

*C.G. Jung, The Red Book, 125*

## **A Pictorial Guide to THE RED BOOK**

**Jay Sherry**

The publication of *The Red Book* by W.W. Norton & Co. last October was a major publishing event not only for the Jungian community but for all those interested in psychology and 20<sup>th</sup> century culture. The fact that Jung circulated drafts of it and showed it to many different people makes it clear that he did intend it to reach a wider public. The Philemon Foundation and the Jung family are to be thanked for doing just that. The book is selling well and is now in its sixth printing; the original was on display at the Rubin Museum of Asian Art in New York and now travels to the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles where a series of events are planned in coordination with its exhibition. (Readers should look for specific information about these events on the front page of this issue.) It then goes to the Library of Congress with final stops in Paris and Zurich. How lucky we are to realize that when we read Jung addressing himself to “my friends” that we are now included in his salutation. Sonu Shamdasani’s commentary and footnotes brilliantly elucidate the text and its evolution while the cross-referencing system helps us navigate its complexities with relative ease.

I will confine my observations to its imagery because the text will take time to unravel. The book is like a primeval forest that readers enter at the spot meant for them alone; it is a hermeneutistic delight!

It was with a sense of excitement that I opened the book and paged through it for the first time. How would Jung’s depictions of his fantasies compare to the images I had formed in my mind over the years from reading “Confrontation with the Unconscious”? They unfold in the *Liber Primus* in a series of panels done in a style reminiscent of illustrations found in the popular historical literature of the period which would have inspired his boyhood



**Figure 1** *Siegfried, C.G. Jung, The Red Book, folio iv, verso.*

drawings of battles and castles. In his Red Book picture of the ambush of Siegfried on the mountain path Jung and his brown-skinned companion fire their guns and the hero is thrown back, his shield aloft. Jung reported that in the dream Siegfried was riding in a chariot made out of the bones of the dead but this does not appear in

the picture. Apparently Jung felt that drawing it was beyond his artistic skill and settled for a simpler layout.

We finally get to meet Salome one of the most important figures in his active imaginations and learn that we already know her from the previously published mandala on p. 105. She turns out to be a demure young woman, more an incarnation of Rebecca in *Ivanhoe* than one of the voluptuous *femme fatales* appearing on the stage at this time when the Salome



**Figure 2** *Salome, C.G. Jung, The Red Book, folio v, verso.*

story inspired works in all the performing arts. Jung's vague associations to Salome should not distract us from looking at the cultural context that shaped his

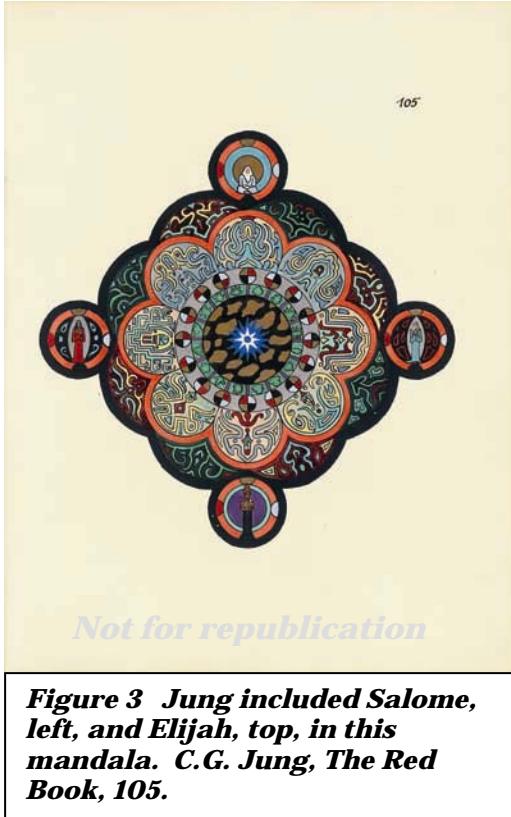


image of her. She captured the imagination of the artists of the time and was one of Franz von Stuck's favorite subjects. Her Dance of the Seven Veils was in the process of giving birth to modern dance and strip-tease. A generational crush on Sarah Bernhardt to whom Oscar Wilde dedicated his play *Salome* would have been Jung's entrée into the period's Salomania. In preparing for her role in *Theodora*, a play about a 6<sup>th</sup> century Byzantine empress, Bernhardt visited

Ravenna, Italy where one of the famous mosaics depicts the main character. Jung also traveled to Ravenna and became fascinated with the Tomb of Galla Placidia and things Byzantine. I believe that Salome was an important element in Jung's erotic-mythical projections onto Sabina Spielrein. In a letter to Freud (June 4, 1909) Jung wrote about how she was "systematically planning my seduction...[and] now is seeking revenge."



(1974 p. 228) He connected it to “an amiable complex” that involved a strong attraction to Jewish women. (ibid. p. 229)

Freud represented another Jewish figure who served as a human embodiment of Elijah, the white bearded prophet and Salome’s companion. In time Elijah transformed into Philemon, the central wisdom figure in Jung’s active imaginations. One source for the origin of Philemon’s name is the New Testament where he is a recipient of a letter from St. Paul, the other can be found in classical mythology and in Goethe (who elaborates on the story) where he is depicted as the husband of Baucis. I would like to propose another source. Jung owned a copy of the novel *Hypatia* by the Victorian writer Charles Kingsley. It is a historical romance about the life of the female Neo-Platonic philosopher Hypatia. The book also includes another character, a monk named Philammon.



**Figure 5 Jung’s first Philemon. An Illustrated Biography of C. G. Jung by Gerhard Wehr, p. 72.**

In The Red Book chapter entitled “The Anchorite,” Jung meets a monk called Ammonius (p. 267f) whose name has resonance to Philemon. The novel *Hypatia* is set in ancient Alexandria and Jung’s reading of it may have influenced his description of Philemon’s emergence from the Elijah figure as “...a

pagan...[who]...brought with him an Egypto-Hellenistic atmosphere with a Gnostic coloration.” (1961/1989, p. 182) This evidence indicates another historical source for this central figure in Jung’s active imagination.

Jung painted three versions of Philemon. The first was based on a dream. A winged Philemon flies across from left to right gazing out at the viewer; he holds a key ring in his right hand and holds a key aloft in the left. He has the horns of a bull with a sun in the background creating a halo-effect. (Wehr, 1989, p. 72) Shamdasani mentions Blake’s influence on Jung’s artistic project but this

needs more elaboration. Timing is important here as there was a significant rediscovery of this visionary poet made manifest in the founding of the William Blake Society in 1912. We know that Jung owned *The William Blake Calendar* (1913) and its daily quotes celebrating the life



**Figure 6 “Elohim Creating Adam” by William Blake. *The Seer and His Visions*, p. 57.**

of the imagination would have given Jung encouragement in the experiment that he was about to undertake. His depiction of Philemon owes something to Blake’s *The Elohim Creating Adam* and Plate 11 of the Book of Job that is accompanied by the quote “With Dreams upon my bed thou scarest me & affrightest me with Visions.” (1977, pgs. 57 and 135)

The most familiar picture of Philemon is the one he painted in *The Red Book* (p. 154) sometime after 1924, possibly during his 1925 seminar on



**Figure 7 Philemon, C.G. Jung, The Red Book, 154.**

“Analytical Psychology” when he spoke for the first time about his encounter with the unconscious. Philemon wearing a floral tunic with his hands cupping a precious light hovers over a domed building. In the background is a grove of palm trees.

Philemon’s costume and axial composition are clearly derived from Byzantine iconography. I would also suggest that the picture more specifically reflects the ongoing influence of Ravenna on Jung’s

imagination. The domed building closely resembles the Tomb of Theodoric found there. Furthermore, the blue background and rondels across the top of the picture are similar to those that decorate the Tomb of Galla Placidia. It was this version of Philemon that Jung later painted as a fresco in the guest bedroom of his tower at Bollingen. (1964/1972, p.198)

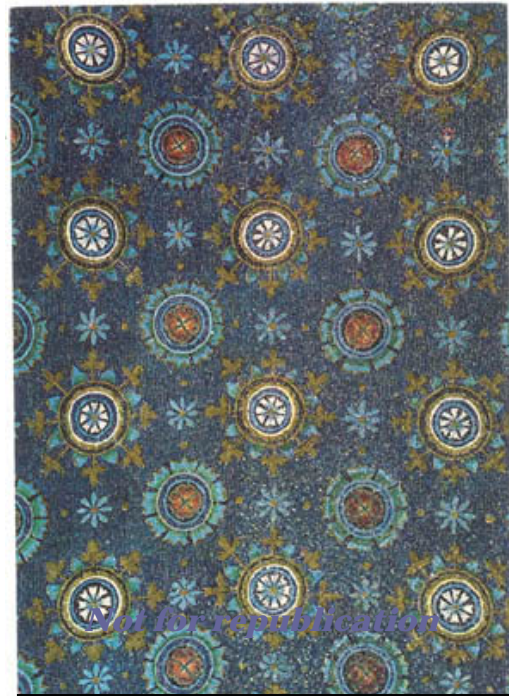
The technique of active imagination that Jung was developing helped him process the libido that was building up during this period of deep introversion. He described



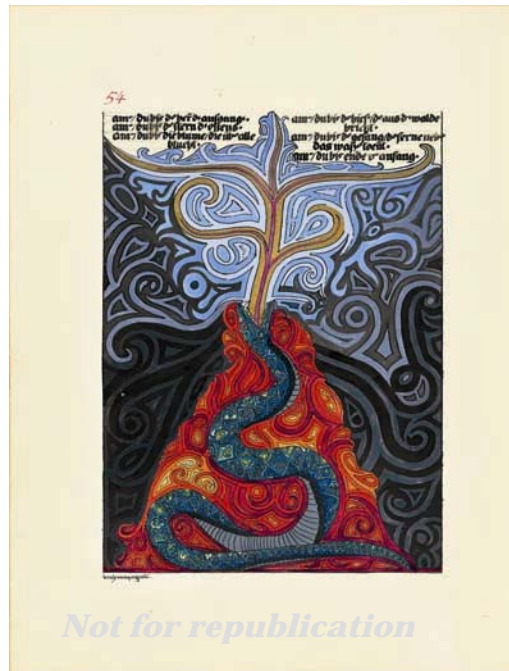
**Figure 8 Actual domed building at top of Figure 7. Tomb of Theodoric. Author’s photo.**

the figures that he encountered as “personified emotions” and “realized” them in pictorial, symbolic form. The symbol that Jung uses most frequently throughout the book is the snake which appears on the very first page in the capital “D.” It emerges from a pot of fire with a crown on its head and symbolizes the Kundalini energy that was being activated in Jung. The snake appears in many different ways, as a harmless black garden snake in two following capitals before appearing at the feet of Elijah and Salome. On page 54 the snake erupts with volcanic force and from its mouth sprouts a stylized tree. Jung enhanced the snake’s power and majesty by his attention to its twisting body and beautifully intricate pattern of scales.

One of the most interesting new elements to be found in The Red Book is Jung’s representation of himself. In the Liber Primus we see him as a white robed pilgrim with black hair in a page-boy cut. His robe later becomes green as he kneels before the giant Izdubar, an early name



**Figure 9 Mosaic ceiling from the Tomb of Galla Placidia.**



**Figure 10 Snake erupting, C.G. Jung, The Red Book, 54.**



of Gilgamesh (p. 36), one of the most important figures Jung was to encounter on his inner journey. An interesting amplification of this motif of the pilgrim is found in a bookplate of Jung's that dates from this period (it appears in a book published in 1918). This bookplate shows a kneeling woman drinking from a cup offered by a robed man. A river winds through the middle ground and the sun rises in the distance. The accompanying motto reads "POST TENEBRAS LUX" ("After darkness, light"). The lettering of Jung's name is done in an art nouveau style; the skilled rendering of the figures indicates either a major step in his artistic skill or the fact that it was done by another hand. One possible inspiration for its iconography was the Tarot deck designed by



**Figure 11 Temperance Tarot Card.** Illustrations from the Rider-Waite Tarot Deck® reproduced by permission of U.S. Games Systems, Inc., Stamford, CT 06902 USA. Copyright ©1971 by U.S. Games Systems, Inc. Further reproduction prohibited. The Rider-Waite Tarot Deck® is a registered trademark of U.S. Games Systems, Inc.

Pamela Colman Smith under the direction of Arthur Edward Waite, a member of the Order of the Golden Dawn. The Temperance card (XIV) is the most suggestive in this regard. The deck was published in 1909 and very possibly became familiar to Jung, who owned several books by Waite, while he was immersing himself in astrology.

We also get to watch several other of Jung's symbol systems unfold through the pictures. An example of this can be found with the image of Atmavictu ("breath of life") who first appears on p. 29. It rises up from a subterranean ball of magma and glares at us with its sharp set of teeth. I think



**Figure 12** *Atmavictu, C.G. Jung, The Red Book, 29.*

that the decorated border gives us a clue as to one of its meanings. The colorful images are rendered in a child-like style; the image directly below *Atmavictu* shows a caterpillar with a reclining figure inside. We are reminded that from the caterpillar emerges the butterfly (psyche). Jung included many alligators, insects, and scarabs to go along with all the snakes, a sea monster, dragon, and a dinosaur. He concentrated on “cold-blooded” creatures

more distant from the human experience than their mammalian successors.

*Atmavictu* was connected to Philemon and Izdubar in a complex web of correspondences discussed in the footnotes. The last major figure to emerge was *Telesphoros*, a god of healing associated with *Phanes* who in Orphic mythology was born from an egg. *Telesphoros* was one of the *Cabiri*, phallic daimons who can be seen sprouting from the flowers. These figures had lifelong significance for Jung and were the subject of sculptures that he later carved.



**Figure 13** *C.G. Jung, The Red Book, 123.*



**Figure 14** *Ballet Russe set.*

an art-historical approach to better understand Jung's project.

We have already noticed the neo-Byzantine style of Philemon; in addition, Jung's preference for Middle Eastern costumes and arabesques can be found throughout. One highly visible contemporary

source was the popularity of the Ballet Russe with its extravagant Orientalist productions, many of which were designed by Leon Bakst to showcase Nijinsky's dancing. Nicholas Roerich was another of its designers and Jung owned his 1925 *Tibetan Paintings*. A further connection can be found via Robert Edmund Jones who did sets for the company's 1916 American tour of *Till Eulenspiegel*. In the 1920's, Jones went to Zurich for analysis with Jung and was shown *The Red Book* which

impressed him with its theatricality. Even if he did not visit it, it is likely that

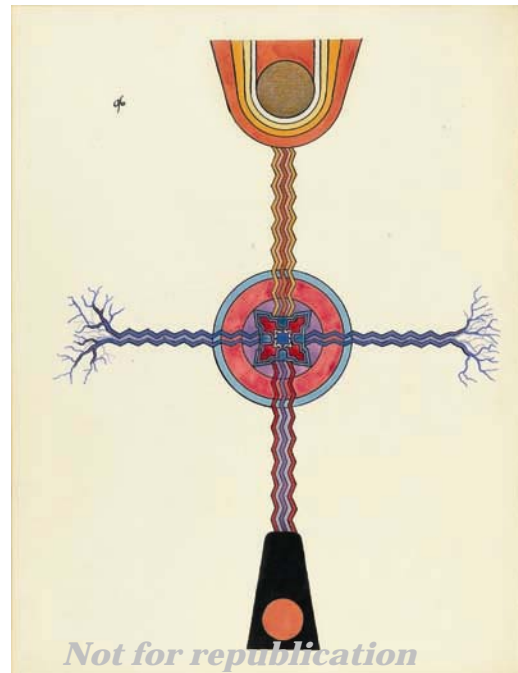
What have we learned now that we didn't know from the images previously published in the illustrated biographies by Aniela Jaffe and Gerhard Wehr? Although Jung resisted "the voice's" characterization of what he was doing as being "art" we must pursue



**Figure 15** *Ballet Russe costume.*

Jung was aware of the Muhammedan Art Exhibit held in Munich in 1910 which brought the glories of Islamic civilization to the attention of a wider European audience.

What is new and exciting is how The Red Book reflects a great many other artistic traditions as well. One can see Jung experimenting with Navajo sand painting, Aztec jade masks, Celtic, and tribal art. Jung even includes a Minoan double-bladed ax in his picture of Izdubar. Jung's research into anthropology, mythology, psychology, and the history of religions along with his field trips to North Africa, the American Southwest, and Africa tuned him into the global culture just beginning to emerge in the years after



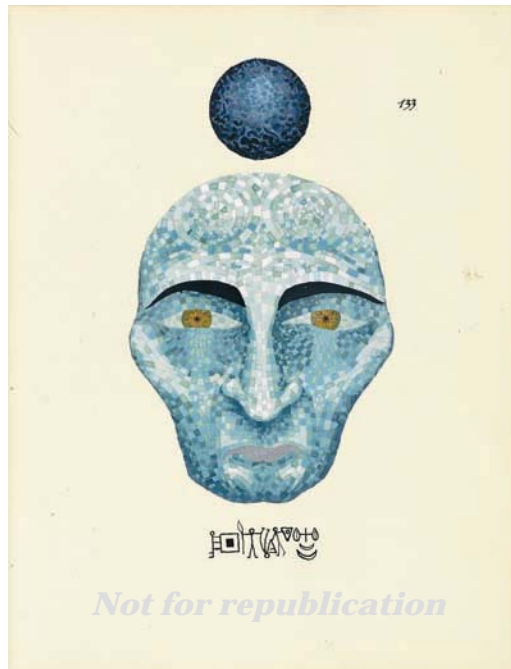
**Figure 16 Jung drawing in Navajo style. C.G. Jung, *The Red Book*, 96.**

1900. Jung was keenly aware that modern society was so individualized and secularized that it no longer operated within a single collective myth, a view he picked up from Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*. Like many of his generation he considered his era's spiritual template to be Alexandria rather than Athens and went on to develop a psychology appropriate to it. In a letter to Freud (November 15, 1909) Jung wrote that "Greek syncretism, by creating a hopeless mishmash of theogony and theology, can nevertheless do us a service: it permits reductions and the recognition of similarities, as in dream analysis." (1974, p. 264) As time

went on his therapeutic goal became that of helping people discover meaning in their often fragmented sense of self and society.



**Figure 17 Navajo Sand Painting.**



**Figure 18 Jung drawing in Aztec style. C.G. Jung, The Red Book, 133.**



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**Figure 19 Mask of Jade. From Palenque, Mexico.**

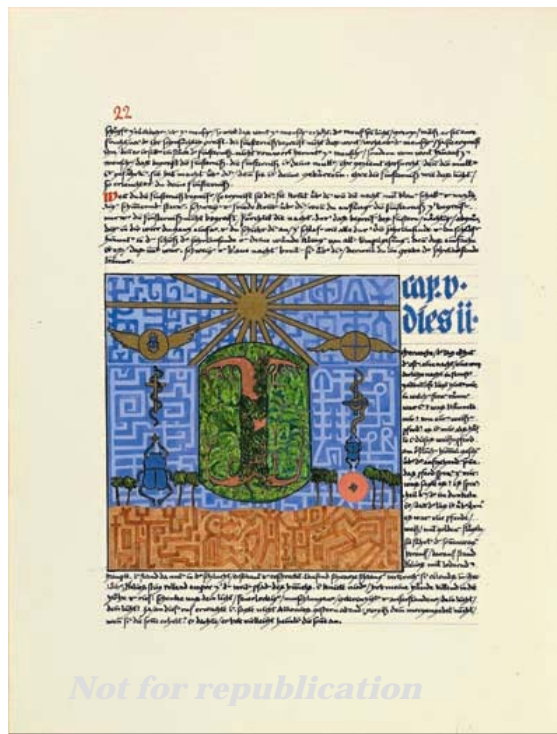


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**Figure 20 Jung drawing in Celtic style. C.G. Jung, The Red Book, 152.**



**Figure 21 The Book of Kells.**



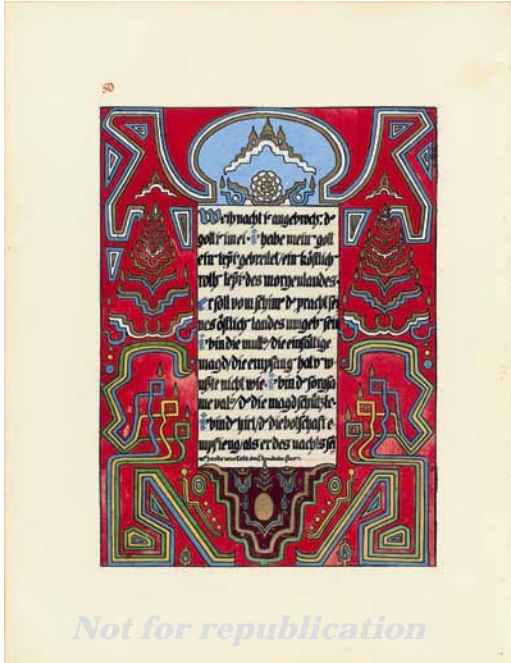
**Figure 22 Jung drawing resembling Cuna art from Panama. C.G. Jung, The Red Book, 22.**



**Figure 23** *Cuna art from Panama.*

Jung's encyclopedic appetites and progressive demeanor were moderated by an ingrained allegiance to the conservative humanism taught in his native Basel. This side of Jung's nature is most vividly reflected in *The Red Book* by his devotion to the traditional form of medieval manuscripts. I was surprised by the large number of illuminated capitals that grace its pages from beginning to end. In them many different kinds of flowers are depicted in loving detail. He paid homage to that era's genius by including a stained glass window (p. 79) and multiple references to astrology. The band across the top of the very first decorated capital letter is inscribed with the signs of Cancer, Gemini, Taurus, Aries, Pisces, and Aquarius. The Water-carrier appears several pages late (folio v) and again toward the end of the book on p. 123 in an image that echoes the Temperance card.





**Figure 24** C.G. Jung, *The Red Book*, 50.

Jung mixed avant-garde elements with traditional forms throughout the book. He wrote pictographs on some of his mandalas as if he were trying to recreate a primordial writing system. Remember that the avant-garde artists of the years before World War I were obsessed with discovering the “primitive” as a means of escaping the iron cage of civilization. Besides tribal art, they turned to the art of children and the insane for inspiration.

The boldest part of the book is the section entitled “Incantations” in which the rebirth of Izdubar culminates in his hatching from the cosmic egg. Rather than simply reading the text we should imagine chanting the verses like some shaman, an association heightened by noticing that the first page of the series is decorated like a Tibetan prayer rug. Participating in this auditory-visual experience would help in re-enchanting a dis-encharnted world. Jung was uncomfortable with the nihilistic assaults on culture undertaken by the Dadaists active in Zurich at the same time he was doing *The Red Book*. They savagely celebrated the meaninglessness of a world bleeding to death in the trenches of the Western Front while he sought to discover a new birth of meaning by going on a journey within. He found their blasphemies puerile and sought to foster a new piety, one directed to the psyche rather than to a deity. Artistically he had a neo-Romantic distaste for the modernist ethos then gaining ascendancy, an ethos that favored

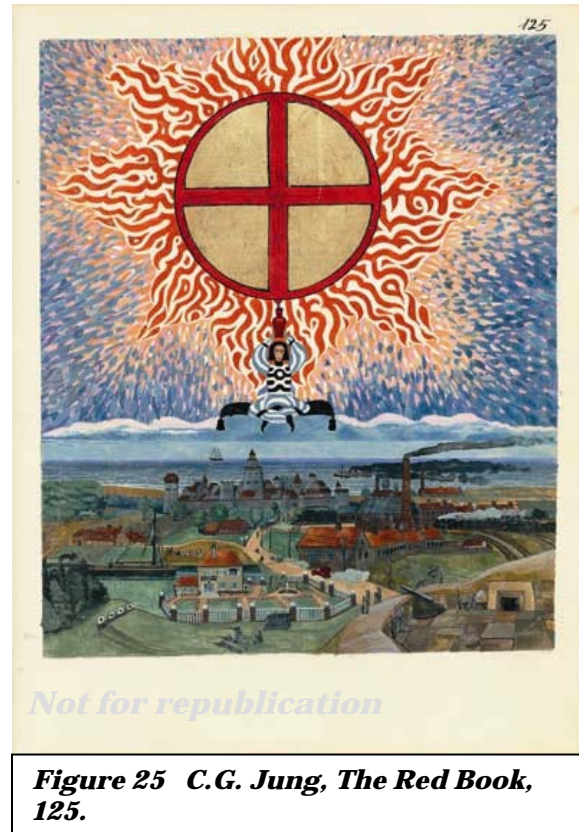
the elimination of all ornamentation and historical reference in a work of art. Years later Jung registered his disdain for this development when he wrote “How are we to explain the blatantly pathological element in modern painting?” (CW 10: 430)

Jung was an “avant-garde conservative” and this duality is best expressed by the mandala on p. 125.

As he often did, Jung divided this picture into transcendental and

mundane zones. The upper zone is dominated by a radiating golden mandala while below he paints a Swiss landscape in a folk-art style. The two are mediated by a yogi, eyes closed in meditation, holding a vase aloft. The landscape can be further divided into left and right: the left shows the country’s rural side while the right shows its industrial reality. Significantly, a strong wind is blowing from the left to keep the gritty smoke of modernity from polluting the traditional, pastoral world.

One place where the commentary needs amplification is the account of Jung’s library of modern art books (p. 203). First, there is no mention of the fact that Jung owned a book by the Swiss Symbolist painter Giovanni Segantini (1909). A more serious omission is the fact that Jung owned four books by Wilhelm Worringer whose *Abstraction and Empathy* (1908) was revolutionizing



the study of art with its analysis of the psychological foundations of artistic styles. Jung had used the book in his paper on psychological types at the psychoanalytic congress held in Munich in September 1913, the last he was to attend.

Furthermore, his Red Book pictures show his application of Worringer's ideas. To use just one example look again at the picture of Elijah and Salome (Figure 2). To more fully grasp his intentions one must treat the border and the picture as a totality; it is only then the polarities that Jung was trying to convey become clear: star/blue/masculine/linear/thinking and snake/red/feminine/sinuuous/feeling.

In *The Transformative Vision* Jose Argüelles wrote that "most observers did not appreciate the creative, artistically transformative value of Jung's vision until they were plunged into greater awareness by the psychedelic revolution of the 1960's." (1975, p. 223) Since the days when Jung dreamed of Liverpool and

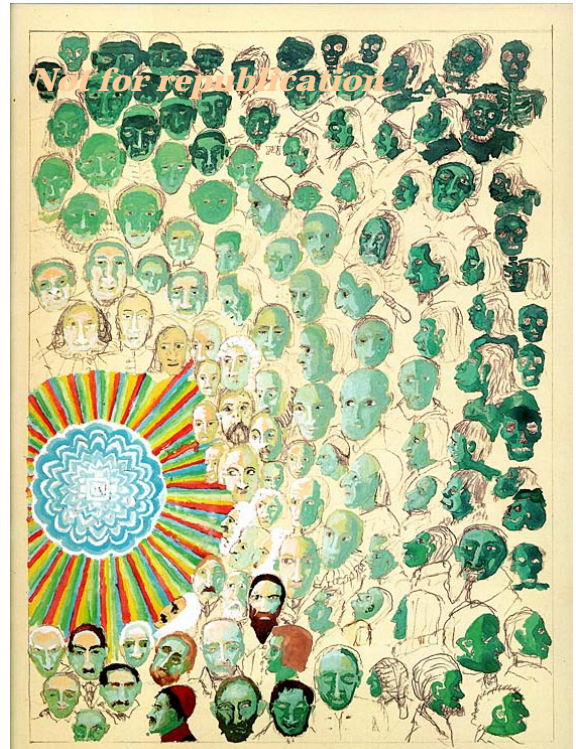
joined Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club (top row between W.C. Fields and Edgar Allen Poe) his sense of magic, mystery, and touring has caught on with more people than ever before.

In the last picture of the book, faces arranged around a mandala morph outward into skulls (p. 169) in a style uncannily reminiscent of the Belgian Symbolist painter James Ensor. It serves as a *memento mori* and a kind of closure



**Figure 26 "Self-Portrait with Masks", James Ensor.**

since it recalls caricatures he drew as a boy. “Similar caricatures sometimes appear to me before falling asleep to this day, grinning masks that constantly move and change, among them familiar faces of people who soon afterward die.” (p. 30, 1961/1989) Done in the 1950’s the mandala looks like a nuclear rainbow explosion. Jung ended his book forty-six years after he started it, writing in his normal script stopping in the middle of a sentence, the last word “possibility” sitting alone at the top of a page. This, along with the fact that the last



**Figure 27 The last image in The Red Book. C.G. Jung, The Red Book, 169.**

capital was blocked but not executed (p. 187), conveys the feeling that Jung was now letting go of a project that had been so crucial to his individuation process. We might also understand it as his sly hermetical invitation to remember that what we are holding is not a closed book but a contemporary template for the ongoing play of creative fantasy. One might imagine his Red Book as a user’s guide to the psyche, a personal odyssey that began in Basel and ended with Zen.

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**Biography:** Jay Sherry is an educator living in Brooklyn, NY. He has published in such journals as *Harvest*, *Quadrant*, *Spring*, and the *San Francisco Jung Institute Library Journal*. He received his Ph.D. from the Freie Universität Berlin. His book *Carl Gustav Jung, Avant-Garde Conservative* will be published by Palgrave Macmillan in October 2010.