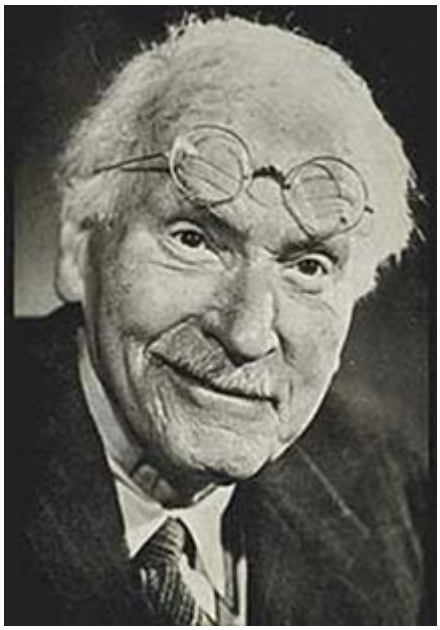
POSSIBLE BOOKS: Carl Gustav Jung: The Collective Dream, Part 1

From *POSSIBLE BOOKS*



Carl Gustav Jung: *The Collective Dream: The Literary Criticism of C.G. Jung, 1912–1961*.

EDITOR'S PREFACE

Out of the work of a lifetime has grown a complete anthology of literary criticism and, flowering at its center, an enchanting theory of literature. To introduce it to the reading public, and to justify it, is the purpose of this preface. The grandness of the task prevents me from heeding the otherwise good advice of Quevedo to keep a preface brief. My purpose requires that I employ instead the French mode, in which a book of one thousand pages is introduced by a preface of one hundred, without, I hope, the tiresome characteristics of that genre: structureless critique and self-centered

analysis.

Until now this book has been largely unrecognized, embedded in the mountain of Carl Jung's *Collected Works*. (*See* ***Supplement 1***) A petal of it was discovered by me through serendipity, the entire flower through many hours of reading and research. The author himself was probably not entirely aware of its existence. Ultimately, it is immaterial whether Jung recognized it himself or not. A corollary of his literary theory is that what an author has to say about his own work is often far from being the most illuminating word on the subject: a work is an author's fate, which is best left to the judgment of others. Jung, like the visionary poets and the significant novelists he examined, was essentially the instrument for his work and subordinate to it.

It is a principle of Jung's psychology that the human psyche is the womb of all human arts and sciences. It is a principle in the psychological study of art that a product of the psyche is something in and for itself. Jung recognized both principles as valid, and he explored the perspectives of both. Yet all of Jung's literary commentaries were the results of clinical encounters and were written for professional purposes. This collection has one other limiting factor. The basically earthy nature of Jung the Swiss has shown a marked predilection for literature written in languages and composed by human natures close to his own. Never in the twenty volumes of his collected works do we find mention of Franz Kafka's atrocious fantasies of behavior and feeling; never the negative themes of Stephane Mallarme or the dark splendors of Charles Baudelaire and Thomas de Quincey, who dramatized their unhappiness in famous volumes; neither the admirable plots of Henry James nor the mortal chaos of the Russian novel; neither the joyous, semidivine hero of *Leaves of Grass* created by the man of letters Walt Whitman nor the resigned and insipid days remembered by Marcel Proust.

The commentaries Jung made on works of dubious aesthetic

merit, which often held great interest for him as a clinical psychologist, are also excluded from this anthology by design. This collection of essays represents solely Jung's attention to familiar works of world literature, primarily those of the West, and primarily those in verse. Noticeably absent from this anthology as well are many of Jung's voluminous commentaries on Goethe and his beloved *Faust*. To include all of his personal feelings and insights here would have thoroughly changed the character of the present volume and trebled its length. These have been retained for publication in a separate companion volume, *Goethe According to Faust*. Jung's important theoretical works on mythic archetypes written in collaboration with Karl Kerenyi are also absent. The scope of these monumental works disqualifies them, or even parts of them, from entry into this volume: folktales, cultural myths, and epic song cycles represent the expressions and spiritual excursions of collective authors; that is, whole cultures, not individual authors.

The commentaries that appear here on the vast literatures of alchemy, philosophy, and science are exceptional. Those that are included are short forewords written by Jung for books of other psychologists that happen to approach literary themes directly. In one, Jung absolves fantasy, and, by extension, fantasy literature, of its reputation as an unnatural and morbid activity (see the foreword to Wickes, *The Inner World of Childhood*). In another, he vindicates the function of poetry and recounts the archetypal and redemptive process represented in drama (see the foreword to Jung, *Configurations of the Unconscious*). In a third, he praises Cornelia Brunner's discussion of Rider Haggard, the Victorian spinner of yarns who developed the motif of the anima in the purest and most naive, if not the most aesthetic, form in his novel *She* (see the foreword to Brunner, *The Anima as a Problem in Man's Fate*).

The individual chapters of this book do not require extraneous

elucidation; the method of their arrangement, however, does. A careful disorderliness, the method suggested by the narrator of *Moby Dick*, is the blameless order of this volume. The world proposed by this book of literary criticism is not systematic, and neither is Jung's manner of studying it. The chapters of Part I are sequestered in three major sections. The first section is theoretical and defines his views on the relation of analytical psychology to poetry. The second section examines the works of particular authors for evidence of the psychic events that transpired in their creation; this section, titled "Critiques," is by far the longest section of the book and almost a critical anthology in itself; in it individual authors are arranged not alphabetically nor chronologically but according to the mode of creation they employ or the pathological process their works resemble. The third section exposes the central archetype of Jung's literary theory. The sequence of chapters listed in the table of contents may not appear inspired, but it is certainly not arbitrary: it constitutes an outline of Jung's thought on modern Western literature. The format of Jung's book portrays his aversions and recognitions. It also suitably obscures the boundaries of verse and prose. The lack of distinction made between genres adds a special texture to the collection and at the same time supports more essential distinctions. The intimate network of relations between Jung's theories and his application of them to specific works will become fully apparent to anyone who pursues a single topic of special interest through the extensive listings in the topical index of Jung's *Collected Works*. Finally, it should be mentioned that the editor has attempted to introduce each chapter and section of this book with the kind of care and understanding that Robert Bly has imparted to his charming anthologies.

Just as the first section of theoretical essays in Part I engenders the second section of critiques, those two sections together beget Part II, a statement of the essential theory behind them both: the equation of literature and dream. The

necessary root of this equation, the poet who functions as dreamer, is clearly assumed. The authors who are examined individually in Part I are identified in Part II as the natural and active agents of a collective dream, a kind of congress of local representatives who speak with our voices. The poet, Jung says, has moods and a will and personal aims as a human being; but as a poet he is a "collective man," one who carries and shapes the unconscious psychic life of mankind:

> *An epoch, like an individual, has its own limitations of conscious outlook, and therefore requires a compensatory adjustment. This is effected by the collective unconscious in that a poet allows himself to be guided by the unexpressed desire of his times and shows the way, by word or deed, to the attainment of that which everyone blindly craves and expects —whether this attainment results in good or evil, the healing of an epoch or its destruction. (See **Supplement 2**)*

In this statement lies the social significance of poetry: It is constantly at work educating the spirit of the age, conjuring up the forms in which the age is most lacking.

< PART 2 >