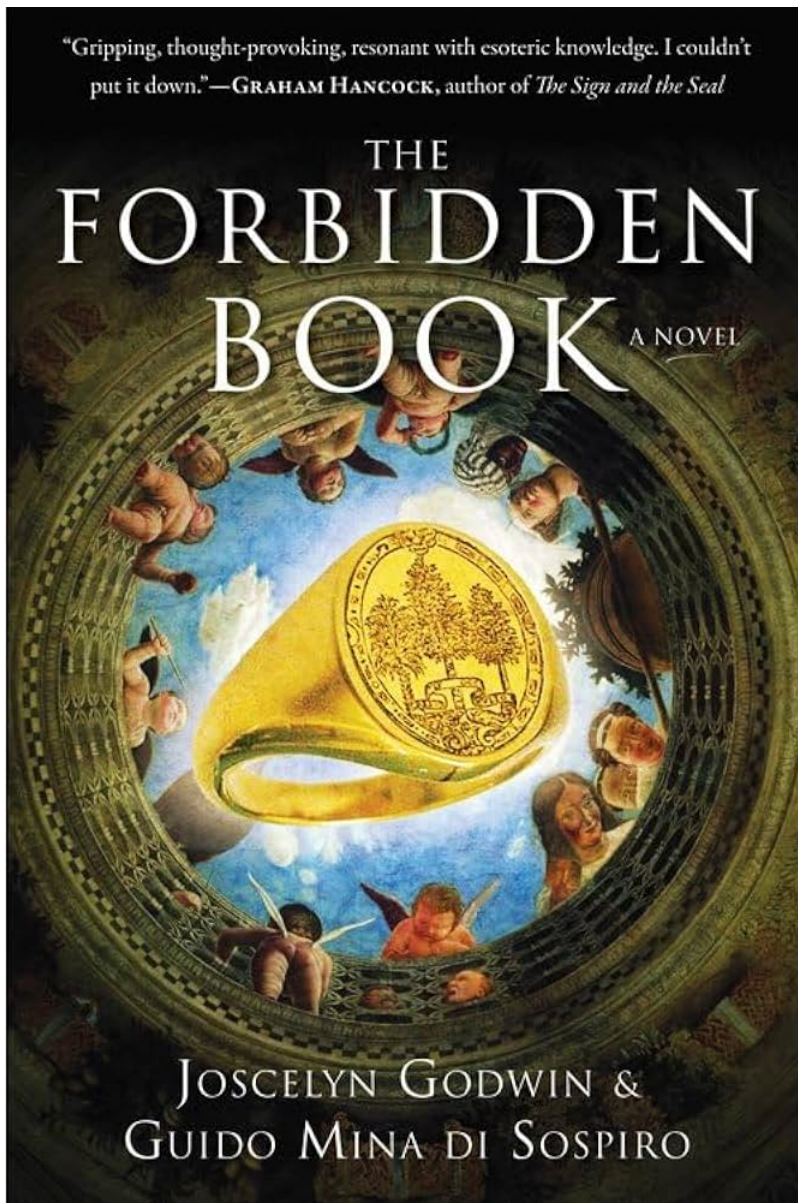


The Forbidden Book: Dialogue with Joscelyn Godwin and Guido Mina di Sospiro



Guido Mina di Sospiro's book (cowritten with Joscelyn Godwin), *The Forbidden Book*, was recently translated into Italian. The Italian blog, [Il Giornale](#), did a short interview with both of them. It's in Italian, but the translation (thanks to Google!) is below:

Politics and magic, international intrigues, secret services and enigmas are the ingredients of ***The Forbidden Book***, occult thriller set between Italy and America, which to a precise knowledge of the esoteric and hermetic sources – something very rare, in this kind of literature – combines a narrative mordant that has made it a literary case in several countries. It is signed by **Joscelyn Godwin**, one of the greatest scholars of esotericism in the world, with various publications also in Italy, for the types of Settimo Sigillo and Mediterranee, and **Guido Mina di Sospiro**, essayist and author for Rizzoli, Ponte alle Grazie and – soon – Lindau. The plot of the *Forbidden Book* is hermetic and fascinating. Around a *pseudobibulum* of the sixteenth century, the unknown version of ***The Magic World of the Heroi*** of Caesar of the Riviera, unraveling murders and investigations of police, interrogations and plantings. While the protagonist engages in the decipherment of **ancient alchemical codes**, traveling in parallel dimensions and hallucinatory scenarios, Europe is cried out by an impressive **clash of civilizations** between Christianity and Islam. A fascinating labyrinth of past and present, physical and metaphysical, containing arcana that it would be better not to reveal ... Having already reported the volume on this blog when the Italian translation was still *in mind of the gods*, we took advantage of its recent publication in the **Bietti** catalog to ask some questions to the two authors.

The Forbidden Book was finally published in Italian. How many years have passed since its writing in English? I know that in the meantime it has been translated into many other languages...

GMdS: It must go back to the distant 2004-'05, then about twenty years ago. Yes, the novel has been translated into nine languages, including the Thai; who knows what effect it must do in Thailand to read a book so deeply rooted in **Western esotericism...**

The whole plot revolves around a pseudobibulum. Who did the idea come to draw from Cesare Della Riviera's alchemical masterpiece?

JG: I bought the book at **the Bookshop Europe, a treasure of subversive wisdom within the walls of the Vatican**, while I was in Rome for the conference of the centenary of **Julius Evola**, in 1998. Our *modus operandi* has two aspects. One, semi-humoristic, is to invent a private edition with further "cabalistic" clues, while the other is a serious attempt to imagine what metaphysical practices the author could have in mind.

GMdS: I, coincidentally, also bought the book at the Europa Bookstore; I don't remember exactly when, but more or less in the late nineties.

A question from Joscelyn Godwin. You are known primarily as a scholar of esotericism. Many historians of religions (I think, for example, of Mircea Eliade and Ioan Petru Culianu), alongside academic non-fiction, have ventured into fantastic literature, where they were able to express their ideas with greater freedom. Is that your case? How does the "Godwin essayist" relate to the "Godwin narrator"?

JG: I had never written fiction, nor do I read much of it. Guido, on the other hand, had seven novels and a deep knowledge of world literature behind him; therefore, he was able to provide the adequate imaginative and creative structure. Perhaps because of my **youthful experiences as a composer**, it was easier than expected to invent scenes and dialogues, integrating them with those of Guido. In general, I consider all my work, however learned, as a form of play, because in English the musicians "play" *play* and a comedy is a *play*].

Your novel has a number of readings. The esoteric, the political one... Then there is the plan of the characters, and another, related to police investigations. How do they

intersect? What do they compose, together?

JG: To take what was said earlier, I think of the **Renaissance alchemist Michael Maier** and his books *Lusus Serius* and *Jocus Severus*. Even ours is a “serious game”, with private jokes that only a few readers will understand. At the same time, it is a moral tale with a good and a bad one. But it poses ethical questions that are not the simple contrast between good and evil. The **Baron Della Riviera** has a much higher level of culture, taste and education than the American professor. The two represent, *inter alia*, the encounter between the Old and the New World. By mixing the levels, we wanted the reader to be amused, comforted, educated and even troubled.

GMdS: We have explored various literary *tòpoi*, even *whodunit*, of course, but by giving them the Joscelyn/Guido treatment, namely, in its own way, playful. Without revealing the plot, we say that the inspector, despite his good will and a great desire to unravel the skein, is not really a top. An American reviewer took it, accusing us of putting an honored *th?pos* of the police genre in the saloon: the investigator with an infallible nose like Holmes, Poirot and many others. The shocking reality is that many murders remain unsolved, and often the investigator must surrender. Another reality belongs to the **so-called “esoteric” novel**: often the mystery is, so to speak, “magical”, but it is solved by conventional, that is, rational, because the authors do not really know esotericism. Instead, we have set ourselves to **solve the mystery** through how much contained in *The Magical World of the Heroes* – both the public and the private edition – that is, **thanks to magic**.

Writing a book with four hands is a less simple feat than you might think. How did you proceed materially to its drafting? One of you did a first version and the other corrected it? Reading it, one has an extraordinary impression of organicity, as if the author were one...

JG: In writing this novel and ***Forbidden Fruits***, we had a basic

idea of the characters and what could happen to them. If I remember correctly, everyone wrote a scene, not necessarily connected, and emailed it to the other, which improved it at will. I don't think we ever had a fight. Guido has a perfect command of English, but I am a native speaker and much of the surface diction is mine. I had no experience in fiction writing or dialogue and needed advice about the good and bad ideas that came to mind – so, the form of the work is mostly Guido's work. He has a knowledge from within the Italian **aristocratic world**, while I know how guys behave like Nigel, the English husband of the co-star. I had recently spent five months in Venice with university students; so, I made most of the Venetian scenes, including the invention of **Palazzo Riviera on the Grand Canal**. Guido had just published a splendid biography of a tree, and therefore the arboreal theme was perfect for him.

GMdS: I remember with great pleasure when I got a "piece" written by Joscelyn, a *bit*, as he called it. We worked a lot by e-mail, every now and then by phone. I opened the email like a child discards a gift under the Christmas tree. I don't know if it was the same for Joscelyn when I was the one to send him a "piece", but I know that neither of us ever wanted to touch the other because we always liked them. It goes without saying that we didn't write the novel sequentially, an amateur approach. We've created a large number of "pieces," skits and scenes, without worrying about their location. After creating a puzzle, we set out to combine the many pieces. If something was missing between pieces and another, it was added *ad hoc*. It sounds like a great complication, but in reality it was **the most fun and exciting artistic experience of my life**. I also studied as a musician and an instrumentalist, and I also found writing it together like playing the piano four-handed: a duo of artists who complement each other. Moreover, as much as Joscelyn had never written fiction, he has a natural instinct for well-thought-out plots and twists. In reality he is first and foremost an artist, and then also an

erudite, in various fields. I know from experience that scholars without artistic proclivities are, to be kind, tedious; Joscelyn, on the other hand, has **an imagination equal to that of Cesare Della Riviera himself.**

One last question, to conclude. You have written another novel together, which Joscelyn mentioned earlier, namely Forbidden Fruits, whose title is assonante to the one published by Bietti... Is it a sequel?

GMdS: In a way, yes. The male protagonist of *Forbidden Fruits* already appears in *The Forbidden Book* ...

JG: I add that the idea of writing another one could be tempting, especially to unite some of the characters in the two novels. One thing is to be said: **what is “forbidden” today?**