This chapter goes into the details of the response generated by the works used in this thesis, within their various socio-cultural dynamics. The general reaction to three such works will be used as case studies to examine how works featuring Christ tend to become debatable at times. The focus of attention would be not on critical reviews regarding the literary merit of the texts, but instead on the controversy these gave rise to. The chapter will attempt to provide a descriptive re-creation of the controversies in chronological order. It will look at the factors cited as being responsible for making these works disputable, the authors' response to these, and the eventual outcome of the altercations. It must be mentioned here that not all works chosen for this study have become controversial, at least not in a very public manner, while some have been more contentious than the others. There have also been instances when the polemics surrounding some works have been exaggerated to a large extent. We will begin with Jose Saramago's *The Gospel According to Jesus Christ*, which, among the works studied here, is the most recent casualty of the controversy surrounding works of art featuring Jesus Christ. Saramago's novel initially ran into trouble with his country's administration:

The Portuguese government lambasted his 1991 novel *O Evangelho Segundo Jesus Cristo (The Gospel according to Jesus Christ)* and struck the writer's name from nominees for the European Literature Prize, saying the atheist work offended Portuguese Catholic convictions.¹
Although the book was later allowed to enter the contest, Saramago was disturbed by what happened; he left Portugal to settle in Canary Islands in Spain. The controversy surrounding *The Gospel According to Jesus Christ* later came to the forefront when Saramago won the Nobel Prize for literature. Saramago had won this coveted award in 1998, and in the midst of accolades from the Portuguese President, Jorge Sampaio and the Prime Minister, Antonio Guterres, the Vatican newspaper, *L'Osservatore Romano* argued that *The Gospel According to Jesus Christ* was the "testimony of a substantial anti-religious sentiment."² The newspaper reported that Saramago was an agnostic who had remained "ideologically an unreconstructed communist"³ and that *The Gospel According to Jesus Christ* displayed his "largely anti-religious vision."⁴ It further went on to say that the selection of Saramago as a Nobel laureate, showed that it was "yet another ideologically slanted award."⁵ Saramago retorted back by saying, "...if the Pope were on the jury they wouldn't have given me anything... The Vatican is easily scandalized, especially by people from outside. They should just focus on their prayers and leave people in peace."⁶ The Swedish Academy too reasoned that Saramago was chosen because his works, "sustained by imagination, compassion and irony, continually enables us to apprehend an elusive reality... He invokes tradition in a way that in the current state of things can be described as radical."⁷ Nevertheless, the fact remains that the establishment in Vatican totally disapproved of Saramago winning this prestigious award.

Something similar, on a much larger scale, happened in the United States of America when Martin Scorcese made a movie based on the life of Christ. *The Last Temptation of Christ* is a film where we find the divinity of Jesus Christ, the most
important cultural icon of the West, being repudiated. To understand the film and more importantly, why Christ is being picturised in this particular manner, it becomes vital for the cultural background of the film to be taken into consideration. As the making of the film has already been looked into, it suffices to say here that the period in which this film was made, the 1980s, was when Ronald Reagan took over the presidency of the United States of America, and when America was involved in military and intelligence operations in various parts of the world like Libya, West Asia, Central and South America, etc. Reagan's presidency also brought back memories of the Cold War. According to Richard Sterne in *Savior on the Silver Screen*:

Reagan's rhetoric positioned America and its (covert) allies in Nicaragua as the "freedom fighters" against a government funded by the "evil empire" of the USSR. At the same time he was condemning the USSR, however, Reagan created an image of stability, even a grandfatherly figure of reassurance. A master of media manipulation, Reagan carved out a national space on nostalgia and a sense of superiority.\(^8\)

Keeping in tune with this political scenario, Hollywood movies of the period began to portray the concept of evil as something that was not within but outside of the American society. Films like *Rambo II, Rocky IV, Red Dawn* and *Die Hard* are examples. Such a clear cut positioning of the good and the bad came about because the 1980s was seen as a period where the national pride, lost amidst the "defeat in South-east Asia and the shame of Watergate, and further burdened with a growing fear of the rise in terrorism"\(^9\), had to be restored:

The cycle of Vietnam War movies exhibited throughout the decade of the 1980s enabled the country to establish a fictitious, utopic space of victory, usually based on the dynamics of 'loss and recovery'. It is easy to see that the legacy of Vietnam in the 1980s—now restored into a vigilante motif
and an excuse for racism—would function well under the hegemony and rhetoric of nationalism and anti-terrorism.¹⁰

In a sense, it could be argued that "the failure of Vietnam and Watergate, created a decade of Rambos, vengeful and invincible."¹¹ Martin Scorsese, who came from the New York University's film school, belonged to a generation of directors who "acknowledged the classical industry conventions, but...revitalized and transformed generic conventions into something new."¹² Several movies on the life of Christ like *King of Kings* (1961), *Jesus of Nazareth* (1977), *The Greatest Story Ever Told* (1965), *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* (1965), etc presented a Jesus who was very much like the Jesus in the Bible, well aware of all that he had to say and do. Scorsese understood these films as those that "typically placed Jesus as the center of knowledge in the story."¹³ He felt that such films failed to present Jesus as a vulnerable being, which would then highlight his humanness. We may argue that Scorsese's film became controversial because he explores the various facets of vulnerability present within his Christ character. And through this, he confronts the American "collective, cultural memory"¹⁴ of what Jesus is, "a deeply held community identity that has gathered itself around the image of Jesus"¹⁵ as opposed to the movies of the period that tried to "reassure the audience of its collective imagination."¹⁶

Without doubt, the most controversial among all works studied for this thesis, is Martin Scorsese's *The Last Temptation of Christ*. The controversy in general, centred around the treatment of the Christ-character as being a man whose humanity overshadows his divinity. To put it more specifically, it was a scene towards the end of the film that shows Jesus as having sex with Magdalene that led to the film being branded
as an outright blasphemous movie. The *Time* magazine reported the issues that caused unease to a lot of people:

Fundamentalists are upset by scenes in which Christ (Willem Dafoe) is shown as tormented and self-accusatory ("I lied, I am afraid. Lucifer is inside me") and in which he persuades Judas (Harvey Keitel) to betray him because it is God's plan. But what has them fuming is a portion of a final dream sequence—meant to be Christ's hallucination while on the cross—in which Jesus is shown briefly engaged in sexual relations with Mary Magdalene, played by Barbara Hershey.

This scene comes towards the end of the film and it may be seen as symbolizing the natural urge of Christ to live life as someone who wants to get along in the world as an ordinary individual, but has been forced to become the Messiah. It is the conflicting polar modalities that arise within him as some one who wants to live life in his own way, but is not allowed to, that Scorcese attempts to emphasize in this film. But a section of the American society opposed this attempt and criticized its producers and director.

Martin Scorcese let us note, was raised a catholic and identified himself as a believer. In fact one of his ambitions was to become a priest. According to Atlanasio:

At one point in his life, Scorsese wanted to be a priest; he was, however, expelled from the preparatory seminary. "I was doing good, then I was 13 or 14, I realized there were women, girls, y'know, and I started to get fascinated by that. You simply couldn't concentrate. And the idea of celibacy was very hard."...Although Scorsese got thrown out of the seminary, he never quite gave up on the idea of being a priest. While he was at NYU, he toyed with going back to it, toyed with being a filmmaker and a priest.
Scorsese narrates his reasons for making *The Last Temptation of Christ*. In 1972, he was given a copy of Kazantzakis' book by Barbara Hershley, the actress who plays Magdalene in his movie. The book, especially the author's approach "that the human part of Jesus would have trouble accepting the divine", fascinated him. So much so that he decided to adopt it to celluloid. He finds it difficult to comprehend why such a hue and cry should be made about depicting the human side of Jesus:

Scorsese claims he had learned "from a priest friend that the Kazantzakis book is used in seminaries, not as a substitute for the Gospels, but as a parable that is fresh and alive, which they can discuss and argue about. And this is what I hoped the film would do." Scorsese was raised a Catholic and at one point wanted to be a priest... "I believe that Jesus is fully divine," he has declared, "but the teaching at Catholic schools placed such an emphasis on the divine side that if Jesus walked into a room, you'd know he was God because he glowed in the dark," instead of being someone "you could sit down with, have dinner or a drink with." Scorsese succinctly puts it this way about what he wouldn't do: "I didn't want a Christ who glowed in the dark." Scorsese argues that the film is an expression of his faith. At times though, it may appear that Scorsese himself is in a dilemma so as to whether his Christ is God or man because though he says that he's interested in the humanity of Christ, he is in agreement with the majority of Christians when he proclaims that, "He's God. He's not deluded. I think Kazantzakis thought that, I think the movie says that, and I know that I believe that..."

I believe, what Scorsese attempts in his film is to define a Christ who's God but human enough to be recognized as one of us. He's treading a very fine line here because human beings are susceptible to sin and Christians find it difficult to accept Christ as
someone who sins. But the protests and the negative propaganda campaign against this film seem to show that Scorcese and his film were more sinned against than sinning.

The protests against this film gathered pace even before the cameras started rolling. And even at this stage they were powerful enough to make one studio house abandon Scorcese and his project mid way through. "Paramount had planned to produce it in 1983 but backed away, fearing pressure from Fundamentalists."23 The protests at this initial stage were in the form of a letter writing campaign: "The campaign was initiated by The National Federation of Decency under the leadership of the Rev. Donald Wildmon, based in Tupelo, Mississippi."24 And this campaign was successful.

In 1987, Scorcese managed to get Universal Pictures to fund his project, but the budget for the film was reduced from $12 million to $6 million and there were changes in the cast. Though Aidan Quinn was supposed to play Jesus, the role eventually went to Willem Dafoe, whom viewers will recognize as the super-villain Green Goblin in the recent blockbuster Spiderman (2002). The film was set to hit theatres across USA in September 1988, but the protests simply grew. Universal seemed to have learnt from Paramount's experience and took a few steps, which they felt would counter the hostile campaign against the film. One of these was to hire a born-again marketing expert called Tim Penland, "a consultant who had experience promoting films to the evangelical Christian market"25, so as to use his religious tag to appease conservatives. But this move back fired when "Penland resigned in June, charging that Universal had reneged on a
promise to let conservative religious leaders see the film and comment on it well in advance of its release.”

Nevertheless, Universal Pictures did not take the protests lying down. They advanced the releasing date by a month and justified this move by saying that it’s important for people to actually see the film, so that it would "allow them to draw their own conclusions, based on fact, not fallacy.” The protests however only increased:

Jerry Falwell, the founder of the by-then disbanded Moral Majority called for boycotts of all theatres showing the film and all products of MCA, Universal’s parent company. Bill Bright, leader of Campus Crusade for Christ reportedly offered to raise ten million dollars to reimburse Universal if the studio would render unto him for destruction all copies of the Scorsese film.

Advertisements were also placed in newspapers criticizing the film. The producers too retaliated in like manner: "Universal responded with lofty, full-page newspaper ads in four cities, quoting Thomas Jefferson and announcing that the constitutional rights to free expression and freedom of religion were not for sale.” At times, the protests also become anti-Jewish in tone:

The Rev. R.L. Hymers Jr., a Christian extremist in the Los Angeles area, staged a demonstration near the Beverly Hills home of MCA Chairman Wasserman, who is Jewish. An actor portraying Wasserman stepped repeatedly on the bloody back of an actor dressed as Jesus and carrying a heavy cross. An airplane meanwhile flew overhead trailing a banner that read, WASSERMAN FANS JEW-HATRED W/TEMTATION, and a crowd chanted, "Bankrolled by Jewish money.”

A group called Morality in Media was "particularly incensed by Jesus’ anguished comment, 'I am a liar, I am a hypocrite. I am afraid of everything . . . Lucifer is inside
me. It’s Director Joseph Reilly felt that *The Last Temptation of Christ* "is an intentional attack on Christianity." The protests also took different forms. For example a Methodist Minister sent out "2.5 million mailings protesting the film and scheduled anti-Temptation spots on 700 Christian radio stations and 50 to 75 TV stations." The film was also criticized by Franco Zefferelli, the director of *Jesus of Nazareth*, a movie based on the life of Christ released in 1977. According to Zefferelli, "Scorcese’s film is damaging to the image of Christ. He cannot be made the object of low fantasies."

However, there were voices that spoke in favour of *The Last Temptation of Christ* and some of these were from the religious fraternity. The *U.S. Catholic* of December 1988 had an article titled 'Thank You Martin Scorcese' by Father Henry Fehren where he appreciates Scorcese for "daring to portray Jesus as one who was tempted and for reintroducing the notions of temptation and sin for discussion in the church." But then such voices were drowned by the din and fury created by those speaking against the film. Scorcese himself was quite irritated by these protests, because he felt that "Ninety-nine percent of the people who are complaining have not seen the picture."

Yet, the Office for Film and Broadcasting of the United States Catholic Conference gave the film an 'O' rating which meant that it was a 'morally offensive' film. Though there does not seem to have been an official ban on this film, the protesters did not completely fail in their mission. *The Last Temptation of Christ* was released on August 12th, 1988 in select cities like New York, Washington, Chicago, Los Angeles, Seattle, etc:
The protests and the continued calls for boycott reduced the number of theatres in which the film was screened nationwide and possibly made the film a box-office loser, at least according to leaders of the boycott. Even when the film was released in video format the next summer, there were video chains and local stores that refused to stock it.

Therefore it is evident that all the negative hype surrounding this film did have an impact, but then this was severe when *The Last Temptation of Christ* traveled to other countries like Chile and Russia. According to the Religious Affairs Reporter of BBC News, "Condemned by the pope, censored in South Africa. Israel and Chile, the film by Hollywood director Martin Scorsese has been the focus of often violent protests from Christian groups across the world." 39

So we see that the film became controversial in a lot of other places too: "Scorcese's movie generated a record 1,554 complaints to the UK regulator, the Independent Television Commission, when it was shown on Channel 4 in June 1995." 40 The film was banned in Chile during the dictatorial rule of General Augusto Pinochet. In fact, lawyers argued at the Interamerican Court of Human Rights in Costa Rica to lift the ban on this film. According to one of the lawyers, Alex Munoz, "The film has been transformed into an emblem for the fight for freedom of expression, particularly artistic freedom to create..." 41

In Russia, the popular television channel NTV "twice cancelled scheduled broadcasts of the film under pressure from the Russian Orthodox Church and some parliamentary deputies." 42 But on the third occasion, the channel decided to go ahead with the screening and this move received condemnation from the Russian Orthodox Church. BBC News reported:
Patriarch Aleksiy II and the synod of the Russian Orthodox Church appealed to managers of the NTV independent television company to cancel the showing of Martin Scorsese's notorious *The Last Temptation of Christ*, scheduled for 9th November, (as they felt that) this heretical film profoundly insults the religious feeling of Orthodox Christians.43

It's important to mention that NTV's decision to screen the film was criticized not just by the Russian Orthodox Church, but also by the Roman Catholics, the communists and Muslim groups.44 All these make obvious that Martin Scorcese's movie raised a storm not just in the Unites States of America, but also in other countries.

Scorcese, recently in the news for being nominated the Oscar for his film *Gangs of New York* (2002), feels that he does not really stray much from the Bible as far as his Christ character is concerned. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, according to Scorcese:

Kazantzakis' Jesus is both human and divine, in accordance with Christian teaching. What interested Scorsese in the author's approach was that the human part of Jesus would have trouble accepting the divine.45

However it is obvious that a section of the Christian society did not want a Christ-character who would have problems with his divine calling. The scene where Jesus has sex with Magdalene, employed by Kazantzakis and in effect by Scorcese to further emphasize his humanness was however used by the protesters as an amplification of their remonstrations. But at times, works of art featuring Christ became controversial, even if Christ's sexuality was not directly addressed. *Jesus Christ, Superstar* is an example in this regard. In fact, this text had become controversial for a variety of reasons.
It was condemned for being a "blasphemous hippie version" of Christ's life and also for the "flesh flashed by Christ's dancing followers." The probability that Magdalene could have harboured thoughts of a non-platonic relationship with Christ was also not appreciated by Christian activists, who picketed the Broadway show for giving the Gospel a 'rock-pop music' treatment. Jewish groups also joined the protests claiming that the "nasty portrayal of Jerusalem's high priests (in the film) would encourage anti-Semitism, while (Christian leaders like) Rev. Billy Graham decried the show's conception of Jesus as a mortal with delusions of divinity." The unbiblical lyrics in the film like, "One thing I'll say for him, this Jesus is cool" sung by Caiaphas and Herod telling Jesus, "Prove to me that you're no fool/Walk across my swimming pool," were also criticized. Ted Neeley, the actor who plays Jesus recalls the controversy:

*Jesus Christ, Superstar* triggered outrage, attempted bans and picketing both in New York and on the road. Part of that emanated from the rock-music treatment, part of it because the premise of this show is taking Jesus down off the stained-glass window and putting him in the streets where he was, adding the humanity element to Jesus that is not in the Bible... Everybody thought it was the ultimate blasphemy... We had to fight our way through picket lines every night just to get into the theater to go to work. We didn't think we could have opening night. They said we were going to destroy the religious fiber of the community, and demanded that we not perform. It was as if every religious group in the community was afraid we were going to destroy their religion. And the community was New York.

In short, the controversy seems to have risen mainly because of the depiction of a very human Christ. But the director of the film, Norman Jewison meant no disrespect to anyone. He felt that the musical was, "reverent and cynical at the same time." Neeley offers more explanations:
The stress is on the humanity of Jesus, not his sanctity... In that way, it's different from the stage version. To me, Jesus was a great, charismatic leader, theologian and thinker, but not God. He was a man who got beyond himself and went too far. No one ever talked about Jesus as a man—the human side—and that's what this [musical] does...

But if it was for the depiction of a human Christ that the creators of Jesus Christ, Superstar got brickbats, then more than 20 years later, it was for the same reason that they began to receive accolades. All the controversy generated earlier seemed to have worn off. According to Neeley, their musical has become highly popular:

It's considered wholesome family entertainment now, a rock-spectacle-with-a-message that enraptures audiences wherever it plays. We started out last year doing what was supposed to be a three-month tour...But everywhere we go, we're so successful we're invited back... Now I feel I'm the most fortunate person alive to be given this opportunity again.

It's a different matter that Neeley initially did not want to play the role of Jesus. He wanted to be Judas, as he felt that since Judas was a relatively unknown character, he could outline the contours of the role according to his own imagination:

I felt that, from the point of view of the acting premise, it would be great to create the character that nobody knew anything about, other than he had done allegedly the most dastardly deed of all time. I thought that I had free rein to create a human being that would be driven to do something like that. I didn't want to play Jesus because I felt-that everybody in the world knew exactly who he was.

But the role that Neeley coveted ultimately went to Carl Anderson, an African-American actor. As a matter of fact, getting the roles that they eventually played was no Cakewalk either for Neeley or for Anderson, as neither was the first choice for the roles. Anderson clearly remembers director Jewison's words in this regard, "I got my Jesus and got my
Judas," he told them. "I don't want to deal with a black Judas, and I don't want to deal with recasting." But both Neeley and Anderson performed exceptionally well in the screen test that Jewison had to give them the roles. Anderson went on to play the role of Judas in so many productions that he began to get tired of it:

I hated this piece. I hated doing it, because I wanted to do the next thing... I had not a clue, didn't appreciate it. Now I understand it... Opening night, I said to Ted: I just want to thank God for the opportunity to redo this thing under these circumstances with the person that I should have done it with all the time... It's just that God wrote this part for me. Andrew Lloyd Webber was a willing pawn. Nobody else can do this.\(^{59}\)

This was after they had started doing a lot of shows together across America. The influence of Christ (or the lack of it), in the early lives of both Anderson and Neeley, helped them in dealing with the characters they played. Both of them had a religious upbringing, though this didn't mean that they themselves were very religious. Anderson in fact, was a rebel:

My father was a strict religious guy, which is why I ran away—in the revolutionary sense—from Lynchburg, Va., to Washington when I was 20. It was the only place I knew that had nightclubs open on Tuesday night.\(^{60}\)

Neeley feels that his religious upbringing helped him in carrying off the role of Jesus well:

On Sundays we'd go to Sunday school, attend a church service, then a church social and go back to church at night for a prayer meeting... Religion was part of life. It was there. It still is. (The character of Jesus) is so deeply set in my mind and spirit that I can go into the theater, put on the wardrobe, walk onstage and just do it... I was born and raised Southern Baptist, and to an extent I guess I still am. I haven't been to church in years except for weddings and funerals or when I am invited to speak to a
congregation. Isn't that wild? I guess I believe that God in whatever form is in us. In that sense I guess I am religious. ⁶²

He also feels that the role itself deepened his understanding of Jesus: "I try to play Jesus with such inner strength that would garner the respect of those around him." ⁶³

The humanity of Christ seems to have been better received in the 1990s with Neeley even getting invited to churches to speak about his role and about the show:

In retrospect, we see that 90 percent of the groups that protested that opening back in 1971 are using the CD and the film as a teaching tool because they found this concept helps children learn about Jesus much easier because of the kinetics of the music... It's been an amazing turn of events... It's very satisfying to be so appreciated for something we were damned for 25 years ago... Now we're canonized every night on stage. That's why I've been with it so long, because it's been so rewarding. ⁶⁴

So we see that *Jesus Christ, Superstar*, that was strongly protested against when it was released for its unbiblical portrayal of Christ by giving weight to his humanity, hit it off well second time around, and this time not as a film but as a musical show performed all over America; so much so that it has influenced viewers in a religious manner too. The words of Ted Neeley are quite noteworthy in this regard:

There are thousands and thousands of people in America and Canada who have become Christians because they went and saw this movie or this stage show... Yes, it's a musical, and yet there are people all over the world who think of it as a ministry. ⁶⁵

In fact Neeley seems to have been elevated almost to the status that the biblical Christ enjoys. He feels that a lot of people link him with the Christ of their perception:
Everybody who sees this show comes into the theater with their own interpretation of Jesus... They project that up on the stage and onto me. Because of that, I do everything I can physically, spiritually, bodily, mentally, emotionally, to project what I feel is the true biblical essence of the character. They are in essence using me as a palette, upon which they're painting their opinion of who Jesus might be.  

Several sincerely consider *Jesus Christ, Superstar* not as a film or a stage show, but a divine plan for Neeley to spread the Gospel. They take his role in the film far too seriously than he himself would like to take it. He says:

There are people who love the film, who look at it as literally a video Bible. They find a spirituality in it, a sort of salvation they can't find in scriptures or church... Then there are people who see the live show and forget that I'm a person playing a role. I've had people come up to me after the show and say, 'I loved your performance, but you really shouldn't be drinking that beer.'

But Neeley is very sure about his identity, which he makes crystal clear:

I don't believe I'm the character. I'm not opening the Church of Ted all across the country! That's a joke. I play Jesus in the show... I'm a rock n' roll drummer from Texas. I'm a father, I'm a husband... I'm a human being.

Neeley reckons he's one of the most hugged men in North America. But he's worried about fans' adoration when they say that they see his face when they pray. But he tries to see the practical side of these responses:

When people come up to me and say 'You are in fact the true embodiment of Jesus Christ in this lifetime,' then that's endorsing our work as a group of performers. Most of the people in the audience have seen the film or heard the music or seen the show on tour before... They bring such positive energy into the building, and they sit there and focus that energy onto the stage. I walk out on that stage every night surrounded by the most
positive energy I've ever felt in my life. Quite frankly, I just float around the stage every single night.  

All these responses seem to show how much Ted Neeley has influenced viewers in a spiritual sort of way, as the Jesus in *Jesus Christ, Superstar*. So much so that he has a group of fans who call themselves 'Tedheads.'

It's important at this stage to look at the history of this phenomenon and how it developed through the years. *Jesus Christ, Superstar* has had so many incarnations. It was composed as an album by the British musician Andrew Lloyd Webber, and written by Tim Rice. Webber and Rice had actually wanted to release their creation as a stage musical. But financial constraints forced them to release it as an album. Money, however, never became a problem for them after this:

By February 1971, *Superstar* had hit the top position in all three major trade magazines (Billboard, Record World and Cashbox) and made music history by returning to the number one spot in all three magazines twice. *Jesus Christ, Superstar* was a huge success in 1971. The album was the year's top-selling LP, with more than 2 million albums sold.

It premiered in Broadway in October, 1971 and became an instant hit:

It was the first Broadway show to have a $1 million budget and more than $1 million advance ticket sales. The original Broadway production ran for more than 700 performances and followed with a sold-out national tour.

It was made into a film in 1973, directed by Norman Jewison at various locations in Israel at a budget of $3.5 million. "*Superstar* grossed over twenty million dollars and earned an Oscar nomination for Andre Previn's musical direction." Ted Neeley and
Carl Anderson got two Golden Globe awards each for their portrayals of Jesus and Judas respectively in the film—one for best actor and another for best newcomer; Yvonne Elliman also won a Golden Globe award for best actress for her role as Mary Magdalene. However, it was not the film but the road show based on it, staged almost twenty years later, that really saw adulations pouring in. The stage show in 1992 was in celebration of the 20th anniversary of the film. The first show in December was in Baltimore and subsequently there were to be performances in other places for the next three months. But the show was so successful that it was staged continually for almost five years across the length and breadth of America. Such was the success of the show. But then Jesus Christ, Superstar was controversial when it was initially released.

An over emphasis on the humanness of Jesus Christ seems to be the cause that ignites controversy as far as the reception of the three works analysed in this chapter is concerned. But it becomes difficult to conclude so in very general terms, especially when one takes a look at Gore Vidal's Live From Golgotha. In fact this book forces one to think that controversies hardly follow a set pattern. Incidentally, Live from Golgotha did not really spark off any major controversy. In fact coming three years after The Last Temptation of Christ, there have been no calls by religious groups to boycott or ban this book. An article titled, "Gore Vidal Spoofs History of Christianity" mentions that "there has been no reaction at all (to speak of) to this new Vidal book, which is far more truly 'blasphemous'" than The Last Temptation of Christ. The reviewer discusses this novel as a satire: "The effect of this new Vidal satire is that of all great satirists: It will delight
those who like to see religion skewered, and it will infuriate those who take religion severely.  

Vidal here mocks at the historical Christ by making him a Zionist 'first and last' who's only interested in the establishment of a Jewish nation, which is why he escapes crucifixion by accusing Judas of being the Messiah. But more than Christ, it is other prominent Christian historical figures like Paul and Timothy who become the butt of Vidal's ridicule. Vidal does not explore the complexities of his Christ-character, leave alone mention anything about his sexuality. Perhaps this could be the reason why there was not much of a furor regarding this book, despite the fact that Paul is described as a homosexual and Timothy as his young lover.

By and large, the above-mentioned works are those that brewed controversies. There were protests against these works and also calls to ban these, which were successful at times. It may be observed here that visual forms of fictional characterizations of Christ have become more controversial than purely textual ones. The protests against these have also become thunderous on occasions. This is because visual forms of art like cinema, drama, stage performances, musicals, etc appeal and cater to a larger audience, than a novel or a story would. Perhaps this is why Vidal's novel and others like King Jesus and The Man Who Died did not attract much attention towards their unbiblical depiction of Christ. But it's difficult to generalize controversies as following a set pattern. There are deviants here too. For example, it's interesting to note that a work like Jesus Christ, Superstar, which was decried for its so-called blasphemous content, became extremely popular more than twenty years later. It is also interesting to
note that *The Gospel According to Jesus Christ* became controversial and attracted negative attention when it was initially entered for a European Literature contest and later when Saramago won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1998. All this urges one to be inclined to think whether protests and remonstrations against works that stray from the biblical illustration of Christ’s life are knee-jerk reactions or whether there are larger political issues at play here!
NOTES


4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.


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10 Ibid, 289.

11 Ibid, 294.

12 Ibid, 290.

13 Ibid, 291.

14 Ibid, 292.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid.


19 Ibid.


25 Ibid.


27 Ibid.


30 Ibid.

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid.


38 Ibid, 170.


41 Ibid.


47 Kevin Nance, "Actor says Superstar Spreading the Spirit", Herald Leader.
<ftp://ftp.charm.net/pub/usr/home/sky/mc.htm>
50 Ibid.
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54 Ibid.
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64 Dave Kurtin, "Jesus Freak", <ftp://ftp.charm.net/pub/usr/home/sky/jfdc.htm>


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70 Ibid.


77 <http://www.the goldenglobes.com>


79 Ibid.