

Forbidden Fruits: An Occult Novel

JOSCELYN GODWIN and GUIDO MINA DI SOSPIRO

Rochester, Vt.: Inner Traditions, 2020. 288 pp., paper, \$19.99.

Occult novels, especially thrillers and mysteries, are a popular genre that can provide escapist entertainment for even the most serious esotericist. And surely there was never a better time for some escapist entertainment than 2020.

Yet the very elements that make thrillers and mysteries attractive—extended suspense, the unfolding of surprise events, and the final resolution of a puzzle or conflict—also make them difficult to review. No reviewer wants to pepper their review with spoiler alerts, much less spoilers themselves. It's a dilemma that I will do my best to surmount.

Forbidden Fruits, like Godwin's and Mina di Sospino's first occult thriller, *The Forbidden Book* (2012), takes place in the Mediterranean: in Italy in both books, with the addition of the island of Malta in their new novel.

While the occult core of *The Forbidden Book* was a consideration of the esoteric philosophy of Julius

Evola and its considerable downside, *Forbidden Fruits* delves into both the contemporary survival of the Catholic chivalric Knights of Malta (né Knights Hospitaller of St. John of Jerusalem) and the possible discovery of the psychoactive nature of the entheogenic initiatory components of the Eleusinian Mysteries.

All of this is pondered and revealed in the context of a series of murders whose perpetrators are assuredly evil and omnipresent, but at the same time exasperatingly elusive.

At the center of the drama is the Pinto de Fonseca family, a noble Maltese lineage descended from Manuel Pinto de Fonseca, the storied Portuguese Grand Master of the Knights of Malta in the latter half of the eighteenth century. Scion Sebastian Pinto, who is fabulously wealthy, has been underwriting a deep-sea archaeological dig that turns up a prehistoric golden artifact in the shape of a pomegranate. He is also the inadvertent witness of a savage beating of an African immigrant by Russian skinheads, helping to run them off before they have the chance to murder their victim outright.

These two events at the outset of the novel adumbrate two of the main themes of *Forbidden Fruits*: ancient history, wisdom, myths, and their continued effects today; and the forces at work causing and shaping the flood of immigrants from Africa into southern Europe and beyond. It is not long before Pinto and his family, as well as lead archaeologist Dr. Monica Bettlheim, are plunged willy-nilly into grappling with dark forces stirred up by the dig's discovery. Someone wants them dead, but who or what? I leave it for the reader to find out and enjoy the paranoid thrill of running for your life.

What sets these highly readable thrillers apart from Dan Brown's or those of his run-of-the-mill imitators is that Godwin and Mina di Sospino use their novels to impart actual information or at least well-researched speculation. Although both authors shared the writing tasks, there is a

singular authorial voice and style, and it is an elegant one. Yes, this is pop literature, but it is pop lit of a very high quality. The plot is tightly woven and without the holes of logic or detail that seem to plague Brown's best sellers.

Whether it is speculation about the ancient roots of religion or a description of an actual method of skrying or a discussion of alchemical symbolism, our authors know that of which they speak—or, at the very least, know the best sources to tap.

I have no hesitation to recommend this book to *Quest* readers, as you are the ideal readers who would best appreciate what Godwin and Mina Di Sospino have achieved.

Jay Kinney

Jay Kinney was founder and publisher of *Gnosis: a Journal of the Western Inner Traditions*, and author of *The Masonic Myth*. His articles and reviews have appeared in *Chronicles*, *California Freemason*, *Reason*, and *Quest*.

