

The Fourth Version of Judas

Valerius Soranus died for having revealed the occult name of Rome; what infinite punishment would be his for having discovered and divulged the terrible name of God?
(J.L.Borges, *Fictions*).

Whilst Borges imagines a never-ending punishment for the theologian Nils Runeberg who, in the course of his studies discovers that the name of God is Judas, an epistemological or hermeneutic punishment is reserved for whoever wishes to take on Judas as the object of a critical reading, as the pretext for a rewriting, as the opportunity for a mis-reading, or, simply because it reflects some vague desire. The myth¹ of Judas has been represented in narrative (both literary and iconographic) over the various different periods of Western culture, but it eludes all attempts to classify it. Even the category of essay, whose definition is so wide and flexible (cf. Segre, 1981 and 1988) is too restricted for the many variations and transformations which this myth has undergone, which started even within the Biblical texts themselves. Although it is not difficult to recognize, in the narrative universe of Western culture, the recurrence of themes which can be traced to an individual and his or her name (Prometheus, Oedipus, Don Quixote, Don Juan and others) - so much so that these Proper Names make up a list of *loci communes* of our imagination - it is an extremely arduous task to find a place in this list for Judas. In this name, the most varied themes of narrative coexist - betrayal, solitude, excess and the concept of the double. Whereas the search for recurrent themes presupposes an analysis of the forms of

¹ "Myth" is to be read in the sense intended by N. Frye (1957)

content, the Judas theme appears essentially as the form of the expression. It is nothing more than a signifier - a Proper Name - which functions as the anaphoric referent for a narrative corpus capable of transmitting the most varied and contradictory messages. As a Proper Name it has entered into colloquial language and is to be found where the banality of idiomatic phrases deprives the sign of meaning and charges it with sense - literally the word makes its own sense - *Judas!*, *the kiss of Judas*, *the eye of Judas*, *the Judas tree*. In any case, it is impossible to grasp the content of this name, or enough of a topic or a theme to be able to insert it into the list of narrative topoi. Nor does his name share with all the other Proper Names the function of deixis, since it has been deprived of that which indicates the person, the world outside language. Not so much because with the diffusion of the New Testament nobody will ever again be christened Judas, but because, by committing suicide, he cancelled out the referential alibi par excellence, the living thing .

From this vast narrative tradition, two stories are of particular relevance to my reading. The first is the story of Judas as related in medieval legend which reveals how the P.N. functions as a mechanism for textual production. The second is the J.L. Borges fictional tale entitled *Three Versions of Judas*.

The medieval legend, whose best-known form is to be found in the *Legenda Aurea* by Jacopo da Varazze, tells of a new-born child abandoned at sea by its parents and terrified by a premonitory dream. He is saved by a Queen who seemingly cannot have children but who feigns a pregnancy in order to provide an heir to the throne. But Judas loses this right when the Queen gives birth to a real son. He kills his rival and flees to Jerusalem where he becomes Pilate's manservant. He is attracted by a woman, kills her husband and obtains her hand in marriage from Pilate. And now the woman recognises Judas as her abandoned child. Ciborea, the mother-wife, in order to atone for her sins, persuades him to serve Jesus. He becomes at first Jesus' disciple and then apostle.

It would seem that simple betrayal was not nearly enough for the Medieval legend. The negative connotations of the character of Judas are expanded with a brace of murders, including that of the father, and incest. It is clear that the intention of the narrator is to blacken the apostle's character still further, but the final result is a tragic figure, fatally predestined to commit his crimes, independently of any act of will. What justifies this interweaving of the myth of Judas with that of Oedi-

pus? Perhaps a culture which uses symbolism extensively, as the Medieval one, realizes that what links Judas and Oedipus is a shared meta-narrative value, since both myths speak of their own means of production, of the communication of the story, of the origins of writing in an original crime and of the written trace of the P.N.. Oedipus (he of the swollen feet) is a hero who is already marked in his body by the written sign, by the hieroglyphic which describes him. The nail of Laius opens in Oedipus feet a hole which will be filled only by the closing of his eyes at the end. In the narrative logic, the *father's nail* is the functional equivalent of the buckle which Oedipus, King of Thebes, takes from the *mother's dress* to blind himself. The stylus - nail, buckle - opens and closes the writing and its holes: the P.N. establishes its themes and their dispersal through the text. Even in the Oedipus of the New Testament, a single letter, part of the P.N., bears the weight of the distinction between God and Judas, between Yahvè and Yadhvè - between the Father and the Son.

This minimality of the difference between he who is most despised amongst men and God Himself is at the centre of the theological argumentation of Nils Runeberg². Borges comments on the three solutions to the textual enigma of Judas. The first sees his betrayal as not accidental but preordained and necessary to the economy of the Redemption. If God-made-flesh passed immediately from infinite happiness to death, it was necessary for a man to make a similar sacrifice. The infamy of his betrayal, his willingness to be cursed and his voluntary death are the mirror image of God's sacrifice. Thus, if I may pretend to comment in turn on Borges' pretence, I would call this version *the mirror-image theory*. The Swedish theologian's second hypothesis - which I would define *the theory of excess*, argues that the crime was the result of an over-zealous asceticism. If the ascetic debases and mortifies the flesh, Judas Iscariot mortifies the spirit. He renounces the Kingdom of Heaven both because he feels himself unworthy of being

² In Borges' fiction, there is no explicit reference to the P.N. or to writing. However, the Swedish theologian's surname implies the question to be asked in the story. Runeberg means "Mount of Writing", and the "runes" were a sacred script with a mysterious air about them, which were used both to transcribe phonetic values and also for magical-religious practices (runic magic). The Icelandic poem Sigrdzifa tells how the hero Egil Skallagrimssons went one day to visit a sick girl after which her illness grew worse because a number of runes which had been engraved to cure her had been incorrectly applied. He rubbed them out, threw them on the fire, engraved new ones and when these were placed under the young girl's cushion, she got better immediately.

good and because the happiness of the Lord was enough for him . The third version, which perhaps we could call *the theory of the secret hero* proposes a God who accepts his role as a man in every way, even accepting his shame, even to the point of damnation and the abyss: he chose a shameful destiny: he was Judas .

The link with the Oedipus story to be found in the *Legenda Aurea* and Borges' *Three Versions of Judas* - the mirror image, the excess and the secret hero - make up an exemplary myth, since whoever comes to it must consider the means of production and of communication of the story itself. So much so in fact that he or she cannot avoid the textual place where a meta-narrative theory is being outlined, a theory based not on the well-known oral tradition of the New Testament but on the written trace. Like writing itself, Judas Iscariot shuts himself off from the oral, and by hanging himself, forces the creative breath back into the body where the word becomes flesh. But the dead body , just as the written word, opens itself and broadcasts its own traces. At times these might be the symbolic traces of the thirty pieces of silver³ strewn across the Sanhedrin which leave the sign of blood, at others they are the real, tangible traces of the guts strewn across the Field of Blood, along with the mercenary silver pieces themselves.

And when the reader, caught up in the endless game of refractions which shoot between the surface of the body, the P.N. and the writing itself wishes to find refuge in the safety of the Biblical text, they will discover that it also contains within itself a spiral of contradictions and a plan for a reading which is full of paradoxes. It too is capable of generating the four versions listed here and even more varied textual per-versions.

³ The thirty coins are also the topic of a medieval legend. Gotofredo da Viterbo tells how they were first coined by Nino, King of the Assyrians, in metal which Adam had brought with him from the Garden of Eden. Abraham brought the coins into the land of Canaan, where they were used to set free Joseph of the Israelites. After passing through various hands and royal treasures, the Magi gave them to Jesus as a gift who in turn donated them to the Temple treasure. They were thence taken to pay, first of all, Judas' reward, and once he had given them back, the soldiers who guarded Jesus' tomb (cf. Graf 1964: 273-310).

Through the various exchanges and donations the coins represent - even without going into the psychoanalytical aspect - a metaphor for writing, especially in the way in which they are transmitted in substitution for things, in fact finding their value in the very absence of things.

The corpus / a Gospel body

The Dinner at Bethany

Then Jesus six days before the Passover came to Bethany, where Lazarus was which had been dead, whom he raised from the dead. There they made him a supper; and Martha served: but Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with him. Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment. Then saith one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, which should betray him, Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor? This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein. Then said Jesus, Let her alone: against the day of my burying hath she kept this. For the poor always ye have with you; but me ye have not always. (John 12: 1-8).

The Sanhedrin

Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests, and said unto them, What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you? And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver. And from that time he sought opportunity to betray him. (Matthew 26: 14-16).

And Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve, went unto the chief priests, to betray him unto them. And when they heard it, they were glad, and promised to give him money. And he sought how he might conveniently betray him. (Mark 14: 10-11).

Now the feast of unleavened bread drew nigh, which is called the Passover. And the chief priests and scribes sought how they might kill him; for they feared the people. Then entered Satan into Judas surnamed Iscariot, being of the number of the twelve. And he went his way, and communed with the chief priests and captains, how he might betray him unto them. And they were glad, and covenanted him with money. And he promised, and sought opportunity to betray him unto them in the absence of the multitude. (Luke 22:1-6).

The Last Supper

Now when the even was come, he sat down with the twelve. And as they did eat, he said, Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me. And they were exceeding sorrowful and began every one of them to say unto him, Lord, is it I? And he answered and said, He that dippeth his hand with me in the dish, the same shall betray me. The Son of man goeth as it is written of him: but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! It had been good for that man if he had not been born. Then Judas, which betrayed him, answered

and said, Master, is it I? He said unto him, Thou hast said. (Matthew 26: 20-25).

And in the evening he cometh with the twelve. And they sat and did eat, Jesus said, Verily I say unto you, One of you which eateth with me shall betray me. And they began to be sorrowful, and to say unto him one by one, Is it I? and another said, Is it I? And he answered and said unto them, It is one of the twelve, that dippeth with me in the dish. The Son of man indeed goeth, as it is written of him: but woe to that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! Good were it for that man if he had never been born. (Mark: 17-21).

When Jesus had thus said, he was troubled in spirit, and testified, and said, Verily, verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me. Then the disciples looked one on another, doubting of whom he spake. Now there was leaning on Jesus bosom one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved. Simon Peter therefore beckoned to him, that he should ask who it should be of whom he spake. he then lying on Jesus breast saith unto him, Lord, who is it? Jesus answered, He it is, to whom I shall give a sop, when I have dipped it. And when he had dipped the sop, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon. And after the sop Satan entered into him. Then said Jesus unto him, That thou doest, do quickly. Now no man at the table knew for what intent he spake this unto him. For some of them thought, because Judas had the bag, that Jesus has said unto him, Buy those things that we have need of against the feast; or, that he should give something to the poor. He then having received the sop went immediately out: and it was night. (John 13: 21-30).

Then cometh he to his disciples, and sayeth unto them, Sleep on now, and take your rest: behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of the sinners. Rise, let us be going: behold, he is at hand that doth betray me. And while he yet spake, lo, Judas, one of the twelve, came, and with him a great multitude, with the swords and staves, from the chief priests and elders of the people. Now he that betrayed him gave them a sign, saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is he: hold him fast. And forthwith he came to Jesus, and said, Hail, master; and kissed him. And Jesus said unto him, Friend, wherefore art thou come? Then came they, and laid hands on Jesus, and took him. (Matthew 26: 45-50)

Rise up and let us go; lo, he that betrayeth me is at hand. And immediately, while he yet spake, cometh Judas, one of the twelve, and with him a great multitude with swords and staves, from the chief priests and the scribes and the elders. And he that betrayed him had given them a token, saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is he; take him, and lead him away safely. And as soon as he was come, he goeth straightway to him, and saith, Master, master; and kissed him. And they laid their hands on him, and took him. (Mark 14: 42-46).

And while he yet spake, behold a multitude, and he that was called Judas, one of the twelve, went before them, and drew near unto Jesus

to kiss him. But Jesus said unto him, Judas, betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss? When they which were about him saw what would follow, they said unto him, Lord, shall we smite with the sword? And one of them smote the servant of the high priest, and cut off his right ear. And Jesus answered and said, Suffer ye thus far. And he touched his ear and healed him. (Luke 22: 47-51).

When Jesus had spoken these words, he went forth with his disciples over the brook Cedron, where was a garden, into which he entered, and his disciples. And Judas also, which betrayed him, knew the place: for Jesus oftentimes resorted thither with his disciples. Judas then, having received a band of men from the chief priests and Pharisees, cometh thither with lanterns and torches and weapons. Jesus therefore, knowing all things that should come upon him, went forth, and said unto them, Whom seek ye? They answered him, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus saith unto them, I am he. And Judas also, which betrayed him, stood with them. As soon then as he had said unto them, I am he, they went backward and fell to the ground. Then asked he them again, Whom seek ye? And they said, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus answered, I have told you that I am he: if therefore ye seek me, let these go their way. (John 18: 1-8).

When the morning was come, all the chief priests and elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death: And when they had bound him, they led him away, and delivered him to Pontius Pilate the governor. Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, Saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? see thou to that. And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself. And the chief priests took the silver pieces, and said, it is not lawful for to put them into the treasury, because it is the price of blood. And they took counsel, and bought with them the potter s field, to bury strangers in. Wherefore that field was called, The field of blood, unto this day.

Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him that was valued, whom they of the children of Israel did value; And gave them for the potter s field, as the Lord appointed me. (Matthew 27: 1-10).

And in those days, Peter stood up in midst of the disciples, and said, (the number of names together were about an hundred and twenty) Men and brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus. For he was numbered with us, and had obtained part of this ministry. Now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out. And it was known unto all the dwellers at Jerusalem; insomuch

as that field is called in their proper tongue, *Aceldama*, that is to say, The field of blood. For it is written in the book of Psalms:

Let his habitation be desolate,
and let no man dwell therein:
and his bishoprick let another take.

(*Acts* 1: 15-20).

Of paramount importance - and this of course is the case for all the apostles - is the information the New Testament gives us about Judas Iscariot. He was born in the village of Qerioth, son of Simon of the tribe of Judas. To this we must add that all four of the Gospels, when they list the apostles, leave the name of Judas Iscariot until last, anticipating the fact that this man will become *he who betrayed Jesus*. What is far more interesting than this is the implicit information which the name of the tribe evokes in those who have a smattering of biblical knowledge. Judas Iscariot, alone among the apostles, belonged to the favoured people, those descending from the Patriarch Judas and destined for rule:

The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be. (*Gen.* 49: 10).

Preordained to be the ruling tribe, the house of Judas produces kings and warriors. They include David and Judas Maccabeus, the last of the warrior kings who led the people of Israel to victory against the armies of the Gentiles. But along with this privilege, the race of Judas carried with it, from the earliest times, the stigma of betrayal which manifests itself as carnal betrayal. By means of a substitution and a weak form of incest, Lia, the mother of Judas the Patriarch lies down under cover of night in Job's bed, taking the place of her sister, Rachel. Another carnal betrayal is carried out by Judas' son who fails to fulfil his promise to God, who had commanded him to pass on his seed to give birth to the Saviour, but

Onan knew that the seed should not be his; and it came to pass, when he went in unto his brother's wife, that he spilled it on the ground, lest he should give seed to his brother. (*Gen* 38: 9).

Onan wastes his seed, he scatters it so as not to have children. This loss of seed leads us on to the Gospel, which can only reach a conclusion with the crime of Judas Iscariot and renew itself with the scattering of the entrails on the Field of Blood.

It is not only his family history delineated by the Old Testament and set against novel-style *topoi* like leadership, deceit, waste and breaking of pacts with God which weigh upon Judas, but he also has a name which

is too similar to the forbidden Name: *Yadhvè* = I shall praise *Yahvè*. The P.N. itself manages to turn this character into a double actor. One who, by the simple dropping of a letter may become God, because in Hebrew script a single letter - *dàleth* - differentiates the name of Judas from the magic letters, the *Tetragrammaton*, which may not be either written or spoken. A simple distraction, a *lapsus calami*, the falling down of a border (*dàleth* means door, threshold in Aramaic) could confuse Judas with God. It is the scholars of the Scriptures who take an interest in the similarity, using it to resolve the unfortunate result of some distraction or other, as suggested in the wide and profound Talmudic debate upon the restrictions on writing which the P.N. taboo creates. Because if it is sacrilegious to write the forbidden word, it is still more so to cancel it out once it has been written by mistake. The problem is overcome by the addition of a letter, Rabbi Hisda and Rabbi Aha Ben Jacob advise in the Babylonian Talmud, and they also suggest that one should insert the *dàleth* thus transforming God into Judas and avoiding any cancellation⁴.

This textual node which concentrates on the P.N. is the prejudice from which we start, or, if we prefer, the point of arrival for a narratological analysis of the narrative corpus. At this juncture, we may as well put our trust in the surface of the text and observe how the division offered by the localization of the actions in space is clear and powerful enough to define the narrative functions. In the Sanhedrin, Judas makes his pact with the priests. It is at table during the Last Supper that the traitor is discovered. In the garden of Gethsemane, Judas carries out his act of betrayal by indicating who Jesus is, and in the Field of Blood he hangs himself. Once the pact with the priests has been made in the Sanhedrin, the narrative program⁵ of the traitor apostle is both opposite and complementary to that of Jesus. The *qualifying* proof of the anti-hero is performed during the Last Supper when his role is revealed (only in Luke are the apostles still uncertain at this point as to the identity of the traitor (Luke 22-23, 21-23)). The revealing sign is a hand gesture, he dips into his dish at the same moment as Jesus. The kiss in the garden of Gethsemane (found in the three Synoptic Gospels) or the leading of the guards to the place where Jesus was to be found (John

⁴ This information on the Talmud is taken from F. Fabbrini (1965).

⁵ For the conceptual scope of narratology, and especially the concept of "pragmatic and cognitive dimension", "spatialization", "actant" and "actor", see A.J. Greimas, J. Courtés (1979). See also Bucher (1971). I also find P. Calefato (1987) very much in tune with the style of my own reading of the Bible.

18: 2-7) constitute the *principal* proof, whilst the suicide in the Field of Blood can be defined as the *glorifying* proof.

However, it is not the whole narrative algorithm and its pragmatic dimension which interests us here. Instead, our attention focuses on the cognitive axis in the attempt to describe the textual modalities which organise the function of the *make-known* and thus reveal the status which the text itself confers on those who are called to know and communicate the knowledge. Here it is sufficient to underline how, in the three proofs of the Judas narrative program we are shown a concurrence between the localization of the actions (pragmatic spacialization) and a cognitive spacialization, which is lexicalized by means of the representation of the physical contact between those involved. The hands of Jesus and Judas *touch* when they both dip their bread in the same plate. In the Garden of Gethsemane there is another bodily contact, the *kiss*, which Judas uses to indicate Christ to the soldiers. In the glorifying proof, the apostle's narrative program comes to an end with his *body hanging* from the tree, whilst the body of Jesus is hanging on the cross. While in real space the two bodies are distant, disjoined, the narrative brings them together in symbolic space where they are represented as double in a mirror-image. Thus, the evolution of the Passion story passes from the contiguity of the two bodies to the final similarity of their representation. It is this very corporeality of the interaction which induces the ethnologist M. Jousse (1975)⁶ to talk of *mime dramas* when he finds in the Gospel text a corpus which bears out his theory of the *anthropology of gesture*.

The explicit intention of the Gospels to recount the life of Christ so that *thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed* (Luke 1: 4) and the mechanisms for legitimizing the narrators are enough in themselves to lead the narratologist to consider as privileged the ways of knowing and of communicating knowledge for the ways in which they are organized inside the text itself. In this way we are able to reach those places in the text in which the text itself tells of the process by which it was generated, and in which it highlights the means of its own production and reception (hearing, reading). The instance of enunciation, in which the subjects of knowledge are to be found, forces the various actors, who in the story have very different functions, into reciting roles which are complementary. This is the case of the Priests, of Judas, of Peter and of the holy women. Analogous to

⁶ This is a posthumous edition of essays published around 1950.

this is their cognitive actorialization, which would seem to be definable in particular for the fact that no-one participates in a transformation from the not-knowing to the knowing and that everyone is acquainted with the Book and the prophecies which sanction the word of Jesus and the promise of resurrection. Nor is any of them interested in a transformation from erroneous knowing to correct knowing. On the other hand, it is the modality of will - the desire to know - which distinguishes between three different statuses: the Priests desire not to know; Judas wishes to demonstrate his knowledge and so he reveals the secret; Peter and the women forget their knowing.

This last mechanism is the winning or rather the happy one for a communicational theory. It gives form to the transformation of the role of the listener (those who have listened to the word of the Rabbi) to that of narrator. It is through Peter's lie and the forgetfulness of the women that a semiotic analysis can reveal the mechanisms of the logic of *recognition* and of *conversion*. At least this is the thinking behind an essay by G. Bucher (1975) who tries to compile a list the parallels and differences between the cognitive instances of Peter and of the women. Even before denying Jesus, Peter went to the Sanhedrin out of curiosity, just to see how it would all end up (Mt 26, 58) (and this too is a metatextual place where a theory of reading foresees and designs a reader, who, out of pure curiosity, arrives at the end of the story). He forgets the words of Jesus which had predicted his denial. It is at this point that he denies three times, adding blasphemy to disavowal. Only the crowing of the cock frees him from his amnesia and brings him back to consciousness. What activates the narrative transformation of the missing act and awareness of distraction is the materiality of a signifier: the crowing of the cock. This phonetization of the letter oscillates between orality and writing like the body of a hanged man. On the one hand it lays the blame on orality, bringing into play that process which, according to J. Derrida, constitutes one of the characteristic aspects of the metaphysical functioning of the sign common to every logocentric culture. On the other hand, in its physicality and its recall to the missing act, the crowing of the cock does not refer to any pre-existing meaning, it declares itself to be trace and to play through to the end its role as passage between writing and difference. Thus, at the signal which permits him to take account of his mendacity and forgetfulness, Peter bursts into tears, in turn not able to avoid responding with a corporeal trace.

The holy women too, when they go to the tomb to embalm the body, forgetting the promise that Jesus had made concerning his resurrection,

become players in a disavowal. Once more it is a missing act - forgetfulness of the word - which gives the narrator the opportunity to omit the crucial part of the entire story. Of the resurrection there is no representation. The empty tomb - which is entered out of forgetfulness - is the only trace of the missing body and the gap in the narrative: a sign of absence or absence of the sign, a place of reading and of hermeneutics, of a narrative work aimed at recovering the memory - a value object of the enunciatory instance - of what had been announced. *He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay* (Matthew 28:6).

First the lie and then the hiding of the body - out of oversight, by removal - leads on to the epiphany of the signifier (*phoné*, trace) which announces both to Peter and to the women the recognition of the prediction. The missing act, the lapsus, the flaw, the semantic gap appear to be indispensable in order for the trace of the forgetting to produce meaning, once again by the removal - *clinamen* - of the body and the letters, so as to escape from the truth set in place by the Logos and the spoken word. In the cognitive economy of the Passion it is necessary that an unstinting effort of translation of the signifier alone - *panglossia* - anticipates the sign and enables this to arrive at the *difference*, by which is meant difference of the word itself, of the text from itself. The conversion thus becomes the result of a distraction from the word of God: a perversion of the signifier.

By contrast, the cognitive program of Judas allows of no distractions. He is permitted no lapsus. He does not disavow Jesus, quite the opposite in fact, since his betrayal consists in *revealing* him, in disclosing a secret. Judas' revelation therefore needs no signal (the cocking of the crow or the empty tomb) to remind him of the spoken word, of which he possesses such that he can sell it for thirty pieces of silver. No longer a signal but the symbol par excellence - the revelation of meaning here depends on a reward. The circulation of money collocates Judas on the side of writing, of a written sign, as deadly as the thirty coins, which at the end of the story are used to buy the Field of Blood. And it is writing once more which condemns him to be hanged, in so far as *the trace, writing's necessary mark, is impossible or difficult to cancel until some movement snaps the cord and provokes a suicidal or, at times, a homicidal act* (Mathis 1979: my translation). By hanging himself, the apostle closes his body off from the voice and his body alone remains in the wind to dry. This would seem to be how the orality of the Last Supper and the revelatory kiss comes to an end.

The desire to show God is, moreover, the central trait of mystic enunciation, in which the modality of value draws up communicative contract by means of a performative whose price is the cancellation of any referential value of language. What M. de Certeau writes about mystic discourse is most appropriate to Judas;

The mystic ego fulfils itself through forgetting: the loss of identity, in the forgetting of names, objects and message receivers is the *a priori* form of the ego. Pure will or intention introduces into the mind and into language a break from determinate content. The ego is traced invisibly, an empty place...One can recognize the gap which the will produces in language by going through it. (1982: my translation).

But in the story of the Passion, neither the suicide nor the gap in language are ever resolved. The economy of the symbolic system does not allow the restitution of the coins nor a closing of the body which becomes assumed into the organization of a new body (of the New Testament) which is totally different from the Torah. The body of the New Testament is founded on non-separation, seeking contact with the impure and the lepers, being organized in a scriptural map whose hieroglyphics are cancer of the skin, the lesion of the reassuring shell of integrity, the sores and the stigmata which the image of the Other design, with a caress on the surface. Christ lets himself go at the sight of the repentant tears of the woman who had sinned (Luke 7: 38) submerged by the overabundance of bodily traces: tears, hair, kisses, perfumes are all mixed together in an internal flux where the distinction between sin and love is weak. The opposition between inside and out, which substitutes the complex taxonomy of the Old Testament (so organized as to distinguish the pure from the impure) has nevertheless uncertain and fuzzy margins: the door (*dâleth*) is left ajar. There is always a means of escape (between the entering and leaving) which enables one to delineate a space, divine or Nietzschean, in which the same act, that of the atopic subject incarnates the word and assumes corporeality in words. And so the narrator has to imagine that Judas' body opens and the skin breaks to bring about the necessary fusion between inside and outside. This is how his innards (the remains of the story) become strewn across the Field of Blood and, in this phantasm of a birth-giving, the borders get superimposed (and+ and-; neither+ nor-) so that it is no longer possible to distinguish between the act of incorporation and that of introjection (cf. Haddad 1984 and Gandelman 1987: 61-77), between sin and love.

The connotation in writing of the traitor, immersed upside down in Lucifer's mouth is picked up again in the polyphony of *The Divine Comedy*:

Each mouth devoured a sinner clenched within,
 Frayed by the fangs like flax beneath a brake,
 Three at a time he tortured them for sin.
 But all the bites the one in front might take
 Were nothing to the claws that flayed his hide
 And sometimes stripped his back to the last flake.
 (*Inferno* 34: 55-60. Translated by D.L. Sayers)

It is not sufficient that the orality of the demon swallow and incorporate the orality of Judas, nor that his body be mutilated. To be sure that whatever is left *outside* is not able to communicate by means of traces, hieroglyphics and stigmata. Lucifer, obsessive and possessive, must cancel out the only medium on which the message could have been transmitted, the skin. The body of Dante's Judas (Judas I-*scar*-iot) represents the inane attempt at a separation between outside and inside to eliminate the ambiguous space in which body and world intermingle.

Exactly the same undecidability is in the language, at least as regards those metatextual rules which the story of the Passion proposes for its own reading and telling. The only cognitive contract which is successful is the one indicated in the route taken by Peter and the women⁷: only through forgetting and distraction from the already spoken, from a pre-existing signification is it possible to arrive at the recognition of the word and at conversion. Distraction establishes a difference and a deferment between the word spoken and the recognition of the word, which only a loss - the fall of a sign or of a letter - is able to produce. By contrast, it is continuity which characterizes revelation, and if the story does admit a loss, it is only in order to compensate for it immediately with a reparation (the thirty pieces of silver). Nevertheless, Judas narrative program is not bursting with an excess of continuity. Quite the contrary. It manages to avoid all the mechanisms of coherence and of cause-effect relationships precisely because it results from the performative *I want* (the desire to show and reveal what he knows) which is able to turn upside down the semantics of the action. There are, in effect, no clear motives for the betrayal, the recompense is not especially large and it is difficult to understand why the priests had to pay him for pointing out a man everyone knew in any case. But it is pre-

⁷ Even the disciples of Emmaus (Luke 24: 13, 31) fail to recognize Jesus who accompanies and converses with them for quite a stretch along the road. Only when Jesus breaks the loaf of bread at supper - once again it is a gesture which leads to recognition - do they "open their eyes and recognize him, but at that moment he becomes invisible to them".

cisely in the break from narrative logic that the discourse frees itself from Peter's precarious orality to insist on the diffusion of writing, which commutes distraction into a system of differences, into games of removal, the opening up of spaces and thus makes every reading into a lengthy task. The work is taken up and put down time and again to fix in the text what is missing: the remains of the body and the letters. The remains of the writing coagulate at the beginning of the Book and anagram the P.N. without sealing it. That which in the several versions of Judas remains implicit will later be made manifest in full awareness by a German mystic of the 17th Century (Angelus Silesius) who places within the signifier game all the possible refractions of the subject of the enunciation, identifying

the graphic sign of the separate (Jah or Jahvé) with the boundlessness of the ego. Precisely and uniquely in the place of the P.N. (a Name which shuts out all else) the expropriation is established (by consenting to everything). The same phoneme (Ja) brings together both fracturing and opening, the *Non-name* of the Other and the Yes of willing, absolute separation and infinite acceptance... (De Certeau 1982: my translation).

The cognitive mechanism of the Passion story therefore organizes a whole series of rules for reading which contain a spiral of paradoxes. The first way of reading indicates that the word is to be recognized only through the sweetness of distraction and the liberty of forgetfulness (Peter and the women), nor can the excess of awareness and will of Judas have any effect. But it is just this reading - or rather, misreading - which imposes on the reader a second, in which what is given precedence is a textual hieroglyphic traced by means of a lapsus which insists on the body of the letter and focuses attention on the P.N.: letting the letter slip away, all that remains is to read Yahvé where Judas is found written. The disappearance of the *dàleth* thus sets in motion a process of refraction and a possible doubling of the monotheistic God which generates a new version of the Judas story which was not foreseen by Borges' theologian. A perversion engraved in the unreversed and limitless diffusion of the signifier.

If the reader follows the metatextual project of Peter and the women they can never arrive at Judas, but the project of Judas denies any distraction from the Logos. The traitor apostle denies, even before himself, the oral story he produces, seeking guarantees for his own existence, insofar as it is a sign, in writing. But no-one - if the winning economy is that of distraction - can any longer guarantee the number of letters necessary to write the Book, not even the letters in the name of God. The name of Judas thus constitutes the *incipit* of a new system of writing,

organized not as the combination of letters and numbers, but as their free and unpredictable falling away, and thus in a totally different way from the Book of the Synagogue whose typographical body did not permit any loss at all, as Feuchtwanger tells us authoritatively:

Six hundred and forty-seven thousand, three hundred and ninety letters were contained in that Book; and those letters have been counted, weighed, examined and recognized one by one. Every letter had been paid for in blood. For each one of them, thousands of men and women had given themselves up to martyrdom. The Book therefore belonged exclusively to them, and in their synagogues, in their most solemn celebrations, they all, the great and the small, the powerful and the enslaved, recalled out loud: Nothing we have, except the Book. (1956: my translation).

It is not to this book that the new system of writing refers - the system which is set up by the body and the name of Judas. Instead, it refers to the Book of the Apocalypse, which makes sense only through a double reading, by the mouth and by the guts, sometimes sweet and sometimes bitter. The *dàleth* is a precarious and unstable slash, which slips away by *clinamen*. Forever escaping, it has something to add at each new reading.

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