

# Theory of Equilibrium in Norman Mailer's *The Gospel According to the Son*

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**Abstract-** In general, a Jew is identified by either his ethnicity, Jewish race, or by his faith, Judaism. A Jew is recognized as a person who belongs to the Jewish race which is spread across the world. They are identified to be decent of Jewish lineage and have Jewish Heritage. The four gospels in the Bible echo a major part of Jewish history and practices of the Jews as they were written about the Jews themselves. These gospels have been fictionalized by many popular writers but the notable one among them is the legendary Jewish-American author Norman Kingsley Mailer. Mailer's novel, *The Gospel According to the Son*, is kept through the lens of the theory of Equilibrium by Tsetevan Todorov. By enforcing the theory, this article uses this theory that states the five stages of a plot, which start with Equilibrium and ends in New Equilibrium after a roller coaster ride of events. This article aims to use the theory of Equilibrium to find the cleverness of Mailer's fictional narration of the Gospel, concerning the idea that makes it more a plot of rise and fall than a settled style of narration.

**Indexed Terms-** Equilibrium, Disequilibrium, Disruption, Narrative, Recognition

## I. INTRODUCTION

Norman Mailer was born in the United States to Jewish parents. One the most popular Jewish-American writer known for his raw impulse and ego, which he depicts in his novels. Some of his works revolve around the themes of morality and sexuality. His novel *The Naked and the Dead* brought him fame, and *Armies of the Night* won the Pulitzer Prize for non-fiction and the National Book Award. The struggle between good and evil could be one of the novel's recurring themes. Mailer's *The Gospel*

*According to the Son* is one of the last novels produced by the author in 1997. It is a Historical and religious Fiction that retells the life of Jesus as narrated by the Canonical gospels written in the Bible during the first century. Many novelists have retold this Gospel in fiction with varied approaches that had caught the attention of many readers. This version of Norman Mailer's fiction brings a whole new invention to the novel where he brings the first person, where Jesus Christ Himself narrates the story that perfectly matches the five stages of equilibrium. In 1969, Todorov formulated a theory that he believed would act as a map to track down the plot structure with the five stages of Equilibrium. He believed that every plot has a five-stage structure namely Equilibrium, Disequilibrium, Recognition, Solution, and Equilibrium.

## II. EQUILIBRIUM

The foundation of Todorov's theory is Equilibrium. This phase can be found at the beginning of the plot where there is a normality in the climate of the narration. In the novel, Norman Mailer's *The Gospel According to the Son*, the author begins the novel with the protagonist, Jesus Christ, who is called Yeshua in His adulthood narrating the story of His life on His own. Unlike the original Gospel written in the first century by the four writers who wrote a documentary account of the life of Jesus Christ in the four Gospels, Mailer gives a traditional "story-like" approach in restructuring the Gospel account to a full-fledged novel with ups and downs and twists and turns in his novel. The novel begins in an Equilibrium state where there are no shocking movements or even a disturbance of the routine. Jesus Christ as a grown-up recalls his childhood and relishes the legacy of His birth when God blessed Mary, a virgin with a Divine child in her womb, and

Joseph was ordained to grow up the child, who was the Son of God. After these, He recalls the period when His earthly father Joseph was careful to not treat Jesus like the other boys but was careful to grow Him up with diligence and care. He also reminds Himself of the carpentry business taught to Him by Joseph. Until the age of thirty, the narration is well-settled and calm, with just occasional flashbacks, and the details of the past events and mellow memories of the peasant Jewish family in Judea, a state of Israel, where Yeshua grew up were detailed. However, there is no disruption in the equate flow of harmony in the narration or the plot until He takes His baptism, a religious ritual of immersion in water in the name of God, at the age of Thirty. So the equilibrium of the plot is undisturbed by any turn of events.

### III. DISEQUILIBRIUM

The second stage is Disequilibrium, which is the disruption phase when something eventually occurs to disturb the equilibrium. All of the calm harmonious narration gets a gradual heat when Jesus gets baptized in the Jordan River by the Prophet John the Baptist, who was also his cousin who for the first time reveals the identity of Jesus' divinity before all Jews. Soon after the immersion of Jesus into the river, when he came up, a heavenly voice called aloud and recognized Jesus Christ as God's Son before all. Immediately after this great recognition, the struggle begins with the Devil as Jesus went to a desert to fast for forty days where the Devil, who had long awaited this moment tried to tempt the Son of God to lose hope in himself and on the mission, he was sent to do in the world. Mailer cleverly designs the protagonist with a real struggle with evil, and this battle could not get settled until his death, which was considered the ultimate goal of the Devil. In the novel, Mailer writes the way The Devil tried to cause doubt in Jesus' relationship with God, His Father, saying

"But of course, you have no need of food. Being the Son of God, you can easily command these stones to be bread. Which is proper food for an Essene. However, your garment is neither clean nor free of dust. Indeed, that you are the Son of God surprises me. Why did your Father choose you? Say to Him when next you converse that I salute Him. For do you

know? Your Father and I have had much traffic and considerable dispute"(47).

Mailer introduces the struggle of the protagonist with the villain. The author true to the traditional layout of any plot brings in the discomfort between the protagonist and the villain. The Devil does not stop with that he continues to cause doubts and confusion with the protagonist Himself So that he could make Jesus give up His mission of sacrificing His life for the sins of the people on the cross. So, a constant struggle between Good and Evil rises.

### IV. RECOGNITION OF THE DISRUPTION

Recognition of the Disruption is the third stage in the theory. This is the point in the plot where the problem is recognized by the people and there is a danger. After the meeting with Satan, the good and evil struggle begins. This struggle travels throughout the following course of events when Jesus begins his ministry where He begins to implement the Divine Mission. He does various miracles that were prophesied to be done by the one who would be called the Messiah. Messiah means 'the Anointed One' in Hebrew, who would be the One sent from God to become an ultimate sacrifice for the sins of the people so that all who seek forgiveness from God through the Messiah Jesus, sins will be forgiven and they will be given the ability to overcome sin and defeat the Devil. This plan is well recognized by the Devil and he also recognizes that he would soon not be able to drag human souls to Hell if the promised Messiah would come and stand as a sacrifice on behalf of people who comes to Him for the forgiveness of sins. This plan of God greatly threatens the Devil because if Jesus Christ succeeds in making people follow him and if all people believe in him then they would escape Hell and will go to Heaven, Moreover, they will be given the power to defeat the Devil. And so, fearing the great defeat, he understands the underlying danger and therefore wants to repel the mission of Christ. As the story progresses, Mailer creates a constant tension between the protagonist Jesus Christ, and the Devil as he tries his best to discourage the authority of Jesus and to confuse Him. However, Jesus Christ carries on by activating His mission by healing the sick, making the Blind see, curing the def, casting out demons

from affected people, and even raising the dead. All of these made people believe in him and follow him. The mission was unstoppable. However, the Devil's final chance to deploy the mission came with the stimulation of betrayal in the heart of a disciple of Jesus, Judas Iscariot, who would later become a symbol of Greed and betrayal. The Jewish priests and Pharisees wanted to kill Jesus because He claimed that He was the Son of God Himself, and many Jews were following Him. This in turn was a downfall of their power and control of the people for Jesus preached with authority and publicly opened up the hypocrisies and faults of the Jewish priests who had been using their position of power and influence to further fulfil their own evil interests. They weren't preaching the people about the true pathway to paradise. But Jesus taught the people from the scriptures luring the Jews to turn away from their sins and to live a Holy Life pleasing to God. This agitated the Jewish aristocrats to murder Jesus, and though they knew of the miracles He performed, they did not believe Him as the God-sent Messiah. Though Jesus knew from the beginning who would betray Him yet He lets Judas go by his own choice. On the night in the garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus went to say His final prayer of accepting the wrath and judgment of God on behalf of mankind. God thus, as per the wish of His Son, Jesus Christ poured out the blame of all men upon Christ. This stage ends with disruption and hopelessness. For the hostile Jews, it was the end of a problem but for the Jews who were believing in him as their king, it was a hopeless state as their King was about to be crucified on a cross by his own people. The protagonist was soon to face the climax.

#### V. REPAIR OF DISRUPTION

Repair of Disruption is the fourth stage. This is the problem-solving phase of the problem. It serves as an attempt to rectify the damage caused by the disruption. Immediately following this, the protagonist prepared to face the climax of His mission, whereas He awaited Judas for He knew by divine power what was about to happen, Judas came to Him and kissed Him, indicating the group of soldiers who were sent by the Jewish Priests to arrest Jesus and kill Him. On the trial as the Roman Governor Pilate condemns the Jews of falsely accusing Jesus of a crime. But the zealous Jews yell

and cry that He should be crucified because he called himself as the Son of God. As Mailer writes that Satan bellowed in victory as Christ was crucified. It was a triumphant moment for the Jewish priests and other Jews. But the other Jews who followed Jesus and believed Him as the God-sent Messiah and King, was dejected to see their hopes go down to witness the Christ Jesus's death. It was the time the Jews believed that their problem had come to a close and it was also that the Devil believed that he had won the final game. However, there were still more prophecies about the Messiah that was yet to be fulfilled. Jesus was taken from the cross and was in a den-like cave, which was the usual burial place for rich Jews by Joseph of Arimathea, who was one among the Jewish court member yet he was a secret follower. After the burial of Jesus's body, on the third day as per the Jewish prophecies, the messiah Jesus came back to life and rose up from the tomb, thus defeating death and squandering the victory squeals of the Devil. Thus, great turmoil was caused for the Jews who put Him to death. Whereas for the Jews who followed Him, it was a period of great peace as hope was restored in their hearts.

#### VI. NEW EQUILIBRIUM

The final stage is the New Equilibrium where all chaos and twists and turns settle down to form a cyclic method of returning to normality. Though not the old equilibrium, this is the new equilibrium where the order is restored as a new order. In the novel, the new equilibrium begins when Jesus meets his disciples for the last time and gives the last message to many of his believers and commands them to remain faithful to Him and to spread the good news of His message to all the people. He is then miraculously taken up by a cloud to the sky as He gives his final words of hope that He would always be with them. Soon, two angels appear and comfort them saying that He would return the same way He was taken up, in the End times of the earth. This hope given by Jesus to the followers boosts them to live new lives. This normality returns.

Tsetevan Todorov's theory of Equilibrium is applied to Mailer's Gospel novel, *The Gospel According to the Son*. This article uses this theory of Equilibrium to implement the theory, which states the

five stages of a plot that begins with equilibrium and ends with equilibrium after a turbulent series of events.

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