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## Pursuing Inner Images: A Spiritual Interpretation of Jung's Visual Art

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**Abstract** Carl Gustav Jung was not only a pioneering theorist in psychoanalysis but also an innovative artist, with works in painting, wood carving, and stone engraving. This paper analyzes Jung's art through the lens of spirituality, uncovering its role in serving his psychological research. Jung believed art could externalize inner images and reflect the collective unconscious, offering a way to reconnect with the soul and express the "supreme meaning". Symbolic totems: mandalas, snakes, and dragons are central to his visual language. It embodies deep psychological and spiritual meanings. This study approaches Jung's work from a cross-cultural perspective. It explores the resonance between Jung's imagery and eastern philosophy, including yin-yang duality in Traditional Chinese Medicine, spiritual awakening in Zen Buddhism and inner contemplation in Taoism. Through this lens, the paper reveals Jung's artistic act as a profound attempt to bridge Eastern and Western thought, deepening our understanding of self, psyche, and image.

**Keywords** Carl G. Jung, The Red Book, spirituality, totem, modern art, psychological archetype

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## 1. The Expression of Spirituality Through Supreme Meaning Images

Jung is a famous psychologist and a thoughtful and creative artist. His works include paintings, illustrations, woodcarvings, and stone carvings. From an artistic point of view, Jung's visual creations are mystical and have a strong spiritual character. *The Red Book (Liber Novus)*, authored by Jung between 1914 and 1930, documents his deep self-exploration through active imagination during a critical period of psychological transformation. It captures Jung's engagement with the unconscious by combining visionary narratives with symbolic paintings. Why did Jung, a theorist and psychoanalyst, turn to visual arts? He answers this question directly in *The Red Book*: "My speech is imperfect. Not because I want to shine with words, but out of the impossibility of finding those words, I speak in images. With nothing else can I express the words from the depths" (Jung & Shamdasani, 2009, p. 230).

In Jung's view, language and words alone are insufficient to express his profound psychological insights. For example, the concept of "supreme meaning" cannot be fully expressed in language. This is the central term Jung uses to describe psychological and spiritual depths.

Building on his emphasis on the limits of language, Jung offers a more detailed explanation in *The Red Book*, where he describes the meaning and qualities of what he called the "supreme meaning". He writes: "The supreme meaning is not meaning and not an absurdity, it is image and force in one, magnificence and force together" (Jung & Shamdasani, 2009, p. 232). In his view, the supreme meaning has the qualities of image, which is why it can be expressed through drawing images. It also includes force and magnificence. These qualities, for Jung, are unique to the spirits as described throughout *The Red Book*. The supreme meaning goes beyond both meaning and absurdity and lies outside the limits of rational and irrational understanding. This also shows that one important reason Jung's creative arts are to explore the supreme meaning of the human psyche. In this context, the supreme meaning points to the deeper psychological and spiritual layers of the self.

Jung states in the frontispiece of *The Red Book*: "The years when I pursued the images were the most important time of my life" (Jung & Shamdasani, 2009, frontispiece). This suggests that his paintings were not representations of the outer world or things seen with the eye, but expressions of inner and spiritual images. The pursuit of inner images was of great importance to Jung. He states: "Everything else is to be derived from this. It began at the time, and the later details hardly matter anymore. My entire life consisted in elaborating what had burst forth from the unconscious and flooded me like an enigmatic stream... Everything later was merely the outer classification, the scientific elaboration, and the integration into life. But the numinous beginning, which contained everything, was then." (Jung, 2009, frontispiece).

For Jung, the pursuit of inner images is the starting point for much of his later work. He believes that the soul can be expressed through these inner images. As he writes, "The wealth of the soul exists in images. He who possesses the image of the world, possesses half the world, even if his humanity is poor and owns nothing." (Jung & Shamdasani, 2009, p. 232).

Jung's ideas about the psyche, the soul, and spirituality are all developed through this process of working with inner imagery. For him, making images of the inner world is not simply an artistic choice, but a necessary part of his theoretical work. He paints not to become an artist, but because his psychological ideas require images to be fully understood.

Jung's psychological theories, especially his understanding of the soul, the unconscious and the psyche, were deeply influenced by his work on inner images. Creating these images is more than just a personal or artistic activity; it is central to the development of his thought. Although Jung had some artistic background, he did not paint to become an artist. He used painting to express psychological concepts that could not be adequately conveyed in words. For Jung, images are not a supplement to theory but the essence of it.

## 2. Interpreting the Mystery of Jung's Paintings Through Spiritual Totems

Jung's paintings included a wide range of totemic imagery, which he regarded as deeply spiritual and symbolically meaningful. This is one of the reasons why Jung's paintings often seem so mysterious. For Jung, these are not merely decorative or cultural artefacts but psychological symbols that give form to inner experiences. They are ways of expressing powerful emotions and unconscious content that are difficult to articulate in words. In his view, totems represent deeply personal encounters with the unconscious and serve as pathways to spiritual insight. He notes that nearly all early cultures developed secret systems of symbolic transmission, often highly elaborate, to preserve knowledge of the inner world. These systems are typically maintained by totemic clans or spiritual communities that

operate apart from everyday life. In Jung's view, the symbolic teachings they preserved were among the most vital aspects of human experience (Jung & Shamdasani, 2009, pp. 135–136).

Jung believes these totems go beyond aesthetic or cultural expression; they function as projections of the psyche, as spiritual maps underlying psychological structures, and as tools for accessing deeper layers of the mind. For Jung, totems reveal personal experiences, inner conflicts, unconscious processes, and even aspects of the Self as the highest archetype of being. In the following sections, several of Jung's specific works are examined to illustrate how these symbolic elements were manifested in his visual practice.

## 2.1 The Mandala Totem

Among the various spiritual totems in Jung's visual works, the mandala stands out as one of the most conceptually and symbolically important ones. The term mandala originates from Sanskrit, appearing in the ancient Indian text Rigveda, and encompasses meanings such as "circle," "completion," "gathering," and "sacred center." Etymologically, *manda* denotes essence or inner spirit, while *la* refers to possession, containment, or realization. Across many religious traditions, especially in Hinduism, Buddhism, and Tantric practice, the mandala is regarded as a symbolic representation of cosmic structure, a visual expression of harmony, unity, and the totality of being. In some esoteric interpretations, it is even seen as a metaphysical map of the pure land or ideal spiritual realm.

What is particularly compelling in Jung's use of the mandala is that it did not arise from conscious imitation of Eastern iconography, but rather from spontaneous psychological necessity. During the period following his break with Freud—a rupture that deeply affected him both professionally and personally—Jung entered what he described as a time of inner crisis. During this psychological descent, he began to draw circular images as a way to stabilize and understand his inner state. Only later did he come to recognize that these spontaneous forms bore striking resemblance to the mandalas of Eastern tradition. This convergence, discovered through lived experience rather than cultural borrowing, deepened his interest in the symbolic and psychological significance of the mandala.

Jung came to view the mandala not merely as a religious or artistic motif, but as an archetypal image arising from the collective unconscious. For him, it functions as a symbolic representation of psychic wholeness, a structure that emerged in dreams, visions, and creative acts at moments of psychological transformation. He observes that while Tibetan Buddhism preserves some of the most developed and systematic mandala traditions, the symbolic structure itself was not exclusive to the East. In fact, he argues that similar patterns appeared spontaneously in the West—in dreams, in art, and in personal visionary experiences—as expressions of an inner process toward integration. In a letter to Wilhelm dated October 28, 1929, Jung writes: "The images amplify one another precisely through their diversity. They give an excellent image of the effort of the unconscious European spirit to grasp Eastern eschatology" (Jung & Shamdasani, 2009, p. 218). For Jung, the mandala represents a universal psychological phenomenon: a deep symbolic grammar shared across cultures that speaks to the human striving for unity, meaning, and inner order.

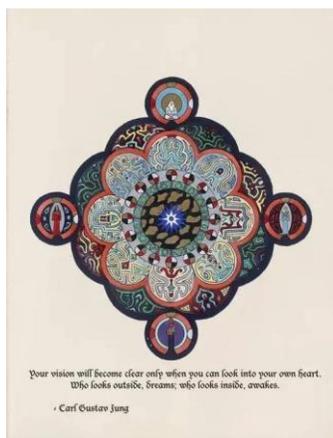


Figure 1: Jung's Mandala "Quaternity" (1916), 26 × 21 cm

Note. Image from *The Art of C. G. Jung* (p. 105), by The Foundation of the Works of C. G. Jung, 2018, W. W. Norton & Company. © 2018 by The Foundation of the Works of C. G. Jung.

At the center of the image is a blue dot, surrounded by an eight-pointed star composed of alternating blue and white, representing a fixed star. Outside of this lies a layer of golden, cloud-like shapes floating in black, symbolizing the night sky. Beyond that is a dark green ring filled with irregular shapes—some resembling branches, others stars—resembling primordial seeds of life, separated by small red columns. The outermost circle consists of red, white, black, and brown segments divided into equal quadrants. These correspond in tone to the four outer circular forms, indicating a relationship between inner and outer elements—a connection between internal and external creative forces and the unconscious, as well as between the symbolic meanings of color.

In Jung's mandala paintings, color carries precise symbolic value, derived from ancient alchemical traditions. Alchemists were among the first to codify the meanings of colors through texts, establishing a symbolic language that Jung believed still shapes our modern understanding of color symbolism.

For instance, in this painting, the white eight-pointed star at the center—when interpreted through alchemical texts—represents the sun. While red is commonly associated with the sun today, alchemy considers white the color of the sun's first appearance, symbolizing dawn. Red follows white, just as sunrise follows dawn. Though red may also stand for the sun, it more often symbolizes fire or blood in alchemical thought.

The surrounding sixteen-pointed blue star also holds symbolic meaning. In alchemy, blue stands in stark contrast to red: it represents calm, peace, and receptivity, and is associated with the spiritual vessel and with water. Psychologically, it is linked to the unconscious. Thus, the central white-and-blue structure reflects a union of water and fire, an idea similar to the Daoist concept of yin and yang. The interplay between these two forces gives rise to the diversity and complexity of the visible world.

Beyond the blue and white is a field of gold, which in alchemy symbolizes intellect. In Jungian psychology, it is associated with the realization of the self and the reconciliation of opposites. As Jung observed, gold evokes not only light and value, but also a sense of the sacred (*The Foundation of the Works of C. G. Jung*, 2018, p. 43). In this context, the appearance of gold following the blue-and-white mandala center suggests a process of unification—a movement toward spiritual wholeness that transcends opposition. This symbolic unity is an expression of divinity, embodying harmony and the resolution of dualities. For Jung, this was a symbol of wisdom: a visual metaphor for overcoming binary conflict and integrating divergent perspectives—cultural, philosophical, and psychological—into a greater whole.

This integrative vision runs through all of Jung's mandala work. Even the colors themselves follow this logic. Although his mandalas are rich and varied in color, Jung saw them as representing a single unified color: rainbow or white. In his view, rainbow hues—symbolizing all colors—are essentially a dispersion of white light. In alchemy, this idea is symbolized by the image of the peacock's tail. The peacock's multicolored feathers, renewed each year, represent not only the beauty of change in nature but, for Jung, a symbol of divine unity in natural transformation. As he explained, the full display of color signifies the culmination of a transformational process—one that leads to awareness of the whole, just as the rainbow signals divine presence (*The Foundation of the Works of C. G. Jung*, 2018, p. 43).

In Jung's symbolic framework, the rainbow carries divine significance because it serves as a bridge between this world and the other—a pathway connecting opposing realms. It also symbolizes the circle or halo, often associated with the sun or moon, and thus with divine radiance. For Jung, color was more than a visual quality; it represented the soul of all things. He believed that every soul possesses a unique color. As he wrote, "*He who awakens his soul will see its color*" (*The Foundation of the Works of C. G. Jung*, 2018, p. 43). To see a person's distinctive color is to perceive the soul itself.

In this mandala painting, color carries deep symbolic meaning, but the human figures depicted also deserve close attention. In the four outer circles of the mandala, each contains a figure. On the left, the figure is painted red; on the right, blue. According to scholars from the Foundation of the Works of C. G. Jung, these figures symbolize the two aspects of the Anima (*The Foundation of the Works of C. G. Jung*, 2018, p. 47). Jung intentionally distinguished them by assigning different colors—red for one, blue for the other.



**Figure 2:** Detail: Left Figure in Jung's "Quaternity" (1916)

Note. Image from *The Art of C. G. Jung* (p. 105), by [The Foundation of the Works of C. G. Jung](#), 2018, W. W. Norton & Company. © 2018 by The Foundation of the Works of C. G. Jung.



**Figure 3:** Detail: Right Figure in Jung's "Quaternity" (1916)

Note. Image from *The Art of C. G. Jung* (p. 105), by [The Foundation of the Works of C. G. Jung](#), 2018, W. W. Norton & Company. © 2018 by The Foundation of the Works of C. G. Jung.

The Anima is one of the key archetypes in Jungian psychology. Jung saw her as the soul in its original sense. This insight emerged from a dream Jung had in 1913, during which he heard an inner voice that he understood, at the unconscious level, to be that of a woman. Psychologically, this suggests that Jung believed every man carries, at the deepest level of the unconscious, an inner feminine presence. This feminine figure holds dual qualities, such as the noble and the mundane, or darkness and light.

In Jung's view, the boundary between male and female is not absolute at the psychological level. A man carries within his unconscious a figure resembling a woman, and a woman carries within hers a figure resembling a man. This idea of a woman in a man and a man in a woman closely aligns with the understanding of gender and the body in traditional Chinese Medicine.

In traditional Chinese Medicine, yin and yang energies are believed to coexist within every human body. As men age beyond sixty-four, they gradually exhibit feminine characteristics, while women begin to display masculine traits after the age of forty-nine (post-menopause) (Zhang & Sun, 2019, p. 4). For instance, female breasts shrink, the voice deepens, and masculine features become more apparent. This comparison is striking and reveals the depth of Jung's psychological intuition. Through analytical psychology, he arrived at an understanding that closely aligns with ancient Eastern conceptions of gender and the balance of body and mind. It also highlights the potential for meaningful dialogue and resonance between Eastern and Western systems of thought. This offers important insights

for reinterpreting Jungian psychology. The convergence between Jungian theory and Chinese medicine also suggests the importance of seeking new perspectives and directions for contemporary psychology through interdisciplinary and cross-cultural research.

In addition to the two female figures, this mandala painting also includes two male figures, each of significant symbolic importance. The elder figure at the top represents the archetype of meaning and spirit in Jung's analytical psychology. More intriguingly, the male figure at the bottom stands in deliberate contrast to the upper figure, as shown below:



**Figure 4:** Detail of Upper Male Figure in Jung's "Quaternity" (1916)

Note. Image from *The Art of C. G. Jung* (p. 105), by The Foundation of the Works of C. G. Jung, 2018, W. W. Norton & Company. © 2018 by The Foundation of the Works of C. G. Jung.



**Figure 5:** Detail of Lower Male Figure in Jung's "Quaternity" (1916)

Note. Image from *The Art of C. G. Jung* (p. 105), by The Foundation of the Works of C. G. Jung, 2018, W. W. Norton & Company. © 2018 by The Foundation of the Works of C. G. Jung.

Jung's essay *Concerning Mandala Symbolism* reveals this lower figure's symbolic identity. He writes: "At the bottom is Loki or Hephaestus, his red hair ablaze, holding a temple in his hands" (*The Foundation of the Works of C. G. Jung*, 2018, p. 120). The appearance of this figure closely resembles a small painted wood sculpture attributed to Jung, believed to depict Loki or Hephaestus, currently held in the collection of the Museum Rietberg in Zurich.



**Figure 6:** Carved Figure of Loki/Hephaestus, painted wood, 21 × 4 × 4 cm, c. 1920, Museum Rietberg

Note. Attributed to C. G. Jung. Image courtesy of the Museum Rietberg, Zurich.

The two mythological figures—Loki and Hephaestus—come from distinct traditions: Loki, from Norse mythology, is a trickster god associated with fire and decay; Hephaestus, from Greek mythology, is the god of fire and metalwork. Despite their differences, both exhibit dualistic characteristics—creative and destructive—and Jung unifies them within the symbolic structure of the mandala. Their reconciliation is visualized in the circular form, which expresses psychic totality through symbolic symmetry.

The circle itself, or mandala, is a foundational archetype in Jungian thought. As Jung explains, the mandala represents an inner image of wholeness centered around a point of psychic energy. This centre is not the ego. It is a deeper point of psychic origin from which the various aspects of the personality emerge and are integrated. It is surrounded by a larger structure that encompasses the entirety of the self, including the oppositions that form the personality. This structure moves from consciousness to the personal unconscious, and ultimately into the vast domain of the collective unconscious—a layer of psyche shared by all humanity (*The Foundation of the Works of C. G. Jung*, 2018, p. 120). The collective unconscious closely resembles the concept of Dao in Taoism. Dao is the highest ontological principle of the universe and the origin of all. In Taoism, Dao is often symbolized by the circular form of the Taiji diagram. This resonates with Jung's use of the circle to symbolise psychological wholeness, suggesting a shared intuition between Jungian psychology and Taoist metaphysics.

In Jung's mandala paintings, the circle functions as a symbol of wholeness. That encompasses the collective and, ultimately, the cosmos. It points toward a vision of universal completeness and order. Within this circular structure, all binary oppositions—light and darkness, good and evil, life and death, circle and square, order and chaos, the human and the divine—can be brought into unity and ultimately transcended. This transcendence of duality is one of the essential features of the spiritual. As a symbolic totem, the mandalic circle does more than reflect psychological integration. It also represents the harmony of body, mind, and soul and the alignment between heaven, earth, and humanity. In this sense, it becomes a profound metaphor for multidimensional harmony—integrating the personal with the universal and the human with the sacred.

## 2.2 Snake and Dragon Totems

Jung's artistic work features numerous depictions of snakes and dragons, serving as central symbolic motifs. In Western culture, the serpent is a powerful and enduring symbol. In Greek mythology, it represents fertility, rebirth, healing, and eternity, but also chaos, destruction, and death. In the ancient Minoan and Mycenaean civilizations, serpents were seen as protectors of the home, believed to bring good fortune and safeguard families from harm. However, in Jung's spiritual imagery, the serpent assumes a radically different meaning.

In *The Red Book*, Jung presents the snake as a symbol of demonic power or corrupting force. As he wrote:

*"The serpent is an earthly soul, half daimonic, a spirit, and akin to the spirits of earth, making us fear them or else having around in the things of the dead. ... The serpent has a female nature, forever seeking the company of those dead who are spellbound by the earth, and who did not find a way across to singleness. The serpent is a whore. She courts the devil and evil spirits; she is a mischievous tyrant and tormentor, forever inveigling the most evil company."* (Jung & Shamdasani, 2009, p. 355)

Jung's choice of language—"demonic," "whore," "tyrant," "tormentor"—makes clear that the serpent in his vision is a negative figure, embodying destructive and chaotic energy. This perspective emerges from his broader understanding of the snake as a deeply mysterious and fear-inducing creature. Its sinuous, hidden movements, its preference for darkness and secluded spaces, and its venomous nature make it both biologically and symbolically dangerous. This suggests that within Jungian psychology, the snake naturally functions as a symbol of the unconscious. It points to what is hidden, repressed, and unacknowledged—the shadow aspects of human nature that dwell in the unseen recesses of the psyche.



**Figure 7:** Jung's Snake Totem, from *The Red Book*, p. 109

Note. Image from *The Red Book* (p. 241), by Jung, C. G., & Shamdasani, S., 2009, W. W. Norton & Company. ©

In this painting, a red human figure stands with arms outstretched, pierced in the chest by a ray of golden light. A serpent coils around the figure's left leg, baring its fangs as if preparing to devour him. The figure's expression conveys pain and fear, reinforcing the terrifying presence of the serpent. At the top of the image, Jung offers the following explanation: "*This man of matter rose up too far in the world of the spirit, but there the spirit of the heart bores through him with a golden ray. He Falls with joy and disintegrates. The serpent, who is the evil one, could not remain in the world of spirits.*" (The Red Book, p. 298, note 193) In this image, the serpent functions explicitly as a force of spiritual disruption—an evil power that intrudes into the realm of spirit but is ultimately expelled. For Jung, this represents the incompatibility of certain shadow elements with higher states of consciousness, emphasizing the importance of transformation and purification in the journey toward individuation.

Jung critiques the serpent as a symbol of rationalization and over-intellectualization. He views the serpent not only as a representation of the unconscious but also as an emblem of the dangers of extreme rationality. As he writes:

*"The ancients called the saving word Logos, an expression of divine reason. So much reason / was in man that he needed reason to be saved. If one waits long enough, one sees how the Gods all change into serpents and underworld dragons in the end. This is also the fate of Logos: in the end it poisons us all. In time, we were all poisoned, but unknowingly we kept the One, the Powerful One, the eternal wanderer in us away from the poison. We spread poison and paralysis around us in what we want to educate all the world around us into reason. Some have their reason in thinking, others in feeling. Both are servants of Logos, and in secret become worshipers of the serpent."* (Jung & Shamdasani, 2009, p. 280)

Here, the serpent becomes an allegory of reason itself, which, when elevated to the level of dogma, becomes spiritually toxic. Jung's critique targets the overvaluation of rationality, which he saw as a modern affliction. Those who venerate the serpent, he suggests, are ultimately worshipping reason—and by extension, Logos—as a kind of religious ideal. In this light, the serpent is not just a figure of chaos, but also of reductive intellectualism, against which Jung positions his vision of integrated, spiritual wholeness.

Jung's discussions of the serpent totem often extend to the figure of the dragon. For Jung, both the serpent and the dragon represent negative, destructive, and demonic forces. This explains why, in addition to serpents, various depictions of malevolent dragons frequently appear in his paintings.

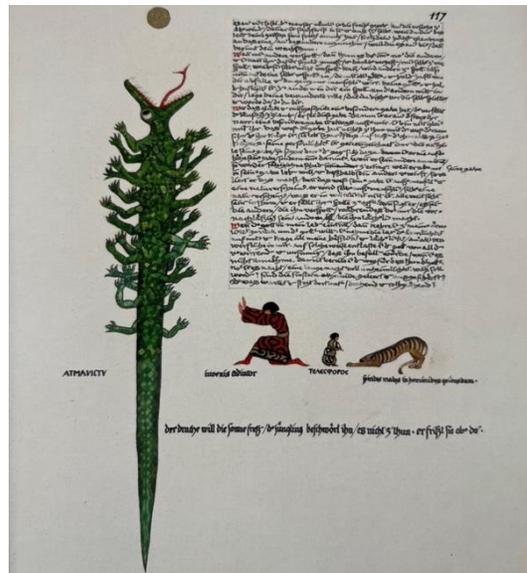


Figure 8: Jung's serpent totem, from *The Red Book*, p. 117

In this particular spiritual painting, a large green dragon appears on the left side, with thirty-four legs, an open mouth, and a long red tongue extended upward as if attempting to devour the golden sun above. At the bottom of the image, Jung includes the following caption: “The dragon wants to eat the sun and the youth beeches him not to. But he eats it nevertheless.” (Jung & Shamdasani, 2009, p. 303, note 222)

From this, we can understand that the central figure—clad in red-and-black striped clothing and gesturing with an outstretched hand—is likely engaged in dialogue with the dragon, pleading with it not to consume the sun.



Figure 9: Detail of Jung's serpent totem, from *The Red Book*, p. 117

In this context, the sun symbolizes ordinary, established truths. The dragon's act of devouring the sun thus represents a rejection of those every day, traditional realities—a gesture of destruction and negation, aimed at overturning established balance.

According to *The Red Book* and *The Black Books*, the green dragon in this painting is a psychological archetype that Jung developed through the intersection of mythological research and personal dream imagery. He named this archetype *Atmavictu*—a chthonic spirit that appears in both dreams and religious traditions, believed to offer insight into the hidden mysteries of the earth.

Similar dragon figures, rising from the depths, appear frequently in Jung's spiritual paintings.



**Figure 10:** Jung's dragon totem, from *The Red Book*, p. 123

In this work, Jung writes: *"This is the holy caster of water. The Cabiri grow out of the flowers which spring from the body of the dragon. Above is the temple."* (Jung & Shamdasani, 2009, p. 306, note 233)

Here, the dragon lies close to the ground, yet strangely, its body gives birth to blooming flowers. This paradoxical image defies logic and spatial constraints, illustrating the surreal and symbolic nature of dream imagery—or what Jung considered unconscious painting. Such compositions transcend everyday expectations, creating an atmosphere of visual fantasy and psychological mystery.

Jung's paintings also depict dragons in flight, as seen in the following work:



**Figure 11:** Jung's Dragon Totem, from *The Red Book*, p. 129

In addition to dragons in the sky, Jung also painted scenes of combat with dragons, as in the piece below:



**Figure 12:** Jung's Dragon Totem, from *The Red Book*, p. 119

In this painting, Jung includes a caption that reads: “The accursed dragon has eaten the sun, its belly being cut open and he must now hand over the gold of the sun, together with his blood. This is the turning back of *Atmavictu*, the old one. He who destroyed the proliferating green covering is the youth who helped me to kill Siegfried.” (Jung & Shamdasani, 2009, p. 304, note 226)

The figure of *Atmavictu*, a psychological archetype discussed earlier, is accompanied here by another figure: *Siegfried*. While less familiar to many, Siegfried is a hero from Richard Wagner’s opera cycle *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, and an important symbol in Germanic mythology. Jung admired Siegfried deeply, viewing him as a representation of strength, pride, and courage. Yet paradoxically, Jung portrays himself as killing Siegfried—a symbolic act he illustrates in another painting titled *The Murder of the Hero*:



**Figure 13:** Jung, *The Murder of the Hero*, from *The Red Book*, p. fol iv

In this image, Jung depicts himself ambushing and killing Siegfried, with the help of a young companion, on a narrow mountain path. This act—killing the idealized inner hero—raises one of the most difficult and central questions in interpreting Jung’s spiritual art.

From the perspective of this paper, the slaying of Siegfried is essential to Jung’s descent into the collective unconscious. To move beyond the confines of surface consciousness, he needed to dismantle every rational, noble, and heroic archetype that blocked the path inward. Only by shattering these internal idols could the contents of the unconscious be fully released. The process bears resemblance to Zen practice, where enlightenment often comes after intense deconstruction—*breaking the Buddha to find the true self*.

In Jung’s view, the collective unconscious is not bound by moral dualism. There is no absolute good or evil within the collective unconscious. One cannot access the deeper truth of the soul nor live out the full expression of one’s inner

being, unless one transcends these binary moral distinctions. This perspective closely parallels the Taoist idea of "*wei dao ji xu*" (Only by compiling emptiness can one attain the Dao) as articulated in *Zhuangzi* (Fang, 2018, p. 53). In this concept, "*xu*" refers to a state of complete emptiness, openness, and quiet receptivity. "Dao" is believed to be the ultimate and indescribable source of all being and non-being, which is a similar concept to the unspeakable "supreme meaning" of Jung. The idea of "*wei dao ji xu*" suggests that to truly capture the meaning of Dao, one must clear the mind of all attachments, desires, judgments, and internal disturbances. This teaches that only by eliminating all inner obstructions and achieving a state of absolute emptiness can one attain the Dao and realize the highest ontological principle of the universe. Both ideology from Taoist Zhuangzi and Jung emphasize that the path to ultimate truth lies in transcending dualistic categorizations and returning to an undivided, primordial state of being.

Jung's symbolic murder of his inner hero also reveals a broader psychological truth: each person harbors unconscious elements of darkness and irrationality. Confronting these elements is essential. Avoiding them leads to stagnation; only by facing the internal evil and chaos can one achieve psychological rebirth. As Jung powerfully writes: "*I have united with the serpent of the beyond.*" (Jung & Shamdasani, 2009, p. 322)

Psychologically speaking, this means learning to consciously engage with the demonic serpent archetype—not fleeing from it but integrating and transforming it. Only through such confrontation can new psychic life emerge. As discussed earlier, the green dragon—after being wounded and offering its blood—becomes the ground from which new synthesis begins. It dies, only to be reborn in another form.

In this sense, Jung's confrontation with the hero archetype mirrors the mythic structure of divine death and resurrection. The death of the hero—or God—is not an end, but a transition: a new life, a new synthesis, a new act of transformation.

## Conclusion

Jung's artistic practice, as this paper has shown, was never separate from his psychological research. In particular, his exploration of the deep psyche and the collective unconscious gave rise to a body of spiritual paintings that are not only visually compelling but also rich in philosophical reflection and symbolic meaning. Among these, his use of totems stands out as a powerful method of expressing inner realities. Through totemic imagery, Jung expanded the spiritual dimension of his visual language and deepened the intellectual substance of his work. These insights, in turn, offer meaningful inspiration to contemporary artists seeking to enrich the expressive and spiritual dimensions of their practice.

In contemporary art, sensibility and reason alone are no longer sufficient. Purely emotive works are prone to becoming secularized and trivialized; they may convey the sentiment of daily life but often lack the solemnity or depth of vision. Rationally structured works, on the other hand, can attain a symphonic grandeur and philosophical weight, but they sometimes lack surprise, wonder, and mystery. However, art that combines sensibility, rationality, and spirituality becomes far more expansive.

Spirituality connects to the deeper structures of being: to the soul, to the collective unconscious, and to the metaphysical source of creativity. On the visual level, it is often expressed through symbols of mystery, transcendence, and otherworldliness. On a spiritual level, it represents a passage beyond the dualism of surface experience. Artists who work from a place of spiritual integration can produce art that transcends form: their work may contain the intimacy of a folk melody, the depth of a symphony, and—most importantly—the ineffable quality of mystery. To achieve such a quality, as Jung demonstrated, spiritualized totems remain one of the most compelling vehicles of artistic expression.

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