

Jung and Aion: Time, Vision, and a Wayfaring Man

Lance S. Owens



Psychological Perspectives, 54: 253–289, 2011
C. G. Jung Institute of Los Angeles

Jung and Aion: Time, Vision and a Wayfaring Man
Copyright (c) Lance S. Owens, 2011

This article was written in honor of the 50th anniversary of Jung's death and the 60th anniversary of the publication of *Aion*. It was first published in the "Epochal Anniversaries" issue of:

Psychological Perspectives - C. G. Jung Institute of Los Angeles, Volume 54, Issue 3 (2011).

I express my gratitude to Gilda Frantz for her encouragement with the article, and to Margaret Ryan for her editorial assistance.

Jung and *Aion*: Time, Vision, and a Wayfaring Man

Lance S. Owens

C. G. Jung stated in 1957 that the visionary experiences recorded in *The Red Book: Liber Novus* were the foundation of his life work: “My entire life consisted in elaborating what had burst forth from the unconscious and flooded me like an enigmatic stream . . . the numinous beginning, which contained everything, was then.” *Liber Novus* is now historically placed in a hermeneutic relationship with Jung’s subsequent writings.

Jung composed the first page of *Liber Novus* in 1915. On this introductory folio leaf he graphically intertwined a prophecy of the future and the coming of a new aeon: an epochal turning-point in human consciousness. Though this revelation was foundational to his subsequent work, Jung did not initially feel free to publicly disclose its keynote.

After several extraordinary near-death visions in 1944, Jung realized it was his duty to finally and openly communicate the central revelation recorded in *Liber Novus*. The first manuscript page of *Liber Novus* penned by Jung in 1915—deeply considered, dense with verbal and pictorial imagery formed in response to the Spirit of the Depths—and the complexly crafted commentary in *Aion*, composed three decades later, are fundamentally wed. They both declare the dawning of a new aeon. While each work might be studied as an independent text, one can only comprehend Jung and his struggle with *Liber Novus* in their conjunction.

Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed? For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground. . . .



Der Weg des kommenden (*The Way of What Is to Come*). The first parchment sheet of *Liber Novus*, composed in 1915, with Jung's symbolic declaration of a coming new aeon. (Some paint chipping on the original parchment has been digitally restored.) *Liber Novus*, Liber Primus, folio i recto.

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as a hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water: in the habitation of dragons, where each lay, shall be grass with reeds and rushes. And a highway shall be there, and it shall be called the way of holiness. The unclean shall not pass over it, but it shall be for those, the wayfaring men; and fools shall not err therein.

—Incipit Liber Novus, 1915¹

Not the opinion of any individual contemporary will decide the truth and error of what has been discovered, but rather future generations and destiny. There are things that are not yet true to-day, perhaps we are not yet permitted to recognize them as true, although they may be true tomorrow. Therefore every pioneer must take his own path, alone but hopeful, with the open eyes of one who is conscious of its solitude and of the perils of its dim precipices. Our age is seeking a new spring of life. I found one and drank of it and the water tasted good. That is all that I can or want to say. My intention and my duty to society is fulfilled when I have described, as well as I can, the way that led me to the spring; the reproaches of those who do not follow this way have never troubled me, nor ever will.

—C. G. Jung, 1917²

In 1915 Jung began crafting the first parchment leaf of *Liber Novus*, what would become the first page of his “Red Book.” Over the two preceding years he had wandered as a wayfarer on an ancient and forgotten imaginative highway, eyes open, “conscious of its solitude and of the perils of its dim precipices.”³ He had languished in a parched desert, discovered the *via sancta*, seen visions, confronted the dexterous and sinister arm of God, and met his guide and master Philemon. The journey had led to “a new spring of life.”⁴

Carl Gustav Jung knew he had received a revelation.⁵ He had gone searching for his own myth and encountered an epochal human story: a fiction that was also a fact, a tale that he found true. Now he made the journey’s

record. He began by compiling a 1,200-page draft manuscript detailing the initial flood of visions, recorded in his “Black Book” journals between November 1913 and April 1914, adding further reflections on their meaning.⁶ With this protean draft at hand, he next turned to creating a perdurable testament to the tale.

The formal record—in initial conception—would be an illuminated book. Into it he would transcribe his account, interweaving images and historiated text, all worked upon folio sheets of parchment in a seemingly medieval style.⁷ And on the beginning page, this first preface page, Jung would offer a succinct reflection upon the whole. Certainly no page of *Liber Novus* was more carefully considered than its beginning. Though this is the first leaf artistically rendered, it is in composition a conclusion, a summary statement made about all that follows. As Jung explained in the text on the verso of the sheet, “I speak in images. With nothing else can I express the words from the depths.”⁸ His prologue offers supreme evidence of what that statement meant.

The words carefully chosen for the beginning are not, however, his own, nor are they found in his draft manuscript.⁹ For a preface to his revelation, Jung reached back across two millennia, to the echoes and preface of an antecedent but parallel moment in the story. Scribed in old Latin, he offered prophetic writ from the threshold of the Christian aeon—four auguries of a new age from the prophet Isaiah, and the signal proclamation of that age’s birth recorded in the Gospel of John: *And the Word was made Flesh*.

Worked around this poem to the prior and passing aeon, Jung added in image his own declaration of the new. The key figure is a depiction of the sun’s precession through the zodiacal circle. Astrological observations linked the vast human story with the gradually shifting vernal equinoctial position of the sun relative to the fixed stars, a transposition within the zodiac marked every 2,200 years or so. At the dawn of Christianity, the sun had entered the astrological house of the two fish, the constellation of Pisces. Now the solar spring point is on the cusp of transitioning into the zodiacal constellation of Aquarius, inaugurating a new age.

Within the first four words of *Liber Novus*—*Der Weg des kommenden*, “*The Way of the Coming*”—Jung intertwined a graphic tale of the past and a prophecy of the future. “I speak in images. With nothing else can I express the words from the depths.” The preface declaration of the *New Book* offers, in complex image, the mythopoetic proclamation of a coming new aeon: an epochal turning-point in the human story. This is Jung’s summary perspective on *Liber Novus* as it was formed in 1915. The story and its revelation remained a cornerstone to all his coming work.

THE WAY OF WHAT IS TO COME

In 1957, near the end of his long life, Jung spoke these now familiar words to Aniela Jaffé about the experiences from which *Liber Novus* emerged:

The years ... when I pursued the inner images were the most important time of my life. Everything else is to be derived from this. It began at that time, and the later details hardly matter anymore. My entire life consisted in elaborating what had burst forth from the unconscious and flooded me like an enigmatic stream and threatened to break me. ... Everything later was merely the outer classification, the scientific elaboration, and the integration into life. But the numinous beginning, which contained everything, was then.¹⁰

Although critics once held this broad statement suspect, its truth can no longer be questioned. Nearly half a century after Jung's death, publication of *The Red Book: Liber Novus* provides the long-awaited primary evidence to the fact of his words. Sonu Shamdasani declares, based on over a decade of comprehensive study and editorial research preparing the text for publication, that *Liber Novus* "is nothing less than the central book in his oeuvre."¹¹ It is the bedrock and foundation upon which any understanding of the life and work of C. G. Jung must be built. This relationship will, however, be fully appreciated only after a complete reconsideration of Jung's work in light of "the numinous beginning, which contained everything." And that complex reorientation will require the efforts of more than a single generation.

Even adept students of Jung find *Liber Novus* a difficult and perplexing work. Jung understood their problem—he had lived through it. *Liber Novus* is Jung's record of a journey into mythopoetic imagination, and it was a difficult passage. What confounds the reader now is the same issue that confronted Jung then: Though imaginative, mythic, apparently fictive, and ultimately subjective, what Jung met in his wanderings spoke with the

Jung did not record *Liber Novus* as a private, aesthetic pretension. He addressed it to readers in a future time, though, from the beginning, he was never quite sure when that time might come.

voice of an objective fact. It was independent, ineffably ancient, and yet intimately and synchronously involved with human history. He perceived it as real, and the story it told had the tenor of a revelation.

Jung did not record *Liber Novus* as a private, aesthetic pretension. He addressed it to readers in a future time, though, from the beginning, he was never quite sure when that time might come.¹² Nonetheless, Jung anticipated that potential readers of *Liber Novus* would need preparation; the book demanded from him a hermeneutics and an exegesis appropriate to its voice. So he gave one, or at least struggled mightily with the effort. For decades readers have perused the result—essentially, everything Jung wrote after 1916—unaware of what it really is, and often frustrated by this chasm in their comprehension. The intertext to the enterprise, the critical foundation to comprehension, remained occulted.

Now we must begin again, reading and considering Jung in circular fashion: *Liber Novus* and Jung's developed hermeneutic to his visions—the once occulted primary text and its extended exegesis—both require each other. They are integrally interwoven in Jung's life and in his writings. Any presumption of understanding Jung, absent an appreciation of *Liber Novus* and the revelatory mythopoetic experience that engender his new book, is vain.

An examination of the first page of *Liber Novus* reveals the path awaiting exploration. Of course, the intention of this initial parchment folio might seem a matter open to diffuse conjecture. And so it would be, if Jung had not given its image a book-length commentary late in his life with the publication of *Aion* in 1951.¹³ The first stunning manuscript page of *Liber Novus*, penned by Jung in 1915, deeply considered, dense with verbal and pictorial imagery formed in response to the "Spirit of the Depths," and the complexly crafted commentary in *Aion* composed thirty-five years later, are fundamentally wed. Although each might be studied as an independent text, one can only comprehend Jung and his struggle with *Liber Novus* in their conjunction.

In the following comments, I focus on *Liber Novus* and *Aion*. This is just a brief introduction, perhaps a paradigm for the work awaiting. In like manner, all of the four major works Jung published after his illness and near-death visions of 1944—the late writings that I call his "summary quartet," composed of *Psychology of the Transference*, *Aion*, *Answer to Job*, and *Mysterium Coniunctionis*¹⁴—demand a new consideration. Formed near the end of his life and completed after a second extraordinary visionary experience, each provides a uniquely focused elaboration and final testament to the "numinous beginning" recorded in *Liber Novus*: "Everything else is to be derived from this."

HEAVEN ABOVE, HEAVEN BELOW

In February of 1944, Jung slipped in the snow and broke his ankle. This modest injury and associated immobilization led to development twelve days later of a life-threatening pulmonary embolism and heart attack. For three weeks Jung hung between life and death. And in that twilight, he was immersed in a prolonged series of visions. They seemed the end of his journey, the conclusion to the story he had lived. “It is impossible to convey the beauty and intensity of emotion during those visions. They were the most tremendous things I have ever experienced.”¹⁵

I would never have imagined that any such experience was possible. It was not a product of imagination. The visions and experiences were utterly real; there was nothing subjective about them; they all had a quality of absolute objectivity.

We shy away from the word “eternal,” but I can describe the experience only as the ecstasy of a non-temporal state in which present, past, and future are one. Everything that happens in time had been brought together into a concrete whole. Nothing was distributed over time, nothing could be measured by temporal concepts.¹⁶

This illness, these visions, and a year of convalescence—soon followed by a second serious cardiac event in November of 1946—deeply affected Jung’s perspective upon his life, his story, and the task remaining to him. They marked the summation of an experience foreshadowed by *Liber Novus* and gave origin to his book *Aion*. After his second heart attack, Jung wrote in a letter to Victor White:

Yesterday I had a marvellous dream: One bluish diamondlike star high in heaven, reflected in a round, quiet pool—heaven above, heaven below—. The imago Dei in the darkness of the Earth, this is myself. . . . It seems to me as if I were ready to die, although—as it looks to me—some powerful thoughts are still flickering like lightnings in a summer night. Yet they are not mine, they belong to God, as everything else which bears mentioning.¹⁷

“At the beginning of the illness,” Jung later noted, “I had the feeling that there was something wrong with my attitude.”¹⁸ Events reoriented it. Barbara Hannah, an astute observer close to Jung during this period, characterized the illness and visions as being something like a second “rite of initiation”—the first great initiation having been his visionary passage thirty years earlier, recorded in *Liber Novus*. Using the image of a shamanistic

medicine man (expounded by the mythologist Mircea Eliade), she explains: "Although as a rule there is only one initiation, yet sometimes in an emergency, for example, when a great disaster threatens the tribe, the medicine man also goes through a second."¹⁹

Hannah's comments expose a great deal both about Jung's experience and about how disciples close to Jung during these years historically witnessed the story he was telling with his life. She described the visions as "the greatest milestone in Jung's attainment of wholeness."²⁰ Hannah continues:

It most certainly changed and developed Jung to an incalculable extent. . . . Before his illness one often felt he was on the mountain; one could say that the absolute knowledge in the unconscious was accessible to him, as it might be to an immortal; but he was also often completely in the valley. After his illness he seemed to be much more completely on the mountain, but at all times he could descend into the valley and speak and act in its terms.²¹

Beginning in 1913, at the age of thirty-eight, C. G. Jung consciously engaged an inner mythic reality. The activity continued for several years. This was his "first initiation," to use Hannah's expression. For thirty years, he had followed the implications of the experience. At the very beginning of his journey, Jung most closely associated his experience with Gnosticism, an experiential and visionary fact present in early Christianity. But he also sensed relationships with Egyptian hermeticism and the late classical mystery traditions, Mithraism and Orphism.²² He identified his master, Philemon, whom he met in a vision, as an Alexandrian Gnostic. Philemon subsequently disclosed himself as Simon Magus, whose bride Helena was the incarnation of Sophianic wisdom.²³ Jung long pondered that story.

The path led him on, wandering through the visionary traditions of the West, searching experiential evidence for a story he knew was not his alone. Jung eventually determined that he had identified its thread reaching across centuries, to hermeticism, alchemy, medieval heretical traditions, and Jewish Kabbalah. He recognized the unifying fact of a central and defining experience

It is vitally necessary to understand the ramifications of Jung's late-life encounter with Jewish Kabbalah, and the intimate relationship between Kabbalah, alchemy, and the hermetic culture of the Renaissance.

hidden somewhere within all of these traditions: It was the imaginative, mythopoetic initiation he had, in measure, shared.

Jung's explorations led inexorably toward a summation experience he perceived as having been witnessed by the visionary tradition, the *mysterium coniunctionis*. Historically it has been symbolized in the holy wedding of two natures named with many names: divine and human, male and female, eros and logos, king and queen, salt and sulfur, inner and outer, sense and nonsense, above and below. During the years immediately prior to his 1944 visions, Jung was grappling with alchemical and Kabbalistic texts, ciphering cryptic textual evidence about this sacred experience which he perceived central to the traditions. It was the focus of a work that he conceived might be his opus magnum: *Mysterium Coniunctionis*.

Now during his illness, it happened to him. He lived it: "The visions and experiences were utterly real; there was nothing subjective about them."

I myself was, so it seemed, in the Pardes Rimmonim, the garden of pomegranates, and the wedding of Tifereth with Malchuth²⁴ was taking place. Or else I was Rabbi Simon ben Jochai, whose wedding in the afterlife was being celebrated. It was the mystic marriage as it appears in the Cabbalistic tradition. I cannot tell you how wonderful it was. I could only think continually, "Now this is the garden of pomegranates! Now this is the marriage of Malchuth with Tifereth!" I do not know exactly what part I played in it. At bottom it was I myself: I was the marriage. And my beatitude was that of a blissful wedding. . . .

There followed the Marriage of the Lamb, in a Jerusalem festively bedecked. I cannot describe what it was like in detail. These were ineffable states of joy. Angels were present, and light. I myself was the "Marriage of the Lamb."

That, too, vanished, and there came a new image, the last vision. I walked up a wide valley to the end, where a gentle chain of hills began. The valley ended in a classical amphitheater. It was magnificently situated in the green landscape. And there, in this theater, the *hierosgamos* was being celebrated.²⁵

The journey had started in *Liber Novus* with Jung's petition to his soul, whom he found again "only through the soul of the woman."²⁶ She had subsequently offered herself, in the form of Salome, as a bride. He had followed the trail of that illusive mystical wedding across the ages. Now his story had reached its experiential conclusion. Jung had entered the bridal chamber, he had met the bride: "I was the marriage."

In an insightful recent study, Stanford Drob called these visions “Kabbalistic Visions.”²⁷ It is vitally necessary to understand the ramifications of Jung’s late-life encounter with Jewish Kabbalah, and the intimate relationship between Kabbalah, alchemy, and the hermetic culture of the Renaissance. But it is also important to remember Kabbalah’s experiential links to earlier Merkabah mysticism, roots reaching back at least to the period of Christian origins and related to the visionary milieu out of which Gnosticism had emerged. Jung described his experience in three settings, each with distinct symbolic imagery. In sequence, they were Kabbalistic, mystically Christian, and Hellenistic—the last vision was a mystery rite of pagan antiquity. It seems more correct to broadly suggest that these are Gnostic visions—understanding Kabbalah in Gershom Scholem’s definition as “Jewish Gnosticism”²⁸ and defining the Gnosis by its visionary hermeneutics, not by any temporal delimitation of dogma.

Regardless of how one struggles to categorize the ineffable, this second and final visionary initiation *was* transformative. It refocused Jung on the core experience of his life, *Liber Novus*, and on “how important it is to affirm one’s own destiny.”²⁹ Woven in the fabric of that destiny were *Liber Novus* and its declaration of a new aeon. Jung gave this summary of his own sense about what had changed:

A good many of my principal works were written only then. The insight I had had, or the vision of the end of all things, gave me the courage to undertake new formulations. I no longer attempted to put across my own opinion, but surrendered myself to the current of my thoughts. Thus one problem after the other revealed itself to me and took shape.³⁰

In the Fall of 1945, only shortly after emerging from the prolonged convalescence following his first heart attack, Jung began an extraordinary correspondence, and eventual friendship, with Fr. Victor White, O.P., an English Dominican priest and Catholic theologian. Their letters are among Jung’s most important, and personally most valued, epistolary legacies.³¹ They provide a rare window into Jung’s reformulating focus after his second visionary initiation and offer an intimate view on his struggles with the end of the Christian aeon.

The first new work that crystallized entirely during this period after his near-death visions was *Aion*. In a historically crucial letter to Victor White, written 19 December 1947, Jung recounts how he was forced to begin writing *Aion*:

Not very long after I have written to you [letter of 22 Sept. 1947], I simply had to write a new essay I did not know about what. It

occurred to me I could discuss some of the finer points about Anima, Animus, Shadow and last but not least the Self. I was against it, because I wanted to rest my head. . . . In spite of all I felt forced to write on blindly, not seeing at all, what I was driving at. Only after I had written about 25 pages in folio, it began to dawn on me, that Christ—not the man but the divine being—was my secret goal. It came to me as a shock, as I felt utterly unequal to such a task.³²

It was, however, a task he had directly confronted before, though the event and its conclusions remained sequestered in his hidden new book, *Liber Novus*. The current of Jung's thoughts was now forcing him back to the unfinished task of *Liber Novus*. In three decades of writing, Jung knew he had not yet directly and publicly confronted the revelation summarized there on its first page: the Christian aeon's end and the way of what is to come. Now he must. Several years later Jung commented in private conversation:

Before my illness I had often asked myself if I were permitted to publish or even speak of my secret knowledge. I later set it all down in *Aion*. I realized it was my duty to communicate these thoughts, yet I doubted whether I was allowed to give expression to them. During my illness I received confirmation and I now knew that everything had meaning and that everything was perfect.³³

This was his task of tasks. We will return later to the rest of this letter from Jung to Victor White about the writing of *Aion*. But first we need to circle back with Jung to the beginnings of his story. Without understanding that beginning, we cannot grasp the meanings at its end.

THE TASK OF TASKS

Jung's writings during these final and focused years following his illness in 1944 have confused many readers; their intertwined coherence can be difficult to apprehend. Only with *Liber Novus* open is it possible to see what Jung was doing, how he was struggling to turn the circle of his journey homeward and finish his tale, "speak my secret knowledge." *Liber Novus* is the key to these late works, and they in turn are Jung's final interpretive working of the visions recorded in it.

Early in this period and while still finishing *Aion*, he was directed to a reading and extensive revision of *Wandlungen und Symbole der Libido*, the threshold study feverishly composed between 1910 and 1912. It was a crucial episode in his journey; this was the work that signaled an end to his misadventure with Freud. Jung penned an introduction for this revision (published in 1952 under the new title *Symbols of Transformation: An Analysis of the Prelude to a Case of Schizophrenia*³⁴) explaining in mature reflection how that book first came to be:

The whole thing came upon me like a landslide that cannot be stopped. The urgency that lay behind it became clear to me only later: it was the explosion of all those psychic contents which could find no room, no breathing-space, in the constricting atmosphere of Freudian psychology and its narrow outlook.³⁵

As the old age fragments and
factures, deep seams are rent
open. . . . In coming time,
humankind will rediscover
the manifold essence of an
inner world, light and dark.

Note that Jung is now critically placing the beginning events of his journey into the context of his story. He recounts that his intense study of mythologies during the prior three years forced him to conclude that without myth, a human “is like one uprooted, having no true link either with the past, or with the ancestral life which continues within him, or yet with contemporary human society.”³⁶ He continues:

So I suspected that myth had a meaning which I was sure to miss if I lived outside it in the haze of my own speculations. I was driven to ask myself in all seriousness: “What is the myth you are living?” I found no answer to this question, and had to admit that I was not living with a myth, or even in a myth, but rather in an uncertain cloud of theoretical possibilities which I was beginning to regard with increasing distrust. . . . So, in the most natural way, I took it upon myself to get to know “my” myth, and I regarded this as the task of tasks. . . . I simply had to know what unconscious or preconscious myth was forming me, from what rhizome I sprang.³⁷

So, over the next four years, he confronted the portentous “task of tasks.” And he found his myth. As he explained to Victor White, “I wanted the proof of a living Spirit and I got it. Don’t ask me at what price.”³⁸ It had led him to the “new spring of life.”

The myth that distilled in Jung appears, at least on a first reading of *Liber Novus*, somewhat chaotic. But it has a coherent and unifying motif, which can be condensed something like this: The third age of human history, played out vastly over two past millennia, is drawing to a close.³⁹ We now stand at the threshold of a new aeon, an epochal turning of perspective. An “enantiodromia” in human consciousness is coming. The demiurgic Spirit of this Time with its dominant monistic rationalism has reached a cataclysmic end-time. This is a period of darkness, dissolution, and inevitable psychic disruption.⁴⁰ But there will be a new dawn. As the old age fragments and factures, deep seams are rent open, and from forgotten depths, an ageless treasure will emerge. In coming time, humankind will rediscover the manifold essence of an inner world, light and dark. And with it will come a new perception of man and woman and God and their intimate relationship.

Here are his words from *Liber Novus*:

Your soul is in great need, because drought weighs on its world. If you look outside yourselves, you see the far-off forest and mountains, and above them your vision climbs to the realms of the stars. And if you look into yourselves, you will see on the other hand the nearby as far-off and infinite, since the world of the inner is as infinite as the world of the outer. Just as you become a part of the manifold essence of the world through your bodies, so you become a part of the manifold essence of the inner world through your soul. This inner world is truly infinite, in no way poorer than the outer one. Man lives in two worlds.⁴¹

... He who sleeps in the grave of the millennia dreams a wonderful dream. He dreams a primordially ancient dream. He dreams of the rising sun.

If you sleep this sleep and dream this dream in this time of the world, you will know that the sun will also rise at this time. For the moment we are still in the dark, but the day is upon us.

He who comprehends the darkness in himself to him the light is near. He who climbs down into his darkness reaches the staircase of the working light, fire-maned Helios.⁴²

Jung went searching for his myth in 1913 and found a *via sancta*—“the way of holiness”—leading into an epochal vision. He dreamed the primordial



Detail of the historiated initial beginning, Liber Secundus (the second book), of *Liber Novus*. A force like molten basalt is pushing through geologic fissures, extending up from the depths. Beside this image, a human heart and circulatory system link the visible world with the unseen depths. *Liber Novus*, Liber Secundus, folio 1.

dream, discovered the ageless story, the rhizome from which he sprang. At least, so it seemed to him. It linked him with the past, with the ancestral life that continued within him, and with contemporary time. It also bound him to the future, to a new dawn and a destiny:

It seems as though a message had come to me with overwhelming force. There were things in the images which concerned not only myself but many others also. It was then that I ceased to belong to myself alone, ceased to have the right to do so. From then on, my life belonged to the generality.⁴³

And as he wrote to Victor White in 1947, "Conforming to the divine will I live for mankind, not only for myself, and whoever understands this message contained in and conveyed by my writing will also live for me."⁴⁴

Two thousand years earlier, so his story disclosed, other wayfarers had passed upon this highway of vision, foreseen the dawning of a new aeon, and given it a voice and a keynote. "*And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water. . . .*" Their testimony endured as sacred writ to the passing age. Now, in turn, Jung met his destiny and his time, and gave his voice to what he had seen. He explained in a letter from 1929, "When the confusion is at its height a new revelation comes, i.e., at the beginning of the fourth month of world history."⁴⁵

BEGINNING THE FOURTH MONTH

Jung had taken an active interest in the psychological significance of astrological symbols several years before the initial eruption of visions that assailed him in late 1913 and subsequently produced *Liber Novus*. In 1911, while immersed in his studies of mythology and its symbolism for *Wandlungen und Symbole der Libido*, he wrote Freud: "My evenings are taken up very largely with astrology. I make horoscopic calculations in order to find a clue to the core of psychological truth. . . . I dare say that we shall one day discover in astrology a good deal of knowledge that has been intuitively projected into the heavens."⁴⁶ And in another letter two months later in 1911, he shares intuitions about omens indicating a great change:

I . . . have the feeling that this is a time full of marvels, and, if the auguries do not deceive us, it may very well be that . . . we are on the threshold of something really sensational, which I scarcely know how to describe except with the Gnostic concept of σοφία [Sophia], an Alexandrian term particularly suited to the reincarnation of ancient wisdom in the shape of ΨΑ.⁴⁷

Then two years later, in a note dated March 1913, he speaks of the neurosis resulting from a failure to recognize the work awaiting "of helping to build up a new civilization." He continues:

We are all far too much at the standpoint of the "nothing-but" psychology; we persist in thinking we can squeeze the new future which is pressing in at the door into the framework of the old and the known. And thus the view is only of the present, never of the future. But it was of most profound psychological significance when Christianity first discovered, in the orientation towards the future, a redeeming principle for mankind. In the past nothing can be altered, and in the present little, but the future is ours and capable of raising life's intensity to its highest pitch. . . . The

neurotic is ill not because he has lost his old faith, but because he has not yet found a new form for his finest aspirations.⁴⁸

Jung was most certainly aware of late-nineteenth-century occultists' pronouncements—prominently including those of H. P. Blavatsky, the founding luminary of the Theosophical Society—linking an impending new age with the gradually approaching astrological transit of the sun into the zodiacal house of Aquarius.⁴⁹ This supposed portentous and symbolic event, along with Jung's own intuition of a new future “pressing in at the door,” a Gnostic Sophianic “reincarnation of ancient wisdom,” and the significance of “a redeeming principle” in orientation towards that future, all worked in Jung's imagination as he approached his confrontation with the unconscious. That passage began in full force on 12 November 1913, as related in opening pages of *Liber Novus*.

The image of a new age augured in the stars requires some further explanation; Jung only briefly describes the astronomical background of the event in his commentary within *Aion*. It remains an obscure topic, especially in a time when most people no longer see the stars nightly nor visually recognize the constellations of heaven circling slowly with the changing seasons. The physical and astronomical facts behind the phenomenon are fairly simple to explain, at least to people with an apt spatial imagination. Others, however, find the details rather befuddling or mysterious. And they really are.

In simple definition, an *aeon* denotes a vast period of time, an age of world creation. The word derives in Latin from the Greek word *αἰών* (*aion*), an ancient term with broad temporal implications, ranging from the span of a human life to the moving image of eternity.⁵⁰ Tacitly linked to purely temporal definitions, however, there is also a mythological implication: An aeon is the personification of an age. In Platonic philosophy and subsequently in Gnostic mythology the word signified a power existing from eternity, an emanation or phase of the supreme deity taking part in the creation and order of the universe. The historical shifting of time marked in heaven and the mythological movement of a story on earth became intertwined in human imagination.

To tease them apart, let me first explain the observed astronomical and temporal fact eventually linked to the concept of an aeon. The axis upon which the earth turns night and day—the imaginary central “skewer” running through from the North to the South Pole—is tilted a bit to one side. The absolute direction of this tilt, relative to the distant stars, is not fixed. Instead, the earth's polar axis very slowly rotates, changing over eons the celestial direction in which it points. As it turns, the starry background of the sky, as seen at different seasons, shifts slightly. Think of a toy top set

quickly spinning on a table, tilting a little to one side. As it spins, the direction in which it is tilted changes, rotating in a slow circle. The earth does the same thing; the direction pointed by its polar axis relative to the stars very slowly shifts, making one complete rotation about every 26,000 years.

Throughout our history, men and women have looked up at the heavens and observed sun, moon, and planets apparently circling the earth. The regular path (called the *ecliptic*) traveled by these wandering lights falls upon a broad background belt of twelve imaginatively demarcated and named constellations, each filling roughly one-twelfth (30 degrees) of the sky circle. These are the constellations or “houses” of the zodiac: Aquarius, Pisces, Aries, Taurus, etc. From the beginnings of recorded history, this zodiacal ring with its imagined twelve divisions was looked upon as fixed and immutable, an unchanging imperium against which the solar, lunar, and planetary transits—and perhaps, the fates of men and women—were all marked.

But around 140 B.C.E. the Greek astronomer Hipparchus discovered that even the empyrean realm was in motion.⁵¹ Based on careful comparison between his own celestial observations and the notations of Greek stargazers in earlier centuries, he determined that the constellations were very slowly shifting position: The circle of the zodiac was gradually rotating backward relative to the sun’s orbit.

Of course, Hipparchus did not grasp the geophysical reasons for this. His observed fact was simply that the “fixed stars” of the heavens were not fixed, but apparently very slowly moving. Using the position of the sun relative to the zodiacal stars at the moment of the spring equinox (called the *vernal point* or *spring point*), it was eventually estimated that the heavens rotated backwards about 30 degrees, the equivalent to one zodiacal house, roughly every two millennia. In his own lifetime, on the first day of spring around 140 B.C.E., Hipparchus saw the sun passing the junction between the constellations of Aries and Pisces. And in the coming two millennia, he could now predict, it would transit across the house of Pisces, just as it had moved from Taurus into Aries a little over two thousand years before. This slow transit of the sun backward into and across the preceding zodiacal constellation is known technically as the “precession of the equinox.”

It was a revolutionary discovery. And here begins the story. The fixed background of time became mutable. The heavenly constellations, forever sensed by mortals to be intimately entwined with human fate, were themselves shifting over vast ages. The mythic and symbolic imagination of the late classical period did not, however, immediately assimilate this new astrological observation into its story. (Here I must note the possible exception of the Mithraic cult, which formed in parallel with early Christianity; and the Mithraic deity *Aion* does occupy both the title and the frontispiece to Jung’s

book on the subject.⁵²) While seers of the time saw a new age approaching, history leaves little evidence that they explicitly linked their story to the precession of the equinox and the new age of Pisces. Nor was the zodiacal shift associated in astrological lore with Plato's more ancient concept of the aeon until much later in history.

Jung explained that the association of . . . the perceived completion of a vast age in the human story and the astrological transit of the sun through the zodiacal ring—was entirely acausal and “synchronous.”

It seems (and Jung makes this point in *Aion*⁵³) that the recognition of a new age, so integral to early Christianity, was only gradually associated with the astrological fact of the precession of the equinox and the new ruling constellation of the fish. But the image of the fish nonetheless symbolically constellated in the Western imagination and story, and it eventually became fully associated with the Christian age. By the late

nineteenth century, it had developed into a symbolic astrological story playing on human history: Pisces marked the passing age; as the sun transited into Aquarius, a new aeon of history approached. What that means is usually obscure in its specifics, but the story has carried into the popular culture of the twenty-first century.

In his late-life reflections, Jung explained that the association of these events—the perceived completion of a vast age in the human story and the astrological transit of the sun through the zodiacal ring—was entirely acausal and “synchronous.” The coming of a new age would not be “caused” by either a geophysical fact or a determinative occult astrological force. The events simply walk hand in hand, a sign to seers imagining meaning in the human story we call history.

LIBER NOVUS AND THE AGE OF AQUARIUS

So we circle back to *Liber Novus* and the first image of the preface page. I earlier suggested imaginative implications for Jung's choice of the ancient prophetic texts on this beginning sheet. But now look closely at the very large and artfully worked initial to the opening proclamation, *Der Weg*, “The Way.” And understand: These are not random doodles. They are intensely considered words from the depths, as Jung interpreted them in 1915.



Detail from the first folio of *Liber Novus*, showing the zodiacal precession of the equinoxes. *Liber Novus*, Liber Primus, folio i recto.

The central sketch suggests a spring day with a ship setting sail on a voyage. Below, the painting reaches down through the waters of creation to primordial earth and its fiery central magma. And above, “you see the far-off forest and mountains, and above them your vision climbs to the realms of the stars” (LN, 264i).

In the heavens Jung outlines the zodiacal belt of constellations marked with a ribbon of lighter blue, each noted by the traditional symbol. Traveling upon this celestial highway is a gilded sun with four rays, one greatly extended and pointing the way. However, there is something very unusual about the six zodiacal symbols Jung has scribed here. They are *not* drawn in usual sequence, as they appear in the sky and as they have been written in manuscripts for thousands of years. The proper order goes like this: Aquarius ♒, Pisces ♓, Aries ♈, Taurus ♉, Gemini ♊, and Cancer ♋. Here they are reversed in order, shown in backward sequence.

This is no mistake, and Jung’s symbolic meaning is certain. He is indicating the precession of the equinoxes over prior ages. The path of the sun’s precession through five aeons is shown with a thin golden thread, leading forward to the current solar position, at the end of the constellation of Pisces. And note, the golden thread of past time and story ends here. But a ray of sun reaches onward, stretching over Aquarius ♒, the coming age, and heralding his introductory words: *The Way of What Is to Come*.

Follow along this highway Jung marked for wayfarers. By 1915, Jung had distilled from his visions and marked in his record this keynote of his story: The two-millennia-long aeon of Pisces was ending, and a new age was about to begin. But what distinguished the passing age from the coming age?

A primal characteristic marking an aeon is the god-image that dominates its story—this reflects the implications of the original Greek term, *aion*. Throughout the visions recorded in *Liber Novus*, by directly engaging the mythopoetic imagination Jung found himself wrestling with God. His “empirical man” had entered a greater dimension, a “divine” realm, the realm

of the greater “self.”⁵⁴ In the union of inner and outer, above and below, he witnessed an epochal transformation occurring in the *imago Dei*. Of that fact, he poignantly gives testimony in September of 1915, as transcribed in *Liber Novus*:

Through uniting with the self we reach the God. . . . I have experienced it. It has happened thus in me. And it certainly happened in a way that I neither expected nor wished for. The experience of the God in this form was unexpected and unwanted. I wish I could say it was a deception and only too willingly would I disown this experience. But I cannot deny that it has seized me beyond all measure and steadily goes on working in me. . . . No insight or objection is so strong that it could surpass the strength of this experience.⁵⁵

“I have experienced it. It has happened thus in me.” And he had thus been given a task:

When something long since passed away comes back again in a changed world, it is new. To give birth to the ancient in a new time is creation. This is the creation of the new, and that redeems me. Salvation is the resolution of the task. The task is to give birth to the old in a new time.⁵⁶

An aeon was not simply a ledger book of years, begun and ended by the phantom finger of an astronomical phenomenon. Jung beheld the aeons as prodigious volumes in the human saga, an ongoing epic of the relationship between two worlds. In mythopoetic imagination, story and history inseparably entwined. Human consciousness became proscenium to the tale, and time was only the flux in plot.

The third age of the story was now nearing its end. Human struggle with the “two worlds” had distilled its defining themes, just as that dynamic had demarcated the denouement of preceding ages. Jung gives the gist of the plot:

When the month of the Twins⁵⁷ had ended, the men said to their shadows: “You are I,” since they had previously had their spirit around them as a second person. Thus the two became one, and through this collision the formidable broke out, precisely that spring of consciousness that one calls culture and which lasted until the time of Christ. But the fish indicated the moment when

what was united split, according to the eternal law of contrasts, into an underworld and upperworld. If the power of growth begins to cease, then the united falls into its opposites. . . . But the separated cannot remain separated forever. It will be united again and the month of the fish will soon be over.⁵⁸

Men of Jung's home and generation laughed at such assertions. They saw only the exterior of reality. But he had wandered beyond their shire, passed through the ancient encircling hedge, and met the fictive fact. Now he proclaimed, "This inner world is truly infinite, in no way poorer than the outer one. Man lives in two worlds."

Jung saw the story. He also sensed that throughout the ages, an occasional wayfarer found this great Janus gate, the dual-visaged passage in the wall between home and beyond, and there witnessed story and history gambling together, spinning destiny. Call them prophets, poets, bards, seers, wizards, or lunatics—or, perhaps simply wayfaring folk. Whatever be the chosen nomination, Jung was one.

In quality and degree Jung comprehended that the directness of his visionary journey was, when placed in historical context, exceedingly rare. And historians considering Jung must now in turn recognize that his hermeneutic of the experience was entirely unprecedented: In fact and in act, his experience and hermeneutics might imaginatively mark a new aeon's birth. Human consciousness, in the vision of this one wayfarer, had reached a new perspective. He wrote the *New Book*. Many years later and with great affect he told Job's tale, how by seeing the backside of God, a solitary man forced that God to incarnate with a new level of consciousness. *Answer to Job*, which erupted from Jung immediately after he finished writing *Aion*, was his most personal statement about the transformative force of human vision at the threshold of an aeon.⁵⁹

This passing "month" was, of course, the Christian age for peoples of the West, and two fish had circled in a sea of opposition. Now the development of the Christian God image had passed its zenith. Jung judges the dogmatic vestiges of Christianity at the terminus of its time with harsh words:

Its teachings are good for the most mature minds of bygone time. Today, it serves immature minds. Christianity no longer promises us grace, and yet we still need mercy. That which I tell you is the way of what is to come, my way to mercy.⁶⁰

Everything that becomes too old becomes evil, the same is true of your highest. Learn from the suffering of the crucified God that one can also betray and crucify a God, namely the God

of the old year [*æon*]. If a God ceases being the way of life, he must fall secretly.⁶¹

The judgment here is upon the cultural remnants of Christianity, and not upon the figure of Christ, who remains in all Jung's writings a paradigm of the way, the Self. Jung addressed the task of giving birth to the ancients in a new time: "Salvation is the resolution of the task." Renewing the old creates the new. Jung apprehended that this also involved a revalorization of a forgotten value affirmed at the beginning of the Christian age by Gnosticism, an experiential and mythopoetic tradition that held Jung's abiding sympathy⁶²:

What has been will be again. For these are all things which are the inborn properties of human nature. It belongs to the essence of forward movement that what was returns. Only the ignorant can marvel at this. Yet the meaning does not lie in the eternal recurrence of the same, but in the manner of its recurring creation at any given time.⁶³

In visions noted in Jung's Black Book journal during the spring of 1916, Christ appears twice. On 12 April 1916, he comes vested in his robe of glory. The vision is recorded in the last pages of *Liber Novus*: Philemon is given the voice and addresses Christ, "My master and my brother, praised be your name ...":

Liber Novus was the primary documentary account of that "secret knowledge," the book he never felt permitted to publish.

But, my master
and my brother,
I believe you
have completed
your work, since
the one who has
given his life,
his entire truth,
all his love, his
entire soul, has

completed his work. What one individual can do for men, you have done and accomplished and fulfilled. The time has come when each must do his own work of redemption. Mankind has grown older and a new month has begun.⁶⁴

These words well summarize Jung's myth of the passing and the coming age: Christ has completed his work, now each must do his own; a new month,



Detail, *Liber Novus*, Liber Secundus, folio 64.

the fourth month, has begun. “Learn from the suffering of a crucified God.” The new aeon signaled emergence of a transforming divine image. Jung had seen it.

Aion

In his seventy-fifth year Jung finished *Aion*.⁶⁵ While completing the manuscript he wrote Fr. White and predicted, “It will be, I am afraid, a shocking and difficult book.”⁶⁶ Shortly after the publication, Barbara Hannah commented, “From the reactions he had received, he thought *Aion* was the least understood of his books.”⁶⁷ Over five subsequent decades, readers have continued to assess it as being somewhere between difficult and thoroughly bewildering. And it is—at least until considered in perspective of its theme’s first declaration in *Liber Novus*.

To understand this intimate relationship of *Aion* and *Liber Novus*, consider again Jung’s remark: “Before my illness I had often asked myself if I were permitted to publish or even speak of my secret knowledge.” *Liber Novus* was the primary documentary account of that “secret knowledge,” the book he never felt permitted to publish. Nonetheless Jung “realized it was my duty to communicate these thoughts. . . .” He perceived that his revelation needed first to address readers in a different language and format from its primary form, something less hieratic and prophetic in tone, yet still sufficient to his duty. And so: “I later set it all down in *Aion*.”

Now, with his new book opened, we see that every motif elaborated in *Aion* flowed forward in a considered development from *Liber Novus*. Placed in this context, *Aion* becomes a commentary to the *New Book*, a

hermeneutic amplification to the visions. And, appropriately, its title echoes the proclamation imaged on the first folio of *Liber Novus*.

The visions Jung experienced in 1944 during his passage to the threshold of death had completed his story, given him a final confirmation of the validity of the revelation, and granted him authority to speak. However, when he began the writing that led him on the road to *Aion* and suddenly realized the task he had begun, he confessed to Victor White, "It came to me as a shock, as I felt utterly unequal to such a task."⁶⁸

At this critical moment of doubt, a messenger arrived from the visionary world of *Liber Novus* to aid him. His name is Izdubar. Jung tells the story in the next lines of his 19 December 1947 letter. Only with *Liber Novus* in hand can a reader possibly understand what happened, and what it meant to Jung. When understood, one begins to fathom the deep imaginative relationship of these two works.

Jung had first met Izdubar, the giant God from the East, in a vision on 8 January 1914. The meeting had gone tragically wrong—confronted by Jung's toxic modernity, Izdubar had been stricken and sickened unto death. Jung sequestered the enfeebled God within an egg; before the egg Jung uttered sacred incantations to his regeneration. Here, *Liber Novus*:

Christmas has come. The God is in the egg. I have prepared a rug for my God, an expensive red rug from the land of morning. He shall be surrounded by the shimmer of magnificence of his Eastern land.

I am the mother, the simple maiden, who gave birth and did not know how. I am the careful father, who protected the maiden. I am the shepherd, who received the message as he guarded his herd at night on the dark fields.

I am the holy animal that stood astonished and cannot grasp the becoming of the God. I am the wise man who came from the East, suspecting the miracle from afar. And I am the egg that surrounds and nurtures the seed of the God in me.

The solemn hours lengthen. And my humanity is wretched and suffers torment. Since I am a giver of birth. Whence do you delight me, Oh God? He is the eternal emptiness and the eternal fullness. Nothing resembles him and he resembles everything. Eternal darkness and eternal brightness. Eternal below and eternal above. Double nature in one. . . .⁶⁹

Thirty-four exquisite folio pages of *Liber Novus*, textually and artistically among its most beautiful sections, are dedicated to this tale of Jung's sacred labor to renew a dying God.⁷⁰ And in the illustrations, we see repeatedly imaged a boat, the ancient barge carrying the Sun-god across a great sea.



Detail, *Liber Novus*, Liber Secundus, folio 64.

With this vision from *Liber Novus* in mind, consider what Jung now says. Here we continue reading the 19 December 1947 letter to Fr. White, recounting the dream that led him into the writing of *Aion*:

Christ—not the man but the divine being—was my secret goal. It came to me as a shock, as I felt utterly unequal to such a task. A dream told me, that my small fisherboat had been sunk and that a giant (whom I know from a dream about 30 years ago) had provided me with a new, beautiful seagoing craft about twice the size of my former boat. Then I knew—nothing doing! I had to go on.

Of course, it was not in a dream thirty years previously that Jung had met Izdubar, but in imaginative vision. Izdubar, the God whom Jung had renewed, was providing a vessel that would now help him cross a vast aeonal sea. The illustration of the boat in *Liber Novus* is so vivid, one can almost fall into Jung's dream.

After this nocturnal visitation from Izdubar, Jung knew, "I had to go on"; he had to make his declaration about Christ, the aeon passing, and the new God-image—the secret revelation of *Liber Novus* about which he had remained silent for thirty years. *Aion* would become a new formation of the keynote message from *Liber Novus*.

He continues the letter, outlining what to him was now crystal clear, but in words that must have left dear Fr. White completely benighted:

My further writing led me to the archetype of the Godman and to the phenomenon of synchronicity which adheres to the archetype. Thus I came to discuss the $\iota\chi\theta\acute{\upsilon}\zeta$ ⁷¹ and the then new aeon of $\text{H} 30^\circ$ (following $\text{Y} 0^\circ$),⁷² the prophecy of the Antichrist and the development of the latter from 1000 A.D. in Mysticism and Alchemy until the recent developments, which threaten to overthrow the Christian aeon altogether. I have found some beautiful material.

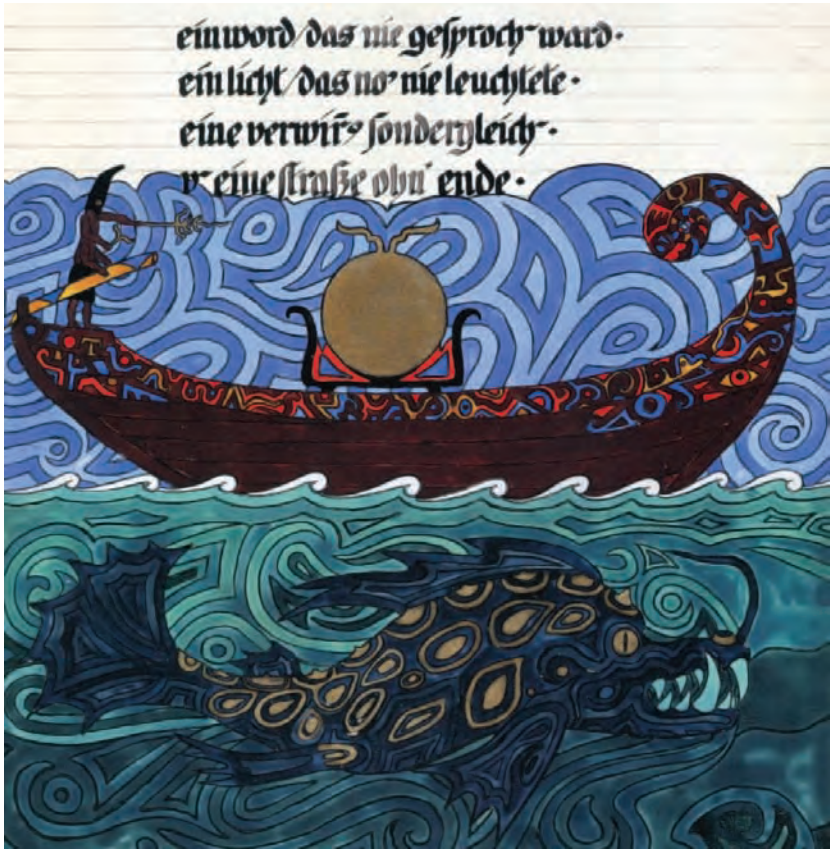
Jung had found some beautiful material—he had returned to *Liber Novus*.

Jung closes this singularly important letter with one more image from the "inner world," a dream that had occurred on the night before his writing the letter. Philemon had visited him again. One might conjecture that the dream somehow motivated his revealing letter that next day, and certainly the dream has something to do with Jung's effort to aid his friend, the Catholic theologian, to see a fact beyond the confines of dogma. He tells Fr. White the dream, in abbreviated terms:

Last night I have dreamt of 3 catholic priests, who were quite friendly and one of them had a remarkable library. I was the whole time under a sort of military order and I had to sleep in the barracks. There was a scarcity of beds, so that two men had to share one bed. My partner had already gone to bed. The bed was very clean, white and fresh and he was a most venerable looking, very old man with white locks and a long flowing white beard. He offered me graciously one half of the bed and I woke up, when I was just slipping into it.

Then a month later, in his next letter, Jung fills in a critical detail omitted in his first recension of the dream:

While I stood before the bed of the Old Man, I thought and felt: *Indignus sum Domine*. I know Him very well: He was my guru



The vessel bearing the God image (symbolized as the Sun-disk) crossing over the aeonian waters of Pisces. *Liber Novus*, *Liber Secundus*, folio 55.

more than 30 years ago, a real ghostly guru—but that is a long and—I am afraid—exceedingly strange story.⁷³

Standing before Philemon, confronted by the invitation of laying down his burdens beside the master, Jung thought and felt: *Indignus sum Domine*. Perhaps no one except a priest like Fr. White could experientially understand the conjoined affect and meaning of these words. The priest speaks them at the most sacred moment of the Eucharistic ritual, as he addresses the consecrated elements, the symbolic and real presence of Christ's body and blood: *Lord, I am not worthy*.

The visit from Philemon confirmed the task. Jung now had a book to write; destiny had given him a duty. But he humbly understood that no one is worthy of the mission mirrored by an *Aion*.⁷⁴

WANDERING IN TIME

I cannot here outline specific themes echoing forth from *Liber Novus* into *Aion*—that task will be met in time, and it will engage our imagination and intuition, as well as a deepened understanding of Jung. It will require us to consider how a story might cross history.

Each text offers something
new to the other; each has a
point of view. The key
“prophetic” themes in
Aion . . . draw broadly
from various sections [in
Liber Novus].

When comparing the two works, one must understand that there is no simple chapter-by-chapter correspondence, though anyone who knows *Liber Novus* should open *Aion* to the Table of Contents and peruse its outlined form. After doing that, read again the first five chapters of *Aion*, from Chapter One, “The Ego,” through Chapter Five, “Christ, a Symbol of the Self.” Then recon-

sider Jung’s journey recounted in *Liber Primus*, the first book of *Liber Novus*. In context of the commentary in these five chapters of *Aion*, reflect upon his story in *Liber Novus*: his personal situation in 1913; the murder of Siegfried; the encounter with Salome and Elijah; and the complex drama at the end of this first book of *Liber Novus*, titled “Mysterium,” in which Jung is Christed. Each text offers something new to the other; each has a point of view. The key “prophetic” themes in *Aion*—the end of the Christian age, the Christ and Antichrist, Gnostic symbols of the Self, and the structure of the Self—draw broadly from various sections. Once you have an ear for the story, you will hear it.

There is, however, one chapter in *Aion* on which I must specifically comment. It always seemed the very strangest: Chapter Seven, “The Prophecies of Nostradamus.” Before plunging into his astrological discussion of the aeon of Pisces, the Christian age, Jung takes a long detour to tell about a man of the sixteenth century—a prophet and astrologer—who accurately read human destiny in the stars. Now, in a flash, it becomes quite clear why Jung adds this bizarre episode. He is placing himself in historical context. After all, he too was a man reading the story of human destiny in the stars.⁷⁵ But, then, who would understand?

Edward F. Edinger presented an extraordinary seminar on Jung’s *Aion* at the C. G. Jung Institute in Los Angeles during 1988 and 1989. The lectures have subsequently been published in book form and provide one of the

most probingly insightful discussions of Jung's late thought anywhere available.⁷⁶ Anyone seeking a detailed exegesis of *Aion* will be well served by these lectures—I doubt it is possible to do better without fully integrating *Liber Novus*.

Based on evidence from Jung's published comments in 1925 about his visions,⁷⁷ Edinger intuited that *Aion* was closely linked with Jung's experience recorded in the then still hidden Red Book. His first evidence was the image of the lion-headed Mithraic deity *Aion* that appears as frontispiece to the book. In the great *Mysterium* recorded in *Liber Novus*,⁷⁸ and told in the 1925 seminar, Jung himself took on this visage. Edinger comments:

Now what does this vision mean? I think that one of the things it means is that Jung is the first representative of the new aeon . . . he is the harbinger of the new aeon—what I call and what I think will in the future be called the Jungian aeon. . . . Just as Christ was the first person to enter the aeon of Pisces, so Jung is the first to inaugurate the aeon of Aquarius.⁷⁹

This is an extreme, and perhaps to some people, even offensive statement. But Dr. Edinger knew Jung better than most men of his generation. And he made similar assertions about Jung on several occasions, despite the wincing response of some Jungian theorists. Only centuries of time will determine whether such comments had merit. Personally, speaking from the present, on this single issue I disagree with Edinger: Jung's own response to the germ of that thought was, "Lord, I am not worthy."

But there is another reason behind my hesitance to accept Edinger's term: a dream first told to me in February of 1993 by a middle-aged woman with a remarkable interior relationship to Jung. We both long ago forgot the dream, but recently while reading her journals she rediscovered it, and brought it back for a second consideration. The dream goes like this: She [the dreamer] is in a store buying a cup of coffee. Instead of accepting her \$20 bill in payment, the female clerk insists on giving to her a \$5 bill, saying, "You may return it next time." She leaves, thinking, "It makes no sense." Something similar happens again in a vaguely remembered scene involving her automobile. Then the image radically changes. I transcribe verbatim from her dream journal as recorded in the morning, 7 February 1993:

Jung is speaking, though unseen. It is Him speaking from another realm, the spirit. He is speaking about the termination or culmination of this present age, with an emphasis on the feminine who is called Sophia.

A book is placed before me after Jung concludes speaking. It is a New Book, a new beginning. And the reading the book is opened to is entitled *Emmanuel*. This clearly is the new feminine name, i.e., it has replaced Sophia. The book is Jung's work. I proceed reading aloud.

There seems first to be the introductory lines and a marked emphasis on the lifting of the weight of oppression this age had with it, bringing a quality of joy, and the people shall experience lightness of heart.⁸⁰

The dream memory ended there, with this final note added: "Emmanuel = With us is God."⁸¹

I confess to pondering the synchronous reappearance of that dream while writing this article. Jung asked himself, "How can I fathom what will happen during the next eight hundred years, up to the time when the One begins his rule? I am speaking only of what is to come."⁸² Only a millennial dream, "a primordially ancient dream," dares augur such a measureless tale.

As I now read Jung's story and ponder its plot, it seems to me his vision of a new God-image certainly involves an integration of the feminine.⁸³ It also centers attention on the *Mysterium Coniunctionis*, a mystery of union in the bridal chamber where two divided natures conjoin. Jung intuited that symbolic names and images will be vitally renewed or reformed in this fourth month of the journey, just as they were 2,000 years ago at the beginning of the aeon of Pisces. And perhaps on the wandering path of the way to come, humankind will imaginatively discover its symbolic compass in a new feminine name, like this dreamed name of Sophia becoming Emmanuel: "With us is God."

Time will tell.

AION IS A CHILD

In 1950, Jung worked the last page of his *Liber Novus* and the story of *Aion* upon a great square stone resting beside his Bollingen Tower on the shores of Lake Zurich. This is his final compendium to a long journey completed, the homecoming oblation of a wayfaring man.⁸⁴

When he began work on the front surface, the stone showed him a circle: It looked out at him like an eye. With chisel, he cut deep the orb, and then the central pupil. In the pupil of the eye—at the doorway between inner and outer worlds—he saw and carved a small figure, the cabiri Telesphoros. His vestment is marked with the symbol of Hermes. In hand, he bares a light. Around him in ancient Greek, the stone speaks this proclamation:



Jung's *Aion Lapis*, completed in 1950 and located beside his Bollingen Tower.

Aion is a child playing—Wagering on draughts—Kingship of a Child
 Telesphoros traverses the dark regions of this Cosmos
 A flashing Star from the Depths
 Guiding way to the Gates of the Sun and to the Land of Dreams⁸⁵

There at the threshold of vision, where story and history wed, we meet the final mystery of Carl Gustav Jung and his tale twice told.

Lance S. Owens, M.D., is a physician in clinical practice and a frequent lecturer on Jung, Tolkien, Gnosticism, and the visionary tradition in Western history. He has also served for many years as a parish priest of the Ecclesia Gnostica. Dr. Owens lives in Salt Lake City, Utah. Text and images reprinted from The Red Book by C. G. Jung, edited by Sonu Shamdasani, translated by Sonu Shamdasani, John Peck, and Mark Kyburz. Copyright (c) 2009 by the Foundation of the Works of C. G. Jung. Used with permission of the publisher, W.W. Norton & Company, Inc.

NOTES

1. C. G. Jung, *The Red Book: Liber Novus*, ed. Sonu Shamdasani, tr. John Peck, Mark Kyburz, and Sonu Shamdasani (W.W. Norton & Co, 2009), 229 (hereafter, LN). Given the large size of the folio pages of LN, citations are to page and page column; column given as *i* or *ii*.
2. C. G. Jung, *Collected Papers on Analytical Psychology* (New York: Moffat Yard and Co.), 1917, 443–4 (hereafter, “Collected Papers”). Compare the comment in *Liber Novus*: Jung says to Philemon, “Your wisdom is invisible, your truth is unknowable, entirely untrue in any given age, and yet true in all eternity, but you pour out living water, from which the flowers of your garden bloom, a starry water, a dew of the night” (LN 316 i).
3. Jung originally titled “Liber Secundus” in *Liber Novus*, “The Adventures of the Wandering,” LN 259 n1.
4. For a detailed introduction to these events, see Lance S. Owens, “The Hermeneutics of Vision: C. G. Jung and Liber Novus,” *The Gnostic: A Journal of Gnosticism, Western Esotericism and Spirituality*, Issue 3 (July 2010), 23–46.
5. In late life, Jung described *Liber Novus* to Aniela Jaffé as an “attempt at an elaboration in terms of the revelation” (LN 219 ii; also, LN 225 i). On 5 January 1922, Jung recorded in his journal a conversation with his soul, who asks him: “Why have you received the revelation? You should not hide it. You concern yourself with the form? Is the form important, when it is a matter of revelation?” (LN 211 ii).
6. LN 225f.
7. At the end of “Liber Secundus,” Jung states the issue facing him: “An opus is needed, that one can squander decades on, and do it out of necessity. I must catch up with a *piece* of the Middle Ages—within myself. We have only finished the Middle Ages of—others. I must begin early, in that period when the hermits died out” (LN p 320 ii; see also, LN 330 n354).
8. LN 230 ii.
9. The prologue, which would include this first preface page, is apparently not in the handwritten draft manuscript or in the typescript of the draft, made circa 1915 (LN 225 i).
10. LN vii. In *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* the comment is rendered: “I have never lost touch with my initial experiences. All my works, all my creative activity, has come from those initial fantasies and dreams which began in 1912, almost fifty years ago. Everything that I accomplished in later life was already contained in them . . . “ C. G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, ed. Aniela Jaffé (Rev. ed., Pantheon, 1993), 191 (hereafter, MDR).
11. LN 221.
12. There is no doubt that Jung addressed *Liber Novus* to a future readership; LN 223 i.
13. The first Swiss edition of *Aion*, completed by Jung in 1950, was published in 1951. The two Swiss editions had two different subtitles: “Researches into the History of Symbols” and then “Contributions to the Symbolism of the Self.”

- In the 1958 edition for the *Collected Works* the subtitle was modified again to “Researches into the Phenomenology of the Self.” This shifting subtitle well represents the problem of summarizing the theme of *Aion*. C.G. Jung, *Aion: Researches into the Phenomenology of the Self*, 2nd ed., *Collected Works* (hereafter, CW) 9 ii (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968). (All references to CW are to page number, not paragraph number.)
14. “The Psychology of the Transference,” published in 1946 (CW 16, 163–323) was largely completed prior to the visions, but published in their reflection. Early sections of *Mysterium Coniunctionis* were written before 1945, the final sections and conclusion came after; speaking of his early work on the book, Jung said after the visions, “All I have written is correct. . . . I only realize its full reality now” (Hannah, 279). *Answer to Job* was first published in 1952 (CW 11, 355–470). “Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle,” also published in 1952 (CW 8, 816–968), is a corollary work that reflects on the themes of this quartet, and the meaningful conjunctions of story and history.
 15. MDR, 295ff. Also see Barbara Hannah’s account; Barbara Hannah, *Jung: His Life and Work* (New York: G. Putnam’s Sons, 1976), 277ff.
 16. MDR, 295–6.
 17. Ann Conrad Lammers & Adrian Cunnigham, eds., *The Jung–White Letters* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 60. The editors of these letters have preserved Jung’s original spelling and punctuation; the letters are quoted as given, without alteration. (I express gratitude to the editors for their work on this invaluable collection of letters, which I have utilized here extensively.)
 18. MDR, 297.
 19. Hannah, 284.
 20. Hannah, 276.
 21. Hannah, 282.
 22. Phanes appears prominently in his later Black Book 6 and 7 journals; LN 301 n211, LN 354 n125.
 23. LN 359 ii.
 24. See the explanatory note, MDR, 294n.
 25. MDR, 294.
 26. LN 233 n49. The woman was certainly Toni (Antonia Anna) Wolff. However, that is a complex corollary to the story.
 27. Sanford L. Drob, *Kabbalistic Visions: C. G. Jung and Jewish Mysticism* (New Orleans: Spring Books, 2010).
 28. Gershom Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1965), 97; Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1974), 75. Jung was introduced to Kabbalah principally through Scholem, and probably understood it in this context offered by Scholem. The Gnostic writings discovered at Nag Hammadi contain texts evidencing source relationships within Jewish, Jewish–Christian, and Hellenistic culture.
 29. MDR, 297.

30. MDR, 297.
31. Ann Lammers relates that Jung gave his son these special letters in a zippered leather case, with solemn instructions about future publication. Jung–White, xxii.
32. Jung–White, 19 Dec 1947, 103.
33. Margaret Ostrowski-Sachs, *From Conversations with C. G. Jung* (Zurich: Juris Druck & Verlag, 1971), 68, quoted in Edward Edinger, *The Aion Lectures* (Toronto: Inner City Books, 1996), 13. In 1958 Jung explained further: “I am fully aware of the risk I am taking in proposing to communicate my views concerning certain contemporary events, which seem to me important, to those patient enough to hear me. . . . It is not presumption that drives me, but my conscience as a psychiatrist that bids me fulfill my duty and prepare those few who will hear me for coming events which are in accord with the end of an era. As we know from ancient Egyptian history, there are symptoms of psychic changes that always appear at the end of one Platonic month and at the beginning of another. They are, it seems, changes in the constellation of the psychic dominants, of the archetypes or “Gods” as they used to be called, which bring about, or accompany, long-lasting transformations of the collective psyche. This transformation started within the historical tradition and left traces behind within it, first in the transition of the Age of Taurus to that of Aries, and then from Aries to Pisces, whose beginning coincides with the rise of Christianity. We are now nearing that great change which may be expected when the spring-point enters Aquarius. . . . I am, to be quite frank, concerned for all those that are unprepared by the events in question and disconcerted by their incomprehensible nature. . . . I undertake this thankless task in the expectation that my chisel will make no impression on the hard stone it meets.” *Flying Saucers: A Modern Myth of Things Seen in the Skies*, CW 10, 311-2.
34. In September of 1950, and just four months after completing the foreword for *Aion*, he wrote this introduction.
35. CW 5, xxii.
36. CW 5, xxiv.
37. CW 5, xxiv–xxv.
38. Jung–White, 30 Jan 1948, 117.
39. In 1929, Jung speaks of three past aeons of human history, reaching back to beginnings of a recorded history in Egypt over 6,500 years ago; the “month” referred to here is the “platonic month” or zodiacal age: “We live in the age of the decline of Christianity, when metaphysical premises of morality are collapsing. . . . When the confusion is at its height a new revelation comes, i.e., at the beginning of the fourth month of world history.” Gerhard Adler, ed., *C. G. Jung: Letters* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 12 Sept 1929, Vol. I, 69. He defines the three past ages of history again, Letters, Vol. II, 229.
40. “Transitions between the aeons always seem to have been melancholy and despairing times, as for instance the collapse of the Old Kingdom in Egypt

between Taurus and Aries, or the melancholy of the Augustinian age between Aries and Pisces. And now we are moving into Aquarius. . . . And we are only at the beginning of this apocalyptic development! Already I am a great-grandfather twice over and see those distant generations growing up who long after we are gone will spend their lives in that darkness." Letters, Vol II, 25 Feb 1955, 229.

41. LN 264 i.
42. LN 272 ii.
43. MDR, 192.
44. Jung–White, 23 Jan 1947, 71. In LN, Philemon tells Jung: "You will be a river that pours forth over the lands. It seeks every valley and streams toward the depths. . . . You will hold the invisible realm in trembling hands; it lowers its roots into the gray darknesses and mysteries of the earth and sends up branches covered in leaves into the golden air" (LN 355 ii).
45. Letters, Vol. I, 12 Sept. 1929, 69.
46. Letters, Vol. 1, 12 June 1911, 24.
47. William McGuire, ed., *The Freud/Jung Letters* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), 29 Aug 1911, 439.
48. Collected Papers, 277.
49. In 1887, Blavatsky wrote: "There are several remarkable cycles that come to a close at the end of this century. . . . [One example] occurred 2410 and 255 B.C., or when the equinox entered into the sign of the Ram, and again into that of Pisces. When it enters, in a few years, the sign of Aquarius, psychologists will have some extra work to do, and the psychic idiosyncrasies of humanity will enter on a great change." H. P. Blavatsky, *Collected Writings* (Theosophical Publishing House, 1950–1991), 8:174n. Jung was well aware of the theosophical movement, and had carefully read the writings of G. R. S. Mead, the most important theosophical historian of the period.
50. Though *Aion* is the title of Jung's book, he did not address, define, or use the word *aion* directly anywhere within the text.
51. Discovery of the precession is attributed to Hipparchus, c. 190 B.C.E. – c. 120 B.C.E, though Aristillus of Alexandria may have noted it 150 years earlier.
52. For a discussion of the precession of the equinox in Mithraic mythology, see: David Ulansey, *The Origins of the Mithraic Mysteries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 49ff.
53. Jung explains in *Aion*, "Although no connection of any kind can be proved between the figure of Christ and the inception of the astrological age of the fishes, the simultaneity of the fish symbolism of the Redeemer with the astrological symbol of the new aeon seems to me important enough to warrant the emphasis we place upon it. If we try to follow up the complicated mythological ramifications of this parallel, we do so with intent to throw light on the multifarious aspects of an archetype that manifests itself on the one hand in a personality, and on the other hand synchronistically, in a moment of time determined in advance, before Christ's birth. Indeed, long before that, the archetype had been written in the heavens by projection, so as then, 'when

- the time was fulfilled,' to coincide with the symbols produced by the new era" (CW 9ii, 92).
54. CW 11, 157.
 55. LN 338 ii.
 56. LN 311 ii.
 57. The aeon of Gemini, the Twins, which ended astronomically approximately 4500 B.C.E., around the beginning of human recorded history.
 58. The "month of the fish" is the age of Pisces (LN 314 ii–315 i).
 59. Jung explained the origins of *Answer to Job*: "The inner root of this book is to be found in *Aion*." MDR, 216. *Answer to Job* (CW 11, 355–470) was published in 1952.
 60. LN 234 n60; this statement, recorded in his Black Book, is not transcribed into LN.
 61. LN 241 i.
 62. In 1917, Jung writes concerning early Christianity and its rejection of Gnosticism: "If the signs of the age are not deceptive, we are now in the great final settlement of the Christian epoch. We know that, evolution not being uniformly continuous, when one form of creation has been outlived, the evolutionary tendency harks back to resume that form which, after having made a beginning, was left behind in an undeveloped state." Collected Papers, 406. In *Aion* Jung states: "*Gnosis is undoubtedly a psychological knowledge whose contents derive from the unconscious. . . . This would explain the astonishing parallelism between Gnostic symbolism and the findings of the psychology of the unconscious*" (CW 9ii, 223).
 63. LN 311 ii.
 64. LN 356 ii. The "new month" here is the aeon of Aquarius. In the Black Book journal account of the event, Jung is himself speaking to Christ.
 65. Jung began work on the manuscript in the fall of 1947, completing a rough draft of his material by mid-December. Sections from what became Chapters IV and V of *Aion* were presented at the 1948 Eranos meetings. The Swiss first edition was published in 1951. Jung–White Letters, 103 n144.
 66. Jung–White, 21 May 1948, 119.
 67. Hannah, 301
 68. Jung–White, 19 Dec 1947, 103.
 69. LN 284f.
 70. "Liber Secundus," folio pp. 36–69, relates the story of Izdubar. The transcription of text and images here in *Liber Novus* reflects events recorded in his journal in early January 1914. By Jung's notation, it appears that the image of Izdubar on folio p. 36 was completed at Christmas 1915 (LN 277 n96). The images on folio pp. 54–63 were painted between January and February 1917 (LN 285 n129, LN 286 n132). Thus Jung spent over a year, Dec 1915 to Feb 1917, reflecting upon and then artistically imaging in *Liber Novus* the story of this section: Izdubar, the boat of the Sun, and the reborn God. During this same period he was intensely involved in the ongoing stream of visionary experiences that formed the last section of *Liber Novus*, "Scrutinies."

71. *Ichthys* = fish.
72. The symbols indicate Pisces following Aries, and the precession of the equinox.
73. Jung–White, 30 January 1948, 116.
74. *Answer to Job* concludes: “Even the enlightened person remains what he is, and is never more than his own limited ego before the One who dwells within him, whose form has no knowable boundaries, who encompasses him on all sides, fathomless as the abysses of the earth and vast as the sky” (CW 11, 470).
75. Particularly see the section titled “The Three Prophecies” (LN 305 i) and the journal entry in LN (306 n236).
76. Edinger, *The Aion Lectures*, op. cit.
77. C. G. Jung, William McGuire ed., *Analytical Psychology: Notes of the Seminar Given in 1925* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 47–8.
78. LN 245 ii.
79. Edinger, 192.
80. Quoted by permission; photocopy of original journal pages in my possession.
81. In *Psychological Types*, Jung touched on this theme: “Significantly, Immanuel (the redeeming symbol) means ‘god with us,’ i.e., union with the latent *dynamis* of the unconscious” (CW 6, 265).
82. LN 306 n236. The “eight hundred year” period is associated with the *coniunctiones maximae* of Saturn and Jupiter, which recur in an 800-year cycle. cf. *Aion* (CW 9ii, 82, 96ff). A Saturn–Jupiter conjunction is imaged occurring in Gemini on the initial folio page of *Liber Novus*. It is also suggested on the *Aion Lapis* (see n 84).
83. cf. *Answer to Job* (CW 11, 461ff).
84. He began work on the stone as he completed the manuscript of *Aion*. When finished, he carved these words under the inscriptions upon the side: “In remembrance of his seventy-fifth birthday C. G. Jung made and placed this here as a thanks offering, in the year 1950” (MDR, 228); for images of the stone, see Aniela Jaffé, ed., *C.G. Jung: Word and Image* (Princeton University Press, 1979), 196f.
85. This is my translation. The first phrase references a fragment from Heraclitus of Ephesus (c. 535 B.C.E.); in Jung’s rendering on the stone it becomes a coherent statement. MDR translates Jung’s amplified German rendition of the inscription: “Time is a child—playing like a child—playing a board game—the kingdom of the child. This is Telesphoros, who roams through the dark regions of this cosmos and glows like a star out of the depths. He points the way to the gates of the sun and to the land of dreams” (MDR, 227).