

About Jung

by Marilyn Mathew

Carl Gustav Jung was an extraordinary and multi-faceted man – psychiatrist, scientist, scholar, artist, writer and pioneer; he was an explorer of the psyche; a dreamer with a keen intellect, a real sense of humour, a man in search of meaning - in many ways he was a twentieth-century alchemist.

Jung was born on July 26, 1875, in Kesswil, Switzerland to a pastor and his spiritualistically inclined wife. Religion ran like a ribbon through his family, so perhaps it was unsurprising that issues to do with God and the Church erupted in his early dreams and continued throughout his life.

As a boy, Jung was solitary, introverted and imaginative. With interests in both religion and science, he finally settled on a medical career.

In his work as a psychiatrist, Jung developed the *word association test*. This produced evidence for the existence of complexes – problematic knots that can develop in the psyche. On reading Freud's new work, *Interpretation of Dreams*, Jung sent him a copy of his thesis, *Studies in Word Association*, and following this the two men met, kindling an intense creative relationship.

In many ways Freud was a father figure to Jung, and perhaps Jung was seen to be his heir apparent, but the two men clashed, with a major difference of opinion over the interpretation of a dream and the nature of the unconscious. In Jung's view, the unconscious is not simply the place where we bury our primitive sexual and aggressive desires, a repository of repression and taboo, but is also a treasure-house of deep and ancient wisdom, full of potential.

For Jung, psyche is image. He delved beneath the tapestry of personal dreams to look at the myths and fairy tales that speak of a culture, and went even deeper, to investigate the patterns and characters of the collective unconscious. These he called the archetypes.

There were dark days for Jung when he split from Freud. While holding down a professional practice and being involved in the raising of five children, Jung entered into a confrontation with his own unconscious, opening himself up to the awesome nature of psychotic states of mind. During this period he kept a record of his encounters in the recently published *Liber Novus - The Red Book*. Within its covers lie luminous and jewel coloured pages - a glimpse of a side of Jung that complements his extensive intellectual writing about analytical psychology in the twenty volumes of his Collected Works.

Reading Jung's collected works is demanding and frustrating. What does he mean by the self exactly? How can it be both centre and circumference? What is an archetype? Trying to grasp the paradoxes and contradictions in his writing can drive you berserk. But read it at another level and it can begin to make a different kind of sense.

From today's perspective we can recognise his singular genius, opening up and charting the underworld, but we can also see that he was a man of his time with significant faults. His relationships with his female students Toni Woolf and Sabina Spielrein and his prejudices are aspects that do not sit easily with us. Like many remarkable human beings he was not spotless, but he was in so many ways truly outstanding – as a researcher, thinker, writer, artist and pioneer. He was the founding father of analytical psychology.

Jung lived into his eighties, leaving us to carry his work forward. He was horrified at the idea that others should call themselves 'Jungians' but here we are with all our own individual quirks and qualities.

Further reading:

C.G. Jung: Memories, Dreams, Reflections

C.G. Jung: Man and His Symbols

C.G. Jung: Modern Man in Search of a Soul

C.G. Jung and R.T.C. Hull: The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious

C.G. Jung, S. Shamdasani, J. Peck and M. Kyburz: The Red Book

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