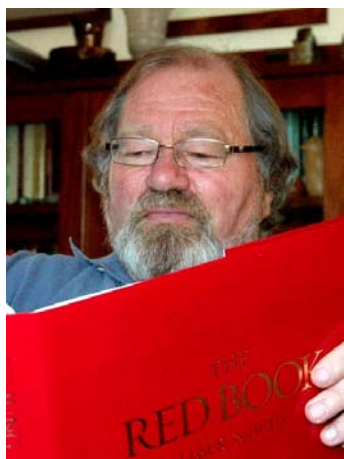


Far from home?

Reading C G Jung's Red Book adventures



Peter Geyer

Jung's *Red Book* is a consequence of his 'confrontation with the unconscious'

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*I can't afford to take a rest
I'm heading out into the sun
And find the place where
I once saw a new life starting*

*It's not so far to get there
It's waiting up around the bend
Don't know if I'll be back again*

Steve Winwood

An interest in psychological type (these days, unfortunately and misleadingly described as 'personality type'), sometimes leads to an interest in C G Jung.

When I was first MBTI accredited, Greg Latimore's teaching reawakened my latent interest in Jung. This was reinforced by learning and teaching the Otto Kroeger Associates qualifying workshop, where specific attention was paid to Jung's ideas, including the conscious and unconscious. In OKA's USA course, videos on Jung's life and ideas were shown at lunch breaks, and I was privileged to sit in on Anthony Moore's presentation of his Jungian interpretation of the movie *Field of Dreams*.

In time, this meant collecting the videos and various biographies, including Jung's 'autobiography' *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, as well as the compendious *Collected Works*, various commentaries and elaborations, and the work of some of Jung's contemporaries.

These books contain a few lifetimes of reading and understanding, even before considering publications of Jung's seminars on dreams, visions, Nietzsche and Kundalini Yoga. Almost none of this material was available to Isabel Myers, or consulted by her, although it seems that psychological type was her specific interest, not the whole *oeuvre*.

The history of *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* and its questionable status as something written by Jung about himself (certainly he wrote *some* of it) involved issues with the Jung family, who took a traditional Swiss view of seeing CG's work as something that belonged within the family and not for further distribution.

In recent times this approach has changed, perhaps because, through natural processes, decisions regarding Jung's unpublished work have fallen to his grandchildren. The publication, via the Philemon Foundation, of *The Red Book* is an outcome of this new approach, with other texts to follow.

The volume has a somewhat mythical or mystical aura, partly because of its non-availability, as well as its contents. The original *Red Book* (there are copies) was something that Jung worked on as a consequence of what has been called his 'confrontation with the unconscious', which began in late 1913.

The book is set out much like a medieval text such as a Book of Hours, with a series of relevant paintings and an appropriate calligraphic style, in German. It is entirely Jung's handiwork.

The large-format publication (40cm high x 30cm wide) contains this text as Jung left it, in full and in colour, as well as an introduction and a translation into English (somewhat Shakespearian in tone, or alternatively with a King James Bible style), with copious annotations. In look and feel it has similarities to a religious text, such as a Missal for use in a Catholic Mass.

The confrontation with the unconscious was a consequence of Jung's recognition that he did not have a personal myth—i.e., something to ground him in his life—and that it was important that he find his myth,

or establish one. This recognition came at the time of his break of relations with Sigmund Freud, which was essentially a time of crisis for him, because he had to strike out and find his own way, rather than be part of Freud's group.

Accordingly, Jung undertook a process of engaging with the unconscious via fantasy, what he might later call *active imagination*, so you're not a bystander in the fantasy or dream, so much as a participant. As Jung has acknowledged elsewhere, there was a danger of madness, succumbing to the unconscious (a topic broached in the text).

These experiences and his comments and reflections were written in a series of volumes called 'Black Books', which Jung later utilised for the *Red Book*. The vast majority of the *Red Book* relates to his experiences in 1913 and 1914.

The book itself was never completed, and Jung seems to have essentially stopped in 1931, in mid-sentence, something he also does much later. The current publication comprises an informative introduction by Sonu Shamdasani, a well-known and respected Jungian author; a scanning of the book itself; and a translation, in English, which provides comprehensive notes and references to the original text, particularly its images.

The translation uses material from draft documents and the Black Books to provide more insight into Jung's experience, as well as to fill out *lacunae* in the text or provide an alternative wording. The notes give references to other publications by Jung, and books he consulted, including those texts in his own library that have his underlinings and comments.

The significance of the *Red Book* for Jung is best explained in his own words:

The years of which I have spoken to you, when I pursued the inner images, were the most important time of my life. Everything else is to be derived from this. It began at that time, and the later details hardly matter anymore. My entire life consisted in elaborating what had burst forth from the unconscious and flooded me like an enigmatic stream and threatened to break me. That

was the stuff and material for more than only one life. Everything later was merely the outer classification, the scientific elaboration, and the integration into life. But the numinous beginning, which contained everything, was then. (1957, Frontispiece)

Shamdasani's introduction puts the publication in context, from Jung's decision to enter into the unconscious (his, of course, not anybody else's), and what outcomes there were of his experiences. In discussing the images, Shamdasani points to Jung's ability as an artist, so that it's not something he decided to do without any artistic attributes, but something in which he had skill, and so he was able to be expressive in this art form.

Shamdasani shows that the experiences described in this book were influential in many ways, and sometimes not written about for many years. This is supported by the copious notes mentioned earlier.

*Through the night I'm flying
Moving like a raven
To the night unfolding I call your name
To the night I whisper
To the night I pray
Through the night I'm racing
Far from home*

Steve Winwood

So what's it like?

Firstly, it reads like a mystical text or religious experience, which in some ways it is, and it has a medieval, classicist approach, perhaps like a philosophical tract in the old way, or Dante, who gets a lot of references.

Jung's concerns are in any case religious, given his seeking of a personal myth—although some might suggest spiritual. Against the latter point of view is the fact that a large proportion of the dialogue and reflection in these fantasies (or *adventures*, as Jung called them) relate to Christian belief and characters.

At one point he finds himself in a library and requests (for reasons unknown to him at the time) *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas a Kempis. Interestingly, in other



The book reads like a mystical text or religious experience

parts of the text Jung declaims against imitation or being a chameleon. He also provides and uses quotes from the Old and New Testaments. In many respects, it's a Gnostic text.

Having said that, there is much of classical mythology, particularly Greek gods and characters, demons, serpents and so on, with Jung in dialogue with all of these, including his soul, which appears to be an *anima* figure in various guises (bird, serpent, Salome). So we have Elijah, Satan, Salome, Philemon, and so on. These are, of course, all aspects of Jung's unconscious, and have no existence outside that realm.

Although references are given to the various myths and stories, it helps if you're aware of them, particularly early Christian theology. Jung's peers would have had no trouble with this requirement; but it would be more problematic today, particularly given the standard uses of psychological type, for instance.

The stories or fantasies are like stepping into other worlds. It's an internal experience, Jung seeking himself in at least two places. Opposites and the tension between them come up at various times: the origin of Jung's type idea. In the text, Jung also identifies himself as a thinker and that his opposite is feeling. The editors indirectly corroborate that in notes.

One gets the feeling of a Clint Eastwood movie of a loner or a nobody (an Odyssean strategy). As far as being a hero is concerned, Jung seems to have an aversion to the Hero archetype, implying that imitating the hero, or making the hero's journey your own, is not being yourself.

As long as you are not conscious of yourself you can live, but if you become conscious of your self, you fall from one grave into another. (p 277)

The Hero issue is interesting, because it's in these fantasies that Jung kills Siegfried, the hero, later identified with his superior (dominant) function. However, Jung writes that he's never really liked Siegfried (who seems a figure of extraverted thinking), implying that this superior function was false. Perhaps he changed his mind later.

Jung thinks humans should be more like animals, mainly because animals are usually compatible with their environment, and don't seek to step outside it. 'Apishness', however, is an entirely different thing and this seems to relate to being unconscious or ignorant, a 'fear of isolation and defeat' (p 249). Various public figures come to mind, as well as people in the street. 'Many people are logical in their lack of reason' (p 315).

On the evidence of this publication (and there are others to come, although not necessarily from the same time), Jung's 'fallow period' appears very busy and productive—like others, going from the unconscious to the 'scientific' (a term he used for his work on the types).

It's not to be supposed that Jung took down or remembered everything for the *Red Book*. So, it won't be the sort of text that gives you direct insights into the problematic: more an insinuating, but sometimes directly provocative, approach to the way you look at things. And then there are the things that you don't understand at all.

The *Red Book* is one of those books you need to read a few times, in a contemplative mood, and be able to quietly switch between the translated text and the related images.

I'm wishing for a bigger table and a light airy room for contemplation and browsing.

No one should be astonished that men are so far removed from one another that they cannot understand one another, that they wage war and kill one another. One should be much more surprised that men believe they are close, understand one another and love one another. (p 289)

References

- C G Jung (2009). *Liber Novus: The Red Book*, edited by Sonu Shamdasani, translated by Mark Kyburz, John Peck and Sonu Shamdasani, preface by Ulrich Hoerni. WW Norton, Philemon Series.
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