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Propaedeutic Interpretation of *The Red Book* by C. G. Jung

Oana Elena LENȚA¹, Marius Constantin CUCU²

Abstract: The interpretative approach made over one of the most imposing and controversial works of psychological literature, Carl Gustav Jung's Red Book, does not pretend to essentially define or clarify certain concepts. This is due to the fact that the author respects Jung's opinions, according to which the interpretation of the dynamics of the unconscious has to be open and mobile like the productions and manifestations of this latter. We are, therefore, in the parameters of a special kind of logic, similar to the poetic inspiration or to the theological revelation. Even more, as Jung warned, throughout this extremely complex work, such a field of the human mind must be explored and appreciated at its right value. Starting from this challenge, the interpreter can propose an itinerary going through the dimension of visionary confession and relating opened by Jung's famous work. The present article attempts to highlight a series of general conceptual parameters and a number of key-components that can form the basis of an hermeneutical act developed on one of the most representative Jungian writings. This interpretive act that targets the Red Book must constantly take into account the mobility of meanings and valences to which the Jungian text opens, that Jung's themes are essentially openings to endless, inexhaustible psychological horizons always disposed to new explorations and postmodern analytical approaches. At the same time, from this perspective and awareness, the multiple connections of the Jungian work with perimeters of human research and creativity in the area of ethics, art, theology, anthropology or mythology must be considered.

Keywords: interpretative discourse, the conscious-unconscious duality, oniric experience, rationality, intuition, archetypal symbol, pictorial expression, psychoanalytical exploring

1. Introduction

The analytical remark that could be assumed by an interpreter, as the premise of his interpretative developments on *The Red Book*, is summarized by the idea according to which this work would essentially represent a long dream that does not only belong to Jung but to the whole humankind, the famous psychoanalyst only confessing the experience of this oniric

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exceptional state. Modern psychology can consider the confession going on in *The Red Book* as a simple release of repressed fantasies or accumulations and then it will easily overcome the event of its emergence, just as one often gets beyond the moments represented by the emergence of dreams or, on the contrary, it can adopt an analytical position, while lingering and trying to develop a series of questions and concerns meant to open some of the reference points, of the symbols and concepts brought to the foreground by the confession of the *Red Book*. The interpreter could try to place himself in this field of the interpretative endeavour on the existence recounted by Jung in his above-mentioned work. Thus, the researcher would question himself on the challenge that this work puts in front of modern perspectives of psychology? (Galipeanu, 2013) What types of psychoanalytical attitudes determine and request the confessions of this writing? The concepts of saviour hero, of God, of prophetic act, of revelation and of scientific discovery experience, from the perspective of the *Red Book*, the inclusion under other ontic and gnoseological valences and coordinates than those postulated and potentiated by the cultural and empirical tradition of humankind. Jung does not only put these concepts under a new light, but he also invites us to become conscious of their new meanings (Odajnyk, 2013). The problem of such terms cannot be regarded distantly or rationally, it is an issue that belongs to each and every one of us, deriving from the area of the collective unconscious, as a dimension and an area sustaining and maintaining active the whole psychic life of humankind, but also of human individualities. Jung considers that the deep understanding of the psychological dynamics and influence of such concepts is not possible in the absence of the phenomenon of psychic interaction between the individual conscious and their specific evidence. Therefore, whoever is willing to focus their attention on pondering upon these terms, has to assume the conflict with their ultimate meaning, conflict that can change the whole individual perception on life and human destiny. Thus, one is confronted here to an issue of personal implication not in the absence of the psychological process, but from its most representative inner life. What Jung stresses upon is that we cannot recognize the influence of these psychic pivotal points in our lives, we can assume to confront them or to open to them or, on the contrary, we have the liberty to ignore them. But they have been dominating us and they will continue to decide upon and influence our psychological lives, with the individual and collective conscious being always directed by

unconscious drives, drives that revolve around these concepts, which Jung considers as being invested with a major archetypal value.

2. Some Interpretative Methods

Throughout his interpretative endeavour on Jung's texts, the interpreter can constantly report to Jung's warning as regards the relativity and subjectiveness of the unconscious experiences, experiences resulting in oniric and symbolic events like those related in the *Red Book*. Therefore, the interpretation of such an event is related to the personal experience of the one who undergoes it, and which is valid for him, in terms of translation of the unconscious experience, is not necessarily valid for others. Starting from the assumption of this Jungian perspective, the interpretations of the spiritual dimension manifested in the *Red Book*, are developed from the positions of understanding the interpretative relativity and the hermeneutic subjectiveness. Although the analytical endeavour developed in this way tries to concentrate its advocacy on conceptual and theoretical terms, he could not avoid the symbolic register which is prevalent in the Jungian work, however the exploration of its main features is made under the auspices of assuming that primordial hermeneutic relativism. As an interpreter, the vision underwent from the Jungian area of the unconscious can only be assessed under the reserve of the impossibility to attain all the essential senses implied by this vision. Jung will confess more than once that despite of the fact that the dreamer is the best interpreter of his own dreams, he cannot either attain the plenitude of psychic data emitted within an oniric experience, thus, the indescribable part of a dream or of a vision proves to be wider than the one which can be translated accordingly. The *Red Book* comprises, though, except for a huge symbolic material, also an important intellectual content, which makes out of it one of the major guiding marks of the humanist culture of the twentieth century. Tackling this intellectual dimension through identifying and highlighting the psychological, theological and artistic ideas from the *Red Book* is one of the first and foremost tasks of the exegete who assumes this risky, but fascinating hermeneutical exercise. A second important landmark aimed at by the interpretative analysis on the Jungian text might be to identify the main psychic informational boundaries evoked throughout this work, since they are representations of pivotal moments in Jung's life and creation. Thus, the exegetical effort could not skip a strong reference to the biographical aspect of this Jungian work. The itinerary proposed and evoked in the *Red Book* essentially represents the description of the evolution of Jungian experiences

and of the whole journey of Jung's psychic attention in the area of his individual unconscious, but also in the area of the collective unconscious. The situation can also be interpreted the other way around, and it clearly has a double interpretation, so as the events related in the *Red Book* are not only those that represent decisive moments in Jung's destiny, but also those unconscious experiences that generated radical changes in Jung's life (Shamdasani & Beebe, 2010). The interpretative endeavour should take into consideration this double aspect, the fact that in the *Red Book*, there are statements that represent events that marked the Jungian destiny and others that symbolize the source of these events. Thus, the correspondence between the Jungian conscious under the spatiotemporal experience and the collective and individual unconscious, the spatiotemporal relativity of which was often sustained by Jungian psychoanalytic statements. In the *Red Book*, Jung confesses the dialectics of the discovery of his own unconscious dimension and of the collective unconscious, the process of individualizing the Jungian conscious as a realm potentiated from an energetic viewpoint from the depths of the individual and collective unconscious. As Donald Kalsched stated, it is only in this way that the Jungian delimitation between number one personality and number two personality can be interpreted (Kalsched, 2017, pp. 130-131). Thus, the first hypostasis belongs to the spatiotemporal conscious, and the second one emerges from the area of the individual and collective unconscious. The junction, but also the conflict between these two boundaries of the Jungian personality give meaning to Carl Gustav Jung's life and creation (Stevens, 2006, p. 17), that was also highlighted by Anthony Stevens in the biographical work devoted to Jung's life and work. At the same time, as regards the interpreter's understanding and assumption of the boundary between *conscious* and *unconscious*, it can also appear as a correct hermeneutical approach of the Jungian distinction between the *the spirit of this time* and the *spirit of the depths* (Jung, 2011). Jung will often confess that when the spirit of the time gave him a clear direction and options impossible to reject, the spirit of the depths imposed its logical and over-rational influence upon his destiny, with the reason being finally subordinated to the unconscious intuition. In the end, it is only from the assumption of the Jungian vision that proposes a double component of the human soul, namely the individual conscious and unconscious, assisted by the vast openings to the collective unconscious, that the interpreter could have a coherent perspective on the phenomenon often related by the Jungian analytics under the name of *Vox Dei*. As a matter of fact, as the well-known Romanian exegete of Jungian opera, Vasile Dem.

Zamfirescu argues, this voice belonging to drives and positive archetypal structures and to the primordial moral function of these ones imposed itself in the area of the Jungian conscious as a guiding factor (Zamfirescu, 2016, p. 437), symbolized by certain fictional characters, evoked throughout the confessions of the *Red Book*. The hermeneutical endeavour has to develop its analytical exercise, starting from the understanding and assuming of these Jungian conceptual separations and postulations. They are conceptual to the extent that they have reached, in the Jungian psychoanalytical discourse, the statute of clearly delimited specific notions and reference points, which also bear, at the same time, empirical valences, since they are in a constant correlation with the Jungian personal experience and with the clinical research done by Jung throughout his psychoanalytical career. Another reference point of the hermeneutical approach that can be made on the *Red Book* is represented by the attempt to integrate or, more specifically, to identify the exact place that can be occupied by the Jungian psychoanalytical thinking and the endeavour exposed by the *Red Book* in the universal cultural context. An attempt and an interpretative act performed on such a text, in which one can identify both unconsciously archetypal symbols and multiple data from the universal culture, can only be performed by including a multitude of operational correspondences situated between the global vision of the Jungian psychoanalytical thinking and important spiritual traditions (Corbett, 2011) such as the gnosticism, the Christianity or the Judaism. At the same time, as stated by Sanford L. Drob, it is also about being aware of the connexions between Jung's work and the philosophic perspectives of other authors such as Nietzsche, Heidegger, Sartre, Wittgenstein or Derrida (Drob, 2016, pp. 21-23). These connexions include similarities, but also differences in concepts relating to the Jungian psychoanalytical vision. Of course, the creation that represents the most eloquent type of inter-relating evoked here, connection, connection that cumulates not only conceptual similarities, but also irreconcilable differences, is represented by Sigmund Freud's work. It is also necessary that the hermeneutic endeavour on the *Red Book* should take into account and constantly report to these reciprocal correlations and influences between Jung's thinking and the thinking of a whole galaxy of great resurrection spirits belonging to the universal culture. At the same time, no genuine exegesis can be made on any Jungian text without understanding and deepening the influence of Jungian theses on subsequent developments at the level of the exploration dimensions of anthropology, theology or art.

The universalist and encyclopedic Jungian spirit has expanded its analytical approach and intuitive findings on the subject of concern that far outweigh the area specific to psychoanalysis and psychology as a whole. This is due not to the practice of extrapolation to these areas of Jungian analytics but, on the contrary, to the Jungian researches of natural telluric connections between these seemingly distant domains. Thus, the postulated correlations are not designed as a product of a desire to adapt the truth to a particular thesis or psychological direction, but they are only elements, real factors of junction between different areas of creativity and human living under the auspices of the individual unconscious, and above all, of the collective one.

An interpretation of Jungian visions and analysis must, therefore, take into account the understanding of the unconscious area as a dimension of a particular type of logic, very different from the rationality of ontic and gnoseologic interactions with the spatiotemporal world. The dream represents, in this context, an illuminating example of the way of operating and expression at the level of data related to the individual and collective unconscious. The oniric experience has a coherent development, but thanks to a harmony which is different from the one assumed in the spatiotemporal logic. The psychoanalyst has, therefore, the difficult task of following this oniric narrative thread, entering the existential parameters of dreams and unconscious areas. Here, the path of rational security has to be considered insufficient. In his turn, the interpreter of psychoanalytical findings has to accept the Jungian thesis stating that the *unsure* path is the correct one and that can cumulate possible openings and priorities towards a superior knowledge. Thus, the authentic interpreter of the *Red Book* does not have to be surprised by the presence of certain conceptual contradictions, by the fact that some of Jung's debut assertions have been later contradicted by other statements, or by the postulation of multiple dilemmas or interrogations for which Jung does not propose a solution anymore. Jung's silence indicates the impossibility to adapt unconscious events and phenomena to the mechanisms of the logic and argumentative definitions. The unconscious manifests like an open universe, a dimension with a dynamics that does not develop according to the rules and axioms of our scientific rationality. Jung will warn upon the fact that the mechanisms of the institution, of the feeling, of the premonition or of the presentiment prove to be more efficient in the research of deep meanings of archetypal messages of symbolic and oniric type. So, a credible interpretative endeavour cannot be made of the *Red Book* in the absence of an attitude which is open from the very beginning to the

interrogative vision and approach. The interpreter has to understand Jung's confession according to which his visions are often impossible to understand for himself from a rational and scientific viewpoint. Thus, the interrogation, the dilemma, the problematic and the unexplainable become the constants of Jung's discourse, characteristics which the interpreter has to take into account constantly in his own hermeneutical discourse.

Taking into account the interrogative typology of Jung's approaches, the interpreter has to constantly use the same method recommended by Jung when studying the unconscious areas. Thus, this approach will be marked by numerous interrogations and dilemmatic positions as regards the Jungian perspective on science, reason, love, the presence of evil or on the way in which can be understood wisdom and superior knowledge, illuminated at the individual level, as a personal journey, a path of the individual psychic experience. The answer to some of these interrogations cannot be given by the interpreter, taking into account the open nature of these ones and the fact that they have been expressed and postulated as themes of interpretation and meditation for the reader. Thus, just as Jung often invites us to an individual meditation upon his psychoanalytical remarks, in the same way the hermeneutical endeavour upon his conceptual positions and symbolic confessions present in the *Red Book* have to include proposals and appeals to interpretations and re-approaches from readers. From a point of view of the hermeneutic technique, Sanford L. Drob will center his analysis, in interpreting the *Red Book*, on two major directions. A first perspective aims at tackling the Jungian work chapter after chapter. This endeavour, even if it seems to be submitted to a risk of stereotypes in interpretation and can forget the work as a whole, while concentrating on the inherent details of every excerpt, has the advantage of a discursive organization that intimately follows the Jungian analytics, an analytics that ends up unexpectedly, fractionally and without conclusions and definitive solutions.

The second interpretative perspective which Sanford L. Drob assumes here aims at focusing on decisive themes in the symbolic and conceptual universe of Jung's work and their organization according to interpretative priorities and conclusive essential points of the hermeneutical exercise developed in this context. As a matter of fact, the Jungian topics present in the *Red Book* tackled from a hermeneutic viewpoint in a succession which is important for final argumentative logic of the whole interpretative discourse. What matters in this register is the finality of the interpretative discourse. It is true that the richness of the Jungian research

remains an open and unpredictable flow in its possibilities in terms of inedited ideas and perspectives but, despite this reality, though, the interpreter can establish some final landmarks towards which he can direct his exploratory discourse. The advantage of the second interpretative direction consists in the fact that it implies a greater hermeneutical openness but it can lose the narrative and discursive thread of the Jungian work, while lingering too much on its own field of research. Thus, there is the risk of a substitution of Jungian topics with the interpreter's thematic. In order to avoid such side slips, the constant return to the first interpretative direction is needed, only the combination between the two hermeneutic techniques having the possibility of constituting a pertinent analytics of the text of the *Red Book*. Considering this aspect, Sanford L. Drob realizes, at the same time, within his analyses, a permanent endeavour of relating to other works belonging to Jung or to other philosophers who interfere with the psychoanalytical thinking of Carl Gustav Jung. These correspondences clarify, in the interpreter's opinion, certain Jungian positions and theses present in the *Red Book*, they complete the possible lacks of image and perspective on some mainly symbolic statements or assertions.

A special issue for the interpretative discourse of the *Red Book* is represented by the frequent occurrence of pictorial representations among its pages. This symbolic content can be divided into two specific classes. The first category includes those pictures which highlight once more the idea and the image already illustrated by words by the Jungian confession. For this grouping, is considered the intention to highlight or clarify what was indicated through words. Here is activated the function of clarification and definition of the creation of images. Thus, through image, the meaning of a visionary, symbolic or archetypal assertion or statement is easier to understand. The second category of paintings and graphic systems that are to be found in the *Red Book*, mean to reveal what words cannot describe. There is, within the contact with the unconscious area, a wide range of psychic states and feelings that are not totally compatible with the falling into the parameters of elaborated speech and writing. These experiences cannot be transposed into words and any attempt to force their content and to adapt it to the imperatives of speech would represent the production of a fake pretending to be true. Since he experienced these affective and mental limits, Jung found the formula and the technique through which they can be rendered of course, partially, but enough as for the readers of the *Red Book* to understand the intensity and complexity of such intersections with the archetypal and

symbolic dynamics of the unconscious. A painting can, in this context, render much more accurately the paroxysmal level of a visionary experience arisen through the contact and openness manifested between the dimension of the conscious and the individual and collective limitless unconscious. The understanding of this phenomenon must, as any other hermeneutic endeavour of the Jungian work, take into account the frequent calls of this work towards the universal visual creation, creation in the evolution of which an important role is played by religious symbols. The attempt of interpretative assessment assumed in this way has to deal, among other things, with the duality of the Jungian psychoanalytical intentionality. It is about the fact that Jung essentially developed two different discourses that he used to the same extent. The first discourse is a symbolic and mystical one, through which he opens the way for possible inter-correlations with the area of unconscious experiences. The second discourse is related to the conceptualization, to the argumentative and logic illustration, with Jung maintaining active, throughout his career, the claim for the scientific nature and argumentative organization in his works. If he chose and invested as unique endeavour for his cultural evolution only the path of the mystic symbolism, he would have probably be easily included in the range of writers with a religious or individually experimental nature. But if he chose the path of the strictly rationalist and scientific analysis, then the postulation of his entire work, along with that of his master, Freud, would have been a fully justified endeavour. Jung will assume, though, both directions, showing exploratory areas compatible with the irrational experience and intuition and with dimensions congruent with conceptual and rational interrogations. As a matter of fact, from such a perspective, Jung will sustain the idea according to which there is not a real incompatibility between the phenomenality of religion and the research characterizing natural sciences (Jung, 2014, p. 338). This duplicity is also found in the *Red Book*, and any interpretative endeavour has to take it into account, understanding it as one of the main features of Jungian psychoanalytical approaches. In this context, we can agree on the existence of a *conceptual layer* in this work, structure that Jung stresses upon constantly when he refers to data and contents included. The diary of the individual journey of revealing and exploring one's own soul, the *Red Book* could not do without a conceptual and analytic component, level that reflects the constancy of synthetic terms and perspectives of the Jungian psychoanalytical thinking. At the same time, another aspect which the hermeneutical research has to ponder upon is the calligraphy and the format of the *Red Book*. It has been elaborated in the style of graphical presentation of

a medieval manuscript, with a deeply religious form and content. The illustrations and its dimensions, as well as the extremely wide cultural area it covers show to the interpreter and also to the reader the presence of a work whose intellectual scope makes it incompatible with a surface reading or with a superficial interpretation. As stated by Sanford L. Drob, the *Red Book* must be first read, and then studied. It proposes a series of themes that do not take into account space or time, they belong to the whole humankind, aiming at the psychic reality of each and every one of us. For all those who would like not only to read it but also to study *The Red Book* for deepening, we also recommend reading the volume of studies edited by Thomas Kirsch and George Hogenson, *The Red Book: Reflections on C.G. Jung's Liber Novus* (Kirsch & Hogenson, 2013).

3. Conclusions

From the perspective of this register of information and multiple data, the *Red Book* also represents an appeal made to everyone, encouraging each and every one of us to know ourselves better and to assume that we do not know anything about our own self. An authentic hermeneutical approach developed on this Jungian writing will postulate the awareness of the fact that the Jungian representations and interrogations proposed are openings and revelations that do not offer solutions, but only evidences, often thought-provoking, that address to our spiritually interrogative mechanism. Though the questions that can be seen beyond the succession of images, Jung aims at addressing an invitation to formulating new interrogations able to generate the evolution of each and every reader implicated in a thorough reading of the *Red Book* (Drob, 2016, pp. 23-28). All the more such as the interpreter assumes the role of surprising new meanings and valences of what the author indicated as being decisive guiding marks on the path of evolution of the human spirit. From these findings, the interpreter becomes a mere exegete, that is an intermediate between the Jungian thinking and the contemplative experience of any reader.

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