DESCENSUS AD INFERNOS: JUNG'S 'SEASON IN HELL'

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the linked themes of the descent into hell and divine madness, as articulated in Jung's self-explorations between 1913 and 1930 and as portrayed in his *Liber Novus: The Red Book*, situating these with the history of these notions. This in turn open the question of the relation between Jung's visionary experiences and his subsequent conceptual elaborations in his exoteric scholarly works.

KEY WORDS

Liber Novus, *The Red Book*, hell, divine madness, visionary experiences, esotericism, Jung, Blake, Dante, Swedenborg.

The sign on the gates of hell in Dante's *Commedia*—'*Abandon all hope all who enter here*'—might not be out of keeping when individuals first begin to grapple with *Liber Novus*, the spirit of the depths and the dark denizens that lurk within. For Jung's *Liber Novus* is a descent into hell: Jung's hell, and possibly our own. At the same time, it marks the inception of an engagement with madness, divine madness, and prophecy which led to a radical reformulation of Jung's work.[1]

But all may not be lost. As a denizen of this domain nailed and chained to this book for what seemed fast approaching an eternity and close at times to turning into a shade myself, the following provides some short dispatches from hell to help one on one's descent.

As the Christian designation for the dwelling of the dead, depictions of hell from the outset was superimposed on classical descriptions of the underworld or Hades. The first major Christian description of hell occurs in the apocryphal apocalypse of Peter (Elliot 1993:593f). In this, Christ shows Peter hell in graphic detail, people hanging by their tongues, a lake of flaming mire and other full of pus, clouds of worms, people gnawing their tongues and having flaming fire in their tongues and so forth.

The key trait of these depictions is a notion that in hell punishments enact the nature of sins. In his 1893 work on this text, *Nekyia*, Albrecht Dieterich argued that the apocalypse of Peter drew heavily on Orphic-Pythagorean traditions. Descents into the underworld feature in different traditions.

At the outset of *Liber Novus*, two descents have an exemplary role, Odysseus' descent into the underworld in the *Odyssey* and Christ's descent into hell. First to Odysseus. Book 11 of the *Odyssey* depicts Odysseus' descent into the underworld to consult Tiresias. To enter the land of the dead libations mixed with honey, milk then sweet wine and white barley were made. They then cut the throats of sheep, probably organic in that time. Tiresias then gives warning and advice concerning what lies in store. We will return to this motif but I would just like to put this as one of the backdrops to the terrain we'll be entering.

The second major theme is that of Christ's descent into hell, the harrowing of hell. *The Apostles' Creed* states, 'he descended into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead'. This is cryptically brief: what indeed took place there? Accounts are found in the apocryphal gospels. It was a descent into hell to preach to the dead, to redeem the dead and to

[1] An earlier version of this article appeared in French in *Colloque de Bruxelles. Danger et nècessité de l'individuation*. Bruxelles: Esperluète Littéraire, 2014:1-26.

redeem Adam. This formed one of the major themes in Christian theology until a reaction sets in in the Protestant Reformation. Zwingli, for example, took the account of Christ's descent simply to indicate that he had really died. Calvin dismissed it merely as a fable.

The fusion of classical descriptions of the underworld and the Christian hell reaches its apotheosis in Dante's *Commedia*. It is important to note that in presenting his vision of hell and one's journey through it, Dante also presented a hermeneutics of how the text should be read. In his famous letter to Cangrande Della Scala he differentiated two modes in which the *Commedia* could be read: 'The first sense is that which comes from the letter, the second is that of that which is signified by the letter. And the first is called the literal, the second allegorical or moral or anagogical'. He then differentiated them in this text in the following manner:

> The subject of the whole work, taken only from a literal standpoint, is simply the status of the soul after death, taken simply... If the work is taken allegorically, however, the subject is man, either gaining or losing merit through his freedom of will, subject to the justice of being rewarded or punished. (cited in Boldrini 2001:30-35).

In this second mode of reading, hell is to be understood in an allegorical sense.

The historian D. P. Walker (1964) notes that hell began to lose its hold in the 17th century. There were many reasons for this: the weakness of scriptural arguments for hell, the decline of the notion of retributive justice, the rise of rationalist modes of thought and problems concerning the precise location of hell conceived of as being in the bowels of the earth. For example, in his article in Diderot and d'Alembert's *Encyclopédie*, Swiden argued that the number of the damned argued against the location of hell in its traditional place inside the earth (Casey 2009:211f). It was simply overcrowded. The only place big enough was the sun, and this had the added virtue that it provided enough heat for the eternal flames. So even back then, there were problems of global warming and over-population, but in the form of sufficient space for the dead and heat for the fires of hell.

Alongside this notion of the problem concerning the literal hell and its location was a metaphorical use of the word hell. The *Oxford English Dictionary* characterises this as 'a place, state or situation of wickedness, suffering or misery'. It notes instances of the first usage going back in the English language to Chaucer. In Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Satan states 'the mind is its own place, and in itself / can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of

Heav'n.' Satan knew a thing or two about hell'.

An instance of this metaphorical use is found in a statement by Meister Eckhart which Jung cited on several occasions:

> Therefore do I turn back once more to myself, there do I find the deepest places, deeper than hell itself: for even from there does my wretchedness drive me. Nowhere can I escape myself! Here I will set me down and here I will remain. (Eckhart von Hochheim n.d.:389).[2]

Here, the self is described as 'deeper than hell'. Within the context of the decline of the belief in a literal hell, two figures stand out: Emanuel Swedenborg and William Blake. In terms of sensual precision and graphic detail it is perhaps only Swedenborg's hell which comes close to matching Dante's. Swedenborg, a Swedish scientist and Christian mystic underwent a religious crisis in the 1740s depicted in his *Journal of Dreams* [1860]. In 1745, he was sitting in a tavern in London. He heard a stranger say, don't eat so much. He went back home and that night the stranger appeared in a dream and revealed himself as Christ and told him that he would travel through heaven and hell and talk with demons and angels and the dead and show people the true faith. He was told to note what he'd seen and heard and demonstrate the symbolic meaning of the Bible, which he duly did. In Swedenborg's work, *Heaven and Hell* [1758], heaven and hell were presented as strictly dichotomous. All things in accord with the divine order corresponded to heaven and all contrary things to hell. In hell, the spirits of the dead continue their lives much as they did on earth. The main thesis of Swedenborg's work is encapsulated in this statement, 'heaven and hell are from the human race' (Swedenborg [1758]:174). Within each of us there were two gates. One which is open to evil and to hell, the other to good and to heaven. What characterises those who are currently in hell was that when they were living in the world they loved the flesh, the self and the world as opposed to the soul, the love of the Lord and the love of the neighbour.

Now how did one get to hell? Swedenborg presents its geography. Hells were to be found under mountains, hills and rocks and their opening appeared like holes and clefts. Some of the hells looked like the dens and caves of wild beasts in the forests. Some were like the hollow cabins and passages that are seen in mines. Some hells present an appearance like the ruins of houses and cities after conflagrations. In some hells, there were nothing but brothels. There are also deserts where all is barren and sandy (ibid:363).

[2] This was cited by Jung in 1921 in *Psychological Types* (CW 6: §166n).

One didn't see them by walking by them because a light only flashed when the soul was cast into hell. They would have some smoke coming up.

Against the common belief that there was one hell which was the same for everyone, Swedenborg noted that there was an infinite variety and diversity. In a similar manner to Dante, Swedenborg not only presents a vision of hell but also a hermeneutics, a spiritual hermeneutics. He argued that the Bible had two levels of meaning, a physical literal level and an inner spiritual one. These were linked by the doctrine of correspondences. We will return to this notion in the visionary tradition of a linkage between a vision encapsulating its own hermeneutics.

The most acute reader of Swedenborg was William Blake. From his youth, Blake had visions of angels and historical figures whom he conversed with. For a time, he joined the Swedenborgian church in London, where it was established. Blake became critical of the institutionalisation of Swedenborgianism and began taking a more critical view of Swedenborg. Around 1890, he published *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. Here, Blake articulated his critique of Swedenborg. Indeed the very title, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* encapsulated his sense that these were not two radically dichotomous and distinct locations. Swedenborg's problem, he noted, was that he had conversed only with angels and not with the devils who hated religion (Blake 1790:157). He had had the wrong informants: if you want to know what hell is like, you have to talk to a devil. What Swedenborg failed to see, Blake noted in his annotations to Swedenborg, was that 'Heaven & Hell are born together' ('Annotations to Swedenborg's *Wisdom of Angels Concerning Divine Love and Wisdom*', ibid:96).

Blake articulated a notion of dynamic oppositions. What is basic is a series of contraries: attraction and repulsion, reason and energy, love and hate, and these oppositions were necessary for life. What religion has called good and evil were secondary terms, derivatives which sprang from these basic series of contraries. They were not primary. At the same time, Blake then launched a critique of organised religion. And of Swedenborg, he noted, 'done much & will do much good[;] he has correct[e]d many errors of Popery and also of Luther & Calvin' (Crabb Robinson's diary, Symons 1907:257). However, he felt that there was little that was genuinely new in his work and it ultimately served orthodox belief despite its protestations to the contrary. Blake considered Dante to be the greater figure. And his last years he produced a series of engravings to the *Commedia*.

Before turning to Jung's descent, I would like to briefly sketch some of the historical background of divine madness. The locus classicus for the idea of divine madness was Plato's discussion in the *Phaedrus*. Plato

differentiated two kinds of madness—the first was from human ills, the second was from a divine release: 'Madness, provided it comes a gift of heaven, is the channel by which we receive the greatest blessings' (Plato 360 BCE:46-244). Plato distinguished four types of divine madness: (1) inspired divination, such as by the prophetess at Delphi; (2) instances where when ancient sins have given rise to troubles, individuals have broken forth into prophecy and brought relief by leading to prayer and worship; (3) possession by the Muses; (4) the lover. The first was inspired by Apollo, the second by Dionysus, the third by the muses and the fourth by Aphrodite and Eros.

In the Renaissance, the theme of divine madness was taken up by the Neoplatonists, such as Ficino, and by humanists such as Erasmus. Erasmus' discussion in his *Praise of Folly* in 1509 is particularly important, as it fuses together the classical Platonic conception with Christianity. For Erasmus, Christianity was the highest type of inspired madness. Like Plato, Erasmus differentiated between two types of madness:

> Thus as long as the soul uses its bodily organs aright, a man is called sane; but truly, when it bursts its chains and tries to be free, practising running away from its prison, then one calls it insanity. If this happens through disease or a defect of the organs, then by common consent it is, plainly, insanity. And yet men of this kind, too, we find foretelling things to come, knowing tongues and writings which they had never studied beforehand—altogether showing forth something divine. (Erasmus 1509:128-9).

He added that if insanity 'happens through divine fervour, it may not be the same kind of insanity, but it is so like it that most people make no distinction' (ibid). For lay people, the two forms of insanity appeared the same. The happiness which Christians sought was 'nothing other than a certain kind of madness' (ibid:132). Those who experience this 'experience something which is very like madness. They speak incoherently and unnaturally, utter sound without sense, and their faces suddenly change expression... in fact they are truly besides themselves' (ibid:133).

In 1811, the German philosopher F. W. J. Schelling discussed divine madness. He noted that 'The ancients did not speak in vain of a divine and holy madness'. He related this to the 'inner self-laceration of nature', which was often depicted in mythology and represented in rituals such as the rites of Dionysus. Schelling claimed that 'Nothing great can be accomplished without a constant solicitation of madness, which should

always be overcome, but should never be entirely lacking'. Individuals could be typified by their relation to madness. There were sober spirits in whom there was no trace of madness, together with men of understanding who produced cold intellectual works. Alongside these individuals, there were individuals who were overcome by madness, and others who managed to govern madness. He contended that: 'There is one kind of person that governs madness and precisely in this overwhelming shows the highest force of the intellect. The other kind of person is governed by madness and is someone who is really mad' (Schelling 1811:102-4). Thus to be capable of the highest creative acts required the overcoming of madness.

As these examples show, several philosophers and theologians argued that there existed a divine madness which bestowed the greatest gifts, and also, that it is not easy to recognise and distinguish this form of madness from 'ordinary' madness. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, psychiatry was dominated by a materialistic outlook. Within theology, little place was given to the ecstatic experiences praised by Erasmus and others. The materialistic perspective was used to discredit religion and religious experiences. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the psychological study of religion commenced (see Iagher 2015). A work which marked a watershed was William James' *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. What distinguished his study from those of other psychologists was his focus on the extreme forms of religious experience, and his stress on their non-pathological nature. He criticised the attempt to reduce religious experiences to be nothing but psychopathology:

> Medical materialism finishes up Saint Paul by calling his vision on the road to Damascus a discharging lesion of the occipital cortex, he being epileptic. It snuffs out Saint Teresa as an hysteric, Saint Francis of Assisi as an hereditary degenerate... And medical materialism then thinks that the spiritual authority of all such personages is successfully undermined. (James 1902:16).

For James, establishing the origin of an experience was no way to decide upon its spiritual significance, which could only be done by judging the results of such experience. As he put it, 'By their fruits ye shall know them, not by their roots' (ibid:24). He went so far as to suggest that if there were inspiration from higher realms, it could well be that a neurotic temperament was required for it to be received. For James, the common source of religious inspiration and psychopathology was the subliminal consciousness.

We now return to Jung. In the preceding, there has been no mention of Freud. As Eugene Taylor and I have argued for decades a Freudocentric legend of the genesis of Jung's psychology, namely that its origins lay first in Jung's discipleship and then divergence from Freud has led to the complete mislocation Jung in the intellectual history of the 20th century (See Shamdasani 1998; Taylor 1996; Borch-Jacobsen and Shamdasani 2012). Since 7 October 2009 the full extent of this error became apparent in the public domain, with the publication of *Liber Novus*. To continue to argue that psychoanalysis is the key determining context for the emergence of Jung's psychology can hence forth only be regarded as an act of willful obscurantism. In no way does *Liber Novus* emerge as a consequence of Jung's divergence from Freud. Rather, it should be located and situated within the context of the visionary tradition. What *Liber Novus* presents us with is on the one hand is a way back to hell: a hell that was increasingly lost to the western imagination, and on the other, a way back to the inspiration of divine madness.

As noted between the autumn of 1913 and the summer of 1914, Jung engaged in lengthy period of self-experimentation inducing fantasies in a waking state: his first 'season in hell'. If one reads these fantasies through chronologically, it is clear that the main theme was a deliberate intent to regain a sense of religious meaning in his life. Moreover, this first sequence had more or less come to a successful culmination by the end of April, 1914 (See Jung 1913-1932, *Black Book V*, April 1914:212f).[3]

The outbreak of the war convinced Jung that a number of his fantasies had been precognitive: indeed, that they had been prophetic of this event. This gave him a completely new perspective on the relation between his fantasies and what was unfolding in the world. How could one accommodate this possibility within psychology? Jung reflected at length on this question, and reflected on the themes of madness, prophecy and the hells of one's experience, and how they could be accommodated in a modern view of the world. He wrote a handwritten manuscript of a thousand pages adding a second layer of lyrical elaboration, interpretation and commentary. This was his second 'season in hell', in which he reentered his fantasies, reliving them, and contemplated their meaning. He then had this typed and retranscribed it into a calligraphic volume.

This was self styled as a prophetic work, 'Der Wege des Kommenden', the way of what is to come. Like Dante's vision of hell, like Swedenborg's vision of hell, Jung's vision contains its

[3] It is significant that Jung ends the second section part of *Liber Novus*, *Liber Secundus*, in the middle of this entry.

hermeneutic within it. In the second layer, he elaborated a lyrical commentary on the meaning of his fantasies. Thus, like Dante, Swedenborg and Blake, Jung's endeavour was not simply to elaborate a work born of visionary experience and to give it form, but also to elaborate a hermeneutics of how it should be read. In a critical sense then interpretative commentary is superfluous. The book contains its own interpretation. What is required is a wider contextualisation.

In *Liber Novus*, Jung deliberately laid aside psychiatric terminology. The term he uses, 'madness', is a general one. At the beginning, Jung recounted how he had reached a turning point in his life. Up till then, he had pursued science. But he had now come to realise that science did not encompass all of life. There was much of life which was not in accordance with reason, which science simply set to one side. Thus *Liber Novus* commences with the issue, how is one to comprehend what is irrational? It is from within this perspective that the question of madness is posed, as madness represents, par excellence, what is not in accordance with reason. Thus madness is taken in a wide sense.

When Jung took up the topic of divine madness, the question he was addressing was that in psychiatry and psychology, there was no way of differentiating 'divine' from 'ordinary' madness. In other words, there was no way of telling whether a particular experience was of spiritual or psychopathological origin. With the exception of figures such as William James, the question was not even posed.

On 14 and 16 January 1914, Jung wrote down the following fantasy sequence. His I found himself in a library, with a librarian. He asked him for a copy of the *Imitation of Christ* (Jung 1915-1930:328f; 1913-1932, *Black Book III*:136).[4] Jung's I said that he wanted to read it for prayer rather than for scholarly interest, as there were times when science left one cold. He then had a discussion with the librarian concerning Christianity, Nietzsche and Goethe. He left the library and went into the kitchen where he met a fat woman. He sat down and read his book. She asked if he was spiritual, as she thought that no one would read such a book if he wasn't a pastor. Then shadowy forms appeared. They said that they were Anabaptists who have been dead for over 300 years. Their leader, Ezechiel, said that they were heading towards Jerusalem to pray at the holiest graves. Jung's I asked to be taken along. Ezechiel replied that they couldn't take him, because he had a body.

At this moment, people burst in, including the librarian and the police. Jung's I was placed in a van, where he continues to read his book.

[4] References to *Liber Novus* are to the *Reader's Edition*, henceforth abbreviated as LN.

He then realised that he had been taken to an insane asylum. There, he was confronted by a superintendent, two doctors, a small fat professor. A psychiatric examination ensued. The fact that he is carrying *The Imitation of Christ* is taken as proof that his is a case of religious paranoia. The professor states that the *Imitation of Christ* today leads to the insane asylum. Jung's I states that he feels completely well, and objects to the diagnosis. He is then placed in a ward. His neighbour is in the final stages of a progressive paralysis. Reflecting upon this episode, Jung reflected:

> The problem of madness is profound. Divine madness—a higher form of the irrationality of the life streaming through us—at any rate a madness that cannot be integrated into present-day society—but how? What if the form of society were integrated into madness? At this point things grow dark, and there is no end in sight. (LN:338).

This sequence forms a striking parody of the psychiatric examination—the very procedure which Jung had performed on hundreds of occasions. It also forms a strong critique of the diagnostic system of psychiatry. The very fact that he was reading *The Imitation of Christ* was taken as a symptom of a psychiatric malady. Two nights later, Jung had a further dialogue with his soul.

> Soul: Have you recognized that all of your foundations are completely mired in of madness? Do you not want to recognize your madness and welcome it in a friendly manner? You wanted to accept everything. So accept madness too. Let the light of your madness shine, and it will suddenly dawn on you. Madness is not to be despised and not to be feared, but instead you should give it life... If you want to find paths, you should also not spurn madness, since it makes up such a great part of your nature... Be glad that you can recognize it, for you will thus avoid becoming its victim. Madness is a special form of the spirit and clings to all teachings and philosophies, but even more to daily life, since life itself is full of craziness and at bottom utterly illogical. Man strives towards reason only so that he can make rules for himself. Life itself has no rules. That is its mystery and its unknown law. What you call knowledge is an attempt to impose something comprehensible on life. (ibid:348).

Jung wanted to accept and affirm life, and his soul told him that to do this, he had to accept his own madness and learn to value it. But the problem he was confronted with was that if reason shunned the irrationality of madness, how could one accommodate this within science or scholarship? Were these not apotropaic defences against madness, and hence against life?

Jung's further deliberations on this subject led him to suspect that this exclusion of divine madness from contemporary Western societies had a historical source: Christianity. In *Liber Novus*, he noted:

> You will consider yourself mad, and in a certain sense you will in fact be mad. To the extent that the Christianity of this time lacks madness, it lacks divine life. Take note of what the ancients taught us in images: madness is divine. But because the ancients lived this image concretely in events, it became a deception for us, since we became masters of the reality of the world. It is unquestionable: if you enter into the world of the soul, you are like a madman, and a doctor would consider you to be sick. What I say here can be seen as sickness, but no one can see it as sickness more than I do. This is how I overcame madness. If you do not know what divine madness is, suspend judgment and wait for the fruits. But know that there is a divine madness which is nothing other than the overpowering of the spirit of this time through the spirit of the depths. Speak then of sick delusion when the spirit of the depths can no longer stay down and forces a man to speak in tongues instead of in human speech, and makes him believe that he himself is the spirit of the depths. But also speak of sick delusion when the spirit of this time does not leave a man and forces him to see only the surface, to deny the spirit of the depths and to take himself for the spirit of the times. The spirit of this time is ungodly, the spirit of the depths is ungodly, balance is godly. (ibid:149-150).

Thus present day Christianity lacked divine madness—it blocked access to divine revelation and ecstatic inspiration. Nothing could be further from Erasmus' conception of Christianity as inspired madness. To recover a notion of divine madness, one had to return to the middle ages—and it is no accident that important episodes of *Liber Novus* are set there. In a lecture in London in 1938, Jung noted: 'From my observations, I learned that the modern unconscious has a tendency to produce a psychological condition which we find, for instance, in medieval mysticism' (Jung 1938,

CW 18:§638).

As Jung saw it, anyone entering the world of the soul would be seen as mad—exactly as he was. This was inescapable, because society lacked a capacity to differentiate such states. Jung argues that if one wants to know what divine madness is, one should look at the fruits—the pragmatic standpoint advocated by William James. Divine madness, Jung suggested, consists in 'the spirit of this time' being overpowered by 'the spirit of the depths'. Delusion occurred when there is no reconciliation between the two and one identified with 'the spirit of the depths'. Thus divine madness and delusion are intimately linked—what differentiates one from the other is the failure of the individual to maintain a proper relation to 'the spirit of the depths'. For Jung, Nietzsche was the prime example of someone who failed to do this.

The final element of Jung's discussion of divine madness in *Liber Novus* occurs in his encounter with the Cabiri (see LN:425f). The Cabiri were the deities celebrated at the mysteries of Samothrace. They were held to be promoters of fertility and protectors of sailors, and had put in an appearance in Goethe's *Faust*. The Cabiri offered to forge Jung's I a sword with which to cut through the knots which he was entangled in. Jung's I took up the sword, and was about to strike when he realised that the knots were his brain. The Cabiri indicated that the interconnections represented his madness, and that the sword represented the overcoming of madness. They then revealed that they themselves were these interconnections, and were willing to die for his sake. They told him that if he struck, he would overcome his madness, which he did. The notion here of overcoming madness is close to Schelling's distinction between the person who is overcome by madness and the person who manages to govern madness. What does Jung mean by the overcoming of madness? The overcoming of madness designates the process by which one is to gain inspiration and instruction from the spirit of the depths and the various figures without identifying with them.

In his subsequent writings, Jung attempted to translate some of the ideas of *Liber Novus* into psychological and scientific terms. In the language of *Liber Novus*, one could say that this was an attempt to reconcile 'the spirit of this time' with 'the spirit of the depths'. Henceforth, he would attempt to lead his patients through the selfsame steps which he had taken, and to reinvigorate Christianity with the divine madness it had cast aside. In so doing, he tried to transform the practice of psychotherapy into a sanctuary where an element of divine frenzy could enter in. In his 1934 Eranos paper, 'Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious', Jung wrote:

> The symbolic process is possible only when one allows the ego-consciousness to enter the image, whatever it is; that is, when no obstruction is offered to the happening in the unconscious. But this is tantamount to a temporary renunciation of being a subject. One might, therefore, call the necessary condition for the process *an intentionally induced psychosis* [eine freiwillig eingeleitete Psychose]. For a psychosis is a largely involuntary yielding before an irruption from the unconscious that has attained a higher potential than consciousness, and so overflows the inhibiting barrier—called the threshold of consciousness—that is otherwise maintained intact. This analogy is again no empty metaphor, but represents a constant danger in the process—threatening, indeed, yet fortunately remaining for the most part at some distance. (Jung 1939a:30).

The manner in which such a process has been traditionally imagined and conceived has been as the descent into hell. Before returning to how Jung articulated this in *Liber Novus*, I would like to briefly consider his relation to Dante and Blake.

In terms of the western cultural tradition, not a little has been written on Jung's relation to figures in his pantheon such as Goethe and in particular Nietzsche.[5] But other figures such as Dante, Swedenborg and Blake have received little attention till now.[6] In Jung's copy of the *Commedia* there is a touching slip of paper inserted by the opening cantos by the lines, 'in the middle of the journey of our life / I found myself astray in a dark wood / where the straight road had been lost sight of.' This was a situation where Jung found himself. In a lecture at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in 1935, Jung noted,

> A point exists at about the thirty-fifth year when things begin to change, it is the first moment of the shadow side of life, of the going down to death. It is clear that Dante found this point and those who have read *Zarathustra* will know that Nietzsche also discovered it. When this turning point comes people meet

[5] On Jung's reading of Goethe, see Bishop (2008). On Jung's reading of Nietzsche, see Bishop (1995); Liebscher (2011); Domenici (2019). On Jung and western cultural history, see my *Jung: Biography in Books* (2011).

[6] On Jung's relation to Dante, see Priviero (2021). On Jung's relation to Swedenborg, see Taylor (2007).

> it in several ways: some turn away from it; others plunge into it;
> and something important happens to yet others from the outside.
> If we do not see a thing Fate does it to us. (Jung 1935:223).

It's clear from this that Jung found an existential as well as a literary prototype for his activity in the *Commedia*. There are also indications that Jung was reading the *Commedia* during this period. On 26th December 1913 he transcribed the following lines from the *Purgatorio* into *Black Book 2*: 'And I to him: "I am one who, when love / Breathes on me, notices, and in the manner / That he dictates within, I utter words"' (*Purgatorio* 24, 52-54). 'And then, in the same manner as a flame / Which follows the fire whatever shape it takes, / The new form follows the spirit exactly' (*Purgatorio* 25, 97-99). (Jung 1913-1932, *Black Book II*:197). These citations give voice to Jung's undertaking to give expression to what he was experiencing, and his attempt to transcribing what he was hearing in a faithful manner. Here, too, the new form follows the spirit exactly, as Jung attempted to maintain a fidelity to the event.

In his published scholarly writings, Jung read the *Commedia* as a visionary experience disguised under historical and mythical events. Its significance for Jung as a historical document is found in his commentary in *Psychological Types* in 1921. He argued that the birth of modern individualism began with the worship of women, 'which strengthened man's soul very considerably as a psychological factor since the worship of women meant worship of the soul. This is nowhere more beautifully and perfectly expressed than in Dante's *Divine Comedy*' (Jung 1921, CW 6:§377). Here, Jung situates the *Commedia* right at the birth of modern individualism, the worship of the soul. He then goes on to comment on canto XXXIII in *Paradiso*, Saint Bernard's prayer to the Virgin Mother.

We turn now to Swedenborg. In his youth, Jung read through many volumes of Swedenborg. Though not directly cited, Swedenborg features critically in the backdrop to *Liber Novus*. At the very beginning of the text Jung's turning away from the things of the world to the soul can be seen as parallel to Swedenborg's conception of heaven and hell—the turning inward, the turning away, and the realisation that what he previously lived had been a hell, in a sense, a negation of the soul. There are also many similarities in the manner in which Swedenborg engaged in dialogues with figures in the spiritual world and Jung's endeavour in *Liber Novus*. The critical difference is simply one of ontology. Jung replaces Swedenborg's spiritual realism with psychic realism, his notion of *esse in anima*, first articulated in *Liber Novus* itself and then in *Psychological Types*.

Swedenborg's spiritual hermeneutics, reading the symbolic sense of the Bible, also appears to inform the hermeneutics of layer two of *Liber Novus*.

By contrast, Jung's relation to the works of Blake appears to be more ambivalent and oscillates. And this appears to be connected to Jung's ambivalence concerning the notion of art.[7] Jung's library contains four editions of works by Blake: *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1927), *Pencil Drawings* (1927), *The Writings* (1925) and *A Quotation from the Works* (1913). Intriguingly, in his manuscripts, there is also an undated list of excerpts from volume one of the 1906 of Blake's *Poetical Works* (ETH archives, Hs 1055:377, 'Div. Träume'). In 1921, Jung cited Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* in *Psychological Types*, which indicates that he read it during this period when he was working on *Liber Novus*. It is curious that the most read chapter in *Psychological Types* has been the definition of types at the end. In the perspective followed here, the most important chapter of the text is Chapter 5, 'The Type Problem in Poetry', in which Jung sought to transpose into the conceptual language some of the insights of *Liber Novus*. At the end of this chapter, Jung cites Blake's statement from *Heaven and Hell* that there were two classes of men, the prolific and devouring, and that religion was an attempt to reconcile the two (Jung 1921, CW 6:§460).[8] Jung then noted that this summarised the whole of his previous discussion, which is quite striking.

In 1930 in a discussion of visionary works of art, Jung noted that poets turn to mythological figures to give suitable expression to their experience. This did not mean that they were working with secondhand material, rather that it was the only way to give form to imageless primordial experience. One starts with imageless primordial experience, authentic visionary experience, which poets use mythological and historical figures to give form to. They've derived the figures from somewhere, but that does not mean that the visions themselves are merely derivative. This point is important to note when one considers Jung's use of historical figures in *Liber Novus*. Jung then commented 'Dante decks out his experience in all the imagery of heaven, purgatory, and hell.... Blake presses into his service the phantasmagoric world of India, the old Testament, and the apocalypse' (Jung 1930, CW 15:§151). As stated here, Jung considered that Blake's work contained visions from the collective unconscious clothed in mythological language.

In 1939, in his introduction to Suzuki's work on Zen Buddhism

[7] On this question, see my 'Expressions symboliques: Jung, Dada, le Mandala et l'art de la folie' (2018).

[8] This passage was one of those which Jung excerpted in his undated manuscript.

Jung noted the glimmerings of a breakthrough of total experience in the west where to be found in Goethe's *Faust* and Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*, again the usual suspects from Jung's pantheon. However, tucked away in a footnote we find 'in this connection, I must also mention the English mystic William Blake' (Jung 1939b, CW 11:§903). This implicitly raised Blake to the level of Goethe and Nietzsche. In 1944, in *Psychology and Alchemy*, Jung featured two images by Blake, one of which is his one of his illustrations to Dante. The legend in *Psychology and Alchemy* describes this as the soul as a guide showing the way. It's a revealing slip. It's actually Dante and Virgil ascending the mountain of purgatory (Jung 1944, CW 12:55, 60; figures 5, 19). Jung appears to have transposed his experience in *Liber Novus*, where his soul did indeed lead the way, on to Blake.

In a 1948 letter, he noted, 'I find Blake a tantalizing study, since he has compiled a lot of half- or undigested knowledge in his fantasies. According to my idea, they are an artistic production rather than an authentic representation of unconscious processes' (Jung 1975:513-4). Here again, one finds examples of this oscillation. It as though this oscillation concerns Jung's own ambivalence concerning his own work, was *Liber Novus* a work of art? The notion of the dynamic interplay of contraries central to Blake's *Heaven and Hell* is a key theme in Jung's *Liber Novus*, though there's no evidence to suggest that he derived this idea from Blake. Rather, it's indicative of what Jung may have found tantalizing in the reading and study of Blake.

We return now to Jung's descent. Around 1910, he went on a sailing trip with his friend Albert Oeri and three young doctors, during which Oeri read out chapters from the Odyssey dealing with Circe and the Nekyia. Jung noted that shortly after this, 'he, like Odysseus was presented by faith with a Nekyia, the descent into the dark Hades' (Jung/Jaffé 1962:102-3). Here, Jung figures his self-experimentation as a descent into the underworld. Let's now, briefly, trace this motif. On the 21st December of 1913 in a fantasy at the outset of his journey in which he first encountered the biblical figures of Salome and Elijah, Jung's I gazes into a stone and catches sight of Odysseus and his journey on the high seas, one of the first figures that he encounters. After his interchange with Salome and Elijah, Jung's I looks again into this stone thinking again of Odysseus and how he passed the rocky islands of the Sirens and wonders if he should do so or not, imagining himself in the same situation. In his commentary in the layer two on this passage, he noted that the image indicated the lengthy wanderings lay ahead of him. Odysseus had gone astray when he played his trick at Troy. Then Jung notes that Odysseus would not have become

what he was without his odyssey (LN:182n). So it's the question of the necessity of the wandering, of the erring, in terms of his becoming. In handwritten drafts to the second book of *Liber Novus*, *Liber Secundus*, Jung subtitled *Liber Secundus* the 'Adventures of the Odyssey'. In the corrected draft this is retitled 'The Great Odyssey' (ibid:212). And finally, Jung suggested the line from the *Odyssey* 'happily escaped from the jaws of death' be used as a motto for Aniela Jaffé's biography of him, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*.[9]

We come now to the descent into hell. On 28 November Jung noted in the *Black Books*, 'I hear the cruel word "Wait." This is the devil's most horrible punishment of hell, he lets people wait' (Jung 1913-1932, *Black Book II*:165). He experiences the desert of his self as 'a hot hell' (ibid). A fortnight later, on 12 December, Jung engaged in his first visual fantasy. In his 1925, in a seminar he recalled, 'I devised such a boring method by fantasizing that I was digging a hole' (Jung 1925:51). In the *Black Books*, the fantasy begins in a vivid manner: 'I fall with you along gray rocks into whirling depths, pillars of steam shoot up, hissing and roaring noises—descent into hell', following which he enters a black cave (Jung 1913-1932, *Black Book II*:168; LN:147). For one versed in Swedenborg, digging a hole in the rocks is a sensible procedure, as is where he suggested that hell could be found. In the fantasy that ensues, Jung saw a killed figure float by on the stream and serpents covering the sun, from which a stream of blood flowed. In 1914, after the outbreak of the Great War, Jung felt that these fantasies were precognitive, so he titled this chapter, 'Descent into Hell in the Future'. In this fantasy he had descended into hell and the bloodshed that he'd saw depicted what was happening in Europe: 'As darkness seized the world, the terrible war arose and the darkness destroyed the light of the world, since it was incomprehensible to the darkness and good for nothing anymore. And so we had to taste Hell'. (ibid:265). Hell was now indeed let loose. It was the earth, the bloodshed and the slaughter of the Great War. The world had gone literally to hell.

But critically, in Jung's account in *Liber Novus*, this was not senseless but meaningful for the further development of mankind. We may follow further depictions of Jung's imagination of hell in *Liber Novus*. On 12 January he found himself in a gloomy vault with a tangle of human bodies. He realised then that he'd reached the underworld or hell (ibid:315). On 18 January 1914 after he had been interred in his fantasy in an insane asylum, he found himself in a steamer, his

[9] Draft Manuscript of *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, Countway Library of Medicine, Boston:213. See my *Jung Stripped Bare by his Biographers, Even* (2005).

neighbour in the ward, a fool who declared himself to be Nietzsche and Christ told him simply that they were in hell (ibid:347). On 2 February 1914 his serpent soul tells him that they had arrived in hell (ibid:430). He saw a hanged man who'd poisoned his parents and his wife. The man tells him that he'd done this to honour God so that they could escape the wretchedness of life for state of eternal blessedness.

In his fantasy of 28 December 1913 he found himself in a castle in the forest where he met an old scholar. He is led to a room to sleep and imagines that the scholar has locked up his daughter were seen to be a hackneyed theme for a romantic novel. She then literally appeared before him. Jung's I noted:

> I am truly in Hell—the worst awakening after death, to be resurrected in a lending library! Have I held the men of my time and their taste in such contempt that I must live in Hell and write out the novels that I have already spat on long ago? Does the lower half of average human taste also claim holiness and invulnerability, so that we might not say any bad word about it without having to atone for the sin in Hell? (ibid:222).

So the canonical notion of the fitting punishment in hell is articulated here. Jung had despised such novels. His I now finds himself condemned to literally be in one, forced to live them out. The contemporary equivalent would no doubt be finding his work featured in the Venice Biennale alongside works of Rudolf Steiner and psychiatric patients.

Reflecting on this episode, Jung noted, 'Your Hell is made up of all the things that you always ejected from your sanctuary with a curse and a kick of the foot' (ibid:231). What was required then was to give due attention to what led one to contempt and rage. Through accepting this, through accepting what one had rejected, one redeemed one's own other into life. Hence, the notion of going to hell is seen as essential in affirming fullness of one's existence and indeed of life itself. Life affirmation required an affirmation, and an acceptance of hell. Hell epitomises a state that Jung found himself in. A moment of collapse of all that he cherished, all that he had striven for, all that he'd aspired to and held dear. It represented a transvaluation of all his values and he comments as follows:

> What do you think of the essence of Hell? Hell is when the depths come to you with all that you no longer are or are not yet capable of. Hell is when you can no longer attain what you could attain.

> Hell is when you must think and feel and do everything that you know you do not want. Hell is when you know that your having to is also a wanting to, and that you yourself are responsible for it. Hell is when you know that everything serious that you have planned with yourself is also laughable, that everything fine is also brutal, that everything good is also bad, that everything high is also low, and that everything pleasant is also shameful. (ibid:169-70).

Thus the experience of hell represented a complete moment of reversal, the Eckhartian sense of the return to one's self as deeper than hell itself or indeed the deepest hell. Jung continues 'but the deepest hell is when you realize that hell is also no hell but a cheerful heaven. Not a heaven in itself but in this respect a heaven and in that respect a hell' (ibid).

This is indeed what Blake would have called the marriage of heaven and hell. What then does one do when one finds one's self in hell in life? Jung found a prototype in Christ's descent into hell, the harrowing of hell. One of the key themes in *Liber Novus* is that of the imitation of Christ, and how was this to be understood and how it was to be lived. In reflecting upon this, Jung understood it not on a literal level but in this deeper sense of living one's life as fully as Christ lived his. In attempting to do this he has experienced something akin to Christ's descent into hell:

> No one knows what happened during the three days Christ was in Hell. I have experienced it. / The men of yore said that he had preached there to the deceased. What they say is true, but do you know how this happened? / It was folly and monkey business, an atrocious Hell's masquerade of the holiest mysteries. How else could Christ have saved his Antichrist? Read the unknown books of the ancients, and you will learn much from them. Notice that Christ did not remain in Hell, but rose to the heights in the beyond. (ibid:167).

In Jung's understanding, Christ's journey to hell was necessary. Without this he would not have been able to ascend to heaven. In Jung's account in *Liber Novus*, Christ had to become his antichrist, his underworldly brother. He had to become hell himself. Christ's task of the redemption, of the salvation of the dead, is then taken up in what I call Jung's theology of the dead in *Liber Novus*. To cite one of the statements from the draft of *Liber Novus*: 'Not one iota of Christian law is abrogated but instead we are adding a new one accepting the lament of the dead'

(ibid:345n). In Jung's theology of the dead, redemption does not take the form of saving the souls of the dead, but of taking on their legacy answering their unanswered questions.[10]

After his work on *Liber Novus*, in his published scholarly writings, Jung attempted to translate some of the insights of *Liber Novus* to a language acceptable to medical scientific audience. One aspect of this undertaking was a psychological formulation and interpretation of Christ's descent into hell. In 1937, in his Terry Lectures at Yale Jung noted, 'the three days descent into hell during death describes the sinking of a vanished value into the unconscious whereby conquering the power of darkness, it establishes a new order, and rises up to heaven again, that is, attains supreme clarity of consciousness' (Jung 1937, CW 11:§149). In 1952, in *Aion* he noted, 'The scope of the integration is suggested by the "descensus ad infernos", the descent of Christ's soul to Hell, whose work of redemption also encompasses the dead. The psychological equivalent of this forms the integration of the collective unconscious which represents an essential part of the individuation process' (Jung 1951, CW 9,2: §72).

Here we find Christ's descent to hell interpreted as the individuation process and the integration of the collective unconscious, the central theme in Jung's later work—but we must pause here, which language, which articulation is primary? The first person voice and articulation in *Liber Novus* or its subsequent reformulation decades later into the psychological conceptuality of the *Collected Works*? Relevant here are some comments that Jung made in a discussion of none other than Swedenborg, in the Psychological Club in the 1950s:

> There are also visions whose pathological character can be recognized not from their form but from their effects. Or also, that they subsequently require a continual working. For instance, Niklaus von der Flüe. He had a terrible vision and had to protect himself from it. (Reinterpretation of the vision in the image of the holy trinity). The same with Swedenborg: he went up to into this doctrinaireness, to protect himself against the vision; since this was dangerous for him. He hitched himself to the concepts. One must also give the patient something, with which he can hold onto himself, which he can grasp. (=concepts). The visions of Swedenborg are something terribly important. Also with him a danger is shown, that he plunged into the abyss, because of that he had to hold onto the concepts. These form

[10] On this question, see Hillman and Shamdasani (2012).

a true salvation for many men. (Aniela Jaffé papers, ETH).

This is a nuanced statement. Jung was saying that to protect himself, Swedenborg formed concepts. But Jung is not merely being critical and indicates that for many people, concepts were all they have to hold onto to be able to withstand the experiences in question. Now this raises the question whether Jung's later conceptual system—which in some of his followers has not lacked for doctrinairness—forms such a safety net or guard rail, which has been vital for some, no doubt, for protection, but may have ended up blocking access to the very experiences in question. Taking this further, does Jung's significance lie in his conceptual formulations, individuation, the collective unconscious, the integration of collective unconscious, archetypes and so forth or rather does it, in the terms of his own visionary experience, lie in the recovery of hell as made accessible through individual fantasy, through individual vision, and through enabling a new route to hell and back? If, as Jung claimed, Dante and Blake clothed visionary experience in mythological forms, could we not pose the question that Jung in turn attempted to clothe visionary experience in conceptual psychological forms? If so, the power and significance of his work does not reside in his concepts which are familiar to us, but in the visionary experience which was at the back of them. *Liber Novus* then finally enables one to reconsider Jung's significance in wholly new yet quintessentially ancient manner, as recovering the road to hell, and with it, the way to recovering something of divine madness, without succumbing to psychosis. In 1935, Jung headed his Eranos paper 'Dream Symbols of the Individuation Process' with an epigram from Virgil's *Aeneid*, with which I will end:

> ... facilis descensus Averno;
> noctes atque dies patet atri ianua Ditis;
> sed reuocare gradum superasque euadere ad auras,
> hoc opus, hic labor est... VI, 126-29
>
> Easy is the descent to Avernus:
> night and day the door of gloomy Dis stands open;
> but to recall your steps and pass out to the upper air,
> this is the task, this is the toil. (Jung 1935, CW 12:39,
> prior to §44).

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