

Literary Jung: Aion and the History of the Imagination

Susan Rowland: Reader in English and Jungian Studies, School of Humanities, University of Greenwich, Old Royal Naval College, Park Row, Greenwich, LONDON SE10 9LS, UK email: S.A.Rowland@greenwich.ac.uk

Chair: International Association for Jungian Studies: www.jungianstudies.org
Conference: University of Greenwich, July 6-9th 2006

Author of: **Jung as a Writer** (Routledge, 2005 ISBN 1583919023), **C.G. Jung and Literary Theory** (Palgrave, 1999), **Jung: A Feminist Revision** (Polity, 2002)

[I]n contrast to the "Gothic" striving *upwards* to the heights, [there was what] could be described as a horizontal movement *outwards*, namely the voyages of discovery and the conquest of Nature.
(Jung, *Aion* 1951/1959, CW9ii: Para. 150)

We will give the name *chronotope* (literally, "time space") to the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature. This term [space-time] is employed in mathematics and was introduced as part of Einstein's Theory of Relativity...
Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history.
(M.M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* 1981: 84)

The image of man is always intrinsically chronotopic.
(*ibid*: 85)

Our ways of narration are limited to four kinds: epic, comic, detective, social realism... psychology would do better to turn directly to literature rather than to use it unaware.
(James Hillman, *Healing Fiction* 1983: 18)

Introduction

My paper today is taken from a larger project of looking at Jung as a writer, the subject of my new book (*Jung as a Writer* 2005). For as a literary figure, an author, Jung has had a bad press. His work is said to be opaque, digressive, circular, indulgent, difficult, inconsistent. I would add, 'tricky', and in that word begin to see something other than a problem with his style. For Jung writes not only *about* the psyche but also *from* the psyche. Although we expect someone calling himself a 'scientist' to prioritise rational, linear, logical prose, Jung prefers to *write from different positions* in the psyche. The persona, the ego, the anima, shadow etc. all speak to us directly in the writing.

Sometimes Jung writes as trickster. And in particular, Jung tries to write not only *of* the self but also *from* the self. One of his most ambitious attempts to do this is *Aion*, volume 9 part 2 of the *Collected Works*. Today I want to start to suggest how Jung tries to incarnate, to live the self in the writing of *Aion*. By attempting to embody the unconscious in words, something that rides the border between the possible and impossible, Jung is not simply entering the realms of the artist - he is doing far more - he is deconstructing the boundaries in our culture between science and art. In fact he is revealing those boundaries to *be* culture.

Aion

Aion traces a history of the western imagination in the form of religious and scientific discourses. By looking at manifestations such as Gnosticism, alchemy, astrological symbolism both inside and outside Christianity, Jung is transforming this material into psychic genres, into ways of knowing and participating in the self. For Jung, religious doctrines and symbols were a collective bodying forth of the self. There are not so much projections as territories of the collective psyche. In fact, I think there has been too little emphasis hitherto on Jung's profound realisation of time and space as interconnected - the psyche is space and time as inseparable. And this means that he has a sense of history as that which in-forms us. Moreover his own psychology becomes another fold of the cultural sculpting of time and space. It is both contingent on the modern world and also another incarnation of human psychic needs that have been variously imaged as alchemy, Gnosticism, monotheism, polytheism, etc.

So *Aion* is history as a map of the psyche in four dimensions of space-time. It is an attempt to offer history as a form of psychic energy. *Aion* is a history of the imagination written *from* a particular time and place. It was written *for* the present and future. Indeed, it is the acknowledgement of both its own, and modernity's understanding of time and space that makes up its radical and provocative charge for the twenty-first century.

So what kind of book is *Aion*? Well in James Hillman's ground breaking work, *Healing Fiction* (1983), he criticised case *history* for its generic narrowness, in particular for relying so much upon literary epic with its tendency to structure a heroic ego. If *Aion* is to be the book of the self, then it must strive for maximum heterogeneity. I'd like to

suggest that Jung heeded Hillman's warning thirty years previously by offering *Aion* as a novel.

In particular, I am pointing out a resemblance here between the writing of Jung and ideas of the literary theorist, M.M. Bakhtin; a connection first introduced by Raya Jones in her seminal papers on archetypes. Bakhtin's suggestively named book, *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981), has numerous points of contact with Jung, so I will just mention two: that meaning is dialogical, a product of inevitable heterogeneity of different kinds of language in social use (or in Jung's terms, between different parts of the psyche), and that there are underlying forms structuring human life and culture called chronotopes.

Bakhtin also privileges the novel over all other literary forms because it is the genre that maximumly engages the reader in the production of meaning. To Bakhtin a novel does not have to be fiction. A novel is any written work with many voices that encourages the reader to have a dialogue with it. A novel is a different work every time it is read because its meaning is created in the reader's psyche, anew, every time. An historical novel is particularly important because it reconciles the inhuman expanses of historical time with an individual life span. It *incarnates* history.

I am arguing that *Aion* is a novel in the Bakhtinian sense. Bakhtin concentrated his work on language and culture, but implied a dialogic psyche. Jung concentrated his work on the dialogic psyche - that meaning is produced in the inner dialogue called individuation - but implied a dialogic language. Both come together in *Aion* as Jung shows how culture is a dialogue between archetypal forms (using religious or psychological language) as realisation of the interdependence of time and space. For Bakhtin, these cultural structuring of time-space were called chronotopes. 'Chronotope' - literally time-space, means a specific structuring of time-space relations shaping a particular aspect of culture. Our notion of 'life as a journey' is an example. Crucially *Aion* reveals the function of archetypes and the notion of chronotopes to be very close.

For example, take Jung's interest in quaternity throughout *Aion*. Time as past, present, future, can only be imaged by the addition of a fourth, space. Space as height, width, and depth can only be realised by its fourth, time. Moreover, *Aion* rescues myth from the narrowness of epic and converts it into novel - indeed *myth for Jung is the means of*

bringing together historical and personal time in the psyche.

Aion is novel because it dialogically implicates the reader in the making of meaning. Reading Jung's aesthetic, playful, part-rational, part dream-like writing is to engage individuation. Reading *Aion* is to be touched by, be animated by, the self as manifest in Jung's understanding of European culture. It turns history into psychic being. For Jung, culture is the enacted self.

I will now just mention very briefly three of the archetypal-chronotopic forms in *Aion*: synchronicity, and what I am calling 'history of modernity' and 'doctrine as medicine'.

My understanding of synchronicity is, of course, indebted to Roderick Main's new book, *The Rupture of Time*. My reading of it in *Aion* concentrates upon its aesthetic function. Synchronicity connects events stemming from the unconscious to the wider world in ways that cannot be rationally accounted for, such as a significant dream or a chance meeting that meets a secret need. It is a way of reading reality non-rationally and symbolically, in ways traditionally assigned to the making of art. So synchronicity treats time and spaces as aesthetic components of momentary artistic wholes. It is possible, therefore, to argue that synchronicity is reality in aesthetic (non-rational) mode, or that it represents the human mind 'reading' or 'composing' a-causal events into art without being entirely aware of so doing.

Most importantly, synchronicity is a way of *writing*: as the psyche composes reality under the aesthetic mood so it writes and re-writes the world.

On the 'history of modernity' of which Jung writes:

[I]n contrast to the "Gothic" striving *upwards* to the heights, [there was what] could be described as a horizontal movement *outwards*, namely the voyages of discovery and the conquest of Nature.

(Jung, *Aion* 1951/1959, CW9ii: Para. 150)

Aion portrays western modernity's progress as an archetype-chronotope of colonial and material *expansion*. Time and space are united in a narrative of political domination and

scientific experimentation. Most importantly, Jung links the materialist western chronotope with earlier narratives of religious history. The ethereal towers of Gothic architecture are a material dimension to an age's preoccupation with transcendence. A reaction sets in, as alchemy's concentration on the god sleeping in matter becomes matter as god, the only true reality to be investigated. Therefore, far from representing an escape from religion, modernity's fond belief in the atomic space-time as the underlying truth of existence is yet another twist of religious sensibility.

Finally, there is the presentation of Jung's psychology as a chronotopic myth: as another form of 'doctrine as medicine'.

Jungian psychology is chronotopic because it explicitly treats the psyche as a node of space-time: a person inhabits a particular social and cultural space, has a unique personal history, is temporally implicated in larger histories. It is also overtly chronotopic in being presented as the product of a specific space of western secular culture at a unique historical moment. Jung offers his psychology as what cultural theorists call 'discourse', or, what he calls myth - one without essentialist, universalist or foundational pretensions.

Most importantly, the Jungian psychology chronotope is medicinal. It is a treatment for the toxic extremities of the chronotope of the history of modernity and *as such* is part of the larger chronotopic structuring of Jung's understanding of history. Hence, like Christianity and alchemy before it, Jungian psychology aspires to heal the soul. The narratives of Jungian psychology do more than describe the need for healing; ideally, they enact it.

Aion creates a new discourse (in Jung's language - a myth) of the psychic present-in-touch-with-psychic-past-and-future. Jungian writing becomes a fourfold affective embrace of time and space.

Aion is history as a map of the psyche in four dimensions of space-time. It offers history to us as a form of psychic energy. The self dreams its being into totality; one whose ultimate nature and bounds cannot be known. Jung called it *Aion*.

Conclusion

Jung is an experimental writer whose radical and daring works have never yet been fully appreciated. His writing urgently addresses a world darkened by weapons of mass destruction and global environmental crisis.

Yet although there has been virtually no attention given to the 'art' of Jung's writing from my own discipline of literary studies - what I am proposing is something the Jungian community has known about for sometime. For example, Murray Stein has written upon both the importance of Jung's sense of the unconscious in the writing and, uniquely, as far as I know, on the significance of Jung's dialogue with key others such as Victor White in shaping the work. Thomas Kirsch has also written on the art of the unconscious in Jung's writing. On a different tack, both Leslie Gardner and Craig Stephenson are completing doctorates that have differing exciting approaches to Jung's language. And of course, it goes without saying that Paul Bishop's scholarship on the intellectual history of which Jung is a part, comprehensively places him in a philosophical tradition of aesthetics.

So what is finally exciting about the research I have been doing, and what I would finally like to offer this conference - is that Jungian studies is no longer for people like me, a matter of individuals working alone and wondering if anyone out there cares about what we do. And perhaps for analysts it is no longer just an intense discussion between yourselves with the sense that academia is not listening. All of the scholars I have mentioned in my paper come from a different discipline to myself. So none of us has exactly the same vision of Jung's writing. Yet in that plurality do we not ourselves constitute some of the different discourses of the self - as Jung understood it (see end 'On the Nature of the Psyche' CW8 for Jung on different disciplines)?

There is an important intellectual argument for the plurality of Jungian studies - to be found in Jung's work - and we, all of us, are its collective body. What I have learned in my short time as Chair of IAJS cannot be separated from my research into Jung's writing. Ultimately what we represent to the academic and socio-political world outside is Jung's great theme: that science, religion and art need to talk more to one another. Their separation is unnatural, against (human) nature, *contra naturam*. The political

psyche is already in dialogue with the sacred. And the intellectual thinking argument for the plurality of Jungian and post-Jungian studies has to go along with feeling, sensation and intuition. Together, we are all a work of the imagination.

References

- Bakhtin, M.M. (1981) *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. M. Holquist. Translated by C. Emerson and M. Holquist, Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Bishop, P. (ed.) (1999) *Jung in Contexts: A Reader*, London and New York: Routledge.
- Bishop, P. (2002) *Jung's Answer to Job: A Commentary*, Hove and New York: Brunner-Routledge.
- Hillman, J. (1983) *Healing Fiction*, Barrytown, New York: Station Hill Press.
- Jones, R.A. (2002). 'The necessity of the unconscious', *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 32: 345-66.
- Jones, R.A. (2003). 'Mixed Metaphors and Narrative Shifts: Archetypes', *Theory & Psychology* 13, no. 5: 651-72.
- Jung, C. G. *The Collected Works of C.G. Jung (CW)*, edited by Sir Herbert Read, Dr Michael Fordham and Dr Gerhard Adler, translated by R.F.C. Hull (1953-91), London: Routledge, Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press. The final date of my citation is the date of the English text.
- Kirsch, Thomas and Thomas E. Parker, 'How to Read Jung'.
- Main, R. (2004) *The Rupture of Time: Synchronicity and Jung's Critique of Modern Western Culture*, Hove and New York: Brunner-Routledge.
- Stein, Murray, 'The role of Victor White in C.G. Jung's Written Oeuvre' – conference paper, Oxford, 2002