

Tribhuvan University

Deconstructing Religious Status Quo in Jerome Bixby's *The Man from Earth*

A Thesis Submitted to the Central Department of English,
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts in English

By
Mangil Ghimire

Central Department of English

Kirtipur, Kathmandu

September 2023

Letter of Approval

This thesis entitled "Deconstructing Religious Status Quo in Jerome Bixby's *The Man from Earth*" submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University by Mangil Ghimire has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

Members of the Research Committee

Prof. Jib Lal Sapkota, Ph.D.
Internal Examiner

Lecturer Mahesh Paudyal
External Examiner

Prof. Jib Lal Sapkota, Ph.D.
Head
Central Department of English

Date: _____

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my respected teacher Prof. Dr. Jib Lal Sapkota for his invaluable supervision of this thesis. This thesis could never have come into this form without his kind guidance, constructive comments and suggestions.

I am grateful to Prof. Dr. Jib Lal Sapkota, Head of the Central Department of English, T.U., Kirtipur, for granting me an opportunity to carry out this research. Likewise I would like to express my gratitude to my respected teachers Prof. Dr. Anirudra Thapa, Dr. Komal Phuyal, Pradip Raj Giri other teachers for their invaluable suggestion for carrying out this research on Jerome Bixby's *The Man from Earth*.

Furthermore, I would like to express my sincere thanks to the participants of this study for their enthusiastic involvement and for sharing their valuable insights and experiences.

I would also like to express my deep appreciation to my family and friends for their unwavering support, encouragement, and motivation during my academic pursuit. Their constant support has been a tremendous source of strength for me. I am thankful to the entire Central Department of English family for their assistance with the administrative formalities.

Lastly, I would like to acknowledge all those individuals who have contributed to the success of this research project in various ways. Your invaluable support has been indispensable in completing this project.

September, 2023

Mangil Ghimire

Abstract

This thesis tries to explore the religious status quo that is prevalent in Bixby's The Man from Earth. The portrayal of Christ in this film differs from the generally known concept of biblical Christ. The movie has emphasized on the issues related to the whole western Christian tradition and myths. By questioning the religious orthodoxy, iconoclastic views and the origin of biblical Christ, this thesis tries to put forward, Deconstructing Religious Status Quo. With the help of books, anthologies and academic works written on the very topic this thesis tries to analyze the portrayal of the figure of Jesus in the film. By portraying Jesus as a sage and healer from east who learned the practices from Tibetan Monks this thesis tries to simplify and deconstruct the religious status quo. The iconoclastic approach has helped in deconstructing the status quo and dismantling the truthfulness and historical authenticity. In contrary to what has been assumed in the movie, facts speaks that the portrayal of the character in the movie is more inclined to show that the Jesus is non other than a common man with more than average knowledge.

Key words: religion, myth, orthodoxy, biblical Christ figure, status quo

Jerome Bixby, in his film *The Man from Earth*, has taken the biblical story of the New Testament in order to cast it in the film with post-modern sense. This film deconstructs the Christian status quo with certain questions, which are frequently raised in the plot. This is a 2007 American science fiction film directed by Richard Schenkman. It stars David Lee Smith as John Oldman, the protagonist of the film. The film garnered its recognition for being widely distributed through Internet networks. The film was later adapted by Schenkman into a stage play with the same name. The plot focuses on John Oldman, a departing university professor, who has secretly survived for more than 14,000 years. The whole movie is set in and around Oldman's house during his farewell. The plot moves forward through intellectual arguments between Oldman and his fellow faculty members. During that discussion, various issues go beyond the Christian myths, Bible, Jesus Christ and prevailing Western Christian tradition as this research project claims.

The Bible is one of the most important books for the entire Western world. This book is the foundation of Christianity, which is one of the most widespread world religions. This has been the most widely used foundation for the Western literature as a whole. It is believed that, "*The Bible* was foundational for the Western literary canon, and so persists, post-Christendom, as the text that is most widely alluded to in Western literature" (Wright 7). Biblical stories and figures do not have only religious importance; they are already an integral part of Christian people's lives and cultures. Biblical statements and characters have become part of their language over time, whether in the form of interjections and swearing, comparisons (like a pillar of salt), but also archetypes for various situations (Judas – traitor, Doubting Thomas, washing hands of the matter, the first to throw stones). In particular the New Testament story of Jesus Christ became the subject of many artworks, paintings, portraits, poems, songs and novels. In this enumeration, of course, the media typical of the twentieth century, film and television cannot be ignored. It is important to note that this story

occurs almost in every genre. Christianity has maintained a status in the Western societies. This very status quo has been dismantled by the film *The Man from Earth*.

This thesis presents the idea that it is important for the commercial success of the film to stand out, to differentiate itself, to attract attention, whether positive or negative. While doing so, the film deconstructs the ideological status maintaining trend too. The Bible story of Jesus Christ is the ideal theme - most of the Western world knows the story. The creator of the film that I've selected for analysis in my thesis used this 'greatest story ever told' to show it in a different light, with specific approach, using various types of narratives and changes in the original Biblical story.

Religion in the movies from the beginning of the film era, from silent films to contemporary cinema with Hollywood blockbusters and independent movies, religion has always been a popular topic for the cinema. "Already in the first five years of its existence, the new art form (cinematography) produced at least six films, all brief, as were all films in those early days, whose subject was the life and passion of Jesus the Christ" (Baugh viii). Religion and film are discussed in various publications, studies, and scholarly works from different points of view. Questions of the film's fidelity to religious texts, its influence on the audience, and its function as a tool for spreading the Gospel among religious communities are probably the main topics of this film/religion discourse. Paul Schrader, author of *Transcendental Style in Film: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer* – one of the most influential studies in the area of cinematography – has defined the common issues between religion and cinema: "Religion and film both attempt to bring people as close to the ineffable, invisible and unknowable as words, images and ideas can take us" (qtd. in Wright 4). According to Richard Walsh in his book *Reading the Gospels in the Dark: Portrayals of Jesus in Film*, opines that;

History of film's portrayal of religion comprises four distinctive eras. From the beginning of cinematography, there was an initial reluctance to portray Jesus figure in

films. The second era is characterized by spectacular portrayal of Christian religious epics. The third one is placed around 1960 and consists of foreign and countercultural inroads in the experimental era. The last one shows the increasing influence of a secular and pluralist society and its iconoclastic portrayal of Christianity and its gradual acceptance of portrayals of homogenized (modern) religion. (Walsh 4)

Despite those four categories, Walsh points out to the emerging fifth era characterized with "increasing evidence of metaphysical society". Walsh also admits that there are no clear divisions of these eras and many exceptions can be found in the movie history, but the major Jesus films do fit into these eras. Among them *The Man from Earth* by Jerome Bixby comes under the last group.

The Man from Earth represents the film that portrays biblical story indirectly. The portrayal of Christ in this film also differs from the widely known concept of this biblical figure by excluding Christ's divinity and highlighting his humanity, moving the story to the contemporary 20th century or telling the story from today's point of view with respect to recent scientific discoveries concerning Christ's life, presenting the story in a shocking visual way, or using the story as the basis for comic satire or even a science-fiction story. My emphasis is on the issues raised in the film in order to question the status quo of the whole western Christian tradition and myths, which are used in order to maintain the status quo of the western world. I will focus on the questioning of religious orthodoxy, iconoclastic views and Christ's origin as the Bible itself is not consistent in this aspect (he is often called the prophet, the son of God, the Messiah, or the pre-existent God). There are numerous books, anthologies and academic works written on the subject of religion in film, as well as a wide range of publications dealing directly with the portrayal of the figure of Jesus in film. Among them Bixby's film *The Man from Earth* presents the unstable sense of religious status.

The plot of the film proceeds while John Oldman is stuffing his possessions onto his truck, preparing to move to a new home. His contemporaries gather to give him an unplanned farewell party, Harry, a biologist, Edith, an art history professor, and sincere Christian; Dan, an anthropologist; historian Sandy who loves John; archaeologist Art; and his student Linda. When his friends force him to tell the reason for his departure, John Oldman unwillingly discloses that he is a prehistoric caveman himself from that very period. He says that he has lived for more than 14 millennia and that he moves every 10 years to keep others from comprehending that he does not age. He begins his tale under the guise of a probable science-fiction story, but ultimately stops speaking in hypothetical terms and begins answering questions from his own perspective. His contemporaries reject to trust his story regarding his claim but admit it as a working hypothesis in order to gather his actual intents. John narrates he had been a Sumerian for more than 2000 years, later a Babylonian, and ultimately went eastward to become a devotee of the Buddha. Here, in this sense, John Oldman's individuality seems unsteady because of the mixture of involvements. In this context, it is commendable to quote Lois Tyson as she states, "we don't really have an identity because the word identity implies that we consist of one, singular self, but we are multiple and fragmented, consisting at any moment of any number of conflicting beliefs, desires, fears, anxieties, and intentions" (273). As Tyson opines human individuality is multidimensional. In the discussion of John's fellows also such ambiguities are abundant.

The discussion among John and his fellow turns to religion, and John specifies that he does not follow any. Even though he does not necessarily have faith in an everywhere present state of God, he does not disregard the possibility of such a being's presence. Pressed by the group, John unwillingly discloses that in trying to take the Buddha's teachings to the West and he became the inspiration or the image for the Jesus story. In this point, John Oldman tries to disassemble the Western Christian practices swapping it with Buddhism. After

this confession, emotions in the room run high and devout Christian, Edith begins crying showing her displeasure. Psychologist Will stresses that John end his saga and give the group a sense of conclusion by confessing it was all a prank, and intimidates to have John involuntarily admitted for psychiatric evaluation thinking he is needed with some help should he deny to do so. John seems to ponder over his reaction before finally "confessing" to everyone that his story was a prank. After John's friends have left the party with numerous reactions: Edith who is comforted; Harry and Dan who show an open mind; Art who never desires to see John again; Psychologist Will who still believe John needs professional help; Minor characters Sandy and Linda obviously believe John for what he has to say. After everyone else but Psychologist Will and Sandy have left John's house, Will hears John and Sandy's chat, which advises John's story which he was narrating unwillingly could be true after all and there are other prospects to contemplate upon.

As mentioned above, the film deals with the idea of a Cro-Magnon man surviving into the present day or modern era. The film is a very unusual demonstrative of the science fiction genre. In its core, this is a conversational film or in broader terms unconventional film that takes place in one room and is based only on a thought-based dialogue among university professors who gathered collectively for an unprepared and unplanned good-bye party for their colleague, John Oldman, who is retiring from the university and leaving the town right away. At this farewell party, John firstly refuses to let his friends know the reason for his departure, but only confines himself to the information that he gets "itchy feet" (Act I Scene 2) and that he often moves on which is not a new thing for him. His brief movements signifies deferral situation of a modern man. Friends argue that he is too young for this and that "he hasn't aged a day" for the past 10 years he spent on the faculty. It turns out that his friends are university professors of anthropology, biology, history, art history, and archeology. While John gradually packs his stuff, the whole company, drinking rare green

Johnny Walker bottle, looks for an appropriate conversation theme for the afternoon and is still returning to the reason why John leaves. So, John decides to share this mystery with them. “There is something I’m tempted to tell you, I think. I’ve never done this before and I wonder how it’ll pan out. I wonder if I could ask you a silly question . . . What if a man from the upper Paleolithic...survived until the present day?” “Wh-what d’ya mean ‘survived’? Never died?” “Yes. What would he be like?” This hypothetical question rouses astonishment among his colleagues, but on the supposition that this is a plot of John's new book which he does not completely refute, they decide to play on the 'game' and discuss the topic within the terms of their practiced knowledge.

They basically agree that if this 140-centuries-old man had an irregularity in his immune system in the form of perfect cellular regeneration, he could have lived for so long. He would look just like us, for there is not a central anatomical difference between the younger Paleolithic man and people of the 21st century. But the immense difference would be in his knowledge, as Dan, the anthropology professor mentions: “Well, we think men of the upper Paleolithic were as intelligent as we are. They just didn't know as much. John's man would have educated himself as the race did. In fact, if he had an inquiring mind, his knowledge might be...astonishing.”(Act I Scene 5a) In the midst of the following discussion of the possibilities of science, of discoveries that can be considered first as magic and superstition, but subsequently shown to be a scientifically proven fact, John discloses that he once navigated with Columbus, and even though he thought that the Earth was round, he was still afraid that they would fall off an edge someplace at the end. While talking about the edge of the Earth he believed the orthodox Christianity as it would believe the flatness of the Earth and later it was revised with the development of the science. The disbelieving, reluctant and confused reactions follow, John is even accused of being mad and drunk as postmodern man has schizophrenic mind but his story all sounds so interesting and appealing to everyone that

they want him to continue. John then tells his story of the centuries-long journey, from the Paleolithic to the present, of life in the middle of a prehistoric tribe, of 46 livelihoods, geography, perception of time and space, learning and new sciences, of his travels around the world, to the Far East, China. He tells about his meetings with famous people in history (Vincent van Gogh, Buddha). What the first friendly afternoon chat was, changes over time into intense interrogation full of mysteries. John's story, on the one hand, is utterly unbelievable, but John challenges the erudite objections from his colleagues without any problems and has a very credible answer to all questions. And they are truly aware of that, as Dan points out:

There's absolutely no way in the whole world for John to prove this story to us, just like there's no way for us to disprove it. That's why there is uncertainty in everything. "No matter how outrageous we think it is, no matter how highly trained some of us think we are, there's absolutely no way to disprove it. Our friend is either a caveman, a liar, or a nut. So, while we're thinking about that, why don't we just go with it? (Act I Scene 9a)

Dan utterly accepts that what John was telling them was more or less true. Art, a professor of archeology, expresses great concern about John's mental health, and calls another colleague, Will Gruber, an old psychiatrist, who soon assumes the role of the main "interrogator." The conversation turns to education, John admits that he has 10 doctorates in various disciplines (including all that his colleagues teach), but he can no longer keep up with all the news in all disciplines. The colleagues are fascinated, although according to John "... living 14,000 years didn't make me a genius. I just had time"(Act I Scene 9a). A fundamental contradiction, however, occurs when the conversation begins to concern religion, and when the question arises whether John knows someone from biblical history. He wants to avoid this question and refuses to answer it several times, stating that the Bible is largely just a myth, partly

based on historical events and that "... the mythical overlay is so enormous...and not good. The truth is so... so... simple." By refusing to clarify about the biblical stories and telling the Buddhist story John Oldman tries to deconstruct the status quo of Christianity. Then he narrates the story of a man who knew and appreciated Buddha's teachings and decided to spread it in modern way. He tried it, but because he was alone against Rome, Rome won. And the rest is a familiar history. Even though the name was never told, it was clear to all people in the room. "I knew it. He's saying he was Christ" whispers Edith, the professor of art history and the most religious person in the room. Then there came the resurrection story:

He blocked the pain, as he had learned to do in Tibet and India. He also learned to slow his body processes down to the point where they were undetectable. They thought he was dead. So his followers pulled him from the cross, placed him in a cave... His body normalized as he had trained it to... He attempted to go away undetected, but some devotees were standing watch. Tried to explain. They were ecstatic. Thus, I was resurrected, and I ascended to central Europe to get away as far as possible. (Act I Scene 10)

Here John confesses that he himself was Jesus. John pronounces that the present form of religion and church is primarily different from what he was trying to teach at the time. Here, John Oldman is deconstructing the Christian status quo by saying that Christianity has been changed a lot in the long span of time as he further opines "I see ceremony, ritual, processions, genuflecting, moaning, intoning, venerating cookies and wine. And I think...it's not what I had in mind." Dan approves "Taken alone, the philosophical teachings of Jesus are Buddhism with a Hebrew accent. Kindness, tolerance, brotherhood, love. A cruel realism admitting that life is as it is here on this planet, here and now. The Kingdom of God, meaning goodness, is right here, where it should be. "I am what I am becoming."(Act I Scene 10) That's what the Buddha brought in." An interesting question arises from this discussion –

what does Jesus have to say to those present who have difficulties to believe in him. John answers: "Believe in what he tried to teach, without rigmarole. Piety is not what the lessons bring to people. It's the mistake they bring to the lessons." John clarifies how history has altered his story, how simple philosophical teaching has become religion, how his name has gradually changed in various languages, the fictional three wise men, walking on the water, or resurrecting the dead. Later generations' people manipulated with languages and changed the crust of Christianity and it was conveyed in the western world. During the long duration of time the meaning of Christianity is changed as Richard J. Lane casts the light on the same issue:

Meaning is always on the move, it is always networked, and created through the differential play of semiotic systems; it is never fixed in one place. Meaning, then, is always something generated through its dissemination and deferral, and when looked at closely enough from a deconstructive perspective, it has always already moved on, or is located elsewhere. (74)

As John Oldman accepts that the meaning of Christianity has changed over the long span of time, the deconstructive philosophy also proclaims that the meaning of anything else is generated through the play of language and there is no steady meaning. With the same tool, we can assert that the fixed status of Christianity is also not possible to maintain in the fixed term forever. However, John admits healing through Eastern medicine. With every word the atmosphere in the room condenses, everyone is speechless, some believe the story, and others refuse to believe it because it basically changes their beliefs. That's why the religious belief is unstable. Its "existence has no center, no stable meaning, and no fixed ground" (Tyson 258). The discussion ends when Will forces John to finally admit that he invented everything because the situation has gone too far. John admits that everything was an imaginary story that was encouraged by the questions his friends asked him. All of them start gradually

leaving, some with relief, and others angry that John played with them. Only Sandy, who is in love with John, believes that John told them the truth, though so incredible. She inquires him about further names he used in the previous times. One of these names (used 60 years ago in Boston - John T. Partee) is overheard by Will. It turns out that John is Will's father who left him as a little boy. Based on this disclosure, Will gets a heart attack and dies. John for the first time observes the demise of his own kid. He and Sandy then leave together. If the science fiction factor is taken away from the story, Jesus Christ remains as a wise wandering scholar from the East, aware of the Buddha's teachings and practices of Tibetan monks, who could be a real historical figure and represent a potential explanation of the story of Jesus Christ, his crucifixion, his death, and his resurrection. Every explanation goes beyond the expectations.

The Man from Earth can be said an iconoclastic film. *The Oxford English Dictionary* characterizes the iconoclasm as: 1) “the action of attacking or assertively rejecting cherished beliefs and institutions or established values and practices” and 2) “the rejection or destruction of religious images as heretical; the doctrine of iconoclasts” (234). From this point of view, the selected movie appears to be iconoclastic, as it breaks the ingrained myths not only about the character of Jesus Christ but also about religion as such. *The Man from Earth* suggests that Jesus could have been a person who is familiar with the Eastern teachings and practices of Tibetan monks. Here the image of Jesus Christ is deconstructed. Generally, it is assumed that Jesus Christ is a Westerner's God but this film makes him familiar with Eastern philosophy too. Rather he benefited from the eastern philosophy. It further creates undecidability. The film has presented "an open-ended rhetorical and grammatical construct" (Esch 386). By locating Jesus in the East, the film has deconstructed the Western thinking pattern.

The portrayal of the Jesus figure that does not correspond with the image of God's son and the Messiah as described in the Bible seems to be the general and common problem for all Christian organizations, irrespective of their religious bearings. Despite so *The Man from Earth* did not meet with criticism from the Church as other religious films would be highly criticized by the church authorities and many films were banned by the same authority. There are probably two reasons for this: first, the film belongs to the science-fiction genre and was not promoted as a Jesus film, therefore the Church was not probably aware of the existence of another film that portrays Jesus Christ. Secondly, the promotion and distribution of the movie first took place primarily through torrents and illegal downloads, which is not exactly the Church's preferred way of obtaining films.

In the discussion disbelieving, reluctant, and confused reactions follow, John is even accused of being mad and drunk, but his story all sounds so interesting and appealing to everyone that they want him to continue. Dan states: "A decade of professorship, in line to chair the department, and you don't know where you're going?" (Act I Scene 2) Hedid not tell where he was going. He may not be sure about his destination. A post-modern man is destination less. John is a post modern man. Being a postmodern man John is in dilemma, which makes him a means to dismantle the fixity of anything else including religious status quo.

Then the conversation turns to education, John admits that he has 10 doctorates in various disciplines (including all that his colleagues teach), but he can no longer keep up with all the news in all disciplines. The colleagues are fascinated, although according to John ". . . living 14,000 years didn't make me a genius. I just had time." A contradiction, however, occurs when the discussion begins regarding religion, and when the question arises whether John knows anyone from the biblical past. He wants to evade this interrogation and denies to answer it numerous times, stating that the Bible is mainly a collection of myth, partly based

on historical events and that “. . . the mythical overlay is so enormous...and not good. The truth is so . . . so . . . simple.”(Act I Scene 10) Then he narrates the story of a man who knew and admired Buddha's teachings and decided to spread it in modern form. He tried it, but because he was alone against Rome, Rome won. And the rest is a well-known history. Even though the name was never told, it was clear to all people in the room. “I knew it. He’s saying he was Christ” (Act I Scene 10) whispers Edith, the professor of art history and the most religious person in the room". The thrilled debate that follows after the interaction accuses John for blasphemy but also scrutinizes the historical link between Buddha's teaching, Jesus, and early myths, e.g. Hercules, who conveys or carries similarity between Jesus' stories. John confesses that the modern or present day practice or form of the religion and church is principally different from what he was teaching or trying to communicate at the time.” Dan approves: . (Act I Scene 10) A ruthless realist acknowledges that life is as it is here on this planet, here and now. The Kingdom of God, meaning goodness, is right on this planet, where it should be. “I am what I am becoming.” That’s what the Buddha brought in." (Act I Scene 10)

An interesting question ascends from this debate – what actually does Jesus have to say to those modern or present day people or dwellers who have problems believing in him. John answers in a humble tone: “

However, he admits remedial therapy or healing through Eastern medicine which he learnt in his travels to the east. With every word the atmosphere in the room solidifies, everyone is in the mood of upset, some believe the story, and others profoundly refuse to believe the story because it principally changes their principles. The discussion ends when Psychologist Will forces John to finally confess that he conceived everything and call it all a fiction he was thinking to write around in near future because the situation has gone too far. John admits that everything was a whimsical story that was encouraged by the questions his

friends asked him. All of John's professor friends start leaving, some with relief, and others angry thinking that John played with them. Only Sandy, who is in love with John, believes that John told the reality, although it is unbelievable. She asks him about other names he used in his previous days to continue the chat. One of these names (which he used 60 years ago in Boston - John T. Partee)(Act II Scene 4) is heard by Will. It turns out that John is his biological father who left him as a little boy. Based on this disclosure, Will gets a heart attack and dies instantly. John for the first time witnesses the death of his own kid. He and Sandy then leave together.

Every decade or so, when people notice John Oldman doesn't age or look older, he packs and moves on to a new place, with a new identity with him. Before parting away from his current life as a history professor, he reveals his secret to his friends who are scholars and intellectuals in different fields. It has a dual purpose. First, on being cross-examined about why he chose to share his secret, he replies “.”(Act I Scene 6c) This focuses the concept of the 'self' and how it may be changed from the perceived 'self'. Second, once he chooses to do this, his self is then separated and pieced together through debate amongst fellow who are experts in different fields of study, adding in different viewpoints to look at his self. Among his peer is Dan, an anthropologist, whose critical thinking takes the chat away from getting caught up in truth, putting a focus on the likelihood of notions instead. Then there is Edith, driven by Christian literalism and by emotions and sincere faith.

Whenever John's story intrudes upon her religious acceptance, she reacts with surprise and hysterical doubt. Biologist Harry, supports John in construction of his chronicle, harmonizing out the feelings of the spectators when they get sensitive. Archeologist Art represents the superiority of knowledge and its rigidity in accommodating insubordinate ideas. He believes John to be mentally disabled and calls a psychologist Will, to check his mental wellbeing. Will backs to exploring the emotional significances of John's story, foregrounding

human associations in the description. While Sandy, an office employee who is in love with John, signifies the passive audience, Linda, Art Jenkins' student and girlfriend, represents the active audience, asking basic questions which also helps the secondary spectatorsto comprehend technical perceptions. This launches that distinctiveness creation is not a personal procedure. It happens through communications with the creation around us. Thus, the supposed self is always manipulating and declaring itself on the objectified self.

The construction of the self is historically situated and is a conscious re-creation of what Nietzsche calls our "second nature" making us "poets of our lives" (Nietzsche 4). This process of re-creation has a variability of indicators. When John Oldman reveals his true identity as a Cro-Magnon, attempts are made to situate him in his historicity from numerousviewpoints. The authenticity of whether or not his claim is true becomes insignificant, as the process of self-fashioning John Oldman as a Cro-Magnon becomes a fact but not the truth. Categorically, his identity is placed spatially and then ideologically, while his temporariness is the playground where the process takes place.

John begins by recalling his surroundings: the geography, the weather, and thefaunas. They try to locate him in his "home" (Act I Scene 6c), to steady his beginnings, but John cannot describe his home in accurate terms because it has changedenormously from that timeto the present. His mind reminiscencesenormously vast natural sceneries but now he can only see cityscapes around. He efforts to put himself using modern geographical markers – "" (Act I Scene 6a) – but the idea of home as it was no longer exists. Just like there is no one everlasting sense of self, there is also no fixed idea of what we call home, especially as time rolls by.

John is then positioned in culture and language. He talks about the numerous languages he educatedhimself and the flexibility in his identity as a Phoenician sailor, a Babylonian, a Belgian, a French, and finally an American. The pronunciation of his name

changed but the sound was always stuck “John”, even in his initial identity. Will, the psychologist, remarks, “?”(Act I Scene 9a) Whether or not it holds an innate nature, one can infer that the Self tries to find an indispensable, steady core to comprehend itself. For John Oldman, it's his first name and maybe the safety of a fireside in his home whether he is a filthy pig farmer or Jesus. He is also positioned in faith and philosophy. These ideological shapers of identity are fashioned at a cultured understanding of the Self and are fundamentally tied to impermanence, as the certainty of death broadly frames them. Repeatedly, John is asked what religion he follows or believes in and what he thinks of being dead. Such complete notions become unsolidified when overextended across thousands of years. His belief or religiosity has flatlined and death has been scooped or taken out of its assets of loss and fear.

A mortal man's one second would be a decade for John's. His lengthy human life permits many subtle elements in the creation of self to be seen evidently, such as the role of the other and of recollection. The identity finds itself in a dichotomous relative with the other ones. John took a very long time to come to relations with his quasi-immortality and comprehend himself as changed from everyone else on this planet. In that course, the nature of alteration also endured multiple developments. From thoughtful of something is wrong with everybody else to trusting he is the one with a disorder. From being revered as God to being hurtled away as an infernal symbol. The dual of 'Self' and 'Other' works on documentation by nullification, that is, “. (Act I Scene 10)

Memory is discriminatory and reconsidering. It is also tied to information in that recollections make sense in the present through the viewpoint we acquire to look at them from. John claims, “How can I have knowledgeable recall if I have no knowledge?”(Act I Scene 6a) He learns to recognize his recollections with modern vocabularies and notions. Similarly, the self is acknowledged through external expressions and perceptions that come

into being as the human race and thought develops. John becomes a Cro-Magnon only when anthropology finds the period. John becomes Jesus only when the notionarises and progresses through the spans. John becomes a caveman only when cavemen are distinguished from present-day human. John becomes a deceiver only when his truth is fabricated by everyone distinguishing his 'Self'.

The process of the formation of selfhood is penetrated by numerous personalities and multiple other personalities, regularly across space and time, breaking the continuousness of self. Being is what we take as unchanging, our own understanding of who we are. Becoming is an effort to symbolize another Being. Currently, John is a professor of history, but through the description of his previous life, he represents numerous becoming. He became a caveman. He became Jesus. Jesus became a caveman. Based on the aforementioned presentation, some appropriate questions arise: Is John Oldman still Jesus in present day? Or has the impression of Jesus exceeded him. Was he ever Jesus in the way we comprehend Jesus? These ambiguities develop because the self is not fixed, left composed in an emptiness. It is often molded in others' thoughts. This is why John needs aspectators to partake in his own identity construction.

The formation of self is an ever-changing process that involves both exterior and interior influence. John's will to share his idea and for it to then reveal and develop through the film exemplifies a tiny nature of the evolution. In the ever-changing world, an unbending sense of uniqueness is delicate and is always being defied. The character of Edith is a good instance of what happens when the central belief on which you have created your individuality – in Edith's case that is her faith in Jesus being a specific person in a certain setting – is defied. That belief is so absolute for her that she breaks down hysterically on John's narration about the formation of Christ's myth. There is no particular way of understanding truth, which is why the same story occurs in many different forms. Similarly,

the self cannot be continued in a static, particular identity. John Oldman can become a caveman, a deceiver, and a cynic all the same.

Religious ethics are regularly deconstructed in the film *The Man from Earth*. Proceeds to religion or theological turns are so common that the display has lost the character of an anti-secular revolt. More and more intellectuals who announce their atheism try to chase astute exegeses of long passages from sacred scripture. Following Walter Benjamin, we can say that most of the 'chess games of philosophy' are played by the concealed dwarf of religion. So far, the meeting of postmodernity and religion has largely taken place under two titles; anti-idolatry and the Nietzschean 'death of God'. When Jacques Derrida spoke about the mutual root of knowledge and faith, he was also taking part in that line of belief. However, this doesn't locate the novelty of his thought in the argument about post-secularism. The element of Derrida's philosophy to which this research draws attention is connected with the often-forgotten agreeing character of deconstruction and seems to be inbred from a great master of Derrida.

In the religious standard the God is some sort of omnipotent, immensely going beyond our perceptive framework. However, "what makes Him actually surpass this framework is the Cross, His death, or His incarnated weakness – vide the concept of 'negative assurance' (Marion, 20). The new doubt is ready to stem negative creations of religion, which watch access to God in accordance with the iconoclastic exclusion of conceptions. With the same defiance the movie *The Man from Earth* also seems iconoclastic. This brings about the varied merge of philosophy and negative theology, which marks in conveying to God areas administered by quietness. However to stress that Derrida emphasized the dissimilar erection of alteration and the God of negative theology, perceiving that negative theology is constantly secondary to a positive theology and finally refers to a sophisticated upper level, which must persist in evasion, when we discard God the descriptions allocated to him

according to our mark. Deconstruction goes a blind eye to that level, sensible that with any form of rejection, ridiculousness, or even antinomy, the indistinguishable logic occurs: there must be a minute where the Hegelian *Aufhebung* (contrast) takes place and according to Nietzsche's prophecy God dies, because what we are facing is only an idolon dependable with our degree. We desire to dispense something continuous or safe, because we need a fixed outline from which and toward which we could run our budget. Meanwhile the *oeconomiadivina* (final catastrophe) is administered by various actions. This anti-idolatric association of philosophy and religion centrals to associating the Nietzschean 'death of God' with 'the speculative Good Friday' without the prospect of rebirth. For many twentieth-century intellectuals, in spite of Nietzsche, it is Christianity "that is preferred as the religion which offers an exit from religion" (Nancy⁸) while conveying God to the cross.

Poststructuralist assumed realizes in Christianity's innate constructions pointing out to being secularist. Nevertheless, there still remain extra component concerning philosophy and religion – demonstrating neither to secularism nor to veneration. Its optimistic appeal looks like to the confirmatory charm of deconstruction, which was claimed by Derrida despite of numerous explanations and evaluations. This component also fits the endlessness of the deconstructive mission because of its imperceptibility, and it is crystal clear that the clarification presented underneath will circle around it without coming near enough to summon it by its name. The motive is that it's all around the name. The hero of the film John Oldman is also in the same state. On the one hand John entitle himself as Jesus Christ on the other hand he proclaims that he is also a secularist. The struggle amongst religiosity and secularity is clearly seen in movie *The Man from Earth* too. The evolution of John Oldman from one home to another and one historical era to another is another notable matter to be recognized in order to deconstruct the religious status quo.

Every form of change would be, according to Derrida, a disloyalty of the other, another somehow programmed in the expression, in the hint, in the spiral, in the age, and so on. But this impression on unfathomable cyphering can be delivered as a symbol of misery over being able to fulfill the skill of a new procedure of subject which would overwhelm the stalemate of paleness and authority. As Derrida goes about his mission to deconstruct the mystical descriptor by working on written language, traces, tropes and interpretations, Derrida has admitted he writes "against his desire" (Derrida 76) as if roughly that surpasses language was for Derrida the anticipated aim of a labour of an anti-logocentric viewpoint. As was indicated at the beginning it is all about the name of the hero, because the name specified to someone who is young but called as Oldman. It is one of the finest examples of the language-power association. A given name is like a stamp connecting the likelihood to call another by one's name and have a mastery over the one who is called. After the verbal turn tricky with the question of who comes after the focus contains the question of naming.

If there is a rebirth after the death of the subject how to distinguish the one who defeated death or who was resurrected after his own death? The axis of this dispute consists in the understanding of sacrifice, while the two opposite poles would be its Christian and Jewish interpretations. Any form of philosophy aware of the information or knowledge-power alliance, trying to stay realistic to the otherness of the other must face the subliminal undertaking of sacrifice. It must look for that sort of mechanism in which the confrontation with negativity doesn't end in dust.

The Man from Earth is a rare movie that increases stimulating knowledgeable queries usually only seen in the best science-fiction works. This is not only by chance, but as it is the final fictional work by playwright Jerome Bixby who produced or wrote several episodes of both series in the 1950s- and 1960s-Star Wars. Not only has John quickly resigned from his job, but a charitable moving crew (Bob Messier) is picking up for contribution all of his

home equipment, furniture, and belongings that he cannot fit into his pickup truck. Edith sees what looks questionably like a previously unknown original painting by Vincent van Gogh.

John deduces that he was a part of the culture archaeologists now have named as the Magdalenian Upper Paleolithic that extended across Europe and the Near East before the end of the last frozen period or ice age, the tool-making culture responsible for the most well-known living cave paintings. ("Upper" simply means recent, derived from geological references to excavation layers. "Paleo" and "lithic" mean "old" and "stone," respectively, so the "Paleolithic Age" means "Old Stone Age.") John says that he has a reminiscence of seeing the British Isles from France across the English Channel, empty at that time because the waters that today flow into it were dammed by ice dams. He says that in his long lifetime, he was an ardent student of the Buddha a philosopher from the East, and a few hundred years later tried to bring those teachings to the Jews of the Roman Empire. He says the painting was given to him by Van Gogh, now a renowned painter in person. Here, John mixes or merges the cultures. Here, Ziauddin Sardar is worthy to quote who is of the view on the same issue as this: "" (229). Here John Oldman is rethinking about the historical civilizations.

Professor of Anthropology, Art becomes convinced that John is having a psychotic breakdown, and he quietly telephones psychiatrist, another colleague, psychiatry professor "Gruber" (Robert Ellis Smith), who quickly arrives to evaluate the patient. As things develop, a police officer (John Burke) is also called. Writer Bixby is very careful to get the details correct; at least insofar as was possible with the science as it was understood before his death in 1998. Unlike many such attempts at hypothetical fiction, someone knowledgeable about many of the subjects touched upon will not be angered by dumb mistakes.

The anthropological agreement a few decades ago was that physically modern humans, the subspecies *Homo sapiens*, emerged around 200,000 years ago, and at some point around 70,000 years ago, possibly in response to a severe environmental disaster, began

growing out of Africa into the rest of the world, reaching much of what would become the populated world by about 25,000 years ago. By distinction, behaviorally modern humans – defined as capable of planning ahead, managing a hearth and fire, knowing how to fish, burying their dead, and making art – seem to have emerged only about 50,000 years ago. Why there seems to have been a gap of nearly 150,000 years between when humans could have become behaviorally modern and when they did is a great mystery in anthropology, explained by hypotheses ranging from lousy evidence (eventually artifacts will be found showing behavioral modernity much earlier) to environmental provocation (everything was going fine until humans were forced to acquire skills to leave Africa to survive).

Since Bixby's death, discoveries including new anthropological sites and better techniques for retrospective genetic analysis have complicated this neat timeline, but his choice to have his main character born 14,000 years ago has held up. After forcing a nomadic existence hunting and gathering, about 12,000 years ago the last ice age gave way to a warming climate that allowed the invention of agriculture along with the beginnings of civilization needed to support it, including social organization and hierarchy, preservation of information across generations through writing, simple machines such as the wheel, enough mathematics to survey land and conduct trade, and astronomy sufficient to manage crop planting. By about 8,000 years ago someone figured out how to fire clay in kilns to make pottery. By about 5,000 years ago someone figured out how to greatly strengthen copper by allowing it to make bronze. By about 4,500 years ago the Egyptians could build pyramids. By about 4,000 years ago the Babylonians needed to make legal codes. By about 3,000 years ago someone figured out how to smelt iron. The rest, quite literally, is history. That's why Bixby's speculation of 14,000 years itself is a question on historiography.

Various strands of the story are drawn from the zeitgeist of the 1960s: The discussion about Christian Gospels that seems a terrifying heresy to Edith, a deep believer, is drawn in

significant part from the highly polarizing non-fiction 1965 bestseller *The Passover Plot* that became well enough known to inspire its own film version in 1976 and remained in print into the 1990s, and it seems impossible that Bixby was unaware of it when writing this play. Here, Harold Bloom's anxiety of influence functions as he opines "the subsuming of tradition of belatedness" (1187).

There are many subtle references, even jokes, about time. At one point John plays a recording of Beethoven's 7th symphony, which is an atypical piece that, unlike any other work by the composer, derives its structure almost entirely from rhythm and tempo – and it is famously the first work in which Beethoven annotated the tempo in explicitly numerical beats-per-minute using the newly invented metronome rather than just the less precise traditional Italian designations (“vivace,” “allegretto,” “presto,” and “allegro”). Art sarcastically suggests that instead he should have played Stravinsky's *Le Sacre du Printemps* (*The Rite of Spring*), perhaps the only widely performed work that depends even more on rhythm and tempo to an extent that provoked riots in the audience at its premiere.

The set design is innovative with two separate platforms, one for the parlor of John's rustic cabin with a stone fireplace and the other a Southwestern vista for his pickup truck as it is loaded with boxes. The house left half of the audience has a much easier view without having to crane their necks, something of a deficiency in the layout for the other half. There are a number of clever “Easter eggs” on stage for Star Trek fans: "if you think you see one, you'll probably be correct. Benjamin wore a David Bowie T-shirt, slyly playing on the confusion of *The Man from Earth* with the similarly named but totally unrelated *The Man Who Fell to Earth*.

Among a uniformly excellent cast in a captivating production, Benjamin is very convincing as “John” as he reluctantly unspools a seemingly fantastic tale in a way that ebbs and flows in the credulity his academic colleagues are willing to accord it. Almeida as “Art”

is the most extreme skeptic, a supremely confident archaeologist, leather-clad and riding in on his motorcycle, regarding John's story as so absurd that the only possible explanation for it is psychosis, although it is Lamarre as "Linda," arriving on the back of the same motorcycle, who is most open to the possibility that John's story is true, innocently observing of a 14,000-year life, "What a chance to learn." Church as anthropologist "Dan" and Sabatino as biologist "Harry" become something of a team, expertly playing off each other as they slowly begin to accept that John's story just might possibly be true. Parent as art historian "Edith," however, is emotionally traumatized into frenzy by the philosophical and religious allegations of John's story, viscerally disentanglement as her counterparts start to take him extremely seriously. Ultimately, though, it is Ruggiero as office assistant "Sandy" who has deeply fallen for love with John and Smith as the ever more strong psychiatrist "Gruber" who must take the lead in influential role in the progression of actions, the former willing to accept John's story on faith and the latter, in a outstanding presentation, reluctant to consider any option other than mental illness.

This cosmos also includes some possible evaluations of Derrida's deconstruction with the negative theology, whose negativity, restraint/abstinence and anti-idolatry is always driven by a higher level (hyper-/supra-) that might imply the reconstruction of the temple, the revival of power and of the logic of fortresses closed against the other. Derrida's 'messianism without messianism' also follows the logic of this order by maintaining the most restrained expectations. But all of the aforementioned elements belong to one side of the newly depicted dividing line. On its other side, we encounter "Plato's Khora, who eludes all anthropological schemes, all history, all revelation, and all truth" (Derrida, 124).

Postmodernity encounters religion not only in negative records of paleness or sacrificial demise, but also – as we are founding – in competing crypto-theological configurations of life. Whereas the Christian legacy leaves philosophy trapped in the “

(Robson, 15). According to Bielik Robson, who definitely is in support of the first approach, the Derridean Khora corresponds to the last, because it contains some suggestion of a pagan immanence of the blessed.

From a traditional point of view, this film more or less imitates the epoch in which it was conceived. The director's personal ideological perceptions play a substantial part as well. This cultural outlook occurs not only in this choice of movie but is fairly common in practically every significant Jesus film in history. Walsh argues "Filmmakers present Jesus according to their personal ideological perspectives" (72). Walsh insisted that *The Man from Earth* "the comic film treatment of a hapless mortal who happens to be born before Jesus and with him and who is consequently mistaken all his life for the Messiah like is not blasphemous because, rather than mocking any deity, it satirizes mortal thoughts" (32). The main objective that is targeted by the satire is the blinded followers of fundamentalist groups. *Encyclopedia Britannica* describes fundamentalism as "type of militantly conservative religious movement characterized by the advocacy of strict conformity to sacred texts" (243).

In Bixby's *The Man from Earth* the postmodern passion for deconstruction and reinterpretation of classical themes can be found frequently. Postmodernism itself rejects the concept of a single truth and a single goal but seeks an alternative approach to the world. *The Man from Earth* highlights education, love, compassion, and friendship. This difference reflects the situation of today's polarized society. These common features (an iconoclastic approach, criticism from the Church for the portrayal of Christ, and thematic reflection of the time in which these films were shot) can be found in all over the film.

The film *Man from Earth* is very explicit concerning the marketing of the film. The trailer which attracts viewers' attention itself and the poster do not even mention the character of Jesus Christ, and it is no wonder - it would disclose the main revelation and plot twist of the film which is the aim. The poster signifies a regular or we can say a normal science

fiction poster does, with our planet the Earth seen from the universe and a free floating figure of a man in bright blinding light above it. Trailer then points out to the legendary writer or we can call him veteran of the script Jerome Bixby and familiarizes us with the the underlying premise of the film, what if a normal or ordinary looking man treads the Earth for 14,000 years and displaysnumerousspeculative hypotheses and arguments among the main characters and enhances the indication of an action in the form of a weapon being drawn in this case a revolver.

The Man from Earth offers the proposition that Jesus might have been mearely a sage or a wanderer and the healer who has travelled places and has now come from the East, who is accustomed with the rehearses of Tibetan monks who are experts in their medicinal and meditating healings. The amalgamation of these two matters –west and east- is very prominent aspect of the film which it has risen to the utmost level. The iconoclastic attitude has facilitated to deconstruct the religious status quo or the present state of religion in the film as well as pulling to piecesassertions of reliability and historiclegitimacy.Now at this stage of the film making process, marketing enters the game to make some money. By analyzing the marketing materials like trailers, posters, and other marketing tools available, the researcher hasstarted to come to believe that the story presented in most of the trailers does not match the real content of the movie and it is completely different what the trailers suggest as if the film has left the researcher jaw dropping. Significant story lines are masked so as to create a sense of aweless, the overall presence of the film is somewhat distorted creating charm, and trailers for the movie which is obviously based on the script hides it true intention, noticeably deliberately avoided the plot and storylines that were a subject of criticism, protest and disapproval. These inconsistencies or contrasting points suggest that advertisingexperts have clear definition of their targeted groups, and subsequently have attuned the advertising of the film which is done fantastically. Based on these discoveries, it is imaginable to come to a

conclusion that though the film was written and made in different periods, its illustration of the “Christ” figure admits the iconoclastic attitude, question to the historical precision, and debate associated with the film. The admiration of the New Testament is evidently implanted in western culture which the movie tries to dismantle. The most famed story of Western society is certainly waiting for many more inventive interpretations in countless arenas of arts. Since the desire to be different is another feature of a archetypal human, we certainly will see diversity of stories of uncommon Jesus Christ figures, whose initiators will rightly claim that their story they are trying to portray is based on truth and unique of genuine in a way, one along with deconstruction of the religious status quo in present day world.

Works Cited

- Baugh, Lloyd. *Imaging the Divine: Jesus and Christ-figures in Film*. Sheed & Ward, 2000.
- Bixby, Jerome. *The Man from Earth*. Directed by Richard Schenkman, performance by David Lee Smith, Falling Sky Entertainment, November 13, 2007.
- Burnett, Ron. "Denys Arcand-Jesus of Montreal." *Critical Approaches to Culture Communications*. Ron Burnett, 2018pp.63-67
- Derrida, Jacques. "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences." *Global Literary Theory: An Anthology*, edited by Richard J. Lane, Routledge, 2013.
- Devid, Fite. *Harold Bloom: The Rhetoric of Romantic Vision*. University of Massachusetts Press, 1985.
- Encyclopedia Britannica*, Inc., 2018.
- English Dictionary, Thesaurus & Grammar, Help. *Oxford Dictionaries*. Oxford University Press, 2018.
- Greenblatt, Stephen. *Renaissance Self-fashioning: From More to Shakespeare*. University of Chicago Press, 2012.
- Lane, Richard J. *Global Literary Theory: An Anthology*. Routledge, 2013.
- John Blewitt. "A Neo-Formalist Approach to Film Aesthetics and Education." *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, vol. 31, no. 2, Summer 1997, pp. 91-96. University of Illinois Press.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. "The Gay Science, translated by Walter Kaufmann." *New York: Vintage* 374, 1974, pp. 336-337.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. "The Gay Science, translated by Walter Kaufmann." *New York: Vintage* 374, 1974, pp. 181-182.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. Read Books Ltd, 2015.

Richard, Schenkman. *The Man from Earth*. Perf. David L. Smiths. Anchor Bay Entertainment, Shoreline Entertainment, 2007.

"The Man from Earth - Movie Trailer." YouTube. YouTube, 10 Sept. 2011. Web. 29 Nov. 2018.

Tyson, Lois. *Critical Theory Today*. Routledge, 2006.

Walsh, Richard. *Reading the Gospels in the Dark: Portrayals of Jesus in Film*. Trinity, 2007.

Wright, Melanie Jane. *Religion and Film: An Introduction*. I.B. Tauris, 2008.