us with the Memoirs of a Traitor, I am sure he will draw a neat distinction between his political employers' cause and his own private feeling. After all, one can only betray what one loves.

It will be much later that the scholar will speak about jealousy, the real reason of Judas betrayal. Now and then his thoughts in their wandering course would come upon his memory where, unobserved, would startle it into life, thrust it forward into his consciousness, and leave him aching with a deep-rooted pain. And when, in conversations with his friends, he will forget about it, suddenly a word casually uttered would make him change countenance, like a wounded man when a clumsy hand has touched his aching limb.

Elijah also walked out, and crossed the Kidron Valley where Simon Peter, who had a pistol, drew it and a bullet struck the high priest's servant, cutting off his right ear. He also heard how Messiah commanded Peter; Put your pistol back in its place, because all who draw the pistol will die by the pistol. He also had stood there trembling, shaking as from a terrific chill, while the dark came. He bought the potter's field, the future burial place for foreigners. He sold it, with profit, to go to Marseilles.

Even Peter, this towering figure, was fooled by false rumors, when, standing up among the believers (a group numbering about a hundred and twenty), said that with the reward he got for his wickedness, Judas bought that field, where he fell headlong, his body burst open and all his intestines spilled out. He, the scholar, spread this wild rumor.

Now he came to regret every pleasure that he tasted in his company, every new caress of which he had been so imprudent as to point him the delights, every fresh charm that he found in him.



**19** The black female devil had arrived punctually. At nine o'clock, one morning late in July, her gorgeous black pickup lurched up the rocky drive to his door in Menton and gave out a burst of melody from its horn. It was the first time Elijah had called on her, though he had gone to two of her parties, and made frequent use of her recipes.

She was balancing herself with that resourcefulness that is so peculiarly devilish - that comes with the absence of prayer. This quality was continually breaking through her punctilious manner in the shape of restlessness. She was never quite still. There was always a tapping foot somewhere or the impatient opening and closing of a hand.

She saw him looking with admiration at her car, bright with black nickel.

He had talked with her perhaps several times in the past and found, to his disappointment, that she had little to say. So his first impression, that she was a person of some undefined consequence, had gradually faded. Before she began leaving her elegant sentences unfinished he required a prophecy.

She looked at him, and knew why Nicodemus had believed he was lying. He hurried the phrase, prophecies, or swells it, or choked on it, as though only the white female devil was able to know the future millennium.

Slowly, swirling like smoke, the prophecy is emerging.

In a well-fanned Forty-second street cellar you will meet Gatsby for lunch. Blinking away the brightness of the street outside, you eyes will pick him out obscurely in the anteroom, talking to another man, Mr. Wolfsheim. A small, flat-nosed man will raise his large head and regard you with two fine growths of hair which luxuriated in either nostril. Gatsby will take an arm of each of you and move forward into the restaurant, whereupon Mr. Woflsheim will swallow a new sentence he was staring and lapsed into an abstraction.

- Highballs? will ask the head waiter
- This is a nice restaurant here, will say Mr. Wolfsheim, looking at the Presbyterian nymphs on the ceiling, although he liked across the street better!
- Yes, highballs, will agree Gatsby, and then to Mr. Woflsheim: It's too hot over there.
- Hot and small - yes, will say Mr. Wolsheim, but full of memories.

- Filled with faces dead and gone.
- Filled with friends gone now forever. I can't forget so long as I live the night with Rosenthal Rosy. It was six of us at the table, and Rosy had eat and drunk a lot all evening. When it will be almost morning the waiter will come up to him with a funny look and say somebody wants to speak to him outside. All right, will say Rosy, and begins to get up, and somebody pulled him down in his chair
- Let the bastards come in here if they want you, Rosy, but don't you, so help me, move outside this room.

It was four o'clock in the morning then, and if they'd of raised the blinds they'd of seen daylight.

- Did he go, you will ask innocently
- Sure, he went. Mr. Wolfsheim will flash at you indignantly. He will turn around in the door and will say: Don't let that waiter take away my coffee! Then he will go out on the side-walk, and they will shot him three times in his full belly and drive away.
- Four of them will be electrocuted, you will say remembering
- Five with Becker. I understand you're looking for a business connection.

The juxtaposition of these two remarks will be startling. Gatsby will answer for you:

- Oh, no, he will exclaim. This isn't the man.
  - No? Mr Wolfsheim will seem disappointed. This is just a friend.
  - I told you we'd talk about that some another time.
  - I beg your pardon, will say Mr. Wolfsheim. I had a wrong man.
- A succulent hash will arrive, and Mr. Wolfsheim, forgetting the more sentimental atmosphere of the old Metropole, will begin to eat ferocious delicacy. His eyes, meanwhile, will rove very slowly all around the room - he will complement the arc by turning to inspect the people directly behind.
- He becomes very sentimental sometimes, will explain Gatsby. This is one of his sentimental days. He's quite a character around New York - a denizen of Broadway.
  - Who is he, anyhow, an actor?
  - No.
  - A dentist?
  - Meyer Wolfsheim? No, he's a gambler.

Gatsby will hesitate, and then add coolly: he is the man who fixed the World Series back in 1919.

- Fixed the World's Series? you will repeat

The idea will stagger you. You will remember, of course, that the World Series had been fixed in 1919, but if you will think of it at all you would have thought of it as a thing that merely happened at the end of some inevitable chain. It will never occur to you that one man could start to play with the faith of fifty million people - with the single-mindedness of a burglar blowing a safe.

- How did he happen to do that, you will ask after a minute.
- He just saw the opportunity
- Why isn't he in jail?
- They can't get him, old sport. He's a smart man.

The end of the prophecy will be unclear.

It was not clear if Meyer will buy land and will open bank accounts in British mandate Palestine, to invest or to establish a nest egg for possible immigration. It will be certain that, in 1903, The Anglo-Palestine Bank will be founded, to become later Bank Leumi, to hold by far the largest number of the accounts in question.

According to a report of Knesset, to be released Tuesday, the banks holding assets from herodians killed in the Holocaust will fail to make a determined effort to return the holdings to their heirs, and when they will be returned, they will be not returned at their proper value.

The Israeli government, as custodian for a large part of the assets, will also fail to make the effort to maintain their value or to return them to survivors or heirs.

What we discovered has filled us with disgust, will say the chairwoman of a parliamentary committee, Collette Avital, a Labor Party legislator.

Ephraim Zuroff, the Israel director of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, will call the report a sad commentary on the inability or willingness of Israel to deal with these issues, while demanding the other countries to do so.

After the outbreak of World War II, land and bank accounts held by people from countries under German rule will be seized by the British mandate government in Palestine as enemy property, and most of it will be transferred to England and held by the British Custodian of Enemy Property. But the banks also will hide some of their accounts, trying to protect their account holders.

After the war Britain will pay back some money as compensation, and records of the accounts will be turned over to the Israeli government, which will set up its own custodian general's office. Some accounts will be returned by the custodian, mostly at values that will be not realistic. But many will be not, and neither the custodian nor the

banks will make serious efforts to find survivors or heirs. Nor will they manage the accounts properly, and their value will be eroded

**20** The great depression brought back to life the concept of socialism, with the hope that a radical transformation would soon usher in a better society. And actually there was good reason to believe that the present system, with its mismanagement, would soon collapse.

The emperor, Gaius Caligula, succeeding Tiberius, initially enjoyed great popularity but his subsequent tyrannical and extravagant behavior brought allegations of madness.

In this case, Elijah hears himself say, I am the judge.

- I will write a book, inventing a conversation between the first century and the following ones, based on secure predictions, in which they take up the question of how the empire will pay for its crimes.

- A word should be said about the scope of this book. Lest one be misled by the word Caligula in the title. This is not a book about Pilate Pontius. It is a book about the people who destroyed him. Not much will be read here about the victims. The focus is placed on the perpetrators.

- The book will describe the vast organization of the machinery of destruction and the men who performed functions in this machine. They will reveal their correspondence and memoranda. From time to time they will deal with the obstacles which will block action

After the breakfast (cereals), Elijah will visit the prosecutor. He will find himself facing an elderly gentleman, bolt upright in a white linen garment stirred by the draft. No, he doesn't belong to the Christian party, he is a Pharisee. Without bitterness he names defeats. The prosecutor learns how the Nazarenes have split off and regrouped as a revolutionary movement. So many intelligent young people, says Elijah with regret and ads ironically: Of good family. When they found that they weren't getting anywhere - because all the stories about resurrection were sheer propaganda - the Nazarenes started

slandering their former comrades, some thousand Essenes. No, says the investigator, Christianity cannot be transplanted to the Roman Empire.

Elijah expressed doubts and spoke corrosively of Judas. He had been too cocksure in predicting the kingdom of Solomon. How often he had aroused false hopes by going so far as not to predict a French Messiah. True, he had been misled by other prognoses, which had been wrong even with regard to the kingdom of God.

The prosecutor answered with imperial arrogance that imposing men of controversial reputation who hurt all parties by lending them money, at a rate of interest considered to be high, took their cut on every transaction, and, even in times of war, plague, and famine, made a profit.

It is not enough to know that Caligula ordered the expulsion of the herodians from Rome. One must also grasp how this deed was done. That is the story to be told in this book. Caligula saw no reason why the deportees should be permitted to transfer, in one form or another, what he regarded as stolen property, because, he said, they could not have acquired it honestly. So he claimed the property of the exiled. More than ten thousand inhabitants of Rome were executed or otherwise slaughtered

**21** Possibly Judas expected friendly applause or at last half-amused agreement. But his speech was followed by silence, then by throat clearing. Finally the prosecutor, more or less as an aside, as though preferring to minimize an unfortunate incident, asked questions

- Don't it strike you as poor taste, defendant Judas, to come here and crack literary jokes at the expense of the empire's security? Yes, yes we know the so-called covenant between you and your god. Look, it was largely the fault of your scholars. Pilate didn't deliberately kill this young son of god. That, Mr. Judas, is Elijah's comical story. No, he was a man of serious and unflagging purpose. A man who knew how to hate his enemies. And what, I ask, was your part in this political act? Did you prod Pilate with your voluble advice? We demand the truth. And nothing but the truth.

Here Judas admitted that he had advised both the patriots and the herodians. True - Judas assured the court - the herodians didn't take his advice.

- But it was not greed that chained me. No, it was political conviction

Next the affidavits of prominent literary critics were read. The court learned that on comparison with Elijah, Judas was lacking in metaphoric refinement. Quotations were employed to show how unskillful use he had made of quotations from other authors. On the basis of his autobiography, the events of a varied, adventurous, but increasingly dubious existence, darkened by his activity as a double agent, were dated. Then came the observation that he was a man of compromise, sometimes with the herodians, sometimes in the zealots' service, tried to mediate between the two. Force makes no man pious.

Another affidavit characterized the scholar's political position as unchanged through all his seemingly opportunistic transformation. Nevertheless, his influence in our literature has been considerable, and he took the highest award, proving that prophets don't lie.

The tribunal took note of all this and would probably have arrived at a mild verdict if the prosecutor had not provoked Judas with barbed questions. This man, who rose to heroic stature even when seated, jumped up, fortified his voice with indifference, and pointed a gaunt forefinger at the bulletproof vest of the scholars. Then he directed -no, fired - question after question at the accused Judas. Simply, and directly, the prosecutor asked if the shirt at the base of the cross was paid.

- Or does the defendant hold that it was not the property of the crucified. Maybe the scholar will be kind enough to draw up a comparison. And tell me this, defendant Judas: can a man on the cross negotiate the price? And how much did you asked for the shirt in Rome? And how much did you pay when you bought it from the soldiers? Because here's what you really mean, those evicted by Caligula didn't have the time to negotiate the price of their properties. You didn't steal the purse of the apostles, you borrowed it, and you didn't open a bank account, on your name. Who has the signature in the bank, defendant Judas? The Son of God? I see that even the silver coins you got from the patriots are not in your bank account. How do you explain it?

The public was floored, too weak even for indignation. The most they could summon up was one long sigh. Only the court-appointed defender counsel, spoke. How awful, he gasped.

The effect was immediate.

Though his speech was conveyed to the ears of the judges and of the public as well, the verdict went against him. He was found guilty of embezzlement and encouraging the crucifixion of a god who was already addled as a result of a dubious trial, without a court-appointed defender counsel. Something was said of illegal property confiscation. In reading the court's opinion, the presiding judge smiled as though finding savor in bitter almonds and conceded that a certain indulgence was warranted in view of the defendant's limited intelligence.

## 22 This was the beginning.

As everybody knows, the city seen from Queensboro Bridge is always the city seen for the first time, in its first promise of mystery and world's beauty.

When the pickup turned south, looking for a sign to go down, it passed by a gasoline station, oily and dark, followed directions, and started the loop. The radio set was transmitting the black female devil's prophecy about the raw emotions and memories, brought to life by a 1988 settlement of a lawsuit against Swiss banks, for their handling of Nazi-era accounts, which filled a Brooklyn courtroom as a federal judge heard what one witness described as a "dog-eat-dog" battle between survivors over how to distribute what could be hundreds of millions of dollars.

It will be Thane Rosenbaum, a son of survivors, who will supply the description in his testimony, capturing the mood in the crowded courtroom as Israelis will argue for a bigger share than the herodians from the former Bolshevia. American survivors said they were being treated unfairly.

More than \$500 million of the 1.25 billion in the Swiss bank settlement has been already been allocated. The debate was provoked by Judge Edward R. Korman's decision governing about \$200 million that has been allocated under parts of the settlement for humanitarian aid. Judge Korman has ruled that such funds should be used for the neediest survivors. He found that the grinding poverty in the former Soviet Union was so severe that he allocated 75 percent of the humanitarian funds to that area. Four percent is to be used for impoverished survivors in the United States, with the balance going to Israel and elsewhere in the world.

The critics - who included demonstrators outside the courthouse - said they believed that approach was unfair for many reasons, and asserted that studies have overstated the number of herodians in the former Bolshevia.

Paul S. Berger, a lawyer lodging complaints on behalf of the Israeli government, told Judge Korman that many survivors who have watched the distribution so far have a sense that justice hasn't been done.

Such feelings of indignation sparked applause and jeers inside the courtroom, and angry comments by the judge, who dismissed as phony arguments claims that he has unfairly sent tens of millions of settlement money to impoverished scholars in countries that were once behind the Iron Curtain, while ignoring the poverty of survivors elsewhere.

Judge Korman scheduled the hearing after a special report said last year that, because the lack of cooperation from the Swiss banks, it might not be possible to satisfy the main goal of the suit - to find depositors with valid claims to \$800 million set aside for people whose Swiss banks accounts were lost or looted.

The suit claimed that the banks had helped eased the transfer of herodian accounts to Nazi authorities, misled the account holders' survivors and routinely destroyed bank records for decades.

Only \$ 154 million has been paid to account holders. The hearing was held to air arguments supporting scores of proposals from all over the world about what to do with the balance, if any, of the \$800 million that is not claimed. Judge Korman apologized for the slow process but said it was still too soon to decide that more people with valid claims to lost accounts could not be found. He said he would not declare any of the \$800 million to be used for other programs soon.

The hearing often veered away from the proposals into emotional demands, painful personal histories and angry exchanges over the approach Judge Korman has taken so far. I have no means right now to live, said one survivor, Esther Mayer, who now lives in Borough Park, Brooklyn.

Another survivor now living in Brooklyn, Malka Moskovitz, told the judge that being survivor in comparatively comfortable America hardly erase the anguish. She described seeing her parents pushed into gas chambers and said, even now, the memories mean that the concentration camps are not fully in the past. I didn't survive the German camps, she said, I am still there.

Mr. Rosenbaum, who is a law professorate Fordham University School of law, drew applause when he argued that Judge Korman was, in effect, giving money to people who survived by escaping to Bolshevia.

He said the beneficiaries of much of the aid so far were not entitled to the money, which, he said, was obtained to compensate direct victims, like the families of bank depositors killed by the Nazis and survivors of the concentration camps. He said Judge Korman's approach was not only an affront to the living, but also a desecration of many of the dead.

The judge heatedly answered that American survivors have received billions of dollars from reparations programs since World War II, as well as 30 percent of the money paid out of the suit settlement.

Mrs. David Schaecter, the president of an American group, Holocaust Foundation USA, got into a shouting match with the judge, who has often ruled against the group. I came here feeling I am a loser regardless, he said, asserting that the judge has ignored the suffering of 30,000 American survivors.



Judge Korman shot back that the claims of Mrs. Schaecter's group were flawed in part because the group did not account for the fact that social services networks in the United States are strong, while nearly nonexistent in the former Soviet Union.

You can go out and hold demonstrations in the street, Judge Korman said, but they're not a substitute for hard, empirical evidence.

**23** In all these debates, the influence of the Herods was inescapable, immense, and almost incalculable. In some sense all the Europeans became their students, whether they knew or not. They were much more than a perpetual fashion. They seemed to have become a culture. The culture.

Known less for the past than for the sheer force of the present, which they served as judge, broker, godfather, gadfly, patron, critic, curator, and cheerleader, their birthdays were marked by symposiums, lectures, outpourings of essays in their honor, and back-to-back dinners at venerable institutions they had played a major role in creating.

Their long career was a study in contradictions. They first became famous as advocates of the herodians, and their early writings helped establish the reputation of socialist prophets. But what will fascinate them the most was the idea of the new, and once they launched communism in the world, they moved on, embracing the reuse of historical elements, a postmodern experiment, to return, finally, again to the modern, with an expressive and highly emotional energy.

After the destruction of the temple, by Titus, with the help of the Danubian legions, they convoked the special courts to reevaluate God in this world, and, standing before them, they will convict Him of murder.

Elijah will be the principal figure of all the centuries. His only rival was Judas, who, though emerged from the scrolls from Qumran, will be a timeless figure. In standing against the unjust world, together, they will always proclaimed that justice must be established against the world, in a deep inwardness of morality that wars against all outwardness whatsoever, and this endeavor requires money. This is what Trotsky told his uncles, the bankers Archelaus and Antipas, asking them to understand the way of history.

- The permanent revolution is expensive. If you want it, open your purses.

At the end of the month, Elijah got on a train and took a seat in the second class car. August was outside the window, and sunlight was a yellow glare on the trees. Up front, a railway conductor in a navy-blue uniform was gingerly backing down the aisle with a heavy package in a gunnysack belonging to the bank of the brothers Antipas and Archelaus.

They were talking about an agreeable seat away from the hot Provence day that was persistent outside, and then they were setting their cargo, against the shellacked wooden wall of the railway car.

Elijah was just recently hired as a professor, but he knew enough about the banks from Provence not to think that the heavy package was sealed up

Soon, however, there was a juggling movement and the gunnysack slipped aside, and the train jerked into a roll through the railway yard, and the gunnysack was jounced so that its gray cheek pressed against the hot window glass. Although it didn't complain, it seemed an uneasy position, and the scholar wished he had the courage to get up from his seat and tug the jolting body upright.

He instead got to his page in *Quo Vadis* and pretended to be so rapt by the book that he didn't look up until Lausanne.

Judas stared over his newspaper before whispering that in Rome, Paul, the apostle, betrayed by an informer, from Avignon, was just crucified.

Had he heard about that one?

## 24 That was that.

This is how the war between the sons of light and the sons of darkness started. In the morning, Elijah ended up in another train, where Trotsky, the man with the glasses, the grandson of Archelaus, was waiting for him.

Your uncles, says in a loud voice his chief of staff, as he sees them pass. After that they all went out for a leak and then, stooped over, their hands behind the back, they took a little stroll. The general was very tired that morning, the orderly confined to him, he'd sleep badly, some trouble with his bladder, so it seemed.

Anybody who talks about the present is a bastard; it's the past or the future that counts. There, in the wartime train night, they talked about the money needed for corralling human cattle for the big slaughterhouses that had just opened. The top general was king. King of revenge. General Trotsky. Absolutely. Nobody more powerful. And nobody as powerful. Except one of the top sergeants on the opposite side.

Due to the Herods, nothing will be left in the villages of the empire, except terrified cats. First the furniture will go, smashed out for firewood, chairs, tables, sideboards, from the lightest to the heaviest. And anything that one could carry. Combs, lamps, cups, silly little things, even bridal wreaths, everything went.

The circumstances will be not conducive to polite preliminaries. The foe will shoot first and introduce him afterward. Besides, what would they say to this general, hostile by definition, who'd come from the other end of the world for the express purpose of extermination? And come to think of it, what would he be? A scholar? Soldiers are lucky, they are stuck with the war same as us, but nobody expects them to be in favor of it, to pretend to believe in it. Enthusiasm is reserved for the scholars.

Millions of stark raving heroic madmen, armed to the eyeballs. With and without helmets, screeching, shooting, plotting, madder than mad dogs, worshipping their madness (which dogs don't), a hundred, a thousand times madder, and worse. Celine's testimony.

The last vision of the scholar will be the twelfth in the continuing drama of the end of the world. The first eleven, with sales of more than forty million copies, will comprise the fastest-selling adult fiction series ever. *Glorious Appearing* will be fiction. Prophecy-based.

Antichrist has assembled the armies of the world in the Valley of Megiddo for what he believes will be his ultimate triumph of the ages. With a victory here he would ascend to the throne of God.

The tribulation force has migrated to the Middle East. The former president of Romania, and UN, Nicolae Carpathia, resurrected by Satan, was last seen outside Herod's Gate in Jerusalem, which is falling to the Global Community's Army. Tsion Ben-Judah has been slain. Few in Petra know of his loss.

The sun will be darkened, the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall. The tribes of the earth will see the Son of God coming with power and glory.

- You tried to attack me upon my earthly birth by filling Herod's mind with the idea of killing all the male babies in Bethlehem. You tempted me in the wilderness and tried to destroy my church through false teaching and persecution. It was you who entered the Herods and made them betrayers and thieves. Elijah betrayed the heavenly Father, Judas betrayed his Son on the earth, and Trotsky betrayed the Holy Ghost.

Like everyone else, Abdullah was fascinated by this unique trial. In all his study of Scripture and prophecy, he never expected to witness it first-hand. He wished he could ask questions, like why the Antichrist and False Prophet were cast forever into the lake of fire, while the female devils themselves were set to be bound for a thousand years, only to be released again for a time at the end of the Millennium.

Those on the left began rising to their feet, while all around Rayford everyone remained kneeling

- Clearly two different groups of people here, Chaim.
- Actually three, those are the goats, over there, the followers of Antichrist who somehow survived to the point. You are among the sheep, on this side, but I represent a third group. Believers because of people like you.

The end is pure Byzantine. In contrast with Rome, in Constantinople, both the flock goats and the flock of sheep are fuzzy. Their intersection, a third fuzzy flock, was never grasped by the modern writers.

The goatsheep, like the catdog, will change the image about world, history, reality, prophecy, and about everything else. It seems that just because these postmodern concepts, America will remain the only great power on the blood stained scene of the twentieth century.

**25** Several years, following his parole, Judas will begin work for the Institute for the Closed Society. A liberal institution, invented to track down Negroes who voted for reparation payments. I do believe that they wanted a man with a reputation for ruthlessness sufficient to strike fear into the hearts of the Baptists from Texas. Had he seen Elijah, Judas would have advised him of this. However, worth-of-mouth reports from members of the family, bits of gossip from home folk passing through, placed him now in New York, now in California, one month wounded in a Detroit hospital, another month married to a woman romanced during a mission in Mexico. All the Herods were busy dismantling Bolshevia.

In contrast to him, the Magi settled in Köln, against this city's soul-killing winter winds. They purged from their speech all traces of the essen accent and warmed themselves by the fire of Paul's three-hundred-year plan. Employment was available in the academy, and there they established, though slowly, a reputation for tact. Because they got along, they began moving up. They found and courted a church-backed foundation. This was the

kind of institution they needed to make their astrology safe. With its backing, they settled into this rough-and-tumble city and learned to dodge all events detracting attention from the direction in which they had determined to move. From time to time, grudging through the winter slush, they would pause to explore a reflection of themselves in a book or a journal.

This was the situation when Judas came to visit.

It is not true, as he has gossiped among his friends, that when he arrived they refused to see him at their office.

It was not his fault that Judas got only as far as the receptionist's desk. It may be he was not dressed properly for the occasion. They received his card only after he had left the building, when they were going out to lunch. The secretary told them, with nervousness they could not at first understand, the gentlemen said he's related to Herod the Great. (On the back of the card Judas had scribbled, 'Call soon'.)

They met in the late afternoon the following day, at a bar. Of course, they did not recognize each other. Judas outfit - the black suit, the white shirt, the black string tie - brought to their mind the image of an undertaker. He looked calmly around the bar-room. Beneath his cool exterior they thought they sensed, in the broad sweep of his left eye, the hint of a certain rough pride.

- You worshipped me first. In Qarioth. My father told me about your visit, and how it was. I want you to acknowledge this fact, and give a statement, if possible notarized. The scholar says that you visited him first, in the palace of Herod. You know that this is not true. I have to show something to these bloody Swiss banks. Otherwise I won't get my money.

They waited. The clink of glasses and the noisy blend of bar-room voices teased their ear. Judas kept them in suspense. He laughed, his demon thumbing triumphantly in his chest.

- You know why, he went on. Elijah went to the chief priests and asked, what are you willing to give me if I'll hand Him over to you? They counted the silver coins. Not only thirty. He still has them. In a Swiss bank. In a dormant account. Imagine the interest after two millennia.