Waiting For C. G.:
A Review of the Biographies
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Biographical works mentioned in this Review:


Anthony Storr’s *Jung*, which may be the most succinct, readable, and competent short account of Jung’s life and work -- including useful comparisons with object relations psychology as well as cogent criticism -- disposes of the biographical material in eighteen pages. Storr takes us only to about 1920, asserting, "Further details of his life need not concern us, since it was externally uneventful" (Storr, 1973: 18). In making this statement, Storr falls victim to the most formidable difficulty in Jungian biographical studies: he has no choice but to base his work on Jung’s mythically shaped life story, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (Jung, 1961). Indeed, he cites almost verbatim Jung’s own refusal to speak of "external events." Furthermore, the *Collected Works*, which by default become the most relevant foundation for understanding the last forty-one years of Jung’s life, are badly in need of replacement by an edition that gives us the first versions of the essays in chronological order along with the revisions and their respective dates (as in Freud’s *Standard Edition*). [1] Given our general historical ignorance, therefore, interpretive speculation tends to outstrip our grasp of the contextual facts leaving us adrift in legendary material where we are as likely to idealize the material as to demonize it.

In view of these facts, we can relegate the several biographies of Jung to one of three categories. First, there are the hagiographies that build upon the mythic foundation of *Memories* and, by adding facts and personal reminiscences, further develop a picture of Jung as hero in his own legendary enactment of the individuation drama. This class includes von Franz (1975), van der Post (1975), and Hannah (1976). The second group includes the muck-rakers who compensate the idealizing tendencies of the first group by emphasizing aspects of Jung’s shadow. These include Stern (1976), Noll (1994, 1997), and possibly McLynn (1996). Between these two categories are the biographies that attempt to balance mythic and shadowy dimensions of Jung’s life. They include Homans (1979), Brome (1981), Wilson (1984), Wehr (1987), and Smith (1996). After a brief review of what these biographies have to say, we shall conclude with an overview of some of the obscure matters that no biography has yet attempted. The point is that we are still waiting for a full and dependable picture of C. G. Jung, and it may be a long time before we get it.
The Hagiographers

*Memories, Dream, Reflections* (still the sales leader in Amazon.com’s "psychiatry" section) is at least as much a disciple’s biography of the "Great Man" as it is an autobiography. Jung referred to it as "Jaffé’s book"; and except for the very lively first eighty-five and last twenty-three pages, it is a compilation. We can confidently take it as a fairly accurate rendering of the Jung legend as consciously promoted by Jung and accepted and developed by his inner circle. It was, however, sanitized by Jung’s heirs so as to exclude such potentially embarrassing material as his forty-year-long extra-marital relationship with Antonia Wolff and his remarks concerning William James.[2] In the second biography to appear in print, Jung’s long-time collaborator Marie-Louise von Franz makes very clear by her subtitle, "His Myth in Our Time," that she is giving us an archetypal interpretation of Jung’s life designed to exemplify how any of us might live in a world in which "God is dead" (von Franz, 1975: 15 ff). Her book -- much more explicitly than "Jaffé’s" -- gives us a perspective on Jung. Jung’s entire life and professional work is viewed through the lens of his late doctrines of synchronicity and the *unus mundus*,[3] a stance as much practical as theoretical:

He noticed at what point in the conversation his dog sighed or a wasp entered into the room or a high wave pounded against the wall. When, as often happened, these small events harmonized with what was being discussed at the moment, he would call attention to it with an amused wink.

Because -- the physician is "the means by which nature is put to work" (p. 55).

Von Franz gives us a more mythic Jung even than Jaffé. For this reason her book has fallen out of favor, which is a shame insofar as Jung’s synchronicity and the *unus mundus* represents the legacy he tried to leave us.[4] To my knowledge, only Robert Aziz[5] has consistently developed this perspective to demonstrate how Jung’s intrapsychic theory of the period from 1913 to 1928 was enlarged into a theory of psyche-in-the-world through the doctrine of synchronicity.

Von Franz’s roommate, Barbara Hannah, gives us the third biography from the inner circle -- again very clearly marked as a personal perspective through its subtitle, "A Biographical Memoir." Synchronistic events abound -- as in the failure of Hannah’s fairly new automobile battery at the moment of Jung’s death, "It seemed quite natural as if the car had known" (Hannah, 1976: 348). But Hannah also gives us a good deal more of Jung’s shadow -- for example, his relationship with Toni Wolff and Jung’s frequent outbursts of anger with his secretaries and the intransigent pots and pans at Bollingen. Although Hannah’s Jung is a master of every undertaking from cooking to stone carving, he is also far more human than the Jung of Jaffé and von Franz. Still, even in the angry outbursts the Jung of legend is not far away; for Hannah asserts that after every one of these attacks of rage Jung would stop and "analyze" the complex that had overcome him (Hannah, 1976: 282). If this is true, one can only wonder why the outbursts did not diminish with his age.

Laurens van der Post’s hagiography does not quite come from Jung’s inner circle. Van der Post was a close friend who came to know Jung only after World War II, when his wife went to Zurich to study with Jung. The fact that he was not an analyst is evident in some of his observations, such as the claim that Jung "always guarded against" the transference (van der Post, 1975: 172). Nevertheless his account is so romantic and admiring that it bears a close resemblance to the other books described in this section. He says that he never
experienced Jung’s shadow (p. 220), yet he cites letters from Jung apologizing for unfeeling responses made during conversations with van der Post (p. 249). Van der Post intersperses what he learned from Memories with actual conversations he had with Jung in such a way that we can sometimes see how Jung was relentlessly shaping his image. "He told me, for example, that he worked through 67,000 dreams with his patients and helpers before ever attempting to theorize about them" (p. 103). With the evidence of Jung’s writings on dreams from the “Teens and Twenties (e.g., CW 7), we can surely be skeptical of this claim. One particularly valuable report, however, which departs from the Jung legend has to do with Miss Wolff’s "great psychological distress" that often showed itself in public while she was traveling with Jung (pp. 175f). This evidence calls into the question the usual claim that Jung had "cured" her of a rather serious but unspecified condition that she suffered very early in her life before becoming his mistress and also before she assisted him through his quasi-psychotic "encounter with the unconscious."

The Muck-Rakers

In appealing to their own personal encounters with Jung, the hagiographers give us subjective reactions suitably labeled as such and placed within a factual context. The muck-rakers, by contrast, describe no contacts with Jung and give us little factual basis for using the legend of Memories as a projection screen for their shadowy depictions. Paul Stern’s C. G. Jung, The Haunted Prophet, which presents the essence of this dark vision, appeared in the same year as Hannah’s "Memoir." For years I read the two books in tendem, hoping thereby to intuit a more accurate image of Jung. But Stern’s claims are so poorly documented that I found myself wandering in a hall of mirrors.

Stern sees Jung as a deeply flawed man whose need to be accepted as a seer outstripped his powers of vision and ability to communicate (Stern, 1976: 8). Being blind to his own shadow (p. 10), he managed in Memories to give us the central "parable" of the Jungian "gospel" (p.17). Stern sees Jung’s childhood alchemical dream as "pointing to Jung’s future adroitness in extracting money from ‘spirituality’" (p. 34). He was a poor husband and father who lived a solitary life (p. 76) leaving him vulnerable to falling in love with women like Toni Wolff. Honegger’s suicide marked the beginning of Jung’s estrangement from Freud, as it showed the psychoanalytic method inadequate to schizophrenia (pp. 103ff). Honegger ended his life with a morphine injection May 28, 1910. If Stern is right about the failed analysis, it must have played a significant role in the writing of Symbols of Transformation (CW 5). No other biographer has pursued this line of thought, however.

Stern’s book is a prototype in that all subsequent muck-rakers repeat the same themes. What makes them particularly difficult for Jungians to accept is that they miss the essence of Jung’s vision, what we might call the "symbolic perspective," the fact the pathology and spirituality are two sides of the same coin. In one economical sentence, Storr shows that he grasps it:

Just as schizophrenics were attempting to create a world system which enabled them "to assimilate unknown psychic phenomena and so adapt themselves to their own world" so the myths of primitive people were devices enabling them better to adapt to their world (Storr, 1973: 26).
Stern does not grasp this, as we may see in his claim that the anima concept was developed to defend against the voice of the neurotic patient who said Jung’s painting was “art.” Jung depersonalized her and escaped destruction, while his cousin Franz Riklin had his life ruined by the same woman (p. 123). Apart from the fact that we do not know dependably who this woman was, Stern frustrates us by providing no basis for any part of his claim. The same may be said about Jung’s estrangement from Toni Wolff, the bungling of the Nazi issue, and the formation of the Zurich Institute as "Jung’s Mystical Body."

In defense of the muck-rakers, any fair-minded person will have to admit that Jung may have used his "symbolic perspective" defensively to hide his own pathology from himself. We know that not a few Jungians have been capable of excusing themselves from extraverted and sensation-oriented tasks by claiming to be introverted and intuitive. Thus it is no great stretch to imagine Jung protesting to Emma that he had to be unfaithful because his mother had left him with a "split anima." This plausible scene is provided by McLynn (1996: 183), though without documentation. The argument that Jung habitually perverted the symbolic perspective so as to use it as a neurotic defense will convince us only when its author understands the value of the symbolic perspective for therapy and individuation. None of these books has sufficient objectivity to tackle this central question.

The most extreme examples of muck-raking bias are to be found in the two books by Richard Noll (1994, 1997) who repeats all of Stern’s views while claiming historical and scientific objectivity for his work. Fundamentally, Noll has written the same book twice. His central claim is that Jung proclaimed himself an "Aryan Christ," a god in his own religion, and set that "religion" up as a pyramid scheme. In his introduction to Aryan Christ, Noll admits that he is drawing a fictional picture (Noll, 1997: xiv); and it is clear from the text of the book that conversations, meetings, and internal reactions of the participants have been constructed whole cloth. The evidence he cites as the historical foundation for this dubious exercise -- a document he presents as the text of a speech Jung gave before the Psychological Club -- has been shown by the real scholarship of Sonu Shamdasani (Cult Fictions, 1998) to have been the work of Maria Moltzer. Furthermore, in contrast with Noll’s vision of the Club as a vehicle for the worship of Jung, Shamdasani documents convincingly Jung’s attitude that the Club was to be an experiment to see if "analyzed" individuals are capable of real sociability with one another (a question that may still be unanswered).

Although Shamdasani has demolished Noll’s central claims, Noll has done a good deal of worthwhile spadework in detailing the German Romantic Tradition as an important context for understanding Jung’s interests and manner of expressing himself. We await a more responsible historian to show us what this means for the development of Jung’s thought. To mention but one of Noll’s limitations on this score, he omits entirely the French and English influences on Jung’s early work and the fact that Jung suppressed those influences only during the years of his association with Freud.[6] Furthermore, Noll makes no attempt to account for his own volte-face -- the fact that his contributions to scholarly journals before the writing of these two books reveals a diametrically opposed stance.[7] In the 1990’s muck-raking sells books.

It is perhaps unfair to include Frank McIlvain’s biography among the muck-rakers. It is the most complete and detailed biography we have, generally quite accurate [ 8 ] and documented as to its details, and contains a chapter on Jung’s "doctrine" which is largely
adequate. McLynn follows the events of Jung’s life chronologically to about 1920 (the first three-fifths of the book) and then organizes its material thematically. Consequently, he makes little attempt to integrate the themes of Jung’s work with the events of his life. The reader acquires no sense of the inner circle’s Jung, the man on a quest for meaning. Instead, we find a Jung nearly torn to pieces by the conflicting demons of ambition, compulsive promiscuity, and thin-skinned touchiness. By now, even the most devoted Jungian can hardly deny that these three qualities were really a part of the great man’s make-up. But our frustration during these decades while we are waiting for an adequate delineation of C. G. lies in our need to integrate these two visions: the examplar of individuation with the man of petty complexes. McLynn’s best attempt in this direction -- albeit all too brief -- is to be found in his treatment of the aftermath of Jung’s 1925-26 trip to Africa.

Nevertheless, McLynn shows little interest in distinguishing established facts from mere gossip, and Stern’s image of the “haunted prophet” dominates the book. For example: "Acres of print could have been saved if Jung had come clean and admitted he was a prophet. But such an admission would have made him vulnerable to certain aspects of his own theories, namely the danger of confusing the individual with the collective archetype" (McLynn, 1996: 316). In the latter sentence, McLynn recognizes the crucial issue of the symbolic perspective without comprehending it. His formulation may be contrasted with that of Robert Stein, a view frequently echoed by the inner circle: "[Jung] was fantastic in the humility he demonstrated as he made [the Great Man] come alive before us. He talked of the importance of not identifying with The Great Man archetype, of not losing our humanness as the archetype speaks through us." The possibility that the Great Man -- or any other archetype -- may speak through one, while one treats that larger-than-human reality as an autonomous visitor is a frequent theme in Jung’s seminars -- even more than in his Collected Works. The "objective" account of Jung’s life and work, for which we are still waiting, will certainly concern itself with the occasions when Jung succeeded and those when he failed to live up to this ideal of the individuation process. In a similar vein, when McLynn says Jung "was forced by his theory of the collective unconscious into optimism and a kind of facile pragmatism" (p. 423), we might wonder whether there may be some truth in the opposite claim: that Jung may have arrived at his formulation of the collective unconscious through a temperamentally optimistic and insufficiently examined pragmatism. But to establish such a position would require that we assimilate the facts McLynn has assembled and genuinely wrestle with the issues involved.

Thus although McLynn has not convincingly arranged of the pieces of the puzzle that is the personality of C. G. Jung, no serious student of Jung can afford to disregard McLynn’s book. It stands as a much more formidable challenge to the Jung of legend than Stern’s muck-raking prototype. McLynn has been too hasty and facile himself, but he has given us much to digest.

In Search of Balance

Vincent Brome’s biography, Jung: Man and Myth (1981), conscientiously searches for middle ground. In the “Prologue” he gives us a series of brief snapshots -- some from the Jung legend and others somewhat less flattering -- and uses them to pose the central question of his book:
what were the influences which combined to produce a person so rich in contradictions, what beginnings gave birth to such a multiplicity of personas, and how did he achieve the smiling serenity of the Wise Old Man so often presented in his last days? (Brome, 1981: 20).

The very phrasing of the question tells us we are going to like this book. Brome is able to tolerate ambiguity. He gives no indication of whether he has grasped the symbolic perspective, but at least he sees that Jung was a protean sort ("multiplicity of personas"). Jung is not going to be reduced to a one-dimensional caricature ("god in his own religion," "trencherman"). But the phrase, *so often*, alerts us to Brome’s skepticism. Evidently Brome’s Jung is not always the "Wise Old Man."

By and large Brome fulfills the promise of this question. His book is a chronological series of anecdotes -- some from interviews he conducted himself. We are always confident Brome is giving us this material pretty much uncontaminated with polemic. He has no interpretation of Jung to give us (he seems to believe). He is just giving us the facts. He is skeptical of Jung’s alchemical interests and a bit flustered by the theory of synchronicity. But he shows no scorn for them. Brome passes few judgments. Generally he ends his more mythic anecdotes by giving us two or three different ways of interpreting them. He makes a point of refusing to choose between them. Brome has no axe to grind, but he also has no *vision* of Jung. There is nothing in his book to disturb whatever cherished vision we bring to it. We read Brome for the anecdotes, not to be challenged.

Gerhard Wehr’s *Jung* (1987) strikes a similar balance, but in tiresome fashion. The anecdotes come off as set pieces with Wehr’s comments in between. The comments are generally not off the mark, but they are so lethargic as to make us wonder what made Wehr decide to take on this project. He seems to lack interest.

I got hooked on biographies of Jung again this summer. It started with Bennet’s reminiscences and Jung Speaking, which engaged both kinds of narcissistic need in me, idealizing and merging. Jung’s own writing and the reminiscences of people like Bennet, who actually knew him, show a man who sparkles with robust, curious energy and close attention to whatever occupied his interests. I was particularly taken with Bennet’s image of Jung playing solitaire every night before bed -- in the same room where other "family" members may be reading or sewing. He thereby distracted himself sufficiently to allow his unconscious to review his day. I flashed onto my grandmother’s patient flip-flip-flip and then to Oeri’s picture (Jung Speaking) of the boy Jung playing determinedly with his blocks like an "inhuman monster." Images like this give us something to conjure with. The portrait we carry before our mind’s eye shifts a bit and fills out.

Such was not the case, however, with Wehr’s tiresome volume. Wehr’s own words give us a sleep-walking Jung. Otherwise, he has substantially reprinted MDR (Jung’s language vibrant in comparison with Wehr’s) with breaks for his commentaries, which range from a paragraph to several pages in length. These comments are intelligent and well-informed, but Jung is dulled out. Wehr has no vision of Jung. I can’t imagine why anyone would undertake such an ambitious task as a biography without having some passion for the subject. Still it is somewhat unfortunate that Wehr will never replace Brome, which seems to have become the de facto authoritative biography. (I reach this conclusion by noticing how frequently he is cited by subsequent biographers.) It is understandable why Brome has come to occupy this position, as he himself is not a hagiographer like von Franz,
Hannah, or van der Post, nor is he a Freudian like Storr or a muck-raker like Stern.

That Brome’s objective-seeming, decently tailored, complete biography of Jung has reached this relative prominence is a depressing reality, for he also has no vision of Jung. His book is not inspiring; and, although he has his facts mostly right, the conclusions he draws from those facts are very frequently at sharp variance with the mind and personality of the author of the CW. Brome does not understand Jung. We are still waiting for a biography of C. G.

While we are waiting, I thought I would see what a man like Colin Wilson, who’s written some apparently responsible books on occult topics, would have to say. I should have been warned off by the ominous, disturbing title ("Lord of the Underworld") and the strident, noxious yellow cover with its high-contrast photo of Jung looking like Eisenhower in swim goggles with a sour taste in his mouth. In contrast with the serious, scholarly, responsible failures of Brome and Wehr, Wilson comes off as careless, slapdash, and full of contradictions. He inclines to believe obscure comments by people who didn’t know Jung, like Lindburgh’s opinions on flying saucers. Wilson seems to prefer Janet to both Jung and Freud, although he has no notion at all of the psychotherapeutic endeavor. He claims Jung’s thinking is muddled -- not so much out of incompetence as out of fear of rejection by the scientific community. He therefore sets out to tell us what Jung "really" meant: e.g., that synchronicity means psychic events cause physical events.

So much for pleasant surprises from unlikely sources. My most encouraging finds were books which set themselves much more limited goals -- specifically to shed some light on the Freud-Jung relationship. I first encountered Jung, in fact, some thirty years ago through a little book titled Freud or Jung? (author forgotten). It was stridently anti-Jung, but nevertheless convinced me that Jung was someone to look into. So it served me very well, indeed. Liliane Frey’s book, which most of us know from the shorter typescript in the Zurich Institute library, is plodding, repetitive, and less strident, but no less biased. Staude presents an accurate picture of Jung growing through the crisis of friendship and loss, but tells us nothing new. In fact his book does not so much set out to tell us about Jung as to use Jung’s difficulties with Freud to illustrate Staude’s own ideas about the developmental psychology of adults. Hoganson has written a challenging and interesting little book of ideas in which he talks about Jung’s intellectual struggle with psychoanalysis and his own quest for meaning. I recommend it highly.

The most recent contribution to this literature is the handsome-looking volume by Donn. Unfortunately she bores us recounting the childhood of each of the protagonists in which she says nothing new and furthermore does not shape the narrative to point up a particular perspective. I was about to give up on the book but am glad I didn’t, because the last twenty-five pages are worth the tedium. Donn was able to get interviews with Franz Jung and C. A. Meier, among others, which add a great deal of detail to our picture of this central crisis in the life of Jung. I already knew that Jung withdrew from his reading, writing, and teaching. I did not know that in the summer after the Munich Congress (where the coming split became inevitable) Jung spend most of his time playing "Englishmen and Indians" with Franz and his nephews. Jung, in cowboy boots and a Mountie hat, was the sheriff of the "English" and taught the (other) children to build tunnels they could actually crawl through to surprise the Indians and burn down their tepees. Franz also helped his father to build the
village of stones on the lake shore. Franz cut reeds to roof the buildings (and went on to become an architect). He asks Donn if she could have lived through what his mother experienced: living with a man who slept with a loaded gun next to his bed and spent his days drawing pictures of circles. We also get a vivid picture of Toni Wolff assisting Jung through his psychotic-seeming process. Freud, too, it seems, was quite shaken by his experience with Jung. Donn says he stood for hours every day in Rome before Michaelangelo’s Moses over a period of three weeks, contemplating the simultaneous rage and calm of the prophet, trying to find a way to deal with his own rage.

These images (and others) have changed my conception of the friendship and bereavement the two founders experienced. I had formerly read their letters as stilted attempts to communicate between two overly careful and suspicious men who were primarily protecting their own turf while trying to use one another to further their ambitions. Perhaps I wasn’t wrong. But it could well be that their confessions that powerful complexes had been stimulated by one another and Jung’s story of abuse by a friend of his father are not merely gestures to try to excuse their uncomfortable distance from one another. It may be that, in their stilted, power-conscious operations, this was the only way for a father-figure and a son-figure to carry on a kind of narcissistic love affair. It throws new light on Jung’s dream of killing Siegfried and on Elijah and Salome -- not to mention Freud’s sudden interest in narcissism.

Personally, Donn’s book also made me feel guilty about a response I gave to Peter Homans’s book (with its colossally inflated title) shortly after it came out. I had defended Jung against what I saw as Kohutian reductionism and presented Jung-the-therapist (as opposed to Jung-the-philosopher/theologian). I got lots of support from the audience and Homans was beside himself with rage. I have recently reread the book and find it to be an elegantly argued, very sensitive, understanding, and perceptive reading of Jung the man and author. I think Homans is right about Jung’s narcissism, partly because I’ve changed my mind about the nature of narcissism. Homans describes the "core" of analytical psychology as a unique articulation of narcissistic issues. He is ten years ahead of Nathan Schwartz-Salant (whose formulations I find very useful). It suggests a way of integrating the best of Jungian and object-relations thinking, in contrast to the way the Fordham school is trying to drive their cart behind a mule and an ox.

1. The editors of the German edition of the Collected Works are very much aware of this problem according to a comment one of them made to me more than twenty years ago (personal communication from E. Rüf).

2. Although I am not sure why the chapter on William James was omitted, if Eugene Taylor is correct and James played a much larger role in the development of Analytical Psychology than is generally known, the exclusion may have been to preserve an illusion of Jung’s originality (cf. Eugene Taylor, William James on Exception Mental States: The 1869 Lowell Lectures, Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984, p. 13).
3. Jung borrows the expression *unus mundus* (the "one world") from the alchemist Gerhard Dorn in the last chapter of *Mysterium Coniunctionis* (*CW 14*). Dorn describes it as the world of pure potential, the world as it existed before the first day of creation. In Jung’s hands, the expression comes to mean the world in which empirical objects and events are complemented by their symbolic and imaginal significance. To live in the *unus mundus*, is to live in the synchronistic world where outer event and inner significance are two sides of the same coin.

4. The strongest argument that Jung saw a synchronicity-based analysis as his legacy is Marion Baynes’ report on a lecture he had to the students of the Zurich Institute in May, 1958. (M. Baynes, "A Talk with Students at the Institute," in W. McGuire and R. F. C. Hull (Eds.), *C. G. Jung Speaking*, Princeton: Bollingen, 1977: 359-364.)


6. That Noll is aware of these things is shown by a letter he wrote me in 1991, praising my contributions regarding the influence of Pierre Janet’s work on Jung’s development.


8. There are some maddening inaccuracies, such as McLynn’s identification of Bro. Klaus three times with Nicolaus of Cusa (!) and once as "Nicolaus of Klue." (He was Niklaus von der Flüe.) Another is McLynn’s belief that an *abaissement du niveau mental* is a "lowering of psychic energy" (McLynn, 1996: 502) rather than a lowering of psychic tension, as it was for both Jung and Janet.


11. For example, in the seminar on Kundalini Yoga Jung urges his hearers not to identify with Kundalini energy or its divine personifications: "It is wise not to identify with these experiences but to handle them as if they were outside the human realm. . . . Otherwise you get into an inflation, and inflation is just a minor form of lunacy, a mitigated term for it" (S. Shamdasani (Ed.), *The Psychology of Kundalini Yoga: Notes of the Seminar Given in 1932 by C. G. Jung*, Princeton: Bollingen, 1996: 27.)

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