

# Revisiting Jung and Corbin: A Review of Peter Kingsley's *Catafalque*

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"It is the truth, a force of nature that expresses itself through me—I am only a channel—... I can imagine myself in many instances where I would become sinister to you. For instance, if life had led you to take up an artificial attitude, then you wouldn't be able to stand me, because I am a natural being. By my very presence I crystalize; I am a ferment. The unconscious of people who live in an artificial manner senses me as a danger. Everything about me irritates them, my way of speaking, my way of laughing. They sense nature."<sup>1</sup>

These few words, spoken by Jung during an interview in 1941, encapsulate the essence of *Catafalque*. The voice of nature speaks through the book, telling of the forgotten past and of what lies below the surface of our conscious world. This voice is very disturbing because both individually and collectively we have lost any contact with nature, with the past, with ourselves. We live an artificial life dominated by technology: a seemingly helpful tool that unfortunately has a very dark side and is gradually transforming even our humanity into the most efficient machines of destruction. Jung warned throughout his life against the life-destroying lopsidedness of rationality, science and technology. He emphasized, instead, the need for westerners to make the journey back into the depth of themselves—to listen to the voices of the past and know what we are "from the beginning"<sup>2</sup>—before we can move into the future.

This emphasis as well as those warnings mean that his was—and, in spite of the artificial institutionalizing of his work, still is—a voice crying in the wilderness. Kingsley allows that voice

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1 C.G. Jung, *Emma Jung and Toni Wolff: A Collection of Remembrances*, ed. F. Jensen (San Francisco: Analytical Psychology Club, 1982) 51–52.

2 For the vital resonances, and implications, of this expression see P. Kingsley, *Catafalque: Carl Jung and the End of Humanity* (London: Catafalque Press, 2018) 10, 37, 58, 466–67 (from now on C.).

to resonate again while being only too aware that, in doing so, he will evoke endless misunderstandings and irritations.

Because the voice from the depths has to speak through a human personality, autobiography is also involved. And a few words need to be said about this so as to prevent readers from falling headlong into one of the biggest traps scattered through the whole length of the book.

At crucial points throughout *Catafalque*, Kingsley offers autobiographical details aimed at situating his work inside the context of a wider tradition of mystics—a tradition that includes Carl Jung and Henry Corbin, medieval alchemists, ancient Gnostics and Hermetic teachers, but reaches back ultimately to the early Greek philosopher–mystics Parmenides and Empedocles. He vividly describes his “encounters” with Jung and Corbin, but also his meetings with those native American medicine men and women who helped him to understand what his task was: “to shock people into an awareness that all life comes from, and returns to, the sacred”, to “turn people around to face their Ancestors whom they imagine they can do without”.<sup>3</sup> Being very conscious that all this will give rise to accusations of “inflation”, if not severe doubts about his “sanity”, Kingsley calmly offers guidance to his readers in the form of a *pharmakon* or remedy against such misunderstandings.

Of course, he agrees, this can all sound absurdly inflated. But he also explains—just like Jung—that this apparent arrogance is simply the inevitable and paradoxical consequence of being forced, without any choice, to step outside our collective norms and submit to becoming the humble servant or tool of something far greater than ourselves. And he warns that a potentially much more dangerous “inflation” is the one produced by our collective identification with an archetype which no one is ever conscious of: the archetype of the *anthrôpos*, manifesting itself as the perfectly reasonable and ordinary and seemingly humble human being with all the usual delusions of individualism and illusions of rationality.

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3 C. 17; see also 13–16, 41–42, 97–102, 213–16, 363–64.

The instinctive fear, shared also by many Jungian therapists, of archetypal forces and of the disastrous inflation which can arise from coming too close to them has the inevitable result that one falls prey to an even more sinister and dangerous one.<sup>4</sup>

The truth is that Kingsley's own personal biography, just like the lives of Jung and Corbin and all other sages who have created and kept alive our western culture, is not significant in itself—because all of them are nothing but manifestations of the same impersonal energy that strives to reach consciousness through the lives and work of individual human beings. Jung understood this perfectly; so does Kingsley.<sup>5</sup> And if we are tempted to dismiss what they say about the matter as some clever “rhetorical” or “literary” device, this means we are choosing to ignore what true wisdom was at the beginning of our western culture and still is in those cultures which have not yet lost the link with their past or the awareness of their culture's purpose.

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4 Warnings about the *anthrôpos* archetype: C. 18–20, 142–44, 555–56. On individualism as the opposite of Jungian individuation, see C. 108–9, 142, 531; on the illusions of rationality, 496–97. For the pathological, psychotic inflation of the ordinary man and woman see 655; and note that, to Jung himself, even the most committed of Jungians were not necessarily an exception to this rule (176, 582–3, 772). For Kingsley's awareness of just how arrogant he is likely to sound, see C. 207; and compare the very similar comments by Jung in *The Jung–White Letters*, ed. A.C. Lammers and A. Cunningham (Hove: Routledge, 2007) 117–18: “I know that my way has been prescribed to me by a hand far above my reach. I know it all sounds so damned grand. I am sorry that it does, but I don't mean it. It is grand, and I am only trying to be a decent tool and don't feel grand at all.” On the central importance, for Jung, of being a tool of the sacred rather than turning the sacred into a tool see C. 120–1, 544–45. And on his crucial experience, described at the very start of his *Red Book*, of being “forced” without any choice to speak and write in service to the spirit of the depths see C.G. Jung, *The Red Book*, ed. S. Shamdasani (New York: W.W. Norton, 2009) 229b–232b; C. 82, 110, 120, 316–22, 332–4, 355, 369, 504, 515, 694, 728.

5 See especially C.G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, ed. A. Jaffé (New York: Vintage Books, 1989) 3, with the textual note at C. 615. To the further passages cited by Kingsley, on the fundamental importance for Jung of experiencing the purely impersonal and objective aspects of reality (107–110, 118, 143, 156–7, 191, 207–8, 414–15, 531, 543–4, 665), add Jung's comments in *Nietzsche's “Zarathustra”*: *Notes of the Seminar Given in 1934–1939*, ed. J.L. Jarrett (Princeton: Princeton U Press, 1988) II, 969: “We are living so much in our personal psychology, in personal relations, in personal projections—we are so linked and cemented with human society—that we cannot perceive or conceive of anything impersonal. I experience the most unholy trouble when I try to say a word about the objectivity of our psychology: it is not popular.” For Kingsley on his own experience of the impersonal see C. 117, 206–8.

Archaic Greek poets such as Homer or Hesiod composed and transmitted their poems orally, making the past alive for their audiences. And they openly declared that it was not they themselves who were speaking, but the Muses who had initiated them into becoming poets. They invoked and evoked them at the start of every performance, conjuring them up in front of their audience through the fascinating rhythm and sound and vivid images of their poems. In Parmenides' poem the goddess of the underworld is the one who reveals not only the truth, but also the way in which human beings misrepresent the truth through their "science".<sup>6</sup> The awareness that a divine energy is the source of poems, songs and sermons is still to be found among oral poets, singers and preachers in many contemporary traditional cultures as well as among true mystics of every culture and time: this is precisely what makes their words so powerful and transformative.<sup>7</sup>

But modern interpreters have completely lost any feeling for the numinous, or any ability to recognize its voice, which is why they are mostly only too happy to explain away these claims to have been initiated or inspired by divine beings as just a "literary" or "rhetorical" device. And so there is a strong possibility that Kingsley's accounts of those mystical experiences in which his whole work is so firmly rooted will be dismissed in the same way. After all: the history of attempts to either minimize or outright deny the reality of divine inspiration and knowledge goes back a long way, through Aristotle, past Plato,

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6 P. Kingsley, *In the Dark Places of Wisdom* (Inverness, CA: Golden Sufi Publishing, 1999); "Empedocles for the New Millennium", *Ancient Philosophy* 22 (2002): 333–413; *Reality* (Inverness, CA: Golden Sufi Publishing, 2003); M.L. Gemelli, "Images and Experience: At the Roots of Parmenides' *Aletheia*", *Ancient Philosophy* 28 (2008): 21–48; *Die Vorsokratiker* (2nd ed., Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2011–2013) II, 6–95; *Parmenide: suoni, immagini, esperienza* (Sankt Augustin: Academia Verlag, 2013).

7 M.L. Gemelli, "Voci divine: i canti delle muse e l'iniziazione poetica nel proemio della Teogonia esiodea", *Technai* 7 (2016): 31–60. This is not to say they don't also learn by human means, but they don't see this as relevant or effective unless they receive their skill and wisdom from the ancestors or gods in visions or dreams. For Jung's view that "systems of thought, or laws, or prescriptions" are not human creations but the gift of an "invisible thinker" see Nietzsche's "*Zarathustra*" II, 970–1; C. 323–25, 697.

as far as the sixth century BC. Even Jung himself was happy to join the ranks of these deniers when it was in his obvious interest to cover his traces and “conceal his vestiges”.<sup>8</sup> The enormous risks involved in directly challenging such a massive tradition of sweeping judgements and rationalizations, which nowadays has come to be accepted as unquestionable truth, were the main reason why Jung kept his *Red Book* unpublished and hid away his own experiences of the numinous as much as he could. At a time when it was virtually forbidden in European universities even to offer courses on the ancient magical papyri, and being labelled a mystic was almost a death sentence for any professional person, Jung could simply not afford to undermine his work before it had been able to assume its definitive shape.<sup>9</sup>

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8 For the 6th century BC see Gemelli, *Die Vorsokratiker* I, 414–18. Much later Plato, in his efforts to appropriate the role of “master of truth”, would cast further doubt on ancient poets’ claims to have received the truth from a divine source (*Timaeus* 40d–e): even when he seems to praise their divinely inspired madness (*Ion*, *Phaedrus*), his real purpose is to deny them any true knowledge or wisdom because they are unable to offer a rational explanation of what they say. For the mature Aristotle, there was no longer any question of divine inspiration because he himself offered poets all the necessary rules and techniques for creating good poems. So, with very few exceptions, any focus on the divine as source of inspiration and truth disappeared from literary criticism and became nothing but a cliché. Interestingly, both Jung himself (see C. 158–9, 566–8, for the famous dispute with Martin Buber) and those closest to him (*The Red Book* 212b–213a: Cary de Angulo) were willing to resort to the artificial ruse of claiming that the material in his *Red Book* was nothing but poetry, as a way of deliberately concealing its true revelatory nature. But inwardly Jung always had the strongest resistance to dismissing such numinous material in this way (*The Red Book* 212b–213a: compare also *ibid.* 199b with C.G. Jung, *Introduction to Jungian psychology*, Princeton: Princeton U Press 2012, 45), and he tried to warn his biographer in advance against turning his work into something aesthetic although she ended up ignoring his warnings completely (C. 694, 788–90). Even today, in spite of Jung’s profound resistance to describing his discoveries as art, Jung scholars are perfectly glad to label his work on the *Red Book* material as “literary experimentation” or “lyrical elaborations” (S. Shamdasani, *C.G. Jung: A Biography in Books*, New York: W.W. Norton 2012, 68, 77, 130); and the commercial pressures to promote Jung as artist are becoming stronger by the day.

9 For the problems faced by Albrecht Dieterich, the classical scholar whose work was to become so important to Jung, in teaching the Greco–Egyptian magical papyri at the University of Heidelberg see *Papyri graecae magicae*, ed. K. Preisendanz and A. Henrichs (Stuttgart: B.G. Teubner, 1973–74) I, v. For Jung’s intense awareness of the dangers of publicly sharing his own

Now, though, times have changed. Alongside the publication of Jung's previously secret and private *Red Book*, his own psychology has become more institutionalized than ever while the over-valuation of rationalism at the expense of everything else has turned into an immensely destructive collective neurosis. So a salutary shock is needed—a shock that will allow us to free ourselves of old prejudices, rigid thinking patterns, and rediscover the real meaning as well as the source of science and knowledge. The problem is that research on Jung is so hopelessly weighed down by the need either to defend or to attack him as a person—both parties being equally influenced by the same tired assumptions about the appropriate labels to use for classifying his experiences and his ideas—that people have lost any real sense for what mattered most to Jung himself, which is the impersonal energy that lies behind every personal story.

One of *Catafalque's* greatest achievements is to have redirected our attention to this fundamental fact. But this also means that an attitude of respectful and attentive listening—free from the usual temptation to give way to mockery or scorn<sup>10</sup>—is essential when approaching the book, just as much as Jung's writings or Corbin's. And it means that in reading *Catafalque* one always has to remain on the alert because, just as with everything written by Jung, it is extremely complex and deceptive in spite of its seemingly simple narrative.

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mystical experiences, see especially his *Letters*, ed. G. Adler and A. Jaffé (London: Routledge, 1973–76) I, 140–42; and for his more general warnings about the danger of being condemned as “utterly unscientific” if one dares even to discuss religious matters with people of science, see e.g. C.G. Jung, *Dream Analysis* (London: Routledge, 1984) 507–508. Jung's revealing mention of the need to “conceal one's vestiges”, referring specifically to his own need to keep silent about the reality of his relationship with his inner teacher, is examined in detail by Kingsley (C. 155–58, 164–65, 258–59, 334, 350–51, 566, 677, 707). Henry Corbin was also constrained by the same imperious need to conceal, through silence and secrecy, the intimate realities of his own relationship with his inner teacher: see his “Post-Scriptum biographique à un Entretien philosophique”, in *Henry Corbin*, ed. C. Jambet (Paris: Éditions de l'Herne, 1981) 46; C. 367–8, 372, 725.

10 *The Red Book* (237) contains some important comments on the real motivation behind habitual attitudes of scornfulness and mockery.

In harmony with the best tradition of ancient Greek poetry, Kingsley returns periodically in a spiral movement to the same themes and motifs: each time presenting them from a different angle, adding new insights, opening wider perspectives.<sup>11</sup> It can be very easy to get lost in the magic he creates, on the one hand through these constant “circumambulations” around the centre and on the other hand through the luxuriant forest into which the reader is lured by the notes inside the second volume. But it is just as easy to be fooled by his language. The warnings that Kingsley offers to readers of Jung apply with equal force to *Catafalque*: “Almost as if by magic the image he conjures into view quickly mists over and keeps drifting off out of sight. If you are not able to stay focused on it, you will lose your bearings and forget you ever saw anything. If you concentrate too much on some detail, you will end up trapped inside the limits of your psychology and the artificial structures of your mind” (184).

The language of completeness that springs from the depths is very different from what we are used to because it plays with paradoxes, ambiguities, allusions. It evokes and hides at the same time, allures and leads astray. So this book is bound to elude any attempt at summarizing it or understanding it thoroughly. But this is all for the best, because the book is a great “symbol” in the Jungian sense. As Jung used to say: to try and understand a symbol is the devil’s way of killing it. And while *Catafalque* can help each of us enormously in understanding the darkness and depths of our own self, we would be wise to let the depths and darkness of the book remain a mystery.<sup>12</sup>

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11 What Kingsley says on the subject of “ring composition” (C. 511) applies with equal validity to *Catafalque*.

12 For his comments on understanding, the devil, and the mysteries beyond understanding see C.G. Jung, *Briefe*, ed. A. Jaffé and G. Adler (Olten: Walter Verlag, 1972–73) I, 53–55. Although the original English translation (Jung, *Letters I*, 30–32) was in almost all respects correct, the supposedly updated version which has just been published is utterly misleading (C.G. Jung and H. Schmid–Guisan, *The Question of Psychological Types*, ed. J. Beebe and E. Falzeder, Princeton: Princeton U Press 2013, 139–42). “Verständigung” here means only “understanding” and not “coming to an agreement”, as the context shows; the “belly” in question belongs not to St. Bridget of Sweden, but to the devils; and

One of the most impressive features of Kingsley's books in general is the attention he pays even to the smallest linguistic details of the texts he interprets. This is far from surprising: every true philological work starts from the care for words.<sup>13</sup> But words coming from a divine source and containing a transformative power demand an even higher attention and respect. To ignore their origins, disregard even a single nuance of their meaning, miss what they allude to and misinterpret or mistranslate them, try to fit them into our own unconscious categories and patterns of understanding rather than listening to what they actually say, means permanently altering their essence; distorting the purpose they were spoken for; turning their true transformative potential into nothing but a destructive weapon.

Plato and Aristotle have of course been seen, for a long time, as perhaps the greatest pillars of western intellectual history. And this made it inevitable that, nowadays, even level-headed scholars would follow later Platonic tradition in presenting them both as initiators into what ancient Greeks used to call the Greater and Lesser Mysteries.<sup>14</sup> But, here too, *Catafalque* delivers a very necessary and salutary shock by pointing to the other side of the story—to the hard and undeniable facts of how Plato as well as Aristotle deliberately manipulated the words and meanings of earlier philosophical and mystery traditions, forcibly adapting them to their own very different conceptual schemes in ways that often have had profoundly devastating effects on the course of western culture.

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Latin *comprehendere* is wrongly transcribed as *comprenderere*. For "symbols", in the Jungian sense, see now C. 115, 538–42, 567, 665, 733–4.

13 The recent attempt to dismiss Kingsley's work as "fake scholarship" is nothing but a rearguard attempt to deflect attention from his consistent criticisms of the poor philological standards, and methodological narrow-mindedness, so common in the "rationalistic" study of ancient religious philosophy. See J.N. Bremmer, "Method and Madness in the Study of Greek Shamanism", *Asdiwal* 13 (2018): 93–109. Jung, too, has repeatedly drawn criticism from scholars who are far less familiar than him with the original texts that he studied in such detail (C. 590–93).

14 See for example V. Adluri, "Initiation into the Mysteries", *Mouseion* 6 (2006): 407–23; G. Shaw, "Theurgy and the Platonist's Luminous Body", in *Practicing Gnosis*, ed. A.D. DeConick, G. Shaw and J.D. Turner (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2013) 537–38.

Already in the first section of the book, Kingsley not only demonstrates the haunting parallelism between Plato's self-conscious "murder" of Parmenides and the gut-wrenching question with which the "spirit of the depths" confronts Carl Jung at the start of his *Red Book*: "Have you counted the murderers among the scholars?" He also demonstrates in the finest detail how exactly the same distortions that we already find in Plato's or Aristotle's ways of presenting Presocratic texts have been taking place, all over again, in the translations and publications of Jung's work during the last fifty years. In spite of all the warnings and clear guidelines, Jung is being murdered by his interpreters and followers in just the same way that Parmenides or Empedocles were murdered more than two thousand years ago.<sup>15</sup>

And, perhaps most importantly, Kingsley shows that these strange repetitions are no accident or coincidence at all but are vivid confirmations that Jung belongs in the same fundamental lineage as ancient Greek philosophers such as Parmenides or Empedocles and Pythagoras. Unlike Plato, Aristotle, later philosophers and religious scholars—who valued light, daytime, ascent, the activity of thinking and reasoning, clarity of intellect and theory—what this lineage values most highly is darkness, night, descent into the underworld, deliberate ambiguity, stillness and that mysterious essence of human experience

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15 For the Platonic patricide of "father Parmenides" see Plato, *Sophist* 241d–242a; Kingsley, *In the Dark Places of Wisdom*; and C. 52–56, 489–92. In esoteric traditions as well as professional guilds, teachers and disciples were respectively referred to as "father" and "son". Sometimes, as happened both with priests and healers and in the very specific case of Parmenides adopting his successor Zeno, teachers went through a formal adoption of their pupils (*In the Dark Places* 150–59; Gemelli, *Parmenide* 107–109). As Kingsley points out, even citing the evidence of pencil markings left by Jung in the books on ancient Greek mystery traditions that he kept inside his library (150–53, 564–5), this has the directest possible bearing on the relationship between Jung as son and Philemon as father which would become such a central reality for him both inside the pages of the *Red Book* (348a–356b) and in his private life (*ibid.* 213b). "Have you counted the murderers among the scholars?": *ibid.* 230b; C. 59. For a detailed introduction to the range of "murders" of ancient sacred traditions, already committed in antiquity, and the remarkably similar murders of Jung's written or spoken words which have been committed by his editors and translators in the last half-century see C. 21–91, 243–44, 470–524, 639.

which we carry with us wherever we go and that Jung referred to very simply as the “dunkle Substanz” or “dark substance”.<sup>16</sup>

Although Jung was fascinated throughout his life by the prophetic figure of Empedocles, he was famously content to trace the ancestry of his psychology back past the alchemists to Gnosticism and Hermetic tradition. It would be difficult to overestimate the value and significance of Kingsley’s discoveries in tracing the lineage of Jungian psychology back even further, to those very same figures from whom much of Gnostic and Hermetic and also alchemical teaching derives: the healer–prophets Parmenides and Empedocles. At every stage in its history, this tradition extending from the Presocratics through to Jung derived its authority from revelation; had an inescapably prophetic character; and deliberately used the language of “science” to convey its message to humans living in a world of illusions.

Interestingly, this process of going beyond even the Gnostics has the effect of restoring everything—including the Gnostics themselves—to their due and proper place. The tendency among Jungians has been to downplay any Gnostic influence on Jung because, as Jung himself was already aware during his lifetime, any association with Gnosticism would automatically tarnish his psychology with the stain of being a “religion” rather than a “science”. But anyone believing that Jung’s psychology can be adequately analyzed, let alone defined, in terms of such clumsy categories could hardly be more wrong.

On numerous occasions, as Kingsley points out, Jung explains the real nature of his attitude towards—and profound reservations about—“science” in the modern sense of the word.<sup>17</sup> As for

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16 Ruth Padel’s *In and Out of the Mind* (Princeton: Princeton U Press, 1992) offers a useful and eloquent introduction to the role of darkness and depth in the ancient world. For Jung’s mention of “die dunkle Substanz” in the unpublished transcripts of his interviews with Aniela Jaffé which she would edit and reshape to create his *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, see C. 611.

17 Jung’s perfectly consistent attitudes towards science, from his youth all the way through to just before he died, are well documented throughout *Catalfalque* (see especially 59–85, 150–59, 307–47, 500–508 and 695–708). Add also his remarkable comments in *Letters I*, 57: “Science is the art of creating suitable

“religion”, Jung often emphasized that to him the word had exactly the same meaning as Latin *religio*: “careful attention”, free from any belief or opinion, to every form in which the numinous manifests itself inside the human psyche. So there should be nothing scandalous about the fact that he saw his psychology as the fulfilment or realization of the old “religion” in a modern form.<sup>18</sup>

And this is only to touch on the edge of the real issues. As Kingsley also points out, Jung’s central and crucial concern in his psychology is with “the act of seeing”: that inner vision which is the essence of religious experience, entirely distinct from “believing” in any doctrine or dogma of a specific religion. The famous answer Jung gave to the BBC interviewer who had asked him if he believed in God reads, “I know. I don’t need to believe. I know”.<sup>19</sup> But knowledge through inner vision and direct experience lies at the heart of those Gnostic teachings that Jung already realized, very early in his career, would supply the necessary foundations for his psychology of the unconscious. In fact even the words *gnōstikos*, or knower, and *gnōsis*, or knowledge, “have the strong underlying sense of being able to

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illusions which the fool believes or argues against, but the wise man enjoys their beauty or their ingenuity, without being blind to the fact that they are human veils and curtains concealing the abysmal darkness of the Unknowable”. The emphasis here on deceptiveness and illusions is one crucial element in what he had learned from his teacher Philemon (*Red Book* 337, 359b); but this constant underlying thread of trickery and deception and illusion in Jung’s work, called *mētis* by ancient Greeks, is one more strand linking him back to the Presocratics (C. 316–26). Those who are not able, or willing, to come to grips with this element of deception effectively disqualify themselves from understanding Jung right from the very start.

18 See for example Jung, *Letters* II, 482–84; C. 276–85, 661–66.

19 Jungian psychology as concerned with “the act of seeing”, “inward experience” and “inner vision”: C.G. Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy* (2nd ed., London: Routledge, 1968) 13–14 §§14–15; C. 114–15, 146, 540 and 559–60 (referring to Empedocles). It should be emphasized that in the case of someone like Empedocles this “seeing” is not equivalent to intellectual contemplation as portrayed by Plato and Aristotle and subsequent philosophical tradition, but is the harshly direct contact with the divine which every true prophet has to experience at his or her own peril. The BBC interview: C. 151, 564; compare also Jung, *Letters* I, 141, II, 5.

see directly; of inwardly perceiving, of intuitively recognizing as opposed to just believing or accepting what others say".<sup>20</sup>

So whenever Jung insisted that he was only interested in knowledge, not beliefs, he wasn't speaking as a scientist. He was speaking as a Gnostic. Nothing with him, as Kingsley shows, is what it seems to be on the surface. This is why exactly the same has happened with Jung's frequent use of the term "empirical" as a way of summarizing, justifying, defining his own work. It all sounds scientific and respectable enough, considering the normal modern implications of the word. But the reality is that Jung himself, in line with ancient healing traditions, took the word in its strict etymological sense: an "empiricist" is someone who relies on direct seeing and inner experience while rejecting all dogmatic theories. And it's no coincidence at all that, as Kingsley reminds us, the prototypical empiricists were nothing like our modern rational scientists. They were the alchemists and magical healers, just like Empedocles, whose overriding concern was with the urgency of direct perception and experience and, exactly like Jung, in their total commitment to practical understanding and healing didn't have a moment to waste on philosophical speculations or empty theories. Once again it should be apparent that Jung has to be read on many levels, in the same way as when deciphering a palimpsest where the most important text is not the one written on the surface but what lies hidden underneath. He is not only allowing but, just the same as Empedocles or Parmenides, positively inviting us to misinterpret what he says by leaving us free to trap ourselves in our expectations and superficial understandings.<sup>21</sup>

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20 C. 146–47, 187–93, 559–60, 593–95; the quotation is at 146.

21 C. 65, 75, 90–1, 152, 158, 318–21, 509–10. As Kingsley has noted in a filmed interview with Murray Stein, Jung was quite open to using the same kind of healing "charms" that were favoured by ancient healers like Empedocles—commenting, himself, on how "enchantment like that is the oldest form of medicine". And at a critical point in the *Red Book* Jung resorts to magical incantations sung "nach uralter Weise", in the ancient manner, as an antidote to the poison of modern science. See C.G. *Jung Speaking*, ed. W. McGuire and R.F.C. Hull (Princeton: Princeton U Press, 1977) 419; *Red Book* 283–86; C. 68, 503–504. For Parmenides, Empedocles, and the use of magical incantations, compare P. Kingsley, *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery and Magic: Empedocles and*

But Jung's emphasis on the fundamental importance of direct vision or experience was far from the only detail tying him to the Gnostics. When he told the BBC interviewer that he didn't need to believe because he *knew*, he was repeating almost exactly word for word what he had been taught by his inner teacher Philemon. In the *Red Book* Philemon is identified by Jung as being none other than Simon Magus, one of the greatest of the ancient Gnostics; and towards the very end of his life he would still describe his teacher Philemon, very pointedly, as a Gnostic. So when Jung insisted that he was only interested in knowledge and not in beliefs, he wasn't just speaking as a true Gnostic. He was also speaking as the initiated student of a Gnostic.<sup>22</sup>

Philemon, Jung's visionary teacher and guide, takes us to the heart of the mystical Jung: to the Gnostic core of the Jungian

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*Pythagorean Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford U Press, 1995) 247–48; *In the Dark Places of Wisdom*; "Empedocles for the New Millennium" 395; Gemelli, "Images and Experience" 21–48. On the supremely practical methods and goals of healer-prophets like Empedocles, as well as of ancient Gnostic and Hermetic tradition, see *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery and Magic* 228–32, 335–43; "Empedocles for the New Millennium" 339–44, 395; Gemelli, *Die Vorsokratiker* II, 126, 134, 324, 342, 350, 357, 368. Jung for his part never stopped trying to distinguish himself in the clearest of terms, as an empiricist, from theoretical thinkers and speculative philosophers. Modern-day academics who try to say something meaningful about Jung's intellectual pedigree by presenting him and his work as a direct "product" of 19th-century German cultural ideas or concepts (e.g. R. Noll, *The Jung Cult*, 2nd ed., New York: Free Press 1997, 41; W.J. Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, Leiden: E.J. Brill 1996, 497) completely overlook the intricacy of those passages where he explicitly distances himself from earlier theorists, and also ignore the significance of Ximena de Angulo's perceptive comment that Jung "could, of course, have chosen entirely new terms, but I think he did not do so because he wants to redefine the traditional terms, show where they arise out of experience, and thus keep the tradition alive, but with a different foundation" (*C.G. Jung Speaking* 216).

22 C. 148–52, 560–64, 578. Philemon on knowing, as opposed to believing: *Red Book* 348b. Philemon as Simon Magus: *ibid.* 359b. Jung again called Philemon a Gnostic during interviews he gave shortly before he died—although his secretary, Aniela Jaffé, duly softened his comments before including them in the published text of *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (C. 148–50, 560–2). The emphasis, in modern rationalistic scholarship, on Jung's need to "disidentify" himself from Philemon is entirely misplaced: for Jung the stage of psychological disidentification was not some apotropaic attempt to keep the magical figure of Philemon at a distance, but only a necessary prelude to the ultimate *coniunctio* or union of teacher and pupil (C. 150–2, 562–4).

mystery. And the fact that Philemon remained his Gnostic teacher, his “Lord”, right through into his seventies is profoundly significant. One of the issues that Kingsley thoroughly examines and discusses is the common mistake of believing that Jung soon left his interest in the Gnostics behind and was happy to replace it with his much more productive work on alchemy. Nothing could be further from the truth. Jung never gave up his outer or inner focus on Gnostic traditions, and the underlying reason for all the years of research and writing which he devoted to alchemy was that they would help him to build a solid bridge from the modern world back to the world of the Gnostics—restoring the missing link in a seamless spiritual lineage.<sup>23</sup>

*Catafalque* has a great deal to say about Jung’s relationship to Philemon, and also about Jung’s relationship to Bollingen: the tower that he built beside Lake Zürich as a shrine dedicated to Philemon, as a sacred space where he could feel completely free and at home with his teacher. The detailed pattern of information that Kingsley provides is enough to bring about a permanent change in our understanding of Jungian psychology—of its origin, its real purpose and its ultimate goals.

What makes his account so remarkable is that it could hardly be more different from the many lightweight subjective appraisals, or rigid and dry analyses, of Jung’s life and work. Instead, just like Jung’s living relationship with Philemon, it too is alive. And the paradox is that this intense aliveness is sustained by Jung’s, as well as Kingsley’s, intimate appreciation of the ancient Greek language and ancient Greek texts.

Once again Jung—and now Kingsley—subtly, or not so subtly, turns all our usual expectations upside down. For most people in our modern society, including the majority of doctors and therapists, nothing could be more irrelevant or dead than texts from thousands of years ago written in ancient Greek. But for Jung, quite the opposite was the case. To him these mostly neglected

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23 C. 185–203, 478–79, 574, 586–90. Philemon as Jung’s “Lord”: *The Jung–White Letters* 103–104, 116–18.

texts are what give us a unique access to the living roots of our culture and the true potential for healing; to the language of our Ancestors who are still vibrantly alive in the world of the dead.

Jung had already hinted at the seriousness of this situation when towards the end of his life he insisted that fluency in reading ancient Greek and Latin was essential for a thorough understanding of the history of western culture—or for any genuine understanding of psychology.<sup>24</sup> His hinting also goes back many years earlier to the time when he described his teacher's home in the *Red Book* and, very carefully using ancient Greek script to spell out the name, noted that one of Philemon's most prized possessions was the books of "Hermes Trismegistus".<sup>25</sup> And as Kingsley documents with astonishing attention to detail,

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24 Kingsley is very right to emphasize how crucially important the ability to read Greek and Latin texts in their original language was for Jung (C. 192, 597, 777). He had considered it impossible without a knowledge of those languages "to come to any real insight into western culture—or arrive at any authentic understanding of psychology", which is a chilling warning for many Jungians and Jung scholars. The quite common idea that Jung relied on Marie-Louise von Franz to help him read and understand ancient Greek or Latin literature is, as Kingsley observes, a myth which may well have been prompted in no small part by von Franz (C. 591–92).

25 *Red Book* 312a, where in the English edition Jung's ΕΡΜΗΣ ΤΡΙΣΜΕΓΙΣΤΟΣ (handwritten by him in the medieval script also often used, as Jung knew very well, for writing out ancient magical texts: *ibid.* 139) has not only been incorrectly transcribed but also incorrectly transliterated into English. Since the initial publication of Jung's *Collected Works*, the same disregard for the ancient Greek language which Jung had respected so much is flaunted repeatedly even in the most basic editions of his writings (compare for example the mess at *ibid.* 370b; Sigmund Freud and C.G. Jung, *Briefwechsel*, ed. W. McGuire and W. Sauerländer, Zürich: Ex Libris 1976, 484). And the text that Jung himself inscribed, in ancient Greek, on the famous stone at Bollingen—which he often tried to keep away from prying eyes by dismissing it as of no significance, while at other times he solemnly admitted that it contained the essence of all his published writings in a nutshell (*Letters II*, 83; M. Oakes, *The Stone Speaks*, Wilmette: Chiron Publications 1987, 15–16)—has fared no better. The sensitive study by Lance S. Owens about "Jung and *Aion*" is an extraordinary introduction to Jung's inner world, up to the point where it falls short in explaining the literary and cultural context of Jung's ancient Greek inscription (*Psychological Perspectives* 54, 2011: 289 n.85). For Jung's intense frustration with people who thought they could offer "intuitive" readings and interpretations of texts written in ancient languages, without having any real understanding of the language itself or any awareness of the full cultural and historical milieu out of which the texts arose, see for example *Letters II*, 507.

in appealing to these ancient Hermetic books Jung was not referring to the kind of generalities and grand philosophical theories that he so openly despised. He was referring above all to the uniquely vivid accounts in the Greek Hermetic texts of the various psychological stages in the initiation process: the initial fear of going crazy, the student's utter terror in confronting the reality of the teacher, the despair and confusion that this fear and terror gave rise to, the bewilderment in face of a teaching that can't be taught, and ultimately the bliss of becoming one with the whole of creation and with the life force behind all existence.<sup>26</sup>

The parallels here between Jung's own living experiences, when confronted with the bewildering reality of his inner teacher, and the Hermetic texts that describe the same experiences and emotions in ancient Greek—texts with which Jung was very familiar, and which were heavily marked up by him in the copies he kept in his library—are unavoidable and undeniable. But unlike the modern scholars who are only too happy in such a situation to claim that Jung's mystical experiences were autosuggested to him by what he read in the ancient texts, Kingsley avoids all such simplistic and reductive explanations by emphasizing the sheer livingness of the situation: the livingness that Jung referred to as synchronicity.<sup>27</sup> The ancient Hermetic and Gnostic texts that he studied with such care were not what caused Jung to have his experiences, but were what confirmed to him that what he himself had experienced with such overpowering force had given him direct access to the same primordial realities already experienced by Gnostics thousands of years ago.

The figure of Philemon introduces us to another, even more fundamental aspect of Jung's personality and work: an aspect which

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26 C. 148–54, 536–37, 553–54, 559–61, 565–66, 581–82, highlighting the special importance for Jung of *Corpus Hermeticum* XIII.

27 C. 153–54. Reading books does not produce the kind of experiences described by Jung in his *Red Book* or later in his life, and he was scathing in his criticism of those who indulged in the useless and sterile pastime of reading books without the accompanying inner experience. See for example *Jung, My Mother and I: The Analytic Diaries of Catharine Rush Cabot*, ed. J. Cabot Reid (Einsiedeln: Daimon Verlag, 2001) 264–65, 301, and also C. 509.

as a rule is passed over or outright denied except by those whose aim is to attack and discredit him. I am referring to his role as a prophet.

The intricate web of evidence about Jung as prophet that Kingsley has woven through the central sections of *Catafalque* is extraordinary in its complexity and completeness. Conclusions and connections are established, then re-established, in a way that can no longer be ignored or dismissed. In these central sections we are not only confronted with the need to absorb an enormous amount of forgotten information about Christian prophetic traditions as well as the earlier traditions—Greek, Jewish, Mesopotamian—that gave rise to them. We are also confronted, time and time again, with the even more urgent need to allow our most fundamental preconceptions about ourselves, as individuals and collectively, to be challenged to the core.

Certainly, those who have any professional interest in identifying themselves as Jungians will have every possible human motivation to object to or take issue with this body of conclusions and interconnections. They will no doubt want to tender alternative perspectives, different opinions. But what Kingsley is offering in such detail is much more than opinions or perspectives. He is providing the one thing that Jung valued above all, but which has become swallowed up in the modern obsession with relativism and subjectivity. He is offering facts: both outer facts about the realities of Jung's involvement with prophetic traditions and inner psychological facts about the ways in which we, as modern westerners, literally feel compelled to misunderstand and belittle and make a mockery of any such involvement.

Of course the key figure in all of this is Philemon—"father of the prophets"—whose prophetic sons are listed by Jung as including Zarathustra, Buddha, Christ, Mani, Muhammad, as well as Jung himself. And then there is the figure of Jung: the "precious jewel" or Zoroastrian Saoshyant who reincarnates for the sake of humanity every thousand years. There is the Jung who, as true prophet in a transcultural sense, is allowed to see not only into the future but also far into the past. There

is the Jung who howls, just like a prophet; who speaks and writes as prophets will always do, by hinting and hiding. And as Kingsley shows, it is the spirit of prophecy that—despite, or rather because of, all the earnest denials—blows through his entire body of work, although we have forgotten so much of our heritage that we are no longer even able to recognize the signs.

It is no accident that Jung's closest Jewish colleagues were the ones who, almost by instinct, were best able to see through to the underlying prophetic dimensions of his work and personality.<sup>28</sup> But there is also one specialist in Islamic mysticism who understood Jung's prophetic task more clearly than anybody. Henry Corbin met Jung for the first time in 1949, through the famous Eranos conferences held every summer at Ascona in southern Switzerland. He would enthusiastically recall in later years the "atmosphere of absolute spiritual freedom" pervading these gatherings which, thanks to Jung's presiding spirit, allowed each of the visiting speakers "to be oneself, to be *true*".<sup>29</sup> Just like Jung, his whole adult life was guided by an inner teacher: Shihâb al-Dîn Yahyâ Suhrawardî, a twelfth-century Persian mystical philosopher who had traced the roots of his teaching back beyond Muhammad to Pythagoras and Empedocles and who had declared that prophecy, far from stopping with Muhammad as Islamic orthodoxy claimed, was still alive in his own person. Because of his obviously questionable and heretical stance Suhrawardî came under heavy

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28 For the appraisal by Erich Neumann of *Answer to Job*—a book which was to lead to so many misunderstandings and publicly land Jung in so much trouble—see C.G. Jung and Erich Neumann, *Die Briefe 1933–1959*, ed. M. Liebscher (Ostfildern: Patmos Verlag, 2015) 298; Jung's *Letters II*, 33 n.1; C. 356–57, 378, 720–21, 740. James Kirsch, on the other hand, was burdened for much of his life by an inner awareness of Jung's prophetic role: an awareness which Jung, far from trying to dissipate, only served to strengthen during his private conversations with Kirsch. Kingsley was very fortunate, in the case of Kirsch, to have access not only to the relevant published material but also to the text of an unpublished lecture that Kirsch gave towards the end of his life and which he was permitted to make use of by Kirsch's son just before he, too, died (C. 250–51, 378–79, 644–45, 672–73, 739–40).

29 H. Corbin, "La Sophia éternelle", *Revue de culture européenne* 5 (1953): 12, closely echoed in comments he made just before he died in June 1978 ("Post-Scriptum biographique" 48); C. 9, 366, 466, 725.

attack and was eventually executed. For Corbin himself, the outbreak of the Second World War meant that his three-month mission in 1939 to gather manuscripts containing the writings of Suhrawardî in Istanbul turned into six years—and throughout this whole time he kept translating Suhrawardî's works, "alone together with his *sheikh* alone". This is when Suhrawardî became his inner teacher and initiated him directly as an *Ishrâqî*, one of those who "appear with the dawn" and "work at fetching the gifts of the sacred into the light of day". This is, in Suhrawardî's words, the tradition of the "eternal leaven" (*al-hamîrat al-azaliyyah*) that contains inside itself the germs of transformation but by nature is also a source of ferment, disorder and disturbance.<sup>30</sup>

In the fourth and final section of *Catafalque*, Kingsley enters into the deepest meaning of Corbin's teaching—adding many new details that were directly conveyed to him over the years by Corbin's wife, Stella—and discusses the mysterious connections between him and Jung. These connections are often disregarded by Corbin scholars, who love to place a particular emphasis on the "philosophical" side of his work, while Jung scholars have had their own reasons for keeping Corbin, as well as his "philosophizing", at a distance.<sup>31</sup> But Kingsley at last goes beyond the outer differences,

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30 C. 367–74, 723–34. Corbin's closest Muslim "friends" and collaborators criticized him sharply for refusing to convert to Islam and submit to accepting a physical teacher on the grounds that he already had his teacher and guide inside him. And even though the figure of the Uwaisî, meaning someone being trained by an invisible master who in many cases had died centuries earlier, was recognized and well established in Sufi tradition, they refused to consider Corbin one of them—subtly explaining his inner experiences away as the product of his own wilfulness and a too active imagination (371–73, 730–32).

31 The prevailingly negative assessment of Jung among Corbin scholars (C. Jambet, *La logique des Orientaux: Henry Corbin et la science des formes*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil 1983, 40–44; P. Lory, "Imaginer l'imaginal", *Politica Hermetica* 30, 2016: 22–27) is due in no small part to the tensions between Corbin himself and the psychologist James Hillman (C. 387–88, 749–52), but the radical oversimplifications of Corbin's relationship to Jung which have been created by the American writer Tom Cheetham have added another layer of misunderstandings (see for example Cheetham's *All the World an Icon*, Berkeley: North Atlantic Books 2012, 130–89; C. 465, 735, 751, 757). On the other hand, Corbin has been very poorly served in the Jungian community. His importance as a source for understanding Jung is widely ignored; and although

pointing to the real essence of their esoteric intimacy. This intimacy is not the same as merging with one another but is a communion between two individuated people, alone to the alone, *monos pros monon*, each of them having their own particular relationship to their inner Self and their specific task. Corbin's last talk with Jung in September 1955, as described by him so remarkably in some unpublished notes and documented by Kingsley, shows all the features of what among Sufis is known as *Sohbet*: the mystical conversation between companions who speak from the heart in the spontaneous experience of total freedom and joy.<sup>32</sup>

This is not to say that Corbin doesn't also recognize the natural differences between them, as is inevitable among individuated people who are ultimately alone with their own higher Self in that same fundamental relationship of "the alone to the alone". As Kingsley appropriately notes, any "parting of the ways" between them was not a parting in any conventional sense but the parting of two knights at a crossroads who both have to follow their own lonely paths in their shared search for the Grail. And Corbin is pointing to the same solitude when he presents Jung's *Answer to Job* as the work of "this man *alone*", whose only strength lies in his soul, while also inviting "all those who are *alone*" to meditate on Jung's book and listen to its inner message "if they truly are *alone*". He immediately adds that any authentic sense of togetherness is always born out of this solitude, and in it.<sup>33</sup>

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Corbin's crucial review of *Answer to Job* was published in English years ago by a Jungian journal, the translation is so dismembered and deformed that it is almost unusable ("The Eternal Sophia", *Harvest* 31, 1985: 7–22; C. 738–39). The quality of the new American translation of Corbin's remarkable writings about Jung, published for the first time in French in 2014 and used to great effect in *Catáfalque* (*Autour de Jung*, ed. M. Cazenave and D. Proulx, Paris: Éditions Entrelacs, 2014; C. 392–93, 663, 764–67), is also extremely poor (*Jung, Buddhism and the Incarnation of Sophia*, Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2019).

32 On the history of the expression *monos pros monon* in ancient magical and mystical literature, as well as Corbin's uses of it for denoting that aloneness which both he and Jung considered the marker of a truly individuated person, see C. 382–84, 742–45. Jung's last meeting with Corbin in September 1955: C. 380–85, 741–42.

33 "La Sophia éternelle", *Revue de culture européenne* 5 (1953): 12–14, repeated by Corbin in very similar terms after Jung's death (C.G. Jung, *Réponse à*

For Corbin, this often unbearable aloneness that he recognized in Jung was the clearest of pointers to the role played by prophets and by prophetic tradition in reflecting into existence the absolute aloneness of God. And Corbin hinted repeatedly at the prophetic character of Jung as well as Jung's work, both in his famous review of *Answer to Job* and also elsewhere, which explains why the realities of prophecy were such a major theme in the discussions between the two men. But for him the single most important link with prophecy in the whole of Jung's work was the central role given by it to "true imagination", *imaginatio vera*, as the power responsible for creating inner and outer reality. Not only did both Jung and Corbin consider this a natural manifestation of the numinous: something totally real and completely different from our usual self-indulgent fantasies. For Corbin, just as for Jung, this faculty of true imagination belongs above all to prophets.<sup>34</sup>

And so we are brought back to the topic of prophecy which was to cause so much trouble to Jung's family, and even more trouble for his followers. There was his role as prophet whose thankless task is to look back into the past to find the true origin of our present illnesses—because only through discovering what went wrong by living with the dead, and restoring our broken links with the past, can someone find the medicine that will cure the collective sickness of our time. And there was also his role as prophet whose task is to reach forward into the future through dreams and visions: visions that were suppressed as effectively as possible by his own family and, in the case of what he saw on his deathbed, even suppressed by his closest colleagues. But the truth has a strange way of getting out; and it was the

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*Job*, Paris: Buchet-Chastel 1964, 252); C. 382–4, 742–44. For the same sentiment in Jung, compare for example *Nietzsche's "Zarathustra" I*, 216–18.

34 C. 384–86, 745–48, 752–54. For the misunderstanding by Jungians like James Hillman of this fundamental difference between true and false imagination, their misuse of the term "imaginal", and the furious reaction that this misuse privately evoked in Corbin himself, see C. 387–89, 749–52. On the venerable antiquity of the western tradition linking the faculty of imagination with prophecy, see C. 747–48, and for Jung's careful reading—in the original Greek—of relevant passages from Iamblichus' *On the Mysteries* see 753–54.

pastor at Jung's funeral who summed everything up when he celebrated Jung as "a prophet who had stemmed the flood of rationalism and given man the courage to have a soul again".<sup>35</sup>

In fact this is the same prophetic spirit that blows everywhere in his work, just under the surface of the "scientific" language. Not just Jung's newly published *Red Book* but also the tone and content of *Aion* or *Answer to Job*, the repeated and passionate warnings not to overvalue reason or science at the expense of the unconscious because otherwise we will end up substituting ourselves for God, are only the most evident signs of his prophetic task. And judging from the way that events are unfolding now around the globe—with the growth of a hyperrational society which, in spite of our feeble talk about progress, is drawing us back unconsciously and collectively into a primitive state—we can see how true Jung's prophecies were.

Kingsley devotes the final pages of *Catafalque* to the last visions of Jung as well as his own dreams and visions, tracing out the desolate outlines of the ending of our culture. This is something to be taken very seriously because, as Jung said while still a relatively young man in his forties, "When the rational way proves to be a *cul de sac*—as it always does after a time—the solution comes from the side it was least expected" which is the side of the prophets.<sup>36</sup> And rather than continue to torture those prophets by distorting or silencing their voices, we would do far better to join the author of *Catafalque* in his lament for the dead—while giving all those who from the beginning have seeded and nurtured our culture the respect and peace they deserve.

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35 V. Brome, *Jung: Man and Myth* (London: Macmillan, 1978), 273; P. Bishop, *Jung's "Answer to Job": A Commentary* (Hove: Brunner-Routledge, 2002), 20. Henry Corbin, too, was celebrated as a prophet at his own funeral: R. Stauffer, "Adieu à Henry Corbin (Homélie prononcée aux obsèques, le 11 octobre 1978)" in *Cahiers de l'Université Saint Jean de Jérusalem* 5 (1979): 10 ("Au sens le plus authentique de ce verbe, il 'prophétisait', si j'ose m'exprimer ainsi"); C. 749.

36 C.G. Jung, *Psychological Types* (London: Routledge, 1971) 260–65 §§438–48; C. 284, 666. It should be added that in discussing the multiple dimensions of western prophetic tradition, as well as the prophetic aspects of both Jung's and Corbin's work, Kingsley keeps firmly focused on the etymological sense of Greek *prophētēs* (C. 647; see also 679).