The Color of His Hair: Nineteenth-Century Literary Portraits of the Historical Jesus

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In 1830, the English writer Harriet Martineau published a short novel titled *Traditions of Palestine*. Given her trailblazing career as the "first woman sociologist" (Rossi 118), Martineau's recent biographers tend to reserve no more than passing reference to this youthful work from her oeuvre. Martineau nevertheless claimed to "cherish" this "little volume" alongside *Eastern Life* (1847)—a freethinker's travelogue to the Holy Land—above all her other writings. In her *Autobiography* (1877) Martineau recounts how, after reading a German novel set in Palestine a century before Christ, she arrived at the "original suggestion" of "giving a somewhat resembling account of the Jews and their country, under the immediate expectation of the Messiah, and even in his presence" (103). In the anonymous history of genres, Martineau's *Traditions of Palestine* can be recognized as the first of a handful of independent French and Anglo-American works in the 1830s and 1840s that together mark the emergence of the "Jesus novel," a subgenre of historical fiction that continues to enjoy an international readership. Over the second half of the nineteenth century, dozens of Jesus novels were published in Britain, the United States, France, Germany, Spain, Sweden, and (shortly thereafter) Russia.

In this body of fiction, the historical Jesus is transformed into a literary character. The nineteenth-century quest of the historical Jesus has been amply documented in the context of biblical scholarship. Yet there has been little comparative study devoted to the portrayal of the historical Jesus in works of fiction from the same period.[1] The principal authors under consideration in this article—Franz Delitzsch, Lew Wallace, and Ferdinando Petruccelli—each adapted the iconography of Christ to the norms of literary portraiture, in the process extending scholars' quest to a search, however quixotic, for his true image and likeness. This search led all three—by way of the emerging disciplines of archaeology and ethnography—from the plains of modern Palestine to the Christ images of early Christianity. Indeed, among the foremost contributions of nineteenth-century novelists to the larger quest was the development of a race-inflected iconography for the historical Jesus, one in which Semitic, Aryan, and African traits frequently intermingled. At the same time, Delitzsch, Wallace, and Petruccelli had somehow to negotiate the sacral quality of the *imago Christi* within the formal constraints of the literary portrait. In the process, not only was the *imago Christi*, no longer sheltered within the walls of the church, exposed to potential desacralization, but the novel—a secular art form—was refitted as a sanctuary for the sacred. This missing chapter in the

[1] See especially Theodore Ziolkowski 13–26, David Reynolds 123–44, and Uwe Kächler.

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genealogy of the historical Jesus thus also furnishes rich material for reexamining the status of the sacred in the realist novel. At their most daring, literary portraits of the historical Jesus, whether they subvert or reify Christ's divinity, exemplify the weak sacralizing effects of realist prose.

Literary incarnations of Jesus as a character extend at least as far back as the fourth century. In the nineteenth century, authors across Europe and the United States—including Honoré de Balzac, Victor Hugo, Gustave Flaubert, Charles Dickens, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Ivan Turgenev, and Rainer Maria Rilke—gave literary form to the figure of Jesus. What distinguishes the Jesus novel from its predecessors as well as most other varieties of nineteenth-century Jesus fiction and poetry is its reliance on noncanonical sources of information on the era in which he would have lived. From the 1830s onward, it is possible to track a set of formal elements that novelists added to the core *fabula* of the life of Jesus. The realism of the Jesus novel, in strictly formal terms, lies primarily in these supplements. Authors of Jesus novels, like their forerunners in biblical fiction, paraphrased and poetically embellished gospel narrative. In addition, they supplemented the gospel accounts of Jesus's life with extra-biblical narrative as well as with the detail-intensive descriptive sequences central to modern literary realism, including literary landscapes of geographically identifiable locations and literary portraiture based on the likeness and personality of characters. To borrow Wallace's words, authors of Jesus novels first "weigh[ed]" the available testimony of the gospels and then "lighten[ed] it with outside facts" (*Boyhood* 89).

These "facts," moreover, derive overwhelmingly from other texts. Most authors of Jesus novels go out of their way to document their sources in prefaces, footnotes, and appendixes. These sources include the writings of Josephus, noncanonical gospels, Hebrew scriptures, the Talmud, David Strauss's and Ernest Renan's lives of Jesus, and Holy Land travel literature. This intertextual exchange between historical fiction and source criticism becomes intermedial in the case of literary portraiture. Novelists attempting to bring the fruits of modern archeology to bear on the *imago Christi*—among the most widely reproduced and recognizable images in Western art—confronted a mass of iconographic precedent. The long history of the Christ image nevertheless offered few clues, if any, as to what the historical Jesus might have actually looked like. The four gospels are stubbornly silent on this point. Remarkably, authors rarely interpreted this silence as a license to paint the figure of the historical Jesus however they wished. Instead, they sought out the remains of his earliest surviving afterimages. The patristic literature as well as apocryphal legends of the Christ image provided verbal descriptions of Jesus's supposed physical appearance. As for works of visual art, the more ancient they were, the more promise of historicity they held. In this sense, Renaissance Christ images—based on variable human models, not a common prototype—proved of limited value. More compelling was the evidence of the Roman catacombs, early Christian mosaics, and Byzantine icons, all of which were undergoing a process of rediscovery from the 1840s onward.

Authors of Jesus novels may not have viewed such cult images as authentic portraiture. It is nevertheless conspicuous how often they were drawn specifically to premodern images, both visual and verbal, that purported to preserve Christ's

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true likeness. In contrast to their source materials, nineteenth-century novelists were not in a position to make robust truth claims for their portraiture. Yet the end result was similar: an authoritative likeness. Delitzsch, Wallace, and Petruccelli, as will be seen below, each exploited a potent combination of ancient Christ images and modern race theory to construct literary portraits whose authority extended beyond the realm of the merely literary. It is here that their greatest ideological impact lies, in the service that the real renders to the sacred.

Literary Portraiture and *Der Unbeschreibliche*

In the Jesus novel, the figure most resistant to the encroachment of literary realism is Jesus himself. Early authors of Jesus novels do not depict his body in any physical detail. In Martineau's *Traditions of Palestine*, not a single gospel figure receives a literary portrait. In Charles Beecher's *The Incarnation; or, Pictures of the Virgin and her Son* (1849), written two decades later, the physical appearance of every principal gospel figure but the "Son" is described according to the "strong national peculiarities of the race" (Stowe v). In an introductory essay to the novel, Harriet Beecher Stowe defends her brother's iconographic choices, arguing that the "vague, misty images" that readers habitually have of biblical figures and scenes should give way to an "imagination chastened and guided by accurate knowledge of topographical and historic details" (v). In this call for realism, Stowe makes an exception only for Christ, the "Divine Subject," whom she places under an explicit image ban (iii–vi).[2] Full-fledged literary portraits of the historical Jesus were not long in coming, however, and such prefaces as Stowe's soon evolved into forums for a thoroughly modern iconology, one in which the Word becomes not simply flesh but historical. In the preface to "La Croix d'argent" (1850), Eugène Sue thus insists that his portrait of "the poor carpenter"—with his "golden blond hair" (340)—lies "within the limits of the most rigorous historical reality" (6). Over the second half of the century, novelists gradually filled in the literary portrait of the historical Jesus.

Such literary portraits offer a limit case for reassessing the ambitions of the realist novel in the realm of the sacred. The history of the literary portrait, as an independent descriptive genre, extends from the Theophrastan-type portrait of antiquity to the *portraits précieux* of seventeenth-century French salons and includes a number of genres from classical oratory. By the mid-nineteenth century, literary portraiture, thanks to such masters of the art as Balzac and Dickens, had secured a central place within the novel's heterogeneous discursive structure. In its modern form, the literary portrait can be defined as the verbal description of a character in terms of external physical features, especially the face, and internal personality traits. The first set of signs almost invariably serves as visible indicators for the second. The literary portrait thus functions as portraiture in two crucial senses: as a copy, or likeness, of a person's appearance and as a mirror of the soul.[3] In light

[2] For further discussion of early American literary portraits of Jesus, see Reynolds (128–29).

[3] For the theory and history of the literary portrait, see especially Wendy Steiner (1–26) and Gisela Köhler.

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of these conventions, authors of Jesus novels were faced with a unique challenge at the high end of the literary portraitist's trade: to paint a portrait of sufficient surface brilliance to be adequate to the inner nature of the historical Jesus, a hero for the ages who—depending on the novel in question—may or may not also be divine.

Despite its prevalence in the novel, the literary portrait remains understudied. In 1979, Michael Irwin observed that "every major nineteenth-century novelist attempted physical descriptions of at least some of his characters. [. . .] Yet such passages have attracted little critical attention" (14). As Jeffrey Wallen observes in a 1995 article, the few critics willing to discuss the literary portrait at all generally adopt a "differential and a negative orientation" (59). There are at least two reasons for this critical reticence. First, the literary portrait, as its name suggests, involves the use of one medium as a model for another. Inasmuch as the correspondence between the two is inevitably incomplete, the literary portrait is open to the charge of intermedial misappropriation. In her study of the literary portrait, Wendy Steiner, drawing on Charles Peirce's tripartite semiotic, draws a useful distinction between the "indexical-symbolic" means through which literary portraiture represents its subject matter and the "indexical-iconic" means of portraiture proper (11–12). Literary portraits, in fact, rarely translate well into visual media even at an indexical level, as can be seen in the iconographic parsimony with which multiple film directors have adapted the exhaustively described Christ figure of Wallace's *Ben-Hur*.[4] In the 1899 Broadway production, to note an even more radical departure from the novel, the Nazarene, with Wallace's approval, was represented onstage by no less than a 25,000 candlepower light (Theisen 37). Structural differences between media need not render them incommensurable, however. From the perspective of both iconography and cultural history, one of the strongest reasons for analyzing the literary portrait of the historical Jesus qua portrait lies in the existence of a parallel trend in painting. Noteworthy (and often notorious) examples include Aleksandr Ivanov's *Appearance of Christ to the People* (1857), William Holman Hunt's *Finding of the Saviour in the Temple* (1860), Mihály Munkácsy's *Le Christ devant Pilate* (1881), and James Tissot's cycle *La Vie de Notre Seigneur Jésus-Christ* (1896).[5] Working alongside painters, novelists modernized the *imago Christi* by developing a realist iconography for the historical Jesus.

Second, and more pertinent here, the literary portrait has suffered critical neglect for its seemingly inescapable ties to since-debunked notions of referentiality. Even in their own terms, nineteenth-century literary portraitists of the historical Jesus, faced with a scant and unreliable documentary trail, were not in any position to recover his true likeness. The historical Jesus nevertheless stood much to gain from their portraiture. In laboring to return to an irrevocably lost origin, literary portraitists instead helped confer the mark of the real on a thoroughly modern Christ

4 The directors Fred Niblo and William Wyler adapted *Ben-Hur* in 1925 and 1959, respectively. An earlier 1907 production excluded the Christ subplot altogether.

5 See Ivan Kalmar and Michael Driskel. I also examine such paintings in an article for the forthcoming volume: Jefferson Gatrall and Douglas Greenfield, eds., *Alter Icons: The Russian Icon and Modernity* (Penn State UP).

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type. Crucially, the sacral quality of this Christ type had yet to be established. At midcentury, and especially in the wake of the international furor occasioned by Renan's *Vie de Jésus* (1863),[6] the very concept of a "historical Jesus"—a figure born of secular biblical scholarship, outside the sanction of the major churches—tended to offend mainstream Christian readers as well as self-appointed defenders of the faith in the press. Through the "art of describing," to borrow Svetlana Alpers's apt phrase, novelists proved increasingly instrumental in determining whether the historical Jesus could be recognized as a sacred figure at all. In this sense, the stakes for the literary portraitist were higher than for the merely "blasphemous" caricaturist.[7] Literary portraitists tested the sacral possibilities of the historical Jesus precisely to the extent that they made his unfamiliar figure appear real.

The high stakes of such portraiture are readily apparent in Delitzsch's *Ein Tag in Kapernaum* (*One Day in Capernaum*) (1871). Of all the authors of Jesus novels, few were better qualified than Delitzsch, a Lutheran Hebraicist at the University of Leipzig, to put the descriptive sciences of ethnography and archeology to literary purposes. In *Ein Tag in Kapernaum*, Delitzsch focused his vast expertise on ancient Hebrew society toward the single task of picturing the historical Jesus in the environs of biblical Galilee. This task, as Delitzsch admits, necessarily involves a "mixture of fact and fiction"; thus he combines the "art of the archeologist" with "imagination," which "fills out groundwork research on antiquity and broadens it into pictures of history and customs (*Geschichts- und Sittenbildern*)" (1, 2). *Ein Tag in Kapernaum* is indeed a "picturesque narrative" (*malerische Erzählung*) (*Sehet* vi)—one in which fictional events and characters seem almost incidental alongside erudite disquisitions on landscape and costume. Delitzsch's initial description of Jesus is itself thoroughly annotated:

> *As the early dawn of the Eastern sky began to take on color, a man in a blue* tallith *(cloak) and a pale red tunic descended from the hilly part of the city down through its narrow streets. His countenance was as pale as the sudar covering his chin and brow. The night watchman, when he saw him, stepped reverently aside, trembling all over, as he was met, under a gentle greeting, by the loving yet deeply earnest beam of the other's wondrous eyes. [. . .] He was badly dressed, more poor than noble [. . .].* (31)[8]

Here and elsewhere, Delitzsch devotes special attention to matters of Jesus's dress, taking care that they conform both to available evidence and to the presumed

6 On the reception of *Vie de Jésus*, see Jean-Yves Mollier.

7 Trials over biblical caricatures were occasionally conducted in France and England in the nineteenth century. For one such case, see Joss Marsh 128–62.

8 Als das Morgengrauen des Osthimmels sich bunt zu färben begann, schritt ein Mann in blauem Tallith (Überwurf) und blaßroter Tunica von der Bergseite der Stadt her durch deren enge Gassen. Sein Antliß was so bleich wie das Sudar, welches Kinn und Stirn verhüllte. Der Stadtwächter, als er ihn sah, trat ehrerbietig auf die Seite und erzitterte durch und durch, als ihn unter sanftem Gruße der liebreiche aber tiefernste Strahl seiner wundersamen Augen traf. [. . .] Er war schlicht und eher ärmlich als vornehm gekleidet. (Unless otherwise indicated, translations from nineteenth-century sources are mine.)

character of their beholder. Two footnotes clarify his sources: Jesus wears a tasseled tallith, by which is meant not a contemporary prayer shawl but an ancient cloak worn by scholars; his head is covered with a Talmudic *sudar*, which, it is later revealed, is white (124, 139nn38–39). As for the colors of Jesus's tunic and tallith, Delitzsch, in a later descriptive sequence, settles on red and blue by a sort of ethnographic process of elimination: purple or scarlet would not have fit his low station in life; black, the color of mourning, would not have been appropriate at the wedding of Cana; yellow and green do not occur in "old sources concerning Jewish clothing." Matching the clothes to the inner man, Delitzsch concludes that "the color of his tunic could conceivably have been brown; but no color is better suited than a soft red for the [. . .] coming King. [. . .] When a painter presents Christ carrying the cross in a blue cloak and a red tunic, this corresponds entirely with [. . .] Jesus' nature and calling" (124–25).

This attention to external detail extends to Jesus's speech habits. As Delitzsch explains, "[T]he gospels do not give us any direct information [on this subject], for their interest in the form of Jesus' speeches (*der Form der Reden Jesu*) is subordinate to their interest in their content" (119–20). In *Ein Tag in Kapernaum*, the exact opposite is true: Jesus's parables, for which Delitzsch offers no exegesis, are reduced to matters of philology and rhetoric. As Delitzsch puts it, "[W]e must not measure Jesus' [Semitic] manner of speaking according to our"—that is, "japhetic" or Indo-European—"understanding of rhetoric and homelitics" (119–20). Moreover, Delitzsch's Jesus speaks Hebrew, not Greek, Latin, or Aramaic. This issue, in fact, remained a contentious one among biblical scholars until almost the end of the century. Delitzsch, in addition to translating the gospels into Hebrew, was a major proponent of the theory that Jesus and his disciples spoke Hebrew among themselves (Schweitzer 273). The Hebraic speech interpolated throughout *Ein Tag in Kapernaum* thus represents an un-translation, an attempt to circumvent the mediation of the gospels, written in Greek, so as to hear the very language of the historical Jesus.

For all its ethnographic detail, however, Delitzsch's portraiture is conspicuous for what it leaves out: height, facial features, hair color, and so on. This iconographic restraint contrasts sharply with Delitzsch's expansive literary landscapes. In the late 1860s, Delitzsch traveled along the north shore of the Sea of Galilee in search of the archeological remains of Capernaum, the presumed site of Jesus's early ministry. Throughout *Ein Tag in Kapernaum*, Delitzsch draws liberally from his travel notes, even comparing his on-site descriptions of Galilee with those of Josephus and contemporary archeologists.[9] The body of Jesus nevertheless remains a blind spot on the hills of Delitzsch's Capernaum. By "the evening," Delitzsch feels compelled to cover over this blind spot with a rhetoric of ineffability: "And he himself? How should I describe him, the Indescribable? Youth and manhood, meekness and strength, undiminished powers and nameless sorrows, exalted majesty and gentle humility, all these were wondrously brought together in his countenance

9 The central role of biblical archeology and Holy Land travel literature in the Jesus novel lies beyond the scope of the present article. For nineteenth-century French, British, and American travel literature on Palestine, see especially Edward Said (166–97) and Hilton Obenzinger.

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and bearing" (110–11). Delitzsch here provides a nominalist portrait, that is, a portrait devoid of pictorial detail. Delitzsch's quest for the likeness of the historical Jesus ends where the body begins.

In Delitzsch's portrait, a blue tallith, a red tunic, and a white *sudar* adorn "the Indescribable" (*den Unbeschreiblichen*). These two tendencies toward exacting description and indescribability, seemingly contradictory, participate in the same aesthetic of the sacred: the essence of the literary Jesus lies in his image. In this respect, the Jesus novel conformed to the anthropology of Ludwig Feuerbach, for whom Christ is the "image of images" (77). Indeed, the way that the quest of the historical Jesus was conducted furnished fiction with fertile subject matter for a realist cult of image. Scrupulous attention to archeological and ethnographic detail went hand in hand with literary deference to an image regarded as sacred by a large majority of readers, that is, an image with certain superlative qualities—manifest yet ineffable—that set it apart from the portraitist's staple subject matter. The *imago Christi* enters the novel from the outside. As in all cults of the image, the face of the historical Jesus, no matter how fully individual novelists might describe it, retains the promise of a truth inaccessible to mere words.

In the Jesus novel, problems of christology (who was Christ?) are resolved less in doctrinal terms (what did he mean?) than iconographically (what did he look like?). Each appearance of the itinerant rabbi of Nazareth is an event of considerable moment in the lives of other characters. Delitzsch's night watchman is "spellbound" (*festgebannt*) (31). Many characters convert on first sight. Ben-Hur, for example, becomes a follower on his second encounter: "[T]he ideal of his faith was before him, perfect in face, form, dress, action, age" (440). Even characters who reject him acknowledge his uncanny appeal. In *As Others Saw Him* (1895), by the Anglo-Jewish author Joseph Jacobs, the main hero, a fictional Pharisee, describes the mesmeric effect of Jesus's eyes: "Nor did the effect die away after I had left the synagogue; for days and days afterwards, whenever I closed my eyes [. . .] I could see the eyes of Jesus, and with it his whole face gazing upon me" (41). This is not how Max Weber later defined the concept of "charisma." For Weber, "charismatic authority" is inexplicable from "the aesthetic point of view": "[I]t is recognition on the part of those subject to authority which is decisive for the validity of charisma" (359). In the Jesus novel, by contrast, followers and detractors alike recognize the prophet through the force of his image.

The effects of literary description on the sacred manifest themselves in an exaggerated form in the Jesus novel. In literary portraits of the historical Jesus, there is no incidental or insignificant detail. On the contrary, every detail is potentially a site of the sacred. Description can preserve the sacred or make sacred, desacralize or resacralize. Moreover, the sacralizing effects of description are difficult to gauge beforehand. The sacred is reducible to neither the described object nor the signs or intentions of an author. The sacred instead gathers or recedes in an object according to how an observer describes it; every detail that passes from an object to an observer, or from a description to an object, alters the equilibrium of the sacred. The decision to include physical details in a portrait of the historical Jesus is thus fraught with risk. Not all novelists followed Delitzsch in cloaking their portraiture

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with the ineffable. In Sue's "La Croix d'argent," the crucified body of the "poor carpenter" is all too describable:

> *Jesus, crowned with thorns, his long blond hair glued to his temples by a mixture of blood and sweat, his figure pallid and imprinted with a horrific pain, his lips bluish, as if he were ready to expire at any moment; all the mass of his body weighed on his hands nailed to the cross, as well on his feet, and from where his blood was turning brown; his arms were stiffened by violent, convulsive movement, such that his half-flexed knees were knocking against one another.* (343)

In Dostoevsky's ekphrasis of Hans Holbein's *Der Tote Christus im Grabe* (1521), to cite a better-known example, the precarious status of the sacred in the realist novel is set in stark relief: "[H]is face has been terribly beaten by blows, swollen, covered with terrible swollen and bloody bruises, the eyes open, the pupils turned up, the large open whites of the eyes bright with a sort of deathly, glassy reflection" (*Idiot* 339). In both portraits, the stigmata of Christ become so many metastasizing details through which the sacred dissipates.

In the realm of the sacred, description is a disruptive force. As in ekphrasis, an ancient descriptive genre that likewise flourished anew in the nineteenth-century novel, the literary portrait, among its many other functions, deploys the descriptive mode as a fragile interface with the sacred. Through the incremental corrosiveness of the concrete detail, the realist novel commanded formidable powers of desacralization in the nineteenth century. Yet from such popular religious fiction as *Ben-Hur* and *Ein Tag in Kapernaum* to the more self-reflexive realism of a George Eliot, novelists could also endow their subjects with a weak sacral quality through the careful description of visible surfaces. Time and again nineteenth-century novelists turned to the art of describing to canonize a whole iconography of "Christ-like" secular saints: toiling peasants, abused wives, martyred children, and so on. In this sense, the Jesus novel represents not an exception but a limit case. From midcentury onward, desacralization and resacralization, to a remarkable degree, moved in step with one another as literary portraiture advanced over the body of the historical Jesus.

The Greco-Jewish Jesus

The sacralizing potential of the literary portrait is inseparable from its perceived power to make real. This is particularly clear in matters of ethnography. In becoming historical, Jesus also acquired race. Literary portraitists attempting to improve over parochial Christ images turned frequently to the emergent, descriptive science of ethnography. In tandem with ethnology, its interpretative complement, ethnography focused on nations and peoples in terms of customs, habits, and racial characteristics. In a suggestive art historical parallel, Erwin Panofsky draws on these twin sciences to help differentiate between iconography, a descriptive field, and iconology, an interpretative one (32). In the Jesus novel, where description predominates over interpretation, race emerged as an iconographic problem specific to the historical Jesus as a modern Christ type.

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In contrast to John Milton, Friedrich Klopstock, and the passion play at Oberammergau, Jesus is generally acknowledged as Jewish in nineteenth-century Jesus novels, if often only in name (be that Joshua, Jeschua, Yeshu, etc.). Jesus did not always become more Jewish the more his literary portrait became racialized, however. In Delitzsch's initial literary portrait, quoted above, the Hebraicist elusively describes Jesus's face as being as pale as his *sudar*. The following year, Delitzsch published a brochure-length "Prologue" to his Jesus novel, titled *Sehet welch ein Mensch*! *ein Christusbild* (*Behold the Man! A Christ Image*), in which he offers the following gloss: "The color of his face is whiter than those of the others around him, who have more the bronze faces of their peoples. [. . .] The profile of his face is not exclusively Jewish, but rather one can see in it a mixture of the Jewish and Hellenic types" (5). By a peculiar paradox, Delitzsch's Jesus wears a tallith, speaks Hebrew, uses a Semitic rhetoric, and yet has a white, Hellenic complexion.

As a biblical scholar and part-time writer of fiction, Delitzsch was a key architect of what can be termed the "Greco-Jewish Jesus." This Christ type finds its fullest and most widely disseminated expression in Lew Wallace's *Ben-Hur* (1880), subtitled *A Tale of the Christ*. Wallace's *Ben-Hur* was far and away the bestselling Jesus novel of the century. It sold nearly 400,000 copies in its first ten years alone, went through thirty-six editions before 1900, and has been translated into at least twenty-one languages (Theisen 35, 37). By some counts, it even outsold *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (McKee 174). General Wallace, a civil war hero and former governor of New Mexico, did not claim any authority in matters of doctrine: "[I] am neither minister of the Gospel, nor theologian, nor churchman" (*Boyhood* 9). Working outside the church as an institution, Wallace brought an ethnographic approach to the portrayal of Jesus that was well suited to a realist cult of image. While Wallace later claimed not to have been "influenced by religious sentiment" (*Autobiography* 2:928) in writing *Ben-Hur*, the novel did provoke a deeply religious response in many readers. One reader was so inspired that he became a missionary, while another gave up drinking, writing in a letter to Wallace that *Ben-Hur* "brought Christ home to me as nothing else could" (qtd. in Theisen 36).

Aside from its fabled chariot race, much of *Ben-Hur*'s appeal lay in the authority with which Wallace wrote of distant peoples and places in the Roman Empire. Wallace—whose storied career also included a term as U.S. ambassador to Turkey—proves a capable diplomat in parceling out positive characteristics to the representatives of his novel's many nations. After an opening nativity section, Wallace introduces Ben-Hur and Messala, the novel's hero and villain, through contrasting literary portraits. Both are "handsome" men who have black hair, black eyes, and "deeply browned faces." They might even be taken for brothers; yet to an "observer skilled in the distinctions of race," it is easy to tell which one is Jewish and which Roman. Messala, the taller of the two, has a "high and narrow" forehead, an "aquiline nose," and "thin" lips. Judah has a "low and broad" forehead, a "long" nose with "expanded nostrils," a large upper lip, a "round chin," and "oval cheeks." Messala, "severe and chaste," is beautiful in a Roman way; Judah, "rich and voluptuous," has the "beauty peculiar to his race" (80, 81).

Late in the novel, Wallace extends his ethnographic expertise to the portrayal of the historical Jesus. As in Delitzsch, Jesus in *Ben-Hur* wears an "outer robe called

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the tallith," one with blue and white tassels "as prescribed by law for rabbis." He also carries in his hand the "usual handkerchief for the head" (438). For Delitzsch, this "handkerchief" is a Talmudic *sudar*. In Frederic Farrar's *The Life of Christ* (1874), a popular British biography, it is an Arabic keffiyeh: "He is not bareheaded—as painters usually represent Him—for to move about bareheaded in the Syrian sunlight is impossible, but a white keffiyeh, such as is worn to this day, covers his hair" (1:312). Whether a *sudar*, keffiyeh, or handkerchief, the head covering of the historical Jesus, deemed "usual" by Wallace, is an ethnographic trait, one in which ancient and modern Palestine are almost invariably conflated.

Wallace, who had earlier distinguished Jew from Roman with ethnographic virtuosity, nevertheless remains unable to identify Jesus by race:

> *The head was open to the cloudless light, except as it was draped with hair long and slightly waved, and parted in the middle, and auburn in tint, with a tendency to reddish golden where most strongly touched by the sun. Under a broad, low forehead, under black well-arched brows, beamed eyes dark-blue and large. [. . .] As to the other features, it would have been difficult to decide whether they were Greek or Jewish. The delicacy of the nostrils and mouth was unusual to the latter type; and when it was taken into account with the gentleness of the eyes, the pallor of the complexion, the fine texture of the hair, and the softness of the beard, which fell in waves over his throat to his breast [. . .] never a woman who would not have confided at him at sight, never a child that would not, with quick instinct, have given him its hand and whole artless truth; nor might any one have said he was not beautiful.* (*Ben-Hur* 438–39)

Like his compatriot Ben-Hur, Jesus has a broad, low forehead. Within the parameters of nineteenth-century race theory, this single detail does represent an advance in the direction of ethnic otherness over midcentury American Jesus novels. In Joseph Ingraham's *The Prince of the House of David* (1855), for example, Jesus has a "high forehead" that looks "like a throne" (296), a mark of phrenological excellence. In *Ben-Hur*, where foreheads are frequently noted, Roman characters have high and narrow ones, while those of Jewish characters are "broad of base and domelike" (172). Aside from Jesus's forehead, however, little else in Wallace's portrait corresponds with the "beauty peculiar" to Ben-Hur's "race." Using a syntax that obfuscates more than it clarifies, Wallace hints that Jesus's "Greek" complexion—which he elsewhere identifies as "white" (203)—lies in his "pallor," the "delicacy" of his nose and mouth, and the "fine texture" of his "auburn" hair (438–39). These traits also seemingly account for his indisputable beauty.

Wallace's Greco-Jewish Jesus represents a diplomatic compromise between two emerging racial types in nineteenth-century biblical scholarship. The problem surrounding Jesus's race was, at least in part, a side product of the quest of the historical Jesus. Among the first casualties of the quest were all gospel claims about Jesus's Judean birth and genealogy. Matthew opens with a patrilinear genealogy demonstrating Jesus's direct descent from David, a king of the tribe of Judah. His birthplace in Matthew and Luke is Bethlehem, the city of David. Such nineteenth-century biblical scholars as David Strauss had nevertheless exposed the mythic underpinnings of the gospel accounts of Jesus's infancy. In his sensational best-

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seller *Vie de Jésus* (1863), Renan declares that "Jesus was born at Nazareth, a small town of Galilee" (19), the region where he also spent most of his public ministry.

In other words, the historical Jesus is Galilean, not Judean. This ethnographic distinction was potentially significant. In Renan's widely cited view, Galilee "included among its inhabitants, in the time of Jesus, many who were non-Jews (Phoenicians, Syrians, Arabs, and even Greeks). Conversions to Judaism were not at all rare in mixed countries of this sort. It is thus impossible here to raise any question of race, or to investigate what blood flowed in the veins of him who has most contributed to effacing distinctions of blood in humanity" (22). Yet Renan's own effacing of Jesus's ties to the tribe of Judah already begs the question of race. As Maurice Olender demonstrates, Renan's five-volume history of early Christianity did much to legitimize the racial opposition between "Aryans" and "Semites" in biblical scholarship (51–81). The presence of Greeks in Galilee after Alexander made it possible that Jesus had been part Aryan. Certainly Wallace and Delitzsch thought along these lines. In the Jesus novel, as in biblical scholarship, demythologization cleared the ground for the emergence of new myths.

As often as not, moreover, these new myths arose from the ashes of the old. For Albert Schweitzer, the nineteenth-century quest of the historical Jesus represented the epitome of "negative theology": "There is nothing more negative than the result of the critical study of the 'life of Jesus'" (478). In a similar manner, authors of Jesus novels regularly questioned the reliability of traditional Christ images. Here they followed the lead of such secular scholarship on the early Christ image as Wilhelm Grimm's "Die Sage vom Ursprung der Christusbilder" ("Legends of the Origin of the Christ Image") (1842) and Adolphe Napoléon Didron's *Iconographie chrétienne: Histoire de Dieu* (*Christian Iconography: History of God*) (1843). At the same time, in the virtual absence of portrait-style depictions of Christ from the first centuries of Christianity, authors had little choice but to return to known legends and cult images. Most important, the doubtful value of a given source did not greatly diminish the authority with which novelists were able to infuse their own portraiture.

In *The Boyhood of Christ* (1889), first published in the 1886 Christmas issue of *Harper's Magazine*, Wallace, or rather his fictional persona Uncle Midas, provides a revealing family lesson in source criticism. As Uncle Midas explains to his nieces and nephew on Christmas Eve, the "authors of the four canonical Gospels were not biographers in the modern sense of the word": "In their great anxiety to get large facts set down imperishably they overlooked the small. For example, so the Sermon on the Mount was reported, of what importance was it to them to tell of the Master's appearance? and whether he had blue eyes or black, or was fair or dark, or tall or short, or lean or fat?" The silence of the gospels on Christ's childhood between the ages of two and twelve nevertheless led "men of sanctity" to write later apocryphal texts—including the so-called Arabic Infancy Gospels, which Uncle Midas subjects to withering critique—in the hopes of supplying the "missing data" (35–36). No sooner does Uncle Midas reject such spurious sources, however, than he paints his own speculative portrait of the twelve-year-old Jesus:

> *The boy's face comes to me very clearly. I imagine him by the roadside on a rock which he has climbed, the better to see the procession winding picturesquely through the broken country. His head is raised in an effort at far sight. The light of an intensely brilliant sun is upon his countenance, which in general cast is oval and delicate. Under the folds of the handkerchief I see the forehead, covered by a mass of sunburnt blond hair, which the wind has taken liberties with and tossed into tufts [. . .].* (92–93)

As the opening lines of this lengthy portrait suggest, Wallace does commit himself on the true color of Jesus's otherwise "sunburnt" hair.

Wallace's choice of hair color—a slightly darker "auburn" for the adult Jesus in *Ben-Hur*—is not an arbitrary one. On the contrary, Wallace relies on a readily identifiable source for his portraiture: the apocryphal Letter of Lentulus to the Roman Senate. In *Ben-Hur*, Jesus is "Greek or Jewish" to the extent that Lentulus's letter accommodates either "type." This Latin text, medieval in origin, is traditionally attributed to Publius Cornelius Lentulus, Pontius Pilate's supposed predecessor. According to Lentulus, Jesus has "bluish-gray eyes," an "abundant beard," and a "smooth brow"; his hair is the color of "ripe hazel-nut" and parted in the middle, "after the pattern of the Nazarenes" (in Dobschütz 2:319). These details closely match those in Wallace's literary portrait: "eyes dark-blue and large," "[auburn] hair [. . .] parted in the middle," and so on (*Ben-Hur* 438). Wallace even transfers the "wine-reddened" cheeks of Lentulus's Christ to his hero Ben-Hur (80). Lentulus, like Wallace after him, also ends his description with a formulaic statement on Jesus's attractiveness: "He is the most beautiful among the children of men" (Dobschütz 2:319). Most conspicuously, Wallace turns his source's "faultless nose and mouth" (*nasi et oris nulla prorsus [est] reprehensio*) (*in* Dobschütz 319) into a Greek "delicacy of the nostrils and mouth," which he emphasizes "was unusual to the [Jewish] type" (Ben-Hur 439). Far from drawing directly on his ethnographic expertise, therefore, Wallace superimposes ethnography onto a portrait derived from an apocryphal text. In *The Boyhood of Christ*, Wallace rejects one set of apocryphal texts; in *Ben-Hur*, he borrows from another. Wallace's two Jesus novels exemplify the complementary forces of desacralization and resacralization at work within the realist cult of image.

Delitzsch opts instead for Abgar's cloth. According to this second apocryphal tradition, which dates from the fourth century, King Abgar V of Edessa,[10] having heard of Christ's miraculous powers, writes a letter to him about his failing health. In later variants, King Abgar also sends his messenger Hannan, a portraitist, to copy the image of Christ's face. After Hannan proves inadequate to the task, Jesus wipes his face with the canvas, leaving his imprint as a perfect copy, which Hannan dutifully takes back to Abgar. In the sixth century, this cloth was "rediscovered" in Edessa and, three centuries later, relocated to Constantinople. Crucially, the Edessa cloth long served as the prototype for Byzantine portrait icons of Christ. Even after the original Edessa cloth was lost in 1204, the *mandylion* (holy cloth) was thus preserved through countless icons, or copies, across Chris-

10 The historical Abgar ruled Osroene from 14 to 50 CE. Abgar IX (179–214) is regarded as the first Christian ruler.

tendom. In a footnote in *Sehet welch ein Mensch!* Delitzsch draws on this tradition to justify his Greco-Jewish Jesus: "Traditional Christ images (*Christusbilder*) lack historical authenticity, yet their inventions were guided by a correct feeling inasmuch as they did not give him a specifically Jewish physiognomy. Both the image that [Jesus] himself is supposed to have sent to King Abgar as well as the image in the *Cimeterio Pontiano* in the Roman catacombs have Greek profiles" (29).

In addition to Abgar's cloth, Delitzsch here alludes to a Greek portrait icon from the catacombs. In the nineteenth century, numerous Byzantine-style Christ images were known to exist in the catacombs, including several in the catacomb of Pontianus, located along the via Portuense south of Rome. These images were not necessarily as old as their surroundings, however. From the fourth to the ninth centuries, the state church turned many catacombs into shrines. As a result, the Greek or Byzantine Christ type descended from above into subterranean Rome. Giovanni Battista de Rossi, the guiding force behind the midcentury rediscovery of the catacombs, argued that Christ images "which could be called iconographic" are "extremely rare among the most ancient paintings" of the catacombs (2:359–60).

Be that as it may, Wallace and Delitzsch followed well-established iconographic precedent in turning to apocryphal legends of the Christ image as source material. The legends of Lentulus's letter, Abgar's cloth, and Veronica's veil each evolved in complex relation with actual images. Lentulus's letter, whose oldest extant version dates to a thirteenth-century Italian manuscript, helped consolidate existing iconographic norms for portrait icons of Christ in Western Europe. According to the legends that accompanied them, Abgar's cloth and Veronica's veil—which were enshrined in Constantinople and Rome, respectively—were images not-made-by-hand (*acheiropoietos*). As such, they were perfect imprints of the True Face. Without explicitly giving credence to such legends and cult images, authors of Jesus novels used them to construct and authenticate their own literary portraits. Wallace, as if an icon painter, replicates a verbal portrait of medieval origin. Delitzsch instead stitches together three sources to close the nineteen-century gap between the historical Jesus and his own *Christusbild*: the legend of Abgar's cloth, which authenticates the *mandylion* as the True Face; a supposed catacomb fresco of Christ, which corroborates the existence of a Greek type as early as the fourth century; and the Byzantine *mandylion* itself, which survives to the present through its copies.

Aside from Wallace and Delitzsch, legends of the Christ image were often rehearsed and debunked in the Jesus novel. In Enrique Pérez Escrich's *El Mártir del Gólgota*, published in Madrid in 1863, Veronica receives the likeness of Christ in the manner prescribed by tradition. As Jesus walks past her on his way to the cross, Seraphia gives him a cloth to wipe his face: "Seraphia, from this day, I bid thee change thy name to that of *Veronica*, for in thy hands have I left *my true image*" (*The Martyr of Golgotha* 2:318–19). The renaming of Seraphia and the etiological pun on "Veronica," or *vera icona* in Latin, are staple elements of the legend. In his novel's introduction, Pérez Escrich writes that he has studied "the Holy Scripture, the ancient customs of the Hebrews, and the traditions of the orient" but that he has not "discarded" any "dogmas" (1:vii). His Jesus novel is thus as Catholic in spirit as Sue's "La Croix d'argent" is anticlerical. In Sue's version of the same legend,

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Veronique wipes the "face of the poor martyr" with her "linen cloth." Rather than leaving her with an imprint of his face, however, Jesus thanks her with a "smile of celestial goodness" (339). Sue—desacralizing and resacralizing by turn—erases the miraculous cloth only to replace it with his own beatific literary portrait.

In *Christusbilder: Untersuchungen zur christliches Legende* (*Christ Images: Investigations on Christian Legends*) (1899), Ernst von Dobschütz undertook the monumental task of compiling all these legends of the Christ image. As Dobschütz explains in his foreword, he had begun by studying the Lentulus legend and then progressed to Veronica's veil and Abgar's cloth. He soon found himself overwhelmed with the sheer number of variants. As he wished to avoid "dilettantism," Dobschütz devoted himself to cataloguing these variants while abstaining from analysis of their historical significance: "Legends are called unreal, unhistorical, it's true; but at the same time legend is often a historical force, one whose reality under certain circumstances can be made unpleasantly palpable" (1:viii). Wallace and Delitzsch exploited such legends to coat their racially mixed literary portraits with a veneer of historical truth. In doing so, they contributed indirectly to the viability of the Aryan Jesus as an emerging Christ type. The concept of the Aryan Jesus was first articulated by Johann Fichte at the beginning of the nineteenth century. By the end of the century, the Aryan Jesus had become a decidedly unpleasant figure. In 1899, the same year that Dobschütz published his monograph, Houston Stewart Chamberlain's *Die Grundlagen neunzehnten Jahrhunderts* (*Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*) sparked widespread public debate over the Aryan Jesus for the first time in Germany.[11] For Chamberlain, an Anglo-German publicist, the Semitic races were "astonishingly poor in religious instinct": "In the case of the Jew, what Darwin calls 'arrest of development' has taken place" (1:221). Dobschütz's judicious, scholarly approach to apocryphal Christ legends could hardly compete at the bookstore with Chamberlain's grand narrative of Aryan civilization.

The Greco-Jewish Jesus is distinct from the Aryan Jesus. As opposed to Delitzsch's and Wallace's racially mixed Greco-Jewish Jesus, Chamberlain argued that there was a "not a drop of real Jewish blood" (1:220) in Jesus's veins. Both the Greco-Jewish and the Aryan Jesus are nevertheless products of the same quest. Indeed, the lines between fiction and scholarship became increasingly fluid as both figures gained in popularity. In *Ein Tag in Kapernaum*, translated into English in 1887, Delitzsch provided the modern equivalent of an icon painter's manual for the historical Jesus. His authoritative *Christusbild* made its way into Farrar's *The Life of Christ* (1874): "His features are paler and of a more Hellenic type than the weather-bronzed and olive-tinted faces of the hardy fishermen who are His Apostles" (1:313). Farrar's *The Life of Christ*, translated into multiple languages, in turn became source material for authors and painters as far apart as Lew Wallace in the United States and Vasily Polenov in Russia.

In public life, Delitzsch was an acknowledged authority on ancient Hebrew society and an outspoken opponent of anti-Semitism. Yet he was also the founder of the *Institutum Judaicum* in Leipzig, an organization dedicated to converting Jews to Christianity. Delitzsch's partial hebraicizing of the historical Jesus in *Ein Tag in*

[11] For the roots of the Aryan Jesus in Nazi theology, see Susannah Heschel.

Kapernaum reflects his conflicting loyalties as a scholar and a proselytizer. In the same footnote from *Sehet welch ein Mensch!* Delitzsch rationalizes his Greco-Jewish Jesus as follows: "[W]hile [Jesus] was certainly Jewish and born within the limits of the Jewish national character, yet in his outward appearance [. . .] his sublimity expressed itself over the natural peculiarities of the Jewish nationality. One must see in him not just a rabbi but a teacher of humanity—the 'Son of Man'" (29). In short, Delitzsch appeals to Jesus's universal humanity in order to erect a racial divide between his "white" complexion and the "bronze" faces of his followers.

In the case of *Ben-Hur*, finally, Wallace's portrait of the historical Jesus even proved capable of underwriting full-blown modern apocrypha. In 1884, a certain W. D. Mahan from Missouri published the "archeological writings of the Sanhedrim," including documents from the "trial of Jesus," which he claimed a German colleague had discovered in Istanbul at the former Church of Saint Sophia (then still a mosque). These trial notes, known as the *Archko Volume* Mahan et al.), contained a firsthand description of Jesus from Gamaliel, one of his judges: "His hair is [. . .] golden [. . .] though it is as much from sunburn as anything else. [. . .] His eyes are large and a soft blue" (92). Wallace, by that point ambassador to Turkey, obtained permission from Sultan Abdul Hamid I to determine whether the alleged Saint Sophia documents in fact existed. After consulting the mosque's library, Wallace pronounced the *Archko Volume* a hoax. Ironically, it seems that Mahan had himself cribbed from *Ben-Hur* in putting the volume together (Goodspeed 39–44). Certainly Gamaliel's literary portrait, down to Jesus's sunburnt hair, bears an uncanny resemblance to the one that Wallace made famous.

The ease with which the Greco-Jewish Jesus moves between fiction, on the one hand, and scholarship and even apocrypha, on the other, exemplifies the consecratory powers of literary portraiture in matters of the sacred. In *Ben-Hur*, the historical Jesus, in receiving all the descriptive trappings of the real, becomes more sacred, not less so. Through his literary portraiture, Wallace thus not only placed the parochial blond-haired, blue-eyed Christ on the authoritative ground of modern ethnography; he also did more than most of his contemporaries to establish the historical Jesus, a new and contentious Christ type, as a viable sacred figure for modernity.

Le Christ laid

Nineteenth-century authors of diverse religious persuasion—from Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox churchgoers to observant Jews and self-identified atheists—produced literary portraits of the historical Jesus. Yet regardless of an author's religious affiliation, the Jesus novel remains a secular genre. In the nineteenth century, secularism, as a self-contained ideology, gained traction in Western Europe and the United States as an alternative to the Christian worldview. In Christian Latin of the late medieval period, however, the term *sæcularis* (etymologically, "generation" or "age") referred simply to the world as opposed to the church. Thus there were the ordained clergy, who lived in cloisters, and the secular clergy (*cleris sæculum*), who lived in society. That such semantic nuances as nonsacred and nonreligious have attached themselves to the word *secular* not only testifies to the dominance of

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the church in defining Christian practice but also presents certain challenges for literary studies of religious fiction. In the Jesus novel, the same descriptive strategies for desacralizing the *imago Christi* can be mobilized to resacralizing effect. Such oscillation, whether within a single work or between different ones, calls into question the secularization hypothesis that—as prefigured in Georg Lukács and Erich Auerbach and explicitly formulated in Ian Watt[12]—informs many of the classic twentieth-century accounts of the realist novel. In broad terms, literary realism does correlate well with the secular and the modern, but not necessarily in the direction of an irreversible "transcendental homelessness" (Lukács 41).

Taken in a more limited sense as a process of displacement, secularization nevertheless retains considerable heuristic value. Popular Christian rituals have always existed outside the walls of the universal, or catholic, church (*katholike ekklesia*). In his groundbreaking *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, Hans Belting demonstrates that Christian cult images derive their source of power from sacred rites ultimately foreign to the "church's institutions": "Rather than introducing images, theologians were all too ready to ban them. Only after the faithful had resisted all such efforts against their favorite images did theologians settle for issuing conditions and limitations governing access to them. Theologians were satisfied only when they could 'explain' the images" (1). The nineteenth-century turn to the Jesus of history on the part of secular scholars, painters, and novelists likewise corresponded with the revival of a popular cult of the *imago Christi*. In the Jesus novel, this cult of image is literally secular in the sense that—with rare exceptions, such as Sunday school readings[13]—it had no liturgical or doxological function within any existing church. The secular nature of the Jesus novel did not preclude the sacred. On the contrary, the ancient *imago Christi* migrates to the novel, a modern art form, with its own sacral reserves.

This remains true even in novels in which the face of the historical Jesus becomes utterly desacralized. In *Les Mémoires de Judas* (1867), Ferdinando Petruccelli della Gattina portrays the historical Jesus as a flawed prophet who is dark complexioned and physically unattractive. By way of conclusion, this rare fictional example of an "ugly Christ" underscores the extent to which desacralization and resacralization belong to the same realist intervention into the realm of the sacred. An Italian journalist, writer, and parliamentarian, Petruccelli had a storied career in European revolutionary politics. He participated in the Revolution of 1848 in Naples, spent periods of exile in Paris and London, and was a Communard of 1871. He wrote *Les Mémoires de Judas* in 1867 and three years later translated it into his native Italian. Petruccelli's well-researched novel may never have achieved the influence of *Ein Tag in Kapernaum* or the sales of *Ben-Hur*, yet as the posthumous publication of Portuguese (1925) and German (1953) editions attest, neither has *Les Mémoires de Judas* fallen into literary oblivion, as have many lesser Jesus novels. Petruccelli, a

[12] See Lukács (103) and Auerbach (502–24). Watt cites both critics in accounting for the novel's "profound secularisation" (80–85).

[13] Paul Gutjahr notes that *Ben-Hur* became popular reading in U.S. Sunday schools (61).

provocateur of modernist sensibility, can be credited with writing the first Jesus novel from the point of view of Judas.[14]

Among nineteenth-century authors of Jesus novels, Petruccelli also proved the most daring in portraying the ugly Christ. In addition to legends and cult images, novelists in search of the likeness of the historical Jesus often turned to two basic Christ types from the writings of the church fathers: the beautiful Christ and the ugly Christ. Here, as elsewhere, their efforts paralleled those of contemporary archeologists. Didron, for example, reserves a large role for the patristic literature in compiling a "History of the Portraits of the Son of God." In *Iconographie chrétienne: Histoire de Dieu*, Didron speculates on the interaction between early Christian artists and the "agitated" debates among church fathers over Christ's physical appearance: "Since the writers and theologians were divided, artists as well must have fallen into two camps; the one composed of partisans of ugliness, and the other partisans of beauty" (272). Partisans on each side emphasized opposing aspects of Christ's dual nature: "[F]or the first group, the ugly Christ (*le Christ laid*) was a man; for the second, the beautiful Christ was a God. [. . .] The bearded Jesus, this is the ugly Christ of the Fathers of the Asian and especially the African Churches; the beardless Jesus, this is the Christ of the Fathers of the Latin Church and of all our Occident" (275–76). Concerning modern artists of the Occident, Didron speaks approvingly of their preference for the "blond hair" and "blue eyes" of the "beautiful type" (269).

In the nineteenth-century Jesus novel, where one finds many more beautiful Christs than ugly ones, echoes of this ancient debate abound. Delitzsch, for instance, cites Psalm 45:2 in which the King of Korah is praised as "the most beautiful son of man" (*Sehet* vi): the "description of the Messiah" (*Schilderung des Messias*) in the Old Testament is "like a mirror-image of the appearance of Jesus, like an echo of the gospels" (*Tag* 123–24). Delitzsch thus concurs with John Chrysostom, who argues in a fourth-century commentary that Psalm 45 "was composed with Christ in mind" (1:257). In *The Prince of the House of David*, Ingraham instead offers a cautious portrait of the ugly Christ. The rabbi Gamaliel reassures the followers of the melancholy "Messias" that his "marred" face has support in the Prophets. On the instruction of Gamaliel, Adina, the novel's heroine, reads the "words of Esaias"—that is, Isaiah 53:2—from a "role of parchment": "He hath no form nor comeliness: and when we shall see him there is no beauty that we should desire him" (122–24). Ingraham is here rehearsing a patristic typology slightly older than that of the beautiful Christ. As Tertullian puts it in his anti-docetist treatise *De Carne Christi Libre* [*On the Flesh of Christ*], written in the year 206, men "despised his outward appearance, so far was his body from being of human comeliness, not to speak of celestial glory" (37–39).

In *Les Mémoires de Judas*, Petruccelli's eponymous hero "corroborates" (211n1) this latter view. In between romantic dalliances with Mary Magdalene, Pilate's wife, and Jesus's sister Ida, Judas meets with temple priests and underworld conspirators in order to plan a revolt against the Romans in Jerusalem. It is decided that a

14 Early Jesus novels based on Judas's point of view include James W. T. Hart's *An Autobiography of Judas* (1884) and Leonid Andreev's *Iuda Iskariot* (1907).

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prophet is needed, and Judas is dispatched to Galilee to coax Jesus to descend from the north. Halfway through his memoirs, Judas sees "le rabbi de Nazareth" for the first time at a Capernaum synagogue:

> *The new reader was a man of about thirty years of age, of average height, agile, and thin. He had a bilious and swarthy hue, a black, pointed beard, and black hair as well, parted away from the face in the manner of the Galileans and falling back in long curls. His forehead, a little low in its anterior part, was enlarged toward the temples. There was little remarkable in his figure save for his slightly accentuated cheekbones and lightly curved nose. A moustache covered his thin and discolored lips; his large mouth was raised at the corners; and his teeth were the color of ivory. All this would have been vulgar, had not his large black eyes—which, under his bushy eyebrows almost joined above the nose, were powerful, mellow, voluptuous, or flashing with bursts of willfulness, and never ceased to be illuminated by his mobile physiognomy—changed according to every inner thought or passion that moved him.* (210–11)[15]

Petruccelli operates within the same iconographic parameters as do Delitzsch and Wallace, yet with very different results. Judas, himself a Judean aristocrat, finds the lower-class Galilean rabbi to be somewhat vulgar in appearance. In a footnote, Petruccelli observes that Judas "corroborates the opinion of Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Origen"—that is, the fathers of the African Church in Didron's typology—"who give Jesus a figure more ugly than beautiful and a disagreeable exterior" (211n1). Judas mitigates his portrait of the ugly Christ only in the case of Jesus's "large black eyes," which preserve their charismatic force until the novel's closing lines. In *Les Mémoires de Judas*, the eyes of the historical Jesus, even when he himself is neither beautiful nor divine, thus remain a last bastion of charisma against the desacralizing effects of literary realism.

In the same footnote, Petruccelli dismisses Lentulus's "famous portrait" as a pious fraud. As Petruccelli argues, there never was such a person as Lentulus, the predecessor of Pilate being "Valerius Gratus, from the year 14 to 25." Yet Petruccelli relies on Lentulus for his own portraiture no less than Wallace does. Most conspicuously, Jesus (in Judas's words) has hair "parted after the manner of the Galileans." The substitution of "Galilean" for "Nazarene" is telling. Petruccelli generalizes "Nazarene"—commonly identified as a religious sect—to the entire region within which the town of Nazareth is located. In other words, parted hair becomes an ethnographic trait particular to Galileans as a whole. Petruccelli, like Wallace, also

15 Le nouveau lecture était un homme d'une trentaine d'année, de taille ordinaire, agile et maigre. Il avait le teint bilieux et basané, la barbe noire, coupée en pointe, les cheveux, noirs également, partagés sur le front à la façon des Galiléens et rejetés en arrière en longues boucles. Son front, un peu bas dans sa patrie antérieure, s'élargissait vers les tempes. On ne voyait de sa figure que les pommettes un peu accentuées et le nez légèrement courbé. La moustache couvrait ses lèvres minces et décolorées, sa bouche large relevée aux coin et ses dents de la couleur de l'ivoire. Tout cela eût été vulgaire, si de grands yeux noirs, aux sourcils épais et presque joints sur le haut du nez, au regard puissant, velouté, voluptueux, doux ou chargé d'éclairs à sa volonté, n'eussent illuminé sa physiognomie mobile, changeant selon la pensée ou la passion intérieure qui l'agitait.

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introduces mixed racial traits into his literary portrait. In *Les Mémoires de Judas*, Jesus has black hair, a black beard, and black eyes. At least three other traits—his "swarthy" complexion, "ivory teeth," and "lightly curved nose"—are racially over-coded. In an echo of Renan's view of Galilee, Judas later argues that Jesus's chosen role as a "universal Savior" represents a "type not realizable in the mixed countries under the domination of Herod's descendents" (267). In the Jesus novel, beauty and ugliness tend to be stratified across an ethnographic continuum. Petruccelli reinforces the conventional coincidence of physical beauty and European ethnicity even as he provocatively insists on Jesus's racial otherness.

In short, Petruccelli's unattractive, dark-complexioned, racially ambiguous Jesus derives from the same finite set of cult images and ethnographic models as does Wallace's beautiful, pallid Greco-Jewish one. Thus it is not that one novelist or the other represents the historical Jesus in a more realistic manner. Rather, Petruccelli and Wallace exploit the descriptive resources of literary realism for different ends. In *Les Mémoires de Judas*, Petruccelli carries the desacralizing potential of realism to its humanist limit. Jesus is no more than a man—and a tragically flawed one, at that. In *Ben-Hur,* Wallace, even as he sidesteps the sticky issue of the Christ's divinity, employs a wealth of concrete detail to resacralize the image of the historical Jesus. For Wallace, too, Jesus "was, in all the stages of his life, a human being" (*Boyhood* 9).

Through the techniques of literary portraiture, Delitzsch, Wallace, and Petruccelli consecrated the historical Jesus—a Christ type of recent origin—with the mark of the real for an international readership. In the process, they also tapped into the wellspring of the sacred within the *imago Christi*. As with later films, from Cecil B. DeMille's *King of Kings* (1927) and Pier Pasolini's *Gospel* (1964) to Martin Scorsese's *Last Temptation of Christ* (1988) and Mel Gibson's *Passion* (2004), the Jesus novel, through its volatile intermingling of the real and the sacred, possessed a remarkable ability to provoke polarizing audience response; different novels could incite either righteous indignation or near-revivalist passions. From the mid-nineteenth century onward, such authors as Sue and Petruccelli siphoned off the sacred from the Jesus of history through all the blemishes on his body. They were in the minority, however. Bringing the fruits of secular scholarship into harmony with the sacral quality of the *imago Christi*, Delitzsch, Wallace, and dozens of other novelists across Europe and the United States worked to make Jesus real before the eyes of the faithful in a way that even the Bible—sacred, irreplaceable, but antiquated—no longer could. The impact of literary realism in matters of religion cuts both ways. In the end, the question of whether the historical Jesus was actually God was of less importance to literary portraitists than the mystique of realism, which placed its equivocal powers of consecration at the service of his human image.

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