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**Crossing the Boundary between Psychology and Spirituality:
 Jung, *The Red Book*, and Its Audience**

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Abstract

This Master thesis frames Carl Jung's *Red Book* as a boundary object, in order to explore the intersection between psychology and spirituality. While psychology is often categorized as a science and spirituality as a non-science, this study uses public discourse as a lens to examine the boundaries between these fields. A qualitative analysis of the Top 250 reviews of *The Red Book* on Goodreads reveals that the book provokes a wide range of emotional responses from its readers. Additionally, the analysis highlights the challenges of categorizing the book within a single discipline. Several key concepts identified by the reviewers are discussed to shed light on Jung's confrontation with the unconscious. Throughout the thesis, Jung's other works are referenced to clarify the relationship between his spiritual experiences, as documented in *The Red Book*, and his psychological theories. Finally, the thesis reflects on the strengths and limitations of using this approach to conduct boundary-work.

Keywords: Active imagination, boundary-work, Jungian psychology, public opinion, qualitative research, spirituality, *The Red Book*, the unconscious

The Red Book as a Boundary Object

If the University of Groningen, like Hogwarts, had a restricted section in their library, we can be sure that Jung's *Red Book* would have had a spot upon its shelves, possibly chained, among the rest of dark art literature deemed unsuitable for the eyes of innocents. The book details a lengthy spell of self-experimentation endured by a man of science who believed he had lost his soul. In the fall of 1913, he embarked on a spiritual journey that fundamentally changed his outlook on life. Determined to find a cure against his spiritual malaise, he set out to “get to the bottom of inner processes” and “translate the emotions into images” in order to “grasp the fantasies which were stirring underground” (Jung, 2009, p. viii). For over sixteen years, Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961) switched off consciousness and methodically recorded his inner experiences. In a self-experiment that became known as his confrontation with the unconscious, he gradually developed a method for exploring and documenting the animations of the unconscious. He called this technique active imagination. Sonu Shamdasani, editor-in-chief and translator of *The Red Book*, described Jung's procedure as “deliberately evoking a fantasy in a waking state, and then entering into it as into a drama ... a type of dramatized thinking in pictorial form” (Jung, 2009, p. 200).

At the end of his life, Jung was worried that he had failed to make people see what he was after – “to open people's eyes to the fact that man has a soul, and [that] there is a buried treasure in the field” (Shamdasani, 2003, p. 351). Yet with the publication of *The Red Book* in 2009, it has become possible to read and see how Jung applied his method of active imagination on himself. As such, we can get a better understanding about the “buried treasure” he alluded to. In the prologue of the book, written in 1957, Jung valued *The Red Book* as “the numinous beginning, which contained everything” and everything afterwards as “merely the outer classification, the scientific elaboration and the integration into life” (Jung, 2009, p. vii). It was his most personal possession; and it forms, as it were, the spiritual core of Jungian psychology.

In this Master thesis I attempt to frame Jung's *Red Book* as a boundary object. Susan L. Star and James R. Griesemer defined boundary objects as “those objects that inhabit several communities of practice *and* satisfy the informational requirements of each of them” (Bowker & Star, 1999, p. 16). In this case, a boundary means a shared space where the sense of here and there is confounded and an object is something people act toward and with. In Star's words, they are “the stuff of action” (Star, 2010, pp. 602–603). To put it differently, a boundary object is an analytic concept developed as a means to manage diversity and

interdisciplinary cooperation. Since boundary objects inhabit multiple social worlds, and have different identities in each of them, they are able to travel across borders. At the same time, they maintain some kind of common identity across these different settings (Star & Griesemer, 1989). A boundary object might serve you as a bridge, acting as a mediator for people or groups with different perspectives. Then again, it could present a brick wall or lead into a rabbit hole, all depending on how the object is perceived and interpreted by the beholder. In any case, a boundary object postulates a shared reference point for everyone who actively engages with it. For example, the Rosetta Stone provided the means for archaeologists, classicists, and linguists to cooperate and eventually decipher the writing systems of ancient Egypt. Even a single word on the Rosetta Stone had potential to form a boundary object for those bygone actors. It became the foundation stone for Egyptology and now the term is used for a groundbreaking discovery somewhere on the frontiers of knowledge.

By framing *The Red Book* as a boundary object my aim is to work out a different method for doing boundary-work. Sociologist Thomas Gieryn defined boundary-work as those strategies employed by scientists to create, maintain, and negotiate the boundaries between legitimate science and non-science (Gieryn, 1983). He realized that these scientific boundaries were shaped by social, political, and cultural contexts, arguing that they were more fluid and dynamic than was previously understood. In his paper *Boundaries of Science*, Gieryn states that science is “nothing but a *space* ... a kind of spatial "marker" for cognitive authority, empty until its insides get filled and its borders drawn amidst context-bound negotiations over who and what is "scientific"” (Gieryn, 1995, p. 403).

The Red Book offers an extraordinary opportunity for exploring psychological boundaries, in any which way one wants to. It is, so to speak, the black box for Jungian psychology. I gradually realized that an exploration of all these boundaries lies far beyond the scope of a master thesis. So, in due course, I decided to focus on the boundary which interested me the most.

The Boundary between Psychology and Spirituality

The science of psychology emerged as a distinct discipline in the course of the nineteenth century, when it began to differentiate itself from its medicinal, philosophical, and physiological predecessors. Early schools of psychology were all founded upon different scientific and philosophic traditions, developing unique mixtures of theory and empirical research. Historian of science Roger Smith has emphasized diversity rather than theoretical

unity as the essential feature of "psychology" and its "history." In his paper *Psychologies: Their Diverse Histories* (2022), Smith argues: "If psychology is diverse both as a matter of social fact and because, for conceptual reasons, there are different meanings of the word "psychology," then history of psychology is necessarily diverse" (Smith, 2022, p. 979). In this thesis I shall concern myself with the theory and history of one of these psychologies, namely Jungian psychology.

It is worth emphasizing that there never has been consensus among psychologists on what the "object" of our science actually encapsulates. *Psyche* appears first on the mythological stage, as a mortal princess of matchless beauty. At the behest of her lover Eros, the son of Aphrodite, she was apotheosized as goddess of the soul. Her myth was written down in the second century A.D., by Apuleius of Madaurus, author of the only Latin novel to survive antiquity in its entirety (*The Golden Ass*, otherwise known as *Metamorphoses*). He used the name *Anima* instead of *Psyche*, "a translation that conveys the word's sense not just of "soul" but of "breath of life" – "that which animates"" (Fry, 2017, p. 374). In a paper originally titled *The Unveiling of the Soul* (1931), Jung argued that an overreliance on physical explanations has led to the rejection of an autonomous spiritual world-system that supports the existence of individuals souls. As a result, a "psychology without the psyche" had emerged, referring to the mainstream psychological approach which disregards the soul when studying the human mind:

The fact that a metaphysics of the mind was supplanted in the nineteenth century by a metaphysics of matter is, intellectually considered, a mere trick, but from the psychological point of view it is an unexampled revolution in man's outlook ... Today the psyche does not build itself a body, but on the contrary – matter, by chemical action, produces the psyche. This reversal of outlook would be ludicrous if it were not one of the unquestioned verities of the spirit of the age. It is the popular way of thinking, and therefore it is decent, reasonable, scientific, and normal ... We can perhaps summon up courage to consider the possibility of a "psychology with the psyche" – that is, a theory of the psyche ultimately based on the postulate of an autonomous, spiritual principle (CW 8, pars. 651, 661).

In her paper *Testing the Limits of Sense and Science*, historian Deborah Coon argued that at the turn of the twentieth century certain American psychologists used their battles with spiritualists as a means to legitimize their version of psychology. In order to safeguard the scientific status of their discipline, these experimental psychologists set out to establish and

maintain clear boundaries between scientific psychology and its mystical and pseudo-scientific counterparts. According to Coon: “Belief in spiritual and psychic phenomena was to these psychologists only the secular ghost of a religious past, but a malevolent ghost preventing public confidence in scientific naturalism” (Coon, 1992, p. 149). The problem was that much of psychology's public appeal lay beyond the confines of what those experimental psychologists designated as science. In a paper titled *New Paths in Psychology* (1912), Jung criticized the experimental psychology of his time for its impracticability in addressing “the infinity variety and mobility of individual psychic life”:

Therefore, anyone who wants to know the human psyche would be better advised to put away his scholar's gown, bid farewell to his study, and wander with human heart through the world. There, in the horrors of prisons, lunatic asylums and hospitals, in drab suburban pubs, in brothels and gambling-hells, in the salons of the elegant, the Stock Exchanges, Socialist meetings, churches, revivalist gatherings and ecstatic sects, through love and hate, through experience of passion in every form in his own body, he would reap richer stores of knowledge than text-books a foot thick could give him, and he will know how to doctor the sick with real knowledge of the human soul ... For between what science calls psychology and what the practical needs of daily life demand from psychology there is a great gulf fixed (CW 7, par. 409).

As a devoted empiricist, Jung placed experience at the heart of his theory of psychology. Whereas *The Red Book* chronicles how Jung symbolized his spiritual experiences through words and images, his voluminous academic corpus shows how he translated those words and images into psychological theories. We can therefore use Jung's academic works as a way to understand his personal, collective, and deeply spiritual psychology.

A Public's Perspective

Nowadays, it seems that we increasingly seek to understand ourselves, others, and the world around us in psychological terms. This omnipresence of psychology makes it ever more difficult to define, both as a science *and* as a system of beliefs and practices found in people's lives – in one's personal psychology. In his paper *Psychologies: Their Diverse Histories*, Smith asked:

Since many ordinary people think and act in self-expressed psychological terms, who controls and has authority over what in psychology? What is the relation of "scientific" psychology and "popular" psychology? (Smith, 2022, p. 979).

According to the APA Dictionary, popular psychology means “psychological knowledge as understood by members of the general public, which may be oversimplified, misinterpreted, and out of date” (“Popular Psychology,” n.d.). To me, and others, this definition of "pop" psychology sounds in itself oversimplified, misinterpreted, and out of date. In their paper *Psychology and its Publics* (2017), Michael Pettit and Jacy L. Young examined the relationship between psychologists and the wider public. They argued that (the history of) psychology often presents a flattened understanding of the public. In reality there never has been a "general" public, which is why Pettit and Young emphasized the plural in public. They concluded:

Psychology has been responsible for a generative language for understanding and realizing the self. However, psychological experts have not necessarily succeeded in controlling the flow of this discourse. Understanding psychology's tremendous cultural impact requires attending to this circuitry and mediation among experts and publics (Pettit & Young, 2017, p. 5).

With *The Red Book* at centre stage, my aim here is to explore an area that currently falls between science and non-science, between psychology and spirituality respectively. The non-scientific nature of spirituality should not condemn it as a topic unworthy of scientific inquiry, least of all from a psychological perspective. Due to the fact that spirituality falls outside the realm of what we nowadays consider to be scientific, I believe it makes good sense to use popular opinion for exploring this particular borderline. This not only enables us to sample the population on psychological as well as spiritual matters, but it also presents us with the opportunity to examine the relationship between scientific and "pop" psychology via public discourse. In order to attend to the circuitry and mediation surrounding Jung's alleged boundary object, the idea is to use the voices of the public as a platform from which to explore the zone of spiritual psychology. Particularly, I became curious to see how others expressed their experience with Jung's *Red Book*.

My Qualitative Analysis of *the Red Book's* Top 250 Reviews on Goodreads

To be clear, my thesis is not a book review. In practical terms it is an exercise in boundary-crossing via one of the more peculiar works ever written in the name of psychology. What does a contemporary audience make out of Jung's self-styled confrontation with the unconscious? In order to research this question, I read the reviews of *The Red Book* on Goodreads. Goodreads is a social cataloguing website that allows individuals to search its

database of books, annotations, quotes, and reviews. Specifically, I asked myself: “How do reviewers on Goodreads express their experience with Jung's *Red Book*?” As of today, on the 24th of June 2024, *The Red Book* has 5,561 ratings, with an average of 4.50 out of 5 stars, as well as 470 reviews in twenty-two different languages. When I started the research, I commenced by copying the content of the reviews into a separate document so I could mark them and make notes whilst reading them. At that time, on the 13th of May 2023, there were 4,923 ratings (with 4.50 average) and 403 reviews in twenty different languages. I ranked them according to how many "likes" a reviewer received from others. I decided to include the non-English reviews as well, using a translation software called Smartcat. Eventually, I settled on using the Top 250 reviews for the qualitative analysis.

The analysis combines two different qualitative research methods, namely thematic analysis and content analysis. In their paper *Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology*, Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke stated that thematic analysis is a “poorly demarcated, rarely acknowledged, yet widely used qualitative analytic method within psychology,” that nonetheless “offers an accessible and theoretically flexible approach to analyzing qualitative data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 77). They argue, and I concur, that thematic analysis isn't a linear but a recursive process, meaning that movement throughout the research phases goes back and forth (Braun & Clark, 2006, p. 86). My investigation of *The Red Book* and its reviews also progressed in this iterative fashion, that is, the steps in the research process were repeated over and over again, in different orders and different directions. In many ways, I found that the itinerary of this kind of research resembles the act of circumambulation, the act of "walking around" something from one source to the next. After ordering the reviews and familiarizing myself with the data, I made a list of the themes I was able to identify whilst reading the reviews. In this case, a theme simply refers to a specific topic that is mentioned by two or more reviewers. In the end, I handpicked 166 themes and divided these into six categories. For a complete overview of the themes, see Appendix A.

Whereas thematic analysis enables a broad exploration of themes and patterns within the data, content analysis offers a method for interpreting these themes in a more detailed and nuanced fashion. Shuffling through the reviews once again, I then made a list of excerpts. Based on two criteria, I selected certain passages from the reviews: either the excerpt offered context to a certain theme, or it demonstrated one or more connections between other themes. The first criterion allows for a more in-depth exploration of the themes, while the second criterion shows the interconnectedness between certain themes. If one or both of these criteria were met, I added the excerpt to my list. In the end, I selected 542 excerpts from the Top 250

reviews. For a selection of the most salient and relevant excerpts, in my opinion, see Appendix B.

To give an example, let's take a look at one of the reviews. Reviewer #4 came in fourth place with the most likes, hence the number four, and is also the first one who wrote a relatively short review. The themes are marked in bold and sometimes I used brackets to clarify a particular theme. The excerpts from the content analysis are the cursive sentences. And here and there I underscored some things that stood out to me. What follows next is reviewer #4's coded review:

An **interrupted read** [Small doses] -- *this book is so **personal** and ephemeral, a Blakean diary [Literature] of **personal discovery** [Search for Meaning], completely inside one man's **symbol** system, written for himself.*

I'm about a third of the way through the body of the text -- there's also a long **introduction**.

*It's already **inspired** me to go back to keeping a **dream** journal, to think of what my own 'red book' would be. Dream life has become extremely active. But it lacks any quality of suspense or forward motion.*

*I have a friend who has the **big** book -- the facsimile Red Book, 18" by 12, weighing in at 8 pounds, with all the **illustrations** Jung painted to accompany the **hand-lettered** [Calligraphy] journal -- she has to keep it on a footstool it's so big.*

*This is the **translation** of the text [The Reader's edition], which is **fascinating** and **boring** and **strange**, by turns, just like Blake's longer poems.*

*Meeting the **soul**, meeting the **anima/animus**, it's the **laboratory** of Jung's own theories -- and like a live album, there's a lot of drum solos. Yet it's remarkable to see the naked material arising, see him struggle with the contents of his own **psyche** before it's all processed and theorized.*

Qualitative analysis involves a progression from description towards interpretation. Therefore, the next step means making connections between the reviewer and every other source at hand. To start with, reviewer #4 isn't alone in comparing Jung with "crazy Blake." Reviewer #176, for example, regards *The Red Book* as "an astonishing example of calligraphy and art, on par with the *Book of Kells* and the illuminated manuscripts of William Blake." Both reviewers seem to refer to Blake's prophetic books, effectively situating *The Red Book* within a larger tradition of visionary literature. Along these lines, reviewer #37

argues that the book is “a kind of filter through which a series of texts have "entered" into Jung's work: Nietzsche *Zarathustra*, Goethe's *Faust*, Dante's *Divine Comedy*, and so on.” From a literary perspective, *The Red Book* can be considered as a hyperlinked text, that is, a text that mirrors the structure and function of hyperlinks in digital texts. Due to the abundance of interconnections and cross-references within the book, a vast network of knowledge lurks beneath its surface. As a consequence, many pathways are revealed – and it is up to the reader which ones he or she cares to explore.

Jung once confessed: “I am no particular friend of Blake, whom I am always inclined to criticize” (Jung, 1973b, p. 17). He expressed his experience of studying Blake as "tantalizing," because, according to Jung: “He has compiled a lot of half- or undigested knowledge of his fantasies ... they are an artistic production rather than an authentic representation of unconscious processes” (Jung, 1973a, pp. 513–14). Although Jung appreciated and applied art as a method for activating contents of the unconscious, as well as respecting the artist for being the one willing to express the archetypal or primordial image, he also believed that there was much more to creative fantasy than aesthetics (CW 15, par. 130). In his semi-autobiographical memoir, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (1963), Jung stated:

In *The Red Book* I tried an aesthetic elaboration of my fantasies, but never finished it. I became aware that I had not yet found the right language, that I still had to translate it into something else. Therefore, I gave up this aestheticizing tendency in good time in favour of a rigorous process of *understanding*. I saw that so much fantasy needed firm ground underfoot, and that I must first return wholly to reality. For me, reality meant scientific comprehension. I had to draw concrete conclusions from the insights the unconscious had given me – and that task was to become a life's work (Jung & Jaffé, 1963, p. 188).

As reviewer #4 further observes, in accordance with eleven other reviewers, *The Red Book* can be likened to a laboratory wherein Jung concocted his psychology. The archetypal hallmarks of Jungian psychology include the persona, the shadow, the anima/animus, and the self. And they all come to life in *The Red Book*. For me, the reviewer's live album metaphor strikes a special note because experiencing *The Red Book* – especially the big book – is far more immersive and galvanizing than simply reading a book. Both experiences capture the rawness, spontaneity, and emotional intensity of a deeply personal and one-of-a-kind performance.

Results of the Qualitative Analysis

The next episode is divided into two parts. Each part begins with a thematic table, that is, a chart that displays the themes most often mentioned by the reviewers within a given category. It shows the number of reviewers that commented on a particular theme, including their percentages, and the number of excerpts I selected from the reviews associated with that particular theme. As mentioned earlier, I found 166 themes during the thematic analysis (see Appendix A) and selected 542 excerpts during the content analysis (see Appendix B). A complete analysis of each and every one of the themes goes far beyond the scope of a master thesis, therefore I tried to stick with the larger themes from the thematic analysis. In addition, each section is supplemented with excerpts from the content analysis that, in my opinion, best capture the themes in question. The first part of this chapter is focused on the reviewer's experience, with an aim to display the range of emotional responses that were expressed by the reviewers. The second part is about classification, in an attempt to show how reviewers set up their own boundaries whilst grappling with *The Red Book*.

Types of Experiences

Theme	Reviews	Percentage	Excerpts
Amazing / Astonishing / Admiring / Awesome	57	22,8 %	22
Complex / Difficult	52	20,8 %	39
Transformative	44	17,6 %	55
Fascinating / Enchanting / Magical	29	11,6 %	21
Personally relevant / Relatable	23	9,2 %	22
Aesthetic / Beautiful	21	8,4 %	9
Enlightening / Profound / Inspiring	17	6,8 %	13
Frightening / Scary / Haunting / Terrifying	17	6,8 %	11
Unique	17	6,8 %	11
Bizarre / Peculiar / Strange / Weird / Mysterious	15	6,0 %	6
Dense	15	6,0 %	8
Intimate / Personal / Private	13	5,2 %	7
Most Important	12	4,8 %	7
Confusing	10	4,0 %	6
Crazy / Insane / Mad	10	4,0 %	10

Table 1. Expressions of the reading experience by Goodreads reviewers of *The Red Book*.

“Would you like to take a spiral staircase down to the realm of the soul,” reviewer #18 asks, “because, in a nutshell, that is what Jung has done in these pages.” The spiral staircase metaphor encapsulates the non-linear, complex, and dynamic nature of the book. It reminded me of the grand staircase in Hogwarts castle, with its moving stairs and living portraits. Accordingly, reviewer #34 calls the book “a deep, mesmerizing account of the figures and archetypes met by Jung, over the course of several years, a combination of visions, dreams,

fantasies and allegory woven together into a rich, moving, living work.” Both reviewers, as well as ten other reviewers, stress the importance of the book. I don't think it is too much of a stretch to say that the experience can be, quite literally, ground-breaking. As reviewer #187 puts it: “Qualifying *The Red Book* with a single adjective is a daunting task, yet it could be described as eye-opening.” But notice that the spiral staircase goes *down* to the realm of the soul; Jung's spiritual journey began with a descent into the depths, thus reviewer #18 concludes his or her review with the following passage from *The Red Book*:

If you enter 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” (Jung, 2009, p. 238).

By the time he started his confrontation with the unconscious, Jung was in his mid-thirties. He had achieved every worldly success he had ever wished for: “I had achieved honor, power, wealth, knowledge, and every human happiness. Then my desire for the increase of these trappings ceased, the desire ebbed from me, and horror came over me” (Jung, 2009, pp. 231-232). Horror struck in October 1913 when, on a train bound for Schaffhausen, Jung was seized in broad daylight by a dreadful vision:

I saw a terrible flood that covered all the northern and low-lying lands between the North Sea and the Alps. It reached from England up to Russia, and from the North Sea right up to the Alps. I saw yellow waves, swimming rubble, and the death of countless thousands (Jung, 2009, p. 231).

The vision lasted for hours and repeated itself a few weeks later, more graphic and horrible than the first one. This time the vision was accompanied by an inner voice that spoke the following words to him: “Look at it, it is completely real, and it will come to pass. You cannot doubt this” (Jung, 2009, p. 231). Between October 1913 and July 1914, Jung experienced twelve distinct visionary fantasies that he retrospectively regarded as precognitions of a collective event. At the time, however, Jung was extremely disturbed by these experiences. Many years later in an interview with historian of religion Mircea Eliade, Jung confessed that back then he feared for his own sanity: “As a psychiatrist I became worried, wondering if I was not on the way to “doing a schizophrenia,” as we said in the language of those days” (Jung, 2009, p. 201). With the outbreak of the First World War in late July 1914, it suddenly dawned on him that his vision had not depicted what would happen to him personally, but what would happen to the whole of Europe: “I understood that my dreams and my visions came to me from the subsoil of the collective unconscious. What

remained for me to do now was to deepen and validate this discovery” (Jung, 2009, pp. 201-202). In a ringing passage from *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, Jung wrote:

It is of course ironical that I, a psychiatrist, should at almost every step of my experiment have run into the same psychic material which is the stuff of psychosis and is found in the insane. This is the fund of unconscious images which fatally confuse the mental patient. But it is also the matrix of a mythopoeic imagination which has vanished from our rational age. Though such imagination is present everywhere, it is both tabooed and dreaded, so that it even appears to be a risky experiment or a questionable adventure to entrust oneself to the uncertain path that leads into the depths of the unconscious. It is considered the path of error, of equivocation and misunderstanding ... Unpopular, ambiguous, and dangerous, it is a voyage of discovery to the other pole of the world (Jung & Jaffé, p. 189).

“I found myself investing a lot of myself into Jung's journey through the unconscious and, like many other reviewers, have found myself affected on a deep level after taking the journey,” writes reviewer #34, describing the reading experience as “something from the mystery schools of ages past.” That the act of reading *The Red Book* somehow triggers one's own unconscious is a sentiment that has been echoed by more than a few reviewers; “A dive into the depths of another's subconsciousness which can't help but cause the reader to simultaneously dive into their own subconsciousness,” writes reviewer #204, arguing that the book is worth reading for the novel experience alone. In a similar vein, reviewer #249 argues that “for anyone who meditates with similar visions, it's amazing to see someone else's version and story of spiritual development.” Reviewer #13 calls it “the best self-help book I have ever lain my eyes on,” adding that “the world would be such a better place for all humans if everyone did an effort to thoroughly understand their psychology and inner self.” Finally, one more rave review, by reviewer #2, who describes the experience as nothing less than life-changing:

Inspired by Jung's process of "active imagination," I opened my mind and heart to encounter what I might find in my own deep unconscious. Fascinated, frightened and yet determined to uncover what was lurking inside, driving my judgments and conflicts, I spent 4 months in my own "depths." This process opened a deep, sobering vein of understanding and growth. It's the best work I've ever done, without a therapist or guru – only *The Red Book* as a road map.

However, not every reviewer expressed their experience in such positive terms. For instance, reviewer #55 states: “*The Red Book* afflicted me with a mental fever for several days.” Likewise, reviewer #88 declares: “One step closer to my soul, two steps further away from my sanity.” Evidently, certain reviewers experienced some form of distress whilst reading the book. Reviewer #70 found the book very difficult to get through for the sheer bizarreness of it: “It is great in that it grants the reader access to the thought processes of a great mind, but the content is just so distant from my view of reality that it was difficult to force myself to follow his stream of thought.” Reviewer #12 takes it up a notch: “There is no way to sugar-coat this book, it's written by somebody with an unhealthy relationship to reality.” Going so far as calling the book “perniciously pathological,” reviewer #12 judges it to be fascistic, pseudo-scientific, and overly sentimental:

Jung, clearly, gives an opening for fascist thinking in this book by placing truth at a focal point outside of us hidden in the ether discoverable with magic or feelings accessible in dreams or with an aid of an analytical-psychologist or otherwise part of his mumbo-jumbo feeling based path to truth that is nothing but speculation or experiences stripped from rational, logical or analytical reasoning. For Jung: science bad, feelings good.

Reviewer #197 disagrees with this take, writing that “it is very easy to brush this book off as woo-woo or crazy ramblings. I get it, it's the safest position to take for both yourself and for common interpretations of reality (particularly scientism and materialist views).” Reviewer #197 argues instead that there is “an abundance of wisdom and truly special insight into the multi-faceted mechanisms of the psyche ... no matter your view, you can definitely gain from reading this book, even if you fundamentally disagree with some of the interpretations; witnessing an empiricist dissect these spiritual and seemingly insane experiences is so very valuable.” Likening the reading experience to that of a psychedelic trip, reviewer #197 cautions readers to treat carefully and keep an open mind: “It could provoke a metamorphosis in the reader, it could strike them with awe, it could scare them, it could be scoffed at, or it could be completely invalidated via dubious means of lacking “sobriety.”” These statements capture the sense of ambiguity that seems to characterize *The Red Book*.

“They saying goes that there's a fine line between genius and insanity,” writes reviewer #84, “and this book is the ultimate example thereof, so much so that you sometimes wonder whether Jung is having a psychosis, is deriving insight from a dream, or is constructing an (all but elusive) analogy.” The complex and symbolic language, the non-

linear narrative structure, the interplay between rationality and spirituality, the blending of personality and collectivity – all these aspects contribute to the book's ambiguous nature. Reviewer #200 quotes the following passage from *The Red Book* that may serve as an illustrative example:

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 toward 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 (Jung, 2009, p. 298).

Clearly, the reviewers show an impressive range of emotional responses as they expressed their reading experiences. Besides the fact that the book is emotionally charged due to it being personal in the extreme, it also elicits strong emotional reactions from its readers. In the next part, we move on to the ways in which reviewers attempted to classify *The Red Book*.

Types of Classifications

Theme	Reviews	Percentage	Excerpts
Psychology	37	14,8 %	28
Art	30	12,0 %	23
Mythology	28	11,2 %	24
Spirituality	27	10,8 %	23
Literature	20	8,0 %	18
Science	18	7,2 %	17
Philosophy	16	6,4 %	14

Table 2. Goodreads reviewers' classifications of *The Red Book*.

Table 2 makes it clear that the book doesn't fall neatly within one specific category. Instead, it is related to a variety of quite distinct areas. Opinions on how to classify *The Red Book* are divided, just like the reviewers' emotional responses, once again demonstrating that the book can be read in several ways. Someone who is more artistically inclined, such as reviewer #15, focuses on the book's aesthetic appeal: "Jung's art throughout the book is quite beautiful; it also important to the writing, as one of his beliefs was that art is a healing tool to be used." Someone who looks at it from a more philosophical angle, such as reviewer #189, writes something like: "In a world of philosophers trying to define the world around them, it is refreshing to read about the findings of a man who tried to define himself instead." While certain reviewers classify *The Red Book* within one specific category, other reviewers use

either double or even triple categories. One example of a triple cross-categorization is made by reviewer #204, who comments on the connection between art and philosophy and relates it to a third category, namely spirituality:

The most obvious differentiator between *The Red Book* and other philosophical ramblings are the large swaths of atmospheric imagery that often border on incomprehensible ... Somehow between this maddening imagery and preachy ponderings a twilight zone emerges. A gem of an idea will briefly emerge bearing some truly unique insights on human spirituality.

In other words, it is the unique combination of words and images that creates a spiritual spark. In *The Red Book*, Jung used a series of vivid, surreal illustrations in order to capture archetypal or primordial images that came to him from the collective unconscious. These images evoke strong emotional responses and deliver deep insights which are nigh impossible to accurately and completely articulate into language. Words therefore often fall short in capturing the full depth of a spiritual experience. Whereas images offer a direct expression of an unconscious content, words are necessary for making sense of these experiences, even if they can never fully capture the richness of visual symbols.

What follows now are two passages from *The Red Book*, the first one quoted by reviewer #81, concerning words, the second one quoted by reviewer #180, concerning images:

There are hellish webs of words, only words, but what are words? Be tentative with words, value them well, take safe words, words without catches, do not spin them with one another so that no webs arise, for you are the first who is ensnared in them. For words are not merely words, but have meanings for which they are set. They attract these meanings like daimonic shadows (Jung, 2009, p. 299).

If we possess the image of a thing, we possess half the thing. The image of the world is half the world. He who possesses the world but not its image possesses only half the world, since his soul is poor and has nothing. The wealth of the soul exists in images. He who possesses the image of the world, possesses half the world, even if his humanity is poor and owns nothing. But hunger makes the soul into a beast that devours the unbearable, and is poisoned by it. My friends, it is wise to nourish the soul, otherwise you will breed dragons and devils in your heart. (Jung, 2009, p. 232).

Reviewer #29 appraises *The Red Book* as “mysterious, spiritual, scientific, intimate, calming and confusing as well.” By using spiritual and scientific in the same breath, reviewer

#29 connects two areas of interest that on the surface seem to be incompatible with one another. In a similar vein, reviewer #1 writes:

The book seems to be Jung's attempt to reconcile the scientific with the mythic and spiritual, the personal with the collective, and as such could not be more timely than to finally see the light of people's eyes ... it is as revelatory, revolutionary, and vitally important as I suspected it would be, not just in terms of Jung's psychological theories but in taking a stance for a broader spiritual approach to reality that is even more lacking now than when Jung was writing.

How did Jung manage to build a bridge between science and spirituality? First of all, he started by treating his inner experiences as empirical data legitimate for psychological analysis. He then interpreted the images that emerged from the unconscious and translated them into psychological concepts, using active imagination as a method for systematically exploring these images – images that represent the irrational and spiritual aspects of the psyche. By eloquently translating the images into words, Jung effectively raised the contents of the unconscious into conscious awareness. Words represent the rational, conscious mind, which is the domain of science, where ideas are analyzed and understood within a logical framework. Together, words and images allow for a more comprehensive exploration of the psyche, harmonizing the rational with the irrational, the scientific with the spiritual, and consciousness with the unconscious. Drawing from a wide array of disciplines – such as art, mythology, philosophy, religion and science – Jung applied a pluralistic approach that enabled him to explore the spiritual realm while adhering to scientific principles.

Jung's Spiritual Psychology

The set-up in this Master thesis has been to frame *The Red Book* as a boundary object and, by using the voices of the public as a sounding board, to explore the boundary between psychology and spirituality. So far, the focus has been on the reviewer's experience and their classifications. In this section, I attempt to come to some sort of understanding by discussing several concepts that were indicated by the reviewers. As reviewer #178 points out, *The Red Book* is Jung's idea of active imagination put to the test, therefore it “could serve to any of us as a blueprint to do the same.” What would this blueprint look like? Who do we encounter when we dive into the depths of the unconscious? Where will it take us? Let's find out.

The psyche is the broadest concept in Jungian psychology, within which all other concepts exist and interact. As the overarching structure, it encompasses all psychic processes

– both conscious and unconscious – thereby representing the full scope of a person's inner life. The seat of consciousness is occupied by the ego, an aspect of the psyche with which we consciously identify ourselves and our surroundings, being aware of itself and the world around it. In *Aion: Researches into the Phenomenology of the Self* (1951), Jung argued that, at least theoretically, the field of consciousness is capable of indefinite extension. From an empirical perspective, however, it always finds its limit when it comes up against the unknown:

The unknown falls into two groups of objects: those which are outside and can be experienced by the senses, and those which are inside and are experienced immediately. The first group comprises the unknown in the outer world; the second the unknown in the inner world. We call this latter territory *the unconscious*. (CW9, par. 2).

Closely related to the ego is the concept of the persona, named after the Latin word for "mask," which was used in ancient Roman theatre to describe the masks worn by actors to indicate the roles they played. Jung called the persona a compromise between the individual and society as to what someone should appear to be, "a mask that *feigns individuality*, making others and oneself believe that one is individual, whereas one is simply acting a role through which the collective psyche speaks" (CW 7, par. 245).

The collective psyche represents the full spectrum of shared human experience, from the consciously influenced aspects shaped by culture and society to the deeper, unconscious forces that underlie and shape our collective existence. One way of looking at it is by identifying the former with the spirit of the times and the latter with the spirit of the depths. The spirit of the times refers to the collective mindset, values, norms, and intellectual currents that dominate a specific historical period. In our modern age, this is a rational spirit that resides largely in the outer world. In contrast, the spirit of the depths is irrational and ancient, dwelling deeply inside all of us. As reviewer #55 observes, Jung's task in *The Red Book* had been "to reconcile the spirit of the times with the spirit of the depths, since it seemed as if there was an unpaid debt between them." In the opening chapter of *The Red Book*, Jung wrote:

The spirit of the depths has subjugated all pride and arrogance to the power of judgment. He took away my belief in science, he robbed me of the joy of explaining and ordering things, and he let devotion to the ideals of this time die out in me (Jung, 2009, p. 229).

In *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, Jung narrates an old story about a student who came to a rabbi and said: “In the olden days, there were men who saw the face of God. Why don't they any more?” The rabbi replied: “Because nowadays no one can stoop so low.” In order to see the light, first we have to risk the dark. Consequently, the confrontation with the unconscious begins with the dissolution of the persona. Behind the mask lies a face which we wouldn't dare to show the world. Welcome to the dark side of your personality, which Jung called the shadow:

This confrontation is the first test of courage on the inner way, a test sufficient to frighten off most people, for the meeting with ourselves belongs to the more unpleasant things that can be avoided so long as we can project everything negative into the environment. But if we are able to see our own shadow and can bear knowing about it, then a small part of the problem has already been solved: we have at least brought up the personal unconscious (CW 9.1, par. 44).

Below the threshold of consciousness lies a relatively thin layer which Jung called the personal unconscious (CW 15, par. 126). Here we meet the shadow for the first, but definitely not the last, time. It confronts us with everything we have either overlooked and forgotten or repressed and denied. This experience involves facing our negative emotions: anger, fear, sadness, disgust, shame, despair, jealousy, hate, and so on. These negative emotions, when suppressed, have a knack for popping up unexpectedly, usually at the worst of times. This illustrates what Jung called the compensatory activity of the unconscious, which serves as a counterbalance for the one-sidedness of the conscious mind. “Everyone carries a shadow,” Jung forebodingly observed in *Psychology and Religion* (1938/1958), “and the less it is embodied in the individual's conscious life, the blacker and denser it is” (CW 11, par. 131). In *Aion*, Jung described the connection between the shadow and emotion as follows:

Closer examination of the dark characteristics – that is, the inferiorities constituting the shadow – reveals that they have an *emotional* nature, a kind of autonomy, and accordingly an obsessive or, better, possessive quality. Emotion, incidentally, is not an activity of the individual but something that happens to him (CW 9.2, par. 15).

The goal of engaging with the shadow is to become aware of your motivations, behaviors, and emotional responses. Integrating the shadow means to recognize its existence within you and paying attention to reactions that seem irrational or overly emotional. Feelings have the power to overwhelm the ego, taking control in ways we least expected from a rational point of view. Often, we project our shadow onto others. But when we recognize

these projections, we can begin to see that the negative traits we attribute to others may actually reflect parts of our own shadow. Accepting these shadowy parts may decrease feelings of self-loathing or it might stop you from relentlessly passing judgement on yourself. In any case, it is often considered the first crucial step on the path towards psychological well-being. But to find a way out of the personal unconscious, we need a guide:

If the encounter with the shadow is the "apprentice-piece" in the individual's development," Jung stated in *The Relations Between the Ego and the Unconscious* (1916), "then that with the anima is the "master-piece" (CW 9.1, par. 61).

Meeting the anima is the moment when a man begins to break on through to the other side, as it were, into the realm of the collective unconscious, where archetypes and primordial images reside. This could be the moment when all hell breaks loose, because it marks the transition from dealing with personal issues to engaging with the deeper, impersonal aspects of the psyche:

Whereas the memory-images of the personal unconscious are, as it were, filled out, because they are images personally experienced by the individual, the archetypes of the collective unconscious are not filled out because they are forms not personally experienced. When, on the other hand, psychic energy regresses, going beyond even the period of early infancy, and breaks into the legacy of ancestral life, the mythological images are awakened: these are the archetypes. An interior spiritual world whose existence we never suspected opens out and displays contents which seem to stand in sharpest contrast to all our former ideas (CW 7, par. 118).

In the early days of his spiritual journey, while recording his fantasies, Jung once questioned himself: "What is this I am doing, it certainly is not science, what is it?" Then an inner voice suggested it was art, which astonished him – particularly because the voice had come from a woman. "Perhaps my unconscious is forming a personality that is not I," he wondered," but which is insisting on coming through to expression" (Jung, 2009, p. 199). In order to get hold on the woman within him, so to speak, Jung offered her his speech centers:

I was greatly intrigued by the fact that a woman should interfere with me from within. My conclusion was that she must be the "soul," in the primitive sense, and I began to speculate on the reasons why the name "anima" was given to the soul. Why was it thought of as feminine? Later I came to see that this inner feminine figure plays a typical, or archetypal, role in the unconscious of a man, and I called her the "anima." The corresponding figure in the unconscious of woman I called the "animus" (Jung & Jaffé, 1963, p. 186).

For a man, encountering the anima involves facing feelings, desires, and traits that are traditionally associated with femininity, such as sensitivity, intuition, vulnerability, and creativity. For a woman, encountering the animus involves facing feelings, desires, and traits that are traditionally associated with masculinity, such as rationality, assertiveness, toughness, and dominance. In *Aion*, Jung argued that “the shadow can be realized only through a relation to a partner, and anima and animus only through a relation to a partner of the opposite sex, because only in such a relation do their projections become operative” (CW 9.2, par. 42).

Interactions in the outside world bring these projections to the surface, enabling individuals to confront and integrate the deeper aspects of the psyche. Once again, the first step is recognizing the projections we make onto others, usually our romantic partners, which asks for openness, honesty, and self-reflection. Via active imagination we can develop a relationship with the anima or animus, instead of fearing or rejecting its presence. If all goes well, the acceptance and balancing of sexual opposites within the psyche reduces inner conflicts, enhances relationships, and fosters a deeper connection with both yourself and others. The integration of the anima or animus archetype only yields practical results if we succeed in “fixing reasonable boundaries to the ego and in granting the figures of the unconscious – the self, anima, animus, and shadow – relative autonomy and reality (of a psychic nature)” (CW 9.2, par. 44). Jung's task in *The Red Book* had been to recognize and interact with the voices and characters that were at play in the unconscious and to differentiate these multifaceted aspects of the psyche. Reviewer #227 writes:

With this account, Carl Jung invites us to explore in our turn what remains in the shadow of our consciousness, and to listen to our inner voice, our anima, that is to say, our soul; this work should allow us to reintegrate these fragments of our unconscious, with the aim of better knowing ourselves and by the same token, acquiring a better understanding of others, as well as our environment.

In his book *Psychological Types* (1921), Jung identified four primary modes through which we perceive and process experiences, which he called the psychological functions: thinking, feeling, sensation, and intuition. Additionally, he recognized two attitudes, extraversion and introversion, referring to the orientation of a specific psychological function that dictates whether someone primarily engages with the outer world or the inner world. Typically, the four psychological functions are polarized, meaning that there is a dominant function, which primarily guides our thoughts and actions. The dynamic interplay of

functions and attitudes, combined with the fact that different functions may dominate at different times or in different situations, led Jung to the conclusion that there exists “a plurality of personalities in one and the same individual” (CW 6, par. 797).

Each function-attitude combination can manifest as a different “personality,” contributing to the richness and complexity of the individual's overall personality. These different, let's say, sub-personalities are influenced by the archetypes, but they are not the archetypes themselves. Instead, they are expressions or manifestations of archetypal patterns in a way that is specific to the individual. In an essay originally titled *The Spirit of Psychology* (1947), Jung emphasized that the images and ideas mediated by the collective unconscious should not be confused with the archetypes themselves. An archetype, in itself, cannot directly reach consciousness, which is why Jung argued that its real nature is transcendent:

Since the archetype's essential being is unconscious to us, and still they are experienced as spontaneous agencies, there is probably no alternative now but to describe their nature, in accordance with their chiefest effect, as “spirit” ... Just as the archetype is partly a spiritual factor, and partly like a hidden meaning immanent in the instincts, so the spirit is two-faced and paradoxical: a great help and an equally great danger (CW 8, pars. 420, 427).

In Jungian psychology, the plurality of personalities within a single psyche, and their connections to archetypes, provide a framework for understanding spirituality as an intrinsic aspect of human experience. One of the key results of his self-experimentation in *The Red Book* is the individuation process, “a means for higher development of the personality,” as reviewer #176 calls it. Individuation is the process through which the individual strives to integrate unconscious manifestations and outer experiences, aiming to achieve psychological balance:

As the individual is not just a single, separate being, but by his very existence presupposes a collective relationship, it follows that the process of individuation must lead to more intense and broader collective relationships and not to isolation (CW 6, par. 758).

In *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, Jung wrote that he only emerged from the darkness towards the end of the First World War, after discovering the meaning behind his mandala drawings. He began to understand that these drawings were cryptograms concerning the state of the self: “I saw that everything, all the paths I had been following, all the steps I

had taken, were leading to a single point – namely, the mid-point. It became increasingly plain to me that the mandala is the center” (Jung & Jaffé, p. 196). Through the process of drawing mandalas, Jung came to understand that the goal of individuation was a circumambulation of the self – “the wholeness of personality, which, if all goes well, is harmonious, but cannot tolerate self-deceptions” (Jung & Jaffé, p. 196). This realization became the cornerstone of his spiritual psychology. In reaching this insight, he recognized his own limitations and, with that acceptance, found inner peace: “Perhaps someone else knows more, but not I” (Jung & Jaffé, p. 197). The self is arguably the most profound and complex concept in Jung's theory of psychology. In *The Relations between the Ego and the Unconscious* (1916/1928), Jung explained its significance:

Intellectually the self is no more than a psychological concept, a construct that serves to express an unknowable essence which we cannot grasp as such, since by definition it transcends our powers of comprehension. It might equally well be called the "God within us" ... it is the completest expression of that fateful combination we call individuality, the full flowering not only of the single individual, but of the group, in which each adds his portion to the whole (CW 7, pp. 238-240).

In a cryptic letter, Jung described the experience of the self as an endless approximation of an "empty" center that is “the thing the archetypes point to” (Jung, 1973a, p. 257). He referred to the self as a borderline concept, as it encompasses an indeterminably vast portion of the unconscious, making its boundaries and full extent impossible to define. Situated on the edge of the unconscious abyss, it is not the final destination but rather a symbol for the eternal journey of spiritual and psychic development. An open ending.

Conclusion and Limitations

Jung's lifelong mission had been to help people recognize the existence of their soul, advocating for a psychology that acknowledges the potential of an autonomous, spiritual principle within the psyche. *The Red Book* stands as a testament to the extraordinary lengths Jung went to in pursuit of this goal, providing a unique opportunity to explore where psychology meets spirituality. As such, it illustrates how Jung's personal experiences and theoretical ideas can create a bridge between these seemingly divergent fields. As psychology continues to occupy a liminal space within the scientific realm, spirituality remains largely beyond its conventional borders. My approach here has been to use *The Red Book* as a boundary object in order to explore this particular borderzone, while using public opinion as

a reflective tool. In doing so, my intent has been to work out a different method for doing boundary-work.

The range of emotional responses from the reviewers on Goodreads demonstrate that the book resonates with readers in diverse ways, eliciting everything from fascination and inspiration to confusion and frustration. Additionally, the difficulty of categorizing *The Red Book* within a single discipline underscores its ambiguous nature, as it spans the realms of psychology, spirituality, art, philosophy, mythology, and literature. By using public opinion as a sounding board, we are able to observe how the book challenges disciplinary boundaries and invites dialogue across various fields, ultimately aiming to facilitate and promote interdisciplinary cooperation. It encourages us to engage with it from multiple perspectives, embracing complexity and diversity as crucial aspects for broadening the horizon of psychology and, consequently, science as a whole.

Integrating spirituality into psychological practices can provide a valuable framework for emotional regulation, enhancing psychological well-being and offering new ways to process our emotions. By adopting a more inclusive and pluralistic approach, we create new opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration, expanding the scope of psychology and science to better address the diverse range of human experiences.

A common criticism of Jung is that he placed excessive emphasis on the inner world, often overlooking the outside world and the role of community in maintaining psychological well-being. As an introverted individual, Jung was naturally drawn inward, making his spiritual psychology more effective for understanding thoughts and emotions than for addressing outward behaviors. Furthermore, it begs the question to what extent *The Red Book* supports Jung's psychological theories, such as the collective unconscious and archetypes, given that these concepts are notoriously difficult to validate through scientific methods. Since Jungian psychology often relies on subjective experiences, symbolic interpretations, and introspective analysis, they do not easily lend themselves to empirical testing and objective measurement. The reliance on subjective evidence affects the acceptance of Jung and his spiritual psychology within the scientific community, which still prioritizes quantifiable data and reproducibility as standards for scientific validity.

This critique of Jungian psychology also highlights a key limitation of using public opinion for doing boundary-work. Public opinion is inherently subjective, often based on personal experiences and interpretations rather than systematic, scientific inquiry. My approach carries some risk, as it may blur the line between scientific theories and non-

scientific beliefs by relying on emotional responses and personal narratives that do not adhere to the strict standards of empirical testing. Consequently, relying on public opinion to validate concepts like the collective unconscious and archetypes may reinforce their speculative nature rather than establish scientific credibility, complicating efforts to clearly define the boundaries between psychology and spirituality.

Having said that, using public opinion for doing boundary-work does capture a broader range of perspectives and lived experiences that scientific methods might overlook. While subjectivity should never replace objectivity as the standard in psychology, the two can and should complement each other by offering a more holistic understanding of human experience. By engaging with the emotional responses and subjective interpretations of a diverse audience, we can uncover how psychological and spiritual concepts resonate with people across different contexts.

Personal Reflection

I always wondered why topics such as religion and spirituality received so little attention during the bachelor's degree curriculum, which is why I wanted to address this issue in the master thesis. In the first course of the master track, *Conceptual Issues in Psychology*, I gave a presentation on Max Weber's notion of the disenchantment of the world. During the evaluation, *The Red Book* came up as an example of what could be described as "enchanted psychology." Several months later, during the *Boundaries of Psychology* course, I became intrigued by the concept of boundary objects. After putting the two together, my research project was settled: in order to explore the boundary between psychology and spirituality, I was going to frame *The Red Book* as a boundary object.

As soon as I saw the book I realized this was something completely different. For starters, it looked like an ancient manuscript, huge and mysterious, and I really did feel like I was granted access to the restricted section of the university's library. When I opened it, my first thought was how on earth am I going to read *this*. I knew next to nothing about Jung, only the basics, so this book was my introduction into Jungian psychology. After finishing it, I was rather confused. This mind-boggling experience left me with more questions than answers, to put it mildly. I decided to read the rest of his oeuvre as well – but I also wanted to talk about it with other people. Unsurprisingly, not many people had read *The Red Book* in my immediate surroundings, so I started to look elsewhere and stumbled upon Goodreads. After some deliberation, the idea popped up to use the reviews as a platform from which to

explore Jung's spiritual psychology. From then on, the overall objective became to figure out a different way of doing boundary-work.

It has been said that getting lost is not a waste of time. I must confess that it has not been easy to find and stick with an unabridged thread throughout the thesis. On the contrary, many times I found myself digressing so far off the beaten track that I am stunned to have found one at all. There are just so many roads to explore and so much knowledge to digest. Nevertheless, *The Red Book's* enigmatic and immersive character is precisely what makes it such challenging and exciting stuff. And when I finally began reading the reviews on Goodreads, it came as a relief to see that most people struggled with making sense out of what they had read. By situating the book in the agora, so to speak, the research evolved from a solitary endeavour into a collaborative social enterprise. This gave me a boost to carry on and, after much ado, bring it to a close. Whether or not I have been successful in this endeavour is up for the reader to decide. In any case, to me, it was well worth the ride. All that remains is to express my gratitude to everyone for their patience.

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Appendix A – The Thematic Analysis of the Top 250 Reviews on Goodreads

1. Types of Experiences

Theme	Reviews	Percentage	Excerpts
Amazing / Astonishing / Admiring / Awesome	57	22,8 %	22
Complex / Difficult	52	20,8 %	39
Transformative	44	17,6 %	55
Fascinating / Enchanting / Magical	29	11,6 %	21
Personally relevant / Relatable	23	9,2 %	22
Aesthetic / Beautiful	21	8,4 %	9
Enlightening / Profound / Inspiring	17	6,8 %	13
Frightening / Scary / Haunting / Terrifying	17	6,8 %	11
Unique	17	6,8 %	11
Bizarre / Peculiar / Strange / Weird / Mysterious	15	6,0 %	6
Dense	15	6,0 %	8
Intimate / Personal / Private	13	5,2 %	7
Most Important	12	4,8 %	7
Confusing	10	4,0 %	6
Crazy / Insane / Mad	10	4,0 %	10
Medieval	9	3,6 %	5
Must Read	9	3,6 %	2
Brilliant / Genius	8	3,2 %	7
Disappointing	7	2,8 %	7
Psychedelic	6	2,4 %	5
Timely	6	2,4 %	4
Boring	5	2,0 %	4
Dangerous	5	2,0 %	4
Disapproving	5	2,0 %	12
Humorous / Entertaining	5	2,0%	4
Nonsense	5	2,0 %	4
Ambivalent	4	1,6 %	3
Absurd	3	1,2 %	3
Anti-religious	2	0,8 %	2
Anti-Semitic	2	0,8 %	2
Cultic	2	0,8 %	2
Epic	2	0,8 %	1
Frustrating	2	0,8 %	2
Unrateable	2	0,8 %	2

Table 1. Expressions of the reading experience by Goodreads reviewers of *The Red Book*.

2. Types of Classifications

Theme	Reviews	Percentage	Excerpts
Psychology	37	14,8 %	28
Art	30	12,0 %	23

Mythology	28	11,2 %	24
Spirituality	27	10,8 %	23
Literature	20	8,0 %	18
Science	18	7,2 %	17
Philosophy	16	6,4 %	14
Wisdom	8	3,2 %	5

Table 2. Goodreads reviewers' classifications of *The Red Book*.

3. Metaphors used by the Reviewers

Theme	Reviews	Percentage	Excerpts
A Journey / Quest / Trip / Odyssey	33	13,2 %	26
A Secret	9	3,6 %	3
A Treasure	7	2,8 %	1
A Masterpiece	6	2,4 %	0
A Bridge	4	1,6 %	5
A Dive	3	1,2 %	3
A Tool	3	1,2 %	3
An Epic	3	1,2 %	1
A Feeling	2	0,8 %	2
Scripture	2	0,8 %	2

Table 3. Metaphors employed by Goodreads reviewers to describe *The Red Book*.

4. Concepts indicated by the Reviewers

Theme	Reviews	Percentage	Excerpts
The Unconscious	56	22,4 %	39
Images	55	22,0 %	32
Dreams	51	20,4 %	32
The Soul	46	18,4 %	35
Visions	33	13,2 %	14
Madness	30	12,0 %	21
Search for Meaning	27	10,8 %	27
God(s)	26	10,4 %	10
Archetypes	22	8,8 %	13
Fantasies	22	8,8 %	15
Ideas	22	8,8 %	17
Psychoanalysis	19	7,6 %	11
Concepts	18	7,2 %	5
Religion	18	7,2 %	15
Self-Experimentation	18	7,2 %	15
Symbols	18	7,2 %	12
The Self	18	7,2 %	14
Words	18	7,2 %	15
Mysticism	17	6,8 %	16

Active Imaginattion	16	6,4 %	11
Psyche	16	6,4 %	9
Consciousness	14	5,6 %	8
Dialogue	14	5,6 %	11
Reality	14	5,6 %	14
Symbolism	13	5,2 %	7
The Shadow	13	5,2 %	8
War / Destruction	12	4,8 %	4
Culture	11	4,4 %	7
Rationality	11	4,4 %	7
Alchemy	10	4,0 %	3
Devil(s) / Satan	10	4,0 %	8
Good & Evil	10	4,0 %	2
Mandalas	10	4,0 %	4
Stories	10	4,0 %	4
Truth	9	3,6 %	4
Descent	8	3,2 %	5
Drugs	8	3,2 %	9
Esotericism	8	3,2 %	5
Hinduism	8	3,2 %	3
Imagination	8	3,2 %	6
Individuation	8	3,2 %	4
Opposites [Enantiodromia]	8	3,2 %	3
Magic	8	3,2 %	9
Antiquity	7	2,8 %	4
Creativity	7	2,8 %	5
Gnosticism	7	2,8 %	1
Introspection	7	2,8 %	7
Orientalism	7	2,8 %	1
Sleep / Nightmares	7	2,8 %	6
Anima / Animus	6	2,4 %	4
Light & Darkness	6	2,4 %	2
Loneliness	6	2,4 %	4
Meditation	6	2,4 %	2
The Spirit of the Times and the Spirit of the Depths	6	2,4 %	2
Synchronicity	6	2,4 %	3
Awareness	5	2,0 %	3
Emotion	5	2,0 %	5
Order & Chaos	5	2,0 %	1
Prophecy	5	2,0 %	5
Suffering	5	2,0 %	5
Theology	5	2,0 %	2
Abraxas	4	1,6 %	1
Hallucinations	4	1,6 %	4
Imitation	4	1,6 %	2

Isolation	4	1,6 %	1
Love	4	1,6 %	1
Metaphysics	4	1,6 %	4
Therapy	4	1,6 %	4
Buddhism	3	1,2 %	2
Death	3	1,2 %	1
Feminity & Masculinity	3	1,2 %	0
Middle Age / Midlife [Metanoia]	3	1,2 %	5
Misogynism	3	1,2 %	3
The Persona	3	1,2 %	1
Tarot	3	1,2 %	1
Intuition	2	0,8 %	2
Occultism	2	0,8 %	0
Psychiatry	2	0,8 %	2
Rebellion	2	0,8 %	3
Transcendence	2	0,8 %	2

Table 4. Key Concepts identified by Goodreads reviewers to describe the essence of the *The Red Book*.

5. Advice from the Reviewers

Theme	Reviews	Percentage	Excerpts
Re-read	28	11,2 %	12
Commitment	27	10,8 %	23
Read Slowly	26	10,4 %	9
Don't Start with the Red Book	9	3,6 %	4
Intellectual Exploration	8	3,2 %	6
Small Doses	7	2,8 %	1
Make Notes	6	2,4 %	3
Take Care	2	0,8 %	2

Table 5. Advice from Goodreads reviewers regarding *The Red Book*.

6. Comments regarding Jung

Theme	Reviews	Percentage	Excerpts
Personality / Sanity	40	16,0 %	39
Legacy	9	3,6 %	7
Reputation	7	2,8 %	4
Critique	6	2,4 %	7

Table 6. Comments made by the Goodreads reviewers regarding Carl Jung.

7. Miscellaneous

Theme	Reviews	Percentage	Excerpts
Content	37	14,8 %	37
Publication	29	11,6 %	12
Introduction	21	8,4 %	4

Size	20	8,0 %	6
Calligraphy	18	7,2 %	5
Intended Audience	18	7,2 %	12
Translation(s)	17	6,8 %	1
Footnotes	13	5,2 %	4
Cost	12	4,8 %	2
Lab-like Quality	12	4,8 %	8
Media	11	4,4 %	5
The Reader's Edition	11	4,4 %	2
Seminality	9	3,6 %	2
Historical Context	8	3,2 %	2
Colors	7	2,8 %	2
Unfinished	6	2,4 %	1
DNR: Did Not Read	5	2,0 %	3
DNF: Did Not Finish	4	1,6 %	1
Paper / Parchment	3	1,2 %	3
Appendixes	2	0,8 %	1
Audiobook	2	0,8 %	1
Group Reading	2	0,8 %	2

Table 7. Themes indicated by the reviewers that didn't fit in one of the other categories.

Appendix B – A Selection of Excerpts from the Content Analysis

Reviewer #1 (5 stars, 152 likes):

On the whole, the book seems to be Jung's attempt to reconcile the scientific with the mythic and spiritual, the personal with collective, and as such could not be more timely than to finally see the light of people's eyes.

As a writer interested in the use of dreams and personal narratives, as well as having taken this process to my own experimental, revelatory, self-mythology and understand the danger of attempting vs. the incredibly potent imagery that can come out of such a process, I suspect that *Liber Novus* may have far reaching cultural effects that we can only begin to image.

I finally started reading the text of Jung's *Red Book* last night, and it is as revelatory, revolutionary, and vitally important as I suspected it would be, not just in terms of Jung's psychological theories but in taking a stance for a broader spiritual approach to reality that is even more lacking now than when Jung was writing.

Reviewer #2 (5 stars, 137 likes):

Only a few books read in a lifetime actually change you. Can you honestly say you are a different person after the work is absorbed? I feel that my cells have been re-charged with a new vitality.

I put aside writing and other projects and devoted my spare time to *the Red Book*. Some of the text is heady, analytical stuff to slog through, but much of it is hilarious. Jung's encounters with his soul, Salome, and other mythic beings inside his unconscious read like epic spats, with lots of grumbling and cajoling.

Inspired by Jung's process of "active imagination," I opened my mind and heart to encounter what I might find in my own deep unconscious. Fascinated, frightened and yet determined to uncover what was lurking inside, driving my judgments and conflicts, I spent 4 months in my own "depths." This process opened a deep, sobering vein of understanding and growth. It's the best work I've ever done, without a therapist or guru – only *the Red Book* as a road map.

Reviewer #4 (4 stars, 33 likes):

This book is so personal and ephemeral, a Blakean diary of personal discovery, completely inside one man's symbol system, written for himself ... It's already

inspired me to go back to keeping a dream journal, to think of what my own "*Red Book*" would be.

Meeting the soul, meeting the anima/animus, it's the laboratory of Jung's own theories – and like a live album, there's a lot of drum solos. Yet it's remarkable to see the naked material arising, see him struggle with the contents of his own psyche before it's all processed and theorized.

Reviewer #7 (5 stars, 26 likes):

I have no idea how to rank this book, nor am I even quite sure what the hell I read ... However, one thing is certain, the experience was powerful, and the impact of the combination of the hand lettering, calligraphy and the careful illuminations with a bewildering flood of psychic imagery is something not to be forgotten.

Reviewer #10 (5 stars, 21 likes):

As he stated in the preface, Jung felt as if his "confrontations with his subconscious" affected his work for the rest of his life. It is a fascinating, little-examined side of a man who has had a huge effect on psychology and is credited, by some, as being one of the leading figures of the New Age movement.

[The reviewer ends with the following passage from the *Red Book*, p. 240 of the Hardcover edition:]

To this my soul spoke a word that roused my anger: "My light is not of this world." I cried, "I know of no other world." The soul answered, "Should it not exist because you know nothing of it?"

Reviewer #12 (1 star, 15 likes):

There's no way to sugar-coat this book. It's written by somebody with an unhealthy relationship to reality.

Jung tries to make myths real and creates an incoherent collective unconsciousness and makes it real, while I say our myths separate us from each other and their beliefs reinforce the cult of the oneness and sameness and give credence to those who want revenge and retribution since they cannot find meaning within their own life and must outsource their meaning to myths, or magic, collective unconsciousness, or in this case all three.

Fascism at its core needs myths (lies) that separate us and allows the in-group to feel superior to others while not actually being superior since for a fascist hating makes them feel superior not be superior and it is always about their feelings not reality.

Jung, clearly, gives an opening for fascist thinking in this book by placing truth at a focal point outside of us hidden in the ether discoverable with magic or feelings accessible in dreams or with an aid of an analytical-psychologist or otherwise part of his mumbo-jumbo feeling based path to truth that is nothing but speculation or experiences stripped from rational, logical or analytical reasoning. For Jung: science bad, feelings good.

This book espouses rubbish and had to be written mostly as a series of dreams or fantasies in order to cover-up the real inanity that is within it.

Reviewer #13 (no rating, 14 likes):

Quite literally the best self-help book I have ever lain my eyes on.

This book will give us tools in order to live in a more concordant manner with our inward self. Not only that, but from the way it is narrated, its mysticism with desert, jungle, sea imageries, and its cohesion all along added an exotic charm during the reading experience, as well as intellectual stimulation to reason out these puzzling figures. Moreover, this puzzling narration indirectly constrains the reader to look into himself, in order to decipher the meanings depicted.

C. Jung's method to trigger the unconscious of his audience is by attempting the artificial creation of a soul in a textual medium: the richness of the book comes from this atmosphere whose origins are known to 1/8th and unknown to 7/8th ... The world would be such a better place for all humans if everyone did an effort to thoroughly understand their psychology and inner self.

[The reviewer uses several passages from the *Red Book*. Here is one of them, p. 266:]

Without the depths, I do not have the heights. I may be on the heights, but precisely because of that I do not become aware of the heights. I therefore need the bottommost for my renewal.

Reviewer #15 (5 stars, 13 likes):

Jung was often challenged by his own unconscious, as he himself would put it, hearing voices and seeing visions. This book is a record of one of those periods. Jung's art through the book is quite beautiful; it also important to the writing, as one

of his beliefs was that art is a healing tool to be used. The calligraphy to die for. His message through history important.

[The reviewer begins with the following passage from Jung's book *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, p. 66:]

All the works of man have their origin in creative fantasy. What right have we then to depreciate imagination?

[The reviewer ends with the following passage from the book *C. G. Jung Speaking: Interviews and Encounters* (1987), pp. 451-452:]

Even a happy life cannot be without a measure of darkness, and the word happy would lose its meaning if it were not balanced by sadness. It is far better to take things as they come along with patience and equanimity.

Reviewer #18 (5 stars, 10 likes):

Would you like to take a spiral staircase down to the realm of the soul? Because, in a nutshell, that is what Jung has done in these pages.

In the *Red Book*, Jung has willingly entered into the realm of the unconscious and into conversations with his soul (he used his own "active imagination" method for access). And he called it "my most difficult experiment." *The Red Book* was unpublished during his lifetime and after his death kept in a vault. Jung considered it his most important work, though only a few had actually read it. He was concerned about the implications for his reputation. It's quite an incredible reading experience and one I recommend for those of you interested in spirituality or psychology.

Much of the *Red Book* went right over my head! There are so many characters, symbols, figures. To fully grasp its meaning, a guidebook could help. I didn't have one, so I just carefully and slowly read the pages! Its 100 page plus intro helped me and is excellent as background! I believe *the Red Book* will go down in history as one of the most important works of literature from the 20th century.

[The reviewer ends with the following quote from the *Red Book*, p. 238:]

If you enter 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.]

Reviewer #22 (5 stars, 7 likes):

This book is one of the most important documents on the soul of the twentieth century. For anyone interested in psychology it is a must-read.

Reviewer #24 (5 stars, 5 likes):

The writing tone of this work highly contrasts that of his books and lectures, being more an attempt at creative literature or myth, much in the same way that Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* contrasts with the writing style of his normal rhetoric. Jung seems to have been embarrassed at the thought of publishing this, either because it wasn't on par with creative writings of professional novelists, poets, and artists or because it would negatively affect the way the professional psychological publications of his were treated from then on out. So at his wishes, the publication of this book was delayed for a long time after his death.

In the realm of Jungian psychology the term "active imagination" sometimes comes up and traces its root to the process that Jung himself began a hundred years ago when he started working on this book. It is a form of creative exploration of unconscious contents of the human mind in which one is totally absorbed in the process of a creative waking fantasy or daydream. It can be used in therapy or for the psychologist's personal exploratory purposes, however the latter seems to be a less popular approach to psychologists outside of the whole Carl Jung and William James schools of thought (those that wish to maintain a safe and scientifically immune & observable distance from the unpredictable realm of direct experience with the unconscious).

Though the text seems to move slow at times and is hard to perceive the plot and direction he's taking, the story does evolve meaningfully and ends with a philosophically stimulating set of speeches that constitute a nice ending ... Combine the length of the book with the slower, more absorbing rhythm required for reading highly-annotated mythological & philosophical text and it could be a long (though enjoyable) read.

I believe this book is a worthwhile read for those who enjoy psychology, mythology, and philosophy ... It's the type of book that ventures some profound ideas (or re-packages them in modern terms) and more than anything else has value to those who wish to see the results (from a psychotherapist perspective) of someone who practiced and grew proficient in a technique that actively engages the unconscious mind.

Reviewer #28 (5 stars, 5 likes):

To all appearances, the work of an exorcist possessed by the devil; theological scrolls and mythological delusions abound in this inspired manuscript, filled with alchemical symbols and mandalas. Left unpublished until 2009, for fear it would ruin Jung's reputation (I don't even know), at last we can enjoy the best graphic novel of all time.

Plot: "*Sometimes we accomplish our greatest deeds in our dreams*" [quote from the *Red Book*, p. 242]. It's true and he proves it.

Reviewer #29 (5 stars, 5 likes):

One of the most important literature/psychology books in history. Mysterious, spiritual, scientific, intimate, calming and confusing as well. Jung's book puts me in direct confrontation with my individual unconscious and our collective unconscious all at once ... With this book, something mysterious, dense, and confusing happened to me, a man who is translating one of Wittgenstein's austere books... a dream that woke me up in terror... and its most delicate part literally came true...

Reviewer #33 (4 stars, 4 likes):

Carl Jung is an encyclopaedia like none I have ever encountered in my life, and the legacy he left in psychology and on me personally will remain eternally. If I must summarize his legacy in one sentence, I would say that the greatest thing Carl offered to humanity, and psychology specifically, is his deep artistic and scientific analysis and critique of mythology, medieval sciences such as alchemy, and religions. Some may ask what is unique about this? Many people have studied these things, and my answer to this question is that what distinguishes Carl from others is his ability to take everything mentioned above and place it within a purely psychological framework. Carl somehow discovered the spiritual dimensions and bonds that connect mythology, religions, and medieval sciences to the human psyche.

Reviewer #34 (5 stars, 4 likes):

Astounding. I found myself investing a lot of myself into Jung's journey through the unconscious, and like many other reviewers, have found myself affected on a deep level after taking the journey. A deep, mesmerising account of the figures and archetypes met by Jung, over the course of several years, a combination of visions, dreams, fantasies and allegory woven together into a rich, moving, living work. This is not like most of Jung's work, so anybody expecting an analytical or "clinical" approach to Jung's concepts and discoveries may be caught off guard, but they certainly will not be disappointed. Reading more like something from the Mystery

Schools of ages past, I recommend the *Red Book* to any student or casual reader of Jung ... A masterpiece.

Reviewer #37 (5 stars, 4 likes):

I have read Jung all my life and have written a lot about him. I had always remained very cold when I read parts of the *Red Book*. I finally decided to read it in its entirety and continue to be puzzled. Of course, I found traces of the origin (in the form of visions) of many Jungian concepts: soul, shadow, Self, etc. However, beyond the curiosity towards such a unique work, I have found nothing new and fundamental in terms of content. The *Red Book* is a kind of filter through which a series of texts have "entered" into Jung's work: Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*, Goethe's *Faust*, Dante's *Divine Comedy*, and so on. But is it really worth reading? For a Jungian scholar, yes. For anyone else, I don't think so. It's like reading an ancient Gnostic text of which you ignore the key.

Reviewer #47 (3 stars, 3 likes):

A fascinating book that I found... remedial. Remedial? Really? Yes! While this is the man – half philosopher, half mystic – who provided us with many of the concepts we use today to explain consciousness and spirituality; and this is the man who entered the ring against that titan Sigmund Freud to convince him that psychoanalysis had a place for the concept of the soul, I wonder how on earth did his most private musings, his dream journal, his doodles of his inner fantasies – how did they end up sounding so *basic*?

I blame Carl Gustav's very own genius. His ideas were so revolutionary and efficient they have permeated our culture to the core. By becoming part of how we think his projections have become flesh and evolved beyond him. Locked away for 80 years in a dark vault they have been outstripped, superseded, redundered [made redundant?]; reduced to mere archaeology. This book is a children's primer for our 21st century psycho-spiritually literate world.

Truly, Jung was a giant upon whose shoulders we all stand.

Reviewer #50 (2 stars, 3 likes):

Carl Jung is a leader in psychology, but here he writes without any constraints. You feel that he extends the hand of his mind to his heart, and he brings out anything he finds and writes it down. He is one of the few willing to go to the broken places within themselves. And his book is more like a private notebook for documenting excavations within the unconscious mind. In other words, it resembles an open-heart surgery. Even he knows that it will appear like either delirium, dream, intoxication, or madness.

I admire him, the idea of diving into the depths, and the story of the book remained a secret until it was published by his descendants. However, I did not like to content of the book, its symbolism, its length.

Reviewer #55 (4 stars, 2 likes):

The Red Book afflicted me with a mental fever for several days. Carl Jung delved into the depths of his psyche, excavating and searching for the accumulations of his unconscious. He conversed with his inner characters, close to the multiple aspects of his unconscious, in dialogues resembling imaginary plays, so to understand and interpret himself and reach his self, his true self. And to reconcile the spirit of the times with the spirit of the depths, since it seemed as if there was an unpaid debt between them.

Reviewer #60 (5 stars, 2 likes):

I have it. It's at home, it's big, it's heavy, it's red. I'm reading it now and it will probably stay with me for the rest of my life, which I hope will last a long time. I had some fear of entering it. Deep respect for the tremendous journey that Jung undertook with himself. For what he faced and overcame he turned into precious knowledge for all those who approach his world of thought. It cannot be rated. You cannot give a grade to a man's soul.

Reviewer #62 (5 stars, 2 likes):

One of the most influential books I have ever read in my life. I wrote my M.A. thesis of some 70 pages on the book, therefore I shall leave the abstract of it here in case someone who sees this wishes to read an academic exploration into the mystical world of the *Red Book*.

[Here follows an excerpt from the abstract:]

I believe that the *Red Book* entails Jung's individualized initiation ritual which leads to psychological wholeness and well-being through trials of imagination. Jung constructed a “personal cosmology” to create symbolic meaning for the visionary experience which nearly made him lose his sanity. The *Red Book* does not imply a particular religious worldview but highlights the importance of intuitive forms of knowledge which Jung sought to connect with the divine image of the Self.

Reviewer #69 (5 stars, 2 likes):

A descent into madness. It took me more than half a year to finish this book – the content is so dense that I regularly had to put the book aside after reading a few

paragraphs and analyze. It is a must read - the work illustrates a general pattern for deep introspective experience.

Reviewer #70 (3 stars, 2 likes):

Very difficult to get through for the sheer bizarreness of it. It is great in that it grants the reader access to the thought processes of a great mind, but the content is just so distant from my view of reality that it was difficult to force myself to follow his stream of thought.

Reviewer #80 (5 stars, 1 like):

I started reading this book pushed by mere curiosity, and I had no expectations of what it might have been. I knew Carl Jung by fame, but I never had the pleasure of reading any of his works, nor do I have a formal education in psychology, therefore I sometimes had to ask my therapist for technical clarifications.

It initially felt like a giant WTF, but it turned out to be the most incredible mind-blow I have ever experienced ... The *Red Book* is not just a work of art; it is also a deeply spiritual and psychological exploration. It documents Jung's spiritual journey, as he grapples with the deepest questions of human existence and seeks to understand the forces that drive us all.

Jung believed that the images and symbols in the book represented archetypes that were present in the collective unconscious. By exploring these archetypes through his art and writing, Jung was able to tap into a deep well of wisdom and insight that he believed could help us all live more meaningful and fulfilling lives.

Carl Jung's *Red Book* is a truly remarkable work that offers a window into the mind of one of the greatest thinkers and even if you are simply someone who is interest in exploring the depths of the human soul, this is a must-read.

Reviewer #84 (5 stars, 1 like):

Not necessarily a recommendation, it reads like a modern religious text where the message is obscured by esotericism, mysticism, and symbolism. A marvellously written encouragement and warning for self-reflection, with all the pitfalls that come with it. The saying goes that there's a fine line between genius and insanity, and this book is the ultimate example hereof, so much so that you sometimes wonder whether Jung is having a psychosis, is deriving insight from a dream, or is constructing an (all but elusive) analogy.

Reviewer #86 (no rating, 1 like):

This was excruciatingly difficult reading for me. I'm not familiar enough with Christianity to grasp the meaning behind all those complex symbolisms. Thus, I felt utterly lost throughout the whole book. And this is quite frustrating too, considering how much I like reading Jung. Not this time. Not for me.

Reviewer #88 (5 stars, 1 like):

One step closer to my soul, two steps further away from my sanity. I recommend that the reader proceeds with bare and teeny-tiny steps to avoid getting lost.

Reviewer #98 (4 stars, 1 like):

Enter at your own risk. If you have a full-time job, it's probably not time to open this book unless you are looking to appreciate it as poetry. If you take this book seriously you just might find a portal to another dimension, and it just may scare the shit out of you. This is a book about introspection into the soul, about unravelling the shadow and shining light on it: a book for the lost soul or the retired sage. If you look deeply, you will find many working parts inside of you... This book encourages you to fall apart so you can put the pieces back together comprehensively. This was not the intent of the author, but in describing his own visionary experience, he sheds light on universal archetypes that live within us all and it tugs at your curiosity to explore. Just... be safe, and don't dive in without something that makes you feel safe and protected unless you want to demolish your psyche for a while.

Reviewer #121 (3 stars, 1 like):

The man was filled with brilliant concepts and thoughts. If you appreciated him for his clinical insights into the human mind, DON'T read this book looking for "more." It is like a mystical diary a 14-year-old wants his grandchildren to find after he is dead.

Reviewer #149 (5 stars, 1 like):

A gift for the soul. A treasure of a book. Jung revealing his raw soul with mind-blowing awareness of the "holotropic" nature of inner reality and its analogue outer. It was worth the wait.

Reviewer #176 (5 stars, no likes):

When Carl Jung embarked on an extended period of self-exploration he called it his "confrontation with the unconscious," the heart of it was the *Red Book*, a large, illuminated

volume he created between 1914 and 1930. Here he developed his principle theories – of the archetypes, the collective unconscious, and the process of individuation – that transformed psychotherapy from a practice concerned with treatment of the sick into a means for higher development of the personality.

While Jung considered the *Red Book* to be his most important work, only a handful of people have ever seen it. Now, in a complete facsimile and translation, it is available to scholars and the general public. It is an astonishing example of calligraphy and art on par with the *Book of Kells* and the illuminated manuscripts of William Blake. This publication of the *Red Book* is a watershed that will cast new light on the making of modern psychology.

[The reviewer begins with the following passage from Jung's Collected Works #16, *The Spirit in Man, Art, and Literature*, pp. 82-83]

That is the secret of great art, and of its effect upon us. The creative process, so far as we are able to follow it at all, consists in the unconscious activation of an archetypal image, and in elaborating and shaping this image into the finished work. By giving it shape, the artist translates it into the language of the present, and so makes it possible for us to find our way back to the deepest springs of life. Therein lies the social significance of art: it is constantly at work educating the spirit of the age, conjuring up the forms in which the age is most lacking. The unsatisfied yearning of the artist reaches back to the primordial image in the unconscious which is best fitted to compensate the inadequacy and one-sidedness of the present. The artist seizes on this image, and in raising it from deepest unconsciousness he brings it into relation with conscious values, thereby transforming it until it can be accepted by the minds of his contemporaries according to their powers.

[The reviewer further quotes the following lines from Jung's famous interview with John Freeman for the BBC television programme *Face to Face*, recorded at his house in Küsnacht in 1959. Freeman asked Jung when he first felt consciousness of his individual self. Jung replied:]

That was in my eleventh year. There I suddenly was on my way to school I stepped out of a mist. It was just as if I had been in a mist, walking in a mist, and I stepped out of it and I knew, "I am." "I am what I am." And then I thought, "But what have I been before?" And then I found that I had been in a mist, not knowing to differentiate my self from things; I was just one thing among many things.

Reviewer #178 (4 stars):

Liber Novus is his idea of daydreaming or active imagination as he called it. Now for me or you, it might be dreaming about that girl or what we will have for lunch. But Jung was no

ordinary person, being a history and alchemy nerd and polyglot; throughout his life, he amassed vast knowledge about the human condition across much of history that, in many cases, and like to most of us, ended up laying deep in his subconscious. Processed by his immense mind and soul. Available but not necessarily accessible.

It came to him through this process of active imagination, in a form of entities like Soul, Philemon, and others. They delved into a discussion that led Jung to self-individualization and could serve to any of us as a blueprint to do the same. A very powerful and complex tool...

As for me, I won't say that even remotely I understood the content of his book. I can only say that some of the ideas felt seen somewhere else and said in a more "scientific" fashion... Jung was speaking like a man from the beginning of the last century, but I was getting a feeling that he was just asking us to remember the forgotten. That throughout history, we understood everything already, and now just need a proper way to tell that story.

In many ways, we cut ourselves off from it due to our beliefs, relationships, social norms, and so on. But by doing so we lose much of our weight as a whole person, we become the living dead, unable to take everything that we can be. Jung was in deep discussion with friends from the subconscious about how to shatter these chains, and obviously, he succeeded.

Reviewer #179 (5 stars):

So, this book is about Carl Jung's journey to discover his soul, where he becomes Christ, goes through hell, and spends a lot of time with the devil and dead people. So, yeah, it's quite deep.

For me, reading it at a time of personal crisis, it did take on a lot of meaning. At the heart of it is self-acceptance, and also accepting humanity and the duality of human nature, and the course of world events.

[The reviewer uses several passages from the *Red Book*. Here is one of them, p. 283:]

This tangible and apparent world is one reality, but fantasy is the other reality. So long as we leave the God outside us apparent and tangible, he is unbearable and hopeless. But if we turn the God into fantasy, he is in us and is easy to bear. The God outside us increases the weight of everything heavy, while the God within us lightens everything heavy.

Reviewer #187 (5 stars):

Qualifying the *Red Book* with a single adjective is a daunting task, yet it could be described as eye-opening. This unique masterpiece unveils the development of his own method known as "active imagination," a process involving the interaction of the subject with elements of their personal and collective unconscious – the latter taking centre stage. Archetypes, independent structure free from conscious action, are exposed and inquired rather than interpreted ... The fascinating fact is that the *Red Book* is Jung's self-application of this method!

This is a grand book in the best sense of the word, worthy of a true lover of literature and science. It's enchanting and extremely relevant, a gem beyond comparison.

Reviewer #189 (5 stars):

Life-changing. The realest book I've ever read ... His vast knowledge of world mythology and his constant references to ancient legends and myths add a thick layer of meaning to the already enchanting dialogues. What manages to capture me the most however, is the fact that this book was never fundamentally meant to be read by others. Jung was apparently very apprehensive about letting people read his personal journals when he was still alive.

It's brutally honest, deeply personal, vastly more poetic and imaginative than his scholarly work, and without a single shred of pretence in any of the words. This book at its core is nothing more than an extraordinary knowledgeable man trying to come to terms with the fundamental questions of his own life and existence, but the way he manages to translate those matters into fantastic stories and poetry is truly inspiring and motivating. In a world of philosophers trying to define the world around them, it is refreshing to read about the findings of a man who tried to define himself instead.

[The reviewer begins with the following passage from the *Red Book*, p. 277:]

On this way, no one walks behind me, and I cross no one's path. I am alone, but I fill my solitariness with my life. I am man enough, I am noise, conversation, comfort, and help enough unto myself. And so I wander to the far East. Not that I know anything about what my distant goal might be. I see blue horizons before me: they suffice as a goal. I hurry toward the East and my rising – I will my rising.

Reviewer #190 (3 stars):

This is more a reference book for any die-hard Jung fan but really not to be read cover to cover, because it's unintelligible for the most part.

Some have called Jung insane after reading his visions. He believed himself to be a prophet no less than the Buddha or Muhammed, however he was very selective as to whom he let that claim be heard. He was also very concerned throughout his career about being demeaned as well as being called a crank. So, this explains why this book was never allowed to be published during his lifetime; only a handful of his closest friends were allowed to read it or obtain copies of it. No wonder!

I'm curious as to what modern shrinks have to say about Jung's mind after reading this. He couldn't have been a "schizo," because he was so well functioning. So, could he have used drugs to induce these long and detailed visions? Or maybe he really was a living and breathing seer or prophet, as he himself secretly believed?

Reviewer #191 (5 stars):

I was not a reader of Jung or really had much interest in psychology, but I had started down this path after facing my own darkness. Although it may sound pretentious, I am not sure this book will be fully appreciated unless one has done this themselves. I only say this as I would never have understood or appreciated this book 3 years ago. It took a winding path down spiritual/personal crisis, Stoicism, Taoism, books by [Alan] Watts and conversations with a great friend and mentor before I was even remotely capable of understanding. Read this book to supplement your own journey, and to learn from the wisdom of those that went before.

[The reviewer ends with the following passage from the *Red Book*, p. 231:]

Believe me: It is no teaching and no instruction that I give you. On what basis should I presume to teach you? I give you news on the way of this man, but not of your own path. My path is not your path, therefore I cannot teach you. The way is within us, but not in Gods, nor in teaching, nor in laws. Within us is the way, the truth, and the life.

[Woe betide those who live by way of examples! Life is not with them. If you live according to an example, you thus live the life of that example, but who should live your own life if not yourself? So live yourselves.]

Reviewer #197 (5 stars):

Read carefully, with an open mind, this book can have similar consequences to that of a psychedelic trip. I mean consequence in the most ambiguous way. It could provoke a metamorphosis in the reader, it could strike them with awe, it could scare them, it could be scoffed at, or it could be completely invalidated via dubious means of lacking "sobriety."

Common criticisms I've seen for the material found is the lack of validity, Jung's turbulent mental health stemming from a critical period, the lack of "science" etc. It's very easy to brush this book off as woo-woo or crazy ramblings. I get it, it's the safest position to take for both yourself and for common interpretations of reality (particularly scientism and materialist views). Personally, I disagree with that take and believe it stems from an initial position of defence.

I think there is an abundance of wisdom and truly special insight into the multi-faceted mechanisms of the psyche. Here Jung ties together his extensive knowledge of various cultures and traditions to explain some of his experiences. I assume most of the experiences described in the book are because of this rich knowledge, with all characters originating in mythology. Due to this, the red book is almost analogous to a jigsaw puzzle that we get to watch Jung solve and interpret.

No matter your view, you can definitely gain from reading this book, even if you fundamentally disagree with some of the interpretations; witnessing an empiricist dissect these spiritual and seemingly insane experiences is so very valuable.

Reviewer #198 (3 stars):

The father of analytical psychology demonstrates his technique by example and reveals the source of his insights. Through fantastic encounters with mythological archetypes and personified elements of the subconscious, Jung finds a path to individuation – to wholeness and freedom – through his own symbols.

This was my first read of Jung's work, and although I found it fascinating, it was very difficult to finish. I found the thick Christian themes alienating. Only the expansive footnotes saved me from shelving the rest of his work, as they revealed his public writings to be far more generalizable. That said, the months I spent plodding through this text were not wasted, not at all.

For me, Jung's key insight seems to be full acceptance of consciousness, including the mystery and darkness of the subconscious. Whatever we deny, we blindly serve; and the only path to freedom is to open our eyes to our subconscious masters, to confront them, and to absorb them.

[The reviewer adds the following passage from the *Red Book*, p. 233:]

[The spirit of the depths even taught me to consider my action and my decision as dependent on dreams. Dreams pave the way for life, and they determine you without you understanding

their language. One would like to learn this language, but who can teach and learn it? Scholarliness is not enough; there is a knowledge of the heart that gives deeper insight.]

The knowledge of the heart is in no book and is not to be found in the mouth of any teacher, but grows out of you like the green seed from the dark earth.

[Scholarliness belongs to the spirit of this time, but this spirit in no way grasps the dream, since the soul is everywhere that scholarly knowledge is not.]

[The reviewer ends with the following passage from the *Red Book*, p. 264:]

[If you remain within arbitrary and artificially created boundaries, you will walk as between two high walls: you do not see the immensity of the world. But if you break down the walls that confine your view, and if the immensity and its endless uncertainty inspire you with fear, then the ancient sleeper awakens in you, whose messenger is the white bird. Then you need the message of the old tamer of chaos.]

There in the whirl of chaos dwells eternal wonder.

[Your world begins to become wonderful. Man belongs not only to an ordered world, he also belongs in the wonder-world of his soul. Consequently you must make your ordered world horrible, so that you are put off by being too much outside yourself.]

Your soul is in great need, because drought weighs on its world. If you look outside yourselves, you see the far-off forest and mountains, and above them your vision climbs to the realms of the stars. And if you look into yourselves, you will see on the other hand the nearby as far-off and infinite, since the world of the inner is as infinite as the world of the outer. Just as you become a part of the manifold essence of the world through your bodies, so you become a part of the manifold essence of the inner world through your soul. This inner world is truly infinite, in no way poorer than the outer one. Man lives in two worlds. A fool lives here or there, but never here and there.]

Reviewer #199 (5 stars):

I cannot praise this work highly enough. While a conscious act to create this work, he braved letting his subconscious speak and let it flow without editing and as you will see, sometimes he let himself be led to the verge of madness. For someone in this century with scientific training and academic reputation to give themselves to esoteric methods is astounding.

[The reviewer ends with the epilogue of the *Red Book*, written by Jung in 1959, p. 360:]

I worked on this book for 16 years. My acquaintance with alchemy in 1930 took me away from it. The beginning of the end came in 1928, when Wilhelm sent me the text of the "Golden Flower," an alchemical treatise. There the contents of this book found their way into actuality and I could no longer continue working on it. To the superficial observer, it will appear like madness. It would also have developed into one, had I not been able to absorb the overpowering force of the original experiences. With the help of alchemy, I could finally arrange them into a whole.

I always knew that these experiences contained something precious, and therefore I knew of nothing better than to write them down in a "precious," that is to say, costly book and to paint the images that emerged through reliving it all – as well as I could. I knew how frightfully inadequate this undertaking was, but despite much work and many distractions I remained true to it, even if another possibility never...

Reviewer #203 (5 stars):

I began reading Jung's *Red Book* in the middle of the Covid-19 pandemic after tumbling down rabbit holes within rabbit holes. Looking back, there's no way I could've prepared for what was written in these pages – but as the book came to a close, it felt like maybe the timing of this was never a coincidence. In many ways, this book has been medicine. One unlike anything I've ever experienced.

Mythos, psyche, amigo, light, dark, devils and serpents, mothers, magicians and the God Head. This is the odyssey of the soul, and nothing less. How Jung was able to reach so deep, I will never understand in my lifetime. No written review by me will come close to sufficient, but I'm forever grateful for the painful, laborious, and brutally honest exploration within the *Red Book* and the doorway it's opened.

Reviewer #204 (4 stars):

This book is worth reading for the novel experience alone. A dive into the depths of another's subconsciousness which can't help but cause the reader to simultaneously dive into their own subconsciousness. The writing is dreamlike yet heavy, like Alice in Wonderland stumbled into the Bible.

The most obvious differentiator between the *Red Book* and other philosophical ramblings are the large swaths of atmospheric imagery that often border on incomprehensible. I highly recommend finding a version of the book that includes Jung's drawings. Somehow between this maddening imagery and preachy ponderings a twilight zone emerges. A gem of an idea

will briefly emerge bearing some truly unique insights on human spirituality. These moments are what make the journey of reading this book worth it.

Reviewer #206 (2 stars):

I go into the work trying as hard as I can to be a believer, but Jung's *Red Book* demands a lot. This is not theory, it is instruction. Not psychology, but religion. And finally not very helpful, although Jung warns us that this text is his *Red Book* and if we want to progress through our... um schizophrenia... into self-actualization, then (as he advised many of his patients) we ought to make our own *Red Book*, based on our own experiences, dreams, and active imaginations.

The project, exploring the collective unconscious through visionary meditation and the creation of an illuminated manuscript, is not an all-out failure; but it never really justifies itself. Like many indulgent, aphoristic cult texts, it's mostly truism with sprinklings of absurdity. This is perhaps the safest cult text I've read, but it does leave me convinced that Jung did not fully transcend his schizophrenia. Analytical psychology is a cult, and all comparative mythology is a little fascist.

Reviewer #214 (5 stars):

One of the most difficult books I have read, in every sense of the phrase. Jung writes in a way that makes words crack, bend, and sometimes break under the strain of thought (to borrow some lines from Eliot).

This book is not the sort to inspire a way of life. Far from it, I think it would be very unwise to build one's life around it. Yet it is a very *arresting* work of art. It taps into the deep-rooted affinity human beings have for the spiritual – and sometimes teaches lessons through the horror and revulsion that only the spiritual dimension can inspire.

Reviewer #215 (3 stars):

What the actual f*ck. I love Jung and his teachings, definitely an interesting dude. This book is his account of his own descent into madness and boy, is it hard to follow. You get all sorts of interesting glimpses into his mind and... I don't know how to explain it. I would recommend a summary of what goes on in this book because, yikes. As for the actual content, I loved it.

[The reviewer ends with the following “fun quote” from the *Red Book*, p. 308:]

There is only one way and that is your way; there is only one salvation and that is your salvation. Why are you looking around for help? Do you believe that help will come from outside? What is to come is created in you and from you. Hence look into yourself Do not compare, do not measure. No other way is Wee yours. All other ways deceive and tempt you. You must fulfill the way that is in you.

Reviewer #217 (5 stars):

This is a documentation of a series of experiences; studying the *Red Book* leads to several discoveries about Jung, myself, and others. One of the most significant points is meta: revisiting what one has written. Re-read your own notes of study from the past. And if you get inspired while re-reading to illustrate: DO IT. Expressing your re-experiences processed through a visual, non-language area of your mind has a strange, transforming effect. This is one of the miraculous take-aways of the *Red Book* I have in my notes.

Reviewer #220 (5 stars):

This book is grand, mystical, and difficult; a religious journey of Jung inside his universe and at the same time – an exploration of something bigger than our short life, something on the edge between artistic literature and the exploration of inner space.

Reviewer #226 (5 stars):

The *Red Book* is not a rational book to read, one does not remember the content of the book after reading it. I cannot explain what the book is about. It is like a dream, an extended dream, one does not remember dreams easily. It is more a feeling. Jung explores his unconscious through a form of free association, he allowed his imagination freedom to talk about any subject. One needs to read the *Red Book* to understand it. There is more to reality in life than rational consciousness. Reading Jung is truly life changing.

Reviewer #227 (5 stars):

A reference work that immerses us in the psyche of C. Jung, a pioneer of psychoanalysis, who relates here his inner journey to discover the depths of his unconscious. With this account, C. Jung invites us to explore in our turn what remains in the shadow of our consciousness, and to listen to our inner voice, our anima, that is to say, our soul; this work should allow us to reintegrate these fragments of our unconscious, with the aim of better knowing ourselves and by the same token, acquiring a better understanding of others, as well as our environment.

Reviewer #245 (5 stars):

In his grappling with the unconscious, Jung embarks on a journey that is personally unique but systematically general to the problems of the human experience. This read is not so much life-changing, but rather life-enriching in its content. These red-bounded pages serve a portal to a world unknown, if you are willing to continue with it.

Reviewer #249 (5 stars):

Fascinating view into the spiritual journey of Carl Jung. In his own words, it could look like madness. But for anyone who meditates with similar visions, it's amazing to see someone else's version and story of spiritual development. I like to think about where psychology and spirituality meet, so I really enjoyed this.