

**Introduction: Thomas Mann and Gnosticism in the
Cultural Matrix of His Time**

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The last decades of the twentieth century witnessed a far-reaching revival of interest in the ancient and radical philosophy of religion known as Gnosticism. In 1945 a cache of original Gnostic texts buried in the desert at Nag Hammadi in Upper Egypt around 400 C.E. came to light by accident when a camel-driver struck upon a large clay jar while digging for fertilizer. The jar contained papyrus codices that are now recognized as the most comprehensive collection of Gnostic writing ever retrieved, comprising fifty-two tractates bound in twelve books. The vigorous new wave of discussion triggered by the discovery has advanced insight into the role of this diverse school of thought -- once marginalized as heresy -- in shaping primitive Christianity as it unfolded in a teeming matrix of Eastern and Western traditions.

To date, this revival has reached far beyond the domains of academic study and into literature and popular culture. Gnostic motifs and sensibility began cropping up in the fiction of contemporary authors Walker Percy, Flannery O'Connor, William Gaddis, and Thomas Pynchon, as well as in science fiction novels by Philip K. Dick, to name just a few well known examples noted in critical studies.¹ In addition, the emergence of contemporary Gnostic societies and churches -- now gaining adherents through homepages on the World Wide Web -- bears further witness to the continuing echoes and remarkable resilience of this ancient school in the twenty-first century.²

The post-war renewal of interest in Gnosticism rests on the foundation of an earlier revival that began in the late nineteenth century and built to a pitch during the decades encompassing the First World War and its aftermath. The first original Gnostic texts began to surface and engage debate at this critical time when the canons of the Western tradition, its faith in reason and progress, were coming under severe attack and increasingly regarded as sterile and exhausted. Christianity too was widely denounced as a bankrupt institution that had supplanted the vigorous true faith of the primitive church with pabulum for the masses. In this context of a

waning tradition, figures on the cultural vanguard began looking for alternative roots in the rejected chapters of history, in those marginalized domains the Western tradition had attempted to suppress and erase. The rediscovery of original Gnostic texts fed this hunger. Pioneering intellectual leaders such as C. G. Jung, Hans Jonas, and Gershom Scholem rehabilitated the once-despised heretics and promoted them to honored precursors of analytical psychology, existentialism, and revolutionary messianism. Ripples from the recovery of a Gnostic imagination and sensibility also extended into the writing of Melville, Yeats, Pound, Artaud, Kafka, Hesse, Nabokov, Lawrence Durrell, and others, and into popular esoteric schools as well.³ The first wave of the modern revival of Gnosticism emerged from this dynamic matrix.

The provocative reappearance of an ancient and supposedly long-dead religious philosophy on the cultural terrain of the secularized modern age invites an accounting, which this study attempts to provide. The first four chapters explore the revival of a Gnostic sensibility across the broad landscape of European literature and thought during the decades leading up to and including the explosive beginning of the twentieth century. The later chapters tackle this subject in microcosm by probing buried layers of Thomas Mann's novel *Doktor Faustus*, in which the world-rejecting aesthetic ideology of the composer Adrian Leverkühn unfolds in tandem with the political ideology of the Nazi regime. Approaching *Doktor Faustus* through the revival of Gnosticism exposes the fault lines in the bedrock of the aesthetic movement that emerged in the context of renewed scholarly and popular interest in ancient Gnostic religion during the generations preceding the historical crises of our era. This approach also exposes a surprising and previously unrecognized dimension of Mann's novel, namely, a covert Gnostic redemption drama that lies encrypted within the main story of the protagonist's downfall and damnation. Recognizing this hidden story solves some of the novel's central puzzles, as later chapters of this study will detail through close reading of Mann's text.

Throughout this study I use the term "Gnostic" to refer to a religious sensibility dating from the Greco-Roman era and noted for its extremism. Gnosticism features a radically pessimistic view of life and the world combined with a radically optimistic belief that the human

spirit is itself divine, though lost in an alien and hostile world ruled by an evil deity. The ancient Gnostics believed that the created world came about through a divine catastrophe. Yet salvation from the emptiness of the human condition could be achieved through the numinous experience they called *gnosis*, that is, a moment flooded with remembrance of the divine spirit within and its true home in the heavenly fullness known as the *pleroma* that lies beyond the world. Coupled with the utmost pessimism of Gnostic writing we find radiant hymns of ecstasy. Gnostics espoused a radical dream of ultimate liberation; they made no compromises with the status quo.

This dualistic and world-rejecting but also transcendent and subversive world view took root among the early Christian heretical sects that blossomed during the second through fifth centuries and among eastern Mandaean and Manichaean variants that continued much longer. The Mandaeans may have originated in Judea as early as the first century as a Jewish baptismal sect that eventually fled from persecution to southern Iraq, where it survives to this day in a community of about 15,000 (Rudolph 363-64). Manichaeism originated in third-century Mesopotamia, among the followers of Mani, in whose teachings the dualism of the Gnostic worldview found its fullest expression and broadest geographic reach. The Manichaeans migrated to Asia, where they prospered at sites along the Silk Road far into Chinese Turkestan until the thirteenth century. Yet, as some have argued, Gnosticism remains far more than an historical phenomenon and a chapter in the history of religions. It is also a feature of consciousness and a response to the world that turns up repeatedly in religious imagination and in philosophy and culture as the kaleidoscope of history turns.

As of this writing, a body of critical studies investigating Gnostic themes in literature has accumulated to include more than 130 titles dating back to 1972, with four to seven new studies added each year. For the most part, these studies investigate Gnostic thematics and sensibility in the works of individual writers, substantiated by evidence of their contact with this or that Gnostic source. Many of these studies cluster around the period of the first wave revival of Gnosticism. Is there an overarching perspective that might link these individual examples to some sort of shared disposition or structure of thought? Part two of this study proposes that

European Aestheticism, also widely known in its day as the religion of art, may be seen as a form of modern Gnosticism in which the ancient Gnostic rejection of the world and longing to escape into otherworldly redemption returned in modern secular guise.

The so-called religion of art in effect rekindled a culturally subversive sectarian structure of thought that left its watermark on diverse literary texts of the period. Beginning with Baudelaire and continuing through the fin de siècle, we find increasing examples of an extremist revolt against modernity itself as a ruined work that parallels on the historical plane the Gnostic revolt against the cosmos. Moreover, the ancient Gnostic salvation through *gnosis* reappears in the *l'art pour l'art* ideal of an autonomous aesthetic utopia of absolute art as a medium for absolute reality and an escape from the social world and the perceived horrors of modernity. This movement culminated in modernist abstraction. In his doctoral thesis *Abstraktion und Einfühlung* (Abstraction and Empathy, 1908), art critic Wilhelm Worringer described abstraction as a life-negating, inorganic, crystalline form of beauty purified of all existential contingency and rendered as pure form.⁴ Worringer noted that abstraction follows from a feeling of being lost and overwhelmed in a hostile universe in which all things are relative (17-21). These counterbalancing pessimistic and optimistic extremes comprise what I suggest is the Gnostic schema in European Aestheticism. This way of cognition governs the imagination and sensibility of many of the movement's leading figures, from which may be discerned a striking structural homology between the ancient religious heresy and the modern secular religion of art.

Mann's literary persona ripened in this milieu. It left a deep imprint on his early work in the struggle between art and life, mind and nature that unfolds as the thematic centerpiece of his novella *Tonio Kröger* (1903) and as the thread linking the early stories with the novel *Buddenbrooks* (1901) and *Der Tod in Venedig* (Death in Venice, 1913). Mann's continuing preoccupation with the contest between these binary opposites, which forms the baseline of European literature of the fin de siècle, places his early work in the continuum of Aestheticism reaching back to Baudelaire. In *Leverkühn*, Mann critically revisits this first stage of his development as an artist but in a way that bares his profound ambivalence. To be sure, he

condemns implicitly his own early world-rejecting aestheticism along with the coldness of modern art that follows from its complete detachment from the social world and indifference to the ideological forces propelling Germany into what Mann suggested was a devil's pact with Hitler. And yet, in the voice of the idolizing narrator, the author's suffering affinity for the artist's elevation and remoteness from life sounds distinctly throughout.

The point of departure for considering a Gnostic subtext in *Doktor Faustus* is that the first figure associated with the name Faust was none other than the legendary Simon Magus. The church fathers reviled this colorful contemporary of the apostles Peter and Paul as the first Gnostic and the father of all heresy. The secondary literature on the Faust myth dutifully credits Simon Magus as Faust's first forerunner. And studies by Richardson, Petsch, Kahler, Quispel, Hanratty, Brown, and Nuttall have also touched upon the implications of Faust's Gnostic ancestry for the larger meaning of this legend that resonates so powerfully with the crisis of Western individualism. Most critical studies, however, have focused instead on the more immediate and well known source: the shadowy sixteenth-century necromancer who called himself "Faustus junior" and "magus secundus" and whose exploits inspired the popular legend recorded in the Faust chapbook published by Spies in 1587.

We know that Thomas Mann was well aware of the deep ancestry of the Faust figure. In his lecture "On Goethe's *Faust*," delivered at Princeton in 1938, Mann identified Simon Magus as the original prototype for the historical Faust. According to Mann, this latter-day figure deliberately shaped the episodes of his life to recapitulate the mythical pattern established by his role model Simon Magus. This accounts, in Mann's view, for the otherwise puzzling fact that the third-rate charlatan of the sixteenth century managed to leverage himself to mythic stature.⁵ Yet, despite Mann's direct reference to this source for his novel that was in gestation at the time of this lecture, the broad implications of Faust's Gnostic ancestry for the meaning of Mann's novel have remained unexamined.

We know that Mann was also at least minimally aware of the revival of Gnosticism that was heating up on the frontiers of comparative religion as newly discovered ancient texts began

to circulate, because he incorporated one of them in the prelude to the *Joseph* tetralogy. The narrator introduces the myth, sometimes called *Roman der Seele* (Romance of the Soul), at the final station in the mythical descent into the well of the past with which the tetralogy begins. He frames the myth as a tradition of human thought deriving from earliest time and based on humanity's truest self-understanding. This tradition subsequently penetrated the prophecies and doctrines of Zoroastrianism, Islam, Manichaeism, Gnosticism, and Hellenism (*GW* 4: 39).

The story tells of the primordial human soul, a being of pure light called the *Urmensch* or Primal Man, who emanated from the divine source of all being before the beginning of the world. He was God's first emissary in the war against the evil that had invaded the new creation. But the Primal Man forgets his mission by instead becoming enamored with his own image reflected in lower nature. He goes down to it and falls into bondage and forgetfulness of his own heavenly home. Through this mingling of the primordial soul with formless materiality, our creaturely world of forms, suffering, and death first comes into being in order to gratify the soul's yearning for union with matter. But God sends a second messenger, the Primal Man's heavenly twin, to awaken the slumbering soul to its plight by kindling a homesick longing for its ancient freedom and lost home in divinity. Only when the soul wings its way homeward will divinity again be restored to its original wholeness, the created world of forms will end, and matter will regain its original formless condition.⁶

Its strategic placement in the structure of the prelude implies that this Gnostic account of creation contains the ultimate answer to the search for our origin and end, and therefore its significance can hardly be overstated. At a later point in this chapter, we will explore how the *Roman der Seele* functions as a touchstone for the entire work, in which Thomas Mann engages and humorously refutes the anti-cosmic message of Gnosticism. But first, we must set the stage with a brief excursion into early Gnosticism and its rediscovery in the nineteenth century in order to establish the context in which Mann and others of his era imported Gnostic myth into their modern literary texts.

Early Gnosticism

In the study of the history of religions, Gnosticism has traditionally been regarded as a wholly ancient, long-dead movement of the Greco-Roman world. The nucleus of this movement consisted of a recognizable group of largely second-century C.E. sects that became the heretical foil against which Christian dogma came to define itself. These diverse sects tended to form around charismatic leaders such as Simon Magus, Valentinus, Basilides, Marcion, and Mani or around specific teachings. A sect called the Sethians, for example, believed that Seth, the third son of Adam and Eve, was the Gnostic redeemer and the first ancestor of a race of spiritual beings. The actual beliefs differed widely, however, because the Gnostics strongly rejected dogma in favor of individual speculation and revelation experienced through *gnosis*. There is no Gnostic confession, only an assortment of hymns, gospels, prayers, dialogues, cosmogonies, and apocalypses from which to derive the general picture.

In addition to the Christian Gnostic sects, the Mandaeans count as an important Eastern variant. Their often hauntingly beautiful literature depicts the mythological struggle between the worlds of light and darkness and the ascent of the soul through the seven hostile planetary spheres on its heavenly journey to its home in divinity. Central to Mandaean cultic ritual is immersion in living water through which the believer is purified and enters into communion with the world of light (Rudolph 360). But unlike the Christian Gnostic sects, which regarded the earthly Jesus as the Gnostic revealer, the Mandaeans rejected Jesus as a false prophet and agent of the ruler of darkness. Their name derives from the Aramaic word *manda*, which is equivalent to the Greek word *gnosis*. Both mean “knowledge.”

Attempts to pinpoint the main lines of belief shared among the diverse sects have led to contradiction and confusion. Participants attending the 1966 Colloquium of Messina on "The Origins of Gnosticism" attempted to sort out the terminological muddle by defining *gnosis* as "knowledge of the divine mysteries reserved for an élite." Gnosticism, by contrast, was summarized in the idea of “a divine spark in man, deriving from the divine realm, fallen into this

world of fate, birth and death, and needing to be awakened by the divine counterpart of the self in order to be finally reintegrated.”⁷

Hans Jonas, a pioneer of the modern study of Gnosticism, emphasizes repeatedly the radically dualistic mood of the Gnostic revolt against the cosmos as the foremost feature underlying the Gnostic attitude as a whole. To this must be added that some authorities regard the main currents of Gnosticism as far less extreme. Elaine Pagels, for example, who brought Gnosticism to a broad audience with her book *The Gnostic Gospels* (1979), treats the Gnostics as an unfairly demonized group of harmless sects. Their insistence on the priority of direct religious experience over blind religious faith, she argues, could have enriched the Christian tradition if the early church had not suppressed their communities and teachings. In stamping out Gnosticism, Christianity lost the radiance and vitality that accompanies the individual's experience of God. In *Rethinking Gnosticism: An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (1996), Michael Williams contends that "Gnosticism" as constructed by historians of religion is so rife with contradiction and that it cannot do justice to the real diversity of the traditions it pretends to encompass. "Biblical demiurgical traditions," Williams suggests, would provide a more precise category for organizing many of the texts usually described as Gnostic (265-66).

Without contesting the merit of Williams's case, I am following Jonas's analysis for the most part because his groundbreaking book on Gnosticism, *Gnosis und spätantiker Geist* (Gnosticism and the Spirit of Late Antiquity) dates from the late 1920s when he studied under Bultmann and Heidegger. The first volume of this work appeared in 1934; the second followed twenty years later, delayed by the hardships of exile and flight from Nazi persecution. Jonas proceeded out of a feeling of affinity linking his own age with the world of the ancient Gnostics, which makes it an especially rich source for grasping the reception of Gnosticism during the period of my study. While recent studies have filled in much more of the picture of ancient Gnosticism, Jonas's work remains unique and indispensable.

The subversive notion that the transcendent God did not create the world as told in Genesis weaves through the various Gnostic cosmogonic myths as a common baseline. The

transcendent and true God of the Gnostics is an absolutely remote, alien, and unknown divinity who has no connection to the created world at all. To account for the creation, the Gnostic tales unfold a mysterious crisis in the Godhead that resulted in the primordial soul's descent and entrapment in pre-existing matter, as told in the prelude to Mann's *Joseph* tetralogy. Or, according to another tradition, the crisis in divinity ends in the procreation of a monster god, the Demiurge, who then proceeds to fashion a monster realm of materiality as a grotesque imitation of the perfect realm of light. The Demiurge completes his evil handiwork by creating a dense and perishable body to trap the light of the spirit and bind it to the iron laws of fate. Named Ialdabaoth in some Gnostic texts, this creator god appears as a petty, tyrannical lawgiver and none other than the Hebrew God of the Old Testament. The lower world fashioned by the Gnostic Demiurge bears no likeness to the higher world, as we see in Neoplatonic thought; Ialdabaoth's workmanship issues instead in a completely bungled and evil realm. Accounting for the problem of evil lies at the heart of these speculations, which Gnostics engaged much more deeply than other systems of thought.

According to many ancient Gnostic sources, the believer faces this predicament with feelings of uncompromising hostility toward the body and the material universe, variously described as a "closed prison," an "abode of death," a "sea of darkness," and so forth. This feeling of cosmic anguish saturates the body of Mandaean and Manichaean literature, as captured in this typical fragment from a Manichaean lamentation about the fate of the soul:

And who led you from your wonderful divine land into banishment, and who
fettered you?

And who jailed you in this dark prison, this incarceration, this place with no
refuge, which constitutes this body of flesh?

Oh god of Light, dear soul!

Who trapped you in this satanic creation, that oozes sweet poison, and why (did
he do so)?

And who gave you over as a slave to the Devil who nourishes himself in this body
in which a great snake (greed) resides?

And who has made you a servant of his dark, shameless, unquenchable, vile fire?

Oh god of Light, dear soul!

Who has sundered you from eternal life? (Klimkeit 149-50)

The entrapment of the divine spark of light within the dark material realm accounts for the human condition of alienation, according to Hans Jonas, and the accompanying feeling of dread and homesickness in the world in which we exist as strangers in exile. It also fuels a spirit of revolt against the kingdoms of the world that cannot be redeemed by politics or the progress of history.

As seen in the prelude to Mann's *Joseph* novels, the transcendent God cannot remain indifferent to the plight of the lost sparks of light because as long as they remain trapped below the Godhead is not whole. Through *gnosis*, those spiritual members of humanity infused with the sparks of light enter into an extraordinary drama of redemption that precipitates divine redemption as well. The moment of *gnosis* floods the knower with remembrance of the divine origin and destiny of the inner spark, as framed in the widely repeated formula attributed to the Gnostic Valentinus:

What makes us free is the knowledge of who we were, what we have become;
where we were, wherein we have been thrown; whereto we speed, wherefrom we
are redeemed; what is birth and what rebirth.⁸

This saving knowledge is reserved for an elite group of "knowers," called *pneumatikoi*. They are deemed superior to the unenlightened and purely materialistic masses who have bodies but not the light of the spirit. In Greek and Coptic Hellenistic sources, the sparks of light are also called *pneuma*, from the Greek word for spirit, while the Mandaean texts use the term "soul" to refer to the transcendent and unworldly self within (Rudolph 88-91).

The Gnostic awakens to this saving knowledge through a "call" from the beyond, from the Gnostic Savior and heavenly twin, whose revelatory message penetrates the slumber,

intoxication, or forgetfulness induced by the noise of the world. Through *gnosis*, the knower experiences a reunion with the knower's own true self, the spark that came from divinity before the creation of the world. In the *Book of Thomas the Contender*, the Savior exhorts Judas Thomas, "my twin and true companion," to:

Examine yourself and learn who you are, in what way you exist, and how you will come to be. . . . For he who has not known himself has known nothing, but he who has known himself has at the same time already achieved knowledge about the depth of the all. (Robinson 201)

The understanding of *gnosis* as the discovery of the true self, the ancient spark within, provided the point of departure for the adaptations of Gnosticism by C. G. Jung and Harold Bloom, as we will see in the next chapter of this study.

In his paper "Delimitation of the Gnostic Phenomenon," presented at the Colloquium of Messina, Hans Jonas spoke to the mood, attitude, and style of ancient Gnosticism that are relevant to later literary appropriation. One of the defining strategies deployed in Gnostic texts, Jonas notes, entailed subverting biblical tradition. Using a method of reverse or inverse exegesis, Gnostics downgraded the Old Testament God by identifying him with the evil Demiurge while also upgrading biblical pariah figures such as Cain or the serpent in the Garden of Eden as the bearers of the heritage of *gnosis* (102). As we will explore further in chapter four, this strategy reappears in Byron's *Cain: A Mystery* (1821)⁹ as well as in Hermann Hesse's *Demian* (1919) and in other texts.

Jonas also describes the Gnostic mythology as secondary, artificial, and derivative, consisting of "pirated elements of earlier myth" adapted with much ingenuity into the grand Gnostic design (100-01). In other words, much of Gnostic literature achieves its meaning not through original revelation but instead by inventively reworking existing mythic and biblical traditions to invert their teachings and to express a radically reordered worldview. Jonas links the artificial and second-hand quality of Gnostic literature to the historically "late" period in which it arose (101), namely during the merging of ancient Eastern and Western cultures into the vast

domain of the Hellenistic world. This period produced a new religious syncretism, involving the creative fusion of free-floating elements from existing religious traditions of the ancient East and West, which Jonas regards as central to the phenomenology of Gnosticism. In the next chapter of this study we will look at the correlation between what Harold Bloom describes as Gnostic and modern “belatedness,” that is, the predicament of following in the wake of breakthrough moments of historical and creative renewal. Thomas Mann, like his character Leverkühn, occupied the transition space between the waning tradition of the nineteenth century and the vital new beginning. And like his character, he forged originality out of the remnants of the dying tradition by pirating borrowed material into his own radically reordered designs. This method counts as one of the stylistic hallmarks of literary modernism.

Jonas also emphasizes the distinction between the catastrophic character of the Gnostic system and the closely related Neoplatonic system, in which the lower world is inferior to but nonetheless in harmony with the upper world. Jonas points to the extremism that distinguishes the pessimistic and world-rejecting character of Gnostic dualism from the more optimistic and world-affirming Neoplatonism and Hermeticism. While these schools coexisted in the ancient world and shared many crucial features such as a common belief in the saving power of *gnosis*, yet their beliefs concerning the human condition in the world and the nature of God remained fundamentally different.¹⁰

It is important to note, to be sure, the subversive extremism that distinguishes Gnosticism from all other schools of thought. Viewed from a longer perspective, however, Gnosticism appears as part of a continuum of dualistic thought that includes pessimistic and optimistic variants. In his essay on the progress of religious ideas, "Religious Evolution," Robert Bellah describes the emergence of the historic, transcendental religions in the ancient world during the first millennium B.C.E. as:

the phenomenon of religious rejection of the world characterized by an extremely negative evaluation of man and society and the exaltation of another realm of reality as alone true and infinitely valuable. (22)

Bellah includes Platonic philosophy in this category (where the body appears as “the prison of the soul”), along with monotheism in Israel, Buddhism in India, and Taoism in China. Seen from this horizon, Gnosticism amounts to a radical member of a dualistic family of religious thought that emerged at a certain point in history and has since receded in favor of a renewed spirit of world acceptance. While Bellah's overall picture of the eclipse of dualist religious thought may accurately capture the broad historical sweep, the argument developed in the chapters that follow takes a phenomenological view that a world-rejecting yet numinous sensibility we can call Gnostic has reappeared in conjunction with the crisis and malaise associated with modernity.

The Recovery of Ancient Texts

To prepare the ground for the chapters that follow, we first survey the emerging profile of Gnosticism in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when the ancient Gnostics began to reappear on the intellectual landscape of Europe thanks to a growing body of texts. As we will see, the rediscovery of original Gnostic documents during this period touched off a lively round of scholarly debate that rippled into popular culture. Through the esoteric school of Theosophy and its offshoots, Anthroposophy and the Quest Society, seeds scattered widely into literature and art, as well as into the ideological agenda of the rising *völkisch* movement that became the precursor to fascism in Germany.¹¹

Prior to the mid-nineteenth century, early Gnosticism was known almost exclusively through quotations from lost Gnostic texts contained in the anti-heretical writings of the church fathers Hippolytus, Irenaeus, Tertullian, and others. While these attacks were meant to demolish Gnostic heresy through polemic and ridicule, they unwittingly managed to preserve a crude outline of its thought through the ages until some original Gnostic texts began to surface. Gottfried Arnold's *Unparteiische Kirchen- und Ketzerhistorie* (Impartial History of Churches and Heresies, 1699) offered the first critical appraisal of the church fathers' polemics against the Gnostics. Arnold was an impassioned advocate of the Pietist movement that arose primarily in German domains in the seventeenth century as a revolt against the empty intellectualized faith of

the institutional church. Arnold enlisted the ancient Gnostics as persecuted disciples of the authentic religious experience of primitive Christianity and forerunners of the Pietism of his day. Subsequent Enlightenment skepticism added to the resistance to institutional religion and promoted the critical rereading of the church fathers. A number of important monographs followed the direction established by Arnold of casting the early heretics in a newly favorable light. Among these must be counted works by August Neander (1818), J. Matter (1828), and Ferdinand Christian Baur (1835).¹²

In 1842, a manuscript hunter in the service of the French Government tracked down an early third-century patristic text in a convent on Mount Athos. Initially attributed to Origen and other authors, majority scholarly opinion finally agreed that the text contained the long-lost sections of the *Philosophumena* by Hippolytus, also called *The Refutation of all Heresies*. Publication followed in 1851 by the University of Oxford. Hippolytus's text turned out to be a veritable encyclopedia of thirty-three Gnostic sects (starting with the Naassenes at the forefront) systematically catalogued in order to demonstrate that they derived not from pious Christianity but rather from pagan philosophy, mystery cults, astrology, magic, and the like. In other words, Hippolytus's refutation of Gnostic heresy rested on showing that it was a not so much a Christian as a pagan phenomenon (Rudolph 13-14). In his book *Fragments of a Faith Forgotten* (1900), G.R.S. Mead, a scholar of the history of religions and a foremost popularizer of Gnosticism, declared the *Philosophumena* to have revolutionized the study of Gnosticism (608-09). The *Philosophumena* set the stage for the voluminous collections of the writings of the church fathers -- much of it consisting of their anti-Gnostic treatises -- published over the next decades. By 1888, collected editions of these writings had appeared in Latin, French, English, and German.¹³

The year 1851 also marked the first publication of one of the few then-known original Gnostic texts, the Coptic *Pistis Sophia*, with Latin translation by M. G. Schwartz. A German translation by C. Schmidt appeared in 1892, followed by the French edition translated by E. Amélineau in 1895 and the English edition translated by G.R.S. Mead in 1896. The *Two Books of*

Jeu appeared in Amélineau's French translation in 1891, followed by Schmidt's German edition in 1892 (Rudolph 27-28). Other Gnostic texts such as the *Hymn of the Pearl*, the *Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles*, and the *Odes of Solomon* also entered the cultural stream during the years around the turn of the century. Newly discovered Mandaean and Manichaean texts further spurred the mounting interest when they began to appear in scholarly editions beginning in 1904.¹⁴

The appearance of these original Gnostic and heresiological sources triggered a wave of secondary and popular treatments aimed at reexamining the origins of Christianity in light of the new Gnostic finds. Among the most notable secondary sources must be counted Adolf von Harnack's *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte* (Textbook of the History of Dogma), which went through several editions beginning in 1886. His *Marcion: Das Evangelium vom fremden Gott* (Marcion: The Gospel of the Alien God, 1921) sparked heated debate among German intellectuals during the early Weimar era. Harnack's treatment completed the rehabilitation of the Gnostics begun by Gottfried Arnold by establishing the once-discredited heretics as philosophers of religion whose beliefs contributed significantly to the development of Christian dogma.

When Hans Jonas's *Gnosis und spätantiker Geist* appeared in 1934, it marked a new threshold of insight into ancient Gnostic myth and speculation. Based on his study of rediscovered texts, Jonas amalgamated the worldviews of Christian Gnostic schools with those of Eastern Mandaean and Manichaean mythology in a unified body of thought. Together they captured the experience of cosmic estrangement of late antiquity. Jonas designated these pluralistic traditions as a religion in its own right, the Gnostic religion.

An entirely different vein of scholarship and criticism investigated the phenomenon of Jewish Gnosticism. Heinrich Graetz's early monograph *Gnosticismus und Judenthum* (Gnosticism and Judaism, 1846) first noted the analogies between Jewish mystical speculation about the celestial chariot (the *Merkabah*) envisioned by the prophet Ezekiel and Gnostic speculation about the *pleroma*. Graetz attributed these parallels to the destructive influence of a foreign Gnostic sensibility that had infiltrated Judaism to produce what he regarded as the

dangerous phenomenon of Jewish Gnosticism. In a series of studies starting in 1928, Gershom Scholem drew on Graetz's work and the Gnostic *Pistis Sophia* to develop his counter-argument, namely, that Jewish Gnosticism was no heretical foreign hybrid but rather a revitalizing development within rabbinic Judaism. In 1924, a new edition appeared of the writing of Nachman Krochmal, an early nineteenth-century scholar who first pointed to the parallels between the Kabbalah and Gnosticism in their closely related teachings of the hidden God and the hypostatization of God's attributes. Following Krochmal, Scholem founded his understanding of the Kabbalah on the premise that its central myth is Gnostic, as detailed in studies published over the course of decades, starting in 1928. While Scholem borrowed from Graetz and Krochmal, he radically reversed their negative assessment of the Gnostic patterns in Jewish mysticism.¹⁵ In the chapter that follows, we will consider the contributions of Jonas and Scholem to the evolving image of Gnosticism in greater detail.

Gnosticism in the Comparative Study of Religion

The search for the origins of Gnosticism captured attention during this period especially among scholars in the comparative study of religion. The *religionsgeschichtliche Schule* (History of Religion School) at Göttingen became a center for comparative philological research aimed at uncovering what adherents believed was the common mythological heritage of the religions that arose in the ancient Near East. History of religion scholars scrutinized early texts for evidence bearing on this provocative theory. If Gnosticism could be found in traditions other than Christianity, it was thought, this evidence would support the view of the Bible as a literary product of regional folk traditions and not divine revelation.

Richard Reitzenstein's study of the first tractate of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, the *Poimandres* (1904), argued for regarding this text as a Gnostic document of pre-Christian Egyptian provenance. The text unfolds the drama of the Primal Man, also called the *Anthropos*, the luminous child of God's light and love. He descends into the cosmic realm where he becomes the slave of his love of lower nature, resulting in the creation of planetary human souls and the

cycle of desire, birth, and death. Deliverance follows when the human souls, awakened by the revelation of the divine messenger Poimandres, lay aside the garment of the body and return to the light realm of God by recognizing their divine origin and destiny. Reitzenstein claimed that the figure of the Primal Man found in the Hermetic tract had served as the prototype for the Christian Redeemer. Although Reitzenstein's contentions have not stood up well to subsequent critical scrutiny,¹⁶ at the time of its publication his *Poimandres* ignited intense interest among scholars keen on finding further Gnostic redeemer myth prototypes in pre-Christian Egyptian, Babylonian, and Persian folk mythology.

At about the same time, a fabulous trove of Manichaean literature and art was reaching the Museum of Ethnology in Berlin from the steppes of Central Asia. A team of Prussian archaeologists, who began excavations at the Turfan oasis in Chinese Turkestan in 1902, had found a mother lode of ancient manuscripts and other artifacts. The great ferment sparked at the time by the Turfan discoveries may be compared to the excitement over the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Nag Hammadi codices discovered decades later (Klimkeit xvii). The Turfan texts left no doubt that a variety of Gnosticism had taken root and flourished magnificently in far away Central Asia where it had blended with the mystical religions of the East. These finds seemed to support the revised view of Gnosticism as not just a development within Christianity, as the church fathers and most preceding scholars had assumed, but rather a key link connecting Christianity to other and earlier forms of religiosity. Wilhelm Bousset's *Hauptprobleme der Gnosis* (Main Problems of Gnosticism, 1907) deployed this theory in arguing that the roots of Gnosticism reached into a pre-Christian mixture of Babylonian and Iranian mythology. In a lengthy chapter on the Primal Man, Bousset worked out parallels among supposedly analogous redeemer figures in Jewish, Persian, Mandaean, Manichaean, and diverse Christian-Gnostic traditions.

The comparative religion approach -- which Thomas Mann drew on for the cosmogonic and anthropogonic framework of the *Joseph* novels -- threw the uniqueness of the Christian redemption story into question. The central mystery of Christianity now began to look like a late adaptation of earlier folk traditions, such as the Babylonian goddess Ishtar's descent into the

underworld to bring back the fertility god Tammuz or the annual descent and return of fertility gods throughout the ancient world. The title of one of G.R.S. Mead's writings in this vein reads: "Did Jesus live 100 B.C.?" As the inevitable outcome of the comparative approach, relativistic historicism displaced the authority of divine revelation. Frazer's studies in religious anthropology dating from this same period pointed to the same conclusion. In *From Ritual to Romance*, Jessie L. Weston, a prominent Frazerian, wrote that Christianity was "no new thing but a fulfilment of the promise enshrined in the Mysteries from the beginning of the world . . ." (149). Weston's book appeared in 1920.

In *Das iranische Erlösungsmysterium* (The Iranian Redemption Mystery, 1921), Reitzenstein continued his investigation of the Gnostic Primal Man, arguing on the basis of the new Mandaean and Manichaean texts that the redeemer myth originated in the dualistic religion of Iran. According to Reitzenstein, the Primal Man is both the savior and the saved, the redeemed redeemer, because the primordial being who falls into material bondage and the heavenly twin who awakens him through *gnosis* and brings him home are one in the same. In Gnostic mythology, as in the prelude to Mann's *Joseph* novels, this identity of savior and saved greatly exalts the metaphysical status of the human spirit, which precedes the Demiurge and the created world in the birth order of existence. Hans Jonas describes this teaching as "one of the most important traits of Gnostic theology in the general history of religion."¹⁷

According to Reitzenstein, Christianity adopted the redemption story from Iran via Gnosticism. This theory amounts to a dramatic reversal of the image of Gnosticism, from an enemy within the faith to a decisive influence that shaped the central mystery of the faith. Rudolf Bultmann basically adopted Reitzenstein's theory of a pre-Christian redeemed redeemer myth in his widely influential New Testament studies of the 1920s and 1930s. In his groundbreaking article on the significance of the Turfan sources for understanding the Gospel of John, published in 1925, Bultmann maintained that the Fourth Gospel had its origins in the pre-Christian redeemer tradition, as seen, for example, in the light and darkness dualism of the prologue where Christ appears as a cosmic figure sent in the disguise of a man. "The most

thorough-going attempt to restate the redemptive work of Jesus in Gnostic terms is to be found in the Fourth Gospel," Bultmann wrote in *Primitive Christianity*.¹⁸ These studies pointing provocatively to the imprint of Gnostic figurative language and thought on the Gospel of John provided the intellectual matrix in which Hans Jonas, then a doctoral candidate studying with Bultmann, began his immersion into the world of the ancient Gnostics.

In *The Decline of the West* (1918-1922), Spengler added his voice to the growing chorus. The myth of the "savior in need of salvation" (the *salvator salvandus*), Spengler maintained, constitutes the core of what he called "the Jesus cult." The cult appeared also in Jewish, Iranian, and Islamic variants as a new and vigorous religiosity at a decisive stage in the evolution of Western culture (2: 212-30). Spengler credits Reitzenstein's *Das iranische Erlösungsmysterium* and the Turfan discoveries with shifting the focus definitively to the East, where the real spiritual origins of primitive Christianity were to be found, in his view, rather than in what he considered the dried-up rationalism of the Hellenistic West (213). Jessie L. Weston summed up this emerging consensus of the day: Imperial Rome had transformed Christianity from a vital Eastern mystery cult into a sterile Western world religion by suppressing its Gnostic mystery elements and kinship with pre-Christian redeemer traditions (151).

These salvos must be regarded as an important part of the context in which Thomas Mann turned to the legend of the Primal Man for the prelude to the *Joseph* novels in late 1926. Most of the sources Mann consulted for the biblical background of the novels assume a common mythological heritage linking Judaism and Christianity with pagan traditions. One of these sources, *Die außerbiblische Erlösererwartung* (The Non-Canonical Expectation of Redemption, 1927) by Alfred Jeremias, specifically refers to the Babylonian fertility god Tammuz as a redeemed redeemer figure.¹⁹ This body of scholarship must have appealed enormously to Mann's notion of individual life as lived myth, as sacred repetition of mythical patterns set by predecessors long ago. The *Joseph* novels work out this notion in the frequent allusions suggesting Joseph's mythic identity with Tammuz, the Henoch-Metatron figure in Jewish

mysticism, and the future Christian Redeemer, as well as with the Primal Man in the Gnostic myth told in the prelude to the tetralogy.²⁰

Reitzenstein's theory of an Iranian origin of Gnosticism today stands eclipsed. Ioan Couliano has noted that the enthusiasm for deriving Gnosticism and primitive Christianity from "Aryan" Iran converged neatly with the anti-Semitic agenda of the *völkisch* movement as it advanced during the Weimar era. He accuses the History of Religion School in particular of collaborating knowingly or unknowingly with those who were bent on excising the Judaic background of Christianity and establishing an "Aryan Jesus."²¹

Adolf von Harnack's still-standard monograph on Marcion, mentioned above, contains what amounts to a similar message. Harnack highlighted Marcion's starkly drawn antithesis between the lawgiving deity of the Old Testament, seen stereotypically as despotic and cruel, and the good and true God of the New Testament who came to redeem the world from the tyranny of the Hebrew god. In the revolutionary mood of the early Weimar period, Harnack's *Marcion* stirred controversy with his argument for separating the "new wine" of the new Christian teaching from the "old wineskin" of the Old Testament as the necessary fulfillment of Luther's unfinished revolution. The foremost task facing Protestantism, Harnack maintained, is to liberate the Christian message of ultimate hope and the everlasting love of the good God from its ties to the lawgiving deity of the Old Testament. The Old Testament deserves recognition as a crucial historical document but not as a sacred canon, Harnack concluded, noting with apparent naiveté that *das Volk* was falling away from Christianity in protest against the church's continuing allegiance to its Jewish heritage (222-23). This example from the writing of one of the most distinguished theologians of his time illustrates how readily the method of reverse exegesis deployed by Marcion and other Gnostics to vilify the Hebrew God as a bungling Demiurge played into the ideological agenda of the extreme right.

Popularization of Gnostic Teachings

G.R.S. Mead, an early adherent of the school of Theosophy, emerged as one of those chiefly responsible for acquainting wider audiences with Gnosticism as a living wisdom to be experienced and embraced, not just an academic study meant for scholars. Mead's steady stream of publications brought Gnostic teachings to the attention of readers hungry for answers to the spiritual malaise of the modern world. Mead authored an early study of Simon Magus (1892), a primer of Gnosticism titled *Fragments of a Faith Forgotten* (1900), the three-volume *Thrice-Greatest Hermes* (1906), an edition of the *Pistis Sophia* (1896, second edition 1921), and other books and articles too numerous to mention. He also edited the series "Echoes from the Gnosis" that appeared 1906-1908 and the quarterly journal *The Quest* from 1910 onward. As the private secretary to H. P. Blavatsky, the legendary founder of the Theosophical Society, Mead took an editorial hand to her grand synthesis of the esoteric traditions, *The Secret Doctrine* (1888), bringing his specialized knowledge of the history of religions to bear on the task.²² Mead's knowledge of Hippolytus and other original sources that emerged during the previous decades is evident in the ubiquitous presence of Gnostic ideas embedded deeply in the teachings of Theosophy.

Although Theosophy and Gnosticism differ in important ways, the central drama of the fall of divinity into materiality, its entrapment in an alien realm, and redemption through *gnosis* lies at the heart of the "secret doctrine" of Theosophy. Adherents regard this teaching as the hidden truth linking all of the world religions. Thus Theosophy's fundamental philosophical understanding of human origin and mission in the cosmos is very similar if not identical to the Gnostic view. In the final pages of his landmark study of the intellectual history of Western esoteric currents of this period, *The Theosophical Enlightenment*, Joscelyn Godwin came to the conclusion that *The Secret Doctrine* was "perhaps the most substantial statement of a modern Neo-gnosticism" (377). C. G. Jung made a similar assessment: "Theosophy, together with its continental sister, Anthroposophy, these are pure Gnosticism in Hindu dress" (*CW* 10: 83).

In concluding this sketch of Theosophy's role in reviving and popularizing a Gnostic sensibility, it cannot go unmentioned that Blavatsky historicized the cosmic drama by adding a racial theory of human evolution to the overall mix. With this new twist borrowed from diverse mythic traditions, the story now unfolds that the divine spark descended through a sequence of four root races (from Lemuria to Atlantis, and so forth). It became increasingly enmeshed in the dense and dark material world before reaching the absolute nadir in the rationalistic, materialistic modern Western world. The present-day world had become "a necropolis," she wrote, "wherein lie buried the highest and most holy aspirations of our Spirit-Soul. That soul becomes with every new generation more paralyzed and atrophied" (*Doctrine 1*: xxii). Present humanity, she maintained, constitutes the fifth root race (the so-called Aryan race), which was cosmically destined to lead the way back home, by reversing the devolutionary cycle and beginning the cycle of respiritualization that would eventually complete the cosmic round. Theosophical teachings aim at helping this process along so that the divine spark might ascend back to its source through human spiritual evolution.

This teaching linked the racial destiny of present humanity to cosmic salvation from the "fallenness" of the modern world. It is important to note, however, that in Blavatsky's revisionary myth, the Aryan race referred to the human race as a whole, not to any specific racial or ethnic group and certainly not to the would-be Germanic descendants of Wotan who later appropriated the Aryan label. By historicizing the Gnostic account of the Fall, Theosophy spoke to the widespread cultural pessimism and despair that permeated the mood of the time. It offered not only a mythical account of the human predicament in the disenchanting modern world but also an uncompromising confidence in humankind's spiritual mission and destiny, which surely accounts for Theosophy's enormous appeal.

Although Mead's profile has largely faded today, his role in popularizing Gnosticism around the turn of the century proved decisive. Theosophy promoted Gnosticism in the popular mind and in the imagination of many artists and writers who drew inspiration from the Theosophical well during the *fin de siècle* and decades thereafter. In her study of the Russian

Theosophical Movement, Maria Carlson describes its profound impact on the Russian intelligentsia of the Silver Age, among them, Kandinsky, Andrei Belyi, Vyacheslav Ivanov, Scriabin, Berdiaev, and Solovyev. During the period leading up to world war and revolution these leading figures and many others were swept away by what Carlson calls the "contemporary Gnostic gospel" (3). The Irish literary revival of the same period, too, traces much of its vitality to the participation of W. B. Yeats, George Russell, John Eglinton, Charles Weekes, and Charles Johnson in the Theosophical Society's Dublin Lodge. Ernest Boyd, the historian of the revival, credited the Dublin Lodge as a literary, artistic, and intellectual center that radiated its influence widely (214-15).

In 1907, Mead formed a splinter group, the Quest Society, which offered lectures on comparative religion, esoteric wisdom, Buddhism, and diverse subjects on the cultural vanguard at Kensington Hall in London. Yeats, Arthur Symons, Ezra Pound, Dorothy Shakespear, Wyndham Lewis, Rebecca West, T. E. Hulme, A. E. Waite, Evelyn Underhill, Gershom Scholem, Martin Buber, Jessie L. Weston, among others, attended the Quest lectures, which continued through the 1920s, and contributed to Mead's journal, *The Quest*. Bultmann's latest Mandaean studies appeared in *The Quest* in 1925-1926; the same volume contained a piece by Gershom Scholem on the Zohar. Weston relied heavily on Mead's *Thrice-Greatest Hermes* in her Frazerian study *From Ritual to Romance*, in which she developed an argument linking the Grail legend to the Gnostic Naassene sect brought to light in the rediscovered *Philosophumena* by Hippolytus. In the Naassene teachings, Weston maintained, we see the mystery of spiritual regeneration coupled with ancient fertility cult figures aimed at the regeneration of nature. Weston sees the spiritual mystery and fertility rites as the esoteric and exoteric sides of a unified tradition that left its signature on the Grail literature as seen, for example, in the sexual symbolism of the lance and the cup. In formulating her original, if controversial, interpretation of the Grail tradition, Weston synthesized the theory, methods, and research of comparative anthropology with History of Religion studies in comparative religion.²³

Weston's reading of the Grail legend sent further ripples into Eliot's *The Waste Land*, according to his headnote stating that the title, the plan and much of the incidental symbolism of the poem were suggested by Weston's book.²⁴ Threads such as these connecting Mead to some of the foremost poets and writers of his era have led some critics to represent Mead as a key figure in the transmission of occult/Gnostic currents into literary modernism. In her study of W. B. Yeats, Virginia Moore claims that Yeats consolidated his knowledge of the Western esoteric tradition through his reading of Mead's *Thrice-Greatest Hermes* (105-12). Mead's theosophical reading of Gnosticism is also the key to understanding obscure figures and passages in Pound's *Cantos*, according to other sources.²⁵ Finally, Mead's influence may have reached as far as Zurich, according to controversial claims by Richard Noll, who credits Mead as the main source of Jung's information on Gnosticism, from which Jung constructed his theories of the collective unconscious and the archetypes.²⁶

The popularized Gnosticism of Theosophy struck especially fertile ground in Austrian and German centers of culture. In Vienna, a neo-Gnostic sensibility rooted in the local Wagner cult fused with the Vienna lodge of the Theosophical Society (founded in 1887) to champion the cause of anti-materialism and mystical religious revival. This insurgent spirit radiated widely through the Viennese cultural vanguard via the far-reaching influence of major figures such as Hugo Wolf and Hermann Bahr. Young Rudolf Steiner also attended these circles; in 1902 Steiner assumed leadership of the Theosophical Society in Germany, Switzerland, and Austria-Hungary. Under Steiner's leadership, the German Theosophical Society turned out popular editions of Gnostic texts and books about Gnosticism for the lay public through Leipzig's Eugen Diederichs Publishing Company (Stark 74). These volumes appeared between 1903 and 1910. While Steiner's interest lay in promoting knowledge of the esoteric side of Christianity contained in the Gnostic texts, the publications also served the publisher's ideological agenda, namely, to subvert orthodox Christianity by making available texts that the church considered heretical (Noll 88). In 1913 Steiner split off from Theosophy to found a rival movement called Anthroposophy which, like its parent school, remains active to this day.²⁷

When Theosophy entered Prague with the founding of the Blue Star Lodge in 1891 by a member of the Austrian parliament, it fueled an already raging occult revival. One of the lodge's most colorful founding members was the author Gustav Meyrink, who experimented with esoteric beliefs and practices that fed the plots of his popular supernatural fiction such as *Der Golem* (The Golem, 1913). Taken all together, Meyrink's fiction conveys a view of the material world as a fallen realm of the damned from which the individual finds redemption by awakening to knowledge of the spirit's divine origin. The immense popularity of Meyrink's novels during and just after the First World War attests to the appeal of his neo-Gnostic fictional fantasies among contemporary readers. Paul Wegener's two film versions of *Der Golem*, which came out in 1914 and 1920, transmitted Meyrink's vision into the heart of German expressionist cinema.

After the turn of the century, the rising movement of German nationalism and racist hatred began to discover ammunition for its cause in the Gnostic teaching of the catastrophic intermingling of divinity and materiality. During the decade 1908-1918, popular Viennese *völkisch* writers Guido List and Jörg Lanz von Liebenfels turned out a hailstorm of pamphlets containing ugly racist polemics based on a crude synthesis of Gnostic myth, the teaching of Aryan racial destiny, and Germanic mythology. In their tracts, the fateful intermingling lamented in Gnostic mythology was repackaged as sexual intercourse between the Aryan "god-men" and racial "inferiors." Lanz cited the *Pistis Sophia* as evidence underpinning his racist version of the Fall (Goodrick-Clarke, *Roots* 91-95). According to List and Lanz, redemption from this fallen state required a Manichaean struggle, involving strict racial eugenics and even extermination, along with the apocalyptic destruction of the hated modern world in order to return to the ancient Paradise, meaning a Pan-German empire purged of racial "inferiors" (95-97). These vicious concoctions illustrate the extremes to which a teaching of salvation through separation can lead.

Other forms of hybrid popular Gnosticism took root in France during these decades, which even witnessed the establishment of a Gnostic church, *L'Église Gnostique*, in Paris in 1888. Symbolist poets active in this resurgent sect reenacted the rituals of the medieval Cathars. Looking broadly at the popularized Gnosticism of *L'Église Gnostique*, Theosophy, the Quest

Society, and other cultural phenomena described above, one cannot fail to see the immense spiritual void and longing for nothing short of *redemption* that animated their following. These deep and explosive longings saturate the cultural-renewal discourse of the period stretching from the fin de siècle through the war decades.

This now completes the outline of the rediscovery of ancient Gnosticism from the translation of original texts through its transmission into popular culture and ideological coloration after the turn of the century and into the Weimar era. Taken all together -- the Turfan discoveries, the comparative religion research reassessing the origins of Christianity, Bultmann's New Testament studies, the debates sparked by Harnack's *Marcion*, plus the many publications aimed at popular audiences -- we can recognize what amounts to a Gnostic revival. Over the course of a few decades, Gnosticism emerged from its historical niche as a counter-cultural force within early Christianity to a popular myth accounting for the malaise of the modern world and promising a means of redemption. And, as the war against institutional Christianity heated up, *völkisch* movement ideologists enlisted Gnosticism as a potent weapon.

The Weimar era proved especially ripe for the revolutionary message of Gnosticism because its subversive spirit of revolt and longing for redemption played so readily into the passions of the day. In his essay "The Spiritual Problem of Modern Man," which appeared in 1928, Jung wrote, "the spiritual currents of our time have, in fact, a deep affinity with Gnosticism" (*CW* 10:83). The surging crescendo of interest accounts not only for the appearance of the Gnostic myth in the *Joseph* tetralogy in late 1926, but also for the Gnostic motifs in Hermann Hesse's *Demian* (1919) and *Steppenwolf* (1927) and elsewhere in the literature of this period.

The broad band of scholarly and popular interest also establishes the context in which Gnosticism was adopted as the earliest precursor for three far-reaching contemporary schools of thought during the Weimar years: analytical psychology, existentialism, and revolutionary messianism. As we will see in chapter two, Jung probed ancient Gnosticism for a prefiguration of his model of individuation as the path to psychic wholeness. Jung's most intense period of

preoccupation with Gnostic precursors occurred during the years 1918-1926. In his groundbreaking study of ancient Gnosticism developed only a few years later, Hans Jonas exposed striking analogues between the cosmic nihilism of the Gnostics and modern nihilism found in existentialism.

Almost simultaneously, Gershom Scholem was developing his argument that the central myth incorporated into the Kabbalah by Isaac Luria in the sixteenth century was a form of Gnosticism. Moreover, he maintained, this revival of ancient Gnostic beliefs became the guiding theology of the messianic revolt against the existing world that gripped Jewish communities throughout the Diaspora from 1665 for more than a century. Unlike all previous scholars, Scholem regarded these extremist currents as not only destructive and dangerous but also as a dynamic force that injected needed vitality into the course of Jewish history. While Scholem's studies concentrated on the heresy of Sabbatai Zevi, the links into his own time were explicit. Scholem pointed to Ernst Bloch, Walter Benjamin, and Theodor Adorno as contemporary ideologists of revolutionary messianism.²⁸ In chapter four we will explore how the Gnostic myth Scholem identified in the Kabbalah reiterates in Walter Benjamin's theory of allegory and redemptive criticism and in Adorno's negative dialectics. Chapter seven probes the echoes of this chain of thought that sound through the ending of *Doktor Faustus*.

Thomas Mann and Gnostic Sources

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the *Joseph* tetralogy begins with the prelude ironically titled *Höllenfahrt* (Descent into Hell). As Herbert Lehnert, Manfred Dierks, and Willy R. Berger have shown through diligent archival research, Mann drew the material for this anthropological overture into the origins and fate of humankind from authorities grounded in a pan-Babylonian view of the mythic unity of the ancient world. Dierks identified Mann's main sources as Edgar Dacqué (1924), Dimitri Mereschkowski (1924), and Alfred Jeremias (1916).²⁹

The journey downward passes through various provisional origins, from the moon wanderer Abraham of Ur back to the story of the flood, to the lost continents of Atlantis and

Lemuria, and finally to the question: Where was Paradise? Mann's source Jeremias answers this question with an account of Egyptian, Iranian, Hebrew, and Christian myths of a golden age, which in his view derived from Babylonian astral beliefs. The well-informed narrator of the "Descent into Hell" considers but rejects this account as a muddling of what should be considered separate traditions – the story of an actual paradise and the legend of a golden age of humanity (*GW* 4: 38). Paradise, he maintains, preceded the creation of the world. Furthermore, the beginning of creation was far from any idyllic Garden of Eden. "Es war die Hölle. Vielmehr es war der erste, verfluchte Zustand nach dem Fall" (38). [It was hell. Rather, it was the first cursed state after the Fall.] Moreover, the narrator adds, "die Geschichte des Menschen ist älter als die materielle Welt, die seines Willens Werk ist, älter als das Leben, das auf seinem Willen steht" (39). [The history of man is older than the material world, which his will produced, older than life, which rests upon his will.] These key passages highlight the fallen condition of the world from its very beginning and the precedence of the pre-existent human soul in the birth order of creation. Together they establish a cosmogonic and anthropogonic framework for the tetralogy rooted in Gnostic speculation.

For the story of the *real* paradise that existed before the creation of the world, Mann now turns to one of those Gnostic Manichaean texts uncovered at Turfan and retold in "Die islamische Lehre vom vollkommenen Menschen" (The Islamic Teaching of the Perfect Man), an article by Hans Heinrich Schaeder. Schaeder was an Iranologist and adherent of the History of Religion School who collaborated with Reitzenstein on *Studien zum antiken Synkretismus* (Studies in Ancient Syncretism, 1926). As Lehnert reports, Mann received an offprint of the article from Schaeder with an inscription dated September 1, 1926, that is, a few months before Mann began writing the prelude to the *Joseph* tetralogy ("Vorstudien" 465). In section 8 of the prelude, Mann paraphrases from Schaeder's article, even incorporating key phrases directly into his narrative, especially those pertaining to the "perfect man" and his descent into the realm of materiality.³⁰

The story that unfolds in section 8 tells of the first prototype of humanity, who emanated from the divine source of all being before the beginning of the world. This primordial

human soul rose as a youthful being of pure light, called the Primal Man or perfect man, as well as *Anthropos* and *Adam Kadmon* in Jewish and kabbalist traditions. The narrator reports that the Primal Man fell in love with his own image reflected in formless matter:

Dann aber habe er niederschauend sein Spiegelbild in der Materie erblickt, habe es liebgewonnen, sich zu ihm hinabgelassen und sei so in die Bande der niederen Natur geraten. Eben hierdurch erkläre sich die Doppelnatur des Menschen, welche die Merkmale göttlicher Herkunft und wesentlicher Freiheit mit schwerer Verfesselung in die niedere Welt unentwirrbar vereinige. (40)

[Looking down he saw his image reflected in matter, became infatuated with it, went down to it and thus fell in bondage to lower nature. This explains the double aspect of human nature, namely, its indivisible unity of divine origin and free essence with severe enslavement to the lower world.]

The created world of solid forms, and also death, comes into being through this union of the primordial soul of the Primal Man with matter.

God then sends a second messenger, the spirit, who is in some mysterious way the Primal Man's own higher self, his heavenly twin, to rectify the soul's mistake. The second messenger's unequivocal mission is to awaken the forgetful soul:

der selbstvergessenen in Form und Tod verstrickten Seele das Gedächtnis ihrer höheren Herkunft zu wecken; sie zu überzeugen, daß es ein Fehler war, sich mit der Materie einzulassen und so die Welt hervorzurufen; endlich ihr das Heimweh bis zu dem Grade zu verstärken, daß sie sich eines Tages völlig aus Weh und Wollust löst und nach Hause schwebt -- womit ohne weiteres das Ende der Welt erreicht, der Materie ihre alte Freiheit zurückgegeben und der Tod aus der Welt geschafft wäre. (43)

[from its self-forgetful entanglement with form and death to the memory of its higher origin; to convince it of the error of getting involved with matter and thereby calling forth the world; and finally to intensify the soul's homesick

yearning, until one day it frees itself completely from pain and desire and flies home. And with this the world would end at once, matter would be restored to its ancient freedom, and death would be dispatched from the world forever.]

Up to this point, the amazing tale follows the characteristic Gnostic account of the fall of divinity and its redemption that was to occur when the primordial soul frees itself from its entanglement with alluring matter. And yet, the narrator suggests -- and here he begins to revise the tradition -- this could not have been God's true intention. No matter how unfathomable God may be, the narrator insists, the Most High could not really have intended to destroy the created world.

The narrator now begins filling in the gaps in the narrative tradition with humorous speculation designed to expose God's hidden intention. It was always God's wish, the narrator hints, to bring about the union of divinity and materiality that would consecrate humankind with a double blessing, from heaven above and from the depths beneath (49). But God felt forced to disguise this plan as a cosmic error in order to avoid inflaming the jealousy of his pious entourage of angels and archangels, who felt slighted by God's interest in the inferior created world and that lowly specimen, humankind, so readily given to sin.³¹ By the end of the tale, Mann has craftily reversed the Gnostic way to salvation with his revisionary sleight of hand. In place of the Gnostic flight from the world, we now find instead a world-affirming vision pointing to a reconciliation of divinity and matter that repudiates the Gnostic anti-cosmic vision. The double blessing redeems the double aspect of human nature as a stage in divinity's rite of passage and in the evolution of the divine plan.

The "perfect man" of the tetralogy is -- ironically, of course -- none other than the not-quite-so-perfect, though exceedingly well favored Joseph, whose self-infatuation precipitates his downfall.³² He dreams of a living journey into heaven, borne on high on eagles' wings. There the Almighty God, enthroned in a palace of sapphire light, exalts him as lord over all the hosts of angels and archangels, arrays him in a garment of light, and pronounces him the little Yahu, the

little God, and also Metatron. The dream ends just as his living flesh turns to flame and limbs to fiery pinions.

Joseph's narcissistic dream image of himself as a being of pure light, singled out above all others for special grace and favor, functions as a humorous foil throughout the narrative against which the events in his life play out in the refractory realm of mundane reality. As a youth, Joseph indeed obtains the special garment, the famous coat of many colors that flashes with the light of the sun reflecting off its metallic thread. He wins this prize not by the arbitrary grace of God but rather by conniving and manipulating his father Jacob's fondness for him as the first son and likeness to his beloved Rachel. This sign of special favor brings not his elevation above all others but rather his descent into the pit, where he is left to die by his jealous brothers, followed by a second descent into the "underworld" of Egypt, where he is enslaved, tempted by lust, and finally imprisoned. Joseph subsequently rises from his fall to become lord over Egypt and is actually gilded, exalted above all others, and proclaimed to be the "deputy God" and "deputy Horus" by order of his indulgent benefactor Pharaoh Amenhotep IV. Joseph fulfills his grandiose dream of apotheosis, not by escaping the wretched world to dwell beside the throne of splendor and glory in a heavenly palace of sapphire light, but rather by remaining in the earthly realm to nourish the people through the long years of famine. Instead of detaching himself from the catastrophe of creation and winging his way back to his heavenly home, the "perfect man" places his many gifts at the service of the fallen world to improve its lot through the progress of history. Yet, as Mann wrote to his friend Ernst Bertram during the first months of work on the *Joseph* (December 28, 1926), the thematic center of the tetralogy is the *double* blessing that goes both ways, from heaven above and from the depths below (*B* 1: 262-63). Joseph's ready wit, charm, dream interpretation and administrative skills make him the perfect agent for bringing the blessings from above down to earth. But the blessing from the depths below, Jacob's blessing, goes to Judah, the son most torn by guilt, that God might finally be redeemed by consciousness of the suffering human condition.

The portrayal of Joseph as a participant in the world, a humorously drawn redeemer of the mundane realm, reverses the conclusion of the Gnostic eschatological drama contained in the *Roman der Seele* and works out in rich and amusing detail the narrator's revision of the Gnostic myth. Willy R. Berger has rightly noted how the Gnostic myth sets up the theme of the double blessing that lies at the heart of the tetralogy as its secret motto (244-48). Joseph M. Kenney has moreover shown how the legend of the Primal Man refracts through a thick pattern of interconnected motifs as "a kind of master myth to be glimpsed behind the other myths in *Joseph . . .*" (55). As these scholars have recognized, the *Roman der Seele* must accordingly be seen as much more than just one mythical motif among many others woven into the fabric of the novel. It establishes the template for the entire narrative, in which Mann engages and gently "corrects" the world-rejecting Gnostic message at a time when the revival of interest in Gnosticism was at its peak.

The tetralogy fulfills what might be called the "redemption" of Thomas Mann from the romantic anti-modern, anti-democratic commitment that animated his wartime treatise *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen* (Reflections of a Nonpolitical Man, 1918). These reflections rounded up anxieties widely shared at the time that the German cultural ideal, nurtured on its freedom from the mundane concerns of the practical world, stood threatened by the disintegrating forces of the utilitarian, rational, technically efficient West. As is well known, Mann repudiated these deeply ingrained sympathies in 1922 following incidents of domestic terrorism, such as the assassination of Walter Rathenau on June 24, by those espousing a perverted version of the pan-romanticism found in Mann's "apolitical" reflections.³³ In his many speeches and essays from that point forward, Mann committed himself to a new ideal, a "third realm" of future humanity in which the old opposition between mind and body, art and life, and between German culture and the new democratic state would achieve reconciliation through dialectical synthesis. In his speech "Von deutscher Republik" (On the German Republic, October 1922), Mann shocked his long-time allies among the conservative intelligentsia by calling on his audience to support the Weimar Republic, referring to acts of terror that had pushed even him into the Enlightenment

camp. His essay “Goethe und Tolstoi,” revised after the murder of Rathenau, projects a utopian vision that unites what he had previously perceived as irreconcilable opposites in a higher ideal of shared humanity. In the conclusion of the essay, Mann designates Germans as the people of the middle, destined to unite the spiritual depths of the East with the progressive forces of the West, nationalism with citizenship in the world.

To these new political commitments belonged a new commitment to a type of narrative Mann hoped readers would see as “friendly to life,”³⁴ which he fictionalized for the first time in *Der Zauberberg* (The Magic Mountain, 1924). The *Joseph* tetralogy carried forward these new commitments by correcting and absorbing the anti-cosmic Gnostic redemption story into a pro-cosmic tale of reconciliation between the upper and lower worlds through the progress of history. This reversal of the message of the Gnostic myth, unfolded in the story of Joseph becoming an agent of historical progress, carries the signature of Mann’s dramatic and controversial about-face.

As he confided to Karl Kerényi, Mann regarded the *Joseph* tetralogy and the Faust novel as mythological colleagues.³⁵ Indeed, they may be regarded as counterparts or companion pieces, representing the opposite sides of Mann’s legendary Janus face.

The *Joseph* tetralogy establishes Thomas Mann's conscious commitment to a mostly optimistic paradigm and to narrative that is friendly to life. In *Doktor Faustus* Mann’s pessimism finds its fullest expression in the story of the modern composer Adrian Leverkühn (1885-1940) whose creative life coincides with the period of transition from the inherited romantic tradition, seen as outworn and reduced to clichés, to the radically new avant-garde form of constructivist music. By deliberately contracting syphilis, he bargains away his sanity and the warmth of human love for the rapture of creative inspiration needed to make the breakthrough. Twenty-four years of heightened creativity, aided by the effects of venereal spirochetes on the brain, result in works of genius during the years 1906-1930, ending in his final collapse and ten years of mental derangement that mirror the demise of Nietzsche, Leverkühn’s most recognizable biographical prototype. Narrating the story is Leverkühn’s idolizing friend from childhood, Serenus Zeitblom,

who appears as an antiquated relic of the fading age of bourgeois humanism in transition to a new age that rejects wholesale the values of the Western tradition to be replaced by a return to the primitive. Zeitblom spends the war years 1943-1945 dutifully recording the story of Leverkühn's high-flying genius and descent into madness as it entwines with Germany's infernal pact with Hitler and final descent into hell.

In conjunction with his preparatory reading for the *Joseph* novels, Mann noted that the deepest past is never gone but is present in every moment.³⁶ He turned to this deeper archaeological level of his own identity formation immediately upon completing the *Joseph* tetralogy in January 1943, when the darkness of the Nazi horrors overwhelmed the fragile optimism in which the *Joseph* novels had been conceived. Reaching back to a conception whose roots reached deep into the bedrock of his life (*GW* 11: 157), the author turned from the cheerful story of the redemption of the artist and the world, as told in *Joseph*, to a tragic story of their mutual damnation. In *Doktor Faustus*, the novel Mann described as his *Parsifal* (157) and "ein radikales Bekenntnis" [a radical confession] (247), he traced the ultimate trajectory of the path he had repudiated through the fictional fate of the loved but cursed figure of Leverkühn.

The route into the inner core of this study passes through two preliminary strata. In the chapter that follows, we look, first, at the affinities between Gnosticism and Western modernity that began to appear during the period encompassed by this study. Part two narrows in on the Gnostic features of European Aestheticism. Part three uses this perspective to explore a Gnostic subtext in *Doktor Faustus*. Although the passage through the next chapter is lengthy, Mann and his work will slip only temporarily from view. He reappears throughout and at the chapter's end where the contours of the argument linking Gnosticism with Aestheticism, modernism, and Thomas Mann begin to take shape.

¹See, among others, Richard Smith, "Afterword: The Modern Relevance of Gnosticism" (1988); Cleanth Brooks, "Walker Percy and Modern Gnosticism" (1977); Patrick J. Ireland, "The Sacred and the Profane: Redefining Flannery O'Connor's Vision"; Roger Cunningham, "When You See Yourself: Gnostic Motifs and Their Transformation in *The Recognitions*" (1988); Dwight Eddins, *The Gnostic Pynchon* (1990).

²The homepage of Ecclesia Gnostica, based in Los Angeles, is located at <http://www.gnosis.org>. It provides links to a Gnostic Society in Seattle and

one in Norway, along with a directory of Gnostic Christian Churches. The gnosis.org web site also features a vast "Gnosis Archive," including a virtual library of the Nag Hammadi and other primary texts, secondary literature on Gnosticism, web lectures by bishop Stephan Hoeller, and a book store.

³See, among others, Thomas Vargish, "Gnostic 'Mythos' in *Moby Dick*" (1966); Gilles Quispel, "Hesse, Jung, und die Gnosis" (1975); Bruce Henricksen, "Heart of Darkness and the Gnostic Myth" (1978); Harold Bloom, "Lying Against Time: Gnosis, Poetry, Criticism" (1980); Carl A. Raschke, *The Interruption of Eternity: Modern Gnosticism and the Origins of the New Religious Consciousness* (1980); Robert Galbreath, "Problematic Gnosis: Hesse, Singer, Lessing and the Limitations of Modern Gnosticism" (1981); Ioan P. Couliano, "The Gnostic Revenge: Gnosticism and Romantic Literature" (1984); Walter H. Sokel, "Between Gnosticism and Jehovah: The Dilemma in Kafka's Religious Attitude" (1985); Josephine Donovan, *Gnosticism in Modern Literature: A Study of the Selected Works of Camus, Sartre, Hesse, and Kafka* (1990); Jane Goodall, *Artaud and the Gnostic Drama* (1994); and John Finlay, *Hermetic Light: Essays on the Gnostic Spirit in Modern Literature and Thought* (1994); A. D. Nuttall, *The Alternative Trinity: Gnostic Heresy in Marlowe, Milton, and Blake* (1998).

⁴Worringer 3. Worringer's thesis appeared in print in 1908 to such an enthusiastic reception that it quickly went into a new edition, making Worringer not only a spokesman for the movement of German Expressionist painting but also a harbinger of high modernism in literature. I am indebted to Walter H. Sokel for drawing my attention to Worringer's thesis and, most especially, for suggesting the defining idea of viewing Aestheticism through a Gnostic prism.

⁵Thomas Mann, *GW* 9: 593-95. See also Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion* 111; E. M. Butler, *The Myth of the Magus* and *The Fortunes of Faust*; Gilles Quispel, "Faust: Symbol of Western Man."

⁶Thomas Mann, *GW* 4: 39-42. The sources for Mann's *Roman der Seele* were identified and discussed in Herbert Lehnert's "Vorstudien zur Josephstetralogie" 506-8; also in Willy R. Berger, *Die mythologischen Motive in Thomas Manns Roman "Joseph und seine Brüder"* 244-48; and in Joseph M. Kenney, "Apotheosis and Incarnation Myths in Mann's *Joseph und seine Brüder*."

⁷Bianchi xxvi. Without wishing to join the highly charged debates, I note for the record that Dan Merkur has taken strong exception to the conclusions of the Messina Colloquium as perpetuating the biases of the early heresy hunters. See his *Gnosis: An Esoteric Tradition of Mystical Visions and Unions* 111-16.

⁸Cited in Clement of Alexandria, *The Excerpta ex Theodoto* 78. 2.

⁹Ioan Couliano has examined the subversion of biblical tradition in romantic texts by Shelley, Byron, Hugo, Lamartine, Leopardi, and Eminescu in his paper "The Gnostic Revenge."

¹⁰For the distinction between "pessimistic" Gnosticism and "optimistic" Hermeticism, see Stephen A. McKnight, "Eric Voegelin and the Changing Perspective on the Gnostic Features of Modernity" in Segal, ed., *The Allure of Gnosticism* 136. In the introduction to his translation of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, A. J. Festugière differentiates pessimistic, dualistic *gnosis* from what he calls optimistic *gnosis*, in which the life world is impregnated with the divine (1: 84; 2: x-xi). Festugière's analysis seeks to account for the range of texts included in the *Corpus Hermeticum*. The *Corpus Hermeticum* is listed among the "Works Cited" section of this study under Brian Copenhaver, who has provided the most recent translation into English.

¹¹Here and throughout I use the term *völkisch* to refer to the pan-German movement, which embraced paganism and biological racial theories and which

prepared the ground for Nazi ideology as the movement developed to a crescendo in the early twentieth century.

¹²August Neander, *Genetische Entwicklung der vornehmsten gnostischen Systeme* (Genetic Development of the Most Distinguished Gnostic Systems, 1818); J. Matter, *Histoire critique du Gnosticisme* (Critical History of Gnosticism, 1828); Ferdinand Christian Baur, *Die christliche Gnosis* (Christian Gnosis, 1835).

¹³These include The Ante-Nicene Christian Library, 24 vols., 1866-1872; Bibliothek der Kirchenväter, 80 vols., 1869-1888; Bibliothèque choisie des Pères de l'Eglise, 27 vols., 1828-1834; and Oudchristelijke geschriften in Nederlandsche vertaling, 50 vols. to date, 1906 ff.

¹⁴The scope of this study does not include the Nag Hammadi texts, which extended interest to a wide popular audience with the publication of Elaine Pagels's *The Gnostic Gospels* (1979).

¹⁵Michael Brenner has provided a good assessment of the ideological agendas underpinning the scholarship linking Gnosticism with Judaism. See his "Gnosis and History: Polemics of German-Jewish Identity from Graetz to Scholem."

¹⁶See Colpe, *Die religionsgeschichtliche Schule*; also Yamauchi 69-72 and Rudolph 121-22.

¹⁷Jonas, "The Secret Books of the Egyptian Gnostics" 268. See also Rudolph 93.

¹⁸*Primitive Christianity* 197. See also Bultmann's "Mythus und Mythologie im Neuen Testament" (Mythos and Mythology in the New Testament, 1930); Wilhelm Bousset's *Hauptprobleme der Gnosis* (Main Problems of Gnosticism, 1907), Reitzenstein's *Das iranische Erlösungsmysterium* (The Iranian Redemption Mystery, 1921) and *Die hellenistischen Mysterienreligionen* (The Hellenistic Mystery Religions, 1927). For a discussion of the intersection among Reitzenstein, Bultmann, Heidegger, and Hans Jonas, see Jonas's "A Retrospective View."

¹⁹See Herbert Lehnert's exhaustive and critical review of Mann's source materials in "Thomas Manns Vorstudien zur Josephstetralogie" and "Thomas Manns Josephstudien, 1927-1939." Lehnert notes that Mann's copy of Jeremias's article shows many marginal notations indicating his active engagement with this idea. Willy Berger and Manfred Dierks have provided insightful studies addressing Mann's reception of Panbabylonian studies in the history of religion and comparative mythology as they bore fruit in the *Joseph tetralogy*. See Berger, *Die mythologischen Motive in Thomas Manns Roman "Joseph und seine Brüder"* and Dierks, *Studien zu Mythos und Psychologie bei Thomas Mann*.

²⁰In a letter to his friend Ernst Bertram of December 28, 1926, Mann stated his plan to treat Joseph as a Tammuz-Osiris-Adonis-Dionysus figure whose solar mythic features carried over into the life of Jesus. See *Briefe* 1: 262.

²¹See *The Tree of Gnosis* 52-53. Indeed, it would be hard not to notice a certain convergence between German Gnosticism research and the ideological context of the popular movement to de-Judaize and paganize Christianity, as advocated by Paul de Lagarde in his *Deutsche Schriften* (1878). A critical evaluation of the work of the History of Religion School and its representation of the Gnostic redemption myth appears in Carsten Colpe's *Die religionsgeschichtliche Schule* (The History of Religion School, 1961).

²²Carlson 215. Mead claimed to have edited in one form or another almost all that HPB ever wrote in English except for *Isis Unveiled*. Cited in Blavatsky, *CW* 14: xxxvii.

²³See Robert A. Segal's foreword to *From Ritual to Romance* for a critical analysis of Weston's thesis.

²⁴Cited in Surette 236. See his chapter "Pound's Editing of *The Waste Land*" in *The Birth of Modernism* for an account of the influence of Jessie Weston, Mead, and theosophy on Pound's edited version Eliot's poem. In a subsequent article, "*The Waste Land* and Jessie Weston: A Reassessment," Surette develops a further argument connecting what he sees as Weston's occult belief in a wisdom tradition to her reading of and association with Mead.

²⁵See Leon Surette, *The Birth of Modernism*, cha. 2, "The Occult Tradition and *The Cantos*," and Demetres Tryphonopoulos, *The Celestial Tradition: A Study of Ezra Pound's Cantos*. Also Angela Elliott, "The Word Comprehensive: Gnostic Light in *The Cantos*."

²⁶See Richard Noll, *The Jung Cult* 69. For a critical assessment of these claims, see Robert A. Segal's review of Noll's book, 599.

²⁷Details on the neo-Gnostic revival in Vienna and Prague before the turn of the century are from Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, "The Modern Occult Revival in Vienna 1880-1900."

²⁸Scholem, "Reflections on Jewish Theology" 287.

²⁹Edgar Dacqué, *Urwelt, Sage und Menschheit: Eine naturhistorisch-metaphysische Studie* (1924); Dimitri Mereschkowski, *Die Geheimnisse des Ostens* (The Mysteries of the East, 1924); and Alfred Jeremias, *Das Alte Testament im Lichte des Alten Orients* (The Old Testament in Light of the Ancient Orient, 3rd ed., 1916). Mann's intensive interest in Jeremias's book is documented in 43 pages of notes preserved in the Mann Archive, as described by Lehnert in "Vorstudien," 467-71.

³⁰In his article "Apotheosis and Incarnation Myths in Mann's *Joseph und seine Brüder*," Joseph M. Kenney speculates that Mann drew on other sources such as Bousset and Reitzenstein, in addition to Schaefer, for the Gnostic material (40-41).

³¹According to Lehnert, Mann's source for the recurring motif of the jealous angels was a collection Hebrew legends compiled and edited by Micha Josef bin Gorion, *Die Sagen der Juden* (1919). Bin Gorion was the pen name for Micha Joseph Berdychevsky, a neo-romantic Nietzschean figure who was very influential in the Jewish revival initiated by Martin Buber. *Die Sagen der Juden* was a key source for the legends Mann incorporated into the *Joseph* novels. Bin Gorion was also an important influence on Gershom Scholem at a time when his interest in Jewish mysticism was taking shape.

³²It is worth noting as an aside that Mann marked one of the footnotes in which Schaefer drew a connection between the exaltation of the youthful being of light in the ancient Orient and homoerotic worship of the divine youth in the contemporary circle surrounding the poet Stefan George. Schaefer asserted, "all dieser Aberwitz hat nicht, wie seine Hierophanten behaupten, in der griechischen Klassizität, gar bei Platon, sein Gegenbild, sondern in der Dekadenz der orientalischen Gnosis" [This nonsense has its counterpart not in classical Greek culture and in Plato, as its hierophants maintain, but in the decadence of Oriental Gnosticism] (253). Lehnert interprets Mann's notation as a sign of his secret bemusement at this exposure of the conceits and carryings-on of the George circle, of which one of his very closest friends, Ernst Bertram, was a steadfast member.

Still, the links connecting ancient Gnosticism with decadence and male homoeroticism must have resonated in other ways as well, given that the author's depiction of young Joseph was drawn from his son Golo's handsome school chum and lover Polo. As Golo Mann reports in *Reflections and Reminiscences*, Thomas Mann asked for photos of Polo, to be taken surreptitiously, to use for his portrait of young Joseph (116). During the early period of the composition of the first novel, Mann was himself actively cultivating his infatuation with a young man from Düsseldorf, Klaus Heuser,

whom he met during the family's summer vacation on the Baltic in 1927 (Prater 169-72). As we will see in chapter six, in the decadent aestheticism of the fin de siècle, male homoeroticism became a strategy for subverting the laws of procreative nature -- i.e., its relentless fecundity and life's inevitable consequence of death and decay.

³³T. J. Reed charts the critical junctures of the "redemption" of Thomas Mann in the chapter "Republic: Politics 1919-1933" in *Thomas Mann: The Uses of Tradition*.

³⁴In a speech delivered on his 50th birthday in 1925, Mann expressed the hope that posterity would say of his work that it was friendly to life, although it knows death. "Wenn ich einen Wunsch für den Nachruhm meines Werkes habe, so ist es der, man möge davon sagen, daß es lebensfreundlich ist, obwohl es vom Tode weiß" (GW 11: 368, original emphasis).

³⁵See Mann's letter to Kerényi of November 26, 1947 in Mann, *Gespräch in Briefen* 156.

³⁶This comment is contained in the notes from his reading of Dmitri Mereschkowski's *Die Geheimnisse des Ostens* (The Mysteries of the East, 1924), as noted by Lehnert in his "Vorstudien" (502).