



# Understanding C.G Jung's Red Book

## Part One

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*As Roger Woolger observes below, the appearance of Jung's Red Book is not only a landmark in the history of psychology, but also in Western Culture. The book is exquisitely produced in a large format and contains beautiful calligraphy and symbolic paintings by Jung himself, the fruit of countless hours of painstaking labour. Anyone seriously interested in Jung needs to have a copy of this book. This is the first half of a comprehensive review, and a more extensive version with full references is available on the website.*



The hell fire of life consumes only the best of men;  
the rest stand by, warming their hands  
*Friedrich Hebbel*

With the publication of the Red Book all our views of Jung are in need of re-assessment. The simplistic 'history of psychoanalysis' view of Jung as the successor who broke from Freud with a broadened view of the unconscious mind and who eschewed the infantile sexuality focus for a religious view of the psyche's healing already had to be abandoned when *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (hereinafter referred to as *Memories*) burst on the world in 1961. This provocative glimpse half a century ago into so many aspects of Jung's inner life had already raised questions about the closet mystic, the secret Gnostic, the painter who had renounced his vocation, the reluctant prophet, the question of his past lives and more. His personality had already begun to seem more complex, even multiple given the personas of doctor, scientist, philosopher, sage, preacher, visionary, painter, and often shaman that he presented to the world in varying degrees.

When, after his great 'encounter with the unconscious' – for which we could equally read 'encounter with the gods' – Jung came into his own, he no longer belonged to psychology, psychiatry or medicine; but from this time on to paraphrase Ben Jonson on Shakespeare: 'he wrote not for an age-or a discipline – but for all time.' Now that we have the Red Book, this far more complete account of his inner

journey than the tantalising hints and fragments first made public in *Memories* (which in some editions also included his elusive piece of pseudo-Gnosticism called the 'Seven Sermons of the Dead'), we can begin to appreciate the enormity of his ambition as well as his achievement.

Sonu Shamdasani follows the reputable scholarly tradition established by Henry Ellenberger in his encyclopedic work *The Discovery of the Unconscious* (1970). Nevertheless, valuable as this hermeneutic undoubtedly is, I feel strongly that Shamdasani is missing the bigger picture. The Red Book is far more than a very important, hitherto buried milestone in western psychology; it must also rank as one of the most outstanding landmarks in the spiritual history of modern times.

Shamdasani is noticeably uncomfortable with Jung's mediumistic practices and frequent interactions with 'the spirit world,' calling them dryly 'parapsychological events' that surrounded Jung as he grew up. He notes that these events were also prominent in his encounters with Freud – poltergeists, cracking tables, shattering knives etc. but does not really explore the deeper question of this manifest ability of Jung's to constellate powerful spirit phenomena, obvious psychic talents he was born with – talents that any anthropologist would see as marks of a shaman.

### **Jung's Family: Ministers and Spiritualists**

What of the actual religious milieu out of which Jung's visionary response to a moribund Christian civilisation arose? It is well known that his father was a minister of the Zwinglian Swiss Reformed church, descended from a long line of churchmen, and that Jung grew up in a country parsonage. What is less well known is that on his mother's side he came from another family of ministers, but who were also spiritualists. Several of his cousins and aunts were sensitive to spirits and aware of their secondary or 'Number 2' personalities, popularly known in those days as 'spirit guides' or 'controls'. Grandfather Samuel Preiswerk was

known to set a place at the dinner table for the spirit of his deceased first wife. As a girl, Jung's mother, Emilia Preiswerk had to stand behind father Samuel's chair as he composed his Sunday sermons so that she could ward off nosy spirits who would distract him from his good Christian thoughts. And it was Jung's mother, herself mediumistic, who encouraged the adolescent student Jung to conduct séances with Jung's much younger cousin Helly, recognised from an early age as the most talented medium in the family of that generation.

Jung too had striking psychic experiences when he was quite young. As he recounts famously in the early chapters of his *Memories*, when he was still a child he had a number of very strange visions. Most remarkable was that of an awe-inspiring giant enthroned phallus. Another, a few years later was to him truly blasphemous: he envisioned the Almighty God defecating on Basel cathedral (!) Naturally he could hardly talk of such things to his conservative and spiritually depressed father and he was for a long time fearful of his mother's psychic double personality. It was only as a curious but hyper-intellectual adolescent studying masses of books on psychical research that he could start to look at such phenomena – but initially strictly as a 'scientific' observer. This is when he began the early experimental summer séances set up by his mother with cousin Helly and his other psychically gifted cousins. These communications with the spirit world are largely glossed over in Shamdasani's Introduction as if they were a kind of embarrassment, or as if 'parapsychology' has long ago explained away all these strange phenomena. It still hasn't. In fact parapsychology, long banished by the American Psychological Association, has barely existed as an academic discipline for the last 50 years. (The Rhine Institute long ceased to be part of the University of North Carolina, for example)

Jung's himself was ambivalent about spirit phenomena. This is mirrored by a curious omission, rarely remarked upon, that occurs in the chapter called 'The Tower' in *Memories*. This chapter, entirely devoted to a discussion of his ancestors and one which I have always found indispensable for understanding of Jung's relationship to the spirits of the dead, *only mentions his ancestors on his father's side*. His mother's side, the Preiswerk family, who as we have seen, were all spiritualists of one kind or another, is completely ignored in this crucial discussion! (It is however possible this omission was a cut made at the behest of the Jung family estate; I have no way of knowing)

Jung eventually let through his own mediumistic side in the personal experiments he made leading up to the writing of the Red Book and when he did so it was close to overwhelming. Previously Jung's psychic gifts had terrified Freud. When Freud's scorn for what he called 'the black tide of mud of occultism' got to Jung he manifested a poltergeist. He felt his belly get red-hot and a detonation occurred in a bookcase in the room; realising he could somehow control it, Jung made it happen a second time. These are signs of the power of a nascent shaman.

When Jung finally went on his initiatory 'vision quest,' to use shamanic language, his second sight expanded into a prodigious talent as a seer and visionary. Like Swedenborg, not only could he see the spirits of the dead, but like Blake he also found himself talking to Old Testament prophets; Elijah is the first to appear, accompanied by the mysteriously blind figure of Salomé, daughter of Herod. Not long after that comes the Devil. Finally at a momentous climactic point he envisions himself physically crucified and is encircled and squeezed by a giant serpent till his blood runs. Then Salomé

reveals to him that he is Christ. A while later, crossing a desert, he meets an old anchorite, but then he must also visit an insane asylum where he is pronounced mad, only to find his fellow inmate is Friedrich Nietzsche.

Jung's visionary encounters are by no means confined to Biblical Judeo-Christian spiritual figures. He also meets the gigantic figure of Izdubel (aka Gilgamesh) and later a scattering of Nordic heroes, serpents of various ilk, and divinities and demonic forces from sundry pagan cultures. A powerful source of inspiration and guidance comes from the Vedic cults of India which he quotes and these are interspersed with images and voices from Egypt, the Hellenic Mystery schools and Alexandrian Gnosticism. The latter current of influences culminates in the figure of Philemon, who becomes his chief authority or guide as the narrative proceeds. Towards the end of the Red Book we find the *Seven Sermons of the Dead* which in *Memories* had at first been attributed to the Gnostic persona of Basilides but here are clearly the teachings of Philemon.

At the core of the Red Book are Jung's rapturous hymns to the spiritual figure of Phanes. They are comparable to the lyrical mysticism of the Song of Songs or the ecstatic Sufi poetry of Rumi. His incantations for the healing of Izdubel recall the Psalms of David and the chants of the Rig Veda. Certainly Jung knew and absorbed all these styles from his vast reading, but what came out of him – or through him – are no clever literary pastiches or scholarly imitations. They clearly issue from a direct and passionate spiritual encounter with that 'wholly Other' that Rudolph Otto called the numinous to characterise the presence of the Divine – 'in the presence of whom all Nature quaketh and all clerkes be fools' (*The Cloud of Unknowing*). I think we can no longer equivocate about Jung's theurgic powers when we read these invocations and when we contemplate his richly and lovingly wrought manuscripts and paintings.

### Was Jung a Mystic?

By and large, the terms *mystic*, *visionary*, *prophet*, *gnostic* or *shaman* are used very sparingly by Shamdasani in his Introduction and his other writings. Nevertheless, some recent writers are more prepared to fully embrace terms like *mystic* etc. We have Lance Owen's very perceptive review of the Red Book from an avowedly gnostic perspective, which considers 'the Hermeneutics of Vision,' as well as Gary Lachman's recent book *Jung the Mystic*, and a very sympathetic blog from American dream psychologist and anthropologist Robert Moss, who looks at Jung as a shaman.<sup>1</sup>

From my own perspective as a student of both religion and the Jungian corpus I find the dazzling visionary world of the Red Book demands this broader view. To be sure, Jung was a supreme psychologist and a radical thinker in psychiatry, but the Red Book also reveals him as a closet mystic and visionary comparable in certain ways to Blake, Swedenborg and Dante. He was scientist *and* mystic; both. This hugely expanded picture that the Red Book gives us of Jung's intense inner life demands that we expand the debate as to who Jung was and where he stands in our religious and spiritual culture as a whole. We can no longer confine him to that ill-defined field called 'psychology.'

Indeed, now that we have the record of his struggles to integrate the polarities of scientist-philosopher versus mystic within his soul we can also see how they urged upon him another mantle that he was very reluctant to wear – because so many have been ridiculed and persecuted for wearing it – that of shaman-prophet. It is surely no coincidence that on the very first page of *Liber Novus*, Jung quotes from Old Testament

prophet Isaiah (53): 'He was despised and rejected of men: a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief ...').

## The Hidden Shaman

The evidence of the Red Book and of those who knew him intimately is that Jung was very much a shaman. But he carefully disguised himself behind the well developed persona of wise old psychiatrist – the 'Herr Doctor Professor' effect as Gary Lachman tellingly calls this persona. Shamanic parallels in Jung's life and especially the Red Book and *Memories* are numerous and striking if we look at Jung's larger role on the cultural stage and reflect on what Marie-Louise von Franz calls 'his myth in our time.' Perhaps Shamdasani shies away from calling Jung a 'shaman' because 'shamanism' is not politically correct in academic or conservative professional circles in Britain.

The fact is that shamans are always outsiders – however much they may try to be insiders, as Jung certainly did. This is precisely because they see beneath the surface of the very 'spirit of the times' to which the established professional class has already largely sold out, as Jung himself did during his years around Freud. The shaman has no choice but to be in touch with those counter-currents that Jung called 'the spirit of the depths' and go against the current of the spirit of the times. This is why Jung was forced to go his own way. For to become who he was born to be – or as he preferred to put it, to individuate – meant not to just reclaim his ancestral mediumistic talents, inherited from his mother's side of the family, strikingly revealed in his childhood visions, or the alchemical wisdom implicit in his father's lineage, but also to accept his shamanic role as a 'wounded healer of the soul' (cf. Claire Dunne's biography of this name.) Part of regaining his lost soul meant reclaiming a painful destiny: it meant accepting the mantle of what Robert Moss, calls 'shaman of the west,' and not shying away from the pervading spiritual sickness that he saw gnawing at the roots of our culture.

Had Jung been born into a tribal society like the Lakota Sioux, to which the famous Black Elk belonged, his childhood visions (the underground phallus, for example) would have been recognised as exceptional by some wise elder or medicine man and he would have been sequestered and trained as a seer by an experienced practitioner. Black Elk's childhood visions became the cornerstone of his tribe's understanding of their coming fate at the hands of the white man and today those visions still stand as sacred utterances for the Lakota people.<sup>2</sup> Some years ago Californian psychologist Julian Silverman wrote an important paper entitled 'Shamanism and Acute Schizophrenia' suggesting that many a 'patient' labeled and heavily medicated as 'schizophrenic' in our secular society might well have been recognised for his or her visions as a potential shaman in other more spiritually attuned societies.

From anthropological studies of shamanism far too numerous to list,<sup>3</sup> I would enumerate some of the most prominent characteristics of the shaman as they relate to Jung. (See also von Franz's biography *C. G. Jung: His Myth in Our Time* for further and more detailed comparisons):

- Shamans are often picked out in early childhood because of their strange dreams, psychic sensitivity and communication with spirits. An older shaman in the tribe will take the child who 'sees,' away from the tribe and begin to initiate and train him or her in the healing use of such visions. (e.g. Black Elk, Helly Preiswerk; cf. too Woolger & Woolger: on the Persephone or mediumistic archetype in *The Goddess Within* (1989))
- Shamans of often have lifelong struggles with breakdowns and severe illness, earning them the common tag of 'wounded healer' (Cf. the title of Claire Dunne's biography: *Jung, Wounded Healer of the Soul* (2000)).
- Shamans stand apart from their tribes, often seeming eccentric, living separated from the group, keeping strange hours and having unconventional relationships with the opposite sex (Jung's relationships with women arouse much comment and speculation to this day.)
- Shamans are 'seers,' they know and pick up things others are not aware of (Jung admitted that he 'saw through people')
- Shamans are in touch with the greater currents of the tribe's destiny, often having prophetic 'big dreams' of approaching disaster and collective upheaval. (This was the case with Lakota shaman Black Elk who foresaw the coming destruction of the Native Peoples by the white man)
- Shamans are natural healers; just to be in their charismatic presence can shake up transform a person's psyche, sometimes without verbal exchange (Jung recognised his own charisma. He once said: 'By my very presence I crystallise; I am a ferment.' (Dunne, p.2.) He was enormously attractive to women spiritually as well as erotically).
- Shamans have secrets they cannot tell; they often suffer the burdens of their knowledge and of 'seeing' too much. They 'know' more than ordinary people, hence they are often described (or reviled) as 'gnostics.' Often this is painful and they feel deeply misunderstood (Jung privately complained of this; but he was also deeply committed to secrecy.)
- Shamans are often tricksters, challenging and reversing social conventions in order to loosen rigid behaviours and open the connections between the worlds to bring about a 'healing crisis.' in those they treat. (Anton Mesmer, another shaman in disguise, coined this term).
- Shamans are the preeminent mediators with the ancestors of their community; they regularly communicate with the dead. (This is the stated intent of the Red Book.) And they have the task of keeping the living and dead in balance (Cf. Malidoma Somé's *Of Water and the Spirit* for a compelling account of this.)
- Shamans 'walk between the worlds', which is to say, they are experts in 'journeying' to higher and lower spirit worlds where they converse with the spirits and the gods, they are intermediaries between the seen and the unseen worlds (In Jung's later language: 'the relationship between the conscious and the unconscious')
- Shamans rescue lost souls and often have to placate or bargain with dark or demonic forces. (Even in his early psychiatric writings, Jung often described psychosis as 'soul-loss' and saw psychotic patients as suffering from invasions by 'the unconscious,' a useful neutral term for the 'spirit world,' which science was becoming more and more suspicious of in Jung's time due to all the charlatanism that popular spiritualism frequently degenerated into)
- Shamans know how to work with tutelary and other helping spirits, often animal in form (Jung worked with his 'soul,' with Elijah and later Philemon, among others, not to say the several serpents who followed him around in the Red Book. Serpents are common in the ancient Mystery Schools and of course in the cult of the healing god Asclepius.)

Jung's intimates, Emma, his wife, Toni Wolff (his close friend and early collaborator) and later von Franz and Barbara Hannah, always recognised Jung's unusual shamanic nature and the torments that went with it, and while it was stormy and unpredictable, leading him to transgress many social conventions, they respected and tolerated it, recognising the enormous gifts he was bringing to the larger world.

Doubtless it is Jung's shamanic nature that has contributed to the rumours, that many have felt as distinctly embarrassing, about the 'wild man' side of Jung, reports of which have slowly leaked out over the years. But during his life this 'wild' shamanic side was by tacit agreement long kept secret by his close collaborators and friends, who kept a respectful eye towards protecting Jung's descendants, from all descriptions a fairly conventional Swiss family.

### Revelation or Psychosis?

The first fully public revelations of the visionary-shamanic side of Jung came shortly after his death with the Swiss publication in 1961 of *Träume, Erinnerung, Gedanken*. Its translation was soon to take the English speaking world by storm as *Memories, Dream, Reflections* (1962). The extraordinary chapter 'Confrontation with Unconscious' then revealed to the greater world for the first time glimpses of the visions that were the source and inspiration for all of Jung's subsequent psychological theories and writings. Now, with the publication of the Red Book, we can see that this stunning chapter is only the tip of the iceberg, a tiny part of the greater revelations of Jung's inner journey, what he called his *nekya*, his journey to the land of the Dead.

His break with Freud, about which much has been written, had left him desolate. He writes of his state of mind that 'after the parting of the ways with Freud, a period of inner uncertainty began for me. It would be no exaggeration to call it a state of disorientation. I felt totally suspended in mid-air, for I had not yet found my own footing. It was a period of profound emptiness, a void...' Nothing had energy for him any more.

He decided on an experiment, a method he later called active imagination: 'I said to myself, 'Since I know nothing at all, I shall simply do whatever occurs to me.' Thus I consciously submitted myself to the impulses of the unconscious.' (*Memories*, p.173)

By allowing himself to sit in this emptiness, assisted by playing with childhood building blocks, Jung found images from childhood would emerge spontaneously. Little did he know he had opened the gates of hell. Before long the experiment turns into an uncontrollable nightmare. By October 1913 he was having huge visions of universal devastation, of 'oceans of blood' all over Europe.

I saw a terrible flood that covered all the northern and low-lying lands between the North Sea and the Alps. It reached from England up to Russia, and from the coast of the North Sea right up to the Alps. I saw yellow waves, swimming rubble, and the death of countless thousands. ... I also saw a sea of blood over the northern lands.

These words were actually first written on the very cusp of the 'Great War.' For all that has been written about his break with Freud causing his near mental collapse, the Red Book makes clear that in the years 1913-1916 Jung was not brooding on his lost position of prominence in the world of psychoanalysis, but on the seeming breakdown of western civilisation. Well aware that he had all the clinical symptoms of schizophrenia, he nevertheless persisted, as his own shaman, to seek meaning and method in his own madness. Never certain as to what horrors 'the spirit of the depths'

would next expose him to, it is no wonder that he slept for much of this period with his Swiss army revolver loaded in a drawer next to his bed, in case one more outrageous dream would push him over the edge. Once the Great War broke out he recognised these as psychic premonitions and not signs of his own impending madness. If anyone was going mad, it was the whole of Europe. It was one of the many collective burdens he would have to bear as shaman.

When psychoanalyst D.W. Winnicott reviewed *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, he said memorably that 'Jung was insane and healed himself, while we are still trying to recover from Freud's sanity.' It is a neat clinical trope but sidesteps the deeper issues that Jung and his Red Book raises about sanity, madness the price of being 'civilised.' The Red Book is compelling evidence that in allowing himself to let in this throng of spiritual visitors from the Land of the Dead, that Jung knowingly took upon himself – at great risk to his sanity and with a presumptuousness he clearly recognised as potential spiritual inflation – nothing less than the rejected and repressed pagan and oriental shadows of the whole of western, which is to say, Judeo-Christian civilisation.

Historian Oswald Spengler and notably poets and writers Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot and James Joyce were also doing something similar at this juncture in history – and each would struggle with depression and near-psychosis – but no one seems to have gone so far into the murky depths of the lost soul of our culture than Jung. In this sense he is the Dante of modern times, braving the depths of the inferno of the unconscious mind, going far beyond Freud or practically anyone else. In the Red Book we have the full context of his experiment, which opened him to Europe's 'collective' nightmare and led him to confront the vast forgotten power that stems from the spirit of the depths.

This was and remains a stupendous achievement. For against considerable odds Jung succeeded where many would have caved in to alcohol, depression or turned into some wild-eyed rambling eccentric. Jung's discovery of his own soul, his quasi-Augustinian confessions that come to form part of the magnificent and deeply moving opening of the Red Book and his descent to hell could just as easily ended as a case study of schizophrenia.

### The Night Sea Journey

I will go down to self annihilation and Eternal Death  
Lest the Last Judgment come and find me unannihilate  
And I be seized and delivered into the hands of mine own  
Selfhood.  
William Blake

### How the Liber Novus starts: Jung's 'Answer to Nietzsche'

*The Way of What is to Come* (*Der Weg der Kommende*) is the title that appears on the grand and magnificently crafted first illuminated manuscript page of Jung's great book. The title he engraved is *Liber Novus*, but is commonly it referred to as *The Red Book*. It was manifestly his intention that when we open the first part, the *Liber Primus* of his book – and the stunningly reproduced facsimile of the calligraphic Red Book is similarly impressive – that we are the presence of a mighty work of prophecy and wisdom whose utterances are to be received with reverence and awe. Its bulk and heft make one think of those huge Protestant Bibles that graced so many chapels and homes during the Gutenberg era. Yet as soon as we see Jung's meticulously illuminated



calligraphy we also feel we are at the same time transported to the Middle Ages. The leading voice in the opening page is actually that of the Old Testament prophet Isaiah proclaiming 'the suffering servant,' who was 'despised and rejected of men' (texts familiar to British readers who know Handel's *Messiah*). These proclamations are interwoven with a resonant quote about the birth of Christ as the Logos, taken from Jung's 'beloved' Gospel of John. A new birth is proclaimed, a fervent call to renewal which is as orthodox and yet as personal an expression of Christian faith as the opening *Kyrie* of Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis*. But it soon turns out to be a misleading guide to what will follow, and in no way prepares us for many of the pagan visions, mythic beings and magical invocations that we will meet.. And least of all does it prepare us for the quasi-Gnostic treatise *The Seven Sermons of the Dead* that appears towards the end of the calligraphic volume.

The opening of the Red Book is Jung's oblique proclamation, stemming, as we shall learn, from the authority of his inner teacher, Philemon, of the coming of a renewed epiphany of the Christ, but one where the new birth will not be through any institution or church or some great charismatic leader, but a re-birth within the soul of every human being (this was the deep understanding that came to him from Meister Eckhart). We might call the opening of the Red Book Jung's consciously wrought 'Answer to Nietzsche.' For later, in the *Liber Secundus* the hosts of the dead tell Jung that they are in need of salvation and that they 'were led by a prophet whose proximity to God had driven him insane' (*Red Book*, p. 297); that prophet is clearly Nietzsche.

## The Spirit of this Time and the Spirit of the Depths

But before he can reveal the full nature of his extraordinary visions Jung is impelled to tell the poignant story of how, in late 1913 at the age of 38 and at the apogee of his extraordinary career, and his years in the Psychoanalytic movement with Freud, he had been seduced by 'the spirit of the time,' and had essentially lost his soul. After the painful reversal of his career, his fall from fame and prominence, he sees that the necessity of his 'descent to hell' was the prompting of a radically different force, namely 'the spirit of the depths' that he had so grievously neglected. 'I had to become aware,' as he writes 'that I had lost my soul, or rather that I had lost myself from my soul, for many years'. Here are some of the moving opening words of his 'confession':

Filled with human pride and blinded by the presumptuous spirit of the times, I long sought to hold that other spirit away from me. But I did not consider that the spirit of the depths from time immemorial and for all the future possesses a greater power than the spirit of this time, who changes with the generations. The spirit of the depths has subjugated all pride and arrogance to the power of judgment. He took away my belief in science, he robbed me of the joy of explaining and ordering things, and he let devotion to the ideals of this time die out in me. He forced me down to the last and simplest things.

He had espoused a false attitude to science which now he had to abandon, submitting to a *sacrificium intellectualis* that will require him to sit long in the darkness of 'unknowing' that a medieval mystic quoted earlier describes as the necessary path of spiritual purification.

## 'Without the soul there is no way out of this time'

Mixed in with the visions of chaos all over Europe are some of the loveliest passages in the Red Book. He tells how he

finally rediscovers the soul he has lost in his years of worldliness and fame

When I had the vision of the flood in October of the year 1913, it happened at a time that was significant for me as a man. At that time, in the fortieth year of my life, I had achieved everything that I had wished for myself. I had achieved honour, power, wealth, knowledge, and every human happiness. Then my desire for the increase of these trappings ceased, the desire ebbed from me and horror came over me. The vision of the flood seized me and I felt the spirit of depths, but I did not understand him....

My soul, where are you? Do you hear me? I speak, I call you – are you there? I have returned, I am here again. I have shaken the dust of all the lands from on my feet, and I have come to you, I am with you. After long years of long wandering, I have come to you again....

As he listens to his long lost soul, he is filled with remorse for having so wantonly immersed himself in the spirit of the time:

I still laboured misguidedly under the spirit of this time, and thought differently about the human soul. I thought and spoke much of the soul. I knew many learned words for her. I had judged her and turned her into a scientific object. I did not consider that my soul cannot be the object of my judgment and knowledge; much more are my judgment and knowledge the objects of my soul. Therefore the spirit of the depths forced me to speak to my soul, to call upon her as a living and self-existing being.

A passage cited from the Black Books by Aniela Jaffé sums up this moving dialogue:

The spirit of the depths sees the soul as an independent, living being, and therewith contradicts the spirit of the times for whom the soul is something dependent on the person, which lets itself be ordered and judged, that is a thing whose range we can grasp. Before the spirit of the depths this thought is presumption and arrogance. Therefore the joy of my re-discovery was a humble one...without the soul there is no way out of this time.

*From the Life and Work of C.G. Jung* (1989), p. 172

## Jung's Descent to Hell

...easy is the descent to Avernus: night and day the door of gloomy Dis stands open; but to recall thy steps and pass out to the upper air, this is the task, this the toil!

Virgil, *Aeneid*, VI, (quoted in Jung's *Psychology and Alchemy* p. 39)

When Jung's visions of the bloodbath that was sweeping over Europe finally subside, Jung's soul leads him into the desert, the equivalent of Eliot's Waste Land. This is the beginning of his journey to the land of the Dead, which he called his *nekya*, the Greek word for the 'Night Sea Journey' made by Odysseus to the place where the shades dwell in Hades, as told in Book 11 of the *Odyssey*. This descent, traditionally referring either to an initiation or some kind of a propitiation of the Dead, recurs in Egyptian sacred texts, Virgil's *Aeneid*, certain Gnostic texts, Dante, and the Walpurgisnacht in Goethe's *Faust*. Jung is painfully aware he is following a well-trodden path. He was also fond of the Virgil quote at the head of this section which comments on the descent of Aeneas.

After several nights and various strange encounters he has visions, previously reported in *Memories*, of a dark cave with a corpse, a red stone, a black scarab, a red sun, thousands of serpents and a huge stream of blood:

I stand in black dirt up to my ankles in a dark cave.... whose bottom is covered with black water... I catch a glimpse of a luminous red stone...the frightful noise of shrieking voices ...

something wants to be uttered. ...I hear the flow of underground waters. I see the bloody head of a man on the dark stream. Someone wounded, someone slain floats there. I see a large black scarab floating past on the dark stream....

In the deepest reach of the stream shines a red sun, radiating through the dark water...terror seizes me...small serpents on the dark rock walls, striving toward the depths, where the sun shines. A thousand serpents crowd around, veiling the sun. Deep night falls. A red stream of blood, thick red blood springs up, surging for a long time, then ebbing.

This flood of moribund images now makes much more sense in the context of Jung's reflections on of his betrayal of his soul that opens *Liber Novus*. The dead body, the scarab and red sun reveal to him the death of his old ego self, whilst the potential for re-birth emerges from deep down in the earth attended with numerous serpents, bearers of the chthonic energy of the depths (Jung is to have many encounters and transformations at the hands of serpents in his continuing journey). In the language of Indian tantra this could be seen as the awakening of huge kundalini energy in the yogi or shaman (cf. John White (ed.) (1979) *Kundalini, Evolution and Enlightenment*.)

A further vision of the death of the hero recurs later as the killing of Siegfried. Jung agonises: 'I felt certain that I must kill myself if I could not solve the riddle of the murder of the hero.' With time and reflection Jung slowly realises how his personal transformation, demanding a painful sacrifice of his old self, is deeply bound up with the collective fate and unprecedented blood sacrifice of the German people. Because they are his immediate ancestors he feels implicated in this war of horrible ferocity that is about to be waged. This leads directly to meditations on Christ's sacrifice

on the cross and to the shocking realisation that the redemptive power of Christ entailed a journey to the underworld to become identical with his own dark brother, the dragon or serpent. It will be the same serpent that in his encounter with Salomé Jung will wrestle with on the cross till he bled copiously. The psychic agony of holding together upper and lower worlds, dark and light, heaven and hell in a posture of the Cross, will recur later in the *Red Book*.<sup>4</sup> This psychic crucifixion will become the essence of Jung's later cosmological synthesis, his personal gnostic mystery of the union of opposites which is the key to the *Seven Sermons of the Dead*.<sup>5</sup>

After death on the cross Christ went into the underworld and became Hell. So he took on the form of the Antichrist, the dragon. The image of the Antichrist, which has come down to us from the ancients, announces the new God, whose coming the ancients had foreseen...

The rain is the great stream of tears that will come over the peoples, the tearful flood of released tension after the constriction of death had encumbered the peoples with horrific force. It is the mourning of the dead in me, which precedes burial and rebirth. The rain is the fructifying of the Earth, it begets the new wheat, the young, germinating God

In Jung's mythological thinking the young green god of re-birth is not only Christ but is another form of the young Dionysus and the dying Osiris. He is also anticipating a life changing dream of 'the Green Christ' that will lead him many years later to the study of the alchemists who understood the identity of Christ with the Philosopher's Stone, the sought after Lapis.

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### Notes

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