

The Black Books of C. G. Jung: Hermeticism Dreamed Onward

Craig Chalquist, PhD
Chalquist.com

Ha, this book! I have laid hands on you again—banal and pathological and frantic and divine, my written unconscious!

—C. G. Jung, *The Black Books*

The long-awaited self-exploratory notebooks of C. G. Jung have finally been published thanks to the Philemon Foundation and scholars Sonu Shamdasani, Martin Liebscher, and John Peck. After reading them, I decided to post an overview and impressions online rather than in an academic periodical.

Are these Jung’s journals, then? Yes. But they are unlike any journals you are likely to have come across. They transcend personal psychology and reach into collective ranges of consciousness.

These notebooks will spur conversation and debate for decades and perhaps centuries to come. If you are familiar with the formerly published Red Book, assembled to be an excerpt of these Black Books, they will not only fill in the picture of Jung’s turbulent inner world and the origins of Jungian psychology but raise new questions about Jung’s celebrated “confrontation with the unconscious.”

After going over the origins and content in the Black Books, we will see examples of how startlingly different they are from anything previously published. What we will find helps place Jung in a particular spiritual tradition suppressed in the West but never entirely lost. A tradition Jung’s interior cast of characters called upon him to extend.

The Experiment Begins: What Are the Black Books?

By October 1913, C. G. Jung stood at a professional pinnacle. He was an internationally respected psychiatrist who had conducted and published research. If anything, his recent falling out with Freud had only increased interest in Jung’s work; pupils attended his lectures, colleagues sought him out, and patients filled his private practice. He had also married into the wealthy Rauschenbach family. He lived on the edge of a lake near Zürich in a stately turreted house custom-built by his cousin.

While riding a train through northern Switzerland to Schaffhausen, drowsing Jung was seized by an overpowering image of flood waters surging over much of Europe. He was badly startled, and even more so two weeks later, when the vision came again.

Was he losing his mind? If so, by what right did he go on seeing patients? What he needed, he realized, was a confrontation with his unconscious.

Freud had conducted a self-analysis to dig up his repressed thoughts and ideas. Jung could feel more than that rumbling below his own vibrating mental horizon. In the evenings after a full day of work, he sat at his desk, cleared his mind, and let the fantasies flow, bringing forth intense emotions, images, and body states as they rose. He quickly learned not to interpret this material until later, when he wrote it down in a series of notebooks with black covers.

Jung, a picture of midlife success, began with an honest painful question: “My soul, my soul, where are you?” When he looked inside himself, he saw a vast desert. “I belonged to men and things. I did not belong to myself.” His method was to still his thoughts, look inward, and follow the fantasy images wherever they led. Eventually, they led him out of the desert.

He wrote in these Black Books from November 12th, 1913, when a figure he thought of as Soul finally surfaced as an internal image and spoke, until December 15th, 1932. “Look down up into your own depths,” she told him. It was a self-analysis not of weeks, but of nearly two decades interrupted by occasional pauses, especially after 1919. Although a large cast of characters spoke during these nightly suspensions of daytime consciousness, most of Jung’s conversations were with Soul, a feminine being who appeared in various forms. Jung referred later to these as dialogues with his *anima*, the feminine component of the male mind. He also recorded his dreams.

In June 1914, Jung began shaping some of this material into *Liber Novus*, a large book with a red cover. He added calligraphy and paintings to style it as an illuminated manuscript of revelations for his time. Half the Red Book text comes from the Black Books, with the rest written as commentaries on the material. Jung toyed with the idea of publishing it but never did, afraid of being seen as a crazy visionary. Jung stopped working on it in 1930; it was not published until 2009.

By 1919, entries in the Black Books became less frequent, especially after December 1926, when his mother died and “Soul” grew much quieter. They halted altogether in December 1932. His attention had shifted to building, occupying, and painting his tower at Bollingen as a “worldly cloister” and stony representation of individuation. His journal had turned into a giant lakeside sculpture. The study of alchemy also captured him; Abraxas had fused the opposed figures of spiritual Philemon and earthy Ka into Mercurius, the soul of alchemical work. As he wrote and lectured more, his focus shifted to the outer world.

What was Jung up to with his Black Book research? What did he encounter?

The Self-Speaking Psyche: Imagination vs Imaginal

People who don't realize how the unconscious works tend to dismiss the play of inner images as "just" imagination. In other words, making things up. The assumption, of course, is that the conscious mind rules. Whatever arises must come from it.

Jung quickly learned differently. When two inner characters appeared, Jung recognized them: the old prophet Elijah and Salome, the dancer who had asked for the head of John the Baptist. Why would two such different figures show up together?

Jung made an interpretive move similar to when he analyzed dream symbols: he labeled the old man Logos, the principle of reason, and the woman Eros, principle of love and connection. At this, the old man surprised him and protested: We are real and not symbols.

This was the first of a series of surprises. Many of these inner figures took stands, espoused values, and voiced opinions very different from those of Jung's conscious mind. There are things in me, Jung saw, that I do not create: an unsettling discovery for a man used to being in rational self-control. The psyche—conscious and unconscious taken together—looked less like a subservient kingdom ruled by an ego (the "I" or "me") and more like a vital plurality of voices checking and balancing one another. (In psychosis, these voices overpower and fragment the ego.)

It is one thing to make fantasies up: to imagine them with one's daytime consciousness. But it's quite another for them to make themselves up, appearing out of the depths of the mind to speak on their own behalf and interact with each other, aligning or arguing, fighting or making peace. For this, we can use Henri Corbin's term: the *imaginal*, a twilight realm of experience in which the unconscious expresses itself through symbols. Some of what we take credit for imagining is actually imaginal, as when the unconscious mind of a scientist offers the solution to a research puzzle in a dream. Who solved it? Not the conscious mind alone.

When we engage imagination deeply, the entire psyche can speak, not just the ego. And that psyche is polycentric, with ego not as master but as mediator, deciding which presences to tend at a given time.

Another surprise for Jung was learning that these presences do not only represent old inner wounds or stifled ideas. They also hint at what's around the corner, not only personally, but collectively.

The Myth-Making Psyche: From Personal to Collective

Myths and mythic figures are collective, meaning they originate in groups, usually through oral tellings passed down for long enough to gradually turn into stories, rituals, or even religious institutions. "Myths" are what academics call a culture's sacred stories or wisdom tales. (Chapter 1 of my book *Myths Among Us* describes the life cycle of a myth.)

During the years he worked with Freud, Jung had discovered that mythic plots and characters also appear in the dreams of individuals. In fact, a mythic symbol of a man strapped to a fiery wheel could show up at night for a dreamer who had never heard of Ixion. Jung was curious

about why. Freud thought of these mythic appearances as signs of psychological immaturity or regression. One reason for breaking with Freud was that in myths Jung found hints at future directions to take, which meant that myths had less to do with pathology than with possibilities for inner healing and wholeness.

When World War I broke out a year after Jung began his self-research, he faced a huge realization: the war was the flood depicted in his hypnagogic visions. The flood had drowned most of Europe but spared Switzerland, just as the war did. He was not psychotic. Rather, he was sensitive, with his mind a psychological barometer. Its readings were images. His unconscious knew the war was coming before his conscious mind did, and showed him with the mythic image of a global flood.

Judging from the material, Jung's visionary encounters seem to have foreseen both World Wars, possibly the Nazi concentration camps (in the gruesome image of lines of the dead, "men and women, and countless children" dissolved into the sky), and our present planetary mass extinction. In Book 5 he describes fire in terms now familiar as climate change accelerates: "I see wide meadows and blue mountains and smoke sweeps over. A sea of fire rolls close in, it is setting the towns and villages on fire, breaking through the valleys, burning the forests." Before he died, he also described a vision in which most of Earth's surface had been wrecked, "but not all of it, thank God."

These glances ahead at what might be also revealed the gaping inadequacy of purely personal psychological science. If collective events appeared in advance in fantasy and dream and art and literature, then a psychological approach doing any real justice to the depths of human nature must be grounded in the humanities. Furthermore, it must reveal where the personal and the collective met in the psyche. Jung was realizing as he worked how much he had taken personally what was actually going on outside. The visions, the dreams, the anxiety and dread were not all individual symptoms announcing disturbance; some signaled the greater disturbance of the time. What then was only inner? What was outer?

It is often said that psychological theorists create the system they need for their own healing. But in Jung's case the healing he needed was not only personal. He needed to learn where he stopped and everything else began.

He was also searching for a sense of the sacred unconfined by walls built by clergy or dogma. Could depth psychology provide this?

The Gnostic Cast of Characters

Jung was born into religious turmoil. On his mother's side ran a line of mediums culminating in a dissociated parent who went in and out of reality and sometimes had to be hospitalized, leaving her frightened young son bereft of care. His father was a Swiss Reformed pastor who silenced his own religious doubts by insisting on belief over knowledge.

Jung had no use for belief. He wanted to know.

In the fall of 1913, when the inner visions began to assail him, Jung had read little about Gnosticism, a set of practices and stories for finding *gnosis*: direct internal contact with the spark of divinity living in all of us. Retconned as a heresy by the Catholic Church, Gnostic ideas and practices preceded organized Christianity. Most Gnostic practitioners were uninterested in institutionalizing what they did, preferring to recast biblical myths into stories of liberation, with an active Divine Mother and Eve as the spiritual awakener of Adam. Gnostic texts buried to keep the church from burning them resurface to this day.

Jung was astonished to learn that some of the presences he faced internally also appeared as characters in Gnostic tales. Philemon confessed that he was also Simon Magus, legendary founder of Gnosticism, with Salome actually his partner Helen, a feminine face of God. Gnostics had a name for the serpent so recurrent in the Black Book: “The Instructor.” Ka, the earthy Saturnian shadow of Philemon, derives from the Egyptian mythology that also birthed Gnosticism. Abraxas, a symbol of opposites-reconciling wholeness, is a Gnostic deity. Eve appeared in a fiery red stone. By 1915, Jung was studying Gnosticism intensively as a matter of psychological survival: it helped him make sense of the inner deluge. (For an account of Gnostic influences in Jung’s Red Book, see [Lance Owens’s Foreword](#) to Alfred Ribi’s *The Search for Roots: C. G. Jung and the Tradition of Gnosis*.)

In “Gnostic Antecedents of Jung’s Key Concepts,” I argued that Jung had cited the Gnostics here and there without indicating the true size of his debt to them. Jungian psychology is basically Gnosticism updated and psychologized, with alchemy and other Hermetic influences included later. As Jung wrote to Josef Lang (Hermann Hesse’s analyst) in March 1918,

It is very important to experience the contents of the unconscious before forming any opinions about it. I very much agree with you that we have to grapple with the knowledge content of Gnosticism and neo-Platonism. These are the systems that contain the materials which are destined to become the foundation of a theory of the unconscious.

In 1913, Jung dreamed that he and a group of peasants plundered a monastery. Little wonder: “Archetype,” “syzygy,” “shadow,” “projection,” “image,” “wholeness,” “unconsciousness,” “Anthropos,” and several other key Jungian terms are Gnostic. The spark of divinity within everyone, which Jung calls the Self, is a Gnostic image, as is Abraxas, also called “the Worm” in the Red and Black Books. Jung’s typology resembles that of the Valentinian Gnostics; in 1915 he wrote Rudolf Lichtenhan, author of *The Revelation in Gnosticism*, whose reply to Jung mentioned how Gnostic characters paralleled the “tough- vs tender-minded” types of William James.

The key figure of Soul is easily recognizable as the Gnostic version of Sophia, with Salome her lower, earthly form. Soul asks Jung if he really knows who she is and protests being reduced to a psychological formula. At one point: “Just don’t assume that somehow you could ever grasp me and embody me. For this you are simply too small.” Her lonely lament and desire to ascend (entry Feb. 4th, 1917) echoes Sophia’s in Pistis Sophia and other Gnostic works. The cosmology presented in the Black Books is a Sophianic view largely derived from Gnostic myth. Jung drew his first mandala from it, a geometric diagram with center and periphery. Many of his mandalas are similar in general structure to those found in the Gnostic Books of Jeu.

Gnosticism in turn is part of a larger tradition stretching back to ancient Egyptian esoteric practices. Hermetism, named from Hermes, a Greek god confused with the magus god Thoth, includes Earth-honoring rituals, a cosmology similar to that of its Gnostic branch, wisdom studies, accumulated lore, reverence for life, scientific exploration, dream interpretation, divination, vegetarianism, astrology, chanting, and music. As cosmopolitan Alexandria rose in Egypt, Hermes met Thoth and amalgamated into Hermes Trismegistus (Thrice-Great), keeping his identity as a scribal magician god.

In 1463, Milanese monk Marsilio Ficino translated the Corpus Hermeticum and thereby popularized Hermetic writings in the West. On the technical side they soon included alchemical texts and imagery expanded by a line of European adepts up to the 19th century. Scholars use 1463 as a convenient date for distinguishing earlier Hermetism from later Hermeticism. [It continued to spread and change.](#)

Jungian commentators have said Jung was writing his myth, or writing a modern myth, but he was actually rewriting Hermetic myth into depth psychology. However, what that myth looks like is somewhat different depending on which books are read.

The Red vs the Black

Obvious differences between the Red and Black Books include the absence of psychological commentary in the Black Books, their reproduction of Jung's written texts, and years of additional material not included in the Red Book, the content for which stops part way through Black Book 6 (of 7 volumes). Also excluded were a few episodes in which the Buddha gives Jung greetings from the East and asks for hospitality.

By comparing the Red and Black Books, we also see a distancing maneuver we might think of as "the archetype made me do it."

When the Red Book was published, we were amazed to see that Seven Sermons of life lessons, admonitions, and Gnostic cosmology spoken to the restless dead of Jung's inner world between December 30, 1916 and January 8, 1917 came from the character Philemon. (Jung referred to him later as an example of the Wise Old Man archetype, but he is actually a Magician.) But in the Black Books, the sermons unequivocally come from Jung. When transferring the Sermons to the Red Book, he changed them by adding opening statements like, "As I proclaimed these words, I noticed that ΦΙΛΗΜΩΝ [Philemon] stood behind me and had given them to me."

Later in the Red Book he writes, "Probably the most part of what I have written in the earlier part of this book was given to me by ΦΙΛΗΜΩΝ. Consequently I was as if intoxicated. But now I noticed that ΦΙΛΗΜΩΝ assumed a form distinct from me." It seems likelier that Jung, who at one time considered publishing the Red Book himself, changed several conversations to make Philemon responsible for them. Preaching to the Christian dead, for example.

Additionally, Jung told Aniela Jaffé that these sermons foreshadowed what Jung (not Philemon) intended to tell the world: "And since the world around me presented me with no such questions or demands, as to how to resolve these matters, they came to me from the dead." Jung was

acutely aware that this material could seem very strange to the uninitiated, as he learned when his translator R. F. C. Hull read it. In assigning what he had said to other characters, he could claim to have been transmitting it instead.

What else did he change?

The Black Books make clear that the pleromatic cosmology of the Sermons and the Red Book derives not from Philemon, but from Soul. She is Sophia, so it makes sense that she would teach this.

Also, a long and acrimonious section of self-castigation over his errors and weaknesses, evidently written in an emotional spasm of self-hatred, is later reinterpreted by Jung as a confrontation with his shadow. This makes no sense. The faults he blames himself for are not unconscious at all. He is well aware of how he mistreats and manipulates people. In fact, he tended to befriend those who would not confront him about his bullying and who made excuses for it instead. Assigning to “the shadow” what results from deliberate calculation and personal responsibility has weakened Jungian psychology ever since.

What else do the Black Books reveal about Jung’s personal struggles?

Human, All Too Human

Jung suffered revelation after painful revelation, admitting to various shortcomings here and there in the Black Book: his chronic impatience, his near-constant state of fear, his feeling-numbing intellectualism, his acute sensitivity to criticism, his ambition to make a name for himself, his sense of entitlement toward the inner figures (“How much pamperedness there still is in me!”)...

He began the visionary adventure in a state of identification not with Philemon the magus, but with the masculine Hero archetype. Of Soul he asks early on, “What is it I shall do? Tell you more about my inner matters? Shall I overcome the daimon of my interior? Is it the hundred-headed dragon?” He dreams of himself more than once as a knight with a Crusader cross on his back; at one point he stands atop an imaginal castle. He confronts a Red Knight, a shadow of the heroic. Parsifal bears Jung’s features. He sees heroic Odysseus sailing past Sirens.

But this Hero identification begins to crack when he dreams of shooting Siegfried, and again when he shrinks the gigantic frame of the hero god Gilgamesh down into an egg. The egg gives rise to a reborn sun. As Parsifal, Jung removes some of his armor. Those who do not sacrifice their internal Hero, he writes, sacrifice themselves and other heroes on the field of battle: a collective expression of what he felt so deeply internally. Still, he goes on trying to force things when he gets anxious, and his theoretical explanation of the hero killing as “I deposed my [superior function](#)” lacks the verisimilitude of the journal entries.

Before his confrontation with the unconscious, Jung had thought of himself as a scientist. This shifted: “All these things lead me so far away from my science, which I thought I had subscribed to firmly. I wanted to serve humanity through it, and now, my soul, you lead me to these new

things. Yes, it is the in-between world, the pathless, manifold and dazzling.” Soul and Philemon tell him that he need not abandon the “language” of science, but he should make it work with art, broadly understood as craft and narrative.

Jung’s dependency on his cast of characters also decreases over time. This progress is reflected in the decreasing frequency of his demands for knowledge, especially from Soul, and in a softening in how he asks. “You have the whole wide earth. What do you want to ask the beyond for?” She also tells him he can trust other people more than he realizes.

We see, however, at least three sides of Jung that undergo little change up to age 57, when the Black Book entries stop: his obsession with religion, his angry paranoia and distrust, and his disdain for women. Encountering the imaginal can bring much transformation, but it cannot cure core psychological immaturities. Only healing relationships can do that, and only when one is open to what they offer. (At one point Ammonius the Anchorite tells him, “Listen, you are still too juvenile for your age. You should get older, the years are dwindling and yet your work has not been accomplished.”)

In Jung’s active imagination, a cook, a librarian, Salome, Philemon, and others confront Jung with what a professor in a “madhouse” refers to as “religious mania.” “You don’t have any insight into your illness yet,” the professor tells Jung the new inpatient. “The prognosis is naturally bad, with at best limited recovery.” A fellow inmate explains that “I am Nietzsche, only rebaptized, I am also Christ, the Savior, and appointed to save the world, but they won’t let me.” He also wonders aloud why his family always locks him in with the real crazies.

At the start of the Black Books, Jung’s obsession with religion takes the form of a martyr complex. “Why still crucified?” asks Salome. Jung’s letters reveal his hope to use depth psychology to heal Christianity. This missionary zeal decreases, especially after a big snake wraps Jung so hard that his arms stick out like those of Jesus on the Cross: the imaginal in effect trying to squeeze the Christ complex out of him. Other figures tell him: We had no idea you were such a believer!

Toward the end of the Black Books Jung witnesses an empty place where Jesus once stood, and he does bypass the monotheism he grew up in to wrestle with multiple gods (whom he interprets as psychological symbols of supreme values); but then, “Once more I forgot that post-Christianity has begun.” The squeeze was a partial cure. He also continues the Christian legacy of splitting everything into “opposites” Soul insists are really partners: higher and lower, good and evil, light and shadow, masculine and feminine.

The acrid tone of rage and paranoia simmering throughout the Black Books can be hard to take. Jung alternates between dependency and contempt, often viewing the human relationship with the gods as one of prey vs. vampires: “I will be a more just administrator than you half-beings, you soulless souls and you godless Gods, and you godforsaken God. You will gather around the source of blood, and you will come bearing gifts so that you may receive what you need.” He says that the restless dead keep returning because they want to rule, having died still lusting for power, although they show no evidence of this when they plead for knowledge and release.

He is especially hard on Soul, his celestial and luminous intercessor with the high god Abraxas. He attacks her relentlessly and repeatedly suspects her of lying. In Book 6, Jung asks her, “Why can’t you live and work together with me?” “I would like to, but you won’t let me get close to you.” She also calls him megalomaniac. His response to Soul’s lonely cry of pain (Book 6), isolated as she is between heaven and earth, is jarringly brutal: “Your lamentation makes me want to yawn. I regret that you feel so forlorn, since the God appeared to men. You held him back too long. You are just a daimon, why do you want to love Gods?” Perhaps because she is one. Jung seems never to have realized this.

Jung’s callous suspiciousness extends to the women in his life. For example, when Soul tells him women know about medicines and healing, he replies, “That is news to me. I usually heard them only whine.” She finally makes it a condition of their continuing conversation and her assistance and support that he rid himself of his contempt for women. In the following exchange, Jung sounds like Freud:

Soul: Why don’t you respect their way? They are also people whose dignity needs to be accepted.

Jung: But they never know what they want.

Contradicting Jung’s later anima/animus binary, Soul states: “Both man and woman, in their respective ways, are governed by the law of Eros and the spirit.” Jung replies, “This is impossible and can never become reality.”

Much has been written about the women in Jung’s life who bore up under his blind spots. One was Toni Wolff, referred to as “the black one” in the texts. Wolff had been Jung’s patient until he put her to work on research to help alleviate her depression. She quickly became indispensable not only for his confrontation with the unconscious, during which she served as an informal therapist and loving companion, but in co-creating Jungian psychology. Entries from her diary included in the Black Book footnotes are revealing:

I was always able to deliver him the problems that he had not thought through to the end—I lived them first—with him—for him—then knowledge. Now it is conscious.

I think that he has got a lot of *Symbols* [his heroically themed book *Transformations and Symbols of the Libido*] from me—I inspired it—the revision—I brought him a lot of it. He probably doesn’t know that.

What C. has achieved now is all based on me. Through my faith, love, understanding and loyalty I have kept him and brought him out. I was his mirror, as he told me right at the beginning.

Again some resistance, when I think how he realized all his famous ideas through the relationship with me (which he only admits occasionally) and how famous he is now, and that E. [Emma Jung] is with him instead of me, and how I can never accompany him there.

Although Jung often acknowledged her influence, he has continued to be regarded as the sole founder of Analytical Psychology. But as Nan Savage Healy observed in her 2017 book *Toni Wolff and C. G. Jung: A Collaboration*, the work emerged alchemically out of the space between the two, which he gave a nod to by referring to her as his *soror mystica* (mystical sister = fellow alchemist).

Wolff was well aware of the conflicts between them. In later life she felt like Ariadne left alone on the isle of Naxos by Theseus after she helped him find his way through the labyrinth. Identifying as Nephthys, the dark sister of Isis, she encountered Egyptian gods in her own active imaginations, at one point speaking with the wizardly Thoth, forerunner of Hermes Trismegistus. She referred to Egypt as her spiritual mother.

Soul noted herself projected by Jung onto “the black one.” When she told Jung to receive life from her rather than from an earthly woman, he replied, “I doubt you and have no confidence in you.” In Book 7, Soul calls Wolff “the emissary of the Great Mother,” a role that made her suffer, and receives runes from the Mother that advise Jung not to think of Toni as an ordinary woman.

Along the journey, Jung learns and fills out what could be called his *personal archetype*, that of the Magus (wizard, magician, seer). He learns from an entire group of wizardly guides: Philemon (who hands him a magic iron wand), Ka (Philemon’s shadow), Ha, Elijah, Klingsor, the shape-changing kobold and former manikin Atmavictu, and He, who turns out to be the wizard god Wotan, whom Jung emulates by hanging near the world tree and by receiving runes from a black magician. The fighting black and white serpents he sees early on mirror a tale of Merlin’s childhood. He makes a Faustian bargain: magic for giving up “solace” and a bit of his humanity. His black wand sits in a cupboard with Kabbalistic texts by Moses and Hermetic ones by Hermes Trismegistus.

In 1958, he told Aniela Jaffé that

I had to think about my earliest mandala pictures. There were black magnetic iron seeds and gold seeds mixed together that had to be put into the vessel where they formed the central body, the self.—And then the story with my magician, who appeared when I painted these seeds, and then he screamed because they had got caught in his eye. That is, he received a projection from me and it caused him pain.

That was something that I did not or could not accept, namely the figure of the magician, the shaman in myself. That is why this figure appeared to me. Only when I realize that I am the shaman, is he healed. He is, so to speak, a precursor of mine, and that is why the seed fell into the right place: in his eye, which means consciousness.

The shaman also serves the natural world. This world spoke to Jung throughout the Black Books.

The Ecological Dimension

In a daytime ritual paralleling the nightly confrontations with the unconscious, Jung reverted to his childhood habit of digging mud channels with sticks and assembling small buildings with stones. It helped him think and dream. So did walking on soil with bare feet and sailing on the nearby lake. Earth and place were thinking with him.

Jung's conscious attitude toward the natural world was divided. In writing, he described its aliveness as an effect of human projections. Few were the sprites and naiads and selkies to be found any longer: driven from the earth, they now resided in the human breast, where they spoke up as conflicts, fantasies, and neuroses. That was the official Jung. The unofficial Jung seems to have been an animist who believed that everything possessed its own kind of consciousness. He talked to stones and silverware, and when he lost a book, he refused to look for it, certain it would reappear when it wanted to.

Several Black Book characters highlight the world of nature. A red rider who shows up in various trickster forms undergoes transformation as he speaks with Jung:

The red of the rider transforms itself into a tender reddish flesh color. My green garments everywhere burst into leaf. The Red One actually looks very much like me.

When this occurs, Jung perceives himself as a kind of nature spirit, laughing and playing in the woods. It bears remembering that some of Jung's most influential early moments were spent outdoors.

A dream recorded on February 22nd, 1914 is one of many that demonstrate the prominence of nature in Jung's consciousness:

Last night a dream showed me standing in my garden; many pure fountains had leaped up and water trickled from everywhere. I diligently channeled all the water into a deep ditch, that led it back again to the womb of the earth.

This could, of course, be interpreted psychologically. It could also serve as one of many reasons why Jung might be considered the first ecopsychologist.

When the dead appear and ask Jung what they did wrong, and why "true belief" while alive was not enough to ensure their salvation and peace, Jung replies: "You did not live your animal." Extended remarks in the Red Book clarify that Jung meant more than being in accord with one's instincts:

These dead have given names to all beings, the beings in the air, on the earth and in the water. They have weighted and counted things... What did they do with the admirable tree? What happened to the sacred frog? Did they see his golden eye? ...Did they do penance for the sacred ore that they dug up from the belly of the earth? No, they named, weighed, numbered, and apportioned all things. They did whatever pleased them... Yet the time has come when things speak.

Things of the Earth that bear witness to human mistreatment of the earth. Furthermore, had men atoned for the ox and the trees and the frogs, they would not have lifted their hand against each other. Social, psychological, and ecological destruction emerge together; for as we now know decades after these entries, alienation from self and alienation from nature represent two sides of one dire pathology.

In a later Red Book visit, Philemon prophesies an eventual return to sense and sanity:

The earth became green and fruitful again from the blood of the sacrifice, flowers sprouted, the waves crash into the sand, a silver cloud lies at the foot of the mountain... The stones speak and the grass whispers.

With that he kisses the Earth and disappears.

Near start of Black Book 6, an entry reveals Jung's weariness after arguing with lost souls:

My soul, if you are the intercessor for the dead, my God, if you hear me, end this torment that I endure from men. I can't bear it anymore.

Soul replies:

Come to us, to the green forests, the lonely mountains, the cold lakes, the sun and starlit night, to the clouds, the mists, the silence of eternal nature. May men be remote from you, no one touches the pure crystal that shines in a thousand fires. The human has fallen from you. You have come closer to the stars.

Today we would call that ecotherapy.

Some interventions by Jung's cast of characters suggest the possibility of a more magical or enchanted kind of psychological grounding. In the summer of 1917, for example, the magician Ha (possibly Wotan) brings a bewildering series of runes consisting of lines, cones, serpents, suns, bridges, hooks, stars, and other figures. Soul asks Ha to explain them.

To Jung: "You lack dirt. Your understanding has no dung in it." One runic figure "has a sun as a head": too solar? Thoughts can be a "door-less prison with thick walls." The prison Jung makes "for both of you" (Jung and Emma? Jung and Soul?) also imprisons a sun.

The runes seem to parody both the intellectual complexity of Jung's otherworldly formulizing and his habit of tearing images into supposed opposites. Ha intersperses all this with comments about how amusing it is, and he ends by saying, "I am called Ha-Ha-Ha—a jolly name—I am clever..." He had warned that he wanted to strangle a man. This he does, with words.

Hearing all this, Philemon, having praised Phanes, begins revising the teachings of Jesus:

Do not say: we love our enemy. This lie would be an extravagance in view of your poverty. Leave your enemy alone, so that his hostility may devour itself...

Do penance for every unearned gift that heaven has sent you, so that you don't contaminate yourself with godliness.

Jesus remains silent, having finished his work. Philemon finishes speaking, touches the Earth, puts on a brown cloak, and walks.

New Gods or Old?

Jung's encounter with images of gods began early. At the age of three or four, he dreamed of a rectangular underground chamber in which, below an arched ceiling, a huge phallus stood on a golden throne, staring upward. An aura surrounded the tip.

Once Jung had studied mythology he linked this early image to Priapus, an erotic god associated with procreation and fruitfulness: what anthropologists who don't get out much insist on calling a fertility god. In the case of Priapus, similar to the Egyptian god Hap, this seems true, although Jung deliteralized fertility, interpreting it as earthy creativity.

Certainly, this deity seemed more exciting than the Lord Jesus, for whom Jung never developed any sense of worship.

I believe that our Lord Jesus Christ has indeed improved mankind. He has redeemed it up to a point where men let themselves be redeemed from Gods and Godmen. Now the time will come when each man has to continue his work of redemption.... There is no longer any unconditional obedience, since man is no longer a slave, but also a God of the Gods. He demands respect, since he belongs to the world of the Gods and he is a limb that even the Gods cannot do without (Book 6).

Jung wanted gods (later: archetypes) who lived in the psyche, haunted dreams and visions, and could be pushed back on a bit. Soul: "Respect for and disdain of the Gods—that is the mystery" (Book 7). One should listen to them but keep one's own standpoint in mind.

It was not that Jung didn't believe in *the* God. He did, but, akin to how the Gnostics regarded their world-creating but clumsy Demiurge, he considered God unconscious. Consciousness required mortality, limitation, and differentiation from the totality of being. These were human prerogatives. God therefore needed us for what consciousness He enjoyed. That was why He had tormented Job. "The totality does not understand the individual. Therefore the individual must seek the way to God" (Book 7). Pursuing our own individuation made it possible for God to experience Himself as individual as well. As Jung puts it in *Answer to Job*, "The encounter with the creature changes the Creator."

God could take many forms, including Priapus, Hap, Izdubar (=Gilgamesh), Mithras, and Jesus. But Jesus represented only the bright and loving side of God. By contrast, Abraxas, a time god similar to Aion, included all possible opposites, dark and bright. As early as 1913, Jung came across this mighty figure in the writings of the heresy fighter St. Irenaeus. An early mandala drawn by Jung titles Abraxas "Master of the World." Jung drew a tree of seven lights to symbolize the individual united with Abraxas via Soul.

From changing Gilgamesh into an Orphic egg and then a liberated sun, Jung had learned an important psychological truth about gods: they were also fantasy structures, imaginal rather than imaginary. When outdated and decayed, they could be renewed by being reinterpreted. Later Jung would write, “The most that we can do is dream the myth onward by giving it a modern dress.”

For Jung, all these god images melted together into one great being who rises up in Book 6: sunlike Phanes, an androgynous father of gods seen as Eros by the ancient Greeks and Priapos and Dionysus Lysios (“Deliverer”) by the ancient practitioners of the Orphic Mysteries. From the seven-light tree of individuation consciously pursued flies the golden bird Phanes bringing illumination. “I called him PHANES, because he is the newly appearing God.”

When Jung invokes Phanes and asks for light, Phanes appears and replies:

I come, my light is with you. Your path leads straight. Your feet do not err. Disaster is warded off. The way is secure. Disunity is removed from you. The Lord of light is born. He lifted himself up and white steeds go before him. Flowers spring up from beneath his feet. The sagacity of the earth and the goodness of the blessing light have prepared the path to joy for you.... My light streams from necessity. My star shines from your misery. My springs flow from the fullness of your life. Everything unlived is shadow and poverty for me. What has been lived nourishes my strength.

Phanes adds, “Heed the emissary,” meaning Soul.

Is this really a new God (or God-image)? It seems more the rebirth of an old one connected to other old ones. For Jung, a Leo, Phanes was solar; Jung also mentions the sun god Helios and several other solar deities. Hermetics considered the sun to be a positive demiurge, a lower god who fashions the cosmos. Copernicus had read their writings, praised Hermes Trismegistus, and placed the Sun in the center of the Solar System.

One way or another, these fluid figures of the divine all lead to Phanes. Elijah turns into Philemon and Salome into Soul. Atmavictu was an old man, a Kabir, several animals, Izdubar, and Philemon, whose Saturnian father was Ka the black magician and institutionalizer of religions. Ka also fathered Salome and considered the Buddha family. Philemon thought Ka his shadow, called himself Simon Magus and Khidr, and said he would rise again as Phanes, celestial brother of earthy Abraxas. It was all mixed up, as with any mythology.

It’s important to remember that for Jung the researcher, all this was psychology. Gods are images of the Self, the archetype of totality and wholeness; in Gnostic terms, emanations of the Pleroma, the heavenly Fullness or Wholeness. “Through uniting with the self we reach the God, who unites heaven and hell in himself. The self is not God, although we reach the God through the self.” In other words, through inner work, individuation, and gnosis.

As Soul/Sophia tells it,

Man is completely in God. He is the mediator between God as world and God as seed. Philemon sees God only as goal, Ka only as ground. You see him through me as seed and world. Since as a being God is the greatest and the smallest... Therefore man would be the mediator in the transformation process of God. And not even the only mediator, as animals and plants also have their role in this work.

A god like Phanes rising upward signifies a reborn supreme value breaking out in collective consciousness. Jung left the task of understanding this psychologically to those who come after. We know this transsexual god has to do with creativity, illumination, and love. The Orphics associated Phanes with death, regeneration, and resurrection, qualities also given fire on the wings of the Phoenix. Hermetics would have seen this dynamic power as ready to make something sunlike and new.

But could a symbol primarily solar fully satisfy the personal and collective yearning for wholeness? What about the lunar aspect?

Jung believed that to develop this understanding further, we needed to work together.

The Invisible Church

In September 1915, three dead people appeared to Jung's imaginal vision.

Dead: We need the symbol, we hunger for it, make light for us.

Jung: Where from? How can I?

Dead: You can, grasp it—upward—onward.

Jung: A phallus?

Dead: That is it, that is the symbol of the middle. That's what we wanted, what we needed. It is terribly simple, initially stupid, naturally godlike, the God's other pole. This is precisely the pole we needed.

The Red Book version says they describe Hap, a son of Horus. His symbol is not the foundation, but more like a tower over a dome. The upper god for Jung is spiritual, the lower sensual. They must be reconciled.

Dead: We need this church since we can live in it with you and take part in your life. Listen: Build the church. Write the holy books, the age-old new ones, that contain the echo of the eternal being, the mysterious ones—mocked wisdom—the lower and upper truth.

Jung makes plain more than once in the Black Books that he has no interest in building either a church or a new religion. Psychologists don't do that. Neither do shamans.

To his surprise, Soul seconds the request of the dead:

Soul: I want the church, it is necessary for you and for others. Otherwise what are you going to do with those whom I force onto you and at your feet? You ought to lovingly receive them, not in your bosom, but in the bosom of the church.

Jung: Where is it? How do I create it?

Soul: Stone by stone. Your dreams will speak.

He did build his Tower stone by stone, but not to house converts. It was intended as nothing so literal, although rough and solid.

Jung may have a “religious mania,” but that didn’t include a desire to found a church. He tries to clarify how literally to take all this:

Jung: Shall I become a sect leader? What the devil! No, no, no!

Soul: The beautiful and natural will nestle and show ways. The church is something natural as well.

Jung: Should it be something external?

Soul: No, internal.

Jung: Why then ceremonies?

Soul: There are also internal ceremonies. The ceremony must be dissolved and become spirit. The bridge should lead out beyond humanity. Inviolable, far, of the air. Your bridge is too low. People will knock their heads on it. There is a community of spirits.

Jung: What, should there be no outer community?

Soul: No, but an inner spiritual community.

Nothing visible, then, and everything “spiritual,” which Jung would also understand as psychological. Soul adds: “Outer dealings are limited to signs with solid meaning.” By “signs” she means what Jung would understand as symbols.

Jung holds the striving for individuation as a sacred mission, one that awakens even God:

The primordial creator of the world, the blind creative libido, becomes transformed in man through individuation & out of this process which is like pregnancy, arises a divine child, a reborn God, no more (longer) dispersed into the millions of creatures, but being one & this individual, and at the same time all individuals, the same in you as in me.

This new God is “born in many individuals, but they don’t know it. He is a ‘spiritual’ God. A spirit in many people, yet one and the same everywhere.” When we fail to recognize this sunlike god and luminous higher value, wars ignite, and the planet too.

Jung saw this at first as an individual project. Now, however, Soul insists on what sounds like a group striving.

He is understandably curious about where all this could lead and asks Soul for “a glimpse forward”:

Soul: Temples in deserts? Secret societies? Ceremonies? Rituals? Colorful robes? Golden images of Gods of terrible aspect? None of them—those branded by the spirit of love, burnt by the fire recognize each other and speak the same language in hidden places. Small indications of the spirit placed here and there, hidden fire in hearts and minds....

Jung: Am I on the right way to this goal?

Soul: Yes, but you trust yourself to do it. Men wait for the redeeming news. You should impart more of it, but only to the few.

Only to the few, because “the genuine is rare and unrecognized. But it works from the few to the many, who do not recognize it.” A small group of individuators can influence everyone, eventually. Thus spake Soul.

Like all of us, Jung sometimes needs to hear difficult messages more than once. Not long after, a night of insomnia prompts him to ask Soul, “What induces you to keep me awake?” Soul replies that “the great work begins.”

Soul: You have been too unconscious for a long stretch. Now you must go to a higher level of consciousness.

Jung: I’m ready. What is it? Tell me!

Soul: Now listen closely: to no longer be a Christian is easy. But then what? For more is yet to come. Everything is waiting for you. And you? You remain silent and have nothing to say. But you ought to speak up. Why have you received the revelation? You mustn’t hide it. You busy yourself with the form? Has the form ever been important, when it is a matter of revelation?

Jung: But you are not thinking that I should publish what I have written? That would be a disaster. And who would understand it?

He then asks: What is my calling?

Soul: The new religion and its proclamation.

Jung: Oh God, how should I do this?

Soul: Do not be of such little faith. No one knows it as you do.

How are we to understand this “invisible church” and “new religion”?

The invisible church is an idea from Valentinian Gnosticism. This aeonic Church, a kind of celestial archetype of Spiritual Community, transformed into the idea of those possessing gnosis being joined in the spirit. Sethian Gnostics told tales about the Kingless (or Immovable) Generation of Gnostics inwardly linked by their common connection to the ultimate nongendered God. An update to this seems to be what Soul/Sophia was pushing for.

Some would say the new religion is Jungian psychology, a psychology that offers access to sacred experience. But we must see that psychology in a wider context and bear in mind Who is really speaking about it. Jung’s version begins with large amounts of imported Gnosticism and broadens into a Hermetic project. Most of what interests him down the decades is Hermetic, including ideas and practices from those aspects of European Romanticism influenced by Hermeticism. Even synchronicity, the occurrence of meaningful coincidences framed by Jung and physicist Wolfgang Pauli as a kind of natural law, rests on the Hermetic (and before that, Stoic) concept of the correspondence between worlds: “As above, so below” as alchemists stated it.

Soul seems to imply that Jung’s psychologizing isn’t fully up to the challenge of renewing Hermeticism: “The bridge should lead out beyond humanity....” and include plants, animals, Earth, and even the cosmos. That is more than therapeutic psychology. “Your bridge is too low. People will knock their heads on it.” James Hillman might speak to this when he says depth psychology leads into cosmology (I would add: into ecology too). Late in his own life, while speaking with Sonu Shamdasani, Hillman made the startling claim that the Red Book material meant more to him than all Jung’s later theorizing.

No outward church, and no literal sacraments. Here we see at least some of Jung’s resistance to the creation of analytic training programs. He had to be talked into it. He probably feared the entire time that Ka would get his thick fingers on them and turn them into creeds and dogmas. (Ka at least had a hand in it: some of these institutional efforts were funded by money made from mining and fossil fuel production.)

Bringing relationality back into the picture, Soul also tells Jung to look for “thrice-holy Isis,” and not just in women. And to live with his wife and friends in peace: he is no longer to seek, for he has paid off the sins of the father.

The Egyptian sky goddess Nut then sends Soul some runes for Jung. The image of Isis is present in them, but they signify that Jung is still one-sidedly out of balance and needs to connect his consciousness to the earth. The runes include three suns as signs of “the new religion” to be tended by the triumvirate of Jung (playing Osiris), Toni (dark Nephthys), and Emma (motherly Isis). “I read you only those hieroglyphs that you need to establish the relationship with your neighbors, otherwise the religion will not become actual” (January 8, 1922). “And it should

become actual. But it expresses itself visibly only in the transformation of human relations.” Not in chapels or doctrines.

Jung took some of this to heart. In a 1923 seminar held in Cornwall, he said, “When we make individual relationships we lay the foundations for an invisible church.”

Cary Baynes, a translator who worked with Jung on the Red Book, mentioned in a paper on human relations that during the seminar, students of Jung “discussed the possible contribution to be made by Analytical Psychology to the ‘church’ of the future.”

We meant by this ill-omened word church, the inevitable form which will be assumed by the ideas of today that tend toward a new synthesis of subjective experience. For it was agreed that in order for ideas of this sort to survive, a form of one kind or another was indispensable...

This was already different from what Soul had insisted upon. Also, the repeated emphasis on subjectivity at least potentially reinforced the long-troublesome split between inner and outer worlds, a split Jung’s visions transcended. Baynes went on:

The special contribution of psychoanalysis [this was before Jungians stopped considering themselves psychoanalysts] was thought to be the building up of the right sorts of relationships, both individual and collective, and the vision of a future in which one came into full self-expression through relationships instead of skulking into them hemmed by a thousand fears...

That Soul would have agreed with.

Book 7 and Final Entries

Soul went on: “You know everything that is to be known from the revelation offered to you, but you are not yet living out everything that is to be lived at this time.” Jung was to turn to his wife for guidance. “You should also speak to her like this, and just as I answer your questions, so also will she answer. You trust me to speak from myself, why do you not also trust your wife? Much rather you should trust your wife.”

He admits this is difficult for him: “I shy away from people’s emotions and from my own.” He agrees to try.

Soul:

Therefore expect no further knowledge from me. You know everything that is to be known from the revelation offered to you, but you are not yet living out everything that is to be lived at this time.

A subsequent conversation about the Self being perceptible “if you are outside with yourself” and not just going inside implies that restoring what Erich Neumann named the ego-Self axis—a conscious relation to the archetype of wholeness—depends on intimacy with other people. Soul

continues: “If you accepted this inner death and held your last supper with this corpse and received the germ of God from this death, then you feel the self as the God in you.” All this was to be lived, on earth and in relationships, not just intuited, thought, felt, dreamed, or imagined.

Back in Book 5, Soul had warned Jung she would rise again and “return to eternal glitter and shimmer.” She admonishes, “You have been in immortal company long enough. Your work belongs to the earth.” At first he blames himself for her coming leave-taking, but she assures him that it’s in her nature. Sophia falls to earth and rises to reenter the heavenly heights. In 1921 she had reminded him to make use of “the healing force given to woman,” care for himself better, rest more, stop smoking in the morning, eat less, and drink less wine. “You can be more sober.”

In 1923, Emilie Preiswerk, Jung’s mother, died after her son had dreamed about it. Her father and husband had been pastors.

Soul’s communications dropped off after this loss. Later, Jung would write about how becoming more conscious of the anima depotentiated it, robbing it of its autonomy. The same dynamic applied to other inner figures as well. In case histories, Jung showed how particular archetypes rose, participated in extended conversation with open-hearted humans, bestowed teachings and blessings, and sank back into unconsciousness. Another way of seeing it: When we no longer depend so much on these aeonic figures, they withdraw to allow us to take better charge of our lives.

After this, Jung seldom returned to the Black Books, using them mainly for recording dreams and occasional brief encounters with Soul. In 1926, he dreamed a Swiss church he had drawn, then a temple. The invisible church made visible? His Aunt Sophie and her architect son also appeared in a dream. Sophia and her son, demiurge and builder of the lower world, were still at large, somewhere.

In January of 1927, on the same night that Jung dreamed of two ogres, one light and the other dark (the light one wanted to attack him), Jung had his famous “Liverpool” dream:

I am with several young Swiss in Liverpool, down by the docks. It is a dark rainy night, with smoke and clouds. We walk up to the upper part of town, which lies on a plateau. We come to a small circular lake in a centrally located garden. In the middle of this there is an island. The men speak of a Swiss who lives here in such a sooty, dark dirty city. But I see that on the island stands a magnolia tree covered with red flowers illuminated by an eternal sun...

A pristine tree on an island in a lake in a garden on a plateau, all separated from smoke, soot, clouds, and urban life. Jung considered the tree a Self symbol, but as an image of wholeness, it remains in an artificial garden, disconnected from the life around it.

Soon after, Soul appears after a dream of himself in dawn-colored clothes and says, “You must wane” so that “a greater light begins to stream.”

The last entry, on December 14/15, 1923, bears the title “The Quest Begins.” Jung had cast the I Ching and received the hexagram 21, Biting Through. The image is of teeth separated by an obstacle that must be energetically bitten through. He was about to enter public life more fully, which he dreaded but knew he had to do for the sake of his work.

He also recorded three dreams:

I. I am together with Prof. Fierz.

II. A farmer and his wife completely smeared with mud, naked, rolling in the field mindlessly drunk.

III. Joggi [his dog] snaps a great piece of ham from me that I had hung as if from a fishing line. I get it again, but a significant part has however fallen to the dog.

Fierz was a chemist. Jung would soon be fiercely consumed by his alchemical studies. A fanciful title for this dream might be, “An Opus Begins,” similar to the title Jung gave this Black Book entry.

Are the farmer and his wife a reprise of Philemon and his neglected partner Baucis? Carl and Emma? Osiris and Isis? Someone else? Whoever they are, they don’t lack for earthiness. Proposed title: “The Revenge of Isis as Aided by Geb.” Why shouldn’t the Earth deities have the next-to-last say?

The last lines in the Black Books belong to Joggi, whose leg-puller of a name echoed Jacob, who wrestled an angel. Previously, Jung associated fishing with Christ, who taught the disciples to be “fishers of men.” Given his penchant for exaggeration and drama, perhaps the title could be: “Let the Hamming Go to the Dogs.”

In any case, Jung went on with his work. His confrontation with the unconscious had given him a lifetime of troubled treasure to unpack, polish, and present to eager learners.

Continuing the Work

When Jung had asked Soul if she could see how his work would develop, she replied, “Only vaguely at best. It is too far away. There is so much unheard of with things barely sayable in between—wars, plights of every kind. Much, infinitely much confusion—tediously back and forth. One would like to despair of humanity.” World War II, the Atomic Age, the Cold War, space flight, the Information Age, and climate change all lay in the future.

Jung shared with Soul an intense focus on the past, even while foreseeing so much of what awaited. In fact, being stuck in the past recurred as a motif in many of Jung’s dreams: pre-history, 12th century, 17th century, others. In August 1919 he was dreaming of old books in a museum and of the Acts of Thomas, a Gnostic gospel, in a barn. The center of each page bore the image of an archaic prophet, his words in hieroglyphics. He had cut back his private practice so he could focus on the Red Book. It should not surprise us that, politically, Jung was a

conservative of the type who flourished in the States during the '40s and '50s. Inevitably, this colored his work.

Jung was fully aware that his approach to psychology rooted itself firmly in the Hermetic tradition. He even wore a signet ring bearing a Gnostic serpent symbol. The serpent also recalled Agathodaimon, a primal Hermetic entity associated with good fortune, wisdom, and the spirit of place. For Egyptian priests, the serpent recalled Atum, the ultimate God beyond gender, concept, or idea.

Although the Black Books offer revelations near and far—on the founding of Jung's version of depth psychology; on the rebirth of god images in the psyche; on the historical interplay of captivating archetypal images and collective fantasies; on spirituality vs. religion; on the uses of active imagination to access the inward depths; on the limitations of self-exploration for healing and maturing; on the intersection of personal and collective consciousness—the question we will consider is: To what extent did Jung update and dream forward Hermeticism in modern dress?

It may seem odd to compare Jungian depth psychology with a spiritual wisdom path, but anyone familiar with Jungian practices knows how they put conscious life in direct touch with the transpersonal, the archetypal, and the mythic. (The development of [terrapsychology](#) has added the ecological.) Overlaps between the two fields are too numerous to list here. Naturally: Jung mined Gnosticism's myths and Hermeticism's technical traditions for his own use. It is legitimate, then, to view Jungian psychology as a psychological avatar of Hermeticism.

As such, it has provided a psychological path to spiritual adventure, shown how what have been known as gods work their strange magic in us, made us more aware of the myths we live by and that live us, offered an array of tools for plumbing the depths and bringing their wisdom to light. It has given us dream interpretation, typological knowledge, shadow integration methods, sacred space for healing, and a template for individuation. And much else besides, as the Black Books highlight by giving us peeks at the Jung hard at work in his alchemical sanctum.

No update can be complete, however. Here are a few examples of areas in need of further work as illustrated by what the Black Books have revealed:

The archetype made me do it. Being seized by an archetype can be overwhelming, as anyone who has fallen in love can attest. But we still choose what to do about it. As Jung insisted throughout his career, we must not surrender that capacity. Losing it cripples consciousness, as when people wait around for hints from the unconscious before deciding anything important. Heidegger's "only a god can save us" isn't profound, it's capitulation. When we lame ourselves like this, Trickster is apt to walk in and shake things up until we take charge once more.

Reifying inner figures. Once seriously engaged, the unconscious wants to be known. It will address us through whatever conceptual schema we apply. If we think in terms of sinister shadow figures, it will supply some to further the conversation and our self-knowledge. There is no fixed path of archetypes laid out to guide us downward: persona, shadow, anima/animus, Wise Ones, Self. These later theoretical formulations certainly did not show up like that for Jung during his confrontation with the unconscious. It might be more helpful (as James Hillman

suggests) to engage whatever figures arise in terms of the mythologies they bring. Instead of psychological functions, we might take them as characters in stories.

Psychologism. Respecting the integrity of these figures would have been helpful with “Soul,” who knew she was Sophia but never convinced Jung she was anything more than the anima. The gods are not reducible to psyche, even when we think of them as archetypes. They seem to be more like sentient natural forces with a psychological dimension, as [terrapsychology](#) holds them. The archetypal, all-pervasive quality of Wisdom in the cosmos shows up as Sophia in old stories (along with a number of her sisters: White Buffalo Calf Woman, Nuwa, Athena, others) and as a particular character inwardly. Trickster as the dimension of play in the world, Zeus and Olorun as the higher view of things, Hera and Frigg as family and kindred, Isis as nature’s generosity: they show up outside and inside us simultaneously, as the Hermeticists told in their myths.

Hyperindividualism. Soul’s efforts to the contrary, Jung continued to hold up the individual as the key to deep transformation. He gave an occasional nod to the fact that every individual is part of a network of human and more-than-human relationships in the world, but most of what he developed was for individual use, including analysis. Analysts who trained with him left accounts of his resistance to group or community work. Fortunately, this has changed over the generations, but it’s still official Jungian dogma in the classically oriented programs even though most humans live in collectively oriented cultures. The Black Book reinforces the need for a relational emphasis as modeled by the collaboration between Jung, Emma Jung, and Toni Wolff.

Subjectivism. This goes with hyperindividualism and is, philosophically, a kind of Cartesianism that splits inner from outer, valuing the first and devaluing the second. The extreme version of this is narcissism: others count only insofar as they serve as mirrors, symbols, and support suppliers. It has been argued that subjectivism and hyperindividualism have amplified the human-caused decline of the natural world: a world traditional Jungians tend to value only for its symbolic qualities and not for itself, as Jung did in his better moments. But as Philemon insisted, “The time has come when things speak.”

Evolutionism. Jung’s contrasts between “primitives” and modern European has long been recognized as both colonial and outdated. Likewise with his religious schema of assigning animism to the childhood of humanity and monotheism to later developmental stages. The racist shadow of this has also been remarked upon ever since Franz Fanon criticized it (see also Fanny Brewster’s more recent work). Ranking types of cultural experience by white European standards of rationality or consciousness has never served depth psychology. Fortunately, the field seems to be moving beyond it.

Splitting into gendered “opposites.” This is not only formulaic, it excludes psychologies that don’t fall into either opposite. In the polarization of Divine Masculine and Divine Feminine, for example, where do trans and genderqueer people go? Is being assertive always “masculine”? What about Artemis? Yemaya? These often-criticized essentialist categories cannot be shored up by an appeal to their symbolism—“Don’t take them literally”—and should be packed up for good, as Soul repeatedly implied to Jung.

Psychology as hard science. Soul and Philemon insisted that depth psychology as Jung, Toni Wolff, and Emma Jung developed it should include science as language and metaphor. The category error of reducing psyche to neural circuitry is another step entirely, one that appeals to the quick fix mentality in search of “evidence-based” solutions in lieu of the hard work of individuation. In the United States, [“scientific” mainstream psychology has so thoroughly sold its soul](#) that its proponents won’t even wait for the highest bidder: it helps police state forces to profile and track peaceful activists, oppressive governments to torture suspects, and malignant corporations to manipulate consumers into buying toxic products they do not need. As much as Jung described psychology as an “empirical” science, he schooled himself well in the humanities, and that is where depth psychology belongs.

Creedal clannishness. This has surfaced in Jungian training programs, more in some than in others, from Marie-Louise von Franz onward. The confusion seems to lie in what Soul called “the few” and may go all the way back to Gnosticism’s typology: *hylikoi* (materialists), *psychikoi* (believers), and *gnostikoi* (Gnostics). The problem is that many Gnostics ranked these types instead of seeing that all are needed in a fully alive human society. It wasn’t just that Gnostics favored a spiritual path of seeking suitable only for a relative few. The few were considered better—higher, holier, the elect—for that reason. Whenever a group thinks itself essentially better somehow than the rest of us, it digs the pit for its own historical decline. The Black Books show us what the dismantling of elitism might look like.

Lack of music and pageantry. Neither Freud or Jung had much use for music. Not for them the lutes that accompanied Ficino’s pivotal translations. This has been remedied to some extent by later practitioners, who now rely on sandtray, dance, art, sculpture, movement, and drama therapy. Music in particular could use more incorporation into depth theory beyond Jungian writings about poets and artists listening to the collective unconscious. Creativity is not an add-on, but, as Rollo May observed in *The Courage to Create*, the very fountainhead of human life, including psychological life.

The image of a god reborn lingers after we close the last Black Book. What, really, is Phanes? With connections to Mithras, Aion, Dionysus, Protogonos, and even the Egyptian god Ptah, father of wizardly Imhotep, he also appears as the Anthropos, the primal human of Gnosticism and Hermeticism: a magical being of light who descends into matter. Gnostics say he was trapped there, Hermetics that he enjoyed Nature’s appreciative embrace. Which we prefer depends perhaps on our mood.

What we know is that this magical god’s theme of dying and rising in flame and light has reached a planetary scale. Perhaps Phanes is everything burning down, with some of it lost forever. We do well to recall that the archetype of Apocalypse brings *two* motions, two wingbeats of the descending and rising Phoenix: the phase of dying, and, afterward, the phase of renewal. Perhaps a reimagined Hermeticism can play some role in sustaining us with healing stories until we complete the cycle. As the Black Books advise,

The uncertain way is the good way; upon it lie possibilities. Be unwavering and create.

Resources:

Chalquist, C. (2020). “‘Heaven in the World’: Can a Lost Tradition of Nature Reverence Reenchant Our Worldview?”

Healy, N. (2017). *Toni Wolff & C. G. Jung: A Collaboration*. Tiberius Press.

Jung, C., & Shamdasani, S. (Ed.) (2020). *The Black Books of C.G. Jung (1913-1932)*. Philemon Foundation & W. W. Norton.

Jung, C., & Shamdasani, S. (Ed.) (2009). *The Red Book: Liber Novus*. Philemon Foundation & W. W. Norton.

#jungblackbooks #blackbooks #jungredbooks #terrapsychology #depthpsychology #ecotherapy #ecopsychology