

THE
GNOSTIC
FAUSTUS

THE SECRET
TEACHINGS
BEHIND THE CLASSIC TEXT



RAMONA FRADON

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Inner Traditions
Rochester, Vermont

In memory of Miss Elizabeth Clever,
a gifted teacher who saw light
where there seemed to be only darkness



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A NAASSENE PSALM

*The soul . . . is worn away in death's slavery,
Now she has mastery and glimpses light:
Now she is plunged in misery and weeps.
Now she is mourned and herself rejoices.
Now she weeps and is finally condemned.
Now she is condemned and finally dies.
And now she even reaches the point where
Hemmed in by evil, she knows no way out.
Misled, she has entered a labyrinth.
Then Jesus said: "Behold Father,
She wanders the earth pursued by evil.
Far from thy breath she is going astray.
She is trying to flee the bitter Chaos,
And does not know how she is to escape.
Send me forth, O Father, therefore, and I,
Bearing the seal shall descend and wander
All Aeons through, all mysteries reveal.
I shall manifest the forms of the gods
And teach the secrets of the holy
Which I call Gnosis."*

INTRODUCTION

SETTING THE STAGE



In the sixteenth century Germany began a long and difficult political, religious, and intellectual transformation, sparked by Martin Luther's challenge to the Catholic Church and the spread of knowledge made possible by the new printing press. But even as Germany evolved and took on aspects of a modern state, the people held fast to their old superstitions, not the least of which was belief in the Devil and the terrible power of his magic.

God-fearing Germans, whether Protestant or Catholic, kept a wary eye out for signs of his presence and many thought they detected them in the practices of the mysterious Hermetic magi, men who strove to manipulate nature with magic and the esoteric arts. The magi sought miraculous power through alchemy, Egyptian mathematics and cabala, the mystical Jewish science of the inner plane and pursued forbidden knowledge with the help of angels or demons. They aimed to transform matter with the power of their minds and wills, and, in an age of unbounded hubris, some of them even aspired to be gods.

The Germans thought their magic was diabolical, but many of these men were utopian visionaries who hoped to heal the deep divisions of society through a universal spiritual awakening. They were associated with the radical Lutherans and the anti-papal Rosicrucians who were forming underground movements in the late sixteenth century. The confrontation of these movements with the forces of the threatened Catholic Church would soon plunge Germany and the continent into wars and religious persecutions that lasted throughout the following century.

Out of the stuff of this fraught and superstitious environment a modern myth was born. Its first manifestation was a crudely written manuscript called *The Vita and Historia of Doctor Johann Faustus*, a story laden with mysterious symbols and filled with magical events. It appeared anonymously sometime around 1570 and began to circulate surreptitiously in central and southern Germany. A quaintly tragic little sorcerer's tale concocted of German folk material and ancient religious lore, it preached the dogma of the Catholic Church but its content was clearly heretical. Doctor Faustus longed for knowledge forbidden by the Church and, in order to obtain it, made a league with the Devil. He indulged in wine and women with the Devil's connivance, acquired miraculous powers, consorted with a phantom goddess, and suffered a horrible end.

Although Faustus's punishment conformed to Catholic expectations, his extraclerical search for enlightenment was frowned on by the Church and the story was considered blasphemous. The scandalous little tale found a ready audience among the German people, however, and it grew in popularity, passing from hand to hand. As time went by it was embellished or adapted into peasant plays and puppet farces that made their way across Europe, wherever Roman rule was being challenged.

Some twenty years after its appearance, a version of the story came to the attention of the English playwright, Christopher Marlowe, and inspired him to write his own *Dr. Faustus*. A rebellious scholar himself who had abandoned church and university, Marlowe lent the tragic theme an intensity and a sheen that transformed the crude original work. He amplified the sense of doom that weighed on Faustus's soul and raised his fatal longing to a level that approached the sublime. With this first great adaptation, the European Faust tradition was born.

In the centuries that followed, a steady stream of dramatic, literary, and musical interpretations

crowned by Goethe's towering *Faust*—adapted the theme to the values of succeeding ages and shaped it into a modern myth whose restless, ever-striving hero is thought to typify the soul of Western man.

Ironically, this remarkably germinal little tale, which has come to be known as “the Faust Book,” assumed to have been written lightheartedly and simply for entertainment. Some opinion suggests that a Protestant or Humanist scholar may have written it in an effort to appeal to or profit from a pious interest that was absorbing the German people at the time. For a generation prior to the Faust Book's appearance, popular attention had been focused on the scandalous doings of one Georg Faustus, a soothsayer, necromancer, and physician of sorts from a central German town, who had died in 1550. The mysterious circumstances of his life and death had become a local legend, gathering many a superstitious folk tale as it spread, and it is thought that the Faust Book, posing as the life of this scoundrel and including a number of such tales in its plot, was engineered to amuse a reading audience.

Borrowings from other material have also been detected in the Faust Book. Scholars have long noted its resemblance to the New Testament Synoptic Gospels. These sketchy accounts of a doomed and wandering miracle worker follow the same crooked path as the Faust Book does and share its chronological disarray and lack of cause and effect. The source for Faustus's mistress, Helen, has been traced back to a legendary companion of Simon Magus, a first-century Gnostic. *Gnostic* is a broad term that encompasses a variety of practices and religious beliefs that were common in the few centuries immediately before and after the birth of Christ. Gnostic comes from the Greek word for “knowledge,” *gnosis*, and refers to the idea that there is special, hidden knowledge that only the initiated may possess. This knowledge is, ultimately, an individual's direct experience of the God that lies within. Simon Magus, called the “father of the Gnostics,” claimed that he was Christ and was vilified by Christian writers. Simon's Helen was a reformed prostitute whose checkered history mirrored the myth of Sophia, the fallen and repentant Gnostic goddess of wisdom. Sophia was known as “the whore” in her fallen state and Faustus's enchanting mistress, Helen, was also a lady of doubtful reputation.¹

The name Faustus, meaning “favored one” in Latin, was used by Simon Magus who also gave himself the cognomen “magician,”² and it is interesting to note that Georg Faustus called himself the “second Magus” or the “younger Faustus.” E. M. Butler matched key features of the Faust Book plot to essential elements of the Magus myth and uncovered another important borrowing. Faustus's story resembles those of outstanding figures of the genre, such as the first-century spiritual master Apollonius of Tyana, and Jeanne d'Arc, both of whom suffered tragic and seemingly foreordained deaths.

Butler characterizes the Faust Book as an “unsightly ruin”—the myth fallen on evil days—a reflection, perhaps, of the lowered status of magicians under Christian influence.³ Her suggestion of a theme underlying the surface tale goes no further, and—while much has been made of the alchemical imagery in Goethe's *Faust* (Carl Jung called it “an alchemical drama from beginning to end”)⁴—no such significance has been attributed to the Faust Book. It has been regarded, rather, as a quaint spontaneous fruiting of the European mythological soil whose deepest purpose was to entertain.

A GNOSTIC CREATION MYTH

While it is true that the Faust Book may be dismissed on literary grounds, in another sense it deserves the closest attention. The reader might well be curious about the number of Gnostic and early Christian references in the borrowed material, for, indeed, these items do not appear by accident nor do they accumulate by chance. Far from being randomly or cynically chosen by the unknown author,

they betray a carefully wrought and skillfully executed plan and may have served as signals designed to alert initiated readers of the time. They are actually outcroppings of an elaborate metaphorical code that reveals a mystical religious message heretical to the sixteenth-century Church.

The Faust Book is, in fact, a cleverly disguised Gnostic composite creation myth consisting of passages from a collection of Gnostic, Christian Gnostic, and Sethian revelation myths, hymns, polemics, gospels, and Hermetic dialogues. Many of them are from a fourth-century collection of Coptic Gnostic manuscripts that was discovered in Nag Hammadi, Egypt, in 1945.

The myth describes the majestic process of cosmic creation and features the story of Sophia, the Gnostic goddess whose hubris, transgression, and fall from grace created the material realm. Her suffering, repentance, and subsequent return to the world of Light constitute the central Gnostic soteriological, or salvation, drama and serve as a model for a human spiritual initiation that is also encoded in the Faust Book. The latter's message is decidedly heretical, pointing the way to salvation through sacramental sex, ecstatic revelation, and mystical communion with the God that lies within. Such a message would have been anathema to the Church and could only have been disseminated secretly or by the kind of coded subterfuge we find in the Faust Book.

The blasphemous little story has an introduction and forty-four short chapters, each of which is an allegory of a phase or feature of the composite myth. The author of the Faust Book selected highlights from the revelation myths and from the soteriological and polemical tractates and arranged them to form a creation myth replete with theological and moral speculation. As this book will demonstrate, the highlights were converted into analogs, metaphors, or symbolic images, or were paraphrased, reversed, or parodied to create the Faust Book plot. The framework of the myth remained the same but the altered passages produced a different story with a radically different message. While the myth assured salvation through acknowledging the inner God, the Faust Book threatened damnation for consorting with the Devil. Faustus represents the alienated soul who succumbs to temptation and suffers the fate of sinners, while the myth speaks of steadfast souls who follow the righteous path and are saved. These are the choices that confront the divided human being, the fate of whose soul is the central concern of the Faust Book.

The Underlying Texts

The composite myth is composed of highlights from several primary works: the Books of the Saviors, commonly known as the Pistis Sophia; the Hymn of the Pearl from the Apocryphal Acts of Thomas; the Apochryphon of John; the Tripartite Tractate, the Gospel of Truth; and the Creation According to Mani. Additional points of comparison can be found in these other Gnostic and Hermetic texts: On the Origin of the World, Zostrianos, Allogenes, The Testimony of Truth, Gospel of the Egyptians, and the Divine Pymander. All except the Pistis Sophia, the Mani myth, the Hymn of the Pearl, and the Divine Pymander are from the Nag Hammadi collection. Some of the codices in that library, as well as the Mani myth, had been known to modern religious scholars prior to their discovery, but only through the summaries or critical writings of Christian heresy hunters.

While the Hermetic Divine Pymander was a staple of Renaissance studies, the Pistis Sophia had been known to Western scholars only since the middle of the nineteenth century and there has been little reason to believe that it or any of the other treatises were available in original versions in sixteenth-century Europe. However, their encoded presence in the Faust Book suggests that their remains of the ancient heresy were, indeed, familiar to certain scholars at that time and, moreover, were circulating secretly in several Christian countries under cover of the popular little folk book.

The Hymn of the Pearl

The Faust Book plot is shaped by the salient features of the Hymn of the Pearl from the Syriac Acts of Judas Thomas. A beautiful allegory of the soul's striving for Gnosis, it is attributed to the third century school of the Christian Gnostic poet Bardaisan. In it, the consummation of the Gnostic quest is likened to a "robe of glory," a mirror of the soul that, when encountered on the path of life, connects the seeker to the Divine. The Hymn epitomizes the myth of the alien Pilgrim Savior who is redeemed by recalling his divinity. A comparison of highlights from the Hymn of the Pearl and summarized events from the Faust Book shows how the cryptic surface story both conceals and reveals the scripture's message of renewal.

Several symbolic terms the Gnostics used are explained here and, for the most part, are based on Hans Jonas's interpretations. The translation of the hymn is his as well.⁵

FAUST BOOK

Faustus is raised by a wealthy kinsman in Wittemberg (the center of early radical Lutheranism and occult studies, and in the text comparisons, often a synonym for heaven).

Faustus strays from the godly path and pursues five studies—theology, medicine, astrology, mathematics, and physics.

Faustus conjures up a ball of starlight, which changes into the Devil, or a gray material form.

Faustus summons the spirit/Devil to his house (the body that encases the soul).

Faustus makes a pact with the Devil in order to receive his hidden knowledge.

Faustus lives alone in his house except for his spirit and a disreputable youth named Christof Wagner whom he adopts and makes his famulus. In the end, he passes on his mission and his silver (inner knowledge) to Wagner.

Faustus indulges in food, wine, and sumptuous clothing procured illegally by the Devil.

Faustus tries to change his ways but the Devil tempts him with beautiful women and he forgets his good intentions.

Faustus falls asleep ("asleep" is a Gnostic term denoting ignorance of the Father) and is flown down to Hell by a devil.

Faustus lies dreaming in bed one night when he hears a roaring voice call to him, "Get thee up!"

Faustus jumps out of bed and sees a chariot drawn by two dragons. It carries him up to Heaven where he receives a revelation.

Faustus performs a variety of magical feats with newly acquired supernatural powers.

Faustus steals silver (profound wisdom) from the pope's palace.

Faustus rids a noble lady of an unwanted suitor and separates

HYMN OF THE PEARL

When I was a little child and dwelt in the kingdom of my Father's house [the world of Light] and delighted in the wealth and splendor of those who raised me,

my parents sent me forth from the East, our homeland, with provisions for the journey [the Gnosis, consisting of five precious substances].

They took off from me the robe of glory, which in their love they had made for me [the divine nature or spiritual body].

I went down to Egypt [the world of matter or the body that imprisons the soul of Light].

I went straightway to the serpent [the evil tempter or the desire nature] and settled down close by his inn until he should slumber and sleep so that I might take the Pearl from him [the divine spark that lies hidden in every man; the deeper knowledge that must be recovered].

Since I was one and kept to myself I was a stranger to my fellow dwellers in the inn. Yet saw I there one of my race, a fair and well-favored youth, the son of kings. He came and attached himself to me and I made him my trusted familiar to whom I imparted my mission.

I clothed myself in [the] garments of the unclean ones [the body or disguise that alienates the soul from its origin] . . . and they ingratiated themselves with me, and mixed me drink with their cunning and gave me to taste of their meat

and I forgot that I was a king's son and served their king; I forgot the Pearl for which my parents had sent me.

Through the heaviness of their nourishment I sank into deep slumber.

All this that befell me my parents marked. . . . And they wrote a letter to me. . . . Like a messenger was the letter. . . . It rose up in the form of an eagle... and flew until it alighted beside me and became wholly speech. [An awakening through a Call from above.]

At its voice and sound I awoke and arose from my sleep, took up, broke its seal and read. I remembered that I was a son of kings . . . remembered the Pearl for which I had been sent down to Egypt,

and I began to enchant the terrible and snorting serpent ...

I seized the Pearl,

and turned to repair home to my Father. Their filthy and impure

a knight from his horse.	garment I put off and left it behind in their land ...
Faustus reencounters the bewitching, numinous Helen of Greece (the equivalent of the robe of glory) whom he had conjured up for his students.	My robe of glory which I had put off and my mantle which went over it, my parents . . . sent to meet me. . . Its splendor I had forgotten, having left it as a child in my Father's house . . . And the image of the King of kings was depicted all over it. . . I also saw quiver all over it the movements of the gnosis.
Faustus makes Helen his bedfellow and they consummate their love.	And I stretched towards it and took it and decked myself with the beauty of its colors. And I cast the royal mantle about my entire self.
An omniscient child is born from their union. (Faustus has overcome duality and acquired transcendent awareness.)	Clothed therein, I ascended to the gate of salutation and adoration. . . .
The Devil comes for Faustus and dismembers him.	[My Father] received me joyfully and I was with him in his kingdom.

The pilgrim's joyful reunion with his Father becomes Faustus's deadly appointment with the Devil—an example of the Faust Book's use of inversion to both hide and reveal its meaning.

Sophia and Faust

The soteriological foundation of the Faust Book is provided by the Pistis Sophia, a collection of seven books containing discourses and a version of Sophia's myth. It purports to be a revelation by the resurrected Jesus to a chosen group of followers in which he reveals mysteries he had not included in his public teaching. In the first two books, he recounts the story of the hubristic goddess Sophia—how she violated the laws of the pleroma [the thirteen highest regions or aeons of the Light world] where ideal forms or stages of awareness—also referred to as aeons—dwell in timeless perfection. Sophia longed to know the unknowable Father directly, to gaze upon his Light, and thinking that she was approaching it, she pursued the Light of a jealous aeon into the darkness beyond the pleroma. There she was hounded and pursued by the forces of darkness until Jesus found her in the chaos, lamenting her wrongdoing and crying to the Light of Lights to save her.

Sophia's story is featured over other fallen deities in the Gnostic pantheon not simply because she personifies wisdom, the goal of the Gnosis, but because the power of her faith and the hope that sustained her inspired her followers and provided a model for human souls who repented and sought salvation. These virtues are expressed in thirteen hymns she sang to the Light as she waited in the Darkness for Jesus to save her. They are scattered throughout the composite myth and accompany the stages of awareness taking place in the human transformation encoded in the Faust Book. The hope they express counters the hopelessness that burdens Faustus throughout the story and hints at his eventual release.

In the remaining four books of the Pistis Sophia, Jesus discloses the names of the rulers and the workings of a vast, hierarchical system of divine retribution. He reveals how the just may be saved and whether or not there is hope for the damned, the information being drawn from him by questions from the disciples. The question and answer format—which also appears in the Faust Book—is used in the Apochryphon of John and other texts as well and is a familiar form in Gnostic scripture.

It has been suggested that the Pistis Sophia was an attempt to syncretize the various strains of third- or fourth-century religious thought. It combines elements of astrology, magic, Christianity, and Gnostic Light physics (a formulated account of the inner workings of the universe based on an inspired vision of atomic structures and processes), docetism (the belief that Christ, a spiritual being, only appeared to be a man, and did not really die on the cross), and emanationism (the flowing forth of extensions of the godhead). It also contains some vivid and bizarre Manichaean cosmological details. (Manichaeism was a syncretistic, dualist religion that reached its peak in the sixth century and

rivalled Christianity for a time. Considered one of the four great world religions, it posits an eternal war between the forces of darkness and the light. Its founder was a Persian visionary named Mani who claimed that he was the thirteenth avatar in a line that included Zoroaster, Buddha, and Jesus.) Like Mani's, the Pistis Sophia's cosmology is complicated, sometimes to the point of incomprehensibility, and has provoked dismay in certain scholarly quarters. In its inclusiveness, however, it is an abundant source for the Faust Book's ecumenical message and provides a certain authority, if not direct inspiration, for Faustus's magical tricks—most notably through the stupendous miracle wrought by Jesus, who reverses the very movements of the heavens. In book five (Ch. 136:359) Jesus makes a invocation, “speaking the name of the father of the Treasury of the Light . . . And in that hour all the heavens went to the west, and all the aeons and the sphere and their rulers and all their powers fled together to the west to the left of the disk of the sun and the disk of the moon . . . And the whole world and the mountains and the seas fled together . . .” (see also chapter 12 of the Faust Book).

Sophia and Creation

Another work of great importance to the Faust Book is the Apochryphon of John, a creation revelation that encompasses the body of Gnostic myth. Its components were accumulated over a period of time beginning before the birth of Christ and its influence extended well into the Christian era—perhaps as late as the eighth century. It is considered a central work of Gnostic scripture and seems to have been understood as such by the Faust Book author, who relied heavily on its inclusive narrative and included many questions it raises about the origin of evil and the fates of different souls.

The Apochryphon includes a version of Sophia's story that complements the one in the Pistis Sophia. While the latter's emphasis is soteriological and focuses on Sophia's repentance and redemption, the Apochryphon of John details her role in creating the material realm. We learn that Sophia's “ignorance” hypostatized into an “abortion” that was cast outside of the pleroma and assumed the form of Yaltabaoth, her hideous son who created the Heavens and the Earth.

Yaltabaoth is the god of the Old Testament—a false god according to this and other Gnostic creation accounts—who fashions Adam as a lifeless prototype of man. Adam comes to life, however, when Yaltabaoth unwittingly blows some of the Light he had received from his mother into the sleeping man's face. This makes Adam luminous, creating envy among the evil powers, who begin to fight with the forces of Light for possession of his soul. The battle takes a number of surprising turns, some of which reverse the temptation account in Genesis. It is the Father, not Satan, for instance, who tempts Eve to eat the forbidden apple, for the fruit is the Father's Word, or the Gnosis.

The cunning archons, rulers of the material realm, give Adam a material body in order to imprison his Light, and they fashion a woman to arouse his desire. This is a setback for the Father's cause, for as Adam's descendants multiply, a portion of the Father's Light is imprisoned in each of their bodies and forgotten. In response to this wicked stratagem, Christ comes down in successive incarnations to reveal the godhead's glory and remind human beings of their lost inner Light. This is Faustus's mission, too, as he “circulates” in his various journeys, stealing silver from the pope, and performing amputations, beheadings, and other magical “extractions” that liberate the Light soul from the body.

Sophia and the Logos

Another significant text in the composite myth is the Tripartite Tractate, a creation account that traces the devolution and restoration of the pleroma through the actions of one of its youthful aeons. This is the Logos, Sophia's masculine counterpart, who is given free will to transgress by the Father and thereby to facilitate the divine revelation. The youthful, well-intentioned Logos attempts to grasp the Father's incomprehensibility, but—unable to bear the sight of the Father's Light—looks into the

Darkness and doubts. His lower thought remains there, as does Sophia's, and produces a "shadow realm—a dark reflection of the Light world based on ignorance and error. This evolves into our world, a discordant realm not unlike the hellish kingdom the Devil describes in the Faust Book. Indeed, the Gnostics equated this world with Hell and the god that rules it, with the Devil.

Like Sophia, the Logos repents, arriving at a turning point that leads to his own and the godhead's restoration. It is a critical moment in the Faust Book, too, but Faustus fails to make the turning. Or, at least, the reader is led to believe. His next act, while seemingly arbitrary, proves to be a reflection of the Logos's change of mind. As the latter puts a stop to the emanations of his lower thoughts and returns to his higher thought to the pleroma, Faustus suddenly abandons his obsession with Hell, becomes an astrologer, and turns his own thoughts upward to the heavens.

His continuing and disciplined study of astrology coincides with the Logos's creation of a new administration whose purpose is to rule and bring order to the chaotic realm he has created. The Logos is aided by a savior who embodies the virtues of the pleroma, and, like Christ in the Apocryphon of John, reveals himself to the warring aeons and their human "copies" in order to remind them of the Father and their own divinity.

The first part of the Tripartite Tractate describes a heavenly trinity consisting of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—the Church—the Church comprising the aeons of the pleroma, a harmonious grouping whose unity is disrupted by the actions of the Logos. The second part is an account of the fashioning of Man and the suffering he endures according to the Father's plan. His fate is to experience pain so that he may repent and seek salvation.

The third part discusses the three soul types whose prospects for being saved vary according to the amount of Light that is in them. The reader is reminded that repentance, spiritual baptism, and hope will bring "redemption into the Father" for those who are worthy, while those who are not will "receive destruction in every way." In the end, the Logos is redeemed and the pleroma is restored to its original unity. Its restoration is signified in the Faust Book by a sumptuous wedding attended by three young lords who represent the trifurcated Logos.

The World of Hell

The Gospel of Truth derides the "sleeping" or "ignorant" souls whose nightmares of violence and discord are the substance of our world. Its descriptions of those nightmares parallel the descriptions of Lucifer's world in the Faust Book. But it also brings the good news of Jesus's coming and celebrates the souls who awaken. Its message of hope, it says, is its own realization: "In the name of the gospel is the proclamation of hope, being discovery for those who search for him." It praises the Father's Word delivered by Jesus Christ and calls it the "book of the living," which "fills the deficiency" and "abolishes the form of the world." The world, in its view, is a product of "error" or ignorant thought and can be dissolved by a reversal of that thought, that is, through knowledge of the Father. These notions are implicit in the myths of Sophia and the Logos, whose ignorance creates the world and whose remembering, or knowledge of the Father, enables them to leave it behind.

Primal Man and the Battle for Light

Another of the primary underlying texts, the Creation According to Mani, provides some colorful details about the Father's attempt to recapture his Light that was imprisoned in the Darkness. He fashions an elaborate system of cosmic purification that employs the revolutions of the Sun and Moon. The latter transports the particles of Light released by the dead up to the Sun and the Sun returns them to the pleroma. Faustus's round trip flying journeys are, among other things, references to these heavenly revolutions.

In Mani's myth, Primal Man is a counterpart of Sophia and the Logos. He is an emissary of the Father who descends from the Light world to repel an invasion by the Darkness, a strife-ridden kingdom that covets the Light out of envy. The eternal struggle between the opposing principles for possession of the Light begins with a tactic employed by Primal Man who surrenders his armor of fire. Light powers to the forces of Darkness, thinking that its virtue will dilute their power.

The evil archons capture him anyway and he falls "asleep" in their midst, forgetting his heavenly origin and the mission on which he was sent. He awakens when he is called from on high and remembering the Father, returns to his kingdom, leaving the armor he surrendered behind. Thus a war begins between the two cosmic forces over the imprisoned parts of Light.

Unlike the transgressions of Sophia and the Logos, Primal Man's descent does not produce the material realm. His role is simply to battle the invading Darkness; the creation results from the great war between the opposing kingdoms. Their competing and often outlandish stratagems produce a mixture of Darkness and Light that evolves into the cruel material realm. The spirit's description of Hell in the Faust Book is based on a Manichaean hymn expressing the alien soul's terror when confronting the hostile forces of nature.

Mani's myth is not included in the text comparisons, but a number of Faust Book events are clearly analogous to some of its important features. Faustus's corruption reflects Primal Man's imprisonment and "sleep," and his bloody end is based on the death of the Manichaean savior, Jesus patibilis. In his role as a doctor who travels widely to answer requests for help, Faustus represents another aspect of this Jesus that is found in Manichaean hymns. There he is praised as the "Light Jesus," a beneficent physician who "walks on every road" to heal human souls and bring Light and hope to the world.

The Frame of the Composite Myth

The structure of the myth is similar to that of the Apochryphon of John and the Creation According to Mani. It is based on the form of an ancient Mesopotamian ritual drama in which the transformation of a soul is enacted twice, first on the macrocosmic and then on the microcosmic level. Sophia's story comes first and is enhanced with details from various texts about other divine transgressors. Together they form a portrait of the fallen cosmic soul in all phases of its initiatory journey.

Sophia's story overlaps the human drama in which the first man, Adam, struggles with the material half of his bitterly divided nature. When the powers of darkness fashion a lifeless Adam, the redeemed Sophia awakens him, and when they battle with emissaries of the Light for the souls of Adam's descendants, Sophia comes down from above to remind them of their inner light. Much speculation accompanies these stories concerning the different soul-types and their prospects for salvation, some passages warning against various evils while others grow rapturous at the joys awaiting the person who receives the Gnosis and experiences the Light directly.

The outline of Sophia's story is visible in the Faust Book plot. Faustus's indulgence in sinful pleasures and consequent torment is a parody of her transgression and her painful exile from the world of Light. While his ending is bloody and seems to negate her joyful rebirth, it is based on the ritual dismemberment of the savior in the Mani myth whose death is implicitly hopeful. The sacrifice of Jesus patibilis—an embodiment of the Light soul imprisoned in Darkness who, as the life force of animals and plants, is slaughtered daily—complements Sophia's redemption, for his cyclical death followed by rebirth and promises eternal renewal. Indeed, in the human spiritual process encoded in the Faust Book, Faustus's death refers to the "shedding of the body" or extinguishing of ordinary consciousness that attends a spiritual awakening.

While the Faust Book author borrowed material from the Mani myth, he rejected its absolute dualism in favor of a unitary theology compatible with the Hermetic worldview that influences the Faust Book. This theology is attributed to Valentinus, a second-century Christian Gnostic visionary.

The Tripartite Tractate and Gospel of Truth—both of which are featured in the composite myth—have been attributed to his school. In these works, Darkness and Light refer to ignorant and enlightened states of mind rather than to antagonistic first principles. The dualistic world emanated from a single source, the mind of an unknowable god the Gnostics called Father, and the whole of creation arose from his generous wish to reveal himself. The material world with its harsh conditions and retributive laws was a paradoxical extension of his loving thought, designed so that ignorant souls might experience pain, seek after him, and receive his revelation.

In a passage from the Gospel of Truth that concludes the underlying myth, a revelation by a savior brings awareness of the Father to a “sleeping” soul and dissolves what it refers to as the “world of oblivion.” The Father’s imprisoned Light is set free by this act and returns to the godhead to help restore its original unity. The Father’s movement toward self-revelation is thus entwined with the human and divine souls’ search for enlightenment. In the text comparisons, the godhead’s devolution into darkness and matter is matched with Faustus’s corruption and loss of faith and with Sophia’s fall and suffering. Its restoration is synonymous with their awakening, and events in the Faust Book that signify one of these transformations, signify them all.

FAUST AND SPIRITUAL INITIATION

While the story of Sophia’s enlightenment takes place in the context of the underlying myth, the human spiritual initiation it prefigures is encoded in the surface story of the Faust Book. It is indicated by Hermetic and alchemical symbols, symbolic numbers and colors and metaphorical enactments by Faustus and others of repetitious alchemical events. There are also suggestions of Yantric diagrams (linear geometric figures designed to focus consciousness on the inner planes), parodies of sacred sexual acts by Faustus and Helen, and other features peculiar to the transforming spiritual practice of Vajrayana Tantra, the yoga of sex.

It is an Eastern form of kundalini yoga involving the awakening of a universal energy/consciousness residing in the body at the base of the spine. It rises and falls at the yogin’s will through an invisible, spiritual channel in the spine. These repetitious movements induce altered states and are designed to reconcile polarities in the body and mind, to unify consciousness and bring about universal awareness. This practice involves worship of the divine feminine through the female body and includes rituals of sacramental sex that require intensive training and iron self-control.

The alchemical references in the Faust Book complement the tantric process, for their aims and methods are similar and, as we shall see, are based on a similar worldview. Tantric sexual arousal is equivalent to the fire used by alchemists to promote change in their metals, and the goal of both practices is to restore multiplicity to unity by reconciling opposites.

Chinese and Indian alchemists are known to have practiced Tantra, but its use is never mentioned by their secretive European counterparts, although it is strongly suggested by the vivid sexual imagery in their otherwise murky writings. The Faust Book seems to be suggesting with its own symbols and imagery that Faustus is practicing alchemy as well as the yoga of sex.

This surprising notion, appearing as it does in the context of a Sophia-centered Gnostic myth, may be the signature of a hidden Gnostic/ Hermetic goddess-worshipping tradition in which alchemical magic, and sacramental sex played central roles. Since ancient times, in secret cults and brotherhoods in Europe, the Middle East, and elsewhere, worshippers of the divine feminine have sought union with the goddess through rituals involving alchemy and sexual magic. In these sacraments, in which passionate arousal was an analog of the alchemist’s transforming fire, the body served as the vessel in which the mystical union took place. Faustus’s name is a play on words that connects him to the

tradition and to its goddess and her sacraments. We will return to this shortly and to further discussion of alchemy and tantra, but first we must determine which of Faustus's contemporaries he really represents and how they relate to alchemy, to tantra, and to the goddess herself.

Faustus and the Magi

While Faustus is thought to be patterned after the disreputable charlatan whose last name he bears, he actually fits the larger mold of the Gnostic/Hermetic magical alchemist, or magus. The magi were the wonder workers mentioned earlier, throwbacks to the Persian magi and magicians who abounded in the Middle East at the time of Simon Magus, John the Baptist, and Jesus. More recently, they followed in the footsteps of Marsilio Ficino and Pico della Mirandola, fifteenth-century Italian scholars who were inspired by ancient Hermetic texts and Jewish cabala to experiment with magic.

They were all devout Christians, but some of the German and later Italian magi consorted with dark or questionable powers and either practiced alchemy or believed that its processes were aspects of universal truth. While the Italian philosophers sang praises to the divinely seductive figure of Venus, some of their successors, both German and Italian, expressed an inordinate passion for the goddess that bore a suspicious resemblance to the "chaste" eroticism characteristic of tantric sacraments.

Like Faustus, the magi traveled widely; besides understanding cabala, they were versed in mathematical or Pythagorean magic and were familiar with angelic hierarchies and resonance between the spiritual and material planes. They manipulated subtle forces with the help of angels and demons and strove, as Faustus did, to acquire godlike knowledge and power.

Henry Cornelius Agrippa (1486–1535) was, perhaps, the most notorious of the magi. A Hermetic alchemist, he also conducted experiments with talismans, chants, and certain sympathetic substances designed to attract and call down planetary influences. Using cabalistic manipulations and mathematical magic, he aimed to contact stars in the celestial spheres and communicate with angels in the regions beyond the stars. He sought to merge with God through a mediating frenzy for Venus that recalls Faustus's passion for the visualized image of Helen. His relentless pursuit of hidden knowledge and power may have been the model for Faustus's fatal pursuit of the Devil's arcane. Indeed, the Renaissance scholar, Dame Frances Yates, suggested that Agrippa's magic was on Marlowe's mind when he wrote his dramatic adaptation of the Faust Book.⁶

It was John Dee (1527–1608), however, whose influence Marlowe may have been attacking. An enormously influential scholar who was a spy for Queen Elizabeth and secretly promoted the Protestant cause in Europe, Dee was a brilliant and eccentric astronomer, astrologer, mathematician, alchemist, and Hermetic. Like the equally accomplished Faustus, he despaired of gaining wisdom through conventional studies and turned to magic, calling on angels to enlighten him. He and his companion, Edward Kelly, communicated with the archangels Gabriel, Michael, and Uriel, and, while Dee did not profess a passion for Venus, he and Kelly engaged in their own brand of "sacred sex" and "alchemical transmutation": they exchanged their wives with each other periodically (not without the ladies' hesitation) believing as good Hermetics that this "elemental rotation" would transform them all and unite them as One.⁷ Dee was a force in Hermetic circles and one of his esoteric treatises may have been an influence on the Faust Book, as we shall see.

Perhaps the most daring and reckless of the magi was Giordano Bruno (1548–1600), an Italian Hermeticist who practiced cabala and powerful Egyptian magic. He ventured further into the arcane arts than the other magi did, openly espousing the Egyptian mysteries and consorting with demonic powers. He cultivated a prodigious memory and a magical system of organizing and storing vast amounts of knowledge in his mind, hoping to acquire the omniscience of a god. This stupendous endeavor surpassed even Faustus's attempts to acquire knowledge, or, as the Faust Book put it, to

“seek out the very foundations of Heaven and Earth.” Bruno was a celibate whose passion for Venus transported him directly to God. He finally exceeded the limits of Church tolerance and was burned at the stake in Rome.

The magi insisted that their magic was “natural” and that their transformations came about through pious contemplation, but the Faust Book seems to suggest otherwise. By attaching tantric and alchemical symbolism to the magus-like figure of Faustus, and by virtue of his singular behavior, seems to imply that the magical alchemists engaged in sacramental sex to promote their spiritual development. In chapter twenty-nine of the Faust Book, the Venus whom the magi worshipped appeared thinly disguised as the conjured image of Helen of Greece, a traditional symbol for Venus and/or Sophia. In a later chapter, Faustus engages with this goddess image in an act of sacred sexual union and there she is associated with the white tantric Rupravajra goddesses who are fertile wisdom figures like Sophia. In their hands they hold a mirror that reflects the whole universe, and all aspects of the world are said to reside in their forms.

The magi were not charlatans like Georg Faustus, but their reputations were unsavory and the magic was thought by many to be demonic. Had it been known that they also practiced tantra, as the Faust Book implies, it would doubtless have brought them to ruin. This may not wholly account for the Faust Book’s secrecy, however, for cryptic complexity was characteristic of occult writings at the time. Unorthodox thought had to be concealed in an era of political and religious persecution, and secrecy had long been a feature of Hermetic/ alchemical literature.

Spiritual Alchemy in the Faust Book

While the alchemists often misled when speaking about their Art, it is clear from their writings that the practice of alchemy rests on two fundamental postulates: one, that all matter is ultimately one substance; and two, that matter is also mutable—that chaotic or unstable substances like lead or tin can be altered and restored to unity (gold) by manipulating or rotating them through the four material elements that govern them. Another basic assumption is that the seed of gold resides in the basest of metals and can be brought forth by the alchemist’s Art, just as precious minerals are gestated in the earth.

In pursuit of this goal, they employed two principal agents to promote the metal’s transformation. They are feminine Mercury—a volatile, corrosive substance that dissolves the metal and purges its impurities—and rigid, masculine, form-giving Sulphur, which works in opposition to Mercury’s effect. When they are placed together over fire in the alchemist’s vessel, they tear at each other viciously, producing the alternations of dissolution and coagulation of the metal that characterizes the alchemical process. Ultimately, Sulphur’s form-giving, creative power is released by its purging of Mercury’s vitriol, and when Mercury is captured and bound by Sulphur, their “marriage” produces Gold, the most stable of metals.

The Faust Book is divided into four parts, symbolizing the major stages of the alchemical process and in each part a color is mentioned—black, green, white, and red in that order. Black signals Saturn’s phase, the *nigredo*, or dissolution, corruption and putrefaction of the metal, while green (the phase ruled by Jupiter) represents the reforming, or “greening,” of the Earth (the metal or Body). The white phase, ruled by the moon, signals the emergence of the feminine principle; and red, the solar phase, represents the culmination of the work where sun and moon are joined in mystical marriage. The Faust Book’s forty-five chapters correspond to the symbolic number of “days” it is said are required to complete the Work, and the flying lions, stags, dragons, distilled water, lilies, beheading bulls, and apes that appear in the story signify operations taking place in the alchemist’s vessel at different stages of the process.

Among their many other roles, Faustus and Mephistopheles play alchemical roles, their actions

dramatize all aspects of the Art, but for the most part they represent Sulphur and Mercury. When Mephistopheles seduces and corrupts Faustus, then guides him on transforming journeys, he reflects the actions of Mercury, the dual-natured catalyst that decomposes the imperfect metal before it transmutes it. In their journeys, when he and Faustus fly back and forth to perform healings and miraculous changes, they are imitating the actions of volatile spirits that rise from the decomposed metal and circulate in the vessel, then return to induce a chemical transformation. (By Spirit is meant the essence of the metal that is rooted in the Divine. It is often conflated with Soul when alchemists speak of an essence that arises from the decomposed Body and returns to impregnate it with new life. The Soul is feminine, however, while the Spirit is male, and is connected to the body as a template and a higher form of consciousness. When it is purified it reflects the light of Spirit and receives it in a mystical union of polar opposites.)

Hermetic philosophers maintained that the process of alchemical transmutation underlay the workings of the universe and the Faust Book is based on that assumption. Indeed, like Goethe's great adaptation, it is an alchemical as well as a Gnostic drama. The alchemical process corresponds to the stages of the cosmic creation taking place in the myth and for the human transformation encoded in the story. Both involve progressive or ascending levels of awareness that are associated with various stages of the Art. Hermetics also believed that Heaven and Earth are reflections of each other and they attempted to unite them here on earth. Their belief was thought to be validated in the transmutation of metals, for there matter was said to be spiritualized and Spirit was given form. As Faustus and Mephistopheles play first one role and then another from the underlying myth, they demonstrate the mutability of matter that was mentioned above, as well as the link between terrestrial and celestial events. Their changes of behavior, character, and motivation are determined as much by the dissolving, putrefying, circulating and coagulating metal as by the changes in Heaven taking place in the myth.

The spiritual alchemists produced transformations in their metals, not merely by reading the "book of nature" and imitating its processes, but by mastering their inner environments as well. Working deeply on the level of the soul and identifying with the spirits of their metals, they influenced them on a cellular—some say atomic—level, and the transformed metals mirrored back the transformation of their souls.

According to the writings of Eastern tantric alchemists, this process was repeated in their bodies as they raised and lowered the kundalini and entered altered states of consciousness. Both involved a break with ordinary perceptions of reality; even as their metals dissolved, so did their conventional body-minds. Faustus's body-mind is dissolved when he "sleeps" or enters into trances before embarking on the "round trip" flights that also signify the Kundalini's rise and fall. He departs from ordinary reality when he conjures up the Devil and, with him, a universe ruled by different laws where strange, yet familiar, characters participate in extraordinary events.

Among them is the aforementioned enchantress, Helen of Greece, whom Faustus conjures from the past and makes his companion and bedfellow. While in the Gnostic context she represents the goddess Sophia, she is also a reflection of the alchemist's Soror Mystica (spirit woman) who is always with him in his mind. She is the feminine aspect of his psyche, the deeper wisdom that must be developed and united with its opposite, just as feminine Mercury and masculine Sulphur are united in a final conjunction.

TANTRA IN THE FAUST BOOK

Faustus's passion for Helen, as we mentioned earlier, recalls the immortalizing "furor" for Venus

experienced by Agrippa and Bruno. Helen's numinous presence seems to be a manifestation of the "divine light" Bruno described, "which takes possession of the soul, raises it and converts it into God."⁸ As such it resembles tantric worship of the divine feminine, although the tantrist radical enhances the spiritual methods the magi reported using, intensifying his passion by means of deliberate and controlled sexual stimulation and by arousal of the Kundalini. The nature of kundalini energy/consciousness is both sexual and sublime and, when awakened, can induce transcendent bliss. While references to the Kundalini are carefully disguised in the Faust Book, certain features in the story are readily apparent to the watchful eye as being those of a tantric initiation.

Mephistopheles' contentious, often ambiguous relationship to Faustus is a reference to tantra just as it is to alchemy. It resembles the shifting tactics of a guru who varies his approach to his pupil in order to dissolve his resistances and prepare him for wider states of consciousness. Both Faustus and the tantric aspirant stimulate and indulge their senses under the guidance of their teachers who encourage them to have sexual encounters with women in their dreams. Both work with magical diagrams or yantras, exhibit extraordinary will, "fly" on visionary journeys, acquire powers of teleportation, invisibility, prophecy, and healing, and have ritual intercourse with women whom they visualize as goddesses. The tantrist is said to become omniscient as a result of his sacred "marriage" and Faustus produces an omniscient child in his union with the visualized Helen, or Sophia.

The tantric yogin indulges in wine, food, and erotic dreams just as Faustus does, but unlike Faustus, he strives to transcend his senses and overcome attachment to pleasure and desire. This goal accords with the efforts of certain magi to rise above carnal love, and with the underlying Gnostic admonition to "cast off the body of desire." It requires strict control of undisciplined thoughts and constant meditation on emptiness.⁹ While Faustus seems unwilling to make such an effort, in fact, he practices these disciplines metaphorically. In chapter 12, at the height of his "aphrodesia" he abandons his pursuit of pleasure, studies astrology, and quietly contemplates the heavens, or the "emptiness" of which the yogin meditates.

The tantrist must also learn to control the Kundalini. This awesome life force "sleeps" in an occult center at the base of the spine. It is one of seven whirling energy centers that lie along the invisible channel of the spine and in the cranial vault. Through an invisible network they govern bodily functions and states of awareness. As the Kundalini rises and pierces each chakra, it burns out knots of emotional complexes and opens the yogin to higher levels of consciousness. When the Kundalini is aroused it can be dangerously disorienting, even deadly, for the person who lacks focus or training and cannot control it. Faustus demonstrates this effect in chapter 2 when he conjures up the Devil impetuously and shortly afterward becomes sexually obsessed and emotionally erratic. We will see in that chapter that the Devil is equated both with the Gnostic Logos and with the Kundalini—a devil that demonstrates the complexity of these figures. While its force can be destructive, when it is controlled and directed upward to the cranial vault by a massive act of will, it produces the transforming effect mentioned earlier. Its function is similar to the magi's transforming furor for Venus.

For the tantrist the Kundalini power is feminine and he worships it through the mediating image of a goddess¹⁰ that coalesces from the figures he consorts with in his dreams.¹¹ Like the tantalizing Helen whom Faustus conjures, her beauty is both seductive and divine and promises unparalleled bliss. When the yogin succeeds in arousing and controlling his Kundalini "lover," having mastered a variety of demanding yogic techniques, he is ready to engage with a mortal woman in the uniquely "celibate" act of tantric sexual intercourse. The Faust Book introduces this mortal woman to Faustus in his bedchamber in chapter 39 when he unites with Helen, but only as a "portrait," or "copy," of the ideal form of the conjured goddess. This reflects a notion expressed in the Pistis Sophia and in Zostrianos—another of the texts whose highlights are included in the myth—that mortals are copies of ideal forms.

or aeons of the Light world.

Before the yogin engages in coitus, he consecrates the carnal act by visualizing his partner as goddess and himself as a god. Then he awakens the Kundalini, and at the moment of climax—using superhuman will—he violently reverses his semen, which is immolated in the intense heat generated by the Kundalini's arousal. Blending in essence with the raging life force, it rushes up an invisible channel paralleling the spine while electric and magnetic, or male and female, currents wind up around it. They unite in the cranial vault and consummate the physical act on a spiritual plane.

Faustus's journey down to Hell is a version of this process, in which two dragons representing these polarized currents transport him through the "hell" of ejaculatory arrest and the "death" or death-trance that follows it, then submerge him in radiant spiritual waters. With the opposites joined, the yogin achieves a primordial state of unity along with godlike vision, and so it is with Faustus. He emerges from the spiritual waters and finds himself perched on a high, pointed crag, denoting his enlightenment and status as a god.

Through pantomime and imagery such as this, the Faust Book takes us through the raising and lowering of the Kundalini. Faustus's gestures are supported by his perception of flashing light, percussive and musical sounds, quaking mountains, and so on, as well as other symbols signifying physical, perceptual, emotional, and spiritual experiences that accompany the Kundalini's awakening. In a different context, some of these symbolic forms also have Hermetic/ alchemical significance, demonstrating the analogous nature of tantric and alchemical events.

These analogous spiritual practices arose from worldviews that were in many ways similar. Tantrists and alchemists, as well as many Gnostics, envisioned the universe as Mind, or energy—the tantrists, for instance, experiencing it as a vast field of oscillating vibrational patterns, positive and negative polarities¹² that, like Light (Wisdom) and Darkness (Ignorance) emanating from the Gnostic Father, issue from an undivided source.¹³ They understood energy, or sound, as the basis of physical forms, and their adepts claimed to have transformed their cellular structures or performed extraordinary feats with the use of mantras as well as controlled breathing, intentional thought, and the exercise of will.

Alchemists and tantrists both utilized the polarities in their work, attempting to reconcile and reunite them: the alchemist repeatedly dissolving and coagulating his imperfect metal, reducing opposites to compatible essences, and the tantrist raising and lowering the Kundalini life force in his body, "killing" and "reviving" his consciousness to purify himself and reconcile his own polarities. Gnostic mythology is predicated on the alternations of opposites, including death and rebirth, and Faustus's transformation also follows this apocalyptic process.

The blending of these systems occurred in the early Christian centuries in and around Alexandria, Egypt, where many religions and cultic practices converged to create new forms of worship. Gnostic "serpent worshippers" or tantrists mingled with Jewish mystics, Egyptian alchemists, magicians, Hermetics, and devotees of Isis, the many-aspected goddess of the Moon. The Gnostics identified Isis with their Sophia, whose sojourn in matter as a "whore," and her subsequent enlightenment, resonated with the sacred sexual rituals of Isian priestesses in which participants were transformed into androgynous gods. Sophia's all-encompassing being—associated with alchemical *prima materia*, the source of all physical forms—further identified her with the fertile moon mother, Isis.

The Favored Ones

Lynn Picknett and Clive Prince, citing a wealth of scholarship in their book, *The Templar Revelation*, have pieced together the outline of a perennial, Johannite goddess-worshipping tradition that seems to have sprung from this beginning. We will avail ourselves of their outline since, surprisingly enough, it includes the features of the Faust Book that we have been discussing and points to Faustus's place

that tradition.¹⁵ It is centered on John the Baptist and Mary Magdalene and includes John the Evangelist and Simon Magus. Curiously enough, the word play in Faustus's name mentioned earlier refers to all of these figures and establishes his link to their movement as well as to its goddess and secret she represents.

While he bears the surname of the notorious Georg Faustus who is supposed to be his model, it is interesting to note that Faustus's first name was changed to Johannes. This has been attributed to a slip of the tongue by Luther's successor, Philip Melanchthon, who confused Georg with a Johann Faustus he had known in his youth. The name is thought to have stuck to the charlatan over the years and influenced the author of the Faust Book when he chose his hero's name. But there seems to be another reason for Faustus's name change—one that a simple matter of translation begins to reveal.

Given the Latin meaning of Faustus ("favored one") mentioned earlier and the anglicized version of Johannes, Doctor Faustus's name translates into English as "John, the favored one." As such, it evokes the image of Jesus's beloved disciple, the one whom he favored above all the others and who rested his head on Jesus's breast. It seems unlikely, however, that the Faust Book author should attribute the practice of alchemy and magico/erotic worship of the divine feminine to this eminent Christian John. We will find an explanation for this strange association if we follow the Johannite tradition back to Simon Magus and Mary Magdalene, who, like Faustus and John, were also "favored ones."

Simon's reputation as a sex magician survived the concealing of such practices when worship of the goddess went underground. (It is attested to in the Pseudo Clementine literature, a third-century cycle of Peter's travels containing references to Simon that are largely responsible for his reputation) and by the nature of his female companion, Helen. As a reformed prostitute, she was a wisdom figure in the manner of Isis or Sophia, and it is assumed that she and Simon performed the goddess's sacraments together, perhaps as priest and priestess or representations of the Sun (Simon) and Moon (Selene or Helen).¹⁶ Simon was a disciple of John the Baptist and, according to some researchers, was his Helen, leading them to speculate that the Baptist was also a follower of the goddess and would have been involved in sex magic as Simon and Helen were.

Some early baptismal cults, such as the Mandaeans who were devoted to John and hostile to the Christians, considered Jesus to have been John's rival and condemned him as a devil for having revealed their hidden mysteries. The medieval Cathars—a neo-Gnostic sect that flourished in southern France until its members were massacred by Christian crusaders—seem also to have believed that Jesus and John the Baptist were rivals. In another strand of this tradition it was held that Jesus and Simon were rivals as well—that they competed for John's favor and Simon was the victor, succeeding the Baptist after he was beheaded by Herod. This might account for Simon's being called "the favored one," the cognomen which connects him to Faustus and to John, Jesus's favorite disciple.

The medieval Knights Templar, the Freemasons, and the Rosicrucians also revered John the Baptist and are thought to be part of this feminist strain. The Templars seem to have overlooked Jesus in favor of both of the Johns, who were sometimes conflated in this tradition. The mysterious Temple knights were also rumored to have worshipped a decapitated head and, here again, the "favored" Johns are associated with sacramental sex. While the severed head was thought to signify John's beheading, his baptisms may have represented a secret the Templars chose not to disclose. The severed head finds an echo in an anonymous medieval poem that was written during the time of the Templars when the cycle of Arthurian romances mysteriously appeared. It is called *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and is a vibrant tantric allegory that concerns itself with keeping one's head. It is clearly a reference to the self-control that is required when raising the Kundalini in the non-orgasmic act of tantric sexual intercourse.

In the poem's erotically suggestive climax, Sir Gawain enters a deep barrow with his spear pointing the way and meets the Green Knight who is waiting inside to cut off his head. He is struck

glancing blow on the neck by the Green Knight's sword, which draws a few drops of blood. The drops represent an intoxicating "nectar" released by the pituitary gland when it is pierced by a tiny protuberance in the pineal gland, or "third eye." The pituitary gland extends when the Kundalini penetrates the sixth chakra.¹⁷ Gawain refuses to flinch at the thrust of this blissful "sword" and manages to "keep his head," or in other words, to maintain his self-control. The image of decapitation would seem to contradict the notion of keeping control but, instead, it signifies the separation of the intellect or higher mind from the body's debasing influence. "To be without a head," says David Frawley in his book *Tantric Yoga*, "is a yogic metaphor for going beyond body consciousness and attachment to the thought composed mind."¹⁸ The headless tantric goddess, Chinnamasta, also represents this form of liberation.

Picknett and Prince pointed out that images of Salome, or even of local priests, carrying John the Baptist's decapitated head on a platter are found in churches located in areas of southern France where the Templars were quartered. There are often statues of the Black Madonna in those places or churches dedicated to Mary Magdalene, which cover ancient Isis shrines.¹⁹ Both seem to represent the ancient goddess, and it is intriguing that churches dedicated to John the Baptist should be located near them, as if the Templars recognized John to be a goddess worshipper, a priest/magician like Simon Magus, and Mary to be a priestess who performed the goddess's sacred rites.

In the Faust Book, the spirits take Faustus on a journey that exemplifies the Johannite tradition of escorting him down to Hell and up to the stars where he receives a revelation. This, of course, is John's baptism, although not an immersion in water, as the Bible describes John's ablutions. Symbols in the story indicate that Faustus is having a hypnagogically induced death and rebirth experience of the kind that John's baptism may represent in this tradition. It is the loss of consciousness and expanded spiritual vision that attends the rise of the Kundalini, whether during ritual intercourse or not.

Esoterically, the Jordan River, where John is reported to have performed his baptisms, is a spiritual stream down which the soul descends into manifestation and then rises to the "promised land." For the Peratae, a second-century Gnostic sect, the downward flow of the river to the Dead Sea represented the ejaculation of sperm, while its upward flow indicated the retention of the seed and the Kundalini's rise up the central channel of the spine. Some Gnostic texts insist that the only true rebirth comes from baptism in spiritual, not ordinary, waters, perhaps referring to "dry" or non-ejaculatory sacred intercourse.²⁰

Having considered the two Johns' relationship to the goddess's sacraments we turn to Mary Magdalene, another "favored one." She leads us closer to the goddess and her secret by virtue of her many aspects, one of which may be "John, the favorite disciple." According to some of the Christian Gnostic dialogues between Jesus and the disciples, it is she who was Jesus's favorite, not John who is largely absent in these texts. In the Pistis Sophia she overshadows the other disciples with her questioning and Jesus praises her purity and light, while in the Gospel of Mary he is said to love her more than the other disciples (18:15) and "more than the rest of women" (10:1). In the Gospel of Philip he "kissed [her] often on her (presumably) [lips]" (63:35). Seen in this light, the report that John rested his head on Jesus's breast seems to be a disguise for Mary's relationship to Jesus, whether as favorite disciple, wife, consort, or sacramental priestess.

Goddess and Chalice

Two treatises found in the Nag Hammadi collection—one of them Gnostic and the other drawn from many sources—demonstrate Mary's complexity and her similarity to the all-inclusive goddess. The first is the just-mentioned Gospel of Philip, which suggests that Mary Magdalene encompasses all three New Testament Marys—Jesus's mother, his sister, and his companion. "They are all three Mary," the author concludes, and in the next sentence he or she elevates this composite figure to

seeming to associate it with the Holy Spirit. “The Father and the Son are single names,” it says, while “the Holy Spirit is a double name,” apparently referring to Mary Magdalene who is the only Mary with a double name, and whose inclusive nature is reminiscent of the Holy Spirit’s. The latter “revealed,” the Gospel says, “it is below. It is in the concealed: it is above” (59:18). Elsewhere, the writer explains the meaning of “revealed,” speaking of “Christ” as a “revealed name.” “Christ has everything in himself,” it says, “whether man or angel or mystery, and the Father” (56:12).

Mary’s name, which derives from the Hebrew *magdala*, meaning “tower,” adds to her complexity. The word *tower* is, among other things, a term used by alchemists for the vessel in which the metal is constantly transformed,²¹ and for its spiritual analog, a sacred chalice or womb that is the source of a new creation. This fertile womb is reminiscent of the Moon goddess, Isis, and of Sophia, whose multifaceted figure appears in several Gnostic self-declarations, attributing many identities, qualities, and even dimensions, to itself. In *The Thunder: Perfect Mind*, the second of the two treatises mentioned above, her voice might also be that of Mary Magdalene as she has been variously portrayed by her worshippers and detractors.

*I am the honored one and the scorned one.
I am the whore and the holy one.
I am the wife and the virgin . . . (13:17)
I am shame and boldness . . .
I am the one who is disgraced and the great one . . . (14:27)*

She goes on to reveal her many aspects.

*I am the mother and the daughter . . .
I am the barren one and many are her sons.
I am the bride and the bridegroom and it is my husband who begot me.
I am the mother of my father and the sister of my husband and he is my offspring. (13:21)
I am the speech that cannot be grasped,
I am the name of the sound, and the sound of the name. (20:31)*

Mary seems to have acquired many of these aspects as a representation of the goddess in the feminine tradition.

Interestingly enough, Faustus also reflects the goddess’s universal, paradoxical nature. He assumes an array of antithetical roles, being male and female, Father and Mother, Devil and Logos, mortal and divine, and—as with Mary and the goddess—is both revered and reviled. Like the fertile Moon goddesses Isis and Sophia, he conjures up life forms at will and is further linked to the sacred chalice through John and/or Mary Magdalene, his fellow “favored ones.”

In Eugnostos the Blessed, another Nag Hammadi text, this overflowing chalice is androgynous—a reflection of the Father’s Light—whose male name is “Begotten, Perfect Mind” and whose female name is “All-wise Begetress, Sophia.” Here we have an echo of the other “favored one,” Simon Magus (or Mind) with his Helen (Selene or Sophia) whom Faustus and his Helen represent. Presumably, the union of this couple transforms them into androgynous gods as does the union of Faustus and Helen, which begets a miraculous offspring—an omniscient, androgynous Philosophical Child.

Kundalini Sacraments

Given Sophia’s importance in the Gnostic myth we should not be surprised to find Faustus identified with her on a level deeper than parody, but he and Sophia both are merely symbols of the true goddess of the magico/erotic tradition. In a recent book called *Tantra: The Cult of Ecstasy*, Indra Sinha also quotes from *The Thunder: Perfect Mind* and her interpretation of the goddess’s self-descriptions:

reveals the latter's real identity.²² Borrowing a phrase from an early Gnostic sect, she speaks of the tantric act of "coitus reservatus" as "ascent to God in sexual union" and—referring to these words from the goddess—she identifies them as a veiled reference to the Kundalini.

*I am control and the uncontrollable.
I am the union and the dissolution.
I am the abiding and the dissolving.
I am the one below and they come up to me.
I am the judgment and the acquittal.
I, I am sinless, and the root of sin derives from me.
I am lust in outward appearance
and interior self control exists within me. (19:10)*

This is the tantrist's true goddess—his Kundalini "lover," both in essence and in motion. Her antithetical assertions—besides resembling a mantra in which opposing syllables are recited incessantly to awaken the Kundalini (see chapter 32)—evoke her polarized forces that wind in opposite directions around the spiritual spine. Her lower chakras govern the material elements and produce "the pleasant forms" of the phenomenal world, which the goddess says "men embrace until they become sober."

Kundalini is said to be profound consciousness, a link to universal Mind and the "unstruck sound of God."²³ She is like the goddess who says: "I am the speech that cannot be grasped, I am the name and the sound, and the sound of the name." When she rises, these substrates of sound/consciousness are absorbed into the unifying bliss that erases dualistic thought and makes humans divine. "When they go up to their resting place," says the goddess, "they will find me there, and they will live, and they will not die again" (21:29).

In a sense, then, all of Faustus's masks are symbols of Kundalini's infinite creativity, and all of the events in the Faust Book represent the rituals and sacraments of her ancient tradition.

The feminine underground strain surfaces from time to time in fairy tales, folklore, and works of art, and out of it have come such tantric and alchemical allegories as the poems of the medieval troubadours, the above-mentioned *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, *Canterbury Tales*, *Tristan and Isolde*, *Parzifal*, *Aeneas*, and other medieval and Renaissance works. While less polished on the surface than the others, the multilayered, far more complex Faust Book seems to be a part of the esoteric literary tradition.

The Monas Hieroglyphica and Transformation

In an age of heroic striving, the Faust Book's ambitious scope was not unusual. The Hermetic magicians particular sought not only to plumb ineffable mysteries, but to transmit them to initiated readers, whether through symbols and allegories, as in the Faust Book, or through charts of angels and celestial spheres or mystifying geometric and cabalistic diagrams.²⁴ An esoteric treatise by John Dee published in 1564, several years before the Faust Book was written, illustrates this mode of thought—one that was also alchemical. It deciphers a mysterious diagram called the *Monas Hieroglyphica* that was widely studied by occultists and adopted by the Rosicrucians.²⁵ Whether or not it came to the attention of our anonymous author, the Faust Book reflects its singular construction.

Like the Faust Book, the *Monas Hieroglyphica* seems simple on the surface but proves to be dauntingly complex. Dee, as we said, shared Faustus's desire to grasp the incomprehensible, and through his *Monas*, claimed to provide access to universal truth. He called it "a new and sacred art of writing—which spoke of 'all things visible and invisible, manifest and most occult, emanating from nature or art from God himself.'"²⁶

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