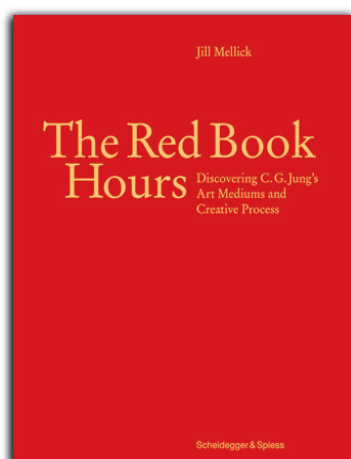


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Jill Mellick's *The Red Book Hours: A Creative Dialogue with Carl Gustav Jung's Work*

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### Introduction

In her *The Red Book Hours*, the Jungian psychologist, scholar and multimedia artist Jill Mellick presents a remarkable and inspiring analysis of one of Carl Gustav Jung's most important works: *The Red Book* (Jung 2009), a sixteen-year-long documentation of his own self-analysis - from 1914 to 1930. Jung wanted to understand himself more thoroughly and familiarise himself more profoundly with the various facets of his personality, creatively transposing and instilling them in his texts and images. This was also to function as a sort of blueprint and pathway for his own patients in their journey towards Self-individuation, to find a more harmonious relationship with their Self.

Jill Mellick's innovative and challenging purpose for her own *Red Book*, pursued with determination and intense critical study and work, is to reproduce and imaginatively replicate Jung's method for studying and discussing his *Red Book*, categorizing his procedures, understanding the importance he gave to the place, tools and materials he chose for working. Similarly, Mellick's *Red Book* consists of magnifications of Jung's imagery and symbols, archival and contemporary photographs, archival architectural blueprints, and construction drawings, through which she closely follows each step of Jung's approach to conception and composition from different artistic, technical and methodological points of view. Mellick identifies a series of themes at the basis of Jung's *Red Book*, which emerge in her own text and foreground aspects related to Jung's techniques and tools, and the context he chose as the background and foundation for his psychoanalytical research. She also uses images, sections of Jung's paintings, images from microscopic analyses of paints and pigments, chemical charts, and so on, in order to give shape and clarity to their meanings. Other archival and contemporary photographs display the contexts in which Jung used to work, including landscapes, houses, working spaces, such as the Bollingen tower, his worktable and standing desk, his library and the natural surroundings in which he lived.

Following Jung's footsteps, Mellick deals first of all with the workings of his (and her own) creative process. Starting from the unconscious as a source for inspiration, Mellick shows how Jung's work was characterised by a stratification of elements aimed at giving life to an original contribution stemming from inner work that brought his visions, words and symbols to the surface. The creative process of transformation takes place (both for Jung and Mellick) in a series of passages and moments, in a state of space-time suspension, or a 'willing suspension of disbelief', as Samuel Taylor Coleridge puts it, where images surface from the unconscious, acquire a physical dimension and become tangible and coloured signs, emblems, images and words on a sheet of paper or on any other form of technical support used.

Another important aspect Mellick refers to is the contexts in which Jung carried out his main activities, for throughout his life he tried to find, create and preserve places where his vital energy could flow freely as a dynamic form of creativity:

Throughout his life, Jung devoted unusually high energy, resources, and time to securing and creating physical and architectural, visual and auditory environments that were harmonious with his inner needs and inner environment [...] (Mellick 2018: 71).

The third focal theme in Mellick's critical study, also in terms of the number of pages she devotes to it, concerns the technical aspects of creation and execution, the tools and materials Jung used in composing his *Red Book*. Mellick's artistic gifts are perfectly appropriate to describe with subtlety and clarity, even to the general reader, Jung's use of materials, colours, different painting and writing techniques, and his style of composition in 'layers' and 'cells'. It is an accurate examination, as if under the microscope, that allows the reader to understand Jung's work in depth and with focussed awareness.

Other pivotal elements in Mellick's book are the therapeutic, educational and artistic aspects she believes to be a significant part of Jung's *Red Book*. Through the determination and strength characterising his personality, Jung always maintained that the images of his book

were not to be considered as a form of art. He asserted he did not have any artistic aims and thought that the symbolism of his drawings was an aspect that eluded any conscious artistic intention. He used his *Red Book* as a source of inspiration for his psychoanalytic sessions and when he received his patients (usually in his library) he kept the book open so that they could observe his work, the method and the commitment with which he conducted his own psychoanalysis. For therapeutic aims, Jung gave his patients instructions on how to work with their own active imagination, in the same way; to hold inner dialogues and illustrate their fantasies, thus creating their own personal *Red Book*. This is also what Jill Mellick knowingly does.

### The Creative Process

Jung's creative process began through 'descending' into his own unconscious. The image used and reported in his book, *Memories, dreams, reflections* (1963) is precisely that of a descent of a thousand and more steps in order to reach the edge of a cosmic abyss:

In order to seize hold of the fantasies, I frequently imagined a steep descent. I even made several attempts to get to the very bottom. The first time I reached, as it were, a depth of about a thousand feet; the next time I found myself at the edge of the cosmic abyss (Jung 1963: 181).

The abyss is a sea inhabited by thousands of symbols, monsters, fantastic images, from which Jung drew and then reproduced sketches on the scrolls his manuscript. In his case, the creative process is induced by a precise desire for personal self-knowledge of his inner world. As proof of this intention, Jung specifies the entrance rituals, which were similar to a game of the descending steps he used to play when he was a child. After these first sketches of *mandalas*, Jung began to consider the process of translating emotions into images as a way to explore his neuroses his neurosis. Central to his creative process is the mythopoeic function of the mind, which he found while analysing in detail his imagination and fantasies. During this inner journey, Jung understood how symbolism is the key to reaching the unconscious and its figurative form of vision (*mythopoiesis*). Thus it cannot be considered real 'art' (whatever that means) but a primordial form of *ex-expression* (*to press out*), in which the author is moved by a sort of 'alien' and uncontrollable impulse, where one is aware of being subordinate to what is happening in his work and feels like an 'observer' of what is happening, as if he were another person<sup>1</sup>.

Mellick carefully exposes these ideas and shows the difference between the 'classic' creative process and that of Jung. The artist is seen responding to an unconscious insight operating from an inner world that is translated into images, artefacts, words, music, sometimes descending from an ecstatic inner state. Jung, however, wants to study the process

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<sup>1</sup> In the introduction to *The Red Book*, Sonu Shamdasani argues that in Jung's essay "Analytical Psychology and Poetic Art" (1922) the psychology formulated a distinction between two types of literary productions: those coming from precise and conscious intentions of their author and those that impose themselves on him without the intervention of conscience. In the second case we speak of symbolic works that originate from the collective unconscious, where the creative process consists in the unconscious activation of an archetypal image – e.g. Zarathustra by Nietzsche and Faust by Goethe – (Jung 2009: 212).

itself from a psychoanalytical point of view and pursues his artistic activity with specific therapeutic and self-therapeutic purposes. Shaman-like, he intentionally goes increasingly deeper into his unconscious in order to recover images that he later will transfer in his works.

According to Jung, the creative process is a stream of consciousness in which it is not possible to grasp what is happening. Only afterwards, in a more conscious state, is it possible to discern and examine oneself from outside, and understand the images created, linking them to a possible meaning. Therefore, the images in his *Red Book* are an aesthetic elaboration of inner fantasies. Jung understood, from the beginning of his research, that figurative language was the best to represent inner psychic states. Mellick draws the reader's attention to how Jung succeeds in identifying four distinct phases in his creative process: 1) preparation and immersion; 2) incubation; 3) insight; 4) evaluation. Through this path of self-discovery, a decisive aspect is determined by the space-time suspension that a person usually experiences, where it is possible to feel deep joy during the very 'descent' process if one stays away from any life distractions and involvement.

### Contexts and Places for Jung's Creative Process

An important section of Jill Mellick's analysis focuses on the spaces in which Jung carried out his work. Mellick researched and travelled extensively in order to fulfil this: at the Jung house in Kusnacht, a town located on the right bank of Lake Zürich, she was able to absorb the atmosphere and observe the context in which the Swiss psychiatrist worked. Again, at the Bollingen tower, she personally visited the refuge created by Jung himself on the shores of Lake Zürich. As Mellick shows, the physical, architectural, audial, visual, intellectual and emotional context that surrounded Jung was fundamental for his creative spirit. Throughout his life, the psychiatrist pursued the idea of creating and maintaining harmonious relationships with the places he chose to inhabit so that would allow him to best achieve his search for his own psyche and accomplish his inner journey. Mellick illustrates how these comforting spaces had precise characteristics that also mirrored Jung's own feelings. Firstly, they needed to be close to 'masses' of water. This aspect is foregrounded also in *Memories, dreams, reflections* and in the documentary titled *Dal Profondo dell'anima* (Weick 1993). Jung always felt the need to live near the water, which he considered a vital element and a powerful symbol. Another key feature was the need to practice his profession and write in isolated and tiny places that were in direct contrast to his fascination with great and open spaces (Lake Zürich is surrounded, in fact, by the vastness of the Alps). To fulfil his need for an indispensable 'generative' solitude, Jung built the tower of Bollingen, the physical matrix of his creativity. He ornamented its interior spaces with symbolic, decorative and familiar paintings. He also supervised the design and construction of his house in Kusnacht, so that it would be built in the right location to obtain perfect natural lighting. It was in its library and inner study where he received patients and worked on *The Red Book*. This inner room of the library was a sort of 'heart' of the place, where he could completely isolate himself.

Mellick describes in detail and with care the tools and the material components of the 'setting' in which Jung realised his work and, in particular, his standing desk: which he

considered and used as a preview for his subsequent analysis of the techniques, materials, colours and tools he was using for the composition of his manuscript. Jung's standing desk, designed and built by himself, was a structure more than a meter high where he could draw and compose while standing.

### Technique and Materials

The most significant part of Mellick's *Red Book* relates to Jung's techniques and processing methods in the composition of his work. Here Mellick demonstrates her remarkable ability for technical analysis due to her personal background as an artist. Together with her activity in psychoanalysis, Mellick is an experimenting artist working with different materials for the composition of her paintings, using, for instance, acrylic, watercolour, and pastels. Her artistic work can now be seen and appreciated through her personal website ([www.jillmellick.com](http://www.jillmellick.com)). In the section titled "Art" Mellick displays watercolours, paintings, photographs and forms. The detailing of her sketches demonstrates her ability in constructing and discerning symbols and characteristics from real life. She is particularly interested in landscapes, portraits and geometrical forms. She mirrors Jung's legacy also in her professional background, which follows at least two main fields of inquiry and research: the psychological and the artistic, which often mix and interplay, giving her the right sensitivity and depth of feeling in her study of Jung's techniques, colours and shapes.

### Preparation and Colours

In order to sketch drawings and calligraphy for *The Red Book*, Jung nurtured his ability to transfer visions into images since his youth. With dedication, care and patience, he trained for many years to improve his technique and talent in the use and choice of material. Towards the end of his medical studies, for about a year he devoted himself to painting, sketching scenarios and landscapes in a figurative style, with a technique that shortly became very refined. Moreover, Jung remained in contact with the artistic milieu of his times and was also "fascinated by the works of Leonardo Da Vinci, Rubens, Fra' Angelico and in general by ancient and Renaissance art" (Jung 2009: 196).

In the section she devotes to Jung's use of colour, Mellick displays the actual pigments he was producing and the techniques he used for drawing on parchment and vellum. She carries out a thorough scientific inquiry of the pigments, classifying them according to their chemical and molecular composition. Furthermore, presenting the images from the microscope, she carries us into their minuscule and infinitesimal nature.

Describing the chemical composition of colours and materials and revealing their origin, value and use in one or more contexts (at the Kusnacht library or even in Bollingen), Mellick allows us to discover what lies behind Jung's symbols and their representations. Showing to the reader Jung's primary elements in their ultimate essential and smallest features, Mellick gives us an intuitive vision and scientific understanding of the most basic and simplest gradation of those substances, in the process of 'returning to the one':

Analysis of the composition of each of these minuscule paint particles from *The Red Book* reveals an even clearer picture. Elemental and molecular analysis established



that almost every one of these particles, carefully obtained from random gutters of the book, contains one or more of the pigments from Bollingen (Mellick 2018: 179).

Mellick not only describes in detail Jung's use of colour, but, more importantly, discusses their toxicity. Indeed, the chemical analysis of *The Red Book* has found traces of uranium, arsenic, mercury, cobalt, chromium, barium and lead. Working in a studio with poor ventilation, Jung must have inhaled and absorbed most of them; this was also aggravated by his smoking a pipe which he refilled with colour-stained hands. According to Mellick, it is possible that the use of these pigments caused anxiety, irritability and altered his mental balance:

Jung did nothing by halves. The call of the muses of the lower world was a call Jung was compelled to heed – at all costs. The potential costs to his health were as serious as the journey to his psyche. Yet he did not waver in his commitment to strap his robust body and strong psyche to the mast of his psychic ship so that he, like Odysseus, could listen to the Siren song and survive to tell the tale (Mellick 2018: 219).

### Realisation

Mellick insightfully reveals Jung's artistic process and techniques in order to realise his drawings and the drafts of his *Red Book*: layering, outlining, patterns, tiling and calligraphy. Jung drew the lines and the shapes he wanted to paint with a pencil and he composed the text in black. As the work progressed, he used less pencil and drew directly with the colours that were painted with *gouache* (a water-based paint that is different from tempera). The colours were applied with a *layering technique*, a progressive stratification of colours applied at different moments. In applying colour over colour, the image emerged from the page with a certain chromatic complexity with the effective presence of nuances and gradations, obtained by the so-called pooling (*i.e.* variations of the concentration of pigments in different areas):

Jung uses layering expertly to achieve particular effects, including one less often used: increasing a hue's intensity by adding another layer of the same color. This reduces the risk of oversaturating the paint mixture with pigment and results in less craquelure. He also uses layering to indicate light source (Mellick 2018: 219).

Mellick clearly explains how this layering technique, combined with the renowned perseverance with which Jung performed all manual work, certainly favoured his need for concentration and isolation in order to achieve his work. These repetitive and meticulous processes allowed him to experience a total immersion and consequent isolation from the 'background noises' of everyday life. Mellick explains how, having completed the main shapes with pencils and colours, Jung used to outline the contours of his images in order to achieve different lighting effects. The outline of the contours provided a 'mosaic' result similar to an Art Nouveau style. During this second phase, Jung worked with patience, discipline and hand-eye coordination, achieving a state of 'inner absorption', which is very close

to Hindu or Zen meditation. In connection with this inner unconscious inspiration, Mellick focuses on how Jung also worked on patterns of compositions connected to landscapes, *mandalas*, figures from geology, botany and zoology. Themes that later became models he used to recall to his mind different archetypes: they were either internal individual or collective representational motifs. Mellick then argues about Jung's use of the symbolic element, which takes us back to his idea on the 'individuation process'. In composing these symbols on the page, Jung used the *tiling* technique, *i.e.* he worked following small cells (tiles) that he would later join in the final image.

The last element examined by Mellick is calligraphy. Working on the text, as if he were a calligrapher or a miniaturist, Jung designed each letter slowly, line by line, and decorated it with a rich set of illustrations, figurative initials, frames, borders and other ornamental motifs. Each capital letter was based on a different style, often inspired by medieval manuscripts. If at first these illustrations are in direct connection with the text, they later acquire a more symbolic character, thus going beyond their appearance of mere calligraphic exercise and showing the power of his active imagination at work. Mellick underlines the fact that Jung considered calligraphy as a meticulous method to acquire a discipline both of body and mind, a contemplative practice that showed his deepening artistic process, which fully absorbed him in the creation of his inestimable work of art.

### **A Therapeutic and Educational Practice**

One cannot know or think s/he can cure others if one does not know and heal oneself first. As Mellick's *Red Book Hours* itself shows, to be able to create and/or follow the intimate and complex processes of the mind and Self, like heroes and heroines of ancient myths and fables, one needs to undertake an inner search, a journey towards his/her unconscious in order to reveal one's innermost animating forces. In writing *The Red Book*, Jung underwent an important journey of self-analysis. During this period of creativity, Jung experienced a special emotional connection with his work that he described with these words: "The inner images keep me from getting lost in personal retrospection" (Jung 1963: 320).

From this we derive that Jung has an almost physiological need to reproduce images and visions on parchment or vellum, in order to describe the parallel world that he was facing and experiencing in his life. However, this therapeutic experience did not only concern himself: he used his *Red Book* as a useful instrument to inspire his patients during their psychoanalytic sessions, and later, to encourage them to experiment with the same process, through their own drawings and paintings (but also in other creative forms and ways) in a therapeutic flow that would allow them to free their unconscious and bring light to its archetypes.

His own model became the example for his patients, as Tina Keller, one of his patient from 1912, reports:

It happened that he showed me what he had done and commented upon it. The care and precision with which he worked to create those images and the text testified the value of his commitment. The teacher was demonstrating to the student that psychic development requires time and effort (Jung 2009: 205).

His *Red Book* started as a practice, carried out for personal purposes, and later, when shared with patients, became a model of self-therapy and education, a mutual “collective experiment” (Jung 2009: 205) that reveals the therapeutic and educational value of his work, creatively and artistically interpreted in Mellick’s beautiful and original *Red Book Hours*.

### Beyond Art

Jung did not want his manuscript to be defined as a work of art, even if he employed colours, nibs and different artistic techniques. As Mellick’s analysis clearly reveals, his work went much deeper and achieved much more than a ‘simple’ aesthetic or artistic artefact. His attempt at producing a long-lasting creation has also left a remarkable sign of his inner world as well as a profound mark in both his patients and readers. The mapping of his personal world became a pathway made of images and symbols belonging to the ‘collective unconscious’, where anyone could recognise himself or herself. While the compensatory aspect of the unconscious is always present, its symbolising function manifests itself only when we are ready to recognise it as such. Moreover, if in the artistic production the creative insight takes place spontaneously, Jung helped us in its recognition and recovery from the creative force of its symbols. The reconciliation between a rational truth and an intuitive and imaginative one can be realised in the symbol, because it naturally contains both aspects. In this regard, Mellick argues:

Whether or not Jung’s work was “art”, it is enough for the purpose of this exploration to accept that Jung didn’t consider himself (or any patient engaged in a similar process) “an artist”. Neither did he consider the processes in which he immersed himself “artistic”. Jung used art materials and art techniques for his own purposes (Mellick 2018: 36).

Jill Mellick points out that, unlike any artist, Jung was not interested in the appeal his *Red Book* could have on others (Jung 2009: 220). His own figurative representations and those of his patients were not to be considered artistic works but rather true emanations of the spirit. In experimenting with images, the individual discovered and came close to his/her personal myth, thus approaching an archetypal form of understanding. Therefore, the book’s ultimate aim was to transform our worldview in accordance with the active contents of the unconscious. Hence, Jung felt the need to decipher the conceptions brought up from the unconscious, with its literary and symbolic form, translating them into a language compatible with a contemporary perspective.

### Conclusions

Jill Mellick’s outstanding, profound and generous work reveals and discloses for us some of the secrets of Jung’s *Red Book*. Her work is an original text that helps us to better understand a complex and stratified manuscript. It can be considered an important intellectual instrument for psychoanalysts, psychotherapists and scholars of related disciplines and also a precious source of inspiration for artists. Mellick’s aesthetic and methodological analysis delves into Jung’s unconscious world, thus allowing psychiatrists and psychoanalysts to come closer to Jung’s thought, personality and self-therapeutic method. Although Jung re-



peatedly said that the figurative contents of the book are not to be considered art but rather seen as symbols of his self-therapy, it is nevertheless clear that the techniques, the creative process and even the final result have the beauty and quality of artistic creative expressions.

Because Mellick's *Red Book Hours* parallels Jung's ideas of the unconscious as an unbound repository of symbolic wealth and meaning, she refrains from giving a final and reassuring meaning to the reader:

Dreams, overanalysed, explained, and subsumed in the service of clarity and application, dry up their wellspring of psychic nourishment. [...] So, too, a researcher into another's creative process and experience should remain acutely aware of treading softly [...]. If I have done my work well, my inquiry will leave a mystery richer for the exploration, and still as elusive (Mellick 2018: 23).

It is precisely through this mystery and the elusiveness of Jung's (and Mellick's) symbolic works that the attentive reader is led to a deeper unconscious dimension by fixing the gaze on those images and representations, establishing a connection with her/his 'authentic being', a feeling we could experience when observing a fresco or listening to a symphony with closed eyes.

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