sort of hieros gamos nor a kiss. Until now the only interpretation that
convinces me is that of Gaffron, since without any doubt the term is
strongly related to the pleroma, to the desired goal of the Gnostics, to the
heavenly wedding feast, to the reunification of the images (i.e., the
believers) and the angels, of the female and the male as "virgins and
"free men," like the Father of the All and his virgin Sophia or like Jesus
and his consort, the virgin Mary Magdalene. Perhaps the bridal chamber
ritual is the lifelong practice of the "free men" and the "virgins" living
together in one community but without marrying, as do couples of the
world. Such "spiritual marriages" are well known in early Christianity,
particularly in eratic circles and among cenobites. According to the
Gospel of Philip, the bridal chamber is described as a protection against
the behavior of unclean male and female spirits who are trying to defile
the perfect ones (65,1—66,4; 81,34—82,26). And it is a weapon for an
unchecked journey to heaven as well. The realization of the eschato-
logical approach begins in this world, that is the full meaning of the term
discussed.

Images of the Feminine in Gnosticism, ed. Karen King.

19

ANNE MCGUIRE

Virginity and Subversion:
Norea Against the
Powers in the Hypostasis
of the Archons

The texts of Nag Hammadi demonstrate clearly that gnostic literature
abounds in images of sexuality and gender. Most scholars agree that
these images served as powerful vehicles of gnostic expression and that
they had a variety of meanings in gnostic thought and practice. Yet
beyond the recognition of variety in these uses of gender imagery, there
appears to be little agreement on precisely how this imagery functions
and what it signifies in Gnosticism generally or in individual texts.

This essay seeks to address the question of the significance of gender
imagery in Gnosticism by focusing on an individual text: the Hypostasis
of the Archons. This remarkable text offers a retelling of the primordial
myth of Genesis as a story of confrontation and subversion. At the
center of the drama is the conflict between the Archons, or Rulers, of this
world and Norea, the virgin daughter of Eve. The dramatic account of

1. Michael Williams (in his essay "Variety in Gnostic Perspectives on Gender," in this
volume) has clearly illustrated the diversity in gnostic uses of gender imagery and
argued effectively for a methodological program which attends to the significance of
gender in specific texts before constructing a general account of gender in Gnosticism.
On these points I stand in complete agreement with Williams; on the significance of
gender imagery in individual texts, such as the Hypostasis of the Archons, we take
somewhat different perspectives, as is shown below.
2. Hypostasis of the Archons 86,20—97,23. All citations of the Coptic text are taken
351-425, with commentary and notes in idem, "The Hypostasis of the Archons," pt. 2
HTR 69 (1976), 31-101. See also B. Barc, L'Hypostase des Archontes.
3. This description of the Hypostasis of the Archons as a "story of confrontation and
subversion" represents a deliberate alternative to Michael Williams's description of the
Hypostasis of the Archons as "a story of escape." Though we agree that the myth focuses
on the struggle between the "Rulers" and the "spiritual children of Adam and Eve," we
disagree on the center and purpose of the narrative's depiction of that struggle.
their confrontation explicitly discloses the true reality or nature (hypostasis) of the Archons, as it reveals the power of Norea against the archontic powers that would dominate her.

Previous studies have demonstrated that the retelling of Genesis in the Hypostasis of the Archons, as in other gnostic texts, characteristically "inverts" the meaning of Genesis and other exegetical traditions on which it draws.4 This essay builds on these studies and grounds its analysis of the characters, action, structure, and gender imagery of the Hypostasis of the Archons in a view of the nature of mythic narratives adopted from Paul Ricoeur's analysis of biblical narrative.

Ricoeur offers a hermeneutical perspective on the "world" of biblical narrative that may prove useful to the interpretation of gnostic myth. In Ricoeur's analysis, biblical narrative creates a possible world and invites its readers imaginatively to enter that world and thereby expand their sense of their own possibilities and their own world. "Texts such as this," Ricoeur writes of biblical narratives, "do not exhaust their meaning in some functioning which is purely internal to the text. They intend a world which calls forth on our part a way of dwelling there."5 The meaning of the text thus does not lie "behind the text," but "in front" of it, "in a way of being in the world which the text opens for us."6

In Ricoeur's terms, it is the task of the interpreter to open up the meaning of the text by disclosing to us its world: "What has to be appropriated is the meaning of the text itself, conceived in a dynamic way as the direction of thought opened up by the text. In other words, what has to be appropriated is nothing other than the power of disclosing a world that constitutes the reference of the text."7

4. Scholarship on the text has illuminated the relation of the Hypostasis of the Archons to exegetical and philosophical traditions. See esp. the commentaries of Layton and Barz; and the essays of D. Pearson, "She Became A Tree."—A Note on CG II, 4:89,25-26, 4:71,15-17; "The Figure of Norea in Gnostic Literature," in Proceedings of the International Colloquium on Gnosticism, Stockholm, August 20-25, 1973 (ed. G. Widengren), 4:89,25-26, and "Revisiting Norea," in this present volume. While much attention has been paid to the gnostic inversion of biblical tradition, relatively little attention has yet been paid to literary analysis and social function of gnostic myth.

5. P. Ricoeur, "Naming God," USQR 34 (1979) 226. William Placher ("Paul Ricoeur and Postliberal Theology: A Conflict of Interpretations?" an unpublished paper distributed among members of the "Narrative Interpretation and Theology Group," and discussed at the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion in Anaheim, November 25, 1985) alerted me to the significance of this text for the interpretation of biblical narrative, especially the parables. I am grateful to Placher for helping me to see that Ricoeur's work might prove more useful for the interpretation of gnostic myth than his published reflection on myth and Gnosis, such as The Symbol of Evil (trans. E. Buchanan), 156-74.


7. P. Ricoeur, Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning, 92. A. Y.

If gnostic myths may be described as narratives that create a "world" of meaning in which they invite their readers to dwell, the task of interpreting gnostic myth may be similarly described. Through literary analysis of the depiction of character, action, and structure in gnostic narratives, the interpreter may be able to open up the meaning of the text by disclosing its vision of the world. Such analysis can open the world of the text to its readers, as it opens its readers to the world of the text, inviting them imaginatively to adopt that world as their own. Through close analysis of gender imagery and narrative patterns in the text, but especially in the account of Norea's struggle against the Rulers, this essay attempts to offer such an analysis of the Hypostasis of the Archons.8 It seeks to open up the "world" of the Hypostasis of Archons and provide a new perspective on the relation between literary form and social function, between gender imagery and the "world" it helps to shape.

The analysis starts from a reading of Norea's confrontation with the Rulers as a confrontation between two modes of power, each of which has a distinctly sexual and social force. In the Hypostasis of the Archons, the confrontation of archontic and spiritual power is symbolized in a series of encounters in which the Rulers of this world attempt to grasp the female spiritual power. Twice their efforts take the form of attempted rape. In its representation of the struggle between the Rulers and the female manifestations of Spirit, the Hypostasis of the Archons creates a world in which issues of power are directly linked to issues of gender. Throughout the narrative, the Rulers display their power in efforts to dominate and defile. Norea displays her virginal power, by contrast, in the ability to resist, subvert, and reframe the Archons who would falsely claim to rule Norea, her children, and the entire world.

The Hypostasis of the Archons can thus be read as a story of subversion and promise: the narrative depicts the subversion of archontic power by the virginal power of Norea and promises the transfer of such power to her "children." This depiction carries important implications for the reader of the text. For in creating a mythic "world," the Hypostasis of the

Collins (Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse, 18-22) illustrates the usefulness of this hermeneutical perspective for the interpretation of the Book of Revelation.

8. Especially important to the development of this essay have been recent works in feminist literary criticism, esp. E. Schüßler Fiolenza, Bread Not Stone, and P. Trible, Texts of Terror. For more general discussion, see A. Y. Collins, ed., Feminist Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship, and E. Showalter, ed., The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature, and Theory.
Archons invites its readers to enter that world and adopt its analysis and critique of “archontic” power in the world. Similarly, it invites its readers to hear the promise to Norea and her children and to receive the “virginal spiritual power” that subverts the powers of the Archons in the mythic world of the text and, perhaps, to exercise that power of critique and subversion in their own world.

The analysis that follows is divided into four parts: (1) the reality of the Rulers in the world of the Hypostasis of the Archons; (2) the birth and naming of Norea; (3) Norea’s struggle against the Rulers; (4) the promise to Norea and her children. This analysis is followed by a concluding interpretation of the Norea narratives and of the significance of gender imagery in the world of the text and the world of its reader.

1. THE REALITY OF THE RULERS IN THE WORLD OF THE HYPOSTASIS OF THE ARCHONS

The world of the Hypostasis of the Archons is governed by the “Authorities” against whom “the great apostle” warned and about whom the narrator now writes: “[I have] sent you this because you (sing.) inquire about the reality (hypostasis) of the Authorities.” These are the “Authorities of Darkness” (Col. 1:13) about whom the apostle “told us, ‘Our struggle is not against flesh or blood, but against the Authorities of the Cosmos and Spirits of wickedness’ (Eph. 6:11-12).”

With these references to Ephesians and Colossians, the prologue gives the reader a double message. On the one hand, in referring to “our struggle” against the Authorities, the prologue suggests that the Authorities have a continuing reality (hypostasis) against which the narrator and the readers must struggle. In this respect, the narrative may serve to inform the readers about the reality and the nature of the Authorities so they may better be prepared for the struggle that continues. On the other hand, the references to the apostle remind the attentive reader of another story and another reality: the power of God, who “delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the Kingdom of His beloved Son” (Col. 1:13).

The reader may thus already know what the mythic narrative of primordial times will reveal. The reality of the Rulers is such that there continues to be a struggle, but their reality has been exposed and overcome by God. In the eschatological promise of the narrative, their “rule” will be broken; in the eschatological perspective of the Pauline text, their “rule” has been broken by God, who offers empowerment for the struggle against them. The Rulers constitute a real threat, as the Pauline text implies, but the eschatological victory is, in some sense, already obtained. Yet at the same time, their reality persists, the struggle continues, and the reader must be exhorted to enter the struggle, recognizing that against the spiritual power from above, the Rulers have no power.

Within the primordial world of the Hypostasis of the Archons, the Authorities rule the cosmos, falsely assuming it to be the only world. The chief of the Rulers, known alternately as Samael, Sakla, and Ialtabaath, appears from the beginning of the narrative as a blind god and “god of the blind.” Because of his power, ignorance, and arrogance, he claimed to be the only god.

12. Eph. 6:10-17 focuses less than Colossians on the redemption already offered and more on the continuing struggle. It assures the reader of God’s empowerment for those who heed the exhortation: “Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. . . . Take the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand [emfistéteten] in the evil day, and having done all, to stand [stéhn].”

13. Layton, “Hypostasis of the Archons,” pt. 2, n. 14; the “point is that the heavenly Rulers constitute, as Paul implies, an objectively real threat—but that against the spirit-endowed gnostics they have no power.” This reading may underemphasize the extent to which the struggle is real and the reader needs to be awakened to the reality of his or her own power against the Rulers.

14. Layton, “Hypostasis of the Archons,” pt. 2, n. 12, 46-47, and n. 167, 72-74; Samael (one of the principal names for Satan in Judaism from the Aramaic term for “blind”) appears at Hyp. Arch. 87.3; 94.25-26; Sakla (the usual Aramaic term for “fool”) at 95.7, 95.11-12; 96.3-4. Barc (L’Hypostase, 75-76) puts forward the view that in the first redaction, Ialtabaath and Sabaath were identified as the two sons of the chief Ruler. In his view, the second redactor identified Samael with Ialtabaath and made Sabaath his son.

15. “Their chief is blind” (Hyp. Arch. 86.27); “You are mistaken, Samael (which is, ‘god of the blind’)” (87.3-4; also, 94.25-26).

It is I who am God; there is none [apart from me]. When he said this, he sinned against [the Entirety]. And this utterance got up to Incorruptibility, and a Voice (fem.) came forth from Incorruptibility, saying, "You are mistaken (κρανακος), Samael, which is 'god of the blind.'”

This passage introduces a pattern that recurs throughout the narrative: the vain and arrogant claims of the Archons evoke a voice of rebuke from the realm of Incorruptibility. The rebuking voice from above unmask the ignorance and error of the Rulers, shatters their assumptions, and subverts their claims to authority. This narrative pattern, like the voice itself, discloses the nature of the Rulers as blind and powerless in the face of a higher power from above and sets the stage for further action.

The interactions of the Archons and powers from above also be described as setting a pattern of gender representation in the world of the text. The Archons appear in androgynous and specifically male forms, while the higher power from above is manifested in images, voices, and characters almost exclusively of the female gender. In several scenes, the Hypostasis of the Archons depicts the struggle against the Authorities as a struggle between the androgynous Archons and female manifestations of the virginal spirit from above.

In the case of the first rebuke, a voice (fem.) from Incorruptibility (fem.) projects the Image (fem.) of Incorruptibility in the waters below. Enamored of this spiritual and female Image, the Rulers attempt to capture it by modeling a male human being "after their body and after the image that appeared in the waters."

They said, "Come let us lay hold of it (the image) by means of the form that we have modelled, so that it (fem.) may see its male counterpart (τετελεσθήσε) . . . . and we may seize it with our modelled form (τετελεσθήσε).”

The Rulers assume that the "male counterpart" will attract the female image from above. Yet because they are powerless and do not understand the force of God or the power of the Image, they are unable to make their modeled male form arise.

It is only after a Spirit (fem.) from the Adamantine land comes to dwell in the human being (ποιμέν) that he becomes a "living soul" and receives the name "Adam, since he was found moving upon the ground." A Voice (fem.) then comes from Incorruptibility (fem.) for the assistance (πανσέλετον) of Adam, and he becomes empowered to give names to all the animals of earth and birds of heaven.

And the Rulers gathered together all the animals of the earth and all the birds of heaven and brought them in to Adam to see what Adam would call them (ναμοῦτε εφού), that he might give a name (τοῖν ἀνήμον) to each of the birds and all the beasts (88,19-24).

A voice (fem.) from Incorruptibility is thus manifested a second time as a spiritual power of speech. In this appearance, however, the power of speech is not a rebuke against the Rulers but an assistance to Adam and, indirectly, to the Rulers whose creatures he names.

As the narrative continues, the Rulers bring a deep sleep of Ignorance upon Adam, and "they opened his side like a living Woman." With this act, the Spirit leaves Adam and enters the woman separated from his side. She is now described as the “Spiritual Woman” (τετελεσθήσε) and "Mother of the Living." Her presence, like that of the image in the waters, arouses the Archons. They respond with their second attempt to grasp a manifestation of the female Spirit from above. In this attempt, the Rulers try to "sow their seed" (σπέρμα) in her. But the Spiritual Woman they desire leaves her carnal form behind and enters a tree. The Rulers, mistaking the carnal form "stamped in her likeness" for the Spiritual Woman herself, succeed only in defiling the carnal woman left behind. "And they defiled (ἀκάθωρις) the form that she had stamped in her likeness." In this act of rape, the Rulers and the carnal woman conceive Cain.

Upon leaving the woman, the Spiritual Woman (τετελεσθήσε) enters the serpent and instructs the man and woman to eat from the tree of recognizing evil and good, against the Rulers’ command. This act of
spiritual instruction is simultaneously an act of insubordination. Upon questioning Adam, the Rulers learn that the woman gave to him from the tree and they curse her. She in turn informs them: “It was the Snake who led me astray.” From that day, the Snake came to be under the curse of the Authorities; until the All-powerful Human Being (πενεκοντα) was to come, the curse fell upon the snake. The Rulers then cast Adam and the woman out of the Garden and throw humanity into a life of distraction and toil, so that they “might be occupied by worldly affairs and not have the opportunity of being devoted to the Holy Spirit.” In this setting, Eve gives birth first to “their son” Cain. She then conceives with her husband and gives birth to Abel. The account of these births completes this portion of the narrative and forms the transition to the Norea narratives.

Four of the themes outlined above bear directly on the representation of gender and power in the Hypostasis of the Archons and prepare the reader for the depiction of Norea's struggle against the Rulers. These are: (1) the desire of the androgynous Rulers for the female manifestations of the Spirit from above, taking the form of violent efforts to grasp and rape; (2) the hostility of the Rulers toward the modeled creatures they would dominate, but who in fact are more powerful than they; (3) the mobility of the Spirit in its manifestations as the Voice from Incorruptibility and the Spiritual Woman (both female); and (4) the spiritual power of speech and naming.

In the Norea narrative, these themes find dramatic expression and resolution in three crucial moments of disclosure around which the narrative can be ordered. The first occurs around the birth and naming of Norea: the second in the depiction of Norea's struggle against the Rulers' attempt to rape her and subordinate her to their power; the third appears in the eschatological promise of Eleleth to Norea and her children. Considered together, these moments of disclosure provide crucial insight into the significance of gender and power in the mythic world of the Hypostasis of the Archons.

1. THE BIRTH AND NAMING OF NORAEA

Norea's spiritual identity is signaled immediately in the account of her birth as one of two “spiritual children” of Eve.

31. Hyp. Arch. 90.30–91.3.
32. Hyp. Arch. 91.4–11.
34. Hyp. Arch. 91.30–92.4.
35. See esp. the comments of Birger Pearson in his essay "Revisiting Norea" in this volume.
36. H. M. Schenke ("Das scheinischen System nach Nag-Hammadi Handschriften," in Studia Copice [ed. M. Nagel, 165–73], and idem, "Gnostic Sethianism," in Rediscovery [ed. Layton, 2588–616]) has argued most compellingly for a common "Sethian" system of thought and a "Sethian" corpus of texts of which the Hypostasis of the Archons is a member. The "Seminar in Sethian Gnosticism" of the International Conference at Yale discussed and debated the hypothesis of a distinctively "Sethian" variety of Gnosticism without coming to agreement. See Rediscovery (ed. Layton), 2, 2457–865, for the papers and discussions of the seminar.
37. C. Stroumsa (Another Seed, 53–60) focuses on Norea as a female figure who escapes from the "rape of the archon." Like Pearson, Stroumsa offers a very useful discussion of gnostic inversion, and describes Norea as female counterpart to Seth. Such a description subordinates Norea to Seth and places the Hypostasis of the Archons under the interpretive framework of the Sethian system. Close examination of the Hypostasis of the Archons and the texts of the "Sethian" corpus suggests instead that the Hypostasis of the Archons turns away from the "Sethian" pattern of mythmaking and recharges the mythic drama with a new and different kind of tension: the tension of androgynous sexuality vs. virginity and of the power of dominance vs. the power of its subversion.
be grasped as if she were a "counterpart" or subordinate to the Rulers, or even to her brother Seth. She stands apart, rather, as a figure who subverts such schemes of dominance and displaces the Rulers, Seth, and perhaps even our own readings from their positions of dominance in the world of the text and the world of scholarship.

In her first appearance in the text, Norea receives two epithets, from her mother and the narrator respectively, that immediately focus the reader's attention on her spiritual identity. Both recall the language of earlier scenes in the narrative, but more important, they point forward to Norea's manifestations of spiritual power in the struggle with the Rulers and in the eschatological promise to her children.

In the words of her mother Eve, Norea is "[a] virgin (parthenos) begotten as an assistance for many generations of humanity." In the words of the narrator, "She is the virgin (parthenos) whom the Forces did not defile." In identifying Norea as parthenos, both epithets point to her gender (fem.), her sexual purity, and her spiritual identity. Both point to her relation to divine power as they anticipate the identification of the Spirit itself as virginal in Eleleth's assurance to Norea: "Your (pl.) abode is in Incorruptibility, where the Virginal Spirit (πάρθενος) dwells."39

As both epithets name Norea parthenos, each of them refers to a specific aspect of Norea's virginal identity. The first epithet identifies the nature of Norea's spiritual identity as Assistance. Eve announces at her daughter's birth that 'He (the Father of the Entirety)'39 has begotten on me a virgin as an 'assistance' (botheia) for generations of mankind." The use of the term botheia recalls the "voice which came forth from Incorruptibility for the assistance (botheia) of Adam."40 It is this voice which empowers Adam to name the birds and beasts gathered by the Rulers "to see what he would call them."41 The first epithet thus suggests that the spiritual identity of Norea is connected to the spiritual power of speech and naming.

Like the voice from Incorruptibility that assists Adam, Norea's assist-

42. Layton, "Hypostasis of the Archons," pt. 2, n. 96, 62: "The word botheia, which here refers to Norea, calls to mind the heavenly faculty of speech implanted in Adam 'for his botheia' (cf. n. 48). Norea will be the voice of the Divine addressed to future generations. . . . Likewise just as the 'voice' of Adam came from above, from the 'Virgin' Spirit, so Norea is a parthenos and thus a human replica and reminder of the Spirit above."

43. Hyp. Arch. 88,17-24: "A voice came forth from Incorruptibility for the assistance of Adam; and the Rulers gathered together all the animals of the earth and all the birds of heaven and brought them in to Adam to see what Adam would call them, that he might give a name to each of the birds and all the beasts." As Layton points out ("Hypostasis of the Archons," pt. 2, n. 49-53), Adam imitates the Spirit which has just named him.

44. Hyp. Arch. 88,27-28: "And they defiled [it] (Eve's shadowy reflection) foully. And they defiled the form that she had stamped in her likeness."

45. Hyp. Arch. 93,27-32, Eleleth assures Norea: "These Authorities cannot defile you and that generation; for your (pl.) abode is in Incorruptibility, where the Virgin Spirit
the Rulers who attempt to rape her and subordinate her to their false powers.

3. NOREA'S STRUGGLE AGAINST THE RULERS

The prelude to Norea's central confrontation with the Rulers takes place at the ark. Immediately after the announcement, "Then mankind began to multiply and improve," after the birth of Seth and Norea, the narrative focuses on the Rulers' plan to "cause a deluge without hands and obliterate all flesh (sarr) from human to beast." The Ruler of the Forces subverts this plan by instructing Noah to build an ark "and hide in it—you and your children (nekropho) and the beasts and the birds of heaven from small to large, and set it on Mount Sir." When Norea comes to him (acei o de kai rirroum), wanting (ekeiayou) to board the ark, Noah resists her advances. Norea responds with a demonstration of her power: "And when he would not let her, she blew upon the ark and caused it to be consumed by fire." Although this episode does not narrate a direct confrontation between Norea and the Forces, it points to three crucial oppositions: (1) between the Rulers and "all flesh"; (2) between the Rulers and the Ruler of the Forces (probably to be identified not with Ialdabaath but Sabaoth), who saves Noah and his children from obliteration; and (3) between Noah, the faithful servant of the Ruler of the Forces, and Norea. This sets Norea in a context of opposition on three fronts: against the Rulers who want to obliterate all flesh; against the Ruler of the Forces, who wants to protect Noah and his children but not her; and against Noah, who wants to preserve his special status and prevent Norea from entering the ark. Against Noah, Norea shows the superiority of her spiritual power when she consumes Noah's vessel of archontic service with her fiery breath. Immediately after this demonstration of power Norea encounters more formidable foes: the Forces who would defile her. Her response to them reveals both the source and the consequences of the

dwells, who is superior to the Authorities of Chaos and to their universe." In a note to this passage, Layon ("Hypostasis of the Archons," pt. 2, n. 135, 68) points out that the Coptic verb xaiâes ("defile") has previously appeared in Hyp. Arch. 89,27-28, but fails to mention its two important connections with the Norea epithet: the adjective pankekthos, here applied to the Spirit, and the use of the verb "to defile."

46. Hyp. Arch. 92,4-8.
47. Hyp. Arch. 92,8-14.

virginal power by which she will function as an assistance for many generations of humanity.

The Rulers went to meet her, wishing (ekeiayou) to lead her astray (Parara). Their Great One (supreme chief) said to her, "Your mother Eve came to us (acei rirroum)." The words of the Rulers attempt to lure Norea, but their formulation reminds the reader of their misguided attempt to "sow their seed" in Norea's mother, the spiritual woman Eve. This points to a similarity between the episodes; but the language of this episode also reminds the reader of the immediately preceding encounter of Norea with Noah at the ark, where "Norea came to him, wishing to board the ark," as they "went, wishing to lead her astray... and claimed... "She came to us."

Together, these connections lead the reader to see that the application of the same verb to Norea and the Rulers points to the different objects of their wishing, even as the narrative shows that opposition prevents the fulfillment of their wishes. The words of the Rulers also expose the Rulers' ignorance of their own failure to deflate the spiritual woman Eve and even to recognize the difference between the spiritual Eve and the carnal woman in whom they sowed their seed.

The connections also point to the similarity and the difference of Norea and her mother. Both are said to come to a male figure, but the reader knows that the words of the Rulers ("Your mother Eve came to us") are false: the true mother of Norea did not in fact come to them; but Norea did come to Noah. Finally, the connections expose the inability of the Rulers to perceive the difference between the carnal and the spiritual Eve or between the carnal woman and Norea. It also shows them unable to perceive the relation between the spiritual woman Eve and Norea, or to see the nature and power of Norea, displayed so recently in the destruction of the ark.

Against their efforts to convince her, "Your mother Eve came to us," Norea confronts them in a bold confrontation and displays her power with even greater force as a power of speech.

But Norea turned to them and said to them, "It is you who are the Rulers of Darkness; you are accursed. And you did not know my mother; instead it was your female counterpart (teirpeine) that you knew. For I am not your descendant; rather it is from the World Above that I am come." The arrogant Rule turned with all his power... and his countenance became

like . . . He became presumptuous and said to her, 'You must render service to us, [as did] your mother Eve, for . . .' 51

This exchange represents the turning point of the mythic narrative. The words of Norea represent the first human expression of the Voice from above against the Rulers of this world. With this bold rebuke, Norea inverts previous patterns of signification in the narrative. She names the Rulers as "Rulers of Darkness" and curses those who previously cursed Adam and Eve. 52 She corrects the Rulers' foolish claim to have known her mother and renames the woman they knew as their 'female counterpart.' This distinguishes her true mother, the Spiritual Woman, from the carnal woman they knew, but more important, it links that failure to grasp the Spiritual Woman to their previous failure to grasp the female image that appeared in the waters by modeling a "male counterpart" for it.

In this third effort to grasp a spiritual woman, the Rulers once again fail to discern properly the spiritual woman they desire, as they mistakenly identify Norea as the daughter of "their female counterpart," the carnal woman. Against their false claims, Norea asserts her spiritual origin and demonstrates her spiritual power. Against their claims to possess her and rule her, Norea claims divine parentage for herself. They are the Rulers of Darkness; she is from the world above. Norea thus escapes the clutches of their acquisitive and domineering power by renaming them ("Rulers of Darkness") and renaming herself as one who is "from the World Above."

The Rulers would claim to have power over Norea and to make her subordinate, to have her 'render service' to them. But even before the divine revelation of the Illuminator Eleleth, 53 Norea exhibits in her speech the Gnosis and power of the divine voice against the Rulers. Norea exercises her spiritual power of naming by exposing the Rulers' identity and revealing her own. In this way, the narrative discloses how she will be an "assistance" for many generations of humanity.

From the perspective of gender analysis, the Rulers' demand that Norea render them service can be read as an attempt to submit the female spiritual power to the Rulers whose nature (hypostasis) is manifested overtly in their presumptuous claims to sexual dominance. Their encounter exposes their authoritarian 'power' as illegitimate and ultimately powerless tyranny. At the same time, it reveals Norea's power as virginal and superior. Norea's response to the Rulers might thus be read as a rejection of false claims to dominate and subordinate the spiritual powers from above.

In the primordial world of the Hypostasis of the Archons, spiritual power is depicted almost exclusively as 'female' 54 and archontic power almost exclusively as "androgy nous" and/or 'male.' This should not be taken to mean that in the world depicted in this text, or in the world of the reader, spiritual power is manifest only in females and archontic power only in males. It does suggest, however, that the pattern of gender representation in the text, especially archontic efforts to dominate female spiritual characters, may correspond symbolically to a pattern of relations which the narrative seeks to expose and displace.

Norea's speech provides a model for subverting the claims of illegitimate power through the power of the Spirit. In renaming those powers who would dominate her, Norea frees herself from their clutches, declares her independence, and asserts her superiority to the Rulers: 'I know who you are. You are the Rulers of Darkness.' This strips them of their false claims to power and frees Norea to cry out in a loud voice to the God of the Entirety:

The arrogant Ruler turned with all his power (ζήλοσαν) . . . . He became presumptuous and said to her, "You must render service to us, [as did] your mother Eve, for . . ." But Norea turned, with the power (ζηλοσαν) of [ . . . ] and in a loud voice [she] cried out [up to] the Holy One, the God of the Entirety. 'Rescue me (ευ ανοιγε) from the Rulers of Unrighteousness and save me from their clutches—forthwith!' 55

This summons for divine assistance (hōtēia) brings a response from Eleleth, or "Understanding," who stands in the presence of the Great Invisible Spirit. 56 The revelation of Eleleth begins the third part of the Norea narrative and brings the third moment of disclosure: the promise to Norea and her children and the transfer of Norea's virginal power to her children, including the reader of the text.

52. Layton ("Hypostasis of the Archons," pt. 2, n. 107.63) notes: "The Rulers' curse upon Adam and Eve (91.6) is now turned against them."
53. Pearson ("Revisiting Norea") appears to overlook the extent to which Norea has already demonstrated power before Eleleth appears.
54. Exceptions to the female manifestation of Spirit are the Father of the Entirety, the True Human Being who is promised, and Eleleth, who reveals the promise to Norea.
56. Hyp. Arch. 93.18-22 presents these predications as self-disclosures of Eleleth.
4. THE PROMISE TO NOREA AND HER CHILDREN

In his revelation, Eleleth asks Norea a question that appears rhetorical but is crucial to the disclosure of Norea's identity and to the meaning of the text.

Do you think these Rulers have any power (δύναμις) over you (σας)? None of them can prevail against the Root of Truth; for on its account he appeared in the final ages (εἰκόνα) and these Authorities will be restrained. And these Authorities cannot define (ἀποκάλυψις) you and that generation; for your (πληθυνία) abode is in Incorruptibility, where the Virgin Spirit (αὐτοκεφαλὴς πάρκον naanah) dwells, who is superior to the Authorities of Chaos and to their cosmos. (93.18–32)

This revelation discloses to Norea the source of the power she has already demonstrated in her confrontation of the Rulers. It is the Root of Truth that preserves Norea and her children against the Authorities. Their abode is in Incorruptibility where the Virgin Spirit dwells, and none of the Rulers can prevail against the Root of Truth, because it is superior to the Authorities of Chaos and their cosmos.

Norea then asks Eleleth to teach her about the Authorities and their cosmos: "How they came into being, and by what kind of hypostasis, and of what material, and who created them and their force?" Eleleth then reveals the origin and pattern of the Rulers and their cosmos. To explain the nature (hypostasis) of the Rulers, Eleleth narrates events that preceded those narrated at the beginning of the text. Eleleth begins with Sophia's attempt to create something alone without her consort and continues with the shaping of this product in matter. He then returns to the vain claim of the chief Archon and moves on to the repentance of Sabaoth and the completion of the entire sum of Chaos. 58

This placement of a narrative (the revelation of Eleleth) within the larger narrative (Hyp. Arch) works as a literary device to allow Norea, and the attentive reader as well, to see more clearly the larger pattern in which Norea's struggle with the Rulers fits. The revelation places Norea's struggle with the Rulers in the larger context of the origin and genesis of the Rulers and so allows her (and the reader) to see more clearly the relation between the presumptuous claims of the Authorities against her and the manifestation of divine power against the Rulers.

The power of Norea's words is thus seen to be one manifestation of a pattern manifest already in the activity of Sophia, Zoe, and her mother Eve.

At the conclusion of his revelation, 59 Eleleth places these events in the larger context of the eschatological promise to Norea and her children. After three generations, he tells Norea, the spiritual seed sown in her and her offspring will become known:

You, together with your children (οἱ γυναικεῖοι) are from the Primeval Father, from Above, out of the imperishable Light, their souls are come. Thus the Authorities cannot approach them because of the Spirit of Truth present within them; and all who have become acquainted with this Way exist deathless in the midst of dying Mankind. Still that Sown Element (ἀναβάσεως) will not become known now. Instead after three generations it will come to be known, and free them from the bondage of the Authorities' error (τιμάμαν). 60

In response to her question: "How much longer?" Norea receives the promise that "when the True Human Being (τριγύρος οὐρανοῦ), within a modeled form (πραγμάτευμα), reveals the existence of the Spirit of Truth, which the Father has sent," 61 then the previously hidden sown spiritual element will become known and the tyranny of the Authorities will be overturned.

The revelation of Eleleth concludes with a full account of what will happen when the True Human Being comes:
1. He will teach them about everything;
2. He will anoint them with the unction of Life eternal, given him from the undominated generation.
3. They will be freed of blind thought;
4. They will trample death, which is of the Authorities, underfoot;
5. They will ascend into limitless light, where this sown element belongs.
6. Then the Authorities will relinquish their ages;
7. Their angels will weep over their destruction;
8. Their demons will lament their death.
9. Then all the Children of the Light will have Gnosis of the Truth and their Root and the Father of the Entirety and the Holy Spirit.

57. Hyp. Arch. 93.32—94.2.
58. Hyp. Arch. 94.4—96.15.
59. Hyp. Arch. 94.2—96.17.
10. They will all say with a single voice: The Father’s truth is just, and the Son presides over the Entirety. And from everyone unto the ages of ages, Holy Holy Holy! Amen

With this conclusion, the revelation of Eleleth and the mythic narrative as a whole, places the reader in the last days, as it relates the primordial Norea to the eschatological True Anthropos, showing that her action anticipates the work of the last days and establishes its recipients. The reader has thus come to know the primordial Norea as the virgin whom the Forces did not defile because she has the divine faculty of speech, the voice which has the power to rename and resist the Rulers themselves. She will pass on that power to her children, Eleleth assures her and the reader. Norea’s children, the eschatological revelation of Eleleth promises, will receive the revelation and anointing of the True Anthropos, and thus will inherit the promise to Norea and her virgin physical power.

In depicting this mythic drama, the Hypostasis of the Archons thus invites the reader to identify himself or herself with the children of Norea. The telling of the narrative allows the reader to perceive the reality of the Rulers and of the Root of Truth; it thus allows the ‘children of Norea’ to see their place in a pattern that begins in primordial times and extends to the eschatological subversion of the Rulers.

The telling of the narrative also invites the readers to perceive the patterns of the narrative and to connect them with their own lives. Against the distorted and oppressive androgynous power of the Rulers, Norea’s virginity preserves the purity and power of divine androgyny, but, more particularly, of her divine and human mothers, the Virginal Female Spirit, Sophia, Zoe, and Eve. This power is transmitted to the children of Norea, which makes them heirs of the promise of Eleleth and participants in the virginal power of their mother Norea and her mothers, the spiritual Eve, Zoe, Sophia, and the Female Virginal Spirit from above.

By this reading, the Hypostasis of the Archons not only depicts but actualizes the female subversion of false archontic claims to dominance. By tapping the divine power above and within her, Norea is able to rename the ‘Powers’ and strip them of their power. The account of Norea’s struggle against the Rulers thus extends the subversive power of Norea’s speech as it specifies the character of her “assistance” to generations of humankind. Her children are those who have been anointed by the True Human Being, who are called now to understand themselves as inheriting the promise to Norea and her children. This means also that they inherit the faculty of divine speech from her and from the manifestation of the True Human Being.

By identifying with the children of Norea, the reader—male or female—who has witnessed the depiction of power in the text, is invited, or empowered, to take on the virginal power of Norea and exercise it in the same way.

In conclusion, I want to suggest that the meaning and power of gender imagery in the Hypostasis of the Archons resides in its projection of an image of subversion: Norea stands as a model of spiritual subversion of the oppressive powers that illegitimately claim to rule the cosmos, the social order, the psyche, and the body. That she is female and they are androgynous or male in representation has symbolic significance. This does not mean that spiritual power is almost exclusively female in manifestation or that archontic power is almost exclusively male in manifestation. It suggests instead that the unmasking of illegitimate male domination by female figures of spiritual power proved to be a powerful vehicle for the expression of the gnostic revolt against the powers. As mythic symbol, the gendered representation of Norea and the Rulers does not point to a historical world behind the text in which women, like Norea, revolted against the oppressive rule of men. Rather, the mythic symbols of Norea and the Rulers may gain their representational power from a correspondence to the social world of the original audience or the contemporary reader, but their symbolic significance remains open-ended. In one sense, their symbolic power resides in their ability to use that correspondence to depict and subvert the reality (hypostasis) of false powers—male, female, androgynous, neuter—but in another, the symbolic power of Norea’s struggle against the Rulers stands against efforts to delimit the meaning and power of the narrative by identifying, or naming, the powers in the reader’s world that correspond to the spiritual and archontic powers in the world of the text.

The mythic narrative of the Hypostasis of the Archons invites the reader to dwell in the imaginative world depicted in the text, to see things as the revelation of Eleleth and Norea’s confrontation with the powers reveal them, and to discern their respective modes of exercising power. Under this reading, the Hypostasis of the Archons invites its
readers to dwell in a world marked by struggle between spiritual and archontic powers, but it also empowers its readers to recognize the powers at work in their world, and to participate in the exercise of Norea’s virginal power against the powers of the Rulers. In this way, the *Hypostasis of the Archons* challenges its readers to identify with the “children of Norea,” to inherit the promise, and to resist and rename those powers that would claim falsely to rule in their world, as Norea renames and subverts the false powers of her world.

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**Response to “Virginity and Subversion: Norea Against the Powers in the Hypostasis of the Archons” by Anne McGuire**

First, I would like to thank Anne McGuire for a stimulating, productive essay that presents a constructive counterpoint to previous discussions of the character of Norea in the *Hypostasis of the Archons*. That McGuire’s analysis is so different from that of previous scholars reminds us that texts such as the *Hypostasis of the Archons* are richly multivalent, lending themselves easily to different readings. If these texts can generate so many and such different interpretations on the part of trained scholars, this only underscores the importance of the audience/auditor and the fact that our different interpretations must be understood, at least in part, by the differing perspectives and agendas that we, as scholars, bring to these texts.

What I particularly admire about McGuire’s essay is that it moves beyond discussion of the history of the traditions about Norea to questions about the functions of the text and how the ancient reader might not only interpret the text but act on it. McGuire allows us to consider not only how gnostic readers of the *Hypostasis of the Archons* might have exegeted the text but how they might have understood the implications of the text for their own lives.

McGuire raises two sets of questions for me. The first concerns the relationship between texts and social reality; the second, the implications of the text, and others like it, for our understanding of Judaism in antiquity.