

The Gnostic 3

A Journal of Gnosticism, Western Esotericism and Spirituality

ΠΡΟΦΗΤΩΝ ΠΑΤΗΡ ΠΟΛΥΦΙΛΟΣ ΦΙΛΗΜΩΝ



The Hermeneutics of Vision: C. G. Jung and *Liber Novus*

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Monograph Edition

This article was originally published in:
The Gnostic: A Journal of Gnosticism, Western Esotericism and Spirituality
Issue 3, July 2010, pp. 23–46.

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Jung and Aion: Time, Vision and a Wayfaring Man

C. G. Jung and the Tradition of Gnosis

C. G. Jung and The Red Book: Liber Novus

The Hermeneutics of Vision: C. G. Jung and Liber Novus

Lance S. Owens

ON THE EVENING of 12 November 1913, Carl Gustav Jung arrived at the mythic crossroads of his life. A power emerging from the depths was compelling him toward a journey he did not comprehend. Unexpected words were demanding his voice. He reached into a desk drawer, retrieved the journal he had abandoned eleven years earlier, and opened it to a blank leaf.

Jung was thirty-eight years old, a famous doctor, clinical investigator, and leader of Freud's revolutionary psychoanalytic movement. He sat in the study of the new mansion he had built for his family on the shores of Lake Zurich. But this night he faced the darkness of a starker interior fact: during a decade of meteoric success, he had lost something precious. Jung had lost his soul.

Now She awaited. He turned to the empty page, scribed the date at top, and began:

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

Do you still know me? How long the separation lasted! Everything has become so different. And how did I find you? How strange my journey was! What words should I use to tell you on what twisted paths a good star has guided me to you? Give me your hand, my almost forgotten soul. How warm the joy at seeing you again, you long disavowed soul. Life has led me back to you. ... My soul, my journey should continue with you. I will wander with you and ascend to my solitude.¹

I.

The odyssey that commenced that evening and proceeded intensely for the next five years would transform Jung. In old age he testified:

The years ... 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.

But exactly what it was that happened—what he experienced, what he saw and heard and recorded in his ledger of the journey—remained Jung’s hidden mystery.

Historians, biographers and critics struggled to explain this seminal period in his life. They called it a creative illness, a period of introspection, a psychotic break, or simply madness.² Lacking any factual foundation, all these words were vessels of pure speculation. Jung’s own record remained hidden.

And Jung had kept an extensive and detailed record. First, there were six sequentially dated journals, known as the “black books,” which he began this night in November of 1913 and continued through the early 1920s. These journals might be best described as his primary and contemporaneous ledger of a voyage of discovery into imaginative and visionary reality, what he termed “my most difficult experiment.”³ By 1915, as the magnitude of his experience penetrated him, he felt the need for a more formal and elaborate recording of the visions. With great artistic craft—employing antique illuminated calligraphic text and stunning artwork—Jung labored for sixteen years translating the primary record of his experience from the black books into an elegant folio-sized leather-bound volume: this is the famous but long-sequestered *Red Book*. Jung titled it *Liber Novus*, “The New Book.”

Throughout his life the *Red Book*, *Liber Novus* remained veiled. Only a handful of his closest students and colleagues were allowed to examine it; after his death in 1961, his family refused all requests (and they were fre-

quent) for access to the volume or to the secret Black Books.⁴ For the last several decades, the Red Book was closed away in a Swiss bank vault, unseen by anyone.

Now nearly a century after the record began, both the book and the experience that produced the book have been opened. With the full cooperation of Jung's heirs and after thirteen years of exhaustively detailed editorial work by Dr. Sonu Shamdasani, in October of 2009 W.W. Norton published *The Red Book* in a full-sized folio facsimile edition, complete with an English translation, a comprehensive introduction, and over 1500 extensive editorial notes including excerpts from the black book journals and other previously unknown contemporaneous documents.

In sum, this publication signals a watershed in the understanding of the life and work of C. G. Jung. It is a revelation. In its light, our understanding of the story and history of Jung begins anew.

The Way of What is to Come

Liber Novus is the long occulted key to comprehending everything Jung said and wrote after 1916.⁵ But it is also a singularly modern document, a book unlike any other, defying categorization or comparison. It fractures expectations; it speaks with voices beyond common ken.

Whether one approaches *Liber Novus* as an historian, a psychologist, a literary critic or simply as an interested reader, the puzzle is the same: What was the man doing, what was happening to him? Is this record to be read as an imaginative literary creation, a psychological work veiled in prophetic language, an epoch-defining revelation, or as pure madness? How do we interpret Jung?

Jung well understood the problem. In private comments recorded by a close associate during the 1920s, he expressed his own doubts about whether the work could ever be revealed or understood.⁶ Modern language lacked words with meanings vital enough to convey the nature of what he had experienced. He himself struggled to understand it, find words to contain it or explain it. After more than a decade besieged with the burden of his revelation, and nearly as many years transcribing that revelation into *Liber Novus*, Jung concluded it could not be disclosed. No one would understand.

First must come another crucial work. He had to establish again in history a method to his madness, a hermeneutics to his vision. After 1928,

Jung set aside work on *Liber Novus* and turned to that task.⁷ It would occupy the remaining decades of his life. Throughout this extended enterprise, the seminal experience he faithfully served would remain hinted but hidden.

We now have the record of his experience, a transformative journey of discovery that lasted in intensity for about five years.⁸ And we have the corpus of Jung's public enterprise, the hermeneutics to his vision, extracted from that crucible over the forty following years. Finally, together, we see how in Jung they wed.

But like much of Jung's work, this too is a circular course. *Liber Novus* and the hermeneutic enterprise it fomented form a paradoxical *complexio*. Neither can be what it was until it has the other with it, as it is. The experience, and the knowledge granted by the experience, is one. Vision revealed a hermeneutics. The hermeneutics demands confrontation with the vision.

Once one enters the realm of *Liber Novus*, it is impossible to read Jung's collected works without hearing its echoing voice. Encountered anew, with *Liber Novus* in hand, the greater sum of Jung's subsequent writings is revealed as a vast hermeneutical project intent on opening to modern comprehension his experience, its record, and its centering fact: the forgotten reality of the Soul.

My soul, my journey should continue with you...

But what was the man doing, what was happening to him?

In early 1913 Jung's six year long association with Freud acrimoniously dissolved. These years had brought both frenetic activity and what Jung later identified as escalating self-alienation. It was a short passage in Jung's long life and it is best understood in the negative context of its failure.

When the two men first met in 1907, Jung was thirty-two years old and just finding professional footing. The elder Freud proffered exactly what the younger doctor then dearly sought: a comprehensive theory, seemingly built on years of clinical insight, that added order to Jung's own puzzle of observations and nascent intuitions about the psyche.

Jung initially embraced Freud with an almost religious zeal. Freud responded to this "Father complex" by precipitously proclaiming Jung a Joshua to his Moses, his successor and crown prince in the psychoanalytic movement. Of course, along with immense intellect and enthusiasm, Jung

brought Freud something else dearly needed: an exponent with international stature from outside the marginalized Jewish circle surrounding him in Vienna. The association with Jung and his respected Swiss colleagues put Freud on a much larger stage.

Jung was, however, not an obedient son. His own distinct intellectual background, powers of observation and natural predilections inexorably drew him toward views that Freud's dogma did not abide. Freud had firmly delimited the unconscious psyche as a midden of life's infantile traumas and sexual repressions, a dank cellar of personal pathology. Jung differed. He sensed in the soul not just the refuse of repression, but beneath that undeniable personal layer, deeper healing strata running to yet indeterminate sources.

In the visions of his psychotic patients and in the dreams and fantasies of more balanced individuals Jung had discerned primitive mythic motifs and symbolic images—evidences augmented by his own self-observation. What these espoused, how deeply they were rooted, he did not know. But this question became his central focus. When Jung published his massive—if somewhat chaotic—mythologic and symbolic study of the psyche, *Wandlungen und Symbole der Libido*⁹ in 1912, Freud saw final evidence of heresy. Jung saw in Freud a quasi-religious fixation on a theoretical creed. By hypostatizing his own sexual dogma, Freud had cut short the psyche.

The severing of his relationship with Freud was not “the cause of Jung's impending mental breakdown,” as past critics have facetiously suggested. With new facts at hand, the end of that association appears more a by-product of Jung's own relentless quest. And to this, Freud remained peripheral.¹⁰

The psyche—the soul—was an experienced force. But Jung could now say nothing more. He explained in the draft manuscript of *Liber Novus*, “I had to accept that what I had previously called my soul was not at all my soul, but a dead system that I had contrived.”¹¹

During the early months of 1913, his dreams presented puzzles he could not order. Inchoate forces stirred in the unconscious, petitioning a voice he did not own. This activation climaxed in October of 1913 with two repeated spontaneous visions:

In October, while I was alone on a journey, I was suddenly seized by an overpowering vision: I saw a monstrous flood covering all the northern and low-lying lands between the North Sea and the

Alps. When it came up to Switzerland I saw that the mountains grew higher and higher to protect our country. I realized that a frightful catastrophe was in progress. I saw the mighty yellow waves, the floating rubble of civilization, and the drowned bodies of uncounted thousands. Then the whole sea turned to blood. This vision lasted about one hour. I was perplexed and nauseated, and ashamed of my weakness.

Two weeks passed; then the vision recurred, under the same conditions, even more vividly than before, and the blood was more emphasized. An inner voice spoke. "Look at it well; it is wholly real and it will be so. You cannot doubt it."¹²

The eruption of over-powering visual hallucinations caused Jung to fear that he was "menaced with a psychosis."¹³ He had witnessed the disastrous sequels of such phenomena in many patients. Commenting in a private seminar twelve years later, he explained, "I thought to myself. 'If this means anything, it means that I am hopelessly off.'"¹⁴

Over the next weeks, he surveyed his situation, delving for any brand of insight that might staunch seeming insanity. He found none. There was no way back, no way around. From this crossroads, one solitary path awaited him: It went in.

And so, on the evening of 12 November 1913, Jung sat at his desk, opened his journal and addressed the mystery: "*Meine Seele, meine Seele, wo bist Du? (My Soul, my Soul, where are You?)*..."¹⁵ A year later, in reflection on these initial words, he added commentary:

The spirit of the depths forced me to say this and at the same time to undergo it against myself, since I had not expected it then. I still labored misguidedly under the spirit of this time, and thought differently about the human soul. I thought and spoke much of the soul. I knew many learned words for her, I had judged her and turned her into a scientific object.

I did not consider that my soul cannot be the object of my judgment and knowledge: much more are my judgment and knowledge the objects of my Soul. Therefore the spirit of the depths forced me to speak to my soul, to call upon her as a living and self-existing being. I had to become aware that I had lost my soul.

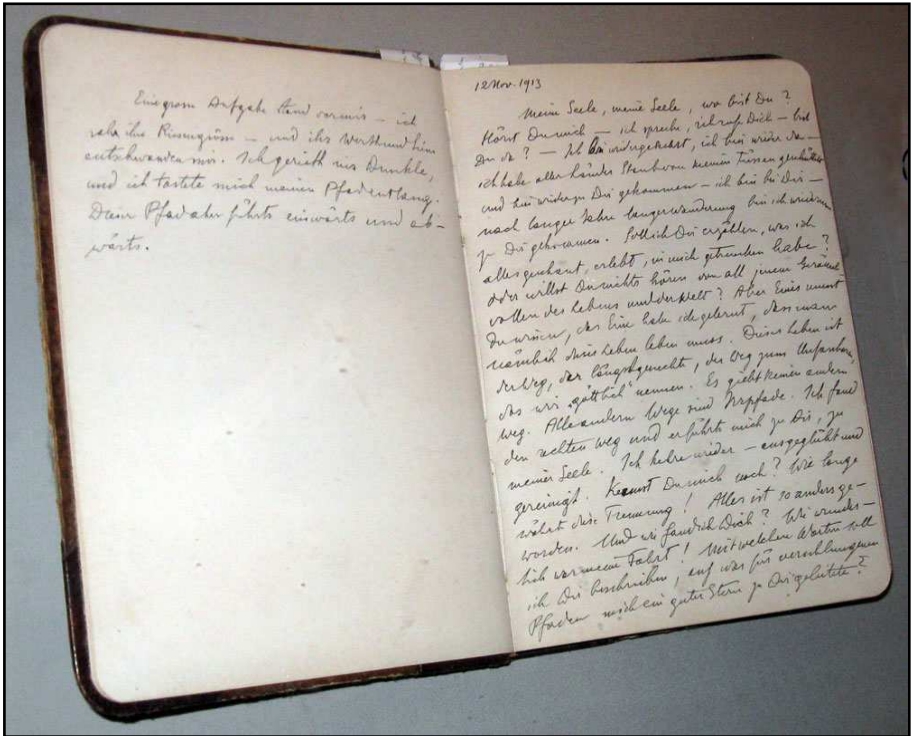


Figure 1. Jung's Black Book journal, opened to the entry of 12 November 1913, the night his journey began. (Photograph by author.)

From this we learn how the spirit of the depths considers the soul: he sees her as a living and self-existing being, and with this he contradicts the spirit of this time for whom the soul is a thing dependent on man, which lets herself be judged and arranged, and whose circumference we can grasp. I had to accept that what I had previously called my soul was not at all my soul, but a dead system. Hence I had to speak to my soul as to something far off and unknown, which did not exist through me, but through whom I existed.¹⁶

Who are you? Are you God?

A journey had begun, but the course before him was obscure. He had no theory or concept to explain what he was doing, whom he was addressing, or how he should proceed. He simply had to let things happen, let the unconscious find its voice. How else could he hear its intent, see its point of view, probe its depths? Two nights later, on 14 November 1913, he called out to his soul:

I am weary, my soul, my wandering has lasted too long, my search for myself outside of myself. Now I have gone through events and find you behind all of them. For I made discoveries on my erring through events, humanity, and the world. I found men. And you, my soul, I found again, first in images within men and then you yourself. I found you where I least expected you. You climbed out of a dark shaft....

I wandered for many years, so long that I forgot that I possessed a soul. I belonged to men and things. I did not belong to myself. Where were you all this time? Which Beyond sheltered you and gave you sanctuary? ... How should I decipher you?

Who are you, child? My dreams have represented you as a child and as a maiden. I am ignorant of your mystery. Look I bear a wound that is as yet not healed: my ambition to make an impression. Forgive me if I speak as in a dream, like a drunkard—are you God? Is God a child, a maiden? ... How strange it sounds to me to call you a child, you who still hold the all-without-end in your hand.¹⁷

And the next night:

What strange things are happening to me? ... Where are you leading me? Forgive my excessive apprehension, brimful of knowledge. My foot hesitates to follow you. Into what mist and darkness does your path lead? ... I limp after you on crutches of understanding. I am a man and you stride like a God.... I should give myself completely into your hands—but who are you?¹⁸

Then came a portentous quiet. “I wanted to throw everything away and return to the light of day. But the spirit stopped me and forced me back into myself.”¹⁹

Jung had addressed his Soul, felt the penetrating reality of the Soul. He had heard a call from the Depths. But the dialogue he was attempting was, so far, very one-sided. For twenty-five nights he persisted, petitioning communication. He sensed himself in a desert: an anchorite wandering in his own internal and barren wasteland under a burning sun. He had to wait, stay present in that interior fact, turn off conscious and exterior critical thought: observe the empty, listen to silence. Wait.

Slowly a response began to come, finding voice through him. The words began as short phrases and cryptic comments. He explained, “Sometimes it was as if I were hearing it with my ears, sometimes feeling it with my mouth, as if my tongue were formulating words; now and then I heard myself whispering aloud.”²⁰ Jung had arrived at the threshold of vision.

II.

In 1925, about eleven years after these events, Jung gave a seminar to a small group of individuals then working with him in Zurich. The group wanted to know more about the formation of his psychological views, and specifically, details of what happened during this decisive confrontation with his unconscious a decade earlier. Jung complied, giving his most explicit—yet still highly abbreviated—public account of the experiences recorded in *Liber Novus*.²¹ Selecting from the critical landmarks of his passage, Jung discussed at length two opening events. They might be described as the “threshold” and “doorway” of his journey, and had occurred in December 1913. To this pair, in late life Jung added to the public record two more landmarks, described in *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*.²²

These four beacons help orient us in a brief survey of the journey recounted in *Liber Novus*. Long established in Jung’s literature, they also allow us to compare Jung’s abbreviated published renditions of the story

with his primary record. I would descriptively title these four landmarks or passages (and this is entirely my own apparatus): “The Cave”; “Elijah’s Door”; “Meeting Philemon”; and “The Summary Sermons.” I will touch upon each in the ensuing comments.

During his “twenty-five nights in the desert,” the period between mid-November and December 1913, Jung was struggling to go deeper into what he now conceived as “the depths.” To aid the progress, he began to work intentionally with visualizations:

Not knowing what would come next, I thought perhaps more introspection was needed. When we introspect we look within and see if there is anything to be observed, and if there is nothing we may either give up the introspective process or find a way of “boring through” to the material that escapes the first survey. I devised such a boring method by fantasizing that I was digging a hole, and by accepting this fantasy as perfectly real. This is naturally somewhat difficult to do—to believe so thoroughly in a fantasy that it leads you into further fantasy, just as if you were digging a real hole and passing from one discovery to another. But when I began on that hole I worked and worked so hard that I knew something had to come of it—that fantasy had to produce, and lure out, other fantasies.²³

He labored, imaginatively: Digging, digging, digging. Watching, hearing. Digging.

Finally, I felt I had come to a place where I could go not further down. I said to myself that, that being the case, I would then go horizontally, and then it seemed as if I were in a corridor, and as though I were wading into black slime. I went in, thinking to myself that this was the remnant of an old mine....

Entry of the Cave

A full account of what followed is recorded in his journal, dated 12 December 1913, and thence in *Liber Novus*: “The spirit of the depths opened my eyes and I caught a glimpse of the inner things, the world of my soul, the many-formed and changing....

I stand in black dirt up to my ankles in a dark cave. Shadows sweep over me. I am seized by fear, but I know I must go in. I

crawl through a narrow crack in the rock and reach an inner cave whose bottom is covered with black water. But beyond this I catch a glimpse of a luminous red stone which I must reach. I wade through the muddy water. The cave is full of the frightful noise of shrieking voices. I take the stone, it covers a dark opening in the rock. I hold the stone in my hand, peering around inquiringly. I do not want to listen to the voices, they keep me away. But I want to know. Here something wants to be uttered. I place my ear to the opening. I hear the flow of underground waters. I see the bloody head of a man on the dark stream. Someone wounded, someone slain floats there. I take in this image for a long time, shuddering. I see a large black scarab floating past on the dark stream.

In the deepest reach of the stream shines a red sun, radiating through the dark water. There I see—and a terror seizes me—small serpents on the dark rock walls, striving toward the depths, where the sun shines. A thousand serpents crowd around, veiling the sun. Deep night falls. A red stream of blood, thick red blood springs up, surging for a long time, then ebbing. I am seized by fear. What did I see?”²⁴

In 1925, Jung concluded his summary of this first invoked vision, saying:

When I came out of the fantasy, I realized that my mechanism had worked wonderfully well, but I was in great confusion as to the meaning of all those things I had seen....²⁵

“I was in great confusion...” He had no conceptual framework, no map, for what he would encounter on his exploration. Jung was entering an unknown or forgotten dimension of reality, a place as close as the beating heart in his breast, and yet as distant as the faintest stars of heaven. Everything he had held as a theoretical concept would be discarded before the reality of the experience.

Dr. Shamdasani explains, “His procedure was clearly intentional—while its aim was to allow psychic contents to appear spontaneously.”²⁶ And now, “The spirit of the depth opened my eyes and I caught a glimpse of inner things, the world of my soul.”

Jung had crossed the threshold, and his sight had opened to an inner vision. A year later he added commentary to his initial account:

Because I was caught up in the spirit of this time, precisely what happened to me on this night had to happen to me, namely that the spirit of the depths erupted with force, and swept away the spirit of this time with a powerful wave. But the spirit of the depths had gained this power, because I had spoken to my soul during 25 nights in the desert and I had given her all my love and submission. But during the 25 days, I gave all my love and submission to things, to men, and to the thoughts of this time. I went into the desert only at night.

Thus can you differentiate sick and divine delusion. Whoever does the one and does without the other you may call sick since he is out of balance.²⁷

At this point in the story and history, a question inevitable arises: “Was Jung insane? Is this a psychotic episode, marked by auditory and visual hallucinations?” The answer, based on extensive historical documentation, is: “No.”

During this period, and over the next several years while pursuing his “nocturnal work” Jung continued to function in his daytime activities without any evident impairment. He maintained a busy professional practice, seeing on average five patients a day. While undeniably complex, his family life was full. He lectured, wrote, and remained active in professional associations. In addition, he gave obligatory service as an officer in the Swiss army and served on active duty over several extended periods during each of the following years.²⁸ In the balance between his night and day he found sanity: “Whoever does the one and does without the other you may call sick since he is out of balance.”

This is our conundrum: in modern conception an individual who claims to have “visions” is either insane, or using the wrong word. Finding the right word—faced against the spirit of the times—was a chore for Jung. In the remarks above, Jung employs the word “fantasy” to describe his night work. But elsewhere he declares his dislike for “fantasy” and the limited meaning it conveyed in modern usage.²⁹ Alternative terms he used to circle the experience are “imagination” and “vision.” Unfortunately, they all suffer the same limitation: common parlance either pathologizes or trivializes the words.

Jung fractures this conundrum with his own paradox. In subsequent years, we follow him in his writings struggling to revalorize the barren con-

ceptual vessel of the Word with a living and experienced fact.³⁰ This endeavor was crucial to his extended hermeneutic project.

Elijah's Door

Jung had found a "glimpse of inner things." He wanted to follow this inner path further. About ten nights later he attempted to do just that. And this time the doors of perception swung wide open. He explained to the 1925 seminar,

"The next thing that happened to me was another fantastic vision. I used the same technique of descent, but this time I went much deeper. The first time I should say I reached a depth of about one thousand feet, but this time it was a cosmic depth. It was like going to the moon, or like the feeling of descent into empty space."³¹

In *Liber Novus* he recounts the vision:

On the night when I considered the essence of the God, I became aware of an image: I lay in a dark depth. An old man stood before me. He looked like one of the old prophets. A black serpent lay at his feet. Some distance away I saw a house with columns. A beautiful maiden steps out of the door. She walks uncertainly and I see that she is blind. The old man waves to me and I follow him to the house at the foot of the sheer wall of rock. The serpent creeps behind us. Darkness reigns inside the house. We are in a high hall with glittering walls. A bright stone the color of water lies in the background. As I look into its reflection, the images of Eve, the tree, and the serpent appear to me. After this I catch sight of Odysseus and his journey on the high seas. Suddenly a door opens on the right, onto a garden full of bright sunshine. We step outside and the old man says to me, "Do you know where you are?"

I: "I am a stranger here and everything seems strange to me, anxious as in a dream. Who are you?"

E: "I am Elijah and this is my daughter Salome."...

The visions that followed and continued intensifying over three nights form one of the longer encounters in *Liber Novus* (and here "vision"

is the precise word Jung used to describe the experience). They are also highly complex and meaningful, and impossible to summarize adequately. Jung called the visions the “mystery play,” the *Mysterium*. He describes it as his “transformation.”³² One finds the personages of Salome and Elijah repeatedly referenced in Jung’s later writings, though never explicitly linked to this experience.

Sometime later Jung penned a psychological reflection on the figures encountered: “They are certainly not intended allegories; they have not been consciously contrived to depict experience in either veiled or even fantastic terms. Rather, they appeared as visions.”³³

At the conclusion of the first night’s vision, Jung exclaims to Salome and Elijah, “You are the symbol of the most extreme contradiction.” Elijah corrects him: “We are real and not symbols.”

Elijah explains that he and his daughter, his Wisdom, have been one from the beginning. Salome declares her love for Jung, and explains that she is his sister; their mother is Mary. At the denouement of the vision, – which occurred on Christmas 1913, Jung is Christed—he suffers the last hour on Golgotha. Here, *Liber Novus*:

Salome says, “Mary was the mother of Christ, do you understand?”

Jung: “I see that a terrible and incomprehensible power forces me to imitate the Lord in his final torment. But how can I presume to call Mary my mother?”

Salome: “You are Christ.”

I stand with outstretched arms like someone crucified, my body taut and horribly entwined by the serpent: “You, Salome, say that I am Christ?”

It is as if I stood alone on a high mountain with stiff outstretched arms. The serpent squeezes my body in its terrible coils and the blood streams from my body, spilling down the mountainside. Salome bends down to my feet and wraps her black hair round them. She lies thus for a long time. Then she cries, “I see light!” Truly, she sees, her eyes are open. The serpent falls from my body and lies languidly on the ground. I stride over it and kneel at the feet of the prophet, whose form shines like a flame.

Elijah: "Your work is fulfilled here. Other things will come. Seek untiringly, and above all write exactly what you see."

Salome looks in rapture at the light that streams from the prophet. Elijah transforms into a huge flame of white light. The serpent wraps itself around her foot, as if paralyzed. Salome kneels before the light in wonderstruck devotion. Tears fall from my eyes, and I hurry out into the night, like one who has no part in the glory of the mystery. My feet do not touch the ground of this earth, and it is as if I were melting into air.³⁴

In his later reflections,³⁵ Jung explains that no other event in *Liber Novus* shared the same quality as these visions. This experience marked a doorway of mystery. Jung passed through.

III.

At the end of the *Mysterium*, Elijah gave an explicit mandate: "Other things will come. Seek untiringly, and above all write exactly what you see." Jung complied.

His journey had commenced forty-five days earlier. Now the imaginal realm lay opened before him, and he engaged it untiringly, almost nightly, throughout the winter and early spring months of 1914. The kaleidoscopic series of adventures, the imaginative figures and the dialogues that ensued cannot with justice be briefly summarized.

Jung's experiences varied in both intensity and mode of expression. Many of the experiences he recorded are highly visual, others are more auditory and conversational. The literary flow of several passages suggests an imaginative encounter written in progression. Jung's comments in later years on "active imagination" accepted a broad range of experience in the imaginative mode: it involved the whole being. But ultimately every sensory metaphor for the experience of the imaginal fails to the degree that it remains single-sighted, bound by the exterior light of day.

In the opening passages of *Liber Novus*—written about a year after the initial experiences and interpretively reflecting upon them—he attempts explanation:

If you remain within arbitrary and artificially created boundaries, you will walk as between two high walls: you do not see the immensity of the world. But if you break down the walls that con-

fine your view... then the ancient sleeper awakens in you.... There in the whirl of chaos dwells eternal wonder. Your world begins to become wonderful. Man belongs not only to an ordered world, he also belongs in the wonder-world of his soul...

If you look outside yourselves, you see the far-off forest and mountains, and above them your vision climbs to the realms of the stars. And if you look into yourselves, you will see on the other hand the nearby as far-off and infinite, since the world of the inner is as infinite as the world of the outer. Just as you become a part of the manifold essence of the world through your bodies, so you become a part of the manifold essence of the inner world through your soul. This inner world is truly infinite, in no way poorer than the outer one. Man lives in two worlds.³⁶

The key is immersion and involvement in the mythopoetic imagination: grasping the independent reality of imaginal voice and vision, and participating with it. I do not say “granting reality” to the experience—that would imply the sovereignty of the granting observer. The shattering fact that Jung knew is that the ego sacrificed all sovereignty in the experience.³⁷ The demiurge was deposed: daylight consciousness was not the sole creator of the real.

Meeting Philemon

By January 1914, Jung had received a gift of magic. But he knew not how to explain it, interpret it, or use it. What was magic? He needed the help of a magician. The event that follows is the third landmark Jung gave to his journey³⁸ and it forms a major section of *Liber Novus*.

In a dream (apparently about this time) Jung had met an impressive figure,

It was an old man with the horns of a bull. He held a bunch of four keys, one of which he clutched as if he were about to open a lock. He had the wings of the kingfisher with its characteristic colors. Since I did not understand this dream-image, I painted it in order to impress it upon my memory.³⁹

Jung sought out the figure in vision and “after a long search I found the small house in the country fronted by a large bed of tulips. This is where ΦΙΛΗΜΩΝ [Philemon], the magician, lives....”



Figure 2. Philemon, as painted by Jung around 1924 in his Red Book.
(*Liber Novus*, folio 154.)

But in this first imaginative encounter, Philemon appeared feeble, senescent, and of improbable aid:

Why is ΦΙΛΗΜΩΝ a magician? Does he conjure up immortality for himself, a life beyond? He was probably only a magician by profession, and he now appears to be a pensioned magician who has retired from service. His desirousness and creative drive have expired and he now enjoys his well-earned rest out of sheer incapacity, like every old man who can do nothing else than plant tulips and water his little garden.⁴⁰

Over the coming years, Philemon's mask of senescence transmuted as he disclosed himself to Jung in progressive emanations of timeless grandeur. In his 1916 commentary for *Liber Novus* on the initial encounter, Jung would pen a long ode to Philemon and express understandings recast by further experience:

You know, Oh ΦΙΛΗΜΩΝ, the wisdom of things to come; therefore you are old, oh so very ancient, and just as you tower above me in years, so you tower above the present in futurity, and the length of your past is immeasurable. You are legendary and unreachable. You were and will be, returning periodically. Your wisdom is invisible, your truth is unknowable, entirely untrue in any given age, and yet true in all eternity, but you pour out living water, from which the flowers of your garden bloom, a starry water, a dew of the night.⁴¹

In *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, Jung hints at the nature of his relationship with Philemon, "At times he seemed to me quite real, as if he were a living personality. I went walking up and down the garden with him...." Jung names Philemon as his teacher and "guru." But in private comments to Cary de Angulo in 1923, Jung describes Philemon as something ineffably greater. He was, in multiform manifestations, an avatar of "the Master,"

...the same who inspired Buddha, Mani, Christ, Mahomet—all those who may be said to have communed with God.⁴²

Above Philemon's image painted on page 154 of *Liber Novus*—and this is one of the few images from the book released for publication in pri-

or decades—Jung penned an appellation in Greek: “Father of the Prophet, Beloved Philemon.”⁴³

But the deepening understanding of Philemon came only in the next two years and as a result of the revelatory power of other visions. In the initial encounter during the winter of 1914, Philemon was simply a mysterious old magician, a strange dream figure with the blue wings of a kingfisher, holding a key.

The Conception of Liber Novus

By the summer of 1914, the initial imaginative flood ebbed and then ceased entirely. Jung had accepted Elijah’s vocation, he had recorded in his ledger all he had seen and heard. But what was its meaning? How should he interpret it?

Beginning with the spontaneous visions of destruction flowing over northern Europe in October of 1913, and then in other images throughout his months of descent into the imaginal, Jung had repeatedly confronted dark portents of war. Initially, he worried they reflected his own internal state, the danger of being rent apart by psychic dissolution. The Great War loomed unsuspected over Europe.

When war did erupt in August of 1914, Jung’s understanding of his private journey reformed. The visions had actually been precognitive and prophetic, and not entirely personal. His experience had been entwined with forces acting upon the exterior world. As he explained in a letter to Mircea Eliade many years later:

Now I was sure that no schizophrenia was threatening me. I understood that my dreams and my visions came to me from the subsoil of the collective unconscious. What remained for me to do now was to deepen and validate this discovery. And this is what I have been trying to do for forty years.⁴⁴

Working from his ledger of the experience, the black books, he began a new draft manuscript. It appears he was considering compiling a record for publication. And here he engaged a first interpretive endeavor. The visions from his journals were faithfully transcribed, but to each sequence now was added a secondary commentary or meditation. Upon completion of this draft, the next phase of work commenced: a medieval artistic calli-

graphic labor of elaborating the text onto folio-sized parchment with historiated initials and interspaced images.

After transcribing material up through the *Mysterium* onto seven parchment leaves,⁴⁵ he envisioned yet something more. He commissioned a beautiful folio-sized volume containing about 600 blank pages, and exquisitely bound in fine red leather. On the spine, in golden lettering, Jung put the title: *Liber Novus*.

Now he began transcribing the contents of the draft manuscript directly into the Red Book. The effort would continue slowly and with great artistic craft over the next 15 years. The book was never completed. Of the draft material he had compiled, only about two-thirds of the text was eventually transcribed into the red leather volume of *Liber Novus*.⁴⁶

Seven Summary Sermons

In the late summer and autumn of 1915, after having completed his first draft manuscript, a new stream of imagination erupted. These deepening experiences continued over the next year, through the summer of 1916, and formed the last sections of *Liber Novus*. From this time on Philemon is an increasingly central figure in Jung's imagination.

Philemon first reappeared on 14 September 1915 and greeted Jung with a long enigmatic statement on the mystery of gold, "A blazing hoard is piled up, it awaits the taker." He informed Jung that "Hermes is your daimon." Both these cryptic comments would only reveal their means to Jung two decades later.⁴⁷

The tone of the encounters in this second phase of experience seems deepened and subtly changed from the earlier material. Jung has spent a year compiling and reflecting on his initial experiences. He is differentiating and integrating the voices that have emerged from the depths, and gaining perspective on his own voice relative to them. The visions are working towards a coalescence.

A critical juncture in this distillation came on 16 January 1916 when Jung's Soul delivers an astounding mythologic statement about the nature of God, man, and creation. In tone and content, it reflects an ancient Gnostic myth—the story of Sophia (who speaks here as his Soul) and of Abraxas, the creative Demiurge who had separated from Sophia:

You should worship only one God. The other Gods are unimportant. Abraxas is to be feared. Therefore it was a deliverance

when he separated himself from me. You do not need to seek him. He will find you, just like Eros. He is the God of the cosmos, extremely powerful and fearful. He is the creative drive, he is form and formation, just as much as matter and force, therefore he is above all the light and dark Gods. He tears away souls and casts them into procreation. He is the creative and created....

But you have in you the *one* God, the wonderfully beautiful and kind, the solitary, starlike, unmoving, he who is older and wiser than the father, he who has a safe hand, who leads you among all the darknesses and death scares of dreadful Abraxas. He gives joy and peace, since he is beyond death and beyond what is subject to change....

This one God is the kind, the loving, the leading, the healing. To him all your love and worship is due. To him you should pray, you are one with him, he is near you, nearer than your soul.⁴⁸

Two weeks later, Jung was visited by a ghostly horde. They demanded a statement from him. In the form of seven sermons, he gave the ghosts the summary revelation of his experience, reflecting all he had so far integrated from the visions, and including insights granted by the revelation from his Soul, above. This event is the final major landmark Jung publically disclosed about the experiences forming *Liber Novus*.

In *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* Jung offers an account of what happened:

It began with a restlessness, but I did not know what it meant or what "they" wanted of me. There was an ominous atmosphere all around me. I had the strange feeling that the air was filled with ghostly entities. Then it was as if my house began to be haunted....

Around five o'clock in the afternoon on Sunday the front doorbell began ringing frantically ... but there was no one in sight. I was sitting near the doorbell, and not only heard it but saw it moving. We all simply stared at one another. The atmosphere was thick, believe me! Then I knew that something had to happen. The whole house was filled as if there were a crowd present, crammed full of spirits. They were packed deep right up to the door, and the air was so thick it was scarcely possible to breathe.

As for myself, I was all a-quiver with the question: "For God's sake, what in the world is this?" Then they cried out in chorus, "We have come back from Jerusalem where we found not what we sought." That is the beginning of the *Septem Sermones*.⁴⁹

Over the next nine nights, Jung composed and presented to the dead his *Septem Sermones ad Mortuos*.⁵⁰

The *Seven Sermons to the Dead* present a vast cosmogonic myth, a discourse on the progressive emanation and evolution of human consciousness from the first unconscious source, an ineffable, undifferentiated fullness Jung calls the *Pleroma*.⁵¹ Though using terms common to ancient Gnostic mythology such as *Pleroma* and *Abraxas*, this is not a recapitulation of any single extant mythologic progenitor. An incautious reader, unaware of the true authorship, could however easily locate it within the framework of ancient Gnosticism.

From his diaries, it appears that Jung wrote the sermons with his own voice. As he later reflected on the experience, however, he saw that it was Philemon who had spoken them through him. When he transcribed the *Septem Sermones* into his final manuscript of material for *Liber Novus*, Jung made Philemon voice:

Behold, ΦΙΛΗΜΩΝ came up to me, dressed in the white robe of a priest, and lay his hand on my shoulder. Then I said to the dark ones, "So speak, you dead." And immediately they cried in many voices, "We have come back from Jerusalem, where we did not find what we sought. We implore you to let us in. You have what we desire. Not your blood, but your light. That is it."

Then ΦΙΛΗΜΩΝ lifted his voice and taught them....

Jung adds something more to the text of the sermons in *Liber Novus*. After each of the seven sermons, Philemon offers exegetical comments, in dialogue with Jung. Philemon declares his statements are not declarations of "belief," but are avowals of his sure knowledge (*gnosis*).

Jung stated, as recorded in *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*,

These conversations with the dead formed a kind of prelude to what I had to communicate to the world about the unconscious: a kind of pattern of order and interpretation of its general contents.⁵²

They are also the only part of *Liber Novus* which Jung disclosed during his lifetime. In 1916 he had a small number of copies of the *Septem Sermones ad Mortuos* privately printed. In the printed version, Jung pseud-epigraphically attributed them as: “Seven exhortations to the dead, written by Basilides of Alexandria, the city where East and West meet.”⁵³ Basilides of Alexandria was an early Gnostic Christian, about whom very little documentation now survives.

Throughout his life Jung occasionally gave copies of this small book to trusted friends and students, but it was available only as a gift from Jung himself. Those who received copies usually held them in strict confidence.

Septem Sermones ad Mortuos, a summary statement coalesced from Jung’s experience of the Depths, brings *Liber Novus* toward a close. There is, however, one last detail about Philemon disclosed on the final of page of the text that must be mentioned.

In the ultimate vision recorded in *Liber Novus*, Jung meets both Philemon and Christ in his garden. Philemon addresses Christ as “my master, my beloved, my brother!” Christ sees Philemon, but recognizes him as Simon Magus—one of the first historical figures of ancient Gnosticism. Philemon explains to Christ that once he was Simon Magus, but he has now become Philemon.

This needs further consideration. Jung is the voice of the sermons in his first journal rendition. In the version of the *Septem Sermones* transcribed into the Red Book manuscript, Jung gives Philemon as the voice. When Jung transcribes the *Septem Sermones ad Mortuos* to be printed as an independent text, they are attributed pseud-epigraphically to yet another historical second century Gnostic teacher, Basilides of Alexandria. Then it is revealed that Philemon is Simon Magus! Thus Jung, Philemon, Simon Magus, and Basilides are all finally conflated together in the voice of the Gnostic prophet who speaks the *Septem Sermones ad Mortuos*.

At this point in his journey, the sum of evidences suggests Jung associated something very central in his experience with an ancient nexus of Gnosis. This was, of course, not the end of Jung’s journey. His encounters with the imagination continued into the early 1920s. Final disclosure of that material, contained mainly in Black Book 6 and 7, will be forthcoming in future years.

IV.

Crystallizing a Stone

From the very beginning of his journey in November 1913, Jung struggled with an interpretive task: translating his imaginative encounters—his visions—into words. The translators of *Liber Novus* comment,

“At the outset of *Liber Novus*, Jung experiences a crisis of language. The spirit of the depths, who immediately challenges Jung’s use of language along with the spirit of the time, informs Jung that on the terrain of his soul his achieved language will no longer serve.”⁵⁴

The theoretical, didactic and discursive forms of his previously well-honed scientific jargon would not carry the fact of this experience. Jung confronts the challenge before him in his introduction to *Liber Novus*, and he makes this petition to the reader for understanding:

“My speech is imperfect. Not because I want to shine with words, but out of the impossibility of finding those words, I speak in images. With nothing else can I express the words from the depths.”

Near the end of life, Jung spoke of the visions as “the fiery magma out of which the stone that had to be worked was crystallized.”⁵⁵

The first task—the primary hermeneutic task—was a crystallization of the stone. That stone, the fact he would work for the rest of his life, originated in a protean visionary experience playing over several years, a descent into mythopoetic imagination. Now he needed to give this experience firm form. This was an intensely focused and deeply considered interpretive process. The voice of the depths spoke in images, and so, in translating his experience, must Jung. Even the graphic expression of words on the page needed to speak with image.

Jung further intuited that his experience was not *sui generis*, but rather somehow linked with something that existed earlier in history.⁵⁶ With parchment and pen, and archaic calligraphic script, he had to bridge an invisible chasm in time, linking past and present. And future.

The process unfolded in a dynamic progression. As the transcription proceeded, parchment pages changed to paper in the red folio volume; artistic images imaginatively brought to the text became more abstractly ex-

pressive; the calligraphic hand appeared less archaic. The sum reveals these temporal strata. But it is all stone crystallized from one same source.

C. G. Jung recognized that what he had experienced was not personal. It was epochal. Commenting on signal imaginative creations across the ages, in 1930 he states that great imaginative art,

...draws its strength from the life of mankind and we completely miss its meaning if we try to derive it from personal factors.

Whenever the collective unconscious becomes a living experience and is brought to bear upon the conscious outlook of an age, this event is a creative act which is of importance for a whole epoch. A work of art is produced that may truthfully be called a message to generations of men.... This is effected by the collective unconscious when a poet or seer lends expression to the unspoken desire of the times and shows the way, by word or deed, to its fulfillment....⁵⁷

He was occultly speaking in kind of his own hidden book, *Liber Novus*: the primary translation to word of vision, a multifaceted layering of word in image and image in word, reaching back and forward in time, “a creative act which is of importance for a whole epoch ... a message to generations of men.”

Working the Stone

By the end of the 1920s, C. G. Jung had emerged from the crucible of his experience. He held a stone, a crystallization of vision. How he worked it over the remaining four decades of his life constitutes one of the most multifaceted and complex hermeneutic projects in human history.

I cannot here give full voice to deciphering the layered meanings in that declaration. Jung turned two million words and more to the story of his stone. Here I will open just three aspects of the way his interpretive project developed.

Physician and Wound

A decade earlier Jung had been thrust into a difficult and dangerous self-experiment. As a physician he had already spent years studying the power of psychic functions to gravely wound as well as to mysteriously heal. But he had no idea what these powers were or from where they originated. His

therapeutic model had proved inadequate. Finally it seemed his own sanity hinged upon finding answers.

What happened in the course of his journey of discovery was unexpected, extraordinary, creative, imaginative, artistic. And more. Jung had rediscovered the depth and vitality of the mythopoetic imagination. A doorway had opened upon the forgotten “other pole” of human nature, the fact behind human consciousness.

Jung had experienced his “empirical man” entering a greater dimension, a “divine” realm, the realm of the greater “self.”⁵⁸ In the union of inner and outer, above and below, he had discovered the image of God. To this witnessed experience he poignantly gives early testimony in September of 1915:

Through uniting with the self we reach the God. ... I have experienced it. It has happened thus in me. And it certainly happened in a way that I neither expected nor wished for. The experience of the God in this form was unexpected and unwanted. I wish I could say it was a deception and only too willingly would I disown this experience. But I cannot deny that it has seized me beyond all measure and steadily goes on working in me. ... No insight or objection is so strong that it could surpass the strength of this experience.⁵⁹

But Jung did not seek the mantle of prophet to the God. Nor was he called to be an artist. And he was certainly not a madman. At the end of his journey, he remained a physician confronting the festering wound of his age: Modern man had lost his Soul. The stone now crystallized in his hand held healing powers. But it needed to be worked to that purpose.

First he had to awaken his age to the fact of the existence of the psyche. This awakening uniquely required an experiential encounter with the Soul. Dream was one ubiquitous evidence of psychic activity, but there were others, including the royal road of imagination and vision. With interest aroused in the phenomena, Jung would encourage inner exploration, show doorways and paths. He would become a guide to many. Those whom he judged had successfully journeyed themselves and encountered the terrain would join him as guides, as analysts—understanding always that a guide or “therapist” can help others only through lands they themselves know. And Jung would aid the task with maps of the terrain, signal-

ing the prominent landmarks, translating what he had learned from his own travels into tools of discovery.

To speak of the psychic terrain meaningfully, a new vocabulary was needed. Words that had been cut from their roots by modern culture needed to be revitalized, valorized, and grafted to the perennial radix of experience. This was a task of vast hermeneutic complexity.

The core of Jung's psychological terminology is figuratively a map of his own journey. Archetype, active imagination, collective unconscious, anima, animus, persona, and individuation: All these words were first spoken descriptively by Jung between the years 1916 and 1918 in the early development of this second layer of the hermeneutic project. And the words imagination, vision, God, symbol: these were sound vessels to be refilled with the elixir of experience.

Jung the physician had been called to treat a terrible wound. He offered his unguent, artfully compounded from a rare and healing stone.

Vision and History

By the late 1920s Jung had fleshed out his map of the psyche along with a descriptive vocabulary. These were not theoretical constructs, but rather tools for deciphering human experience. Any understanding of their practical utility required contact with the phenomena of the psyche. As a physician, he dedicated himself to personally guiding patients into that phenomenal realm, pointing out landmarks in their personal chaos and paths with healing potential.

In his duty as a scientist, however, he faced a different and broader task. He needed now to collect his evidences and elucidate the phenomenology of the psyche at a generic level. The facts needed to be summed. And though he worked a lifetime collecting specific case histories and clinical fragments of psychic phenomena, no sum of study could substitute for the touchstone resting in his study, opened on his desk: *Liber Novus*. The empirical foundation, the bedrock to his science, was already crystallized there. But he could not reveal it.

Jung knew his book would not—not yet—be understood. The primary ledger of his most difficult experience, and the material formed in *Liber Novus*, had to remain concealed. Then in 1928, another road opened.

In that year, Richard Wilhelm sent Jung a Chinese meditation text he had recently translated, *The Secret of the Golden Flower*, and asked for

Jung's comment. Jung was stunned. In the treatise he saw a clear description of what he had been doing. Not only was the visionary technique described in the text similar to his own, but also the result of the process described there mirrored his own result, imaged by his mandala paintings in *Liber Novus*. Suddenly he saw a path by which the contents of his book could find "their way into actuality."⁶⁰

The Secret of the Golden Flower figuratively maps passage through a little-evidenced experience. By fact of his own journey in that terrain, Jung immediately recognized what was being described. He had been there, done that. Jung turned his interpretive skills to commentary, using this independent document to illustrate and amplify his discoveries. From this point onward, *Liber Novus* remained the occult Rosetta Stone, the unseen intertext, to his hermeneutics.

Jung searched through esoteric literature seeking other material that fit into this hermeneutic method. He had long recognized in ancient Gnosticism the analog of his experience, but the fragmentary literature available at the time, in the early twentieth century, remained too limited and corrupted to sustain his full development. Then Jung discovered remnants of the Western alchemical literature. Here awaiting him was a magnificent locked library of experience—and he had been given the key.

The medieval alchemists had been brother physicians, seemingly seared and marked by a molten *prima materia* Jung too had known. He would apply the hermeneutics of his vision to that historical record, the quest for the Philosopher's Stone. Using this documentary source, he could establish extensive evidence, drawn from many centuries of recorded experience, for the generic outlines of his science, elucidating the phenomenology of the psyche.

Over the next twenty-five years Jung worked, resurrecting deciphering, refining, and illuminating the alchemists' forgotten old books. And preparing way for his new one: *Liber Novus*.

Hermeneutics and Tradition

The revelation of *Liber Novus* and other related primary documents opens new perspectives on the life and work of C. G. Jung. One of the most important of these focuses attention on his multifaceted vocation as hermeneut.

I have mentioned very briefly two aspects of Jung's approach to the interpretation of his experience —how he worked the stone in his roles as physician and as scientist. But there is another vital and complex issue that must be considered: Jung had received a revelation. How did he interpret this fact in the context of Western religious tradition, and what was his reading of *himself*, the one chosen to receive the revelation?

To say he rejected the archaic role of prophet is both accurate and completely insufficient. This is a critical issue in understanding Jung and his hermeneutics, and simply saying, "No, he didn't do *that*" is no answer at all. Over many years, Jung reflected deeply upon the answers to these final questions; in the last two decades of his life, he directly confronted the soteriological implications of his experience within the contexts of Christian history. In conclusion, I will focus attention here.

Among the astounding source materials Dr. Shamdasani provides in the editorial apparatus of *Liber Novus* is a section from Jung's journal dated 5 January 1922.⁶¹ Jung entered a conversation with his soul about his vocation. The dialogue he recorded adds perspective on the immensity of the burden Jung felt resting upon him.

Jung has not been able to sleep, and addresses his Soul, asking why. She says there is no time to sleep, he has great work to begin, he must go to "a higher level of consciousness." Jung asks, "What is it? Speak!"

Soul: You should listen: to no longer be a Christian is easy. But what next? For more is yet to come. Everything is waiting for you. And you? You remain silent and have nothing to say. But you should speak. Why have you received the revelation? You should not hide it. You concern yourself with the form? Is the form important, when it is a matter of revelation?

Jung: But you are not thinking that I should publish what I have written [*Liber Novus*]? That would be a misfortune. And who would understand it?

Soul: No, listen! ... your calling comes first.

Jung: But 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. There is no one who could say it as well as you could.

Jung: But who knows, if you are not lying?

Soul: Ask yourself if I am lying. I speak the truth.

Three days later, his soul explains further:

“You know everything that is to be known about the manifested revelation, but you do not yet live everything that is to be lived at this time.... The way is symbolic.”

He knows everything to be known about the revelation. Now he has to live it. The way is symbolic.

It appears Jung is confronting not just the “revelation” but also the fact of himself, a modern man, being the “revelator.” How could he live *that* peculiar fact “at this time”? He faces not only the hermeneutics of a vision, but of himself as hermeneut.

Behind the word “hermeneut” resided a mythic and symbolic history of meaning. Jung knew it. Hermes was the interpreter of the words of the Gods to Men, the mercurial messenger imaged in his planetary aspect: a tiny celestial luminosity visible only occasionally in twilight hours between light and dark, on swift journey between the gates of the sun and the land of human dreams.

Old theological discussions of the hermeneutical art worked principally within a horizontal axis: the methods of interpreting meanings from an object (classically, a sacred text, the “word of God”) in comparative historical, ethical, allegorical and metaphorical modes.

However, another mysterious mode of interpretation was mentioned in medieval commentaries. It was called *anagoge*.⁶² Its methods remained perpetually vague in many centuries of commentary. The Greek word itself means to lift up, or elevate. Hermeneutics in the anagogical mode cleaves all other approaches with a vertical axis: it reads mystical meanings. Here the hermeneut directly bridged above and below, thus witnessing the visionary fact veiled by words.

Jung traveled that high way—the vertical axis—the ancient road of Hermes. Understood symbolically, in image of the hermeneut, he stood as nexus between inner and outer, hidden and seen, above and below, Gods and Men. In this symbolic task, Jung had duties to his own time. He described his situation:

There were things in the images which concerned not only myself but many others also. It was then that I ceased to belong to myself alone, ceased to have the right to do so. From then on, my life belonged to the generality.⁶³

Many evidences suggest Jung understood himself as a link in a golden chain, the hermetic “...*Aurea Catena* which has existed from the beginnings of philosophical alchemy and Gnosticism.”⁶⁴ The chain was forged from individual human lives, each link binding an epoch with ageless reality.

Jung stood himself within a tradition that was not defined by creed or dogma, but instead by an experience: a baptism in the mythopoetic stream of imagination, an entry into the ardent furnace of the primal fact. In myth and symbol and text, wayfaring men who returned from the ancient highway worked the interpretative art. In the records they left, Jung recognized signal images of his own experience.

In his scientific writings, Jung repeatedly pointed to these specific historical manifestations of the tradition, drawing upon that record to help amplify his own. Most specifically, he pointed at early Christian history where the tradition had been called Gnosis, and at the textual traditions of Hermeticism and the hermetic “yoga” of alchemy. Both of the latter, Jung stated, were entwined in origins with Gnosticism, and complexly mingled in Western Christian tradition over more than a millennium.

Through the seer’s stone of his own experience, Jung read the marks in history of a visionary hermeneutics. What he saw and attempted to explain often remains entirely obscure to his readers. And he understood their problem. Only those who had traveled the inner world, and been wayfaring men, could clearly recognize these ancient maps for what they were. To explain what he saw, he had to help others take the journey into psychic reality. Then they too would see. This was a difficult and circular course. He gave his life to it.

In the end, Jung did not proclaim a new religion. Instead, and with increasing focus during his last years, he turned his vision to revealing the living stream from which the myths, rituals and symbols of Christianity took source. He said we stood beside a great river. If a bridge over it was to be built, it must start from the ground where we stand. And we stood upon a great wealth and we did not see. The discarded and forgotten but still precious stone from the past would be the cornerstone of that bridge to the

future. But first, humankind must return to the source, find the imaginative fire from which experience wrought the myths and images of old. In that molten basalt emerging in imaginative channels from ageless depths, our destiny would crystallize.

In an interview coinciding with the publication of *Liber Novus*, Dr. Sonu Shamdasani was asked to prophesy on ways the Red Book would affect Jung's image in coming years. By way of answer, Shamdasani references the immensely important collection of Gnostic texts rediscovered in 1945 and first published in 1977 as the *Nag Hammadi Library*—texts widely recognized to be long lost primary documents of the ancient Gnosis. Looking to the future, he replied:

The publication will be seen to mark a caesura comparable to the effect of the publication of the Nag Hammadi library on the study of Gnosticism—finally, one is in the position to study the genesis of Jung's work and what took place in him during this critical period, on the basis of primary documents....⁶⁵

I vision Dr. Jung smiling broadly over the mysterious conjunction within that comment.

V.

Jung wrote the conclusion of *Liber Novus* not with pen upon its many remaining blank pages, but in stone at his Bollingen Tower on the shores of Lake Zurich. This was his shrine to Philemon, his repentance of the Faustian sin—the hubris of modern consciousness that refused a place of welcome to the Gods.⁶⁶

In 1950, in remembrance of his seventy-fifth year, Jung worked the last “page” of *Liber Novus* from a large square stone resting beside his tower. As he began work on the front surface, the stone showed him a circle: it looked out at him like an eye.

With chisel, he cut deep the orb, and then the central pupil. In the pupil of the eye—at the doorway between inner and outer worlds—he saw and carved a small figure, the cabiri Telesphoros. His vestment is marked with the symbol of Hermes. In hand, he bares a lantern. Around him in ancient Greek, the stone speaks this proclamation:

*AION is a child playing—Wagering on draughts—Kingship of a Child
Telesphoros traverses the dark regions of this Cosmos
A flashing Star from the Depths
Guiding way to the Gates of the Sun and to the Land of Dreams*⁶⁷

There, at the threshold of vision, we meet the final mystery of Carl Gustav Jung and his *Liber Novus*.



Figure 3. Jung's *Aion Lapis* at Bollingen, completed in 1950.
(Photograph by author.)

Notes

I wish to express my gratitude to Dr. Stephan A. Hoeller, who several decades ago introduced me to the wisdom of C. G. Jung and guided me through the great gateway of the *Septem Sermones ad Mortuos*. This commentary reflects many years of our conversations. Along with a generation of Jung's students, I respectfully thank Dr. Sonu Shamdasani, whose editorial work and scholarship provide the historical foundations for this commentary.

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¹ C.G. Jung, *The Red Book: Liber Novus*, ed. Sonu Shamdasani, tr. John Peck, Mark Kyburz, and Sonu Shamdasani (WW Norton & Co, 2009), p. 232 i. (hereafter, LN) Given the large size of the folio pages of LN, citations are to page and page column, column given as i or ii.

² For extensive review of biographical treatments of Jung and this period in his life, see, Sonu Shamdasani, *Jung Stripped Bare Jung by His Biographers, Even* (Karnac, 2005).

³ LN p. 200 ii.

⁴ There are seven journals, the first dating from before 1902. The events beginning 12 Nov 1913 are recorded in Black Book 2 through 7. The last five of these journals had black covers, the cover of Black Book 2 is a dark brown. Somewhat confusingly, Black Book 2 is often referred to as the "first journal", since it is the beginning the record pertinent to LN.

⁵ Sonu Shamdasani, Oct 9 2009 address delivered at New York Academy of Medicine, author's transcript; and LN p 221 ii.

⁶ LN p. 212ff.

⁷ By 1928 Jung had transcribed only about two-thirds of the draft material he had prepared, and apparently intended, for inclusion in *Liber Novus*. In the published edition, this draft material is include within the translation of the manuscript text. See Shamdasani's editorial notes in LN.

⁸ Events continued intensely through 1918, and then less intensely into the early 1920s. LN includes events up through summer 1916, with commentary add up until about 1918 (based on my reading of Shamdasani's notes). Diary material from 1916 onward will almost certainly reach publication at a future date.

⁹ First published in a flawed English translation by Beatrice M. Hinkle in 1916, under the title *Psychology of the Unconscious*; thereafter heavily revised by Jung and published in the *Collected Works* as *Symbols of Transformation*, CW 5.

¹⁰ see, Sonu Shamdasani, *Jung and the Making of Modern Psychology: The Dream of a Science* (Cambridge University Press, 2003) for a comprehensive evaluation of the many intellectual currents to which Jung was exposed, and the relative influence of Freud.

¹¹ LN p. 232 n39.

¹² C. G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, ed. Aniela Jaffe (revised edition, Pantheon, 1993) p. 175 (hereafter MDR).

¹³ MDR p. 200; LN p.198 ii.

¹⁴ C. G. Jung, *Analytical Psychology: Notes of the Seminar Given in 1925*, ed. William McGuire (Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 40; LN p. 198 ii. Ten months later, he recognized this as a pre-cognitive vision of the Great War that erupted in August of 1914. During this period, there were several others vision that he late understood in this context; see LN p. 202 i, and below.

¹⁵ LN p. 232 i. The text following this invocation is given at the beginning of this paper. I have reproduced the repeated words, “Meine Seele, meine Seele”, as written in the original diary entry.

¹⁶ LN p. 232 i.

¹⁷ LN p. 233 i.

¹⁸ LN p. 234 ii.

¹⁹ LN p. 235 ii.

²⁰ MDR p. 178.

²¹ *Analytical Psychology*. At least one of those present, Cary de Angulo (later, Cary F. Baynes) had read manuscript material prepared for *Liber Novus*. It is likely that a few others present, including Jung’s wife Emma, had read material in *Liber Novus*.

²² The rendition of events given in 1925 was subsequently adapted, with many deletions and additions – including these two mentioned signal events – for inclusion in MDR chapter 6, “Confrontation with the Unconscious”.

²³ *Analytical Psychology* p. 47.

²⁴ LN p. 237 ii.

²⁵ *Analytical Psychology* p. 47-8.

²⁶ LN p. 200 ii. Apparently paraphrasing comments made by Jung to Aniela Jaffe, Shamdasani adds: “In retrospect, he recalled that his scientific question was to see what took place when he switched off consciousness. The example of dreams indicated the existence of background activity, and he wanted to give this a possibility of emerging, just as one does when taking mescaline.”

²⁷ LN p. 238 ii.

²⁸ LN p. 201 i.

²⁹ Jung objected: “I really prefer the term “imagination” to “fantasy”... fantasy is merely nonsense, a phantasm, a fleeting impression; but imagination is active, purposeful creation.... A fantasy is more or less your own invention, and remains on the surface of personal things and conscious expectations. But active imagination, as the term denotes, means that the images have a life of their own and that the symbolic events develop according to their own logic—that is, of course, if your conscious reason does not interfere.” *Tavistock Lectures*, CW 18 p. 171.

³⁰ Jung begins *Liber Novus* quoting Isaiah and the Gospel of John.

³¹ *Analytical Psychology* p. 63.

³² LN p. 250 n197.

³³ LN p. 356 i This commentary was probably written in the early 1920s, and is given as Appendix B in *Liber Novus*.

³⁴ LN p. 252 ii.

³⁵ LN p. 356 i.

³⁶ LN p. 264.

³⁷ *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, (Princeton University Press), Vol 11, p. 157 (hereafter, CW; references are to volume and page, not paragraph number).

³⁸ MDR p. 182ff.

³⁹ MDR p. 183.

⁴⁰ LN p. 312 i.

⁴¹ LN p. 316 i.

⁴² Cary F. Baynes papers, Jan 26, 1924, LN p213 ii.

⁴³ This appellation and painted image of Philemon in *Liber Novus* was probably completed in late 1924 or early 1925, base on surrounding dates in the text.

⁴⁴ Shamdasani reviews this matter in detail, LN p. 201ff.

⁴⁵ He would subsequently title this section of the account *Liber Primus* ("Book One").

⁴⁶ The published edition of *Liber Novus* contains the complete text of the drafts in English translation, including material apparently intended for, but never entered into, the Red Book volume. The seven original parchment leaves, *Liber Primus*, would subsequently be place by Jung interleaf into the beginning of the big book. Material transcribed directly into the Red Book constitutes *Liber Secundus*, relating to events from late December 1913 through about April 1914. The last draft pages of *Liber Secundus* were never transcribed, and none of the material from the third section of the draft material, *Scrutinies*, appears in the Red Book volume. By my examination of the original volume, I surmise approximately 400 pages at the back of the volume remain blank.

⁴⁷ Reflecting on these statements in the 1930's, Jung undoubtedly saw alchemical gold. LN p. 337 n25.

⁴⁸ This journal entry is in Black Book 5 and does not appear in *Liber Novus*. LN Appendix C, p. 370. During coming weeks, Jung sketched in his journal the outlines of his first "mandala", the *Systema Munditotius*, which forms a schema of this statement and the vision conveyed in the *Sermones*, LN Appendix A, p. 363-4.

⁴⁹ MDR , p190-1. Based other dated events in his journals, the Sunday referred to in this account is probably Sunday, 30 January 1916. Shamdasani also gives Cary Baynes' remembrance of Jung's account of the event, LN p. 205 ii.

⁵⁰From Dr. Shamdasani's notes in LN, it appears that the Seven Sermons are recorded in journal entries in Black Book 6, dated 31 January to 8 February 1916.

⁵¹ The best available analysis of the *Septem Sermones ad Mortuos* remains the seminal 1982 exegesis by Stephan A. Hoeller, *The Gnostic Jung and the Seven Sermons to the Dead* (Wheaton, IL: Quest, 1982).

⁵² MDR p. 192.

⁵³ Hoeller translation, *The Gnostic Jung*, p. 44.

⁵⁴ John Peck, Mark Kyburz, and Sonu Shamdasani, LN p. 222.

⁵⁵ MDR p. 4 Shamdasani translates the passage less poetically and more precisely, “The first imaginings and dreams were like fiery, molten basalt, from which the stone crystallized, upon which I could work.” LN p. 219 ii.

⁵⁶ At the end of *Liber Secundus*, Jung wrote: “I must catch up with a piece of the Middle Ages—within myself. We have only finished the Middle Ages of—others. I must begin early, in that period when the hermits died out.” LN p. 330, 216 ii.

⁵⁷ CW 15 p. 98.

⁵⁸ CW 11 p. 157.

⁵⁹ LN p. 338 ii.

⁶⁰ Jung’s 1957 “Epilogue” to *Liber Novus*, LN p. 360.

⁶¹ LN p. 211-2.

⁶² See for example, Hugh of St. Victor (c. 1078 –1141), *De scripturis et scriptoribus sacris*.

⁶³ MDR p. 192.

⁶⁴ MDR p. 189.

⁶⁵ “Inside Jung’s Red Book: Six Questions for Sonu Shamdasani”, *Harper’s Magazine*, Oct. 2009.

⁶⁶ Over the gate at the Bollingen Tower, Jung engraved this dedication: *Philemonis Sacrum—Fausti Poenitentia* (Shrine of Philemon—Repentance of Faust). MDR p. 235n.

⁶⁷ This is my translation. The first phrase references a fragment from Heraclitus of Ephesus (c. 535 BC), and can be read on the stone as a coherent statement. MDR translates Jung’s amplified German rendition of the inscription: “Time is a child – playing like a child – playing a board game – the kingdom of the child. This is Telesphoros, who roams through the dark regions of this cosmos and glows like a star out of the depths. He points the way to the gates of the sun and to the land of dreams.” MDR p. 227.

This article was originally published as:

Lance S. Owens, “The Hermeneutics of Vision: C. G. Jung and *Liber Novus*”,
The Gnostic: A Journal of Gnosticism, Western Esotericism and Spirituality,
Issue 3, July 2010, 23–46.