The Redemption of Goethe’s Eternal Feminine: Discovering the Reality and Significance of an Archetypal Phenomenon

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THE REDEMPTION OF GOETHE’S ETERNAL FEMININE:
DISCOVERING THE REALITY AND SIGNIFICANCE
OF AN ARCHETYPAL PHENOMENON

by

MARIANA WEISLER

A master’s thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University of New York

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in satisfaction of the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

The Redemption of Goethe’s Eternal Feminine:
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Mariana Weisler

Advisor: Paul Oppenheimer

This thesis traces the phenomenological history and significance of the archetype of the Eternal Feminine, as well as her role in Goethe’s Faust. Although the Eternal Feminine (Goethe’s “das Ewig-Weibliche”) first appears in literary form in 1832 with the publication of Faust: Part II, she has an ancient archetypal history that reaches from the age of pre-patriarchal domination into the modern era. This thesis contends that the Eternal Feminine is a Jungian archetype—a “primordial image” or motif that exists unconsciously and evokes a universal experience within both the individual and the society. Five historical figures exemplify the archetype of the Eternal Feminine: the Great Goddess of prehistory, the supreme life-sustaining force; the Gnostic Sophia, hypostasis of God in the first century B.C. who administers divine guidance on her own authority; Mary of the medieval cult who is promoted to Co-Redemptrix with Christ; the phenomenon of the Black Madonna, whose dark skin symbolizes empowered female wisdom; and the mystical Sophia, the reclaimed goddess of the Gnostic texts who encourages her own reintegration into consciousness and a restored cooperation of the sexes.
What unites these examples is their shared autonomy, wisdom, and power of transformation, which together constellate the Eternal Feminine as the archetype of dynamic femininity liberated from patriarchal suppression.

Goethe’s reasons for incorporating the Eternal Feminine in *Faust* will likely never be known; nonetheless she is a powerful and compelling force instrumental to the drama’s conclusion. *Faust* is widely recognized as the myth of the modern age, but it also abides as the myth of “patriarchal power.” The central hypothesis of this thesis is that Goethe’s *Faust* indeed mythologizes the patriarchal paradigm, but also subverts it: it is the female Mater Gloriosa who saves Faust, and the Eternal Feminine who redeems Faustian society. Faust’s final effort is to reclaim the land beneath the sea and conquer nature, and he is so satisfied by his success that he utters the words that nullify his pact with the devil Mephistopheles and initiate his damnation. In the Enlightenment Nature is the “Other,” the object of patriarchal domination, and Faust’s dominion over her exemplifies his patriarchal drive. Though his damnation may be deserved, the Mater Gloriosa, who displays the qualities of the five archetypal figures, nevertheless appears and redeems Faust. This redemption signifies the reconciliation of patriarchal society and autonomous femininity. As the archetype of feminine authority and dynamism, the Eternal Feminine thus redeems the Faustian West by empowering her own reintegration into patriarchal society.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would not have been able to complete this thesis without the assistance of my advisor Paul Oppenheimer, whose standards of scholarship have tremendously raised my own. I also extend my sincerest gratitude to my patient husband, as well as my brilliant friends who continue to teach me. Many of the sources used in this thesis I first discovered years ago in the attic library of my late grandfather, whose ceaseless striving for knowledge shaped me in childhood, and whose memory ever inspires me to pursue higher truths. It is in his honor that I present this work as a contribution to the extraordinary legacy of the Eternal Feminine, who draws us all to greater wisdom.
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INTRODUCTION

What Is the Eternal Feminine?

In 1832 Goethe completed his masterpiece *Faust* with a dramatic reversal of the fate of the legendary protagonist. The story of Johannes Faustus, which emerges from sixteenth century folk legends centering on a real and notorious alchemist, is in most of its versions that of a man who sells his soul to the devil in exchange for earthly riches, power, and divine knowledge, ultimately paying with his damnation. Goethe, however, imagines a different end for the Faustian hero. The 1587 Spies Faust book closes with the gruesome image of Faustus’s mangled body, and Marlowe’s Doctor Faustus pleads for mercy as he is dragged off stage, but as the devils swarm about the soul of Goethe’s Faust, a divine figure new to the story breaches the scene and disturbs the contract by drawing him instead into heaven. What continues to intrigue and confound readers of *Faust* is not only the puzzling evolution of the Faust legend through this unearned redemption, but also the agent herself who performs it. Neither God, who initiates the bet for Faust’s soul in the “Prologue in Heaven,” nor the Christian savior Christ, intercedes on his behalf. Instead Goethe’s Faustian redeemer is Mater Gloriosa—the Eternal Feminine—who through her own authority, and against Christian dogma, saves Faust’s apparently unworthy soul.

This single appearance of the Eternal Feminine in the penultimate line of the 12,479-line drama has precipitated much scholarship across multiple disciples. Literary Scholars—along with musicians, philosophers, feminist scholars, and psychologists—endeavor to uncover the
meaning of Goethe’s ineffable Eternal Feminine; and while their interpretations diverge dramatically, critics share the belief that she has an undeniable reality, gravity, and perpetuity beyond the parameters of Faust. Though she was first penned in Goethe’s play two centuries ago, her multidisciplinary relevance affirms that the Eternal Feminine communicates something that reaches beyond the work itself. The Eternal Feminine, indeed, is an ancient phenomenon of Western consciousness, one which Goethe incorporates rather than invents in his Faust epic, and bears profound significance in the modern world.

Goethe was the first to outline the archetypal presence of the Eternal Feminine, but he may have designed her to reflect her various manifestations throughout Western history. “Das Ewig-Weibliche,” therefore, is not only the first literary addition to the legacy of the Eternal Feminine, but can be read as the summation of her distinguishing elements. By name, the Eternal Feminine of Faust is everlasting womanhood, connoting the qualities thought to belong to the female gender; but her essential nature should be discerned through her deeds, which present her as a force of immense power, agency, and autonomy. She is not a mute symbol pointing to abstractions of gender allotted to her through the patriarchal legacy, she is dynamic and active, moving the drama in its final moments to a definitive conclusion. This thesis will demonstrate the Eternal Feminine can be conceived as the archetype of dynamic femininity, whose purpose is to restore herself to Western consciousness. From her prehistoric origins into modernity, the archetype of the Eternal Feminine displays the divine authority and wisdom that highlights the pervasive corruption and repression of femininity through patriarchal judgement, as well as the necessity to rectify this imbalance.
To comprehensively analyze the reality and significance of the Eternal Feminine, this thesis adopts an interdisciplinary approach. It does not function only as historiography, literary criticism, archetypal analysis, or feminist revisionism. Instead it draws on resources in each of these fields to construct a hypothesis of how the Eternal Feminine developed and persists as an archetypal phenomenon, and its effects on Western consciousness. Following a brief explanation of archetypal theory, the thesis is divided into two parts: Part One traces the origins and various manifestations of the Eternal Feminine through Western consciousness, examining the figures and intellectual trends in which she appears in each historical period; Part Two considers the Eternal Feminine within Goethe’s own age of the Enlightenment, and the *Faust* text itself as the myth of the modern age in which she functions. The conclusion offers a brief look at her existence and significance through the modern era, and a hypothesis of her psychological and social consequence as an archetype.

**Applying Archetypal Theory**

The Eternal Feminine functions as a psychological archetype, but it is necessary to elucidate, defend, and to some extent revise archetypal theory before applying it to any analysis. Pioneered by C. G. Jung in the early twentieth century, archetypal theory has widely been discounted if not derided in academia, although it persists as one of his most influential psychological theories. Jung builds his theory of archetypes upon his formulation of the “collective unconscious,” a psychic structure operating below conscious awareness that is
universally shared and understood. Jung contends that the collective unconscious is distinct from the personal unconscious, where the individual’s repressed experiences, memories, and complexes exist and can be accessed. Instead, the “material” of the collective unconscious is “present always and everywhere,” although essentially undetectable (Archetypes 42). Jung summarizes the nature of the collective unconscious as follows:

In addition to our immediate consciousness, which is of a thoroughly personal nature and which we believe to be the only empirical psyche (even if we tack on the personal unconscious as an appendix), there exists a second psychic system of collective, universal, and impersonal nature which is identical in all individuals. This collective unconscious does not develop individually but is inherited. It consists of pre-existent forms, the archetypes, which can only become conscious secondarily and which give definite form to certain psychic contents. (Archetypes 43)

Jung’s concept of archetypes draws directly from the Platonic Forms, although in this sense the archetypes as Forms are psychic rather than cosmic (Tarnas 387). Through his study of religion and mythology, Jung observes distinct patterns of “primordial images” that appear across cultures in different guises, but—like Forms—are nonetheless universally recognizable (Man and His Symbols 67). These “primordial images,” stored within the collective unconscious, constitute a database of globally comprehensible figures and psychic forces. Richard Tarnas illustrates how archetypes adapt and yield to the historical moment and social context in which they exist, but do not lose their immanent significance:
Though it was clear that human experience was locally conditioned by a multitude of concrete biographical, cultural, and historical factors, subsuming all these at a deeper level appeared to be certain universal patterns or modes of experience, archetypal forms that constantly arranged the elements of human experience into typical continuity. These archetypes endure as basic a priori symbolic forms while taking on the costume of the moment in each individual life and each cultural era, permeating each experience, each cognition, and each world view. (385)

The main criticisms of Jungian archetypal theory are threefold: its lack of evidentiary supportability, its reliance on ideas involving ontological dimensions, and the hypothesis of a universal human condition underlying individual human beings.¹ To the first point, because the collective unconscious is by nature impenetrable by the conscious mind, there is indeed a lack of empirical evidence; but Jung and his successors offer abundant material that seems to validate archetypal theory. Secondly, Jung’s ontological leanings do not inherently undermine his psychological observations. Lastly, while the supposition that a universal human condition falls short of the modern scientific standards of psychology, as Tarnas points out, Jung’s psychology offers “a fruitful middle ground between science and humanities—sensitive to the many dimensions of human experience, concerned with art and religion and interior realities” (385). Jung’s archetypal theory indeed provides an attractive lens to view pervasive mythological, social, and creative phenomena.

¹ Such ontological ideas include the archetypal “Self,” a pseudo-spiritual soul-image that cannot be defined nor made distinct from divinity, and upon which Jung formulates his theory of individuation. Indeed, Jung has a strong proclivity for the mystical and religious, which often intermingles with his psychology, but certainly does not eliminate his theory from being applicable and relevant.
On the other hand, applying archetypal theory in contemporary scholarship does oblige necessary updates. As Demaris Wehr suggests, Jung is known for his tendency to “reify” archetypes by ascribing them numinous qualities and individual wills, though they are more appropriately social phenomena (23). If archetypal study is broadened to include the social context in which the archetypes function, it could elaborate their discernable reality and effect. What Jung attempts to communicate through his reification of archetypes is that archetypal motifs do not surface arbitrarily. Shifting cultural themes both inspire and are inspired by archetypal currents, so that “as new psychological predispositions and metaphysical assumptions emerge from within the collective mind, from within many individual minds simultaneously, they are matched and encouraged by . . . the emerging archetypal gestalt” (Tarnas 439). What looks like an archetypal “will” is actually the synchronistic revolution of cultural motifs, as individuals and the community cyclically inform and assimilate archetypal experiences. Archetypes thus materialize both inwardly and outwardly, forming a communion between the psychological and sociological reality of individuals and their society.

This reciprocity between the individual and social experience of an archetype is a particularly important subject for feminist archetypal theory, which works to understand the patriarchal effect on Femininity. Estella Lauter’s and Carol Schreier Rupprecht’s “Feminist Archetypal Theory: A Proposal” summarizes the core issues of Jungian archetypal theory, and illuminates how it should be adapted to suit the needs of modern scholarship:

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2 An example of this effect is Romanticism, Goethe’s own aesthetic. Romanticism is a response to the overvaluation of Enlightenment rationalism, but it is also a literary tradition initiated by individuals. The archetype that encourages the Romantic movement simultaneously inspires individuals’ personal psychologies. This fosters an archetypal reciprocity that reinforces emerging paradigms and trends.

3 For the purpose of clarity, the terms “Feminine” or “Femininity” with a capital “F” refer to generalized archetypes rather than social constructs which are presented in lower-case (unless preceded by the adjective “archetypal”).
It should be clear from the essays we have included that we are unwilling to
discard or ignore all the work done in the Jungian tradition . . . because it is
“corrupted” or “contaminated” by patriarchal theories. Jung’s ideas, nevertheless,
pose some difficulties. . . . One of them is his tendency to reify concepts, so that
archetypes seem to be fixed entities with a life of their own rather than cultural
hypotheses about psychological processes. This tendency, coupled with his habit
of thinking in rigid oppositions . . . has been particularly detrimental. . . . This
situation was exacerbated by Jung’s belief that the feminine as it appeared in
works by men was the same as the feminine in actual women. Thus, he did not . . .
consider the masculine bias of many of the mythic and religious documents which
he used to substantiate his theory of archetypes. (223-4)

Jung fails to appropriately examine the extent to which female oppression affects feminine
archetypes, as well as how women relate to the archetypal projections with whom they
themselves identify and are identified by others. The established ideas about Femininity in
archetypal theory are contaminated by male bias, or, as Jungian theorist Mary Ayers puts it,
“exist within the fantasy structures of a patriarchal psychic reality” (63). In omitting female
perspectives, archetypal theory upholds patriarchal prejudices constructed from the imposition of
male understandings of women’s natural qualities.

Because there is meager exchange between the male and female experience of gendered
archetypes, femininity and masculinity remain in stark opposition with little to no fluidity or

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4 Psychological projection is the casting of inner psychic material onto the outer world. Erich Neumann defines
projections clearly: “Just as in the motion picture an image situated behind the observer appears before him on the
‘projection’ plane of the screen, so contents of the unconscious are primarily ‘projected’ indirectly as contents of the
‘outside world’ and not directly experienced as contents of the unconscious” (20).
mutuality between them—whatever archetypal energies inhabit men, women hold the opposite. The clearest example of this is the Logos/Eros binary. Adapted from the classical tradition, Jung and subsequent critics understand the archetypal male-female dichotomy through this model. Logos expresses objective reasoning, union with spirit, and interest in truth; and Eros encompasses love, connection to nature, and the capacity for relatedness (Ulanov 337). Logos actively seeks truth, and Eros passively supports this pursuit as either the inspirational muse or loving mother. The actual relation between gendered archetypal energies, as the Eternal Feminine exemplifies, is not so rigid. To deepen an understanding of feminine archetypes, archetypal theory must be more inclusive of women’s actual historical experiences, more attuned to patriarchal influences, and encourage the criticisms of female academics.  

With these points in mind, archetypal theory can be applied without resulting in the reductive discrimination of femininity or the clumsy turn toward mysticism, and the Eternal Feminine—although an explicitly numinous force—can be analyzed practically and without prejudice within the social context in which she appears.

At this point, the question that must be addressed is whether the Eternal Feminine can genuinely be considered an archetype. If she arises out of Goethe’s personal consciousness in the nineteenth century, can she be the encapsulation of a “primordial image”? Joseph Campbell explains that archetypes typically appear in cultural mythologies, but can also appear in individual imaginations through the process of “creative” mythology—an author’s purposeful creative process stirred by his unconscious archetypal experiences. An individual’s unique

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5 A note about the terms “women” and “female.” In the historical context, these terms refers to people who are biologically female, and thus innately contain certain “feminine” attributes. In the contemporary sense (i.e. that referring to critics and scholars), the application of these terms is not specified and refers to those people identifying as such.
realization of a character such as the Mater Gloriosa, who is drawn from an archetype within the unconscious, may carry a “certain depth or import” that communicates “the value and force of a living myth” (*Creative Mythology* 4). The Mater Gloriosa of *Faust* shares in legacy of previous manifestations of the archetype of the Eternal Feminine—the Gnostic goddess Sophia, medieval Mary, the Black Madonna, and mystical Sophia—and thus perpetuates her “depth and import.” Through his own imagination, Goethe adapts the “living mythology” of the Eternal Feminine into a figure that more appropriately suits modern consciousness.
PART ONE
The Eternal Feminine as an Archetypal Phenomenon through History

Archetypal Femininity and the Patriarchal Paradigm

Because the patriarchal paradigm values and promotes maleness while diminishing femaleness, one of the issues that faces archetypal theory is discerning genuine archetypes of femininity from reactionary standards formed out of patriarchal bias. The feminine archetypes with which modern people are familiar are generally powerless, malevolent, or else defined by their sexual relation to men; there are markedly few examples of powerful, benevolent, and sexually independent archetypes of Femininity. Theorists focused on the Feminine, therefore, work to excavate archetypes of the pre-patriarchal era before female oppression. Comparing these depictions and descriptions of the Feminine to modern ones, furthermore, illuminates how she is corrupted and repressed, and furthermore offers a foundation for analyzing the Eternal Feminine, whose inherent archetypal meaning is autonomous, dynamic Femininity outside of the prescriptive patriarchal mold.  

The archetype of pre-patriarchal Femininity is largely identified as The Great Goddess (or Great Mother), who, as Jungian Mary Ayers writes, encapsulates the “awe and wonder and the sacred beautiful mystery of life” (13). Most of the evidence of the archetypal significance of

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6 First conceived by Freud, repression is the psychological urge to forget or push away trauma that may injure the psyche. This is a healthy instinct for an individual, but not necessarily valid for the whole of society. The consequence of social repression is global imbalance and shame; but, as Freud contends, what is repressed tends to resurface at the slightest opportunity, and even at times without cause (Engelsman 31-6).
the Great Goddess is evaluated through Paleolithic and Neolithic figurines and sketches, shown in figure 1, of an exaggerated female body that signifies the foundation from which life and nourishment springs (Ayers 14). As agrarian societies of the Neolithic Era settles, they begin to link the Great Goddess with nature, identifying her womb as the Earth itself that provides their sustenance (Neumann 118). The popularity of these sculptures, and the correlation of Femininity with the maintenance of life itself, together prove that the Great Goddess is powerful specifically because of her femaleness. Because women are biologically linked with the Great Goddess and share in her life-giving power, furthermore, they are consequently afforded a similar reverence and possibly even dominance in agricultural civilizations (Campbell, *Goddesses* 21). From 4300 to 2800 B.C., the influx of Indo-European nomads—male-centered and war-minded herding tribes—subjugates the Great Goddess and the transition of power to the patriarch initiated (Ayers 16-7). The agricultural and matrifocal societies ruled over by the archetypal Great Goddess lose both the egalitarian cooperation between the sexes and reverence for the authority of the Feminine. No longer allowed to freely participate in society, women are divested of their autonomy and their natural psychic bond to the archetype of feminine power. By approximately 1200 to 700 B.C., patriarchal domination becomes permanently established and the “female powers” are muted, so that surviving sects of Feminine worship are driven underground into cults of secrecy, such as the Eleusinian mysteries (*Goddesses* 57-8).
Ayers observes that as the dynasticism of the patriarch dominates these matrifocal societies, the Femininity that sustains them is also dominated; like the women themselves, feminine archetypes are conquered and silenced, or otherwise corrupted to uphold the new paradigm. As Ayers illustrates, one of the most direct examples of this perversion of benevolent and powerful Femininity—and its subsequent patriarchal subjugation—can be seen through the goddesses Inanna and Lilith in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, dated approximately 2100 B.C. Lilith, popularly known as the licentious first wife of Adam who abducts babies in the night, is originally a Sumerian figure playing the role of handmaid to the great goddess Inanna. While Inanna lovingly reigns as the “Queen of Heaven and Earth,” Lilith manifests herself as the
darker, sexual side of the goddess. Lilith displays a shadowy nature, but it does not so much indicate her malevolence as her independence; in fact, unlike Eve who is taken from Adam’s rib, the Jewish mythology of Lilith begins with her creation at the same moment as Adam, and out of the same earth. Inanna, on the other hand, is a supreme goddess who controls many spheres of influence including love, war, fertility, and justice, and is both beloved and feared. In the *Epic of Gilgamesh* Inanna attempts to rescue the huluppu tree, the tree of life, from its three invaders: the wise and charming serpent, the anzu bird with its young, and Lilith herself as a witch. Although she is the supreme godhead, Inanna somehow cannot manage the task on her own and calls on her brother Gilgamesh who, with his masculine might, drives away the serpent, the anzu with “his” young, and sends Lilith into exile in the wild forest. Gilgamesh, the symbol of patriarchal force, thus usurps the power of the goddess and banishes the dark maid, eclipsing both the Great Goddess and succubus at once. *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, read as the mythology of the patriarchal revolution, exemplifies how the Great Goddess is incapacitated and her dark and mighty sister debased into a witch-like demon that must be overpowered and expelled “as the only way to make a safe connection to the female other” (16-23).

To summarize Ayers’ argument in her own words, “in the revolution to patriarchal civilization woman becomes victim, and the Great Mother is diabolized” (17). The oppression of free womanhood institutes the repression of autonomous Femininity. Because women are not free to steward the conservancy of authentic Femininity, and the patriarchal impulse is to escalate dominance, feminine archetypes are expelled to repression or defiled into reflections of

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7 The Great Goddess and the succubus, who Ayers calls the “Terrible Mother,” are clearly both archetypes of power despite their relative benevolence and malevolence (17).
shame in order to mitigate collective male guilt (18-9). This degradation of archetypal femininity is the patriarchal legacy that sustains through the Enlightenment age, and even persists today.

In turning now to historical manifestations of the Eternal Feminine, the challenge is correctly identifying which implicitly belong to her. While male archetypes are discriminated and individually identified in mythological figures, the “Feminine” is widely considered a singular archetype that can be subdivided but not differentiated. Erich Neumann, author of the seminal text on archetypal femininity, *The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype*, consolidates the totality of the “Archetype of the Feminine” into the Great Mother in his schema (figure 2). This oversight substantiates the patriarchal disregard of authentic feminine individuality and autonomy, as Lauter notes:

> Neumann would have us subsume all the aspects of the feminine under the archetype of the Great Mother. As we have seen, the schema cannot even encompass the diverse images of the mother, and it surely does not take into account images of women with no apparent relationship to men or to children.

(73-4)

As we approach the Eternal Feminine, the task of discerning her distinctive qualities lies in the process of differentiating the Great Goddess. She indeed contains the independence of Lilith and the supremacy of Inanna, as well as—looking to Neumann’s schema—the powers of wisdom as Sophia and rebirth as Mary. But the Great Goddess’s significance, in its broadest sense, is her custodianship of the great mystery, divine authority, and the vital dynamism with which she empowers all beings. It is from the Great Goddess that the archetypal reality of the Eternal Feminine begins to be uncovered.
Sophia, Gnostic Goddess of Wisdom

The Gnostic goddess Sophia lives at the core of any study of the archetypal feminine. At the height of patriarchal dominance in the last few centuries B. C., the figure of Sophia somehow
manages to emerge from patriarchal repression and take her seat beside the Judaic Yahweh as the minister of divine wisdom. Scholar of ancient religions Joan Chamberlain Engelsman suggests that the influence of goddess-worship that survived in neighboring civilizations of the Ancient Near East (particularly of the Egyptian Isis and Mesopotamian Astarte) inspires the revitalization of divine Femininity in the Judaic tradition (75). Unlike Isis and Astarte, however, Sophia is not an independent goddess with her own separate cult, but a hypostasis, a “personification of an aspect of God,” who eventually quietly passes back into repression (Engelsman 74). Believed by some to be a passive partner of God, and others an active goddess in her own right, Sophia is a somewhat unstable figure, though invariably recognized as a container of true Feminine divinity nonetheless (Raff 15).

Sophia is crucial to the discussion of the Eternal Feminine, not only because she is God’s co-creator, but because she displays exceptional supremacy and power, as demonstrated by her aretalologies (“I am” statements). Found in the books of Proverbs and Wisdom, Sophia identifies herself as the “first principle of [God’s] sovereignty,” who is not God’s servant or subordinate but “beside him binding [all] together” (cited in Engelsman 77). Her power, moreover, lies almost exclusively in her role as a purveyor of sacred wisdom who “order[s] all things well;” not only is she the magnanimous intermediary between an ostensibly passive God and his people in need, but she is also a divine “fixer” herself, receiving and answering prayers (Engelsman 81, 92). Neumann, thus, compares Sophia’s role to God’s as “no abstract, disinterested knowledge, but a wisdom of loving participation” (330-1).

Sophia also exerts the powers of salvation, rebirth, and transformation of spirit. Jung, in fact, constructs his conception of the anima—the archetype who invigorates the final
transformation of the personality into wholeness—on these principles intrinsic to Sophia. Like the Mater Gloriosa who receives Faust’s soul at Gretchen’s request, Sophia responds to those who call her:

Wisdom is radiant and unfading,
and she is easily discerned by those who love her,
and is found by those who seek her.
She hastens to make herself known to those who desire her.
One who rises early to seek her will have no difficulty,
for she will be found sitting at the gate.
To fix one’s thought on her is perfect understanding,
and one who is vigilant on her account will soon be free from care,
because she goes about seeking those worthy of her,
and she graciously appears to them in their paths,
and meets them in every thought. (NSRV Bible, Book of Wisdom 6:12-16)

Sophia’s guidance resists the passivity associated with Femininity and is clearly active. Engelsman highlights, moreover, that Sophia’s saving power is indeed proportionate to her strength of wisdom, matching—and even surpassing—God in her efforts to guide and redeem her people (93; Raff 41).

As the Christ-figure rises in the later half of the first century, however, Sophia is correspondingly submerged into obscurity and eventually subsumed by him, augmenting Christ’s

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8 Jung’s idea of the anima is scrutinized by feminist theorists, but she remains a crucial part of his psychology. The anima is the contrasexual aspect of the male psyche that must be fully integrated before realizing the completion of the individuation process. He sections her into four stages of development within a man’s psyche: Eve/(Goethe’s) Gretchen as instinct and biological impulse; (Goethe’s) Helen as aesthetic and romantic adoration; Virgin Mary as Eros and spiritual devotion; and Sophia as transcendent wisdom (Man and His Symbols 195).”
own role as savior of the world (Engelsman 120). Engelsman and others maintain, even, that Christ appropriates Sophia’s capacity for salvation, and that the Christian figure of redemption is more accurately a Jesus-Sophia syzygy (106-7). The substitution of the feminine hypostasis of God with a masculine one confirms the patriarchal refusal of Feminine authority, which Sophia legitimately displays, and a preference for a male figure despite their nearly identical archetypal powers. Referring back to Neumann’s schema, Sophia is found under “Virgin,” which indicates not sexual abstinence or innocence but autonomy. As Jungian Ann Ulanov argues, archetypal virginity “constellates an independence based on fidelity to the feminine principle, one which yields identity . . . in her own right and not simply a counterpart to the male” (206). The virginal Sophia, therefore, like the Great Goddess, is autonomous because of her femininity, and—unlike maternal archetypes—not defined or controlled by her relationship to masculinity. Not only is Sophia’s power of salvation reassigned to Christ, but so is her title as Logos (the word of God) and divine Wisdom, and she herself becomes “Mother of Logos” (Engelsman 100). By undermining Sophia’s autonomous virginity, and diffusing her power from Logos to mother of Logos, Sophia’s power is obstructed.

The mythology of Sophia, like that of Lilith and Inanna, exposes the patriarchal suppression of the Eternal Feminine. Jungian scholar Jeffrey Raff explains that the Gnostics believe Sophia to have both a “higher” and a “lower” nature, the first being discoverable in her divinity and the second in her defilement (15). In the accounts of several early Gnostics, Sophia suffers a fall from her divine grace at the hands of archons—hostile gods—who imprison and rape her, thus bringing forth the evil of the world (19). Her “fall” from divinity and subsequent
imprisonment by the archons resembles Inanna’s disempowerment and Lilith’s exile, and relates her patriarchal domination and repression that causes an archetypal imbalance:

Sophia’s rape corresponds to the oppression of the feminine archetype in the patriarchal world. The loss of Sophia is the loss of all feminine values, and represents the domination of both material and spiritual life by the masculine principle that, in its one-sidedness, is truly the false god. But Sophia is also that which has been lost to God. God is incomplete and one-sided until Sophia is returned to him. . . . Though autonomous, she belongs to the greater whole, and should be part of the greater whole. (26-7)

Sophia’s “higher” nature, as we have seen, is as an emanation of God. She completes the godhead, marrying her wisdom to God’s sovereignty, and without her presence “God has lost something of his own feminine nature and his own wisdom” (Raff 27).

The suppression of Sophia is accomplished through the writings of Philo of Alexandria at the turn of the first century. Philo’s derision of Sophia is founded on by the developing assumptions of femininity: that it is passive, materialistic, often malevolent, and overall less valuable than the masculine (which is active, attuned to spirit, and invested in reason) (Engelsman 102). Figures of autonomous Femininity do not exist in patriarchal culture without a reinstatement of power, which undermines male domination and agitates the patriarchal status-quo. Sophia, therefore, is replaced by Christ, although she will eventually be reclaimed by the mystics of early modern era.
Mary as Co-Redemptrix

As Joan Engelsman asserts, “With the repression of the feminine dimension of the divine in the first centuries of the Christian era, the stage was set for the ultimate return of the repressed” (121). The return of the feminine dimension occurs at least partly through Mary, the mother of Christ, after centuries of Christian resistance to a female power. At the Council of Ephesus in 431 A. D., Mary is granted the title of *Theotokos*, but denied independent authority and deification. She nonetheless prevails as the singular figure of female eminence—the only (illegitimate) goddess of the West—and mirrors Neumann’s schema as the consolidation of the archetypes of benign Femininity: mother, virgin, and muse. Despite the scope of her archetypal significance, Mary’s power is neutralized by Christian dogma; she can be venerated but not worshipped, receive prayers but not field them, access heavenly majesty but not wield it. In essence, Mary is the impotent, feminized replica of her son—human and holy but somehow not divine, the gutted placeholder for autonomous Femininity.

Despite the dogmatic refusal of Mary’s authority, she manages several felicitous moments of “breakthrough,” at which point she seems to manifest the divine power due her. Her most profound “breakthrough” takes place in the High Middle Ages, when Marian fervor is at its height, but Engelsman proposes that even at the time of the Gospels there was an enthusiasm for Mary “as an integral part of the Christian mystery and as a part of God’s plan for the salvation of the human race” (122). The apocryphal texts, in fact, explicitly fuse Mary with Christ, describing

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9 *Theotokos* literally means “one who gave birth to the one who is God” and is originally a term describing pagan goddesses, usually Isis (Pelikan 55). The term *Theotokos* acknowledges Mary’s role as the woman who bore God, but is not the label of goddess.
her as a woman of holiness who performs miraculous acts of healing in childhood, and whose
death parallels her son’s “in a pointed, if not startling, fashion” (123). These texts, furthermore,
extol Mary for possessing “qualities previously associated with goddesses, not mortal women,”
echoing the aretalogy of Isis, mythology of Demeter and Persephone, symbolism of Athena,
hymns of Sophia, and even a kinship to the moon goddess of the day (126). Put simply, in the
eyearly foundations of Christianity, Mary comprises a full index of feminine archetypal powers,
and participates in Christ’s divinity if only obliquely.

Mary’s prominence slowly expands through the medieval period, kindling the passionate
devotion of the Marian cult. She is increasingly displayed in a seat of power and venerated, like
the Mater Gloriosa, as a goddess in her own right (Rubin 121). By the end of the age she is
dubbed “Co-Redemptrix,” and endowed with the ability to not only dispense grace but actually
collaborate with her son to redeem humankind (Debus 62). The merging of Mary and Christ
through their shared redemptive role generates an archetypal pairing “alternative to patriarchal
forms of Christianity,” and augments Mary’s divine power (Debus 63). As with Sophia’s, Mary’s
divine authority negates the exclusive superiority of the Christian male archetypes, and she
enfolds herself into their triune. Jung contends that indeed the holy trinity has a “missing fourth”
that holds the place of the repressed figures of power, and Mary briefly ascends to this position
as the mother and peer of Christ (Psychology & Alchemy 152).10 In a fifteenth century painting
shown in figure 3, Mary kneels at the foot of God while Jesus and the Holy Spirit gaze at her.

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10 Jung’s “missing fourth” is a complicated subject, but integral to his psychology. Inspired by Faust, Jung believed
that the missing fourth was present in Mephistopheles, the devil, the shadow aspect of humankind. However,
because Jung recognized that the feminine principle was similarly repressed, however she included her as a member
of the incomplete quaternity. The problem of both the shadow and the feminine sharing a slot in the divine
quaternity, of course, is that this merged them into a singular phenomenon, perpetuating the Judeo-Christian concept
of women as the carriers of sin and being of a lower nature (Jung, Psychology & Alchemy 151-2).
Although she appears in a subordinate position, she is nonetheless permitted in their divine space and placed at its center. Mary’s moment as an archetypal aspect of the divine, while fleeting and indefinite, affords her special providence and power over the redemptive transformation once expressed through Sophia and recovered in Goethe’s Eternal Feminine.

The Black Madonna

The culmination of the Marian cult manifested itself, paradoxically, in the distortion of Mary into the Black Madonna. Over five hundred depictions of a dark-skinned Mary (typically with the child Jesus) appeared in Europe in the twelfth through fourteenth centuries, and many continue to attract millions of fervent pilgrims every year. Her darkness breeds an incredible mystique, fascinating contemporary scholarship and archetypal theories, although she has only been recognized as a late medieval phenomenon in the past century. Theorists’ consensus is that the Black Madonna does not subscribe to the typical Marian qualities of modesty and motherhood, but commands an archetypal potency reminiscent of Lilith (Begg 35). The Black Madonna is thought to be so captivating, in fact, that Jungians circulate the rumor that Goethe’s inspiration for his Eternal Feminine was an encounter with the Black Madonna of Montserrat, pictured in figure 4 (Gerber-Münch 164).

The critical question concerning the Black Madonna is the reason for her blackness. Many of the madonnas were discolored from years of exposure to the residual soot of incense, the ash and singe-marks of candles, or grime from being stored underground; but curiously, many others were painted black deliberately, or had their discoloration actively maintained (Begg 6). The most popular theory for why the Black Madonna is black is that new communication with northern Africa and the Middle East brought dark-skinned goddesses to

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11 It should be noted that a key factor of the magnetism of the Black Madonna is—without doubt—her blackness, as can be seen in the case of Our Lady of Einsiedeln. After being evacuated to Austria to escape Napoleon’s army, Our Lady of Einsiedeln was returned to Switzerland cleaned and white. The Lords of the Capitol were so shocked and appalled by this that they immediately commissioned she be painted black permanently (Begg 5). The replica made of her in 1690 was also made black (Begg 6). Obviously, her blackness is integral to her identity as an idol and her archetypal resonance.
Europe, where they were adapted into Mary (Begg 5). Jungian theorists Elinor Dickson and Marion Woodman, however, propose that two critical circumstances triggered her appearance. First, the plunder of the crusades indeed brought images of the black goddess to Europe, exposing an entirely new visualization of the goddess archetype; and second, the predominance of the Marian cult and the growing popularity of courtly love produced a preoccupation with the idealized woman, generating the psychological need for a compensating element (28-9).

Figure 4. Virgin of Montserrat—12th century from Michael P. Duricy; “Montserrat Black Madonna;” International Marian Research Institute, University of Dayton; https://udayton.edu/imri/mary/m/montserrat-black-madonna.php.
The real significance of the Black Madonna, although never explicitly documented or revealed by the church, lies in the symbolism of her blackness. Dickson and Woodman explain that while today darkness is associated with the unknown or repressed, in the Middle Ages it is linked to wisdom (8-9). Indeed, the darkness of the Black Madonna points to the natural feminine wisdom of the Great Goddess, the cycles of life, and—like the ancient Sophia—the path of spiritual transformation (9). This last theme, as Ean Begg argues, comes from the influence of Eastern goddesses, whom the Black Madonna appropriates:

In her subterranean darkness she could be compared with the terrifying maw of death, Kali. The circles of wax dedicated to her at Moulins, Marsat, and elsewhere remind us that in our end is our beginning and vice versa, of the uroboric prison of Maya and Karma, the measure of whose round-dance we must tread. She is also the ancient wisdom of Isis-Maat, the secret of eternal life that is the gold at the end of the alchemical process, as well as the initial blackness. (131)

The Black Madonna diverges—both archetypally and visibly—from traditional Mariology, and is more deeply related to these Eastern mystical ideas of the Feminine. Begg resumes, “The Black Virgin is a Christian phenomenon as well as a preservation of the ancient goddesses and compensates for the one-sided conscious attitudes of the age” (131). Although she is costumed as Mary, the Black Madonna is the recovery of the powerful ancient goddesses that were confined in repression by the patriarchal paradigm (131).12

The sweeping devotion of Mary, met by the inception of the dark and powerful Black Madonna, stimulates the flowering of a new appreciation for the feminine principle. Mary’s

12 As with Sophia, Ean Begg emphasizes the virginal rather than maternal nature of the Black Madonna, instead calling her the Black Virgin. Although she was concerned with the domains of fertility and domesticity, the Black Virgin was independent from the male sphere, and not prescribed to her role as mother (133).
white purity signifies her chastity, and the Black Madonna’s darkness points to her sexuality; while the pale madonna is often depicted lovingly embracing the baby Jesus, the Black Madonna stands alone or holds the Christ-child with noble austerity. Like Sophia, the Black Virgin’s devotion derives specifically from her autonomous femininity, although obliquely through her Marian guise:

She was revered in an underground way—the blessing of the crops in the field, the blessing of pregnancy and childbirth, the dark excess of sexuality and delight in the mysteries of the body, and the wisdom that can be experienced in lovemaking. [It] was she who in the most intimate experience possible to the soul, opened herself to the Holy Spirit, was impregnated, and bore God a son. In her aloneness she was independent—a liberated image of the feminine. (29)

The Black Virgin, furthermore, emphasizes the duality of light and dark Feminine natures. As Begg underscores, the traditional Virgin Mary acts as “the statutory female on a patriarchal board essentially hostile to women and nature,” while the Black Virgin openly embodies nature and manifests its healing power (131). In the patriarchal Middle Ages, nature—integrally tied to the carnality of women—is to be denied and transcended, but the Black Virgin boldly resists. The Black Virgin redresses the relationship of Femininity and nature, and accentuates the problem of Mary’s patriarchally prescribed role cut off from nature entirely. The emergence of the Black Madonna and the archetypal motifs she signifies seems directly stirred by the patriarchal repression of the Feminine. Her spirit of liberation, therefore, implies a “quantum

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13 As noted by Dickson and Woodman, “dark” does not hold the same symbolic significance at this time period as it does today, and needs to be identified simply as an aspect of the Feminine rather than a “negative” side. They write, “The words positive and negative do not ultimately apply. They become judgemental words. . . . In feminine thinking, we hold the paradox beyond contradictions. She is the flux of life in which creation gives places to destruction, destruction in service to life gives place to creation” (7).
leap in consciousness, an understanding of the symbolic significance of the relationship of the sexes” (Begg 131).

Robert Graves similarly recognizes a relationship between the Black Madonna and patriarchal oppression. Famous for his illumination of the White Goddess, Graves’ theories are foundational to understanding the divine feminine. His lesser known work, *Mammon and the Black Goddess*, provides insight into this phenomenon of dark Femininity. While the White Goddess, the singular goddess with many names, is Muse and love-bearer, her counterpart—the Black Goddess—does not abide by the same laws of patience and cooperation with the male sphere:

> The Black Goddess is so far hardly more than a word of hope whispered among the few who have served their apprenticeship to the White Goddess. She promises a new pacific bond between men and women, corresponding to final reality of love, in which the patriarchal marriage bond will fade away. (164)

Graves’s White and Black Goddesses represent distinct archetypal energies but are not necessarily opposing; thus, Graves’ dichotomy is more fluid and less constrictive than the notion of the Feminine as negative and positive. The White Goddess is the Great Mother and ground from which life springs, and the Black Goddess complements her with profound wisdom by experiencing, as Graves continues, “good and evil, love and hate, truth and falsehood . . . but chooses what is good” (164).

The Black Madonna survives into the following centuries, but her archetypal message of emancipated femininity deteriorates. The reconciliation of the duality of light and dark Femininity, and the new relationship between the sexes that she augurs, are both deflated, and
women continue to be divided into idealized femininity—emblemized by Mary—and vulgar, corporeal femaleness divorced from the archetypal dynamism of the Black Madonna (Dickson and Woodman 33). The ensuing Reformation is conversely preoccupied with Mary’s virginity, humanity, and obedience to her role as mother, defeating the themes of autonomous sexuality and spirituality that the Black Madonna signifies. Still, the legacy of the Black Madonna is not altogether abandoned, as demonstrated by the immense following she has sustained.

Mysticism, Alchemy, and the Return of Sophia

From the sprouting Feminine devotion of the Marian cult, to its efflorescence as the Black Virgin deriving wisdom and power from her darkness, the renewed archetype of femininity cultivates decades of momentum. Like both the divine Mary and the Black Madonna, the Eternal Feminine of the early modern era survives at the fringes of consciousness, now within the hermetic arts. Outwardly, the Feminine may seem subdued, particularly in this era of the Reformation, but in secret her archetypal significance is being rediscovered and eagerly amplified. The humanism of the Renaissance leads mysticism to the ancient biblical texts and alchemy to the Egyptian-Greek *Hermetica*, where each discover aspects of the forgotten feminine principle. These two unorthodox practices subscribe to the same core beliefs about the Feminine, and both identify her by name as Sophia, although each approach her through different means. The mystics find Sophia in Gnostic and Kabbalistic writing, and are captivated by her immanent connection and cooperation with God; to the alchemists she in the material world
itself—nature—the source of alchemical power, and place her in the final stage of their pseudo-scientific process as the literal and metaphoric catalyst of rebirth (Raff 32). What these two fields of hermetic study unitedly share, despite their contrasting platforms, is the idea that integration of the Feminine is integral to knowing God and experiencing spiritual and personal transformation.

Locating the Eternal Feminine in mysticism and alchemy is a different task than examining her through mythologies and iconography. To the early modern mystics and alchemists, the Feminine exists as a principle more than an embodied figure, a psychic state rather than an icon. Although she is indeed personified in the new Sophia, the reawakening Feminine energy becomes—more than anything else—an esoteric path. The first to truly reclaim Sophia from her Gnostic origins and conceive this path is German philosopher Jakob Böhme. His seminal text *Aurora*, written in 1612, provides an alternate creation mythology in which an androgynous Adam (Ur-Adam) contains his heavenly spouse Sophia within himself. When Adam “imagines” himself into corporeality (the Fall), his “companion and matrix” abandons him, leaving Adam incomplete (Roob 149-50). The loss of Sophia is more than the loss of the beloved. Because Adam’s fall renders him mortal, and Sophia is an entity that cannot be separated from her divinity, Adam is eternally detached from his connection to spirit. In turn, Sophia’s role as Wisdom and the divine mirror of God is also cut off from humanity (Debus 119). The goal, then, is to reintegrate her either through philosophical reflection, or in the alembic itself.

The nature of Böhme’s Sophia is paradoxical—she is both eternal and created wisdom. Böhme uses the metaphor of a mirror to elucidate her duality. God can position the mirror so that
he sees his own reflection, and thus look *ad intra*, into eternity. Or, he can angle it *ad extra* so that he does not see his own reflection but the world itself, and by gazing at the world he creates it. The mirror angled *ad intra* is the eternal Sophia, the gateway to divine wisdom; the mirror angled *ad extra* is the created Sophia, the mother of all beings, the matrix encompassing the heavens, and “the power that creates the holy earth” (Debus 119-20). This vision of Sophia presents her as the container and facilitator of all creation, the Great Goddess. She is the means by which life exists, as well as the channel through which humankind can come to know God and itself. Böhme furthermore envisions Mary as an Anthropos-Sophia *syzygy*, the human manifestation of Sophia (Raff 39). As Elena O’Brien summarizes in her master’s thesis, “The Virgin Sophia for Böhme is a redemptive aspect of Christ in its relation to the fallen humanity,” thus also linking with Mary as co-Redemptrix (14).

From late antiquity through the Late Middle Ages, alchemy generally maintains marginal status as a discipline of metallurgy, mineralogy, and chemical technology, until its neoplatonic roots are recovered in the fifteenth century (W. Newman 497). In essence, the goal of alchemy is to discover the panacea, the philosopher’s stone, which can bring about any form of physical or spiritual transformation; and when coupled with mystical philosophy, alchemy becomes the very process of transforming the soul (Davis 124). Jung was among the first to fully investigate the psychological and spiritual significance of alchemy, and he recognized that it is deeply concerned with the reclamation and reintegration of the Feminine. He notes in *Psychology and Alchemy* that a fundamental design of alchemy points to “the primordial, matriarchal world which . . . was overthrown by the masculine world of the father” (23). One of the key steps of the alchemical process, in fact, is the *coniunctio*, the “chymical wedding” or holy marriage, in which
the sulfur and mercury in the alembic—the red King and white Queen, the masculine and
feminine principles—are married into a singular substance as the gold of philosopher’s stone
(232). This sacred marriage not only symbolizes the integration of masculine and feminine—the
reunion of the individual soul (as Adam) with the divine spirit embodied in Sophia—but also
reconciles an equality and oneness between the sexes.

Sophia of alchemy, moreover, is the embodiment of nature, both human and earthly, and
controls its reproductive power (Raff 38). She is keeper of mysteries access to divinity. One of
the earliest and most critical alchemical texts *Aurora consurgens*, begins with a hymn to Sophia
as the divine patroness of alchemy. In the text, a red-skinned Sophia of the dawn is depicted
suckling an alchemist on each breast, feeding them the milk of wisdom in feminine mercury and
masculine sulfur (figure 5). In another image, Sophia is the Black Virgin, opening her womb to
reveal the caduceus—the opposites as serpents entwining together—woven around her sword of
power and authority (Raff 33). These are just two images out of the many in the alchemical
tradition that depict Sophia’s infinite wisdom and unparalleled authority, uniting the masculine
and feminine opposites through her own female body.
Figure 5. Sophia feeding the alchemists—*Aurora consurgens*, late 14th century; from Alexander Roob, *Alchemy & Mysticism*, Taschen, 2006, p. 209.

The most famous presentation of Sophia is likely in Michael Maier’s 1617 *Atalanta fugiens*. In this alchemical drama, fifty emblems allegorically detail the entire alchemical process through the Greek myth of Atalanta and the golden apple. Each emblem is attached to an image, an epigram, and—most strikingly—a musical “fugue.” The twenty-sixth emblem at the center of the work portrays Sophia as a beautiful woman ready to guide whomever approaches, crowned as a queen and standing beside the Kabbalistic Tree of Life (figure 7). The epigram underneath reads:

In Man’s affairs, the greatest wisdom is

The one from which calm wells and healthy life.

Her right hand holds salubrious length of years,

But in her left o’erwhelming treasures hide

If one approaches her with head in hand

She’ll be like fruit from off the tree of life. (cited in Raff 27)

Like the Sophia of the Book of Wisdom, the alchemical Sophia appears to those who need her and counsels them with her infinite wisdom.

Finally, as Jeffrey Raff points out, Sophia is the personification of the love aspect crucial to the alchemical process. This is not the motherly nurturing love of Mary, but a dynamic love that engages opposites and guides and motivates weary alchemists on their noble quest (36). Here, in the early modern hermetic arts, Sophia finds her fullest expansion. Like the Black Madonna before her, the alchemical Sophia openly boasts her power as the Eternal Feminine and the harbinger of “a new pacific bond between men and women,” which perhaps European society was unconsciously beginning to envision.
Figure 7. Sophia of *Atalanta Fugiens*—Michael Maier, 1617; from Jeffrey Raff, *The Wedding of Sophia: The Divine Feminine in Psychoidal Alchemy*, Nicolas-Hays, 2003, p. 28.
PART TWO

The Eternal Feminine in the Modern Era

The Woman Question, a Brief Introduction

Each of the manifestations of archetypal femininity explored in Part One contributes to Goethe’s own conception of the Eternal Feminine in Faust. Goethe was “profoundly fascinated by the mystical figure of the Virgin Mary,” and may have been awed by the image of the Black Madonna (Pelikan 168). He was familiar with alchemy and mystical thought through his study of “the occult medical theories of Paracelsus and the arcane symbolism of the Rosicrucian manifestos,” and conceivably met the alchemical Sophia in his reading of Böhme and Agrippa (Davis 158-9). What bonds Goethe’s Eternal Feminine to these five chosen figures (the Great Goddess, Gnostic Sophia, divine Mary, Black Madonna, and mystical Sophia) is their shared dynamism: each motivates her people with an engaged wisdom that conveys a revised dichotomy of the masculine and feminine principles.

The psychological revision of these principles in the early modern period becomes social revolution in the Enlightenment. The Sophia of hermeticism encourages a new ideal in which feminine and masculine merge to reform the “whole,” the integration of male and female into a cooperative unit, as with Böhme’s Adam and Sophia. The ideal of male and female integration requires men recognizing women as peers, and this hermetic formula sparks early strains of feminist thinking. The querelle des femmes, the “woman question,” is born out of the alchemical
school with Agrippa’s *Declamatio de nobilitate et praecellentia foeminei sexus* (*Declamation on the Nobility and Preeminence of the Female Sex*), in which Agrippa argues that women are the superior sex, but cannot validate this truth because they are oppressed. He contends that men’s insistence that women’s inferiority justifies their oppression is secretly an excuse by which they continue to enjoy their superiority and power. This argument is inspired by his knowledge of the mystical Sophia, who Agrippa directly correlated with real women, and the male-female integration she symbolizes (B. Newman 231). In this way, he transfers her psychological influence as an archetypal power into social reality. Part Two of this thesis similarly moves the archetype of the Eternal Feminine into the social realm. It analyzes her presence within the Enlightenment, considers Goethe’s personal ideas of her archetypal significance, and evaluates the phenomenological meaning of the Eternal Feminine through *Faust* as “the myth of the modern people” (Gerber-Münch 143).

**Enlightenment and the Feminine**

The new relationship to the Feminine forged in mysticism and alchemy seems to be quelled beneath the heel of the Scientific Revolution. Newton’s invention of the mathematical science of physics means that nature is no longer unconquerable due to her inconceivability, and her power can indeed be dominated and manipulated according to Man’s needs. The Enlightenment follows, favoring science, reason, and progress, realizing the patriarchal *telos*: the supremacy of rationality and complete dominion over the natural world. European consciousness
is rapt by the masculine potential for scientific exploration, and scorns the Feminine’s numinous mystery. With no prominent outlets in underground Mariology or occult laboratories, the Feminine is only recognized in her perverted form as the Other, which, in Enlightenment, is Nature herself.¹⁴

Although the Enlightenment persists as a period of severe patriarchal oppression and male authority, it is inherently motivated by the desire to break away from ineffective notions, to illuminate ancient ignorance, and to revise established systems. For the first time in history, feminists such as Mary Wollstonecraft are publicly able to “out” the patriarchal system and to work to revise women’s participation in society, and in turn their ideological and archetypal roles. The writing of these early feminists does not explicitly describe archetypal transformations, but they are shrewdly critical of the tropes of femininity born out of a patriarchal bias. Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* exemplifies this type of criticism. Wollstonecraft directly and indirectly illuminates the traditional perverse ideas of femininity, at times noting that women are assumed to be weak-minded, petty, irascible, delicate, and lascivious, and at others endorsing their innate nurturing, pleasing, and modest qualities. She recognizes that these are not states of femininity but male conceptions produced by patriarchal ideals. Women submit to these assumptions because they cannot disentangle them from their own natural femininity, and indeed it will take significant time and effort to “convince women that they are acting contrary to their real long-term interests” (32). Wollstonecraft wants women to perform “the important duties of life by the light of their own reason,” to reject the feminine attributes that inhibit them from equality and self-awareness (43). The “light of their own

¹⁴ Nature is capitalized here to signify her inclusion as a manifestation of the archetypal feminine.
reason” is the realization of their own potentialities, and confidence in their own autonomous selfhood—both of which are symbolized by the archetype of the Eternal Feminine. As Wollstonecraft declares, “I don’t want women to have power over men; I want them to have power over themselves” (43).

Enlightenment women’s challenge is to shed the oppressive tropes of femininity; but because women are oppressed and integrally bound to nature, they are precluded from developing a self-governing individuality, and thus prevented from articulating their own feminine experience:

Man as ruler denies woman the honor of individualization. Socially, the individual is an example of the species, a representative of her sex; and therefore male logic sees her wholly as standing for nature, as the substrate of never-ending subsumption notionally, and of never-ending subjection in reality. Woman as an alleged natural being is a product of history which denaturizes her. (Adorno and Horkheimer 111)

The pairing of women and nature not only subverts female individuality, but because Nature is the Enlightenment Other, women are linked to its destructive wildness. Rather than assuming the role of the benevolent Great Goddess, they become the succubus Lilith—the primary feminine archetype of the patriarchal perversion—as Phyllis Mack makes clear:

Because a woman menstruated, her nature was viewed as similar to that of the moon and tides, which shared her monthly cycle. And since the moon shone only with the cold, reflected light of the sun, so women were by nature cold, moist and passive. They could also be sinister; just as the moon was linked to night and
mystery, so women had a special affinity with the forces of malevolence that lived in darkness. Men, on the other hand, were thought to be like the sun, which radiates life-giving energy. . . . They were clear-headed, rational, hot and dry.

(Hunt et al. 2)

Andrew Hewitt demonstrates in his “feminine” dialectic of Enlightenment that the first stage in the model of alienation is oppression of this “otherness”: “Man does not dominate woman and identify her with nature—he dominates by identifying her with nature” (153). If the ancient patriarchal goal is the oppression of the Feminine—synonymous to the Great Goddess and nature—and the Enlightenment goal is the domination of nature—inextricably bound to womanhood and the Feminine—then naturally an objective of the Enlightenment is the conquest of Nature and total dominion over the Feminine.

Goethe as Misogynist and Feminist

Understanding the relationship between Enlightenment, women, Nature, and the Feminine is essential in approaching Faust, and even more so for uncovering Goethe’s own design for the work. To avoid the trap of the intentional fallacy, it must be conceded that there is probably no way that Goethe’s intentions can ever be known, but illuminating his own ideas—and more broadly his experience of women and Enlightenment—can provide compelling material. “Faust has been seen as the paradigmatic text of modernity almost since its conception,” writes Jane K. Brown, adding that it is one of those “rare works that capture some
major turning point in our history” (84). The Enlightenment concerns of progress, nature, striving, and female agency concentrate the heartbeat of the Faustian landscape, although it is difficult to discern where Goethe falls with these issues in the text itself. The presence of the Feminine in *Faust*, especially, mystifies readers and draws polarized arguments from scholars as to why the appearance of the Eternal Feminine concludes the epic Goethe took most of his life to complete. Ultimately the debate is whether Goethe is simply a skilled poet caught up in the rigid gender structure of the nineteenth century, or a pioneer of feminist thinking.

His personal relationship with women offers an interesting background for addressing this topic. Goethe famously moved through many intense sexual relationships with women, who inspire a good deal of his poetry (Becker-Cantarino 179). Ostensibly, Goethe adores the image of woman as muse and lover, and is “enthralled by women, and they by him” (244). His ideas of women as individuals, however, is less apparent. Barbara Becker-Cantarino’s discussion “Goethe and Gender” asserts that rigid nineteenth century gender roles fortify Goethe’s opinion that women should focus on their status as wives, mothers, and caretakers, rather than attempting poetry or other artistic inclinations beyond their capacities (181-2).15 Becker-Cantarino maintains, furthermore, that in his autobiographical accounts Goethe describes himself as the sole focal point in his relationships with women: “Goethe’s sense of masculinity and his role as a male was an integral part of his aesthetics. The ‘other’ (the female) was of little interest to him unless she could be absorbed into his own work and be subsumed under his masculine creativity” (183). To summarize Becker-Cantarino’s argument, Goethe appreciates women within the

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15 Becker-Cantarino claims that Goethe’s conviction that women should not enter the public artistic sphere prompted him to sketch an essay with Schiller titled “On Dilettantism,” in which they criticize women’s amateurish “pseudo-art” (181).
domestic sphere, but seems less concerned with honoring them as individuals seeking the freedom to publicly or artistically participate in society.

Katharina Mommsen defends the inverse argument in her essay, “Goethe as a Precursor of Women’s Emancipation.” Mommsen concedes, “There are, to be sure, many disparaging comments in the innumerable written and spoken statements by Goethe about women; however, they are always the product of some special circumstances and can be explained in this light” (51). Mommsen suggests that Goethe was indeed impressed by the many educated and ambitious women that he encountered in his lifetime, and took it upon himself to make “his vocation as a writer to raise the social status of women” (54). He broadcast his conviction that women had the right to compete with men—and were up to the task—and was particularly infuriated by the sentiment of “contempt for women,” which he believed unjustly denied women upward motion though their equality was “self-evident” (52). In his writing Goethe does not shy away from crafting dynamic female characters or pointing to women’s injustice, and Mephistopheles himself mouths the words uttered at the infamous execution of 1771 that inspired the Gretchen tragedy: “She is not the first” (Pelikan 171). In one of his lesser known works, *Die guten Weiber*, Goethe acknowledges women’s long oppression and capacity for individuality and growth:

The phrase “He shall be thy master,” is a formula characteristic of a barbarous age long since passed away. Men cannot claim a right to become educated and refined, without conceding the same privilege to women. As long as the process continues, the balance is even between them; but as women are more capable of improvement than men, experience shows that the scale soon turns in their favor. (cited in Mommsen 63)
This excerpt demonstrates Goethe’s acknowledgement of the patriarchal disparity between the sexes, and—not unlike Agrippa’s—his conviction that women have the capacity to develop into men’s coequals. Goethe’s advocacy for women may not be obvious, or even resolute, but Mommsen insists that he was aware of the fight for women’s equality and “stands in the forefront of those who have fought for [women’s] emancipation” (63).

The question of Goethe as misogynist or feminist illustrates how scholarship can anachronistically apply contemporary concepts, particularly in feminist studies. On one hand, Goethe’s skepticism of women’s ability to meaningfully participate in the public sphere, and his insistence that they focus on their domestic roles, is indicative of a misogynistic mentality; however Mary Wollstonecraft, the ardent feminist, shares some of these beliefs. On the other hand, his acknowledgement and empathy in respect to the women’s struggle demonstrates his feminist leanings; but these leanings to not truly indicate advocacy. Goethe seems to endorse both misogynistic and feminist ideas, but these ideas only exist in relation to the nineteenth century patriarchal paradigm, which had not yet faced scrutiny. Goethe’s views on women can be summarized, therefore, as a “both and.” He is neither misogynist nor feminist, but does exhibit a preoccupation with femininity both in his creative life and the world at large. The significance of Goethe’s Eternal Feminine, then, can be conceived as his own internal debate over the querelle des femmes: is she an expression of the “male fantasy,” a patriarchal ideal; or is she liberated Femininity, the archetypal woman lifted from oppression into her “self-evident” autonomy? The unique and undeniable power of Goethe’s Eternal Feminine indeed undermines the patriarchal construct of female inferiority, and thus to some extent, at least, we can assume Goethe may have resolved that women and the Feminine were worthy of emancipation.
Faust, the “Myth of Patriarchal Power”

Faust has long been considered the myth of the modern man, but as Rollo May suggests, Faust is more befittingly the “myth of patriarchal power” (239). “Faustianism,” May writes, “is the straight line, always moving ahead in progress, which is our contemporary belief” (218).

Spengler’s Faustian West, defined by this motive of progress, rationalism, determination of intellectual will, and drive to explore the infinite is—in Goethe’s vocabulary—masculine striving; these ambitions both define Faustianism and male Enlightenment values. Is Faust’s redemption, then, Goethe’s “affirmative ‘cheer’ for progress” and the patriarchal paradigm (247)? While clearly in favor of many aspects of Enlightenment, Goethe is also critical of the ruthlessness of progress and the treatment of nature (247):

Is Goethe doing penance for his worship of progress and for his epiphany of industry? Ostensibly he believed in this patriarchal gospel and he had a long drawn-out battle within his soul as to whether it was good or bad. . . . Goethe was in a paradox about this chief myth of modern times, which includes our time in the twentieth century as well as his. The paradox comes out of his poetic soul in dealing with the Mothers as the source of love, tenderness, caring, instead of toughness, cruelty, slaughter. (247)

According to May, Goethe’s decision to redeem Faust, along with his inclusion of Feminine power (referred to above as the Mothers) illustrates that Goethe is indeed conflicted over Faustianism. Despite his conventional reductive understanding of femininity as receptivity, love,
tenderness, and caring, May recognizes that these two amendments to the Faust legend sabotage and subvert Faustian patriarchy.

Goethe presents a clear opposition between masculine striving and a feminine nature in Faust, but his own thoughts about them, again, remain ambiguous. Gail K. Hart’s essay “Errant Strivings: Goethe, Faust and the Feminist Reader” notes that Goethe presents Faust neither as a tyrannical megalomaniac, nor as a chivalrous champion, but as a flatly unsympathetic hero whose “arrogance and towering egotism” irritate modern readers, though they nonetheless accept his salvation (14). Faust’s main offenses, unsurprisingly, occur in his interactions with female characters. Part I displays Faust’s outward or literal abuse of Gretchen, providing a true to life example of male abuse of women in Faustian society. He manipulates Gretchen into sleeping with him and then abandons her, driving her to desperately drown the infant born from their coupling. Though Faust rushes to free her from her dungeon—into which he has figuratively consigned her—Gretchen has already gone mad and rejects Faust’s guilt-driven rescue. In Part II we see Faust’s inward or symbolic abuse, which exemplifies the delimited ideological role women are compelled to occupy. After having seemingly forgotten about Gretchen, Faust acquires the coveted prize of the mythic Helen—the exemplified form of female beauty and desirability—who is a willing slave to the male vision and symbol of subordinated womanhood (15). “The figure of Helen does bring out this aspect of Faust’s ambition,” Hart asserts, or Faust’s ambition to possess her, “demonstrating his/the patriarchal will to appropriate women as accessories of authority, but the flatness or bloodlessness of the portrayal ought to discourage rather than inspire advocacy” (15). Although Helen is not callously abused by Faust in the same
way as is Gretchen, her “bloodlessness” strips her of potential “subject-hood” and the opportunity for liberation from Faust’s (and the Faustian) fantasy of womanhood (15).

Hart agrees with May’s suggestion that Goethe suffered a “drawn-out battle” over the Faustian ideology, observing that *Faust* illustrates the “problem or the splendour of Goethean ambivalence that encompasses a certain ‘both and’, even as it presents an ‘either-or’” (“Errant Strivings” 20). Either Faust’s indifferent relationship to Gretchen and Helen epitomizes male authority as the model of the Enlightenment age, or his apathy dramatizes a male exploitation of women for the sake of personal desire. Either Goethe overlooks Faust’s heinousness in order to redeem him, or he supplants Faust’s authority with Gretchen’s leadership “into higher spheres” (2.12094). Again, the “both and” is the case: in *Faust*, Goethe seems both in favor of Faustianism as the modern paradigm, and aware of its injustices against women.

The clearest means of deciphering Goethe’s relationship to the Feminine and its role in *Faust* lies in the treatment of Nature herself. Because Nature is the central archetype of the Eternal Feminine in the Enlightenment, and she displays exceptional influence over the drama, she exists in the text as an individual character. As Harold Jantz notes, the concept of nature as a personified goddess-like figure has an ancient history, one with which Goethe was familiar and which he incorporated into his own poetic imagery (794). Although Goethe presents Faust’s striving optimistically, and at times virtuously, this striving results in the augmentation of his egoism, immorality, and futility, and impels him to attempt the literal conquest of Nature (O’Brien 57). To progress the reach of his domain, Faust reclaims the land beneath the sea; the success of this venture drives him to exclaim, “Beautiful moment, do not pass away!” and he voids the pact (2.11582). If, as O’Brien writes, “*Faust* is an ode to Nature, to its inexhaustible
procreative power, to its breathtaking beauty, and to its majestic greatness,” then Faust’s hubristic striving is an act of defilement. Faust’s heartless domination of Nature—for Goethe and his Romantic aesthetic—is nothing less than a mortal sin. In this way, Goethe seems to rebuke Faustianism and instead value the Feminine (O’Brien 49).

Scholarship overlooks the deeply puzzling reason for Goethe’s use of a feminine savior in a patriarchal world. A common suggestion is that the Eternal Feminine acts as Eros, corresponding to Faust as Logos: the Eternal Feminine’s loving, “relating” function passively supports and enhances Faust’s active rationality and masculine drive for progress (Hamlin 142). But the significance of a female hero in a patriarchal mythology seems more substantial than this explanation. As May stresses, “Each myth in human history is interpreted according to the needs of the society which it reflects,” and in Jung’s view the needs of modern society are the reconciliation of the “opposites,” the polarities of the long-suppressed Feminine and long-dominant Masculine (247; Tarnas 443). Goethe’s revised resolution of the Faust legend seems to subvert its patriarchal marrow, reflecting the needs of a society still reeling from the positivistic Enlightenment that had killed not only God, conquered the power of feminine Nature. The salvation of the patriarchal hero by the victim of his oppression marks the undoing of the Faustian paradigm.
Mater Gloriosa, Redeemer of Faust and Humankind

The redeemer of Faust—and Gretchen before him—is the sublime Mater Gloriosa, the personified Eternal Feminine. Goethe does not adhere to Christianity, but like many of his time he adapts Christian imagery to communicate his symbolism. The mystical Marian figure in the Mater Gloriosa displays power categorically unavailable to her in Christian dogma, and surpasses Mary as co-Redemptrix, performing the miracle herself. She is not the Mary of the post-Reformation, but the Gnostic Sophia who equals God in her authority, the Black Madonna who symbolizes the power of liberated authentic Femininity, and the alchemical Sophia who charts the path of transformation. Doctor Marianus proclaims:

Queen and ruler of the world!
In this deep blue sky,
In thy tent of heaven unfurled,
Show me thy mystery!
I must love thee as a man,
And my heart’s emotion
Gives what sacred love I can:
Spurn not my devotion!

We who fiercely fight for thee,
Conquerors at thy bidding,
Gentle lovers we can be
If thou hear our pleading.
Purest Virgin, noblest Mother,
Queen of our election,
Goddess yielding to none other
In thy great perfection! (Goethe 2.11997-12012)

Like the aretalogies of Sophia, these two stanzas depict a goddess of true autonomy, agency, and supremacy. Mater Gloriosa is “ruler of the world,” “Queen of our election,” and “Goddess yielding to none other.” In her essay, “Das Ewig-Weibliche nasführet dich: Feminine Leadership in Goethe’s Faust and Sacher-Masoch’s Venus,” Hart identifies Feminine authority and leadership as a central issue of Faust. Mephistopheles and Faust each voice their “contempt for the idea of feminine leadership,” but nonetheless it is the Mater Gloriosa and Gretchen who quite literally rescue Faust and lead him up, again pointing to Goethe’s problematic and splendid ambivalence toward the feminine principle (Hart, “Feminine Leadership” 113). In fact, in her single moment of speech, the Mater Gloriosa directs Gretchen: “Come! into higher spheres outreach him! / He must sense you to find the way” (Goethe 2.12094-5). As Hart notes, moreover, with the spirit of Faustian striving as the primary motivator of the drama, the final lines—“Eternal Womanhood / Draws us on high”—indicate that “a feminine principle powers the striving that leads ‘us’ [and Faust] to salvation” (2.12110-1; “Feminine Leadership” 113).16

The Mater Gloriosa, therefore, has the paramountcy to not only grant Faust’s salvation, but motivate his enterprise for progress; like the Great Goddess she is the energetic well from which the masculine principle draws in order to engage in its progressive purpose.

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16 David Luke’s translates these last lines as “Eternal Womanhood,” but they are typically translated to the Eternal Feminine.
Hart’s theory remodels the archetypal conceptions of male activity and female passivity from gender-specific to gender-transitory (“Errant Strivings” 21). Indeed, the Mater Gloriosa is the most instrumentally successful divine force in the whole of Faust, over Mephistopheles and God himself. Although Mephistopheles appears to be actively diligent in fulfilling Faust’s requests, he does not accomplish the actual goal of this activity—winning the bet for Faust’s soul; and the God sagging into his throne in the “Prologue in Heaven,” who “has left off laughing long ago,” does not compete with the vibrant and vital energy of the Mater Gloriosa, and after his insipid debut never appears again (1.278). The Mater Gloriosa watches in seeming passivity, but she appears ethereally in Part I to save Gretchen, and in person in Part II to save Faust, indicating—just as the Gnostic Sophia—that she actively supervises and participates in the drama, in contrast to God’s obvious passive negligence.17

The entire catalogue of characters in this final scene—both biblical and imagined by Goethe—demonstrates the role of Mater Gloriosa as redeemer of Faust and the Faustian paradigm. They affirm the authority of the Mater Gloriosa by attesting to her unique power to transform humankind.18 Paters Ecstaticus, Profundus, and Seraphicus extol energetic Nature with highly animated, rhapsodic, and ironically violent language, but also establish love as her “everlasting core” that “shapes all things and shields them all” (1.11864, 11873).19 The Blessed Boys (notably not the Blessed girls or children) then chant:

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17 The Voice from above who declares, “She is redeemed!” is not definitely the Mater Gloriosa’s (Goethe 1.4612). But because Gretchen reappears as Mater Gloriosa’s “Una Poenitentium,” her personal penitent, we can assume it was indeed she who saved Gretchen.

18 By definition, Christian salvation requires repentance, which Goethe conspicuously omits for both Gretchen and Faust. Therefore, Mater Gloriosa’s power—as noted—clearly cannot be religious redemption but a metaphorical transformation into “higher spheres.”

19 As established above, Nature here is considered an individual feminine character and manifestation of the Eternal Feminine, specifically in Goethe’s age, and is therefore intrinsically related to Mater Gloriosa.
Gladly we welcome this
Chrysalid-aspirant:
Ours now his heaven-bent
New Metamorphosis. (1.11981-4)
Through the beneficence of the Mater Gloriosa, Faust is now in the chrysalis—the shell of transformation—and his impending transfiguration opens the same opportunity to the Blessed Boys. Next, Gretchen’s sister penitents, Magna Peccatrix, Mulier Samaritana, and Maria Aegyptiaca, implore the Mater Gloriosa to employ her great power of mercy and grant Gretchen’s petition for Faust’s salvation. What is noteworthy about the penitents is, like Gretchen, these women have been undone through a patriarchal tragedy, particularly because of their female carnality and concupiscence. They do not uphold the expectations of patriarchal femininity, and yet they are the consorts of the paragon of female chastity, Mary. The Mater Gloriosa thus takes on the role of the Black Madonna who favors penitent whores, healing their psychological and sexual wounds inflicted through patriarchal cruelty (Begg 131).

Finally and most significantly, the entire scene is led by Doctor Marianus, who Jung believed to be Faust individuated and reborn (Archetypes 114). As the transformed Faust, Doctor Marianus is no longer scholar of medicine and theology, but of the feminine goddess herself. He testifies to her great authority as supreme “ruler of the world” who yields to “none other,” not

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20 The first, Magna Peccatrix, is identified as Mary Magdalene through the exegetical tradition (and not the figure referenced in the Luke itself), and is minimized and demeaned as a prostitute, although in apocryphal writings she is Christ’s most beloved apostle (Pelikan 172). Mulier Samaritana is the Samaritan woman, a divorcée and thus an adultress, who asks Christ for a drink and learns his gospel of eternal life. Last is Maria Aegyptiaca, Mary of Egypt, who prostitutes herself to satiate her lust, and is moved to repent upon realizing she cannot enter the sacred temple because of her sinfulness.
even God. He also indicates her magnificent power, not only through his abundant adulations, but his physical prostration as she enacts Faust’s redemption. Traditionally, prostration is managed only in the presence of the divine host, or on Good Friday at the moment when Jesus expires and secures salvation for humankind. Doctor Marianus thus physically validates her magnitude and supremacy by humiliating himself before her as one would before Christ. What Doctor Marianus uniquely communicates about the Mater Gloriosa is that she commands the reversal of the Faustian power dynamic of the feminine and masculine principles. Now transfigured, the patriarchal hero has become the disciple of Feminine power and must defer to her “mystery” and divine wisdom. When Doctor Marianus announces that, “I must love thee as a man,” he does not have erotic love in mind, but a new vision of Faustian masculinity in relation to her authority.

While scholarship often correlates the Mater Gloriosa/Eternal Feminine with Nature, the Mothers, and even Helen, she is recognized least in the Una Poenitentium Gretchen. Notably, Gretchen is the single character in this final scene who does not make her debut there, and furthermore the only one to whom the Mater Gloriosa speaks. In her unique ability to communicate with the goddess, Gretchen bonds to her. Beside the exalted Mater Gloriosa, Gretchen herself is transfigured—she is renamed, a participant in divine wisdom, and the reader may even imagine the golden glow of heaven emanating behind her. In the mythology of Faust, Gretchen is the Western woman struggling to survive her oppression, but she achieves liberation and metamorphosis upon meeting the long-repressed archetype of empowered Femininity. Faust’s redemption as Doctor Marianus is the reconciliation of the masculine and feminine.

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21 Martin Greenberg’s translation supplies this line as, “The gods’ peer and equal,” cautiously implying her equivalence to the Christian God, a blatantly heretical and feminist statement.
relationship, but Gretchen’s redemption is the endowment of her dynamic selfhood. What the Mater Gloriosa reveals is that Faust must “sense” her new inspired identity to find the way forward. For, though she was “not the first” victim of patriarchal injustice on earth, she is first to receive heavenly salvation. Gretchen is now herself the alchemical Sophia, guiding Faust’s redemption, and appeals, “O Lady, grant me now to teach him! / He is dazzled still by the new day!” (2.12092-3).

With Faust’s redemption accomplished, the Chorus Mysticus finishes the play with these cryptic lines:

All that must disappear
Is but a parable;
What lays beyond us, here
All is made visible;
Here deeds have understood
Words they were darkened by;
Eternal Womanhood
Draws us on high. (2.12104-12111)

In his commentary “The Place of the ‘Eternal-Womanly’ in Goethe’s Faust Drama,” Harold Jantz paraphrases the lines of the Chorus Mysticus: “All that we know in life is but a symbol, a metaphor of the ultimate truth, an inadequate representation of what we shall behold in its entirety when that which is indescribable on earth (can only be intimated) will be realized and enacted within us” (791). Indeed, the inclusive “us” reaches beyond the parameters of the story
itself and points directly at the reader. Jantz suggests that Goethe’s final axiom must describe a profound truth that can be internally understood and assimilated, and that this truth is a divine eternal force that raises up mankind, “prefigured here below by the symbol of the womanly” (791). Scholars typically conclude, as Jantz mentions, that this truth is encompassed in the “womanly” because (ascribed) archetypal womanhood is exemplified in the expansive healing energies of love, mercy, grace, or passivity (792). But as we have seen, the truth that can be grasped and assimilated can easily be in the possession of Sophia, keeper of the fruit of the tree of life. It can also rest in the lap of the Black Madonna, the wise and empowered Mary. The truth is contained in the Eternal Feminine because it is hers; it is the possibility of redemption from patriarchal imbalance, which must be intimated and inevitably enacted with “us.”
Jung maintained throughout his life that *Faust* endures as the definitive myth of the modern age, because Goethe uniquely intuited the triumph that was only beginning to form in modern consciousness. Goethe’s insights indeed “possessed a degree of prescience, a capacity to speak from the unconscious depths of his society. The poets as well as the other artists of any culture tell us myths that go quite beyond anything they consciously know” (May 246). Through this prescience, Goethe (consciously or unconsciously) apprehended the phenomenological reality of the archetype of the Eternal Feminine, and placed her at the center of his Faustian epic. As Jung enthusiastically insists, *Faust* is one of the “living myths” of the modern era, but more specifically it narrates the momentous unconscious revolution from Faustian patriarchy to a “new reality, a new form of human existence, a ‘child’ that would be the fruit of this great archetypal marriage, and that would bear within itself all its antecedents in a new form” (Tarnas 444).

This new reality is heralded by Romanticism, which Goethe himself engineers. In revolt of the rigidity of the Age of Reason, Romanticism inversely devotes itself to the sublimity of nature and “claims of the heart, soul, and blood” (Davis 12). The dry objectivity of the Enlightenment is overturned by Romantic poetry that blooms as a dreamworld, plumbing the depths of the unconscious realms and rendering the poets themselves “outcasts from patriarchal society” (Woodman and Dickson 23). Romanticism abandons rational intellect and supernatural
ontology, and instead seeks the ultimate truth in nature, where the male impulse is no longer to
dominate but to glorify. Feminine “otherness” evolves from its inferiority to awesomeness;
women’s roles shift from sensual beings unsuited to the faculty of reason, to icons of irrationality
who surpass the cold parameters of the mind with their uninhibited instinct for love (Davis 12-3).
Femininity is esteemed by the Romantics, but nonetheless the women who embody it are still
encased in the patriarchal Logos/Eros binary. Men prevail on the quest for truth, while women
abide as their muses and mothers, or else embodying the wild “Other.” Still, the inversion of the
dichotomy of male superiority and female inferiority undermines the patriarchal notions of the
Enlightenment, and opens European consciousness to a new archetypal paradigm.

Goethe’s Eternal Feminine is thus a central archetype empowering Romantic ideals, as is
demonstrated in the poetry of William Blake and Lord Byron. Like Maier’s mystical Sophia,
Blake’s Eternal Feminine is an “Emanation” of the male-female whole, who pursues reunion
with her male counterpart in order to achieve redemption for humanity (Billigheimer 108). And
Byron’s own Faustian poem, *Manfred*, presents the eponymous hero plagued with an
unexplained shame and guilt as he desperately seeks to forget his beloved Astarte, who is named
for the Hellenized version of the powerful sky goddess Inanna subjugated to patriarchal
suppression in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. Might Blake’s Emanation indicate the need to recover the
estranged Feminine, for the “marriage” of masculine and feminine principles as peers? Is
Byron’s guilt a response to the oppression of femininity, constellated here in the goddess

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22 At the same time Transcendentalism offers a new appreciation for the Feminine through its philosophical views on
nature. Unlike the Romantics, it does not elevate the Feminine explicitly, but reveres nature (in this period is still
entwined with Femininity) as a numinous force. It also suggests a reconception of women’s roles in society,
particularly in the thoughts of Margaret Fuller, who believes that if “nineteenth-century American culture in general
valued the feminine and freed women to pursue their full potential, humanity could progress and meet many of the
stated goals of cultural and social reformers” (Wayne 80).
Astarte? If these poets indeed continue the legacy of the Eternal Feminine initiated in modern consciousness by Goethe, then the poetry of Blake clearly revive the alchemical Sophia, and Byron’s grieves the patriarchal repression of the Great Goddess. As Woodman and Dickson illuminate, the gift of the Romantics is to intuitively grasp unconscious currents, and they indeed seem to sense the reality of the Eternal Feminine, and recognize her significance in the modern world (23).

Romanticism embraces the Eternal Feminine, advancing her reintegration into the world, and in the decades that follow Western society seems to experience several auspicious developments that encourage her liberating theme. At the end of the nineteenth century the psychology of Freud and Jung catalyzes the reckoning of human behavior with the unconscious mind, inviting men and women alike to sit upon the psychoanalytic couch and reconcile their inner and outer worlds. Women are admitted into the literary sphere, where they at last they illuminate their own individual realities in place of male assumptions. First-wave feminism galvanizes the West to rectify gender inequality, demanding a reexamination of the attributes femininity may possess. More frequently the male vision of the Feminine in the arts is substituted for women in less idealized forms, or portray women as victims explicitly. Cézanne’s painting *L’Éternel Féminin*, shown in figure 8, depicts a woman as victim, bleeding from the eyes and suffering in labor. A crowd of men observes and admires her, some sketching her and composing music, others merely gazing, and even the pope is present and looms over the foot of her bed beside her spread legs. Her victimization is not physical but ideological. The life-giving power of the Great-Goddess that she inherits is simultaneously scrutinized and adored, but she
cannot stand and escape this oppression. She lies deflated and motionless, her eyes gouged as Oedipus, bearing the shame of the patriarchal violation and idealization of womanhood.


What these many shifts in social consciousness portend, and what Cézanne’s painting illustrates directly, is the decline—as Spengler alleges—of the Faustian West. The Romantics’ elevation of the Feminine reveals her previous subordination, and unearths the great shame she has been forced to bear to alleviate patriarchal guilt. As the West enters the twentieth century, it
becomes apparent that the paradigm that sustained Faustianism, thrusting Western man ever forward, only ever did so for man. As Tarnas boldly submits, this realization “looks very much like the death of modern man, indeed that looks like the death of Western man. Perhaps the end of “man” himself . . . in the embrace of the feminine” (445). This “embrace of the feminine,” however, is not the end of “man,” but the reintegration of authentic Femininity and autonomous womanhood into the world of the patriarch. It is the reclamation of the Feminine from repression, and the reversal of her corruption, so that she stands beside “man” as an equal power.

The Eternal Feminine is “both the Redeemer and that which must be redeemed,” and indeed her reintegration into society is the very redemption it requires. The sin of Faustianism is the oppression of women, and its redemption is the reclamation of the archetype of feminine power, so that women and men alike may be able to psychologically experience this motif and manifest it into social reality (Raff 41). As Tarnas observes, “The feminine then becomes not that which must be controlled, denied, and exploited, but rather fully acknowledged, respected and responded to for itself” (444). As the syzygy of victim and savior—the bonded Gretchen and Mater Gloriosa—the great archetypal power of the Feminine is to save herself.

After centuries of repression through patriarchal dominance, the Eternal Feminine comes closer to recovery from repression, as the archetype of feminine autonomy and wisdom. She dismantles the imposed narratives of female passivity and the feminine as Eros, and demonstrates an authority that inspires women’s own autonomy—just as the Mater Gloriosa prompts Gretchen to lead Faust to heaven. Like Gretchen, women themselves most directly experience her archetypal significance, and must steward her reintegration so that they may be empowered to define their own experience of femininity. With the reclamation of the Eternal
Feminine, the Faustian world is redeemed and Western society can create a new paradigm that draws “us” all on high.
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