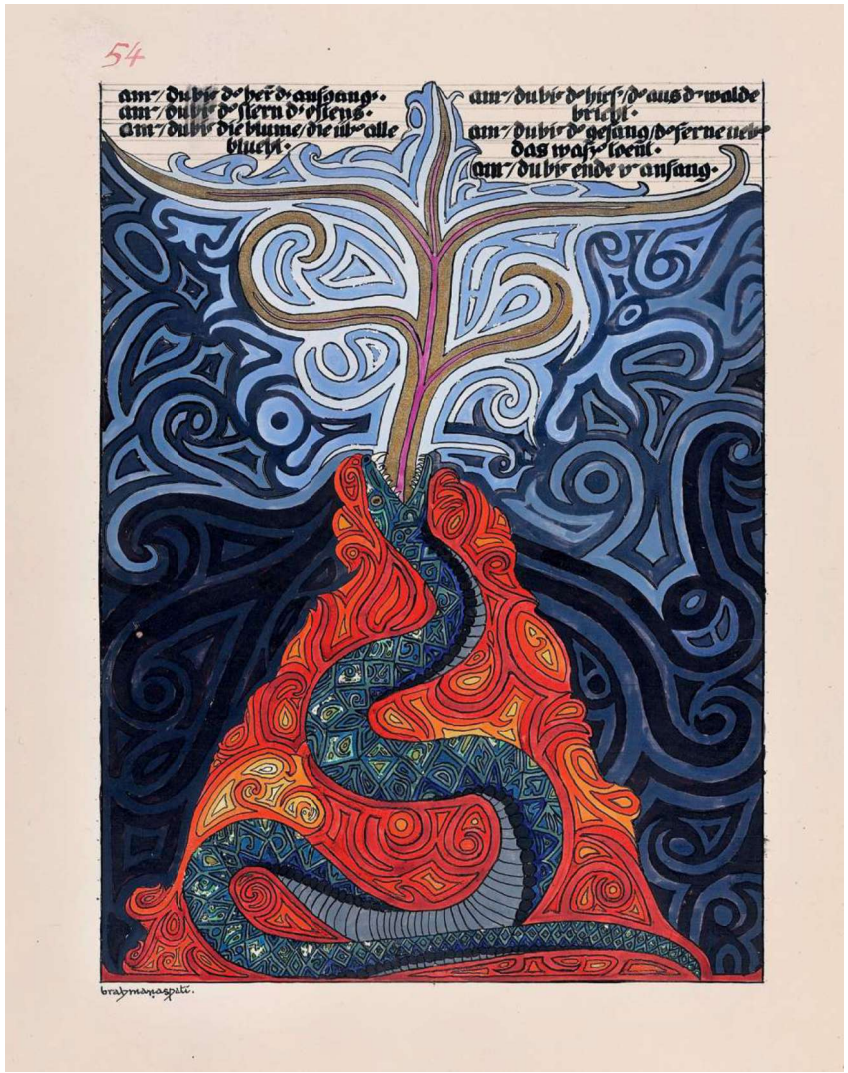


Opposite:
Manuscript of Carl Gustav Jung's *Liber Novus* (The Red Book),
1915–30, 1959 (unfinished), p. 54
Ink, tempera, and gold paint on paper,
40 x 30 x 10 cm
Foundation of the Works of C. G. Jung, Zurich

Wakeful Daydreaming: Jung and the Red Book

Ruth Netzer

> *The Red Book is at the centre of Jung's life and work. A definitive biography of Jung without an accurate account of it would be like writing the life of Dante without the* Commedia, *or Goethe without* Faust.
>
> Sonu Shamdasani, *Jung Stripped Bare by His Biographers, Even*, p. 103

Carl Gustav Jung (1875–1961), one of the greatest thinkers and intellectuals of the twentieth century, was the founder of analytical psychology. His encounter with Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), the "father of psychoanalysis," was the most influential event of Jung's early years as a psychiatrist. The fact that Jung, a Swiss, became the first non-Jew to join the emerging psychoanalytic group was a matter of great satisfaction to Freud, who wished to create an international and not exclusively Jewish movement. Freud regarded Jung as his chosen pupil and successor, and in the early years of their friendship he treated him like a son. Over the years, however, disagreements between the two deepened, especially with regard to the concept of the libido, which Freud believed to be of sexual origin, while Jung understood the term more broadly as representing "psychic energy" from more than one source. In another difference of opinion, Jung stressed the spiritual basis of the psyche, while Freud grounded the id in sexuality, aggression, and overarching instinctive drives. To the personal unconscious defined by Freud, Jung added the collective unconscious, which expresses universal archetypes and instincts.

Accordingly, Jung's perception of dreams differed from that of Freud. Freud regarded dreams as an attempt to conceal repressed information related, principally, to sexuality and aggression, and as fulfilling latent wishes, while Jung perceived dreams as a drive to raise repressed material into consciousness. The dream's purpose is therefore to expand consciousness in order to realize the self. Jung wrote in his diary: "Dreams pave the way for life, and they determine you without you understanding their language."[1] As he understood them, dreams express the entire rich content of the psyche. Jung distinguished between "ordinary" dreams, which derive from the personal unconscious mind, and "big" dreams, which possess a mythic quality and stem from the collective unconscious. Freud had difficulty accepting ideas that differed from his own and, after confronting Jung, severed relations with him. Jung suffered a profound crisis.

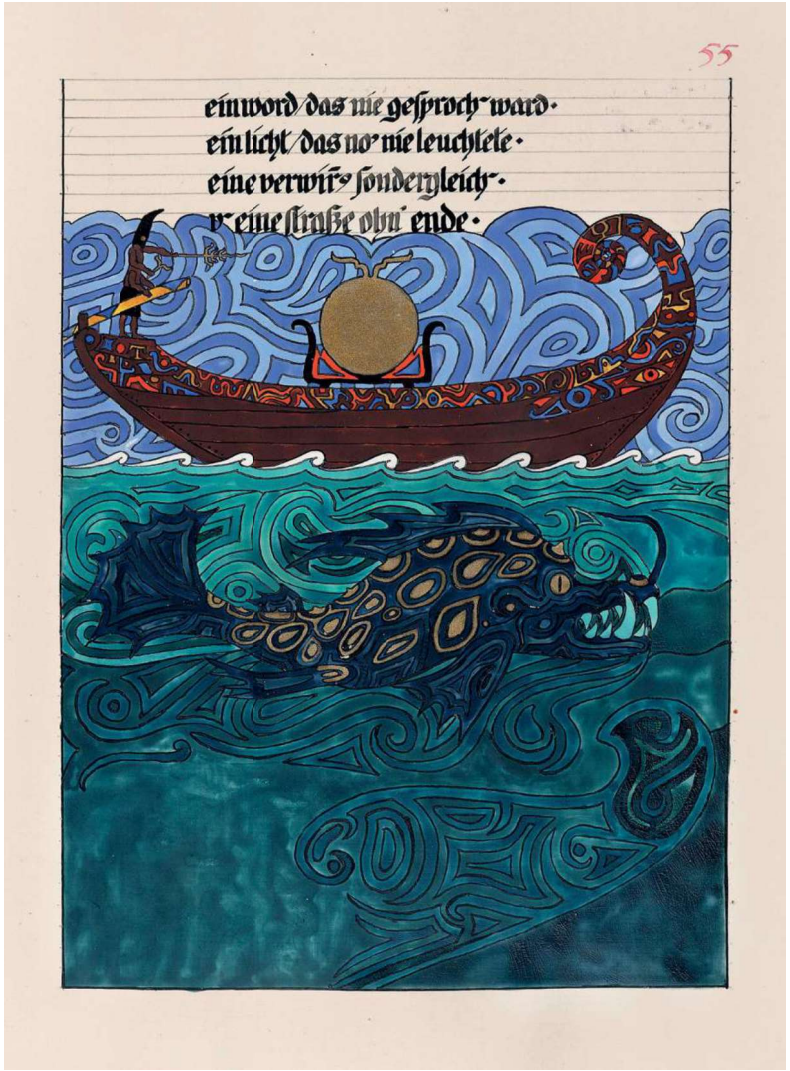
After the two parted ways, Jung turned his attention to the development of his own ideas and embarked upon a courageous journey of self-healing. Harnessing

dreams, hallucinations, visions, active imagining, and drawings, he entered the depths of his own unconscious. The visionary, mythic writings and pictures he produced in the course of this journey were described in his Black Books, which he later edited, reworked, and illustrated in his journal, known as the Red Book.[2]

All this had its beginnings with an overwhelming personal experience: "It happened in October of the year 1913 as I was suddenly overcome in broad daylight by a vision. 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. The vision lasted for two hours, it confused me and made me ill. I was not able to interpret it. Two weeks passed, then the vision returned, still more violent than before, and an inner voice spoke: 'Look at it, it is completely real, and it will come to pass. You cannot doubt this.' I wrestled again for two hours with this vision, but it held me fast. It left me exhausted and confused. And I thought my mind had gone crazy," he wrote.[3] Fearing that he was becoming psychotic, he recalled: "The vision of the flood seized me and I felt the spirit of the depths, but I did not understand him. Yet he drove me on with unbearable inner longing."[4] In April 1914, Jung had a dream in which he saw a glacier slide down from the north in midsummer to freeze the entire land. Residents from all over the region fled, and the cold killed all the vegetation.

This dream from April 1914 reappeared in May and again in June. The conclusion of the final dream was surprising: the leaves of a tree that had previously frozen turned into sweet, healing fruit. Jung picked some and distributed the therapeutic fruit to the many people who had gathered round the tree. This version of the dream appears to mean that even when someone is not in touch with his or her unconscious or is in a state of psychic paralysis, the standstill can be temporary – in the end the tree produces its fruit: qualities that heal the spirit.

In August 1914, when the First World War broke out, Jung saw his dream visions not as symptoms of madness, but as an intimation of the horrific collective experience which lay in store for Europe. He understood that something in his personal fate and something in the fate of the world had intersected, that his visions were prophetic, and that he needed to investigate this connection. Ultimately, he came to the conclusion that the individual unconscious was related to the unconscious of the nation. The individual's psychology was reflected in that of the people, and vice-versa. Jung wrote that the collective unconscious becomes active in the individual psyche in two situations. The first is personal crisis, and the second is social, political, or religious upheaval. In times of political crisis, he wrote, the individual's disorientation is not pathological, and people who are particularly intuitive can use dreams or visions of a socially redemptive nature to draw new strength from the collective unconscious. Of course, the fact that Jung's visions of 1913–14 proved prophetic does not rule out the possibility that they also signaled a mental breakdown following the separation from Freud, reflecting profound anxieties but eventually anticipating his recovery.



Manuscript of the Red Book, p. 55
Ink, tempera, and gold paint on paper,
40 x 30 x 10 cm
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In the wake of these dreams, and after the crisis of parting from Freud, Jung began to heal himself by actively and meditatively entering another state of hallucinatory consciousness: a form of directed dreaming while awake. In this state, he saw images and encountered imaginary events and characters. He conversed with the inner personages who figured in his visions and learned everything he could about his own unconscious and the workings of the collective unconscious – a process he called "active imagination." Jung understood that in order to devise a non-Freudian psychotherapy connected to dreams and fantasies, he must first treat his own psyche using this method. His goal was to simultaneously experience and examine his visions, while remaining detached from the potentially overwhelming products of the unconscious. He attempted to translate his emotions into images, to grasp the fantasy that was playing out, and to describe the emotions in a process he called "confronting the unconscious." Unlike visions experienced in psychotic states, Jung's entry into and exit from the unconscious was deliberate, a matter of choice.

Jung's visions, as depicted in the Red Book, bear traces of submerged influences from numerous religions and myths – Indian, Egyptian, Greek, Gnostic, Jewish, and Christian – and are inhabited by mythic characters. From the Gnostics he took Abraxas and Basilides; from Greece, Philemon; from Judeo-Christian literature, Elijah and Salome; and from India, Izdubar (a wild figure reminiscent of the ancient Babylonian Gilgamesh), Krishna, Buddha, and Kali. Most are embodiments of basic archetypes: the monk, the red man, the snake, Death, the beautiful woman. The characters Jung "met" in his dreaming confronted him with unfamiliar parts of his psyche. Asking each one why it had appeared to him, he understood that he had to get to know these characters, to accept and learn from them, while at the same time remaining separate. Jung said that all unknown inhabitants of the inner world had to be taken seriously, because they were real. Once his vision or his dialogue with the characters was over, Jung would depict the experience in words and drawings.

Jung's experiments in active imagination went on for four years. He processed most of the experiences in writing and drawing up until 1920, although the creation of the Red Book continued sporadically until 1930. Jung recommended this technique aimed at probing the psyche and the collective unconscious to his patients. He showed them his drawings and explained their meaning, instructing them in active imagination and teaching how to create their own "red books." Visions, dialogue, drawing, and interpretation enabled Jung to control the chaos, the yawning chasm inside him and to transmute frightening raw material into something useful and creative.

Manuscript of the Red Book, p. 119
Ink, tempera, and gold paint on paper,
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In the Red Book's chapter on the soul and God, he wrote, ". . . my dreams are the speech of my soul. I must carry them in my heart, and go back and forth over them in my mind, like the words of a person dearest to me. Dreams are the guiding words of the soul."[5] He further said that dreams can be deciphered not by the intellect, but by the heart's wisdom, which is granted only to those who live their lives to the full: "The knowledge of the heart is in no book and is not to be found in the mouth of any teacher, but grows out of you like the green seed from the dark earth."[6] The post-Jungian psychologist James Hillman emphasized this idea in the second half of the twentieth century, when instead of interpreting a dream's images, he sought to relate to it from within "the thought of the heart."[7]

The Red Book formed the basis of the therapeutic theory that Jung went on to develop. As he foresaw in his dream, he reaped the sweet fruits of the collective unconscious and invited – and continues to invite – people throughout the world to eat of them. In the final dream, Jung connected with the Tree of Life, with his real self, and so was cured and brought healing to others. He "fell" into himself, and found himself. It was a journey into selfhood, accompanied by his friend Toni Wolff, who helped him to process and understand his marvelous experiences. At the same time, while occupied with the world of visions, Jung continued to treat his patients and stay in contact with family and the real world. When engaged in wakeful active dreaming, he posed questions about various aspects of life and received answers from his inner guides – the characters with whom he "conversed."

Jung realized that his personal crisis of 1913 and the writing of the Red Book were mid-life experiences in which he developed previously neglected aspects of the personality. He experienced his inner journey as a quest for the soul he had lost when he concentrated on his career and abandoned the depths of the psyche in favor of its rational side. The world of dreaming enabled him to encounter his soul once again. At the same time, he sought a religious-spiritual belief unaffiliated with organized religion that would enable him to express his own unique, deeply rooted personal religiosity. Thus he anticipated the present-day trend of secular spirituality.

Jung would not allow his diary to be published. He knew the general public was not yet ready to accept his ideas and feared – rightly, it must be said – that his imaginings would be construed as madness. Human insight into the psyche needed to broaden and deepen to the point where someone different or strange would be regarded as a creative thinker rather than a madman. It was not until nearly fifty years after Jung's death that the Red Book became accessible to the public. Its publication in 2009 aroused great excitement, a feeling of momentous discovery, even epiphany: at last it was possible to see this treasure, which offers a direct, experiential encounter with the process that led to the creation of Jungian theory. The result was a wealth of articles and monographs, seminars and conferences. With its artistic, psychological, and historical importance, the Red Book has been recognized as a milestone in the understanding of dreams and the human psyche.

1 Carl Gustav Jung, *The Red Book (Liber Novus): A Reader's Edition*, ed. Sonu Shamdasani, trans. Mark Kyburz, John Peck, and Sonu Shamdasani (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2009), p. 133.

2 These titles came from the actual colors of the books' covers, and eventually the Red Book was published posthumously with this name, though Jung himself called it *Liber Novus*.

3 *The Red Book* (above, note 1), pp. 123–24.

4 Ibid., p. 127.

5 Ibid., p. 132.

6 Ibid., p. 133.

7 See James Hillman, *The Thought of the Heart and the Soul of the World* (reprint; Spring Publications, 1998).