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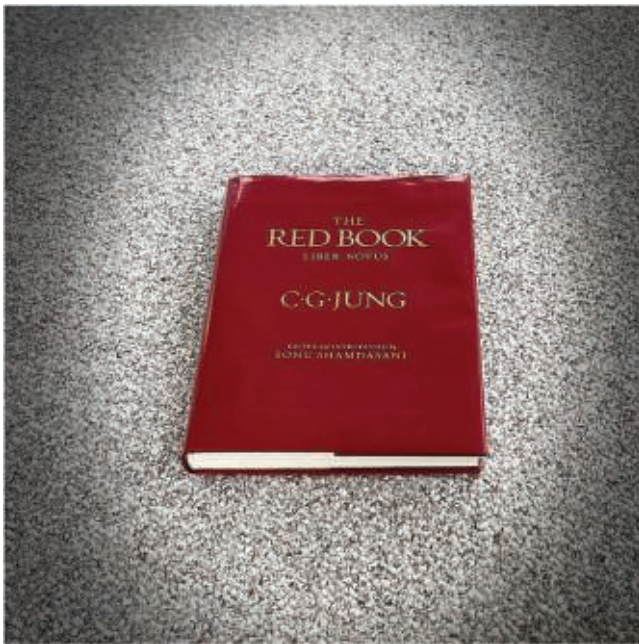
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Editorial

Singing in tune: Carl Jung and *The Red Book*



The Red Book by C.G. Jung. Credit for the journal cover image and the image above: Meir Kryger

“I feel it is the duty of one who goes his own way to inform society of what he finds on his voyage of discovery” C.G. Jung

The Red Book, like Carl Jung himself, is an imposing physical presence. One and half feet tall and weighing 9 and a half pounds the book demands space and solitude on any bookshelf. Listed at \$195, the book was hardly expected to be a best-seller, even by its publisher. Yet a few months after its publication in 2009, *The Red Book* made it to number 18 on *The New York Times*' nonfiction best-seller list. Six editions have been published since then, as well as a less expensive version without illustrations (Figs. 1-3).¹

What do *The Red Book* and Jung have to do with sleep? Jung was the founder of depth psychology and was very interested in dreams. Depth psychologists view symptoms as meaningful communications from the unconscious. In this view, for instance, insomnia is a communication from the inner world, demanding that one “wake up” to a deeper life and sensibility. In many non-Western cultures, a period of insomnia heralds the beginning of a spiritual journey. This was the case with Jung. He struggled with a sustained period of severe insomnia, which resolved when he began, in his view, to pay attention to his inner world and work on *The Red Book*.

Jung did describe one case of brief, but successful insomnia treatment. A family doctor from a small town in Switzerland referred Jung to a young patient with severe, intractable insomnia. Because of her personal and financial circumstances, she could see Jung only once. Her perfectionism and tendency to worry were obvious, and Jung at first made interventions that we would today describe as cognitive. He talked to her about the importance of relaxation. She listened attentively, but Jung realized he was not reaching her on a deeper level. Struggling to have an impact, he found himself, for no particular reason, talking about sailing and humming a lullaby his mother used to sing. The session ended; he never saw her again. Years later, Jung ran into the family doctor at a conference. Excitedly the family doctor pulled Jung aside, “Dr. Jung, how did you cure my patient? She never had insomnia again, and all she could remember was that you talked to her about sailing and sang to her.”²

Of course, this is a single case, and perhaps a placebo effect. But a Jungian would say that Jung intuited internal wisdom from his own depths. Sailing, after all, requires trust in the winds of the unconscious, and singing involves a harmonious relationship to a noncognitive realm. The case does illustrate Jungian treatment, which focuses on establishing a direct connection to the inner world, often through dreams. It is not cognitive-behavioral and not Freudian. It would be a rare Freudian analyst that would sing to his patient on the first visit.

What makes *The Red Book* so popular? Perhaps it is that, unfortunately for his scientific and scholarly reputation, Jung has become something of a pop culture icon. He is considered the father of the New Age movement; most card diviners and crystal gazers pay homage to Jung. Jung would not have been comfortable in that role; he saw himself as an empirical explorer of the inner world, and *The Red Book* was a record of that exploration.

Jung started to develop *The Red Book* in 1913, during a time of great personal crisis. He commissioned a specially bound journal of high-quality paper upon which he could both paint and write.³ Though he frequently showed the work to members of his inner circle, Jung never intended to publish it. Perhaps he viewed it as a private account of his personal psychological journey; perhaps he was concerned that the book would reveal practices and methods that would be viewed as “unscientific.”

Not unlike psychiatrists and psychologists today, Jung faced pressures, both internally and externally, to be “scientific.” His initial clinical work focused on identifying emotionally charged complexes using response times to word association tasks inspired by Sir Francis Galton and Wilhelm Wundt—work that any scientist could be proud of. He coined the terms *introversion*, *extraversion*, and *mid-life crisis*; his work on psychological types is influential to this day. Popular



Fig. 1. At age 82, Jung wrote, “In the end, the only events of my life worth telling are those when the imperishable world erupted into this transitory one . . .”⁵ Image from *The Red Book* by Carl Jung.

inventories like the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, used commonly in industrial psychology, are Jungian in origin.

Though Jung’s professional interest soon turned to more esoteric concepts like individuation and the collective unconscious, he always considered himself to be an empiricist or phenomenologist. He insisted that in his work he was describing what he observed through his own experiences.



Fig. 3. The Self, an image of inner wholeness combining both conscious and unconscious processes, appears in dreams or active imagination as a circular image, like a primordial mandala, or an archaic symbol of the universe/eternity. Jung termed the teleological process of becoming whole “individuation” and saw the ancient practice of alchemy as a metaphor for the process. He later published a series of dreams of the physicist and Nobel Laureate, Wolfgang Pauli, that reflected this process in *Psychology and Alchemy*. Image from *The Red Book* by Carl Jung.

Jung described the tumultuous 16-year period when he developed *The Red Book* to be the most important of his life and called it his “confrontation with the unconscious.”

The years of which I have spoken to you, when I pursued the inner images, were the most important time of my life. Everything else 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. . . Everything later was merely the outer classification, the scientific elaboration, and the integration into life.⁴

Yet Jung was hesitant to publish *The Red Book*. Perhaps it was, for him, a Gnostic by predisposition, part of the secret path for initiates only.

The Red Book is an extended example of what is described in the Jungian literature as active imagination. According to Jung, active imagination requires a state of reverie, half-way between sleep and waking. Active imagination involves the exploration and elaboration of dream images while awake. In active imagination the conscious mind encourages unconscious fantasies to emerge and then actively engages them. If a person dreams, for instance, of an elf, they might, while awake, try to talk to the elf. As bizarre as this might sound, in practice it resembles the kind of dream work that is done in Image Rehearsal Therapy for nightmares.

The Red Book shows us, visually, what Jung observed and experienced during his inner journey. The inner world experienced by New Agers tends to be safe and pretty. Jung’s experience was different: many of his visions were dark and terrifying. One of his early visions included Europe bathed in a sea of blood. When this vision came



Fig. 2. A spirit guide encountered by Jung during his inner journey, whom he named Philemon. Image from *The Red Book* by Carl Jung.

true, as it were, with the outbreak of WW1, Jung was terrified and awe-struck.⁵

During this period, Jung heard voices, conversed with imaginary figures, and faced the spirits of the dead. Though Jung approached his inner journey with dread, he considered it an opportunity to gain knowledge and understanding and made a daily ritual of allowing himself to lapse into a trance-like state and record what he experienced: "... I was committing myself to a dangerous enterprise not for myself alone, but also for the sake of my patients..."⁵

Jung's interest in altered states of consciousness was prescient. Only in the past few years has the scientific community come to recognize the power of these altered states. When coupled with therapy, psychedelic drugs, which readily elicit such altered states, have been shown to be effective in treating depression, end-of-life anxiety, and substance abuse.⁶ Jung rejected dreams as disguised wishes but valued the dream state as a gateway to other parts of our psyche, leading to new insights and creative expression, a concept now supported by empirical evidence.⁷

Bravely, over a 16-year inner journey, Jung recorded, in words and images, all that he felt and saw during his visionary hypnagogic and dream experiences. Although he initially rejected the notion of *The Red Book* as an artistic expression rather than science, the result is a strange, disjointed narrative associated with beautiful images that today are part of the genre of visionary art. It is, without doubt, a profoundly personal alchemical amalgam of art, science, and spirituality that is, in many ways, as relevant today as when it was written over a century ago.

In his explorations, Jung was struck by the fact that the figures and scenarios he experienced echoed ancient myths and fairy tales. He later called these kinds of figures archetypes, like anima, animus, shadow, and Self. To explain his experiences, Jung postulated a "collective unconscious," wherein these mythical figures and settings had an important reality of their own.

Did Jung think these figures were "real?" He wasn't psychotic or delusional. Despite his emotional turmoil during this period, he worked productively and taught. Jung felt the collective unconscious was "psychically real"; that is, it was reproducibly present in his own mind and the minds of his patients, as well as universally present in myths and legends and reenacted in art. He felt that our dyadic categorization of things as real or not real was naïve and did not encompass the imaginal world.

During Jung's altered states, he saw visions and heard voices. If he had this experience in a clinical trial today, he almost certainly would have been pulled out for an adverse reaction. "It is of course ironical that I, a psychiatrist, should at almost every step in my experiment... have run into the same psychic material which is the stuff of psychosis and is found in the insane... But it is also the matrix of a mythopoetic imagination which has vanished from our age."⁵

Jung struggled with the variety of roles, which he bridged with varying success. Was he a scientist? a psychiatrist? an artist? a writer? a guru? a faith healer? He was certainly the first narrative therapist; he realized that his goal in therapy was to co-create, with his patient, "the healing fiction," the story that gave their lives meaning and purpose.

To borrow a New Age term, Jung was the first "psychonaut." Imagine him as something like Darwin, traveling through the Galapagos, meticulously recording and observing species and their forms. Out of Jung's internal observations, a theory emerged. His theories were rich, bold, and unconventional. They do not lend themselves to modern academic standards of testability, but that does not mean they are not true. Like his art works, his theories are beautiful. By a "Keatsian" standard, they are true.

Beauty is truth, truth beauty,

That is all ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.

John Keats, *Ode on a Grecian Urn*

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The authors have declared that they have no conflicts of interest to disclose.

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