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WHY DID C. G. JUNG WRITE HIS AUTOBIOGRAPHY?

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INTRODUCTION

IS THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY of Jung a reliable and valid source of information? What does it tell us about the man himself? Is it possible to use it in order to understand the origin and development of Jung's Jesuit complex? If one does not accept that the autobiography is based on truth it cannot throw much light on the psychological development of Jung and his life. It is obvious that an autobiography cannot provide 'the whole truth and nothing but the truth' since it is never possible to gain access to the whole truth, even concerning our own lives. This is a problem that has to be tackled in every psychological analysis. It is never possible to have access to more than a small part of the psychological reality and that part is distorted in many ways. Even if thoughts and feelings have been described most intimately in a personal diary, which was not meant to be read by anyone except the writer himself, these distortions have to be taken into account. The issue becomes even more complicated when the material was intended for publication, as in Jung's case.

It is possible to analyse these distortions in many different ways. One can focus on the different defence mechanisms of the person, for example. The discussion would then concern how, and to what extent, these mechanisms have influenced a person's presentation of his life in his autobiography. Another approach is to use a historic-critical method. Here the trustworthiness and interrelation of different sources and the period of time between the occasion and the description become of focal interest. In this paper I have chosen another approach, and concentrate on the motive for writing an autobiography.

WHY DID JUNG WRITE HIS AUTOBIOGRAPHY?

The answer to the question gives valuable information on how and to what extent it is possible to use *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* as a source of information on Jung's psycho-history. In this paper I shall make use of Gordon W. Allport's discussion of the problem, 'Why are personal documents written? (ALLPORT 1), as an instrument of analysis of the material. I have chosen this rather unusual angle since the motive for writing an autobiography functions as a determinant of the content. The motive determines the selection of the material. If there had been another motive the content would have been quite different. However, it is not only the selection but also the systematisation of the material and the presentation which are influenced by the motive. Thus the motive is a key to understanding the autobiography and, moreover, a necessary instrument in the analysis of the autobiography's quality as a source of information. An author has normally more than one motive for writing an autobiography, and the motives vary in different stages of the writing process. This should also be taken into account during the discussion. Owing to the significance of the motive I have decided to use Allport's table of thirteen reasons why a person decides to write a personal document or an autobiography. Under each sub-heading I present Allport's view first, after which I discuss if, and to what extent, this can be applied to Jung, and what impact it has on the use of the autobiography as a source of information on Jung's life.

Special pleading

The main reason why a person writes his autobiography is to justify himself and his actions (ALLPORT 1, p. 69). According to Allport the author wants to show that he is without blame, and a subject of wrongdoing, not an agent. In such autobiographies the author often projects his own faults on his surroundings. These autobiographies are very deceptive, and according to Allport they cannot be taken at face value. However, they are not useless to the psychologist, who can obtain valuable material on the study of self-deception and obtain interesting information about the mechanisms which are always at work.

Let us now discuss to what extent Jung's autobiography falls under the heading self-hagiography. In my view Jung's autobiography is very different from other autobiographies. His main interest is not to describe his 'social life' or other external facts. Instead he wants to write about his inner experiences. In this sense his writings resemble James Joyce's 'stream of consciousness'. However, Jung has made a

thorough selection of his material. He does not tell whatever he remembers of his own stream of consciousness. Instead, the selecting principle is:

In the end the only events in my life worth telling are those when the imperishable world irrupted into this transitory one. That is why I speak chiefly of inner experiences, amongst which I include my dreams and visions. These form the *prima materia* of my scientific work. They were the fiery magma out of which the stone that had to be worked was crystallised (JUNG 7, p.4).

My interpretation of this statement is that the selecting principle is what Jung calls the archetypes, and the collective unconscious. That is, Jung writes mainly about experiences where he senses an influence from the archetypes and the collective unconscious. These are the only experiences of real importance to Jung, the only experiences worth remembering. These experiences are mainly of dreams and visions. Of course he has to put the experiences into context, but the context is subordinate to the experiences.

As a consequence of this principle of selection there is little room in his autobiography for self-hagiography or self-justification. The main body of the text does not describe his social life or his relations to other people. Because of this, glorification of the self or justification of earlier actions is not possible.

There are a few exceptions to this rule. These exceptions are found in the chapter concerning his relation to Freud. In this chapter, Jung's autobiography becomes apologetic, where he defends his own actions and discredits Freud's. A few examples are sufficient.

Jung presents himself as a guiltless defender of the attitude of scientific research. He tells us that in the beginning of their acquaintance he defended Freud against unjustified criticism. Freud, on the other hand, showed himself to be more and more unscientific as Jung got to know him better. Jung tells us for instance about his first meeting with Freud in Vienna:

I can still recall vividly how Freud said to me, 'My dear Jung, promise me never to abandon the sexual theory. That is the most essential thing of all. You see, we must make a dogma of it, an unshakable bulwark.' He said that to me with great emotion, in the tone of a father saying, 'And promise me this one thing, my dear son: that you will go to church every Sunday.' In some astonishment I asked him, 'A bulwark - against what?' To which he replied, 'Against the black tide of mud' - and here he hesitated for a moment, then added - 'of occultism' (JUNG 7, p. 150).

It is obvious that Jung's intention here is to show that Freud is unscientific and has a religious belief in his own theories. It is impossible to verify what was actually said at this meeting. The words Jung puts into Freud's mouth may be more or less correct. One should,

however, note that he chooses to describe a situation which he believed showed Freud's unscientific attitude rather than describe an episode which illustrated his ability.

To another example. When Freud and Jung went on a lecture tour to America in 1909 they analysed each other's dreams. Jung tells us that he had a few important dreams which Freud was unable to analyse. Here he implicitly criticises Freud's powers of dream interpretation. Of more interest, though, is the following description of an attempt by Jung to analyse one of Freud's dreams:

Freud had a dream – I would not think it right to air the problem it involved. I interpreted it as best I could, but added that a great deal more could be said about it if he would supply me with some additional details from his private life. Freud's response to these words was a curious look – a look of the utmost suspicion. Then he said, 'But I cannot risk my authority!' At that moment he lost it altogether. That sentence burned itself into my memory; and in it the end of our relationship was already foreshadowed. Freud was placing personal authority above truth (JUNG 7, p. 158).

Here is the same apologetic structure as before. In Jung's view Freud is unscientific, rigid and authoritarian. Jung is blameless, scientific and open-minded.

This means that this chapter of the autobiography is to a great extent self-justification and self-hagiography in Allport's sense of the words. This part of the autobiography is therefore less useful and less trustworthy. It is Jung's subjective view of his relation to Freud. The final break with Freud was probably a main traumatic experience in Jung's life. In terms of Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance, Jung reduced the dissonance from the conflict with Freud by describing Freud in too negative terms and while emphasising his own excellence (FESTINGER 5, p. 44).

Jung had to make a choice. He could either abandon what he thought was the scientific method and follow Freud, or he could be strictly scientific and in consequence break with Freud. The scientific proved more valuable to Jung and the friendship with Freud was terminated. Such a choice results in dissonance, according to Festinger (*Ibid.*, pp. 34–36). The decision was furthermore of great importance to Jung, and he suffered loss because of it. The dissonance was accordingly of great magnitude (*Ibid.*, p. 37).

The pressure to reduce this dissonance was consequently very strong. Jung reacted by 'changing cognition about the alternatives' (*Ibid.*, p. 44). Generally speaking, this can be done in four different ways. First, by emphasising cognitively the value of the positive (consonant) parts of the chosen alternative. Secondly, by decreasing the value of the negative (dissonant) parts. Thirdly, by diminishing the significance of the positive (dissonant) parts of the alternative that

has not been chosen. Finally, by emphasising cognitively the value of the negative (consonant) parts of the alternative that has not been chosen.

I think that Jung's need to point out Freud's unscientific research attitude (in contrast to his own strictly scientific attitude) is a cognitive revaluation of this kind. This is one way Jung decreased the dissonance which was a result of the break with Freud.

It is important to note that chapter five, 'Sigmund Freud', is very much an exception in Jung's autobiography. The main part of it does not have this apologetic undertone. The autobiography is not a defence of the different actions he has taken during his life.

It has been said that in his old age Jung identified with the archetype of the wise old man (JUNG 6, pp. 22, 229 para. 42, 362). According to Brome, E. A. Bennet compared the Eranos meetings with a Chinese court, where the great man was surrounded by a horde of ladies. Brome also refers in his biography of Jung, *Jung, Man and Myth*, to an interview he had with Anthony Storr on 4 Sept. 1974. According to Brome, Storr relates that in the morning Jung collected the court around him and told them about his dreams of the previous night. They listened as if it was a revelation. Storr continues: 'In a very real sense I think he believed that he had a hotline to God. Perhaps he occasionally saw himself as the personification of the wise old man he had invoked in his theories' (BROME 3, p. 252). According to this view his autobiography should have been written with the intention of convincing his pupils of him being a personification of the archetype of the wise old man. The mystification and speculation in the autobiography should be seen in this perspective. From this viewpoint the autobiography is a self-hagiography.

I think it is possible that Jung had this kind of self-concept in his old age, but there is little evidence, if any, to corroborate such an opinion. The evidence would have to be much stronger before it is possible to draw such a conclusion.

I think that there are two other reasons why the autobiography is, to a limited extent, written as self-hagiography. First, Jung wrote to a friend in 1957 on the subject of writing autobiographies: 'I have been unable to conceive of my doing anything of the sort' (JUNG 7, p. viii). The reason why he did not want to write an autobiography is that he believed that they often contain lies and self-deceptions. He believed that it is impossible to describe oneself. Jung strongly disliked autobiographies which are untrue. It is probable that he himself would have tried to meet his own demands on autobiographies and tell the truth as exactly as possible. Secondly, Jung forbade any publication of his autobiography until after his death. The main reason was that he wanted to be in peace while writing. He wanted

to be able to tell his most secret thoughts without having to censor them before publication.

Exhibitionism

According to Allport, exhibitionism is the driving force behind autobiographies (ALLPORT 1, p. 70). The author wants to show himself to the world and most probably be admired. Narcissistic needs are met through such admiration. As an example Allport gives Rousseau's self-glorifying *Confessions*.

Autobiographies can be written without any exhibitionistic need, but I think that it is unusual. Almost any need can be met without publishing an autobiography. The main reason for publishing an autobiography is probably exhibitionistic. It is of course possible to imagine other reasons, but they seem less likely.

Jung's autobiography seems, to a very small degree, to be a result of exhibitionism. The reason for this statement lies in the circumstances under which the autobiography came to be written, namely as a result of the initiative of his close friends. Jung was very sceptical about the project and to begin with refused to take any part in it. This attitude changed gradually and he decided to contribute to the project: 'Although he was rather reticent at the beginning, he soon warmed to the work' (JUNG 7, p. vi) Finally, he became enthusiastic and in spite of his old age wrote several chapters himself. This does not rule out exhibitionistic tendencies completely. I believe, though, that it is reasonable to conclude that these tendencies were not strong enough to make Jung write his autobiography without the initiative of his friends.

Another reason why Jung's autobiography is not a result of exhibitionism is, I believe, that he did not want it to be published until after his death. If the autobiography met any exhibitionistic needs these were indirect. That is, Jung could obviously not expect the direct attention and admiration of the readers, but there can be a more subtle form of exhibitionism. Merely the thought that it is going to be read by other people may satisfy these needs. In this case I think that exhibitionism is more a need to show oneself to the world than to be seen by the world and attract attention. I think that to some degree this can apply to Jung, but there is little evidence that the writing of his autobiography brought any such satisfaction. Because of this it is impossible to say to what extent exhibitionism has played a part.

Literary Delight

A major motive for an author to write an autobiography is to produce a satisfying literary work, according to Allport (ALLPORT 1, p. 71). The author has aesthetic ambitions and artistic goals. These goals can be superior to the autobiographical goals, which could make the autobiography less reliable. Facts of great value could be changed or excluded in order to meet the artistic goals. The author has written mainly to satisfy the reader, not himself.

We should remember that Jung's autobiography was only partly written by himself. The major parts were actually written by Aniela Jaffé. It seems, however, as if Jaffé followed Jung's instructions and supervision thoroughly, and he had of course read them and made corrections. In this sense it does not seem as if Jung himself had any literary ambitions. He told the story of his inner life in the way he wanted to. On the other hand, as an editor, Jaffé clearly wanted the book to be readable. She systematised and organised the material, and also partly decided through her questions what should be included. It seems as if Jaffé and Jung has quite different ambitions: 'I often asked Jung for specific data on outward happenings, but I asked in vain. Only the spiritual essence of his life's experience remained in his memory, and this alone seemed to him worth the effort of telling' (JUNG 7, pp. viif). The result of these different ambitions seems to be that Jung got his way, and Jaffé had to a large extent to limit her work to editing. The conclusion is that the literary ambitions in the work with the autobiography mainly belonged to Jaffé, but that these to a large extent had to give way to Jung's own ambitions to tell the story of his inner experiences. It is this which makes it possible to study the inner life of Jung in depth. Jung's theory of complexes presupposes that it is possible to study their feeling-tone. If it is not possible to analyse the feeling-tone this theory cannot be used. Jung's autobiography focus on the experiential side of his life. This allows us to apply the theory of complexes on the material.

Securing Personal Perspective

According to Allport, when major changes occur in life it is likely that a person wants to look back and examine the processes that led to these changes (ALLPORT 1, p. 71). The changes are the prime motivation for this retrospection. He does not want to lose contact with his earlier life. According to Allport this kind of autobiography is often written at an advanced age. A major part consists of an analysis of the person's life and actions. These autobiographies tend to have as objective a character as possible.

I think that this is one major motive for Jung to write his autobiography. There are certain experiences that meant much to him throughout his life, and he did not want them to disappear when he died. These experiences, which in Jung's terminology have an archetypal character, meant a lot to him when he developed his theories. I do not think it is an overstatement to say that these experiences are the 'empirical' form of Jung's theories, through which he analysed his own psychological life.

Relief from Tension

It is through the presentation of personal faults and guilt feelings that relief may be obtained (ALLPORT 1, p. 71). According to Allport this catharsis can be a significant motive in autobiographical writing as in St. Augustine's *Confessions*. See, for example, Donald Capps's study 'The source of shame and the silencing of Adeodatus' (CAPPS 4). The production of a personal document is a safety valve which prevents the author from self-destructive actions as a result of his feeling of guilt. The disadvantage with this kind of document is its one-sidedness since positive actions and the social side of the self are often left aside or omitted.

At the beginning of his autobiographical project Jung did not seem to have a need for this kind of relief from psychological tension, but this changed during the project. When he speaks of his early life, important memories are actualised, memories which are associated with strong feelings. In Jung's early life there are unsolved conflicts, experiences and problems. Aniela Jaffé tells us: 'After a period of inner turbulence, long-submerged images out of his childhood rose to the surface of his mind' (JUNG 7, p. vi).

As a consequence of the feeling of anxiety Jung decided to write these chapters about his childhood himself. Through his writing his feelings became controllable (JUNG 7, p. vi) and so the writing becomes part of a therapeutic process and a relief from tension. The other parts of the autobiography do not have this quality.

Redemption and Social Re-incorporation

In a Christian context Allport states that the writing of a personal document could be a form of confession and a pre-condition to absolution (ALLPORT 1, p. 73). One confesses one's sins and receives God's forgiveness. The autobiography can also serve similar goals in a secular context confession can be the first step on the way back to social acceptance for the criminal or spy.

This was clearly an unimportant motive for Jung when he wrote

his autobiography. There may be some traces of this, however, when he writes about dreams of a sexual character from his early childhood. Jung says for instance: 'As a matter of fact, I did not say anything about the phallus dream until I was sixty-five. I may have spoken about the other experiences to my wife, but only in later years. A strict taboo hung over all these matters, inherited from my childhood. I could never have talked about them with friends' (JUNG 7, p. 41). When Jung finally published these forbidden thoughts and dreams it seems to have had a redemptive effect on him. This kind of writing to gain redemption is an exception to the rule in the autobiography.

Scientific Interest

The example Allport gives concerning scientific interest as a motive for writing autobiographies is of students who bring their autobiographies to psychologists or scientific researchers (ALLPORT 1, p. 73). They believe that their own experiences and lives are unique or special in some sense, and that scientific theories do not suit their lives. In his position as an academic teacher Allport has naturally met many people in this situation and been given many autobiographies. The rather negative description Allport gives of these writers does not apply in Jung's case however, though Jung definitely had a scientific interest in writing his autobiography, and it would not be an overstatement to say that it is the main reason why he wrote it. Allport's description of 'scientific interests' has to be expanded to suit this case.

Jung did not consider his autobiography a scientific work, and that is why he forbade the publication of it in his collected works (JUNG 7, p. ix). This does not exclude the fact that he had a scientific interest in the publication. If the collected works contain the objective, scientific version of Jung's theories, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* could be said to contain the subjective, experiential version of his theories. In this book he describes the psychological experiences which were of crucial importance in his personal development and the development of his theories. He does not use scientific language but describes his experiences as directly as possible. In the prologue Jung writes:

My life is a story of the self-realization of the unconscious. Everything in the unconscious seeks outward manifestation, and the personality too desires to evolve out of its unconscious conditions and to experience itself as a whole. I cannot employ the language of science to trace this process of growth in myself, for I cannot experience myself as a scientific problem (JUNG 7, p. 3).

We now have to focus on what I think to be the main problem

with using Jung's autobiography as a source of information on Jung's life and as the starting-point for an analysis of his psychology and psychological development. This problem arises as a result of the scientific interest Jung had in writing his autobiography. The problem is that Jung himself had made a psychological analysis of his psychic life. To what extent did this analysis influence later descriptions of his life? I think that it is often possible to see that Jung has restructured the descriptions of his experiences in analogy with what I would expect his theoretical interpretations of these experiences to have been. Most probably this restructuring has taken place on an unconscious level. The analysis then risks being a reconstruction of Jung's own analysis instead of an independent one. Is this problem of theory-impregnation possible to avoid? Through the use of biographical documents it is possible, to a limited degree, to gain information on Jung's life, but there is only his own description concerning the most interesting parts of his life, given late in life and only many years later.

On the other hand there are arguments in favour of Jung's descriptions of his experiences being reliable. First, Jung explicitly wants to describe his experiences uncontaminated by any theory. If his descriptions are influenced by his theories it is contrary to his intentions and most probably unknown to himself. Second, his experiences were powerful and he had vivid and detailed memories of them. Generally speaking, it is less likely that memories of experiences which have made a strong impression should have changed.

In spite of this a considerable distortion and contamination by theories has to be taken into account. I can give one example of such a change. Jung visited Ravenna in 1932, and during this visit he had a vivid experience which he describes in his autobiography (JUNG 7, pp. 284–287). In the Baptistery of the Orthodox he saw four mosaic frescoes which made a deep impression on him. In his autobiography, written almost thirty years later, he describes these mosaics:

The mosaic on the south side represented the baptism in the Jordan; the second picture, on the north, was of the passage of the Children of Israel through the Red Sea; the third, on the east, soon faded from my memory. It might have shown Naaman being cleansed of leprosy in the Jordan . . . The fourth mosaic, on the west side of the baptistery, was the most impressive of all. We looked at this one last. It represented Christ holding out his hand to Peter, who was sinking beneath the waves (JUNG 7, pp. 284f).

Fortunately there is another description of this experience:

' . . . the Peter symbol, Peter walking on the water and being rescued by Christ, combined with the others (Moses bringing water from the rock; Jonah and the whale; the miraculous draft of fishes)' (McGUIRE AND HULL 8, p. 184).

This description was written by Esther Harding after a discussion with Jung in June, 1948. The themes of the mosaics are quite different in this description.

How should these two descriptions be evaluated? The earlier description is probably more reliable than the latter one. Why has the memory of the experience changed? Has it been influenced in some way by later experiences. It is fortunate that we know with a great deal of certainty what actually happened. In his autobiography Jung describes his fascination for the old empress Galla Placidia, who underwent a stormy journey by boat to Ravenna in the fifth century, and had a church built in Ravenna in gratitude for her survival. In the church are mosaics of the perils of the sea and of salvation from danger through God's grace. The church was later destroyed by fire.

I think that Jung's memory of his original experience was influenced by what he had read about Galla Placidia's mosaics. His memory became conformed to what he expected the mosaics to look like. In psychological terms it could be said that his memory was retroactively influenced by his readings. In the autobiography Jung hints that he believes his experience was a kind of parapsychological visualisation of the destroyed mosaics.

We should note that both descriptions of his experience use images taken from the Bible, and that the mosaics in both cases are connected with water. The central experience of Peter trying to walk on the water remains the same on both occasions. Even if there are significant differences between the two descriptions there is a common centre, and one can only conclude that there is much uncertainty about how closely the descriptions in the autobiography relate to Jung's actual experiences. There may be many differences in detail, and the descriptions may be influenced by his ideas, but I think that in spite of this the essence of the descriptions is close to what he actually experienced. I have given an example of how unreliable Jung's descriptions of his experiences can be, and how his conclusions have to be used carefully and checked with external sources to see if there is an internal consistency in his description. If this is taken into account I think that the conclusions will reach the level of certainty that is usual when using personal documents. This level of validity is my explicit aim.

Desire for Immortality

To write an autobiography is in a limited sense to survive death. If one cannot avoid death at least one can avoid being totally forgotten. (ALLPORT 1, p. 74). I cannot agree, however, with Allport, who

believes this to be an uncommon motive for writing a personal document or an autobiography, and think that anxiety about dying and disappearing drives many people to write their autobiographies in old age.

Jung had had many experiences which were immensely valuable to him, and I think that he was afraid that they would disappear totally when he died; to collect them in the autobiography was, therefore, one way to prevent this from happening, and I think that this was one of the main reasons why Jung wrote his autobiography.

Motives of Small or No Importance

Allport gives a few other motives for writing an autobiography besides those I have discussed up to now. These are of little relevance to Jung, so I shall comment on them only briefly.

'Desire for Order' (ALLPORT 1, p. 70). That is, a systematisation of memories. This was not an important motive to Jung, and if it existed, it is because he wanted to record experiences which were of importance in the creation of his theories. In this sense a desire for order can be traced.

'Monetary Gain' (*Ibid.*, 1, p. 72). In his old age Jung was well off and had no reason to write for money; also his autobiography was not to be published until after his death and would accordingly not bring him any financial benefit.

'Assignment', 'Assisting in Therapy' (*Ibid.*, 1, pp. 72f). Here Allport refers to the case when a teacher or psychotherapist has given a person the task of writing his autobiography. Jung clearly did not do this.

'Public Service and Example' (*Ibid.*, 1, p. 74). Sometimes the author wants to bring about social change through his autobiography. Jung did not have this motive.

SUMMARY

In summarising this discussion of Jung's autobiography and its usefulness in an analysis of the psycho-history of Jung and his psychological development, it is of vital interest to note that the autobiography mainly contains subjective experiences and not facts about Jung's psycho-history. Only when combined with other biographies about Jung can an accurate picture of his life and psychological development be obtained. This makes the autobiography unique, though its value is reduced by certain obstacles, which have to be taken into account during the analysis.

The first, and main, difficulty is that the autobiography is contaminated by Jung's theories. Jung tried to describe his experiences as truly as possible: he did not want to attempt a self-analysis of his psychic life. In spite of this it is clear that his book has been influenced by his theories, though I think that this influence only affected the substance of his experiences to a small extent, its main influence being on the structure of the presentation. This structure often leads to a conclusion in terms of Jung's theories, and this can only be avoided if one concentrates on the substance of the experiences rather than on its structure.

Another factor I have discussed above is Jung's description of his relation to Freud. This is very one-sided since Jung mainly describes the relationship from his own viewpoint: he was blameless; Freud is to blame. Even if his descriptions of different situations are correct, the selection of those experiences is tendentious. This problem can only be avoided by taking independent views of the relationship into account as far as possible.

A third and final factor is that Jung wrote only a part of the autobiography himself. Aniela Jaffé wrote and edited the major parts. This would make the description less direct and give rise to questions as to whose descriptions are in the autobiography, Jung's or Jaffé's? A more thorough analysis has shown that Jung had a dominant role in the creation of the autobiography and that when Jung and Jaffé had different views Jaffé had to subordinate hers to Jung's. We should also note that Jung himself wrote the parts concerning his childhood experiences. In my view then this is far less of an obstacle than it initially seems to be.

We have also discussed a few minor problems, but none of these is crucial. In spite of the obstacles I think that Jung's autobiography is of great importance. The difficulties with Jung's autobiography seem to be even smaller than with other autobiographies. The general conclusion is that *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* is a useful source of material for the analysis of the psychology of Jung and his life provided these factors are taken into account.

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