

Review Essay

JUNG'S 'WHITE RAVEN'

The Jung–White Letters edited by Ann Conrad Lammers and Adrian Cunningham, Consulting Editor Murray Stein. Published by Routledge, London and New York, 2007; 384 pp; £50.00 hardback.

The publication of the letters between Carl Jung and Fr Victor White, the English Dominican theologian and psychotherapist, is a major landmark in Jungian studies. It has also been a long time in coming. But at last we have them, and in a beautifully produced and meticulously edited edition, supplied with copious footnotes and six appendices which provide much background and contextual information. Ann Conrad Lammers, Adrian Cunningham, and Murray Stein deserve the warmest congratulations and thanks for their devoted and scholarly labour of love in finally bringing *The Jung–White Letters* to print.

By a happy coincidence, 2007 also saw the publication of the first book-length biography of Victor White: *Fr. Victor White, O.P.: The Story of Jung's 'White Raven'* (Weldon 2007). Readers of *The Letters* who wish to know more about this remarkable priest, whose sometimes impassioned discussions and arguments with Jung helped to inspire – or, maybe, to provoke – Jung's works *Aion* (1968) and *Answer to Job* (1969), will appreciate this authoritative exposition of White's personal and intellectual development. Together, *The Letters* and Weldon's biography of White greatly enrich the picture painted by Ann Conrad Lammers in her earlier study, *In God's Shadow: The Collaboration of Victor White and C.G. Jung* (Lammers 1994).

Why might we want to read these letters? Most obviously, I guess, if we are interested in the dialogue between Jungian psychology and Christianity; or if we are seeking another entrée into the many-faceted character of Jung. But to say this is to give no inkling of the richness of these pages.

The Protagonists

As his semi-autobiographical memoir, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (Jung 1963), revealed, Jung – a clergyman's son – was preoccupied, from the time of his lonely childhood, with the problems raised by religion; but it was only when he was in his 70s, meeting Victor White, that he encountered a theological soul-mate who was able to understand his psychological point of view.

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At the time when this correspondence opens, in August 1945, Victor White (who was then 42) was also lonely. A clergyman's son, like Jung, he had reacted against his father's Anglicanism by converting to the Roman Catholic Church and becoming a Dominican priest. In his 30s he suffered a crisis of faith. Alienated by the excessively academic and abstract nature of his training, he found that the theology he was expected to teach – by then he was a professor of Dogmatic Theology – had ceased to have meaning for him, 'I could not get my mind onto it, or anything to do with it, except with horror, boredom and loathing' (p. 312).

In his distress, he confided in an academic friend who put him in touch with John Layard, a Jungian psychotherapist then working in Oxford. Layard had had a chequered career. An anthropologist, now remembered chiefly for his *Stone Men of Malekula* (Layard 1942), he had had an important – though somewhat disturbing and disturbed – relationship with the poet W.H. Auden, in Berlin, in the late 1920s and early 1930s (Davenport-Hines 2003). There is evidence, in *The Letters*, that Layard's own problems re-surfaced in the mid-1940s and that White, for a time, acted as his former therapist's spiritual adviser (p. 45) – an example of the convoluted relationships which were such a feature of the developing analytic world.

But these complications came later. In the early 1940s it seems that therapeutic work with Layard, and White's own ability to read Jung's books in German – he could read, 'fairly easily', French, German, Spanish, Italian, and Latin (p. 12) – brought about a transformation. Progress was patchy, and Layard less than ideal; but the long-term effects were far-reaching as White learned how to relate to his internal world, and to find symbolic and subjective meaning in the dogma he was bound to teach.

Given the change brought about by his own therapeutic experience, White was convinced of the value of Jung's work. But, being a theologian, he could also see that there might be conflicts between Jung's symbolic approach and the historically rooted nature of the Christian faith. For example, he wrote:

Why does Jung disturb me so? Because it is impossible to read him without drawing the conclusion that if Jesus had not existed it would have been necessary to invent Him. And if it was necessary to invent Him, it seems unnecessary that He should have existed. (p. 315)

White also registered fears that some Jungians were going beyond their empirical data and making metaphysical assertions, which might lead to Jungianism becoming an 'ersatz-religion' (p. 316). By 1942, three years before his first contact with Jung, and in prescient anticipation of later problems, he was taking Jung to task for devaluing the Christian approach to evil (p. 318). As the Second World War ground on, White's personal project became more and more focused on trying to work out 'how far Jung could be placed within Catholic theology' (p. 315). This is the background to these letters.

The Letters

The letters begin in August 1945, and continue, with some interruption in the later years, until White's untimely death, in May 1960.

At the outset, there was a strange echo of the correspondence between Freud and Jung: just as Jung initiated that relationship by sending Freud his *Diagnostic Association Studies* (McGuire 1974, p. 3), so White – also, in psychological terms, the neophyte – begins this correspondence by sending Jung four papers in which he had examined Jung's psychology from a Catholic point of view. Almost eight weeks later Jung writes a genial acknowledgement, promising to read White's articles 'with greatest interest', and saying that he has had many discussions with Catholic priests (pp. 4f). It was a conventional enough beginning.

Twelve days later, though, Jung wrote again, in an altogether more animated way, saying:

You are to me a white raven inasmuch as you are the only theologian I know of who has really understood something of what the problem of psychology in our present world means. You have seen its enormous implications. I cannot tell you how glad I am to know a man, a theologian, who is conscientious enough to weigh my opinions on the basis of a careful study of my writings! This is a really rare occasion. (p. 6)

It would be interesting to know what White made of the 'white raven'. The tag contains his name, but it is also richly overdetermined. In the Bible, ravens bring food to the prophet Elijah when he is hiding in the wilderness (1 Kings 17.1–6). Perhaps Jung was suggesting that White's papers had reached him like manna from heaven. But why a *white* raven? Jung may have known that Dominicans wear a black cloak over their white habits, in which case he may be making an amused reference to the way he imagines Victor White to look. Both explanations are possible, but Weldon has other intriguing suggestions. 'White raven' could be an oxymoron: just as ravens are not white so theologians do not usually understand psychology, but White did (Weldon 2007, p. 47). It could also be a reference to the alchemical symbolism, which meant so much to Jung. Alchemists are popularly thought of as primitive chemists, who tried to turn base matter into gold. Studying their texts, though, Jung realized that their 'chemistry', in which the elements are personified, was actually a wonderfully rich, pre-psychological, description of unconscious processes projected into matter. In Jung's view, though – and as the more enlightened alchemists themselves realized – the true purpose of their experiments was not the creation of precious metal but personal transformation. Looked at like this, the first stage of the alchemical process, the '*nigredo*', in which base matter, heated, turns black in the retort, corresponds, psychologically, to the death of the old attitudes of the ego – the prelude to rebirth. Jung would have

known that the common term for the *nigredo*, in alchemy, was the ‘raven’s head’; and that the first signs of whitening, which signified that transformation was occurring, were described as ‘the black raven becoming white’. Given Jung’s belief that the western image of God had become moribund, could ‘white raven’ be an indication of the potential that Jung was imagining, in White, for its future transformation? Weldon thinks so (Weldon 2007, pp. 47–9), and *The Letters* contain some suggestive passages which support this interpretation (e.g. p. 300, quoted below).

Jung continues this highly significant letter in candid vein, confiding that, although he began his career by repudiating ‘everything that smelt of belief’, he had wanted to demonstrate the importance of religious symbolism to his materialistic colleagues (p. 6). When he now says that God is a psychological complex, he means ‘whatever He is, he is *at least* a very tangible complex’; and, although he never allows himself to make objective statements about God, Jung’s own feeling is that:

Man’s vital energy or libido is the divine pneuma alright and it was this conviction which it was my secret purpose to bring into the vicinity of my colleagues’ understanding. (p. 7)

As a scientist Jung has to give a wide birth to anything dogmatic or metaphysical, and yet he does believe that:

dogma is the hitherto [i.e. in the pre-psychological world – CM] most perfect answer to and formulation of the most relevant items in the objective psyche and that God has worked all these things in Man’s soul. (p. 7)

Jung deeply regrets his theological inadequacy when attempting a psychological commentary on religious symbols – e.g. the Trinity – and his lack of a psychologically-minded Catholic theologian to assist him. When God-talk is dismissed as ‘nebulous phantasies’:

It is of *the highest importance* that the educated and ‘enlightened’ public should know religious truth as a thing living in the human soul and not as an abstruse and unreasonable relic of the past. (p. 10)

‘The appalling lack of understanding threatens the Christian religion with complete oblivion’, but – Jung confidently asserts – White feels as he does, that ‘the theologian ought to learn a new language’, ‘to create a new approach to an old truth’ (p. 10).

Their collaboration was under way.

The Text

Just over two-thirds of Jung’s letters to White – this first, extended, letter included – have already been published, in whole or in part, in the *C.G. Jung*

Letters (Jung 1973, 1976); but with textual emendations designed to ‘smooth over’ Jung’s English. As Ann Conrad Lammers significantly observes, the effect of these editorial ‘improvements’ in the *C.G. Jung Letters* is far-reaching:

Through a thousand small emendations (Jung’s) rough edges, grammatical errors and eccentricities are trimmed away, his diction corrected. Ironically, given Jung’s desire to embrace his shadow at all costs, with such improvements the individuality of the writer is subtly diminished. (Lammers 1994, p. xxix)

In *The Jung–White Letters* Jung’s authentic ‘voice’ is restored: pithy, idiomatic and, often, touchingly expressive. For example, in December 1946, where Jung wrote from his sick-bed that his ‘haleness’ had been tested mercilessly, but that he is now ‘hale’ again, the editors of the *C.G. Jung Letters* silently ‘corrected’ these words to ‘wholeness’ and ‘whole’ (pp. xxix, 60) – words that have their own powerful associations in Analytical Psychology. Besides, the effect, in the *C.G. Jung Letters*, of printing only Jung’s side of the correspondence, with brief notes about the addressees, is to turn each of Jung’s letters into an *ex cathedra* statement, detached from its relational context. Of course, many of Jung’s correspondents may only have received a few letters, and did not make a lasting connection with him; but the opposite was true of White with whom, as with Freud, Jung formed a deeply personal relationship.

Profound But Conflict-laden Affection

Transferences were there from the start. At first, White was somewhat in awe of Jung, as is clear from his rather obsequious reply to Jung’s acknowledgement of his original letter:

Dear Professor Jung,

I was immensely honoured and gratified to receive your very kind letter of September 26th. I had little thought that my impudence in writing to you would elicit any response at all, especially in view of the immense demands which must be made upon your time and patience. (p. 11)

Maybe, but as White suggests in this letter, and confesses in his next, he had actually recorded a dream, ten months earlier, in which Jung gave him a medal for all he had done to spread and develop his work during the war, when he could not get out of Switzerland. In this dream, Jung ‘says there are very few who have really understood him correctly and seen the wider implications of his work as well’ (p. 13). Despite his diffidence, White had wanted to meet Jung for a long time, and already aspired to be singled out as his chosen interpreter.

Their growing affection, tinged with caution, shows in their modes of address. Victor White’s first two letters begin, ‘Dear Professor Jung’, and end,

'Yours very obediently, gratefully, Fr Victor White, O.P.', and 'Yours very gratefully and sincerely, Victor White, O.P.' His third letter begins 'My Dear Professor Jung', and ends 'Yours very sincerely and gratefully, Victor White, O.P.'. Jung's first two letters begin 'Dear Father', and 'My Dear Father White', and both end, 'Yours sincerely, C.G. Jung.' An emotional watershed is reached in January 1947, though, when Jung inadvertently writes 'Dear Father Wight', and then corrects it with the comment 'Excuse me! My feebleness plays tricks to me! I drop into old Saxon' (p. 70). To which White replies:

I admire your proficiency in Anglo-Saxon! Still, if ever you should care to write again, I should like it very much if you were to drop both WHITE & WIGHT & just call me Victor – even though I believe it is customary in Switzerland to be much more formal about titles and surnames than it is nowadays in England.

Jung replies:

My dear Victor,

As you see I avail myself of your kind permission to call you by your first name. I hope you will reciprocate by calling me *C.G.* which is the current designation of my unworthy 'paucity'. (p. 80)

And 'Victor' and 'C.G.' they remained, even after their differences had driven them apart.

Two Agendas

What did Jung and White hope to gain from each other? In retrospect, I think we can see that each man had his own agenda, and that these agendas were, ultimately, incompatible. At the same time, and this was the unforeseeable ingredient, they became deeply attached to one another.

Jung's agenda was clear: he believed that he had uncovered the psychodynamics underlying the development of the western (Christian) psyche, and he yearned for the churches to listen to his voice. In 1960, as White lay dying of cancer, Jung wrote:

As there are so few men capable of understanding the deeper implications of our psychology, I had nursed the apparently vain hope that Father Victor would carry on the magnum opus. (p. 300)

Just as Freud had once pictured himself as Moses, with Jung as the Joshua who would take possession of the 'promised land of psychiatry, which I shall only be able to glimpse from afar' (McGuire 1974, pp. 196f), so Jung hoped that White would be his emissary within the Catholic Church.

White's agenda was slightly different. As a theologian, he was deeply at odds with the dogmatic and authoritarian stance of the Roman Catholic

Church, to which he was required to promise obedience. But White's antagonism towards dogmatic authority seems never completely to have undermined his belief in the fundamentals of Christian orthodoxy – although he was sometimes torn apart as he tried to make sense of them in the light of Jung's ideas. What White hoped to do was to follow the example of Thomas Aquinas, his great Dominican forebear in the Middle Ages, who had used Aristotle's philosophy – then 'state of the art' – as the vehicle for a new articulation of the Christian faith. Where Aquinas had used Aristotle, White hoped to use Jung's psychology, realizing that, in the mid-twentieth century, Christian faith needed to be re-conceived in experiential and psychodynamic terms. This would be White's tribute to Jung – a demonstration of the value of his own analysis, and of the analytically inclined spiritual direction for which he was increasingly in demand (in one letter, Jung refers to him as an analyst, p. 240).

In chronological and psychological terms, White was the junior partner in their relationship, but he worked hard. Michael Fordham – in his time, a leading member of the Society for Analytical Psychology, and one of the editors of the English edition of Jung's *Collected Works* – later wrote that White's psychology was so good that trained psychologists had difficulty competing with him (Weldon 2007, p. 157). He was also impressively well informed. Jung's texts often cite Biblical authors, church fathers and heretics, gnostic and alchemical texts, and mythology and comparative religion. Few readers are competent to assess the use he makes of such diverse sources but, by and large, White was. Working in Oxford, he also had colleagues who could assist him: his Dominican confrere Richard Kehoe was a biblical scholar, and his friend Dr Sherwin Taylor, custodian of the Old Ashmolean Science Museum, an authority on alchemy.

It is sometimes said that Jung suffered from being surrounded by adoring women and other hangers on; that he lacked independent-minded scholars who would not be overawed, but could stand their ground and fight their corner with him. In May 1955, when his working relationship with Jung was foundering over their inability to reach agreement on the nature of evil, and the character of God, or the self, White says as much:

The horrible impression has come upon me in Zürich (I hope it is wrong) that my dear C. G. has around him only sycophants and flatterers: or people requiring audiences or transferences which no mortal can carry. I *hope* I am wrong: such a situation is too inhuman . . . (p. 273)

White's disappointment and jealousy are plainly evident here, but – given these accusations – it is noteworthy that Jung collaborated with such an able and independent-minded scholar so patiently, and for so long.

But this is to anticipate. The bulk of the letters come from the years 1945–1955 and witness to their authors' increasingly close collaboration, cemented by White's annual stays at Bollingen, Jung's country retreat on

Lake Zurich, to which only intimate friends were invited. They share dreams (literally), projects, and ideas. Jung comments, generally very favourably, on White's increasing flow of publications, some of which were published in *God and the Unconscious* (White 1952); and White is invited to lecture at Eranos, and to become a Founder of the Institute for Analytical Psychology, in Zurich. Jung comes through critical illnesses; and White – despite his intellectual distinction – suffers the derailment of his academic career and virtual exile to the United States, probably, although this is still unclear, because his espousal of Jungian psychology had aroused hostility in Rome.

Some of the most sensitive letters in this collection are written by Jung to White, as White struggled to reconcile his inner truth with the crushing demands for dogmatic conformity imposed by the Roman Catholic Church on its theologians. At the same time it is curious, given the severity of White's distress, that Jung never – at least in *The Letters* – attempts to explore possible alternative career moves with White. Was it really so unthinkable, for example, that White might return to the Anglican Church of his childhood, and continue his academic career within that more accommodating branch of the Christian Church? And if Jung failed to raise this possibility with White, was this omission caused by his ignorance of the Church scene in England, at that time? Or, could it have been because Jung's project required White to remain at his post within the Catholic Church?

The Soror Mystica

From January 1947, these rather masculine letters begin to be enlivened by the presence of Mrs Barbara Robb, a highly intuitive, possibly psychic – she once predicted the first three horses in the Derby (p. 140) – friend of White's, who startles both men with her beauty: Jung describes her as 'an eye-ful and beyond' (p. 168), and White as 'quite a corker' (p. 170). Although Jung and White appear unconscious of her contribution, I think it can be argued that her thoughts and dreams, retailed by White, provide a commentary on some of the more unconscious, or unexpressed, aspects of their relationship. In this sense, at least, Jung was right to nickname her the '*soror mystica*': the 'mystical sister', or partner, who sometimes collaborated with an alchemist in his work (p. 70).

Robb's first appearance in this role comes in a letter of January 1947 (pp. 66–9), where White expresses joy that Jung is beginning to recover from the heart attack that had nearly killed him in November, the previous year. Despite his pressured existence as academic, religious, and therapist, White claims, 'there are many consolations. One day I hope to tell you more of the remarkable self-analysis of a married woman friend of mine' (p. 68).

The friend was Barbara Robb, born in 1913 (p. 172, n. 23), ‘no dévotte [“Cloistered innocent” – CM]; but a young and gay and smart ex-ballet-dancer’, who possibly possessed the qualities of the good recipient of Revelation who, according to Thomas Aquinas, needs ‘not good morals, but a good imagination’. Though White does not make this connection, he indicates that her story had been ‘long and intricate and sometimes squalid’.

White had shared with Robb a recent letter from Jung, in which Jung had responded to White’s assurance of prayers by saying, ‘It is a great consolation to know that one is included in the prayers of fellow human beings. The aspectus mortis [face of death – CM] is a mighty lonely thing . . .’ (pp. 59f). In this letter Jung also described a ‘marvellous dream: One bluish diamond-like star high in heaven, reflected in a round, quiet pool – heaven above, heaven below’ (p. 60). Robb’s reaction to this information appears to have been two-fold. Consciously, her ‘whole life’ seemed to ‘have taken the form of a sort of prayer for (Jung)’: ‘THAT HE MAY BE ALL HE CAN BE’ (p. 69). This attitude might mirror White’s own, conscious, devotion to Jung’s well-being. At a less conscious level, though, she reported a dream: that Jung was ill in bed, in her parental home, and had asked her to fix an electric fire plug in the wall, ‘which at once produced a luminous blue diamond’. The outcome, comments White:

(for some reason beyond my understanding) was a complete change of attitude towards her husband [. . .]; and the next day – defying all advice, entreaties and threats of Doctors and psychologists urging her to be ‘kind’, ‘patient’ and ‘considerate’ etc. etc. – she gave him two hefty socks on the jaw! Since when he has been functioning perfectly; and they show every sign of living happily ever after! *Whatever you may think about it, I somehow feel you might like to know about it* [my italics – CM]; if only as one example of the unknown friends you have all over the globe! (p. 69)

What is going on here? The outcome of Robb’s dream – the assault on her husband – may have been ‘beyond White’s understanding’, but might it have been an expression of White’s own increasingly violent, but repressed, feelings towards Jung? It is more than two years later that White reports a dream of his own, in which he and Jung are in a motorboat on Lake Zurich, when the ‘somehow spiritual’ silence of the boat’s engine and the environment is suddenly broken by a ‘terrific explosion’ (p. 136): a dream which must more or less have coincided with the publication of White’s first outspokenly critical comments on Jung’s ideas about evil (p. 140, n. 26).

Bones of Contention

Despite the deferential tone of White’s first letter, he was not afraid to challenge Jung’s basic suppositions.

(a) *Jung's Kantianism*

On 23 October, 1945, in only his fourth letter, White questions Jung's uncritical adoption of Kant's absolute distinction between the noumenon, the 'thing-in-itself', and the phenomenon: the way in which the unknowable appears to us; a distinction routinely employed by Jung to distinguish between the archetype and the archetypal image. Interestingly, White wonders if the split introduced by this absolute distinction in our capacity to know might not, in itself, be psychologically damaging:

I wonder how far the Kantian dichotomy is not itself cause and symptom of the neurosis of Modern Man? Do not the 'two realities' themselves imply a deep split in the psyche, and when 'God' is banished from 'Pure Reason' and wholly divorced from the field of Sensation, is He not bound to slip into the unconscious and become, first a purely irrational, then an anti-rational and even pathological function? (p. 18)

Perhaps significantly, Jung did not respond to this searching question, and White did not press it – though he twice alludes to it again (pp. 39, 189). Behind it lay White's own work on the mystical dimension of Thomas Aquinas's thought, which suggests that, besides rational knowledge, there is also 'affective knowledge'. In other words, White shared the mystics' belief that ultimate reality can be known directly, and not just in the symbolic ways posited by Jung. In White's view, Kant's distinction was itself a symptom of a psychic split. If White was correct in this supposition, it would have interesting implications for the state of Jung's personal psychology – White's later review of *Answer to Job* suggests as much (pp. 349ff), and Winnicott independently came to a similar conclusion in his review of *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (Winnicott 1989, p. 482, cf. p. 228).

(b) *Evil and the Highest Good*

As everyone familiar with the facts of Jung's life knows, Jung and White hit their most intractable problems over the question of evil, and the Christian belief that God is the highest good.

Basic to Jung's model of the mind is the notion that all the unprocessed potentials of the self 'wish' to unfold into consciousness; and, as unconscious potentials emerge into consciousness, they split into opposites. Partly because of his religious background, and partly because he believed that these psychological dynamics underlie religious formulations, Jung liked to describe this process in religious terms. Expressed thus, the self becomes the image of God in man, and the process of unfolding into consciousness a form of incarnation. But because the self contains every potential it is, in conscious terms, evil as well as good. Projecting this model onto the Bible or, as he believed, finding evidence for its operation in the Bible, Jung took the Bible's earlier, amoral, picture of Yahweh, as a symbol of the undifferenti-

ated self; and in the Book of Job he believed he found evidence of a crisis fraught with significance for the development of the western psyche. As Jung reads Job, Job's superior, conscious, moral attitude exposes the duplicity of a more unconscious 'god'. In time, Jung argues, this refined conscious attitude brought about a change in the unconscious, causing the self to differentiate its good and evil potentials by incarnating its light side in Christ, and expressing its dark side through Satan. The Christian era has coincided with the astrological aeon of *pisces* (p. 234) – two fishes swimming in opposite directions – but we now stand at the dawn of the age of *aquarius*, when the opposition between good and evil will come to a head, and:

man will be essentially God and God man. The signs pointing in this direction consist in the fact that the cosmic power of self-destruction is laid into the hands of man and that man inherits the dual nature of the Father. (p. 237)

Jung was always acutely conscious that he was living in the aftermath of the first use of atomic bombs, and of the iron curtain splitting Europe, east from west.

It is hard to condense Jung's views in a single paragraph. What I hope will be apparent, though, even to those unfamiliar with Jung's later writings, is that, as Jung developed his ideas, the line between Jung the empirically oriented psychologist, and Jung the visionary possessed of a psychological-cum-cosmic myth, became thinner and thinner. White's problem was that his project required Jung to be the empirical psychologist, the author of an experimentally grounded psychology that could be used as a *lingua franca* through which the symbolic content of Christian doctrine could be made accessible to modern men and women. The last thing he needed was for Jung to become – in Christian terms – the mouthpiece for a Gnostic myth.

By this time, too, White had travelled a long way with Jung. It may not only be Evangelical Christians and psychoanalysts who will be startled to find White, tutored by Jung, turning to the *I Ching* when he needed an objective viewpoint on his unconscious disposition (e.g. pp. 216, 243, where it seems to have worked well). But a sticking point there was bound to be, and it arose over the question of evil – which White had earlier identified as a possible point of contention (p. 318). Jung took good and evil to be equal and opposite potentials of the self, which he regarded as a symbol for God. How could White express this in theological language, without suggesting that God is both good and evil; clearly unacceptable, from a Christian point of view? White's answer was to think of evil as a 'privation of good', but Jung was violently opposed to this formulation. To him, it suggested that evil is insignificant, a mere nothing. For a long time, White assailed Jung with rational arguments, seeming not to comprehend the adamant nature of Jung's rejection of this notion. After all, as White says, it was his own encounter with Jung's psychology that had enabled him to *experience* evil as a privation of good. In letter after letter, with remarkable patience and

occasional cries of pain, each struggles to convince the other of his views. Perhaps strangely, it seems not to have occurred to either of them to transpose their mythological language into clinical terms, to remember the effects of maternal deprivation: the absent breast which, in time, becomes a malign presence with consequent disruption; or the psychology of envy and all it can involve. Hindsight is so easy!

(c) *Aion and Answer to Job*

Now, with the full publication of *The Letters*, we can begin to appreciate how seminal White's discussions and arguments with Jung were in the gestation of *Aion*, Jung's *Researches into the Phenomenology of the Self* (Jung 1968, German edition, 1950); and, even more, of Jung's titanic eruption, *Answer to Job* (Jung 1969, German edition, 1952).

When the German edition of *Answer to Job* first appeared, White seems to have read it primarily as a subjective statement of Jung's own psychological struggles:

My dear C.G.

Thank you a million for 'Hiob'. Though I have countless other things to do, I can hardly put it down. It is the most exciting and moving book I have read in years: and somehow it arouses tremendous bonds of sympathy between us, and lights up all sorts of dark places both in the Scriptures and in my own psyche . . . Of course, this is not a considered judgement on all it says! The first impact is too strong for me to dare any such thing. (p. 181)

For some unexplained reason, White believed that Jung had given him an assurance that *Answer to Job* would not appear in English (pp. 289, n. 6). When it was printed in English translation, though – containing all the 'psycho-mythology' outlined above, and much more – White's position as the leading British Catholic theologian prominently identified with Jung – and already exiled from Oxford to California, for his pains – threatened to become untenable. At this point White's restraint broke, and he poured his pent-up rage and frustration into a highly perceptive, entertaining (depending on your point of view), and ruthless review, which did not stop short of exposing Jung's personal psychology. Beside some very affirming statements, he also wrote that *Answer to Job*:

has – and this is its most distressing feature – the ingenuity and power, the plausibility and improbability, the clear-sightedness and blindness of the typical paranoid system which rationalizes and conceals an even more unbearable grief and resentment. (p. 355)

Almost immediately, White deeply regretted this *ad hominem* attack, and toned it down when it was re-printed; but Jung was profoundly hurt, and their attempted *Auseinandersetzung* was further undermined by Emma

Jung's recent diagnosis and fruitless operation for terminal cancer. When White left Zurich, in May 1955, he knew 'that it is improbable that we meet again for a very long time' (p. 272).

The Aftermath

Happily, though, this correspondence, which begins with echoes of Jung's with Freud, does not end, as that earlier relationship did, with those four devastating words, 'The rest is silence' (McGuire 1974, p. 540). There are three letters from White to Jung between 1956 and 1958, including arrangements for a meeting; though there is no record of how that meeting went. In April 1959 White was involved in a serious road accident, which threatened permanent brain damage; although he eventually emerged with only his sight and hearing impaired (p. 332). Replying to Jung's messages, which he received gladly, he says that he had smiled 'somewhat cynically' at Jung's remark that he apparently did not wholly disapprove of his work:

(How could I?) It seems that I am in quite serious trouble (and in Rome itself!) for (apparently) my approval of it; so much so that my future is quite uncertain! (p. 281)

Two months later, White was found to be suffering from incurable stomach cancer, and the correspondence was briefly but more actively resumed, allowing Jung to protest White's 'personalistic' interpretation of *Answer to Job*. White was not strong enough to sustain an energetic re-engagement, and his memory of events was distorted, but he did write, touchingly:

I think and hope you know that when you first showed me 'Antwort auf Hiob' I loved and admired it very much, especially when you told me the conditions under which you had written it and what it had done for you. I still love your picture of Job because I love you . . . (p. 289)

Frail as he was, though, he persisted in his criticism that the problem with Jung's reading of Job is that it makes no mention of Job having a shadow. By apparently accepting Job's protestations of innocence at face value Jung seemed, to White, to be colluding with Job's projection of his own dark side onto God.

They could not agree, but their relationship survived. 'Don't worry! I think of you in everlasting friendship', wrote Jung (p. 286). And White's last words were, 'May I add that I pray with all my heart for your well-being, whatever that may be in the eyes of God. Ever yours cordially and affectionately, Victor White' (p. 292). He died on 22 May 1960, aged 57. In the same year, White's most systematic and mature attempt to relate Jungian psychology to Christian belief appeared in his book *Soul and Psyche* (White 1960). It was his final contribution to the great debate.

Jung died on 6 June 1961, aged 85.

Reflections

What are we to make of this passionate and deeply felt engagement? This reviewer cannot pretend to impartiality: my own interpretation of the ways in which Jung's childhood distress – I would like to say 'privation' – distorted his understanding of the Judaeo-Christian tradition is in print (MacKenna 2000). That said, though, to anyone interested in Jung and the genesis of his ideas about religion, these letters are a gold-mine. It is good, too, finally to see Victor White emerging from the shadows – in the cover photograph he is, literally, a dark presence in the shadow of Jung's white-coated figure.

Besides, now there is renewed discussion about the relationship of religion and spirituality to psychotherapeutic thought and practice, it is fitting that this path-finding dialogue should be put into the public domain. It bears comparison with the correspondence between Sigmund Freud and Oskar Pfister (Freud & Pfister 1963), another early clerical analyst. But whereas that correspondence is charming, and areas of disagreement handled with the greatest tact, this one is much more extensive, varied, detailed, and full-blooded.

Jung and White failed to agree and, in these letters, deeply personal aspects of their lives are bared to public gaze. It is to the credit of both men that they emerge with so much of their integrity intact.

Christopher MacKenna

British Association of Psychotherapists, London
[cmackenna@stmarylebone.org]

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