Making Meaning of Madness:
an integrated narrative approach to understanding *The Red Book*

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Making Meaning of Madness:
An Integrated Narrative Approach to Interpreting *The Red Book*

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ABSTRACT

This project develops a framework for integrating narrative constructivist psychology with literary theory and creative nonfiction in order to explore the ways in which written personal narratives can aid identity reconstruction and recovery from mental disorder. Narrative theory and meaning-making explore the ways in which people exist and communicate personally, socially, and culturally. The concept of ‘madness’ as a combination of a personal lack of meaning with social and cultural stigma and dehumanization, is explored in order to delineate the various pressures faced by a person struggling to recover from mental disorder. Independently written personal narratives, or creative nonfiction, are proposed as a method by which “mad” people make meaning of their lives while regaining agency and achieving a social and cultural identity separate from the label of mental disorder, and a legitimate realm of study for narrative constructivist psychology. Analysis of the current discourse between constructivist psychology and constructivist theory within the humanities shows a great need for greater communication and integration, particularly in theories of modernism and postmodernism. The Red Book, the recently published work by Carl Jung, is a personal narrative the significance of which is shared between psychology and literary analysis. This work provides a stage on which to build an integrated model of personal narrative that can be used to better understand the meaning-making and agency-building processes of independently written personal narratives.
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   May the circle be unbroken.
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INTRODUCTION

The human being… is a book reading itself.
P. F. Furbank, quoted in Dolly Sen’s The World is Full of Laughter

You seek the path? I warn you away from my own. It can also be the wrong way for you.
Carl Jung, The Red Book

“What is the meaning of life?”

With a click, I flashed the words up on the projector screen. The students in the classroom – mostly in their first semester at college, all enrolled in an introductory psychology course for which this discussion section served as an addendum – stirred restlessly. This question was the latest in a series of discussion prompts designed to reinforce the week’s lesson about proper research questions… it was the easy one, and they knew it. Grudgingly, a few spoke up. Well, I mean, it’s a bad research question, because how do you measure that? … I don’t think it’s something you can really find, you know? Nobody knows that. … I just think everyone would give you a different response, and you can’t really do anything with that. Excellent answers; on to the next slide.

My students were correct; contemporary psychological research is completely unequipped to deal with this question. I was not surprised; I had chosen the question specifically because it would be an easy target. Soon, though, I began to question my motives in doing so. Psychology began as the study of the soul; how had it come to a point where one of the most profound and troubling questions of humanity was so easily dismissed?

In The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy, Douglas Adams tells the story (which has now reached the status of a small myth) of a computer designed to produce “the answer to life, the universe, and everything” that, to the consternation of its programmers,
eventually comes up with the answer “42” (Adams, 1979). The computer explains that the answer would make sense if the programmers knew the question to life, the universe, and everything. Similar problems are encountered when trying to reach the meaning of life. Hearing personal stories of finding meaning in life can be rewarding, but these specific and personal answers are not applicable from person to person. Like the programmers in Adams’s story, we do not know the question we want the answer to. The best answer to the question, “What is the meaning of life?” might be the question “Why do you ask?” The real work to be done is in putting together the meaning of meaning and studying the process of meaning-making.

Constructivist narrative psychology attempts to address some of these deeper questions of meaning by borrowing perspectives from the humanities: literary and critical theory and philosophy. However, simply borrowing metaphors and constructs is not an adequate way to deal with another discipline’s point of view. I believe that the constructivist narrative psychology theoretical foundation would be strengthened by integrating humanities perspectives, not just raiding them for half-understood references. I will also argue that several core concepts from humanities theories, specifically modern and postmodern thought, have been lost or distorted in the translation into psychological theory, and that this disconnect is harmful to the credibility and the usefulness of the theories derived. Specifically, I will argue for the integration of narrative theories of reader response and intertextuality into psychology’s use of narrative as a guiding metaphor for understanding human life, as well as for a more nuanced depiction of modernist thought in postmodern constructivist theories that would be recognizable and usable across disciplinary lines.
In addition, I will take a constructivist psychological perspective in the analysis of personal narrative. Independently produced personal narratives have been a product of creative writing and a subject of analysis within literary theory, but have received relatively little attention from narrative constructivist psychology despite their obvious connections to the personal narratives co-created in therapy which are often the subject of study. By analyzing personal narrative in the context of personal construct psychology, I hope to show how independently constructed narratives can be understood as constructing a new identity in the same way as a traditional therapy narrative.

The personal narrative I will be studying is from *The Red Book*, the very recently released (2009) opus of Carl Jung. During a period of great stress in his life, Carl Jung had visions and troubling dreams. This part of his life has been construed in many different ways. People applying disorder classifications to his life often characterize it as a psychotic break; he referred to it later in life as a confrontation with the unconscious; the Jungians colorfully refer to it as his night-sea journey. Jung’s followers (and publicly, Jung himself) adamantly denied that the experience had anything to do with any mental disorder. Privately, however, Jung wrestled with the idea that he might be going insane and kept careful records of his visions and dreams in hopes that he could someday make sense of them. The outbreak of war in Europe was actually somewhat of a relief to Jung because he could ascribe his experiences to a gathering storm in the collective unconscious rather than an individual insanity. With this assurance that his experiences were not without greater meaning, he began work on what would become *The Red Book*. Through it, he reordered the structures of his mind and found a way to go on living. This book has produced interest across many fields; I think it provides an excellent grounds
for joining together constructivist psychology and critical theory in an integrative relationship. *The Red Book* is vast and complex, and will doubtless be the source of fruitful study for decades to come in many fields. I do not have (nor is it my goal to have) a definitive version of what it means; I have simply attempted to make a few short steps towards this integrative goal.

In Chapter 1: Narrative, I will go over narrative theory and look at the points at which it intersects with narrative psychology concepts of narrative. Chapter 2: Meaning and Madness is a discussion of psychological theories of meaning making with a focus on the social and cultural meanings of madness. Chapter 3: Story-Shaped Selves integrates concepts of narrative with meaning-making within personal construct and narrative psychology. Chapter 4: Modernism gives a context in which to understand Jung’s work and the misunderstanding between constructivist psychology and other theorists on what modernism entails. Chapter 5: Carl Jung provides a short psychobiography of the writer of *The Red Book*. Chapter 6: *The Red Book* analyzes the opening section of Jung’s work and builds on the idea of *The Red Book* as a site for interdisciplinary, integrative relationship-building between constructivist psychology and other disciplines.

Reference:

NARRATIVE

Stories: stuff and structure

Story is such an integral part of the human experience that more than one scholar has suggested our species would be better known as “homo narrativus – a creature that tells himself stories about the world in order to endow it with order and meaning, understand it and act within it” (Harpaz, 2005 p. 10). We use stories to tell jokes, to communicate deep hurts or personal revelations, to justify our views, to pass on national identity to our children, and to sell shampoo. Although story is quite prevalent in our lives and ways of living, it is remarkably difficult to examine critically. Several disciplines have taken a stab at it, each bringing its own set of general assumptions, theoretical foundations, and definitions. In order to look at how personal narratives of madness work, we must first understand how narrative works: in order to examine narrative, we must first agree on how to speak about it.

Although I have been using “narrative” and “story” pretty much interchangeably so far, I’m going to suggest a more specific way of using each term by the end of this chapter. There is a reason we use story to communicate personal meaning. Stories are tied to their source, which is why they can give us windows into worlds not our own, be they the life of the next door neighbor or Elizabethan England. This characteristic, so useful to literary and cultural critics focusing on one or two works, is frustrating when trying to broaden the field and study the common elements of stories as a whole. It is helpful here to form a more useful definition of story, so that we can narrow this lens for our own purposes; in order to have a useful and thorough definition, it must be solidly based in the available theory.
Although in general experience people in this culture know the value of a life story—a voiceover at the end of a documentary telling us ‘their stories will live on’ may be about as close as we come to deifying our dead these days—the subculture of psychology has been loath to examine personal accounts closely for the reasons explored previously: stories are so individual that when you have understood one, you are no closer to understanding the next. Learning to understand narrative, however, might give a greater and more flexible set of tools to a psychologist seeking to understand how people make meaning of their lives.

_How does an author tell a story?_ 

When attempting to define story, one of the first contentious issues that arises is how much of a role the creator of the story—whom I will call the Author—has versus how much of a role the interpreter of the story—whom I will call the Reader—has in creating what we know as ‘the’ story. Rather than try to parse how much of the story is created by each, it seems useful to determine how the story is created by each: to begin with, in what ways does the Author act on the narrative?

“Everyone knows what stories are—fortunately; for it is excessively difficult to say just what they are,” writes Thomas Leitch in _What Stories Are_ (Leitch, 1986 p.). The same sentiment holds true for saying exactly what Authors are. Or rather, “What actions distinguish the author of a story?” It is difficult to trace the author of a historical epic like _The Iliad_: Homer came up with the version we know, but how much of the story that we know came from historical events? Does Homer get co-author credit for those parts? What about the person who first wrote it down, or the person who told the story to
Homer, or the translators and editors of the edition we’re reading? The debate over how to assign authorship to historical and socially created narratives is an interesting but not entirely relevant discussion for the purposes of this discussion of narrative; it will be touched on again in Chapter 3, Personal Narrative. For the purposes of this discussion, it does not matter whose name should be on the front cover: the Author can be a conglomeration of folk storytellers over dozens of generations, several plagiarizers, a historian or a songwriting duo. All that matters is that they are distinct in regards to the Reader: the person on the other side of the paper, whether that is one person or not.

The question of what an Author does is confusing because of the huge amount of discourse that surrounds it in various spheres. It is worth pointing out that these are general assumptions that, for the purposes of this chapter, I am looking at in quite general terms. The debate over which theorist is a Russian formalist and which is a structuralist and which is a new critic is far too complicated for this project at this time— I am using Formalist and Postmodernist as general groupings for the purpose of looking at common perspectives each grouping has on certain issues, and disregarding some of the differences between the theories in these groups which might be, in another context, vitally important to emphasize. No doubt several theorists would be appalled to see the heading under which they fall. My purpose is not to give a thorough grounding in the theoretical debates surrounding these issues but to show where several contrasting ideas have come from, what makes them difficult to use, and how they might be used with and against each other to create a useful framework with which to analyze and interpret narrative.
One of the most common positions on Authorship is a formalist position that the nature of the story is the inherent in the text and can (and should) be read after “cutting it loose from its author and from his life as a man, with his own particular hopes, fears, interests, etc.” (Brooks, 1951 p. 23). Formalism “assumes that the relevant part of the author’s intention is what he actually got into his work” and centers on the idea of the “attempt[ing] to find a central point of reference from which [to] focus on the structure of the [text]” (p. 24). Theoretically, an ideal reader using a formalist reading can obtain the true meaning of a text. While formalists are quick to point out that they don’t believe anyone, themselves included, is an ideal reader, in the process of acknowledging “the gap between [the critic’s] reading and the ‘true’ reading” they also allege the existence of a central, ‘true’ (if inaccessible) reading of a text.

This claim puts them at odds with other theorists for a few reasons. While the case against formalism is often exaggerated, there are some definite issues that were not fully addressed at the time of its emergence: for all the waffling about not being true ideal readers and striving for a perfect midpoint of all possible readings, it cannot be ignored that the idea of the ideal reader invites homogeneity of perspective in discarding the readings of marginalized people as too far from the norm to critically count. Although the marginalization of the ‘mad’ will not be thoroughly examined until Chapter 2, it can be said here that such a normative approach does little to promote the perspective of people dealing with the many ways of construing mental disorder. Also, for the purposes of this project, the formalist perspective is limiting because it limits the type of text which can be examined. If something does not meet the formal requirements of literature, a formal criticism of it is pointless. This is all very well for analyzing intentional works of
written literature, but when it comes to an interdisciplinary approach to life stories and therapy, a more flexible tool is needed. Developing theory has also thrown doubt on whether anything should be considered intentional literature, and more recent work focuses on the meaning of a text centered in the reader. This will be examined further in Chapters 2 and 3. For these reasons, other relevant theories have sprung up in opposition to these formalist principles.

The postmodern perspective brings another set of assumptions to the table regarding a theory of authorship. Foucault in particular takes to task general assumptions that most people live with, such as the assumption that a book is one text that can be analyzed in one way. He suggests that the physical “unity” of the bound book is only an accessory to a “discursive unity” which is probably not itself reason enough to consider a book one text (Foucault, 1972, p. 92). “The frontiers of a book are never clear-cut: beyond the title, the first lines, and the last full stop, beyond its internal configuration and its autonomous form, it is caught up in a system of references to other books, other texts, other sentences: it is a node within a network…its unity is variable and relative” (Foucault, 1972 p. 92).

This has a great number of ramifications for defining how an author acts on a text. The point of this level of analysis is “not to undertake to re-establish [the text] in an isolation that nothing could overcome; it is not to close it in on itself; it is to leave oneself free to describe the interplay of relations within it and outside it” (Foucault, 1972 p. 93-94). The authors’ intent has very little impact from this point of view: by removing the assumed unities like common authorship between bits of text, the critic is able to control for variables such as “the intention of the author, the form of his mind, the rigor of his
thought, the themes that obsess him, the project that traverses his existence and gives it meaning” and to be able to discover relations “between statements (even if the author is unaware of them; even if the statements do not have the same author; even if the authors were unaware of each other’s existence” (Foucault, 1972 p. 93). The postmodernist approach takes away much of the author’s responsibility to the meaning of the text, and indeed goes a long way towards taking away the meaning of the text as a text; the authors’ power in this situation is that of ordering the elements of whatever they do have a hand in, and creating statements. The meaning of these statements will not be inherent, nor will the meanings be considered to be situated in the text itself to any degree; the meaning will be found by the Reader in the process of making connections to and from other texts. “The Author, when we believe in him, is always conceived as the past of his own book... the Author is supposed to feed the book-- that is, he pre-exists it, thinks, suffers, lives for it” wrote Barthes in his seminal essay “The Death of the Author” (1967). Barthes argues that the old model of authorship used by critics was a way of limiting the text to a set of meanings that could be ascribed to an all-controlling Author. The text is a “node within the network,” a sociocultural landmark from which to make connections to other texts (Foucault, 1972 p. 92).

Depending on what perspective you take, you can conclude that Authors have a very different amount of influence over the text of a story. So it seems useful, to reiterate, to determine not “how much” but “how” the Author influences the story. The formalists suggest that the author’s intent should be visible in the text itself; an accurate reading will get you an accurate meaning. From this, we can gather that one of the author’s roles is to conceive of and create a story with a desired purpose in mind. This
does not guarantee that any reader, ideal or otherwise, will be able to access this purpose, nor does it mean that if one could, one would have “solved” the story; is simply means that this is part of the way an author acts on a text. Likewise, the postmodern perspective suggests that the authors’ role is largely to put their thoughts on paper and step away to let the critics do their work: this does not mean that the authors do not have an intention behind the choices they make in the creation of their text, but that from this perspective, those intentions must be pushed aside in order to critically examine the interrelationships of text and meaning that the product has with other groupings of texts. Given that this project centers on the meaning of personal narratives, it would be very hard to take a completely postmodern perspective, since that specifically decries psychological factors from consideration in analysis (Barthes, 1967).

Both these types of author action will be taken into account going forward, but it is important to remember the assumptions of approach that underlie each theory: these are not theories that can be applied willy-nilly. To be valid, an interdisciplinary effort to use these varied perspectives must be one of picking up different lenses in order to achieve different purposes towards a goal, not one of grabbing and dropping perspectives as it becomes convenient. From my perspective, I think the most relevant point in Barthes is the distinction between the Author and the writer. The Author, for Barthes, is a construct of the critic that limits meaning-making about a text to a set of psychological assumptions about the person who wrote it. It is important to keep in mind that Barthes was not a psychologist—he seems to assume a far more cut and dry, closed-ended psychoanalysis of the author than is possible or even desirable from a psychological point of view. Barthes’s assertion that “the modern writer (scriptor) is born simultaneously
with his text; he is in no way supplied with a being which precedes or transcends his writing” is more exciting than frightening to a narrative psychologist (1967). The idea of the “Author” as a constant is an acceptable loss, provided that the idea of the “writer” is then adopted. Narrative psychology cannot be completely postmodern; the writer’s position will always be privileged. However, the postmodern perspective in general is far more useful at examining the relationships of difference and power that will come to be very relevant in discussions of meaning and madness.

**How does the Reader create narrative?**

Inevitably, after a discussion of Authorship, the question arises of what role the Reader plays in creating a narrative. The same forces battle out their definition in this arena, and their conclusions are very similar. It seems relevant here to reiterate that while all these perspectives are valuable and needed to understand narrative fully, there will be no point at which One True Way of narrative analysis will be declared: the purpose of discussing these theoretical debates is to explore the rules of the language of narrative, so that we can speak it and understand it more clearly. In such a convoluted and nuanced area of study, it is important that we establish exactly what we are talking about; unfortunately, by the convoluted principles of the same theories, it is impossible to establish this with any kind of reliable accuracy. This, however, is the point. Narrative is not something that has been nailed down; the gray areas in how to look at and work with it are part of what make it worth spending time to examine it. The meaning that will be found in narrative will not be found because the Chosen Theorist rises from the mist to
explain What It All Means; per Foucault’s thinking, it will be found in the relationships and tensions between the various meanings that are found in the process of narrative.

As previously mentioned, the Reader’s role from a formalist perspective is to match the perspective of an Ideal Reader as closely as possible. From this point of view the role of the reader is to discern a specific meaning and to avoid a “misreading” which would lead to a “wrongheaded” conclusion (Brooks, 1951 p. 27). Here, clearly, the reader has a job to do, and can do it either by coming up with a meaning that contrasts with the inherent central meaning of the text or divining, as closely as possible, what the text is really saying. This approach creates problems once more in the area of cross-cultural validity: a reader working from the perspective of a different cultural context than the author would have a hard time fitting the mold of the Ideal Reader without dropping most of what gave their interpretation personal meaning. There is also the question of plurality—if it is difficult to divine one author for one text, it is impossible to assume one reader.

From a postmodern perspective, the reader has the lion’s share of the responsibility in creating meaning from the narrative text. The text is assumed to be situated in a complex contextual web of meaning and power, and the reader’s role is to identify points of connection that suggest new levels of meaning. No reader’s interpretation reaches toward any one true interpretation of a work.

Several groups of theorists focus more specifically on the role of the reader: in response to the suggestion of “something independent of and prior to interpretive acts, something which produces them” (Fish, 1976 p. 217) reader-response theory posits that “both the stability and the variety [of readers’ response to similar and different texts] are
functions of interpretive strategies rather than of texts” (ibid.). From this perspective, a person’s interpretive strategy is determined by their sociocultural background, and determines how they approach a given text. This leads to the idea that each iteration of the reader can create a different version of a given story text: when someone comes up with a dramatically different reading than we do, “one of us might then be tempted to complain to the other that we could not possibly be reading the same [text]…and he would be right; for each of us would be reading the [text] he had made” (Fish, 1976 p. 218). This is, on its face, somewhat overwhelming, because it seems to suggest a near-infinite range of possible interpretations for any given reader. However, because such interpretive strategies are sociocultural in origin—“not natural or universal, but learned”—there is hope that the “fragile but real” communities of interpretation proposed by reader response theory can be used to aid an understanding of cultural narrative interpretation. This will become more relevant in coming chapters because of its bearing on cultural metanarratives and narratives of difference and resistance.

Perhaps the most important perspective to have in hand when approaching personal narratives of madness is phenomenology. Phenomenology is concerned with consciousness and lays the meaning of any situation at the feet of one subject: because individuals defines the world from the point of view of their own consciousness, the world of ideas and concepts which we share overlaps with a personal system of interpretations and values:

It is then to this world, the world in which I find myself and which is also my world-about-me, that the complex forms of my manifold and shifting spontaneities of consciousness stand related: observing in the interests of research the bringing of meaning into conceptual form through description; comparing and distinguishing, collecting and counting,
Simply put, from a phenomenological perspective, the only thing that matters is the experience of the subject, (because that is the only thing which exists to matter). In the context of narrative text analysis, if the subject is the author of a story-text, only the author’s intent for and belief about the text matters in interpretation. If the subject is the reader of a story-text, only the reader’s interpretation of the text matters. Clearly this raises some red flags in a discussion of applying narrative theory to therapy. How can privileging one person’s experience so much be good, or even possible, in the context of therapy? Phenomenology in psychology falls back to a somewhat more practical position. In the face of overwhelmingly generalized theories, phenomenologists claim that individual experience does matter, and that psychologists should maintain a phenomenological perspective so that they can keep in mind just how far they have to go to make a connection with another person’s world. Even so, phenomenological psychology is a fairly radical branch of the field.

The reader, then, is given a different set of goals, tools, and rules by each set of theories. From the formalist picture of the reader, we can say that one way in which a reader may act when confronted with a story-text is to attempt to find a meaning implicit in the text itself. In order to do this, a reader may attempt to shift their critical beliefs and assumptions in order to fit the idea of a centrally located Ideal Reader. Again, this is not to say to any definitive end that a given reader should do this, or that this will give valid results. The idea that readers may subject their personal interpretations of an experience to fit a dominant interpretive script is simply too important an idea to ignore in the face of
theories of cultural metanarratives and narratives of resistance, as are discussed more thoroughly in Chapters 2 and 3. Suffice to say that when readers approaches a story-text, one tool that they may choose to use (and one quite commonly and uncritically chosen outside the discourse of literary analysis) is to try to divine a truth that is written into the text.

From the postmodernist perspective, the reader is given many more tools and much more responsibility to clear away assumptions and look for connections in a given story-text. While not every reader will approach every text with the intention of deconstructing it in this way, it remains an option open to them; this is another way a reader can act on a narrative. Reader response theory suggests that readers, given their respective sociocultural backgrounds, are bound to follow a particular interpretive script when faced with a story-text. Leaving aside the question of whether this script can change or not and focusing on the implied action associated with the script, we can say that the reader has the power, upon reading a story-text, to write a unique iteration of it in his own mind with his own experiences and ideas. This idea of multiple readings plays directly into the phenomenological concept of how people experience and construct the world with and within their personal experiences as filtered through sense consciousness. The act of interpretation, in any event, is far from passive (even if the interpreter is tied to one form of agency), and the choices that the reader makes as to what kind of interpretation she will perform have a great deal of influence on what the final narrative is judged to be by the reader.
How is narrative a type of text?

There are extremely varied perspectives on how to view narrative, but they generally group toward two poles of an argument: whether to view “narrative” as a noun, a type of text that can be analyzed using certain appropriate strategies; or whether to view “narrative” as an adjective, a descriptor of any number of kinds of texts. These definitions are really two ends of a spectrum of ideas about narrative. To the extent we view narrative as a type of text, we are primarily concerned with the ways in which a given story-text fits the hypothetical exemplar of the narrative structure. This somewhat limits the scope to which we can apply narrative strategies. To the extent we view narrative as a descriptor of degree—the general approach here is to talk about narrativity as the degree to which a given text is narrative-like—we can apply narrative strategies to nearly any kind of text, no doubt with varying degrees of success. Both ideas of narrative are useful to different degrees in different situations, for examining different aspects of how narrative works in our lives and cultures.

On one side of this spectrum is the idea of narrative as a type of text. A text in critical analysis can be nearly anything, depending on the perspective decided upon: much of the twentieth century has been spent diversifying the types of text which are available for legitimate critical analysis. Like everything in critical analysis, “text” is not an easily defined term. Because the goal of this section is not to explore the various questions that surround its definition, a simpler definition will suffice: a text is the object of analysis, but a text does not stand on its own but in a contextual web of “social practices and conditions which govern the commerce with and constitution of the work of art” (Frow, 1986 p. 228). A significant definition of text from a narrative standpoint is
one which points out temporality: “a text can be defined as ‘any communication that
temporally controls its reception by the audiences… a time regulating structure’”
(Herman, 2009 p. 79). This in itself refers to the temporal process of reading a given text
(reading here being sensing and interpreting; texts can contain non-written elements)
where, due to the nature of sense and consciousness, you must read one part before
reading the next. This is an extremely abstract and specific way of looking at something
that seems fairly self-explanatory, but when we peel away the assumptions that we make
about textuality and it connections to context, we are left with this tenuous definition.

More exciting than what text is alone is what text can do when it works within a
color. The main reason text is so hard to define in isolation is that the concept of text
arose alongside theories that texts are situated in contexts. Reader response theory,
which posits that each reader plays a role in recreating each text in his own personal
construct of meanings and strategies, also points out that the reader himself is part of the
context with which he analyzes the text, and the text is not separate from the context:
although we are prone to think of the reader set against the text, “the problem with any
such opposition of subject to object is that it takes for granted ‘the distinction between
interpreters and the objects they interpret’…The way out of this bind is to recognize that
text and reader are categories given by particular interpretive strategies, and that the
criteria of interpretation are therefore internal to discourse rather than given by the reality
of texts or readers” (Frow, 1986 p. 232). In other words, it is easy to fall into a trap of
assuming that we have access to, or can theorize around the existence of, a “real” reader
or “real” text. While a completely critical perspective of a reader of a text would view
the reader, the text, and the context as parts of one continuum of culture, it is necessary to
divide them in some way in order to analyze the situation in any useful way: therefore, the concept of a separate reader and text is understood to be a pragmatic conceit of analytical discourse and not a reflection of an absolute reality. Text is created by and creates context; likewise, context is created by and creates: “the interpretive frame is not simply prior to particular readings, inexorably governing them, but is inferred, guessed at, constituted by a reading” (Frow, 1986 p. 234).

With an understanding of how text-context systems work, we can look down one level of specificity to the text type (Herman, 2009 p. 79). While all texts convey information over time, “different kinds of texts regulate time in different ways, and one of the motivations of the theory of text types is to capture the differences at issue” (ibid.). Text types can be known as “heuristic constructs used to make sense of more or less heterogeneous semiotic practices” (Herman, 2009 p. 81). They are “conventionalized in a specific culture for certain well-defined and standardized uses of language,” such as “the lexical patterns found in patient histories written by physicians, or the question-answer turn-taking sequence of police interrogations” (p. 80). Text types, then, can be understood as categories into which the mind sorts texts given certain cues from the style and content of the text. Once the text is sorted into a given category, a learned interpretive strategy is applied to it.

The cue that distinguishes Narrative as a text type, according to Herman, invites interpreters “to draw inferences about a structured time-course of particularized events” (Herman, 2009 p. 92). This “event sequencing” or sense of temporal space is one of the key signifiers of narrative across narratological theory: while every text can be understood to exist in a temporal context, narrative calls attention to this process by
emphasizing causality and order. Herman proposes that “like other members of a category, instances of the category narrative adhere to a logic of graded centrality, with specific story artifacts (as well as story-like mental representations) being better or worse examples of narrative” (Herman, 2009 p. 78). The walls of this type are hazy; narrative stands alongside other types such as description and explanation and texts often cross the boundaries between these categories—“such forms again suggest the graded versus binarized, either-or nature of text-type categories, and the way non-prototypical instances of those categories can verge on neighboring textual kinds” (Herman, 2009 p. 78).

How does text type theory apply to the central thesis of this project, then? The guiding logic of the personal narrative is that people interpret their own experiences and form the raw material they find there into a personal narrative of identity. In order to examine how people make narrative meaning of their lives, it is necessary to understand the shapes that meaning might take.

**How is narrative characteristic of text?**

Narrativity is seen as a measure of central tendency for narrative; it measures how close a given story-text adheres to the prototypical narrative. One set of qualifications, designed by Herman, for the prototypical narrative is as follows:

“A prototypical narrative can be characterized as:
(i) A representation that is situated in…a specific discourse context or occasion for telling.
(ii) The representation, furthermore, cues interpreters to draw inferences about a structured time-course of particularized events.
(iii) In turn, these events are such that they introduce some sort of disruption or disequilibrium into a storyworld involving human or human-like agents…
(iv) The representation also conveys the experience of living through this storyworld-in-flux [qualia], highlighting the pressure on real or imagined consciousnesses affected by the occurrences at issue…”
Although Herman consistently applies narrative theory to various expressions of narrative, his prototypical narrative is remarkably specific (at least in comparison to other narrative theorists, whose ideas are remarkably vague). His story-text is situated in a discourse of occasion that prompts an interpreter to recognize the narrative as such; it further cues its audience to notice temporal order and causality. Within the text itself, the narrative’s temporal elements suggest a disruption in a ‘storyworld’ (which can bear any sort of resemblance to the ‘real’ world or none at all) containing agentic characters, either human characters or ‘human-like’. Most importantly, perhaps, is Herman’s fourth point: from this perspective, a narrative produces a feeling of “being there,” or qualia, in the reader. While description or explanation could similarly strive for a sense of qualia, Herman argues that the narrative type is primarily concerned with producing this sense of shared experience. This suggests that some of the most important value in the development of a personal narrative is a communication not of intent or feeling but of experience and perspective. The story does not convey a reasoned argument for coming away with a specific set of beliefs, nor does it simply state the facts of a timeline. To the extent that the author of a story-text imbues it with intentional meaning, narrative communication is an attempt to convey a frame of consciousness from one person to another; it is an attempt to breach the phenomenological walls separating world consciousnesses. A story-text has more or less narrativity in Herman’s scheme given how closely it adheres to these elements of narrative. However, Herman is not the only voice in this discussion.

For Leitch, narrativity is a characteristic of the audience, and
entails three skills: the ability to defer one’s desire for gratification (so that
even if the opening five minutes of a film do not make obvious sense or
provide pleasure, we still assume that the film will ultimately justify our
attention); the ability to supply connections among the material a story
presents; and the ability to perceive discursive events as significantly
related to the point of a given story sequence.
(Leitch, 1986 p. 34)

This definition of narrativity assumes a constructivist reader-response perspective
and deems it “the process whereby an audience constructs a coherent story from the
fictional data (images, gestures, sentences) presented in a given discourse” (Leitch, 1986
p. 34). This completely separate version of narrativity depends not on any elements that
can be found in a narrative story-text but instead relies on and refers to audience
readiness and competence in recognizing and interpreting narrative. Although Herman
discusses reader response theory at length, Leitch puts the narrative and its narrative-ness
in the hands of the audience to an extent that Herman does not reach.

Both theorists, in different ways, are dealing with the ideas of Seymour Chatman,
one of the developers of modern narratology. Chatman himself leans pretty closely on
Aristotelian ideas of what narrative should be and contain: “As Aristotle maintains,
action is the fundamental narrative element. Of course, actions are only performed by (or
happen to) actors, upon or in reference to objects. So we must recognize not only
narrative statements of actions—which I will call PROCESS statements—but also
narrative statements of existence which I will call EXISTENCE statements” (Chatman,
1975 p. 97). Chatman is primarily concerned with the actions of agents within stories or
story statements, which are tiny units of the story used in order to break up the narrative
for analysis. Chatman maintains that narrative, as a “semiological or quasi-semiological
structure quite separate from the language or other medium with communicates it,” is
made up of “an expression plane (called ‘narrative discourse’ or simply ‘discourse’) and a content plane (called ‘story’)” (ibid.). This is another iteration of a dichotomous tension that first appeared on the level of text-context systems and will continue to arise and are explored more in the next section.

An important distinction Chatman makes is the idea of the Narrator, who is present even if only implied in the narrative text—“insofar as there is telling, there must be a teller, a narrating voice” (ibid.). The conceit of the narrative voice provides another step narrative takes away from being dry (or rich) explanation or description: the addition of this voice informs the reader or the hearer that the story is being filtered through a consciousness. While this is always true of any text, the narrator functions to make the audience conscious of it themselves; this is very similar to how the temporal element of narrative brings something present in all texts—the time-bound nature of their readings—to the attention of the reader, and so distinguishes itself from other forms of textual communication.

Chatman further presents another conventional dichotomy between “mimesis and diegesis, or in modern terms, between showing and telling” (Chatman, 1975 p. 97). This separation is an ancient but awkward one: the telling Chatman refers to direct expressions from the narrative voice that Herman might class as closer to description or explanation than narrative. Mimesis is certainly meant to convey a less ‘tampered-with’ version of the story, and this impression is helped along by the fact that “narrative is a mixed mode, combining elements both of direct and imitated speech” and therefore provides a contrast of direct narrative voice in order to encourage the illusion of objectivity that the mimesis provides (Chatman, 1975 p. 97). In this sense, the narrative voice might be seen as a
decoy set by the author: the narrative voice is allowed to confess some information directly to the audience, and then by contrast the events which are shown are taken to be unmanipulated. Chatman delineates two poles, one, “the pole of pure diegesis—is where the narrator speaks in his proper voice, using the pronoun ‘I’ or the like and expresses views which are not so much the story as his view of the story” and the other, “the absolutely unmediated story or pure transcript or record, consists of nothing beyond the speech or verbalized thoughts of characters, omitting even such minimal marks of narrative presence as ‘he thought’” (Chatman, 1975 p. 110). The closer to the mimesis or ‘unmediated story’ pole a text goes, the easier it is for the audience to “forget the act of transcription and assume that the expression is a pure act of mimesis” (ibid.).

Chatman also proposes a form of “indirect free style” found when a narrative abandons the direct narrative voice and becomes partially unmediated: “it provides the structure for a middle ground of consciousness between total submersion in that consciousness, as in the ‘stream of consciousness’, and the Jamesian effect of relatively distanced observation by a narrator of a mediated ‘central consciousness’ or ‘post of observation’” (Chatman, 1975 p. 122). This ‘middle ground of consciousness’ is a very interesting concept to keep in mind moving towards personal narratives and narratives of madness. One of the most interesting questions to come out of these theories is how the process works by which readers “feels a connection” to the author: reader response theory and this level of analysis, which suggest a level of consciousness that crosses the boundary between reader and text, would seem to suggest that readers are at these times recognizing or validating a part of themselves that they have found in the text. This is
relevant to both meaning making processes and personal narrative, discussed in chapters 2 and 3.

These theories of narrative are, again, quite varied, but we can draw from them a set of potential interpretations of narrative action. Herman’s perspective on narrative and narrativity suggests that certain cues inherent in a narrative text, or inferred from its discursive context, will set off a reader to interpret it as narrative. This, combined with his list of the elements of narrative, suggest that narrativity can be a quality of a story-text itself which can be discerned in part by the properties thereof. Leitch, by contrast, sets up a system of judging narrativity in which the text is subordinate to the reading; from this reader response perspective, narrativity is a quality and competency of the readership, which is responsible for constructing narrative sense out of a set of fabula. This suggests that story can also serve as a passive prompt for readers’ constructions of narrative. In a discussion of mimesis and diegesis, Chatman suggests the spectrum of presence of the narrating voice, which moderates the narrative through a set of reminder signals to the reader that there is a separate consciousness filtering the events being indicated; the narrator provides a means of shifting the reader’s consciousness closer to and further from the awareness of the illusion of shared consciousness with the implied author/narrator. All this goes towards showing that story can use mixed methods of both showing and telling its readers, and can use each strategy in turn to create a sense of shared awareness and consciousness, reinforcing an emphasis on qualia and the production of a sense of shared experience.
How is story made up of substance and shape?

The point has hopefully been made clear by now that story is a complicated animal and that, the theory being as widely varying as it is at this time, a certain amount of redefining of terms has to be done at the beginning of every practical discussion of narrative. In order to have a vocabulary set in place for discussing the issues of personal narrative and madness which are coming up in Chapters 2 and 3, which are complicated enough on their own without constantly referring back to eight different narratological theorists, I am going to propose a set of definitions for use in this project that are somewhat cobbled together from various theories.

The meaning of a story can be found in the constructive tension between two camps: the stuff and the structure. The Russian Formalists termed these the fabula and the sujet, or the story and the plot (Rivkin & Ryan, 2004). The stuff—the schedule of events—has to do with the meaning of the story in the time, place, and relationship in which it was given and received. The structure and shape, or the sujet, is the way in which the stuff of story is presented and framed in a given story-text. (This theory, like any in critical theory, is not without controversy: critics point to the dominant Western thread of sujet—an Aristotelian ideal of a story with a beginning, middle, and end—as an threat to non-western Native storytelling practices, which are focused more on the fabula (Cox, 2006). I would suggest that this is certainly an instance of narrative being very powerful and hardly understood: later, in Chapter 3, the threats grand narratives pose to the solidity of identity for anyone who falls outside the norm will be explored in greater detail. At any rate, it might be worth pointing out that I am not using the exact ideas of
The stuff of story—the story or *fabula*—is very important, especially when it applies to personal narrative where the stuff of story is likely to be made up of meaningful life experiences. The *fabula* ties the story to its source and gives it meaning in its own original context of time and place: it provides the ‘other consciousness’ that narrative seeks to join a reader to by way of *qualia*. From a perspective centered on narrative, theorists often disregard the *fabula* as the trappings of plot, but in the context of personal narratives, this part of the story is incredibly important. From a personal narrative standpoint, the entire point of the narrative is to deal adequately with the *fabula*. For this project’s purposes, we cannot write off the *fabula*. However, it is certainly true that it can be mistaken for plot and meaning in and of itself.

Jung points out an analogous problem with people misinterpreting his ideas of archetype: “It is necessary to point out once more that archetypes are not determined as regards their content, but only as regards their form and then only to a very limited degree. A primordial image is determined as to its content only when it has become conscious and is therefore filled out with the material of conscious experience” (Jung, 1954 p.). The ‘material of conscious experience’ relevant to the *fabula* is the constructive nature of meaning-making that surrounds and gives shape to the symbols of day-to-day experience: this is narrative.

Narrative is derived from the Latin for “telling a story,” and can be understood as the process and structure of telling a story. The narrative or *sujet* elements of the story give the story, or the individual telling, its shape. There are certain structures of narrative
that are more common than others, some intraculturally (like Dan McAdams’s The Redemptive Self, a study of American redemption narratives after 9/11) and some cross-culturally (like Joseph Campbell’s Hero With A Thousand Faces). Narrative is important to story because it gives a chance for the author to narrate the story for a different purpose than a bald reading of the text might give. The flexibility of narrative allows for different meanings to be drawn from the same story; however, this flexibility can be difficult to access because of the power of metanarratives (or grand cultural narratives) to define the ways in which people in a culture make meaning of their lives.

In this way, it is possible to look at narrative as a subset of story. However, this only allows us to look at a tiny portion of narrative’s array of manifestations. Narrative is the shape of story, but it is no more restricted to story than octagons are to stop signs. Stories are recognized as being intentionally told; but other narratives are not always even recognized by their creators. Memory researchers use the concepts of narrative ‘scripts’ or schemas to account for tricks in short-term recall, suggesting both that cultural influences are greatly responsible for our cognitive development and that storying behavior is one of the fundamental acts of thinking. Cultural metanarratives are grand narratives in our culture that serve as bases of comparison for members of their culture; they tell us if we are normal, good, or successful. Personal narratives of identity like those studied by Dan McAdams are rarely acknowledged, let alone consciously created, by the people who express them. None of these narratives are intentionally told, and some are not told at all in the traditional sense; however, they are still shapes of temporal events that were created in order to fulfill some purpose — conscious or unconscious, personal or collective, meaningful or evolutionarily pragmatic.
For the remainder of this project, I am treating Story as an intentionally told combination of meaningful images and events in a shape and structure designed to fit a purpose. This does not mean that every author has a set purpose in mind for what goals he wants the narrative of his life story to promote in its readers: although those sorts of intentions would be worth taking into account, these purposes can be insidious and unknown to the author. Like most forms of representation, narrative can fill the purpose of reinforcing the status quo, of justifying the existing power structure, or of condemning an outsider perspective, without ever asking its author’s consent.

Clearly, due to the contested nature of authorship, the author has little control over the end meaning of her Story; the production of meaning from the Story may be a process performed by the Reader, and the story-text may melt into its context so that no intentional narrative is deemed worthy of study. I am dividing Story into two camps, the stuff (fabula) and structure (Narrative). However, Narrative is not restricted to being the structure of intentionally told Story, and can be used as a framework of interpretation for texts which are do not meet this requirement of Story. Narrative can be the shape of nearly anything: in the next chapter, I will explore how identities can be cast and recast in narrative form.
References


MEANING AND MADNESS

What is there, where there is no meaning? Only nonsense, or madness, it seems to me.
Carl Jung, The Red Book

He who has a why to live can bear almost any how.
Friedrich Nietzsche

Meaning

Meaning is closely related to madness; in one of his revelations from The Red Book, Carl Jung declared them to be two sides of the same coin (Jung, 2009). Certainly they are alike in one regard: it is difficult to give a simple definition for either. The search for meaning, particularly, is a difficult journey to trace because it is undertaken not by theorists of one particular discipline but by people across a broad spectrum of orientations. This is one reason why it can feel futile to look at the answers people have reached to the questions of meaning; the ways in which people successfully make meaning of their lives cover far too wide a ground to form any kind of comprehensible whole. This diversity of answers is also one reason why a discussion of the questions is useful and necessary, and why this discussion will be largely limited to constructivist dialogues in which the questions are the focus of the conversation. In this discussion, I will be examining meaning’s significance, production and relationship to power.

What is the meaning of meaning?

"The quest for meaning is one of the most fundamental of all human drives” (Shumaker, 2001 p. 124). From the perspective of psychology, meaning is important because it is be one of the key determinants of a person’s well-being, outlook, and life in society. Meaning “has been defined as ‘having a purpose in life, having a sense of
direction, a sense of order and a reason for existence, a clear sense of personal identity, and a greater social consciousness’” (Shumaker, 2001 p. 124). Meaning, then, is tied to personal, interpretative, and social contexts. The concept of meaning-making depends on the general rule that without a human being actively making sense of a situation, there is no intrinsic human meaning to it – the idea that “human beings manufacture meaning in an attempt to impose order on an otherwise chaotic world” (ibid.).

Kelly theorizes that the process of trying to make meaning of the chaotic world is a process of making, trying, and discarding personal constructs. Constructs are "patterns that are tentatively tried on for size. They are ways of construing the world" (Kelly, 1995 p. 9). Personal construct theory posits that personal constructs are an imperfect solution to the enduring problem of a world that defies interpretation. In Kelly’s theory, the world exists, and this is both the reason for and problem in creating successful constructs.

"Man looks at his world through transparent patterns or templets which he creates and then attempts to fit over the realities of which the world is composed. The fit is not always very good” (Kelly, 1995 p. 9). When a construct doesn’t fit—when it fails to adequately account for the past and predict for the future in a way that allows the person to make sense of the present—the construct can be discarded. Meanings are not final, and only theoretically can they ever be “right.” But the process of making sense of the world continues through many attempts, because “without such patterns the world appears to be such an undifferentiated homogeneity that man is unable to make any sense out of it. Even a poor fit is more helpful to him than nothing at all" (Kelly, 1995 p. 9).

In relation to a person’s life (rather than other areas that use constructs, like the process of learning the theoretical basis of a chemical process), narrative is one of the
most useful and powerful ways to understand constructs of meaning. Living is a process of a body going through time, through maturation and deterioration. The temporal element of narrativity is perfectly suited to Kelly’s assertion that “life has to be seen in the perspective of time if it is to make any sense at all” (Kelly, 1995 p. 7).

It is fitting, then, that our word for “meaning” is a gerund; it describes a process, a constant –ing. The products of this process are more or less imperfect for the purposes of aiding human life. The role of meaning is in addressing the chaos of the universe: this implies that the process of meaning-making is most important and salient at times when the inexplicability of life shows itself, often in painful ways. As Campbell puts it, "Where your pain is, that's where your life is. So find it" (Campbell, 1977 p. 213). Distress, confusion, and existential angst can be signs that meaning is needed.

Why is meaning important?

Meaning is personal, cultural, and social, and so has impacts across these three axes in the lives of individuals, cultures and groups. The narrative structures in which meaning is made form the basis for how “human beings think, perceive, imagine, and make moral choices” (Sarbin, 1986 p. 8). Research focused on meaning’s influence on psychology shows that “meaning is positively related to psychological and physical well-being, as well as life satisfaction, positive self-regard, optimism, coping ability, and personal growth. It has also been shown to protect vulnerable populations (e.g., the institutionalized elderly) from depression. Conversely, deficiencies of meaning can pose difficulties in all these areas" (Shumaker, 2001 p. 124). This suggests that when people make meaning of their lives, they operate with less distress in the world.
"All stories of about social life and subjective experience involve interpretation and reflect the social processes of meaning making. There can be no experience outside the stories we tell" (Brown & Augusta-Scott, 2007 p. 179)

Narratives of meaning determine not just how we act and feel but who we are.

"...narratives emerge within a temporal landscape that includes both the events or experiences that occur and the meaning that we ascribe to them. Intertwined, these dual landscapes include a landscape of action and a landscape of consciousness in which the knower and the known are inseparable" (p. xxx). There is no self that can be understood outside of the constructions of knowledge it produces. The self is in the knowledge.

Kelly goes out of his way to assert that although he is talking about “a real world” and not one “composed solely of the flitting shadows of people’s thoughts,” he has a firm “conviction that people’s thoughts also really exist, though the correspondence between what people really think exists and what really does exist is a continuously changing one" (Kelly, 1955 p. 6). Kelly’s assertion that “people’s thoughts also really exist” is a phenomenally important one that moves constructivism from a self-centered, solipsistic perspective towards a framework where other people are not totally inaccessible, and moves clinical psychology from a place where only observable behavior can be dealt with towards an integrated understanding of people in the world. This is a crucial bridge between abstract constructivist thought and the person-based work of clinical psychology. It is impossible to know the extent to which our constructions of the world match up with the real one; but since those constructions are real, we can work with them. Of course, this runs both ways; the social side of meaning-making allows some grounds for healing but also for harming. In a socially constructed “world of meanings,”
“survival…is problematic without the talent to make up and to interpret stories about interweaving lives” (Sarbin, 1986 p. 11). An inability to make meaning, due to situation, competence, or whatever reason, can lead to distress and chaos in the same way that successful meaning-making can lead away from it.

How is meaning made?

Meaning is made through a complex and not fully knowable interaction of social, cultural and personal processes. Geertz made famous the idea that “man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun” (Geertz, 1973 p. 5) He identified culture as the web, and “the analysis of it to be … not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meanings" (ibid.) We can change and create culture, but we will never know who we are separate from culture because the question itself is framed in cultural terms. We spin it, and we are suspended in it. Meaning is the same way to the extent that it is made up of cultural communications. I may be the author of my own life story, but I am writing it in a shared language, in a shared context, using shared cultural ideas of what a story should look like. Narrative is fundamentally sociocultural. "Narrative is a socially symbolic act in the double sense that (a) it takes on meaning only in a social context and (b) it plays a role in the construction of that social context as a site of meaning within which social actors are implicated" (Mumby, 1993 p. 5). Making meaning in narrative form implies sociocultural means and ends.

Within the person, meaning-making is a process of taking in raw experience and interpreting it into some sort of useful framework. Meaning is made through connection and implication; the ability of one construct to generate more meaning, in other
situations, is what gives that construct meaning and significance. "The more inferential links a construct possesses, the more extensive is the array of implicated constructs in which an event's interpretation is embedded. In effect, the more implications a construct possesses, the more meaningful is the construct" (Mancuso & Adams-Webber, 1982 p. 171). As previously mentioned, the narrative form provides a natural framework for making meaning of life experience. Narrative form “reflects an effort to restore a sense of order and meaning to experience. That is, stories are ways of organizing experience, interpreting events, and creating meaning while maintaining a sense of continuity” (155). The idea of maintaining a sense of continuity is key; life lends itself to narrative because life goes on. The construct must be in a form that can deal with the present and the future, and cannot be one that puts all meaning in closed systems tied to the past.

Who makes meaning?

Most research on meaning has to do with how one person has made meaning of one life, and as a result the impression is that meaning is a personal endeavor. However, narrative meaning depends on its social and cultural aspects: "we do not, and cannot, create our stories by ourselves, as they can emerge only within a preexisting context of meaning. This context of meaning is always social" (Mancuso & Adams-Webber, 1982 p. xix). Being a sociocultural process means that narrative meaning-making is at risk for all the effects of power that social and cultural processes are heir to. The process of narrative meaning-making involves experience, interpretation, expression and integration: every step is vulnerable to cultural and political influence. Even the designation of which experiences are worthy of meaning is tied to a culture of power and
politics. Joan Scott points out that "what counts as experience is neither self-evident nor straightforward; it is always contested, always therefore political" (Scott, 1992, p. 38). People that control culture by extension control the ways in which culture teaches us how to be. People with less power adopt the cultural framework created by the more powerful into their meaning-making process of understanding themselves. This is not, of course, a clear-cut process; culture is a constantly mobile process of exchange, and so is meaning-making. "...[T]he social construction of meaning does not take place in a political vacuum but rather is a product of the various constellations of power and political interests that make up the relationships among different social groups” (Mumby, 1993 p. 6-7). The language of movements to resist this unconscious assimilation reflects the concerns of personal meaning-making: minority groups search for a voice, feminist historians popularized the idea of her-story. Meaning-making through personal narrative has a place in the discourse of political and cultural control.

It is also important to keep in mind that neither group creates the culture from which and in which these ideas manifest themselves; both are caught. Spinning the web, but suspended in it. Both are responsible, and neither. In this way, “the construction of social reality is not spontaneous and consensual but is the product of the complex relations among narrative, power, and culture" (Mumby, 1993 p. 6-7). What is allowed to be meaningful, the ways in which we shape meaning, and our relationship to the meanings of others are all situated in a political power context. This is especially important to consider when thinking about the meanings of madness.
Meanings of madness

There are two meanings to be dealt with here. One, and perhaps the most urgent, is the meaning of madness the word. Madness is a dirty and complicated word. Madness implies unpredictability, chaos, inexplicability, abnormality, meaninglessness and danger. It is a member of a whole class of words denoting non-normality that have generally negative and isolating connotations: crazy, bonkers, insane, certifiable, demented, psychotic, screwy, deranged, off, queer. These words should be used with care, like the powerful and versatile forces that they are; but any language surrounding the issue of madness is limiting at best and damaging at worst, depending on your guiding construct of mental distress. While this is not the place for a thorough discussion of the terminology surrounding mental disorder, I will briefly explain the choice I have made.

I am using the phrases “madness” and “mental disorder” very intentionally. “Madness” is among the many words in this category that have shifted in meaning over time until they gather around a central common meaning: different, unpredictable, dangerous. As I am interested in a contrast to meaning— a failure of a construct system to account for an individual’s history and future, or a failure of the sociocultural system to verify and support the meanings of the individual—madness is an appropriate term. Madness is also a concept where more interdisciplinary integration can occur; while psychology and psychiatry can exclusively claim the meanings of “mental illness,” ‘madness’ is a common theme in literary analysis and other disciplines. The central impetus for using this terminology, however, is that the words “mad” and “madness” are both in the process of being ‘reclaimed’ by Mad Pride and other organizations that argue
for mental patient’s rights and against the stigmatization of those diagnosed mentally disordered (Mad Pride, 2000). As I am arguing that disorder can be helped by personal reconstructions of situations, I support their efforts to change the language of mental disorder and to exert their own power over it. The other phrase I have used and will use consistently is “mental disorder,” which seems to be a good representation of the constructivist view that distress can come from an unsuccessfully organized set of constructs. Madness, like the mad, has a history of being shut up and ignored. Pulling the language of mental disorder out into the open is a small step towards publicly acknowledging and critically examining the sociocultural element of mental disorder.

The second meaning of madness is the meaning that the condition of madness has in our culture. Since this is hardly a simple definition, it might be more accurate to say the meanings that madness holds. Looking at the widely varying interpretations of what it means to be mad (as well as what it means for someone else to be mad) can open a discourse on how the experience of mental disorder is maintained or changed by these cultural impressions.

One of the most enduring images of madness is that of irrationality or an inability to reason. "The ubiquitous image of madness as irrationality is one of those pictures that holds us captive. To paraphrase the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, it lies in our language, and our language repeats it to us inexorably" (Sass, 1992 p. 2). Madness of the irrational sort can fall into two camps: the positive wild and free stereotype and the negative image of the unpredictable lunatic. Sass suggests that the happy madman image has been maintained in modern times by people – “intellectuals, for the most part” – who fear that they have not run aground in life “announcing, a bit too loudly, that they at least
cannot be placed among those self-satisfied yet anemic souls whom Nietzsche mocked so pitilessly for staying on the sidelines of life, having no idea 'how cadaverous and ghostly their 'sanity' appears as the intense throng of Dionysiac revelers sweeps past them'" (Sass, 1992 p. 4). Another important aspect to the cultural image of madness, which contributes to the fear of mad people, is the belief in the primitive nature of madness. "Nearly always insanity involves a shift from human to animal, from culture to nature, from thought to emotion, from maturity to the infantile and the archaic. If we harbor insanity, it is always in the depths of our souls..." (Sass, 1992 p. 4). There is a sense conveyed in this image of madness that mad people are fundamentally inhuman. They lack reason, the trait that divides human from animal; they have devolved and ungrown into animals or children. Both the positive and negative stereotypes can coexist with this. As seen in the idea of the ‘noble savage,’ our culture is often guilty about how far from nature it is and expresses this in harmful ways by centering moral goodness on de-powered people. Note that the traits associated with the mad—animal, nature, emotion, infantile—are also commonly associated with femininity. In this image, this association reinforces the idea that mad people do not and should not have power; they are naturally subordinate. They may or may not be acceptable people, but they shouldn’t be in charge. These are not ideas that sprang from uneducated people who had no experience with mentally disordered people; the idea that mad people were wild beasts who had to be beaten, humiliated, and frightened into submission to serve a purpose in human society was the guiding thesis of psychiatry for a shamefully long time, as chronicled in Robert Whitaker’s excellent Mad in America (Whitaker, 2002).
Although these stereotypes are alive and well, they are also somewhat out of favor in current discourse; they still might be used unashamedly as movie plots but they are not likely to be found in psychology textbooks. The dominant model of mental disorder is currently the biomedical model. This construct consists of a metaphor comparing abnormal mental processes to physical disease. The primary benefit from and reason for doing so is to externalize the cause of abnormal or antisocial behaviors or thoughts, removing the responsibility for the behavior from the person and placing it on the illness. Unfortunately, “once a metaphor has done its job of sense making, the metaphoric quality tends to become submerged. Unless constantly reminded of the as if quality of the expression, users of the term may treat the figure as a literal expression…. The reification provides the foundation for belief systems that guide action” (Sarbin, 1986 p. 5). Partly in order to keep up with medical science, and partly from a trick of language, this construct has become reified to the point that most of the public and many mental health professionals believe that mental illness is simply brain damage or dysfunction, and a great amount of psychological research is done on the basis of this unspoken (and evidentially unjustified) assumption. The biomedical model construes mental disorder as a separate entity, an illness like a physical infection that attacks an otherwise normal person; this construction does not allow for personal responsibility in mental disorder or for the possibility that the symptoms have meaning to the person. It also performs the handy trick of reassuring ‘normal’ people that they do not have to fear the same thing could happen to them—and if it does, there’s a pill for it. The biomedical model is concerned with classification and diagnosis.
While a full criticism of the biomedical model would take too long and is available elsewhere from excellent sources, suffice it to say that strong critics of this dominant model exist (Szasz; Kirk & Kutchins; Boyle; Leitner; Neimeyer; Sass; etc.). In large part, perhaps because they are intentionally trying not to think about interpersonal and cultural manifestations of mental disorder, biomedical theorists often uncritically accept the dominant cultural picture of mad people as different than human. As a result, what Szasz referred to as “all problems in living” are construed necessarily as neurochemical imbalances (Szasz, 1960, p. 113). "The notion of a 'broken brain' evokes the image of a machine whose damaged state prevents it from serving its intended functions. It is much more likely, in fact, that schizophrenia involves exaggerations or diminutions of normal processes rather than anything so radically distinct" (Sass, 1992 p. 384). Constructivist models of mental disorder construe disordered thinking and behavior as rational and coherent within its own context. In this model, madness and normality exist on the same spectrum of human life. There is ‘mental disorder,’ and a person can be ‘mentally disordered,’ but they operate by the same rules that other people—the more ‘mentally ordered’—do. Most importantly, they deserve dignity and respect as human beings. From an interpersonal view of psychological health, the isolation from the stigma of mental disorder labels can be extremely damaging. As Harry Stack Sullivan (1953) famously put it, “We are all much more simply human than otherwise, be we happy and successful, contented and detached, miserable and mentally disordered, or whatever” (p. 16). This model is by far subordinate to the biomedical model, and so the cultural effects are not as far-reaching. But advocates argue that such
an approach would reduce stigma by promoting the idea of madness as a human experience—frightening, painful, horrifying, or deadening, but still human.

*Mad without power*

Given the dominant cultural images of madness that are available to the culture at large—irrational, primitive, broken—it is not surprising that people who have been labeled with a mental disorder have a difficult time achieving agency in society. Because they are seen irrational, they no longer are trusted to make meaning within the culture. People labeled with mental disorders face an unpleasant choice between accepting a powerless role to remain in society and rejecting it to become a feared outcast. People facing mental disorder often hide it, as Carl Jung did, in order to avoid this choice. The double burden of the labeled mentally disordered is that to return, they must make meaning within a system that no longer gives them permission to do so.

"In political, ideological, and philosophical struggle… words are also weapons, explosives or tranquilizers and poisons" (Pfeil, 1990 p. 132). I have already discussed the reclaiming of the word “madness” by Mad Pride organizations. Mad Pride, which is the best known name among a wide movement of psychiatric survivors, mental health user rights advocates, and allies, takes a stand on madness that is often misunderstood. The concept that someone could be proud of a ‘mental illness’ is troubling to the public at large; after all, shouldn’t you want to get better? The stance of Mad Pride (loosely—it is difficult to nail down one statement that every group that answers to the name would agree to) is that mad people should not be ashamed or isolated by society because of their madness. Instead, society should take a share of responsibility in creating the mad:
“madness, though usually very painful, often appears as the only available response to an obscene system” (Mad Pride, 2000 p. 8). Of course, this narrative rarely comes across to the general public, who are easily frightened of a gang of mad people “off their meds.” Struggles like the fight over the terminology of madness are places where the power aspect of meaning-making becomes painfully clear. Who has the right to define the experience of mad people? Who has the right to name them? Since madness as a general label allows society to take such rights of meaning away from people, it is also telling that the process is circular. Knowledge about the psychology of white males comes from college students in a reliable data set going back decades; knowledge about the psychology of everyone else comes from institutions and therapy sessions. "Much of our knowledge of women is derived from the study of female psychotherapy patients and then generalized to all women. Not all women become patients, but patients come to represent womanhood" (Josselson, 1987 p. xi). A power difference in general (that in the early twentieth century, men vastly outnumbered women in higher education) leads to a bias on the part of the powerful in general knowledge (women’s psychology is generalized from women’s psychopathology) which is used to justify the original power difference. Any break from this cycle comes only with great struggle.

One postmodern method for challenging powerful narratives is to develop a local counternarrative. Peters and Lankshear define counternarratives as, among other things, “little stories of those individuals and groups whose knowledges and histories have been marginalized, excluded, subjugated or forgotten in the telling of official narratives” (Giroux et al., 1995, p. 2). A counternarrative is a socially constructed narrative made from local knowledge. By definition, it must exist in opposition to a larger cultural
narrative, a “grand narrative” or “official narrative”) (Giroux et al., 1995, p. 2). As “narratives construct the subjectivities of men and women,” claims Sarup, “the stories we tell are often reshaped in/for the public sphere. And then, when these narratives are in the public sphere, they shape us. Narratives are, of course, sites of cultural contest, and when they become public we should ask: who is orchestrating them?” (Sarup, 1996, p. 18).

Mad Pride represents one active effort to orchestrate a cultural counternarrative. At a local level, a group like this can function as its own small culture, each person legitimizing each other’s attempts at meaning-making. Chipmunkapublishing, for example, is a company run by a Mad Pride member publishing “mad memoirs” and promoting counternarratives of mental disorder. These efforts help to address the difference in power between vulnerable individual narratives and powerful grand narratives of culture.

Making meaning of madness

A mad person faces a double struggle in regards to meaning. Faced with the chaos of the world and the meaninglessness of their current life, they need to find meaning for themselves; however, due to their label, they are deemed socioculturally incapable of producing legitimate meaning. In order to make meaning of madness, it is necessary to confront both problems: the ‘irrational’ or ‘broken’ image tied to mental disorder that allows for the silencing of people with mental disorders, and the personal struggle to regain meaning. One place that is useful in providing a framework for how this might be done is narrative psychology’s work with trauma survivors.
Survivors of violence, abuse, sexual assault, or other traumas face a similar dilemma psychologically: their agency has been injured by the trauma, and their ability to claim agency is stymied by their designation as 'victims.' As a result, the work in narrative psychology takes a two sided approach to understanding the recovery of trauma survivors. While survivors must deal with their own individual traumas, their narratives often are most meaningful when they use their identity as a survivor to return to the world with a mission. "One of the predominant themes in the literature of various kinds of trauma is the 'urge to bear witness,' of the need for 'survivors' to testify to other people the truth of their experience" (Crossley, 2000 p. 109-110). The survivor-advocate identity allows survivors of trauma a way to regain their authority and agency, by transforming the horror of their experience into expertise. "Their responsibility as survivors is to 'bear the tale,' and the process of storytelling is viewed as a 'personally reconstitutive act'" (Crossley, 2000 p.110). Making meaning of a trauma involves finding a way to integrate that trauma into one’s identity as well as a way to integrate this new identity in society. Since meaning and madness are both social and cultural as well as personal, the role of storyteller and the narrative of survival are both valuable tools to be used to help people dealing with mental disorder make meaning of madness.

References:


PERSONAL NARRATIVE

*You never know what you will learn until you start writing. Then you’ll discover truths you never knew existed.*
Anita Brookner

*Tell all the Truth but tell it Slant*
Emily Dickinson

*Story-shaped selves*

Narrative is a hard concept to grapple with, but the reason why it is difficult is the same reason that it is necessary to thoroughly examine: storytelling is a basic and, as far as we know, universally human act. “In many guises, as folktale, legend, myth, epic, history, motion picture and television program, the story appears in every known human culture. The story is a natural package for organizing many different kinds of information. Storytelling appears to be a fundamental way of expressing ourselves and our world to others” (McAdams, 1997, p. 27).

While every kind of story, as explored at length in Chapter 1, is inseparable from its readers and writers and contexts, the personal narrative is something special. A personal narrative is an intentional organization of the self’s experiences and actions into a story that has significance in that it can be used, or is intended to be used, in order to share *qualia*, a sense of common consciousness and experience. Personal narratives, then, are already personally significant because the set of *fabula* they use to construct a story are representations of personal experiences with personal and social meanings already tied to them in the world outside the story. Identity can be understood as a narrative; a narrative can be understood as an identity. “When asked about our identity, we start thinking about our life-story: we construct our identity at the same time we tell our life-story” (Sarup, 1996, p. 15).
At the present time, narrative constructivist psychology focuses on verbally expressed narratives. The subject of the research is usually spoken narratives co-constructed between client and therapist during psychotherapy. Written, prompted autobiographical sketches are also hallmarks of the use of narrative in clinical psychology. Somewhat surprisingly, there’s very little research currently done within this field of psychology on the relationship of an independently intentional construction of a written personal narrative to these theories of identity and clinical space. Due to the limitations of research, narrative psychology has so far done little with therapeutic processes that might occur outside the typical two-person therapy session, or the mental health system in general.

Given the established importance and significance of identity narrative, I suggest that intentionally constructed written personal narratives are a valid field of inquiry for narrative constructivist psychology. I also suggest that the work done by creative nonfiction writers and instructors in looking at the process of meaning-making through the construction of personal narratives is valid material to stand alongside qualitative research into the meaning-making process of oral and written self-narratives in a psychotherapy setting. Personal narratives are a special kind of narrative that use the tools of narrative construction to order and make sense of a human life in terms of a story.

**How is identity narrative in nature?**

The primary signifiers that prompt narrative interpretation are a sense of temporal experience, and a thorough expression of our understanding of our conscious lives (*qualia*). Since human beings are time-bound, “events do not happen randomly—actions
lead to counteractions; attempts, to consequences. For many of us, time seems to move forward, and through its forward trajectory human beings change, grow, give birth, die, and so on. There is development and growth as well as death and decay” (McAdams 1997, p. 30). In our interpretation of our life’s events, this temporal element of our lives allows us to read a narrative sense into them, “assimilating our daily experience to a schema of self that is a product of that experience. Thus, in identity, life gives birth to art and then imitates it. We create stories, and we live according to narrative assumptions” (McAdams, 1988, p. ix). Because we live (and die) in time, we organize our conception of time, the world, and life around our own consciousness of our own experiences. As Ricouer put it: “‘Time becomes human time to the extent it is organized after the matter of narrative; narrative in turn is meaningful to the extent it portrays the features of temporal existence’” (qtd. in Hinchman, p. 135). In a way, we see ourselves in narrative because we ourselves are narratives.

**Developmental narrative identity theory**

McAdams’s narrative identity theory follows human development as a process of gathering storytelling skill. Although infants are not ready to understand story as adults do yet, McAdams explains, “before we understand what a story is, we have seen how they try to do things over time. We have experienced our own intentions. We have tried to do things in the world, and we have witnessed the results of our strivings” (McAdams 1997, p. 47). As this pattern of wanting, striving, and evaluating the results of our trial repeats, one can see a narrative tone emerge, positive or negative depending on the results of our attempts. Later, McAdams points out that children are in the process of soaking up images from all around them: “It is the images in stories—not the stories themselves—
that children appropriate” (McAdams 1997, p. 55). In other words, children at this age are in the process of accumulating *fabula* for their stories. This process allows them to build a vocabulary of narrative pieces that later will be useful for communicating consciousness with other people. Children at elementary school age begin working with themes of love and power in their play, and begin understanding people as separate consciousnesses. In late childhood, they also begin understanding motive.

After childhood comes adolescence, and with adolescence comes the first round of questions of identity. The main question at this point becomes, what is our goal? McAdams joins Jung, Aristotle and Rogers in arguing for “self actualization,” the motivation for people “to realize their own inherent destiny” (McAdams, 1997 p. 70). Although McAdams finds a grand goal in self actualization and “bringing different aspects of the life together into a unifying and purpose-giving whole,” not everyone who subscribes to a theory of narrative identity toes the party line; some “argue that people’s life stories are less integrative and unifying than we might expect” (McAdams, 1985, p. 5). From a meaning-making perspective, a life narrative that went against the grain of societal narratives and was not fully integrated might be better than a narrative that accepted a powerless role. Creative nonfiction offers a way in which mad and other marginalized people might work with their life narrative in order to make personal and sociocultural meaning of their experience.

**Creative non-fiction**

The most obvious manifestation of a personal narrative is autobiographical writing. Creative nonfiction writers and theorists have done much of the work already in trying to discern the meaning-making process that occurs in the process of independent
self-narrative construction. Writing about the self is more difficult than it seems. “[The] minute creative nonfiction writers put pen to paper, they realize a truth both invigorating and disheartening: we are not the rote recorder of life experience…we have difficult choices to make every step of the way” (Miller & Paola, 2005, p. x). The process of creating a personal narrative involves working the raw material of memory into a recognizable story. “Memoir writers must manufacture a text, imposing narrative order on a jumble of half-remembered events. With that feat of manipulation they arrive at a truth that is theirs alone” (Zinsser, 1998, p. 6). Thus the process of honing a written text becomes a process of revising the identity itself.

“Show, don’t tell,” and “tell the truth” are guiding mantras of creative nonfiction. The truth is variable in creative nonfiction. It “may mean… being scrupulously honest about the essential meaning…(the ‘heart’s truth’ or the ‘felt truth’)” (Bloom, 1994, p. 87). The important thing is to ground the work in the personal. A generalized, archetypal protagonist stand-in for the author often provokes a slight resentment, if anything, in the reader: if your character has no rough edges, there is nothing for the reader to hold onto. Far more meaningful connections are made when the writers make “candid admissions of the faults, problems, difficulties, even failures” of their lives (p. 93). The writer of a memoir does not have to be pleasant or likable in real life to establish a connection with the reader: the object is to be compelling, to inspire readers’ sympathy through “unsentimental acknowledgement” of flaws and problems (p. 88). “If you succeed,” advise Miller & Paola on creative nonfiction, “you and the reader will find yourself in a close, if not intimate relationship that demands honesty and a willingness to risk a kind of exposure that you may never venture in face-to-face encounters” (Miller &
Finally, creative nonfiction is a tradition of “telling the truth slant,” with a political end in mind. In “Why I Write,” Orwell describes this aspect as the “Desire to push the world in a certain direction, to alter other peoples’ idea of the kind of society that they should strive after” (Orwell, 1946). Holding that “no book is genuinely free from political bias. The opinion that art should have nothing to do with politics is itself a political attitude,” Orwell reflects that he begins writing from “a sense of injustice” (ibid.). Creative nonfiction is the ideal platform for this kind of personal political argument because it allows the writer to integrate their personal experience into a larger story of injustice.

These aspects of creative nonfiction make them nearly ideal cultural grounds for narratives of madness. The process of constructing memory into a narrative forces a process of meaning-making to occur within a guiding framework of narrative. The focus on essential truth, rather than literal fact, provides room for personal narratives like Jung’s that include stories of deep madness that, while clearly exemplifying “heart’s truth,” are difficult to translate to factual history (Bloom, 1994). The tradition of testifying to injustice allows the writer to simultaneously make meaning of personal experiences and to reassert their identity as a valid meaning-making member of society. Additionally, independent creative nonfiction may sidestep one of the pitfalls of using narrative in therapy: that is, the danger that "in compelling and inciting subjects to 'disclose' themselves, finer and more intimate regions of personal and interpersonal life come under surveillance” (Crossley, 2000, p. 161). In a narrative written independent of therapist input, the text is fully the writer’s and can provide a socially legitimate sense of
agency through achievement.

References


MODERNISM

In the following winter I was standing at the window one night and looked North. I saw a blood-red glow, like the flicker of the sea from afar, stretched from East to West across the northern horizon. And at that some time someone asked me what I thought about world events in the near future. I said that I had no thoughts, but saw blood, rivers of blood.

Carl Jung, *The Red Book*

If I should die, think only this of me:
That there’s some corner of a foreign field
That is forever England…
Rupert Brooke, “The Soldier”

You can’t believe that British troops ‘retire’
When hell’s last horror breaks them, and they run,
Trampling the terrible corpses—blind with blood.
O German mother dreaming by the fire,
While you are knitting socks to send your son,
His face is trodden deeper in the mud.
Siegfried Sassoon, “Glory of Women”

Millions of pages of scholarship have been dedicated to analyzing the causes, insights, results, benefits, detriments, strengths, weaknesses, gaps, politics, and history of modernism in the Western world, and it is a bit presumptuous to give that title to a chapter only a few pages long. I have no ambition to seek great new insights into modernism through this project; no doubt this version of events will seem to many to be simplified and polished of the rough edges which make modernism such a fascinating movement of Western thought, and I don’t disagree. I have two purposes here. One is to provide a historical, and somewhat theoretical, context through which to view the case study of Carl Jung’s *Red Book*. The second is to point out the inconsistencies between the humanities’ definition of modernism and the definition being used by constructivist psychologists, and to argue that constructivist psychology should revise its ideas about modernism so as to communicate more fruitfully across disciplines.
The Red Book will be described in much greater detail in its own chapter, but because it was published so recently some background is necessary. The Red Book is a mammoth book that Carl Jung kept within a circle of close family and friends until his death, at which point it was kept hidden by the family. Although Jung’s autobiography Memories, Dreams, Reflections gives some detail about the period of his life he called the “confrontation with the unconscious” and the visions he experienced, The Red Book details visions and dreams vividly and dramatically in the first person (Jung, 1963). The text itself is recorded in several alternating languages, written in calligraphic script, and profusely illustrated. To frame the transcripts of the dreams and visions, Jung constructs a mythic story of his life that ties the book together. The events recorded in The Red Book are introduced by Jung’s reflection, at a difficult time in his life, that although he had spent his life showing how people gained meaning from myth, he himself had no myth to live by (Jung, 1963; Jung, 2009). The stories within the book are violent, traumatic, and heavily symbolic. Through various stories, Jung wrestles with the role of language in meaning, the role of religion in his life, his male and female identities, the competing truths of myth and science, and his revelation that progress does not exist.

The contents of the Red Book are powerfully symbolic but are often tied so closely to images of ancient myth that it is easy to forget that Jung considered the visions they describe to be extremely pertinent to the immediate present of his life and his world. In order to begin to understand him or his book, it is necessary to go over the state of the world he lived in; not because Jung was closely involved in the great doings of his day but because in a world of postmodernist assumptions, it is difficult to understand the mindset of one of the first modernist thinkers without significant effort given to
understanding the foundational certainties that fell away during Jung’s lifetime, and the shifting sands on which he was forced to try to form a construction of his life’s meaning. Modernism as a culturally visible example of narrative trauma: period in which a great deal of the world, somewhat simultaneously, experienced a series of events that broke the lens through which it viewed existence, making it a very valuable period of time to study from a narrative psychology perspective. While modernism is tightly tied to its time and place of origin, the effects from the movement are still profoundly felt in our contemporary experiences of trauma and formed the template for how we understand narrative distress.

Constructivist psychology’s recently developed perception of modernity is so starkly different than other disciplines’ that it is difficult to integrate any of their definition into the traditional view of modernism. Not every constructivist psychologist has this problem, but enough leading voices in the field are quoting each other on it that it is becoming a problem. The misunderstanding seems to have arisen from a desire to advocate for postmodern therapy and to distinguish postmodern therapy theory from past psychological theories, conflated with the common use of the word “modern” to mean “nowadays.” As a result, many theorists claim that the modernist era was positivist, given to black and white ideas and hopes of infinite scientific progress. Neimeyer (2000) claims, “For modernists, reality is single, stable, and in principle knowable—qualities that modern psychologists attribute to the ‘self’ as part of this same natural order” (p. 5). This is already troublesome, as the breaking down of the idea of a single, stable, knowable universe vies with the emerging idea of an unknowable, transient self for the most salient contribution of modernism to postmodern thought. As Lewis (2000) puts it,
“the modernists were remarkable for investigating in a concerted way the possibility that the mediated nature of our consciousness might preclude our ever arriving, by rational means, at a consensus as to the nature of external reality” (p. 5). Although modernism does not “reject external reality entirely… [it] concerns itself with the relationship between the individual consciousness and the external reality that it confronts.” (p. 4)

Other constructivists do note modern ideas and call them modern, but are clearly speaking in a “nowadays” way in the present tense. “Frameworks of meaning' have themselves become problematic and we now have a sense that no one framework is shared by everyone and that 'the' framework of meaning no longer exists” (Crossley, 2000 p. 165). Neimeyer continues:

In contrast, postmodern approaches turn nearly every feature of this modern, objectivist orientation on its head. The fundamental faith in a single reality that provides a common point of orientation across people, cultures, and historical periods has been eroded and replaced by a recognition, or even a celebration, of the multiple realities conditioned by individual, social, and temporal factors. (Neimeyer & Raskin, 2000 p. 5)

This sounds very good but is once again strikingly misconstruing modernity. Lewis (2000) describes the "'revolt against positivism' of the 1890s” as the immediate intellectual context of modernism (p. 58). So over a hundred years have passed between the modernist movement protesting "the whole tendency to discuss human behavior in terms of analogies drawn from natural science" and the current postmodern movement away from the biomedical model (p. 58). Modernism is not being given the credit it deserves. Gergen (who, given his prolific output on the topic, may well be the source of the problem) describes the attitude of modernism so:

The optimism fueled by the neo-Enlightenment voices contributed to what many view as the grand narrative of modernism. It is a story told by
Western culture to itself about its journey through time, a story that makes this journey both intelligible and gratifying. The grand narrative is one of continuous upward movement—improvement, conquest, achievement—toward some goal. Science provides the guiding metaphor. Had science not demonstrated the capacity to defy gravity, extend the lifespan, harness nature’s energies, and carry voice and image through the stratosphere? Because of the individual’s capacities for reason and observation, as expressed in the scientific attitude, utopias were now within our grasp. (Gergen, 1991)

This suggests yet another possible cause for the alarmingly disparate definitions of the word “modernist.” It is possible that these perspectives on modernism are looking at the popular and powerful culture of the time periods designated “modern” and deducing that these were modernist ideas, while from a humanities perspective, modernism was largely a creation, as Terry Eagleton has noted, of ‘exiles and emigres’" (Lewis, 2000 p. 11).

While Gergen describes the “optimism” of the modernist movement, history and theory tell a starkly different story. "Modernist experiments implied that our perceptions of the outside world and of each other are so tainted by culturally specific or individually idiosyncratic values that there might be no way of arbitrating fairly between the competing claims of various individuals or groups-- no eternal facts, no absolute truth, hence no absolute justice” (Lewis, 2000 p. 5). Hardly the stuff utopias are made of.

Gergen’s idea of the postmodernist self as “full of adventure and what he calls a 'free play of being.' …[in] a world that encourages "experimentation... risk and absurdity,' our opening up to a 'multiplicity of possibilities,' a world 'free from the limiting constraints of the past" (p. 27). Postmodernism does allow for experimentation, risk and absurdity, with identity along with everything else. But the simplistic idea that everything before was bad, and everything to come will be “free,” full of “play” and “adventure,” sounds like a tame version of futurism. “We are on the extreme promontory of the centuries!
What is the use of looking behind at the moment when we must open the mysterious shutters of the impossible?” (Marinetti, 1909). While I mostly draw the comparison for humor’s sake, it also points to a very real problem with this situation. Modernism was a traumatic and horrible time for most of the people who wrote about it. The struggle to make meaning out of an absurd and frightening world was not easy. While on one level, the recent misconceptions of modernism are not very important—these are not modernist theorists, after all—the history of these movements is important for at least two reasons. First, it is a matter of simply being accurate and correct with language. Especially in a constructivist system, language should be used carefully and intentionally, with attention paid to the social and cultural implications of the words you choose to use. Secondly, the gap in understanding here frustratingly prevents any real integration of these two perspectives. *The Red Book* is one of many texts that by nature should be shared between disciplines; how can any useful dialogue occur before a common language is established? Since the ideas of constructivism and narrative psychology were “raided” from the humanities by Theodore Sarbin to begin with in 1986, the humanities perspective here is vastly more valid and constructivist psychology should revise its construct of modern and postmodern thought (Sarbin, 1986). With the context that a reader from psychology might be unfamiliar with a humanities history of modernism, I have summarized some of the basic themes below with attention paid to the ways in which modernism relates to narrative meaning-making.

Modernism is characterized chiefly by the stark break with tradition that it represents. In the Western world (the conclusions of this project, culturally based as they
are, should not be carelessly generalized further), we can generally trace the arrival of modern insight to the Great War. World War I destroyed not only millions of lives but also many systems of meaning. The horrifying deaths that millions of soldiers lived with—thanks to the combination of sickening, futile trench warfare, rampant infection and disease, and new and horrifying uses of technology—reshaped their realities as they returned home. As the saying went round, they “went to the war with Rupert Brooke and came home with Siegfried Sassoon”—the cultural framework built around the glory of the country and the righteousness of war had crumbled, and the modernist thinkers were left in a void to build a new way of thinking of the world (Stallworthy & Ramazani, 2006 p. 1981). Or rather, from a cultural narrative point of view, we can say that the old stories—the cultural metanarratives—no longer worked. The metanarrative exemplified Brooke, that celebrated sacrificial death and glorified the power structure and individuality of the nation, could no longer account for the experiences of the people involved.

There’s another set of perspectives that needs to be taken into account here before we go further with this interpretation. Although the narrative of the Great War and the modernist movement is certainly useful and convenient for my purposes in writing this project, to ascribe the modernist movement particularly to white men—as we must do if we’re going to limit the experience of the time to its disillusioned soldiers—is severely limiting. The experiences of women and minorities in this time, and their contributions to the literature of the period, are very significant and should be valued as crucial insights into the social, cultural and political constructs that were in flux during this period of time (and those which remained stubbornly rigid). Their experience is particularly important
to this project because of the relationship of minority and mad experience at all points in history, but especially this period in time. The modernist insight can be framed as a public and political questioning of public and political assumptions; this includes not just assumptions of nationalist logic but also the assumptions driving gender, racial, and class inequality. The modern period can be construed as the cracking dam, which when sufficiently pressured releases a rush of critical perspectives that erode the social structures preceding the modernist breakthrough.

This being said, modernism also had a great deal to do with white upper-class male experience. The pluralism that is striven for in contemporary times is a new phenomenon; the beginning of the twentieth century was a time when political and cultural power was centrally controlled by the elite white protestant Christian upper-class, specifically, the British Empire: “By the beginning of World War I, nearly a quarter of the earth’s surface and more than a quarter of the world’s population were under British dominion” (Stallworthy & Ramanazi, 2006 p. 1830). Movements towards reclaiming minority identities began as the modern movement got underway, but at the time, quality was still determined by this select cultural group. Politically, however, the British empire was feeling the beginnings of change: several colonies gained commonwealth status and India began calling for self-rule in the first decade of the twentieth century (Stallworthy & Ramanazi, 2006) The disillusionment usually associated with modernism was especially visible among the powerful dominant clique whose identities were heavily invested in the old systems of meaning. Thorough knowledge of the social system has long been a common thread in minority experience; the disenfranchised can see more of
the social power structure because they must learn both how to operate in their own level of society and how one “should” act as determined by the most powerful group.

So what was the experience of the high modernists, and how can we understand it? Stepping back a few years from the war, the turn of the century was already a period of change in the western world: the aesthetic movement of the late 19th century resulted in artists “rejecting Victorian notions of the artist’s moral and educational duties… resulting in the ‘alienation of the modern artist from society’” (Stallworthy & Ramanazi, 2006, p. 1827). The first few modern voices emerged around the turn of the century, with causes including “the rapid pace of social and technological change… the mass dislocation of populations by war, empire, and economic migration… the mixing in close quarters of cultures and classes in rapidly expanding cities”, and with results visible in “powerful concepts and vocabularies… emerging in anthropology, psychology, philosophy, and the visual arts that reimagined human identity in radically new ways” (Stallworthy & Ramanazi, 2006, p. 1828). The basic foundations of Western thought were shaken by a series of philosophical developments that “decentered” Western Christianity, discrediting it as a bastion of external truth, and called some of the most basic scientific assumptions into question with the developments in physics of Albert Einstein and a cohort of pioneers (ibid.).

Also significant to the writing of this period, and especially significant to the life, madness and work of Carl Jung, was the publication of The Interpretation of Dreams by Sigmund Freud in 1900. In Dreams, Freud called into question another longstanding assumption: that of the continuity of human consciousness. Dreams brought the theory of unconscious motivation into the public domain for the first time; it connected
contemporary people to ancient symbols and myths, contributing to the demise of the ideas of progress and special-ness that permeated Victorian society; it framed human experience as a tension between psychosexual urges and cultural restrictions; and it caught the attention of a young student in residency at a mental hospital in Switzerland. Now, after the backlash, Freud is usually mentioned only with derision in psychology departments eager to separate themselves from what they see as an overly humanistic, unreliable, unscientific and old-fashioned form of psychology; at the time, Freud was just as unpopular, but it was because he had not yet made it big. Freud’s theory of multiple levels of consciousness was not welcomed by the world of psychology at large—the young Carl Jung was one of its only defenders— but it was embraced by the modernist artists who were already wrestling with the problems of thought it addressed: “psychoanalysis was changing how people saw and described rationality, the self, and personal development” (Stallworthy & Ramazani, 2006 p. 1828). It is difficult to assess the cultural impact of Freud on Jung separate from the personal impact from their tumultuous relationship. However, it is safe to say that Jung’s intellectual world—along with most of the Western world at the time— was, in large part, shaped by Freud. As W. H. Auden wrote in an elegy for him at his death, “to us he is no more a person // now but a whole climate of opinion // under whom we conduct our different lives” (qtd. Stallworthy & Ramazani, 2006 p. 1828). Love him or loathe him, and there are plenty of people who did both in his own day and ours, Freud changed things. I will later discuss how Freud and his theories played into the personal life of Carl Jung, but Freud is not significant purely because of his relationship with Jung; his fingerprints are all over the new construction of reality begun during the modernist movement.
Modern artists, “whether or not they welcomed the demise of tradition, habit, and certitude in favor of the new… articulated the effects of modernity’s relentless change, loss, and destabilization” (Stallworthy & Ramanazi, 2006 p. 1829). Clearly, the process of modernization began among communities of artists before the first world war; however, in part because of the alienation of the artist from greater society, the effects of modernism were not solidified in the greater culture until the war. The war itself “produced major shifts in attitude toward Western myths of progress and civilization. The postwar disillusion of the 1920s resulted, in part, from the sense of utter social and political collapse during a war in which unprecedented millions were killed” (Stallworthy & Ramazani, 2006 p. 1830). The dire prophecies of artists were backed up by a war of destruction on a scale never before seen, and the effects were profound in the general consciousness of the times.

The experience of modernism, however, was not simply a halt, but a turning. According to narrative psychology, the people of the time had little choice but to “[attempt] to construct credible new alternatives to the old belief systems”-- it was in their nature (Stallworthy & Ramazani, 2006 p. 1838). The new constructions that modernism devised are still in use today: writers especially boldly explored their crumbling belief in the founding assumptions of representation to their time: “that the world, things, and selves were knowable, that language was a reliable revelatory instrument, that the author’s story gave history meaning and moral shape, that narratives should fall into ethically instructive beginnings, middles, and endings” (Stallworthy & Ramazani, 2006 p. 1838). The new foundations of knowledge were created in response to the failings of the old. Since an external, universal reality, in the form of the old
system’s grand narratives of church, king and country, had failed to suffice, an individual, internal, experienced reality was privileged in the modernist view: for example, in the world of fiction, this is seen in the shift from the reliable, omniscient narrator to the unreliable, flawed narrator of the modernist period, who “dramatize[s] the struggle to know, penetrate, and interpret reality, with [a] large rhetoric of the invisible, inaudible, impossible, unintelligible, and so unsayable” (Stallworthy & Ramazani, 2006 p. 2839).

To return to the language we used in the first chapter, the modernist writer was not primarily concerned with story/fabula, but with narrative: in the works of the time, the focus of the reader is directed not to a series of events but to the process by which they were arranged. Rather than arranging a series of fictional events that occur in such an order to suggest a moral outcome, the modernists place the power of writing in the visible hand of the author; the story/fabula of the modernists centers on the mundane, while the narrative becomes the real story. By making visible the ways in which the author/narrator can manipulate the audience, the ambiguity within the narrator’s own consciousness made visible in the fractured structure of the narrative, and the imperfect nature of language itself as a means of communicating experience, the modernist authors’ message to their readers was a warning to trust no one and assume nothing.

What is the meaning of modernism to us as we explore these case studies? I means something to call modernism the “context,” but it is also a fairly general term. At this point it is necessary to call back to Chapter One’s discussion of narrative and text-context systems. The text-context system concept is rather abstract in the absence of an example, but applied to modernism, it is clearer to see. The Red Book is a text that
cannot be understood separate from the many contexts it is woven into; it is a part of Carl Jung’s life, a part of the cultural development of modernism, a part of the young body of psychological literature; it is derived from all these, it defines all these. But also, and importantly, it connects these categories. It is not possible to really examine the text against the background of modernism or any other context because those contexts determine the content and structure of the text. Looking at the trends of modernism gives us not just a setting in which Jung’s text takes place, but the language it is spoken in and the audience it is spoken to. Going on to look at Jung’s life and Red Book, it is crucial to keep in mind the relevant markers of modernism: a sense that all that was once right, true and certain is falling away; strong and inescapable imagery of death and destruction; shattered illusions of progress; an atmosphere of accelerated social, technological, and cultural change; and proactive attempts through writing to find a new way of making personal meaning of the world.
References:


CARL JUNG

... I have had one or two experiences since the publication of my recent lectures which lead me to infer a certain bewilderment in my critics.
Carl Jung, “Introduction to the Religious and Psychological Problems of Alchemy”

“Thank God my memory does not burden me with personal things,” he used to exclaim with relief.
Aniela Jaffe, From the Life and Work of C.G. Jung

The man, the myth…

Carl Gustav Jung, along with his sometime mentor Sigmund Freud, have been inflated to absurd degrees of importance since the time they were both producing work; it is difficult to see past the gigantic images of each and to understand the men that started the fuss. Freud, born “just past the midpoint of…the darkest yet of all the centuries of the modern era” and “destined to use the patterns of thought of his times in order to penetrate by analytical methods into the depths of the human psyche,” found in the student Jung “the disciple who could face him as a creative partner of equal standing and supply that constructive criticism which modern psychological research demanded”—coming into his own, Jung was “not merely a man” but “the explorer of the archetypes in the human psyche” according to one typically gushing biographer (Wehr, 1971 p. 7). Members of Jung’s family approve of this biography, while others hold that it perpetuates the romantic myth of Jung as a spiritual hero (Smith, 1996). (It should say something about both Jung and his biographers that this reprimand comes several pages after a passage hailing Jung as “one of the giants of our time, an intuitive genius who saw profoundly into the peculiar spiritual dilemmas of modern man” (Smith, 1996 p. 1).) Of course, anyone can be forgiven for this dramatic language, as Jung himself certainly did not shy
away from it in his own descriptions of his life’s work—his constant use of colorful metaphor and mythical references is one of the traits that makes contemporary psychology so uncomfortable to be in the same room with him. “Of these things which are revealed to him, that is, of his dreams and visions, he says: ‘These form the *prima material* of my scientific work. They were the fiery magma out of which the stone that had to be worked was crystallized.’” (Wehr, 1971 p. 8). Throughout his professional literature, Jung makes sweeping references to a collective unconscious, spread throughout time, containing all the meanings and projecting into the future, and claims *gnosis* or special knowledge about it (Smith, 1996). Smith is not alone when he finds “[Jung’s] life and writings a source of both inspiration and exasperation”—Jung produced huge amounts of work over a long lifetime, a frustrating mix of grating assumptions and blinding flashes of insight; at times it seems he must have vacillated between piercing, clear vision and complete blindness (Smith, 1996 p. vii).

Although he is careful, in *The Red Book*, to restrict the meanings of his insight to his own life and warn against applying it too broadly, he shows himself quite comfortable throughout his writing to make definite statements about how people different than himself experience the world. Most notably, Jung’s theories of womanhood and Jewishness both posit completely separate psychologies: his work shows a considerable struggle with the idea that women might have souls or be capable of intelligent reason, and his works and comments on Jewish psychology were both “false and offensive” and incredibly poorly timed, as he brought up his thoughts on the issue “at the very moment when the Jews’ existence was threatened, and placed the psychological-racist differences on the scientific program of the International Society” (Storr, 1983; Wehr, 1971 p. 141).
It is easy to peg him, as many have done, as one of the many Dead White Men from the turn of the century whose limiting racist and sexist ideas are nothing but a theoretical cage for the more enlightened minds of contemporary times. But it is important to recognize, even if it is difficult to fathom, the incredible amount of contradiction in Jung’s long life. Jung is infamous for his use of ornate language and dramatic metaphor, but in his own scientific writing he discusses how distasteful he finds this high-flown style and wishes he could find a more down-to-earth way of accurately describing his experiences (Storr, 1983). Much of Jung’s life after World War II was spent critically examining his own and others’ opinions and thoughts leading up to the climax of the campaign against the Jewish people of Europe and the outbreak of another continent-wide war, trying to find ways to understand and trace the progress of the systems of thought that seemingly caused it (Wehr, 1971). Also, although anti-Semitism was fairly par for the course in early 20th century Europe, Jung’s actions of the time are further complicated by his recently abandoned professional status as the token Protestant in Freud’s Jewish psychoanalysis circle and by his personal publications on behalf of his German Jewish colleagues, almost at the same time he was publishing works on the differences in Jewish psychology from the normal (Smith, 1996; Wehr, 1971). Similarly, Jung’s racist and sexist assumptions were fairly typical to the day, and it is easy to dismiss them out of hand as irrelevant relics of the society; to try to understand his works in the absence of these attitudes or in contrast to them, as some did in the years following World War II, as his close colleague, biographer and “ardent disciple” Aniela Jaffe concluded:
In retrospect his mistakes and errors at that time can be seen to fit into his life and work without diminishing the greatness of his personality. In the words of Jungian psychology one could say that the shadow became manifest which is in everyone as an archetype and is often all the darker when a brighter light comes from the personality. Jung has given too much to the world and to mankind for his shadow ever to put in question his intellectual significance and his human greatness. (Wehr, 1971 p. 142)

But the perspective we are using depends on the intertextuality of all these factors: we are not looking at Jung the idol but at Jung the person in mental distress, and there is not an imperative for us, therefore, to justify his actions as there is for those who identify as Jungian. Rather, there is an imperative for us to look closely at these contradictions and not to shy away from them. From the perspective of narrative psychology, the contradictions inherent in Jung’s identity point out places where various narratives of identity come into conflict and demand integration and reframing; interestingly, we can see this process in progress even in the justifications of his followers as they try to construct a narrative which allows Jung to remain the messianic prophet he sometimes appears to be while honestly appraising those parts of his life and work which seem to conflict with that image. In the tradition of psychobiography, I will attempt to sketch out the life of Carl Jung in such a way as to highlight the points of contradiction at which a narrative revision became necessary, and looking back in part at the developmental narrative identity theory of Dan McAdams to lay out how he passed through some of the more important developmental stages. Whole lives have been spent studying Jung, his life, and works, and I am hardly going to be putting forth a definitive version of his biography. What I am interested in is how Carl Jung interacted with the ideas and themes of modernism, and how an understanding of modernist thinking can help us better understand the meaning-making process behind his life during and after the
period I am going to simply refer to as his madness. The end goal here is not to understand Carl Gustav Jung of Switzerland, it is to better understand the human process of narrative restructuring that gives meaning to madness and brings a person to their more complete self. Jung represents a tremendous opportunity for narrative psychology theorists: he was tremendously introspective, he came along at a time when narrative trauma was in vogue artistically, his works have been carefully preserved and analyzed, and his life story has been well-documented. The fact that he is also a giant of psychology and modernist thought whose own ideas would later become part of the foundation of contemporary narrative psychology is inseparable from these other facts, and of course it is exciting, but it is not the point of central focus here: I am most interested in what he experienced, how he experienced it, and how he theorized the world as a person living through tumultuous personal and political times.

Rote biographical information is not in and of itself very academically interesting to a discussion of theory, but it is necessary to do in this case because we are looking at, in part, how Jung’s life narrative organizes his life experiences—and if we are going to look at the narrative of his life that he constructed, we should at least have a passing familiarity with the substance of the story, the fabula that he had to work with. Jung is a particularly tricky subject because of the piles of books that have been written about his life, his personality (or personalities), and its effect on his theories; it is difficult to piece through the dozens of perspectives on, for example, his relationship with his mother, but through the various impressions we may gain a sense of what each has in common with
the next, and what it might mean. As previously stated, the contradictions inherent in the story are not problems, they are the point, and we must boldly stride towards them.

So that being said: Jung was born July 26, 1875 in the Swiss parish of Kesswill, the son of a minister in the Lutheran Reformed Church and the grandson of a doctor and professor of medicine at the University of Basle (Wehr, 1971). For the purposes of establishing a vocabulary, it is important to note first that from an early age, he understood himself to consist of “two persons” which he named, with little creativity, Personality No. 1 and Personality No. 2 (Smith, 1996 p. 18). Personality No. 1 was the outer personality, gave him “a place in time” and was his identity to the world at large—“a schoolboy in Basle obliged to work hard, especially at mathematics, gymnastics and drawing in order to cope with the work” (Wehr, 1971 p. 15). Personality No. 2, which is sometimes (much later in life) referred to as the True Self, was Jung’s inner self—hidden, “Other,” and “numinous,” with access to the eternal and ineffable (Smith, 1996). These personalities and their names would remain constant for the duration of his life, and he often described himself according to the interactions of the two personalities within him (Wehr, 1971). While it is important to know at this point that the division between No. 1 and No. 2 was one of the defining frames of Jung’s life, from the perspective of developmental psychology, it is important not to reify this construct into an unassailable fact about the young Carl Jung. Jung never considered that this division between personalities might be problematic or abnormal in any way—in fact, he argued strenuously and confidently against any suggestion of pathology and built many of his theories around the assumption that everyone else also experienced the world in this way (Smith, 1996). I will not label it abnormal or pathological, but what I would caution
against is the easy-to-fall-into assumption that this trait of Jung was inborn, that it was always a fact of his life; Smith in particular offers a convincing argument that Jung internalized the dual personalities of his own mother in constructing this divided life (Smith, 1996).

It is important to remember that narrative identity is not full and complete until much later in life than Jung reports making this distinction; contemporary theorists are viewing his childhood through the lens of his completed identity, and we must keep in mind that this is all part of a personal construction that served a purpose for a Jung near death, not objective data gathered by psychologists observing the behavior of Jung as a child. Smith points out that Jung’s memoir *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, the source of most information about Jung’s childhood, experienced the same alteration as other autobiographies: “Jung emphasized precisely what fit the image of his life he wanted to convey. In addition, the manuscript was further edited at the behest of family members who wanted certain elements toned down and others eliminated” (Smith, 1996 p. 15). One of the most valuable traits of *The Red Book* is that it never went through the same kind of editing that Jung’s other autobiographical texts went through; it was not open to change by his family or friends, which is important, but more crucially, it is a record of a time when his identity narrative was in flux. *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* is a valuable text for understanding Jung’s life, but it is always taken from this mixed perspective: one old man, one secretary, and a family with interests of their own.

*Father, Mother, and Other Mother*

In keeping with developmental theory, it is useful at this point to examine Carl Jung’s relationship with each parent. His relationships with them would shape the
narrative of many of his relationships. Although contemporary developmental psychology pays less attention to parent relationships (though they are still regarded as the most important bonds a child can make psychologically), we can be sure that a contemporary and disciple of Sigmund Freud dwelt on them quite a bit.

His father, Johann Paul Achilles Jung, was actually a student of philology who had been unable to find work in the academic world and had reverted to serving several country parish churches out of necessity—“when Jung was exploring the possibilities for a vocation, his father said, ‘Be anything you like except a theologian’” (Smith, 1996 p. 14). Johann Jung was not a passionate man of religion; his son was obsessed from childhood with the supernatural and the uncanny but did not feel his father was a kindred spirit in this regard. Rather, the symbols and rituals of Christianity became a stumbling block for the younger Jung in part due to their detrimental effect on the elder: “In important respects it is apparent that Jung’s father failed to develop inwardly in new directions once he entered the parish ministry… [he] was filled with anger over being trapped in the role of upholder of church doctrines through the means of blind belief” (Smith, 1996 p. 33). Jung’s mother was often absent or “ill” and Johann did much of the actual “mothering” of the young Carl (Smith, 1996). Although the father is usually “the source of ego and superego development[,] it would seem Jung did not sufficiently identify with his father, whom he perceived as ineffectual” (Smith, 1996 p. 33). Johann Jung was “an unhappy, frustrated, and miserable man… [he] lost hope and was frequently depressed, for he could not face his doubts, which remained largely unconscious” (Smith, 1996 p. 39). Carl blamed his father’s “wound that would not heal” on Christian institutionalism, and after the disappointment of nothing happening at his
first communion—“I knew that God could do stupendous things to me, things of fire and unearthy light; but this ceremony contained no trace of God—not for me, at any rate,” he wrote in his autobiography—he abandoned his father’s brand of Christianity (Jung, 1963 p. 54). Jung understood his father as a damaged and stunted soul, and though through his father he was introduced to many of the symbols and themes that would obsess him for the rest of his life, he recognized that what he regarded as fascinating, living questions were to his father mundane and meaningless facts of business that did not bear thinking too much about. His compassion made a strong impact on his son, but so did his weakness: from the time of his parents’ first separation during his life, Jung associated “Father” with “reliability and—powerlessness” (Jung, 1963 p. 8).

Jung’s mother, Emilie Jung, nee Preiswerk, had a radically different impact on his life, if not a particularly more positive one. Biographers who center on Jung’s father’s profession and influence—including, in large part, Jung himself—regard his early embrace of the mysteries of religious questions and the inner experience to be utterly isolating, and this tends to paint the young Carl as a lonely and prophetic genius from day one: “It was certainly not simply as an expression of bitterness, but as a sober assessment of the capacity for understanding of the people around him, that Jung wrote … ‘Today as then I am solitary, because I know things and must hint at things which other people do not know, and usually do not even want to know’” (Wehr, 1971 p. 17). Jung certainly felt alone and unable to speak to others about his inner experience, but that does not quite mean that he felt himself completely alone in having access to the inner world of Personality No. 2.
Emilie Jung is the clearest early example of Jung encountering a mind somewhat like his own; her effect on her son was ambiguous, if not downright sinister, but she did represent to him someone else who existed in two worlds. Jung’s mother’s two personalities were represented in his memory as a Day (No. 1) and a Night (No. 2) personality, respectively (Smith, 1996). Emilie Jung’s family history meant that Carl was steeped in all sorts of stories of the supernatural growing up: her father was a pastor and poet who “reserved a special chair in his study for the ghost of his deceased first wife, Magdalene… [and held] intimate conversations with the ghost… to the dismay and distress of his second wife” (Smith, 1996 p. 14). When Jung’s grandfather wrote his sermons, his mother sat behind him, “presumably to frighten the ghosts… ‘He could not bear the thought of ghosts passing behind his back and disturbing him while he studied. If a living person sat behind him, he believed the ghosts were frightened away’” (Smith, 1996 p. 14). Augusta, Jung’s maternal grandmother, was “also thought to be endowed with extrasensory perception” (Smith, 1996 p. 14). The family traced back this “gift” to “an episode when, as a young girl, she lay for thirty-six hours in a state of catalepsy resembling death”—she “saw spirits” and the family claimed her gift “could stand the test of a more rigorous judgment: she sometimes saw apparitions of persons unknown to her, but whose historical existence was later proved” (Jaffe, 1971 p. 2). Aniela Jaffe, Jung’s secretary and confidante towards the end of life who transcribed his autobiography, dedicates the entire first third of her biography of Jung to his relationship with parapsychology and its origins in his family history (Jaffe, 1971). Emilie wrote “a diary in which she noted down all the premonitions, ‘spookish’ phenomena, and strange
occurrences she had experienced”; it is impossible to say for sure, but the contexts suggests this writing may have been a sort of spiritual predecessor to *The Red Book*.

In addition to the parapsychological phenomena that his mother and her family claimed access to, Jung noticed at a young age a contradictory set of personalities in his mother that confused and disturbed him. Emilie, on the one hand, “embodied a sense of charm and magnetism, was a marvelous cook, and provided an enjoyable ambience in the home… a portly person in her mature years, both a good listener and an engaging conversationalist” (Smith, 1996 p. 16). But in addition to her (perhaps too) perfectly normal exterior self was one that Jung only caught occasional glimpses of: “She held all the conventional opinions a person was obliged to have, but then her unconscious personality would suddenly put in an appearance. That personality was unexpectedly powerful: a somber, imposing figure possessed of unassailable authority” (Jung, 1963 p. 16). Carl became convinced that “she consisted of two personalities, one innocuous and human, the other uncanny. This other appeared only now and then, but each time it was unexpected and frightening. She would then speak as if talking to herself, but what she said was aimed at me and usually struck to the core of my being, so that I was stunned into silence” (Jung, 1963 p. 16).

Three main factors prevented Jung from connecting with his mother about these inner experiences. One was the perceived defensiveness of Emilie’s Personality No. 1. When young Carl noticed his mother saying or doing things that showed him her relationship to the inner universe, he was excited, “but [he] also knew, even at that age, that I must keep perfectly still and not come out with: ‘You see, you think as I do!’ She would have repudiated the idea indignantly: ‘You horrid boy, how dare you pretend such
a thing about your mother!’” (Jung, 1963 p. 50). Although Jung perceived that his mother’s and his own No. 2 personalities might have a great deal in common, the process of communicating this truth through the outer, No. 1 personalities, was impossible. Jung’s polite, extroverted No. 1 personality was subject to all sorts of rules of etiquette and decency that No. 2 did not have to deal with, and it is clear from his projections of his mother’s behavior that he assumed her No. 1 personality worked almost as a security system for her No. 2 personality.

The second factor keeping Jung from confiding in Emilie was the perceived “enormous difference between [her] personalities” and the anxiety and fear produced by not knowing which mother was going to be around next (Jung, 1963 p. 50). As a child Jung was driven to “anxiety dreams” about his mother because “by day she was a loving mother, but at night she seemed uncanny… like one of those seers who is at the same time a strange animal, like a priestess in a bear cave. Archaic and ruthless; ruthless as truth and nature” (Jung, 1963 p. 50). Jung considers this to be evidence that his mother thinks the same way he does; Smith suggests that this stage was part of the impetus that drove Jung to divide his identity in the first place. “It is quite possible that many of the features of his mother’s split personality became incorporated into his own youthful perception of the world…Jung’s sense of numinosity seems to emerge, at least to some extent, from the contact he had with his mother’s No. 2 personality” (Smith, 1996 p. 26). Although Jung frames his experience with his mother as one of deep identification, he also stands off from her, and it is not that difficult to see why: “on balance we can see that Jung’s was a difficult, even terrifying mother, at times” (Smith, 1996 p. 26). Jung’s mother was wracked with depression and disappointment in her life with Johann; the two
had marital problems that Carl felt the atmospheric effects of despite their attempts to hide it from him (Smith, 1996; Jung, 1963). Emilie was hospitalized with “mental aberrations” during “at least one critical period of [Jung’s] youth” and she didn’t recover from her “illness” until the death of Jung’s father, a fact Jung’s family edited out of his original draft of *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (Smith, 1996 p. 25).

Emilie was clearly a troubled woman, manifesting different facades to the world depending on her context, unhappy in her marriage, dramatic and high-flown in her way of interacting in the world, and obsessed with communicating with her oldest child as if he were a sort of replacement husband. Jung writes: “My mother usually assumed I was mentally far beyond my age, and she would talk to me as a grown-up. It was plain to see that she was telling me everything that she could not say to my father, for she early made me her confidant and confided her troubles to me” (Jung, 1963 p. 51). In confiding such hidden thoughts and secrets to her child, Emilie reinforced Carl’s opinion of her hidden half and in his opinion of his father’s ineffectuality. This can be understood as leading to Jung’s lifelong obsession with finding a replacement mother figure (and, theorists have pointed out, his obsession with having two at once), his often misguided struggle to understand the feminine soul (anima) and the inner life of the woman, and his casting of the feminine as negative in general—“The figure of the mother would undoubtedly have appeared less demonic to the boy if her energies, languishing in her marriage, had not focused too exclusively on him, her oldest surviving—and for nine years, her only—child” (Smith, 1996 p. 17). This unpredictability of personality is one of the major reasons Jung experienced a fear of his mother that prevented him from gaining any
meaningful connection with her about the inner experiences that troubled him throughout his childhood.

The third reason Jung did not confide in his mother is the only one he gives explicitly in his autobiography, and it is tied to the second: Emilie seems to have been very unreliable, not only in which personality would emerge at a given time, but in more mundane matters of language and truthfulness. He writes of a time, at eleven years old, when his mother, confiding in him again, tells him of a grave matter involving his father. Jung decided the weight fell on his shoulders and, without informing his mother, went to the house of one of his father’s most influential associates to try to change the (unelaborated-upon) situation, but the friend was not at home. Upon returning home, Jung heard his mother refer to the matter again “and this time gave me a very different and far milder picture of the situation, so that the whole thing went up in smoke. That struck me to the quick, and I thought, ‘What an ass you were to believe it, and you nearly caused a disaster with your stupid seriousness!’” (Jung, 1963 p. 52). Jung decides that in the future, he will “divide by two” everything his mother says, and writes: “My confidence in her was strictly limited, and that was what prevented me from ever telling her about my deeper preoccupations” (Jung, 1963 p. 52). Jung interprets this situation in an interesting way: he blames himself for believing what his mother told him. He frames her, in this way, as a sort of malevolent and untrustworthy force; one that can be dear to him, but never exactly trusted. His loyalty to her seems to be born of their likemindedness and not of any particular affection, as he explains that after he grew to an age where he began to realize who his parents were in the context of their societies, “For my father in particular I felt compassion—less, curiously enough, for my mother. She
always seemed to me the stronger of the two. Nevertheless I always felt on her side when my father gave vent to his moody irritability” (Jung, 1963 p. 24). Jung’s mistrust for his mother went back a very long way, to a young childhood illness that “must have been connected with a temporary separation of [his] parents” in 1878 (Jung, 1963 p. 8). This was at the time that Jung’s mother spent “several months in a hospital in Basel, and presumably her illness had something to do with the difficulty in the marriage”—Jung was cared for by a spinster aunt but viewed his mother’s absence as a betrayal of trust at his young age and was “deeply troubled” by the event (ibid.).

He sums up his relationship with both his mother and his father in his description of this early-childhood scene:

From then on, I always felt mistrustful when the world ‘love’ was spoken. The feeling I associated with ‘woman’ was for a long time that of innate unreliability. ‘Father,’ on the other hand, meant reliability and—powerlessness. That is the handicap I started out with. Later, these early impressions were revised: I have trusted men friends and been disappointed by them, and I have mistrusted women and was not disappointed. (Jung, 1963 p. 8)

Jung’s metaphor of a “handicap” seems especially apt here, but not entirely complete. Jung’s relationship with his parents shaped his ideas of masculine and feminine and forecasted his relationships with members of either gender in the future; although he was certainly not set on one course for the rest of his life and continued to learn and grow, these first impressions were deeply ingrained and difficult for him to override—it is clear that even though he “revised” his expectations of men and women, he did so on the basis of finding exceptions to his rules, not in overturning them completely or starting with a blank slate. What the “handicap” metaphor fails to account for is the degree to which Jung’s relationship with his parents was not merely his first
impression of the masculine and the feminine but the set of images, tones, and plots that would be his tools for constructing his life narratives down the way; saying that Jung’s mother gave him a bad impression of the feminine presumes that Jung was already an independent, mature identity capable of being “impressed” by a clearly separate person, something that just isn’t true of a developing child according to models of development that account for sociocultural and familial influences on cognition. The systems approach to psychology, similar to the text-context system reading, would not even have an interest in viewing Jung as an individual, and would be most interested in taking him as a unit of his family system. Suffice it to say, Jung’s relationship with his parents both determined how he would relate to other people and played a huge part in defining who “he” was, who “other people” were, and what kind of behavior and emotion was the correct way to “relate.”

**Growth**

Jung’s realization around the age of eleven that his parents were poor came as he started to take the first steps into the world as an individual. He felt the contrast especially keenly as he attended the Gymnasium in Basel where his “schoolfellows were the sons of wealthy parents who could afford to give their children plenty of pocket-money and send them on pleasant trips during vacations” (Wehr, 1971 p. 18). Jung had a fairly typical middle-childhood depression at feeling left out and underprivileged, but “between the ages of sixteen and seventeen this mood of depression began to disappear” (Wehr, 1971 p. 19). Jung finally encountered philosophy, where the questions he had pondered in his inner mind since early childhood were expressed and discussed in the
outside world: he was “attracted to the thought of Pythagorus, Heraclitus, Empedocles and Plato, despite the long-windedness of Socratic argumentation” (Wehr, 1971 p. 20). As Jung approached the age of finding a career, he was torn between many interests in two general categories: science, which appealed to him because of the “concrete facts” available, and the humanities, which appealed to his deeper, inner self (Wehr, 1971 p. 20). He wrote: “In science I missed the factor of meaning; and in religion, that of empiricism… Science met, to a very large extent, the needs of No. 1 personality, whereas the humane or historical studies provided beneficial instruction for No. 2” (Jung, 1963 p. 21). Complicating matters, his father died at this time, making his student experience an especially impoverished one (Wehr, 1971).

Interestingly, Steele notes in a narrative criticism of Jung’s history that accounts seem to show a popular, well-adjusted young man at school, even “elected president of his fraternity” (Sarbin, 1986, p. 263). This is in contrast to the image of the rejected youth that Jung (and Freud, incidentally) both present of themselves. Steele concludes that Jung, as a successful man, “is fond of the story of his rejection” because it places him in an accepted sociocultural narrative (p. 263). “There may be cases in which ostracism has occurred, but it is more likely that these men have shaped their histories to a popular narrative pattern among successful men of the modern era: the story of the outcast who perseveres despite disapproval to reveal a profound truth to a disbelieving world” (p. 264).

In this context, it is useful to keep in mind Barthes’s admonitions about the necessity of replacing the “Author” with the “writer”: “The Author, when we believe in him, is always conceived as the past of his own book… the modern writer (schriftor) is
born simultaneously with his text; he is in no way supplied with a being that precedes or
transcends his writing” (Barthes, 1977). Even from a narrative psychology perspective
which privileges the creator’s intentions for the text, it is crucial to keep in mind that
there will be no final decision on a true history and meaning of Jung’s (or anyone else’s)
life. A reader can get a (limited, flawed) sense of the Jung that exists as the writer of his
works, born with the text and tied to it, and not much more than that.

Eventually Jung settled on his paternal grandfather’s field of medicine but padded
his compulsory studies with “spiritual literature such as it was at the end of the nineteenth
century”; he wrote his dissertation on “The Psychology and Pathology of Supposed
Occult Phenomena” (Wehr, 1971 p. 23). During his studying for state examinations he
ran across The Textbook of Psychiatry by Krafft-Ebing and decided on the spot to pursue
psychiatry as his medical focus: “there was a chance to unite my philosophical interest
with natural science and medical science” (Wehr, 1971, p. 24). This was 1900, the same
year he finished university studies and entered the Psychiatric University Clinic of the
Burgholzli in Zurich, and the same year Freud published The Interpretation of Dreams
(Wehr, 1971). Jung read it immediately but “had to wait six years before becoming more
closely acquainted with Freud’s rapidly increasing output of writing, and with the
psychoanalytic school in Vienna that was gathering around him” (Wehr, 1971 p. 25). In
1903 he married Emma Rauschenbach, in an event apparently so mundane that Wehr
neglects to mention it anywhere in the text and merely shows a smiling picture of Emma
and Carl together above a description of Jung’s dissertation methodology (Wehr, 1971).
Throughout these years Jung developed many stable relationships: friendships with
patients and colleagues that would last “decade after decade” and a marriage that would
endure until Emma’s death in 1955 (Wehr, 1971). Since we are looking for points of narrative trauma, contradiction, and meaning, however, it is safe to say that none of these relationships, happy and long-lived though they might have been, lived up to his tumultuous six-year relationship with Sigmund Freud.

**Judas**

To say that Carl Jung and Sigmund Freud had a complicated relationship would be quite an understatement. And yet, viewed in context, the twists and turns of their relationship are not out of character for either. After exchanging letters and citations for a few years, Jung finally met Freud when he graduated from university; at their first meeting they talked for eight hours without a break. In addition to a likeminded colleague, each gained something from the ensuing six-year relationship. To Jung, the older Freud was, finally, a father figure who understood the deeper matters of life. There are accounts that Freud informally adopted Jung. To Freud, Jung represented not just a bright young mind to mold but also a chance to break psychoanalysis into the mainstream. Although Jung had spent much of his life trying to escape the limiting effects of institutionalized Christianity, much of Freud’s interest in him came because he was a Christian and a minister’s son to boot. In a letter to another Jewish psychoanalyst, Freud advised,

Don’t forget that really it is easier for you to follow my thoughts than for Jung… racial relationship brings you closer to my intellectual constitution, whereas he, being a Christian, and the son of a pastor, can only find his way to me against great inner resistances… I was almost going to say that it was only his emergence on the scene that has removed from psycho-analysis the danger of becoming a Jewish national affair. (Jaffe, 1971 p. 88).
With such a disciple, Freud would be able to take his theories of psychoanalysis from the small circle of Jewish colleagues he had in Austria to the world at large.

For a time, their relationship worked well in this way; Jung greatly improved Freud’s reputation (although by historical accounts, Freud’s bad reputation was largely of Freud’s own invention) and Freud gave Jung a position at the cutting edge of psychiatry (Sarbin, 1986). However, they parted ways acrimoniously. Pressures had been building throughout the relationship; Jung felt he had to be agreeably submissive unless he wanted to fight (Smith, 1996). Freud promoted Jung’s politically Christian identity when Jung was trying to distance himself from it. For Jung, the association was distasteful; he had grown up disillusioned with exactly this non-spiritual, culturally expedient religion as represented by his father (Jung, 1963; Smith, 1996). Feeling stuck in another child-parent relationship with similar undertones, Jung’s resentment began to come to a boil. During a trip to America with Freud, Jung decided his colleague “had a neurosis, no doubt diagnosable and one with highly troublesome symptoms”: one that he was either unaware of or was intentionally ignoring (Wehr, 1971, p. 38). Neither answer was acceptable for Jung, who valued introspection and brutal self-honesty so much.

Soon he wrote a work in which he called Freud’s concept of sexual libido into question. Knowing it would mean the end of his collaboration with Freud, Jung agonized for weeks: “For two months I was unable to touch my pen, so tormented was I by the conflict. Should I keep my thoughts to myself, or should I risk the loss of so important a friendship? At last I resolved to go ahead with the writing—and it did indeed cost me Freud’s friendship” (Jung, 1963 p. 167). The publication proved to be the last crack before the dam burst. Freud no longer needed Jung and began needling him, moving into
religion, Jung’s research territory, in the hopes that he would leave. He wrote: “Jung is crazy, but I don’t really want a split; I should prefer him to leave of his own accord. Perhaps my Totem work will hasten the break” (Smith, 1996 p. 58). In addition, “on several occasions he called Jung’s unconscious slips to his attention, which infuriated Jung” (Smith, 1996 p. 58). When Jung referred to Freud’s neurosis, “Freud had a hard time determining how to respond to this challenge to his authority. In the end there was something of a conspiracy among Freud and his loyal associates to maneuver Jung out of his position as president of the International Psychoanalytic Association” (Smith, 1996, p. 59).

The history of the broken friendship, like many others, is a list of petty misunderstandings and snide comments: the subtle violence of a few ill- (or well-) chosen words that can only come from someone close enough to cause pain. In the end Jung told off Freud in a letter as “sniffing out the symptomatic actions in his vicinity, reducing others to the level of sons and daughters while he remained ‘on the top as the father, sitting pretty’” (Smith, 1996 p. 59). It is easy to see a connection to Jung’s frustration with his own father, and an anger at a forced return to the “dependence of his childhood” in his charged language (Smith, 1996 p. 59). Enraged at Freud’s constant observations of how Jung’s behavior might be pathological (foretelling the rage of many a college freshman in the future), Jung finally exploded. “You see, my dear Professor, so long as you hand out this stuff I don’t give a damn for my symptomatic actions; they shrink to nothing in comparison with the formidable beam in my brother Freud’s eye.” He continued, “If ever you should rid yourself entirely of your complexes and stop playing the father to your sons and instead of aiming continuously at their weak spots take a good
look at your own for a change, then I will mend my ways and at one stroke uproot the vice of being *in two minds* about you” (Smith, 1996 p. 60).

The fallout from the decision was swift and devastating. Jung’s friend and biographer Aniela Jaffe passionately recalls: “In the eyes of many people Jung…turned traitor when he declined the mantle of the ‘successor’ and ‘crown prince’ (Freud’s own formula!) which the ‘father’ wished upon him… In extreme cases the critics went to the length of diagnosing Jung’s ‘Judas role,’ as though by separating from Freud he had betrayed a messenger sent by God.” (Jaffe, 1971 p. 94). He had been so successful in his campaign to popularize Freud that when they parted ways, Jung’s colleagues sided with Freud (Smith, 1996, p. 61). Because he was so closely tied to his work, this lost Jung most of his friends, and he recalled in his memoir that he relied greatly on his wife at this time (Jung, 1963). In *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* Jung recalls: “After the break with Freud, all my friends and acquaintances dropped away. My book was declared to be rubbish; I was a mystic and that was that” (Jung, 1963, p.167). Freud viewed Jung as “a great loss,” and his circle began to seek out ways to discredit his one-time apprentice (Wehr, 1971, p. 40). For Jung, the disillusionment with this second father figure was devastating, not least because it tore apart his social support network and called his career into question at the break of middle age.

In addition, although Jung makes no reference to the relationship, he began an affair with a woman well known in the psychoanalytic circle, Antonia Wolff (Sarbin, 1986). To his wife and children’s dismay, Jung always felt the need for two women in his life, a trait many theorists trace back to his “two” mothers (Smith, 1996). “Jung’s work provides several interesting instances in which knowing what has been omitted
throws what is presented into richer relief,” notes Steele (Sarbin, 1986, p. 269). “Wolff was his mistress for over 30 years. Their relationship began in the years from 1912-1915 when Jung was severing his collaboration with Freud” (ibid.). At a time when Jung was already under a great deal of pressure psychologically, this relationship adds a level of shame and guilt. Jung never pours out an emotional confession of these events; but between his repeated insistence in his autobiography that his wife was very important to him at this time and his complete omission of his public thirty-year relationship with Toni Wolff, it seems reasonable that at some level he was aware of a conflict between the roles of husband and father that anchored him to normality during his madness and his behavior.

Steele theorizes that the necessity of hiding this relationship from the general public (although it seems to have been well known among his professional colleagues and to his wife, who was devastated by the proceedings) “helps one to understand why Jung’s entire autobiography … is inhabited by spiritual fantasy figures and not actual people” (Sarbin, 1986, p. 269). Steele implies that the “fantasy figures” that Jung refers to throughout his works are constructions made necessary because the actual person involved, who “served as his therapist, confidant, femme inspiratrice, lover, and projection screen for…anima fantasies” could not be revealed to “unsympathetic readers” lest it cast doubt on “the whole spiritual thrust of Jung’s psychologizing” (p. 271). There is merit to Steele’s unflinching, truth-seeking approach to Jung’s history of himself. However, given the compounded misery of Jung visible in his writing at this time, I would argue that the drastic surgery Jung performed on his own life story was not the product of a clear, conniving mind looking to achieve and maintain power by cultivating
a positive public image. Instead, I believe that the writing process visible in the text of *The Red Book* suggests a person in the throes of a terrifying deconstruction of his core values and ideals struggling to make sense of his world.

**Jung’s Confrontation with Madness**

After recounting his break from Freud in his memoir, Jung writes:

> About this time I experienced a moment of unusual clarity in which I looked back over the way I had traveled so far. … And promptly the question arose of what, after all, I had accomplished. I had explained the myths of peoples of the past; I had written a book about the hero, the myth in which man has always lived. But in what myth does man live nowadays? In the Christian myth, the answer might be. “Do you live in it?” I asked myself.
> To be honest, the answer was no. “For me, it is not what I live by.”
> “Then do we no longer have any myth?”
> “No, evidently we no longer have any myth.”
> “But what then is your myth—the myth in which you live?”
> At this point the dialogue with myself became uncomfortable, and I stopped thinking. I had reached a dead end.

(Jung, 1963, p. 171, line breaks added for clarity)

Robert Smith gives the best summary of what happened next: “In December 1913 strange things began happening to Jung” (Smith, 1996 p. 66). The difficulty scholars have in naming these “strange things” echoes the struggle for finding language for mental disorder in general. *Something* happened, and descriptions vary wildly; as with other representations of mental disturbance, language matters. “During this period Jung had both auditory and visual hallucinations and was bothered by the intense activation of unconscious forces” (Smith, 1996 p. 66). Given the stigma of the mental illness label, especially after Jung was already somewhat of an outcast, the reluctance of the Jungians to adopt such terminology is understandable: they use “terms like ‘shamanic descent’ and ‘night-sea journey’ to describe it” or the more common “creative illness” (Smith, 1996 p.
Others “have credited Jung with outright clairvoyance and the ability to foresee war” (p. 67). More recent scholars have dubbed it a psychotic break, which carries a more frightening connotation (Storr, 1983). “Newer interpretations by nearly all investigators have proceeded on the assumption that Jung’s very sanity, and not just an interesting experiment in insight and introspection, was at stake” (Smith, 1996 p. 67).

In *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, Jung himself describes the experience from the far end of his life as a period of “disorientation,” a “constant inner pressure” that at times “became so strong that I suspected there was some psychic disturbance within myself” (Jung, 1963 p. 173). By autumn 1913, Jung felt “the pressure which I had felt was in me seemed to be moving outward, as though there was something in the air. The atmosphere actually seemed to me darker than it had been. It was as though the sense of oppression no longer sprang exclusively from a psychic situation, but from concrete reality” (p. 175). Jung never lost his perspective as a psychiatrist on what the situation looked like. Drawing on his skills as a psychoanalyst, he “twice went over the all the details of [his] entire life, with particular attention to childhood memories; for [he] thought there might be something in [his] past which [he] could not see and which might possibly be the cause of the disturbance” (p. 173). As the visions became less like fantasies and more an alteration of reality, Jung wrote: “I drew the conclusion that they had to do with me myself, and decided that I was menaced by a psychosis” (p. 176).

After one of his first and most confusing dreams, in which he assassinated the mythological German hero figure Siegfried, Jung was struck by voices that suggested suicide: “The inner urgency mounted until the terrible moment when the voice said ‘If you do not understand the dream, you must shoot yourself!’” In the drawer of my night
table lay a loaded revolver, and I became frightened” (p. 180). Jung displayed what we can call, on the one hand, clear symptoms of mental illness; also, however, his condition was concerned with meanings.

The ideas of meaning making and myth are important to keep in mind when looking at Jung’s struggles to make sense of his new groundless world. Recall that Jung’s descent, in his own telling, was triggered by a sense of “mythlessness” and a realization that he had no myth to live by, no framework by which he could assign meaning to his life (Jung, 1963). Jung experienced what Kelly termed ‘threat,’ “an awareness (at some level) of an imminent, comprehensive change in core structure” (Mancuso & Adams-Webber, 1982). With so many of his most important relationships torn apart, so many aspects of his identity gone with them, and the first modern world war breaking out in the background, ripping up the larger cultural constructs his individual constructs depended on, Jung was faced with a mammoth task of self-reconstruction.

Jung’s journey through madness followed what Campbell would later delineate as the three main steps of the Hero’s Journey: “1) separation, 2) initiation and 3) return” (Campbell, 1977 p. 217). As with others’ journeys through madness, the most difficult part of his journey was the managing a successful return. Due to the stigma of mental disorder and irregularity, he could not disclose his separation and indeed prided himself on the successful maintenance of his double life throughout this period. However, it is obvious from an outside standpoint that he took himself away from the world. His memoirs make his sudden and drastic change in priorities clear as he changes his life around to accommodate his frequent trips into the abyss. “I came to the decision to
withdraw from the university… My experience and experiment with the unconscious had brought my intellectual activity to a standstill… I found myself utterly incapable of reading a scientific book. This went on for three years” (Jung, 1963 p. 193).

Jung hesitated to enter the initiation stage. “I knew that I had to let myself down into them... I felt not only violent resistance to this, but a distinct fear…of losing command of myself and becoming a prey to the fantasies—and as a psychiatrist I realized only too well what that meant” (p. 178). Before entering his unconscious, Jung gave himself a moral reason to go in and come back out. In doing so, he laid the path out of the labyrinth as he entered it, like Theseus leaving the thread behind him in the lair of the Minotaur. “One of the predominant themes in the literature of various kinds of trauma is the ‘urge to bear witness,’ of the need for ‘survivors’ to testify to other people the truth of their experience” (Crossley, 2000, p. 109-110). Jung displays similar purposes in going into the depths. “A cogent motive for my making the attempt was the conviction that I could not expect of my patients something I did not dare to do myself” (Jung, 1963, p. 178).

In Memories, Dreams, Reflections, Jung recounts the first time he hears his anima (feminine soul) speak to him: “When I was writing down these fantasies, I once asked myself, ‘What am I really doing? Certainly this has nothing to do with science. But then what is it?’ Whereupon a voice within me said ‘It is art’” (Jung, 1963, p. 185). Jung reacted negatively to the voice and to its (/her) assertion. After consideration he decided that his anima was trying to deceive him with “cunning” so that she could later “utterly destroy” him by denying that the work was art (Jung, 1963, p. 187). The visions and writings that would become The Red Book were not art at all, because if it were art, he
would have to become a tortured artist with “the right to neglect reality” (Jung, 1963, p. 187).

Jung’s painfully clear association of femininity with betrayal notwithstanding, his objection to this statement is interesting. Husband, lover, therapist, father of five, Jung felt a moral responsibility to remain in touch with reality. This compulsion not to lose touch with reality, which normally goes without saying, was clearly at odds with the desire he suspected of his own soul; the temptation to leave reality behind completely (Jung, 1963). Jung’s conception of morality does not reinforce his own prejudices and desires (at least not when applied to himself here). Rather, his morality pulls him away from his soul’s desire to enter the abyss. When he does finally decide to delve into the unconscious, he first must frame it in moral terms; or alternatively, once he sees it in moral terms he has no choice but to delve into the unconscious. “On August 1 the world war broke out. Now my task was clear: I had to try to understand what had happened and to what extent my own experience coincided with that of mankind in general” (p. 176). What sent Jung into the unconscious was, in part, his fear that if he did not master it, it would master him; but the success he had coming out can be credited in part to his framework of responsibility that gave him a purpose for witnessing and sharing what he saw. In doing so, Jung became part of a community of writers whose “responsibility as survivors is to ‘bear the tale,’ and [for whom] the process of storytelling is viewed as a ‘personally reconstitutive act’” (Crossley, 2000, p. 110).

Later this year, Jung would begin writing down this series of visions and dreams in three journals, *The Black Book I and II* and *The Brown Book*, all so named simply because of the colors of the leather covers of the journals. At the outbreak of World War
I, he found a new way to conceptualize and make meaning of his experience.

Reconstruing the visions and dreams written in these journals as emanations from a “much more comprehensive unconscious—a collective unconscious which was the source of impersonal, autonomous contents,” Jung was able to center the disturbance he felt outside himself (Jaffe, 1971 p. 47). With a new perspective that these dreams, like the works of poets, “foretold changes in the conscious outlook of his time,” he began to actively delve into his unconscious (Jung, 1933, p. 167).

References:


THE RED BOOK

What is the Red Book?

*The Red Book* is in part an accurate transcription of the dreams and visions from *The Black Books* and *The Brown Book*, written in several languages in an ornate and illustrated style, like an illuminated manuscript. It is difficult to give through description alone the same startled feeling that opening the book gives the contemporary reader; *The Red Book* is written in several languages, none of them common to Jung’s time, and could easily be mistaken for a medieval scripture (it even begins with several lengthy passages from the Bible). The calligraphic text is broken up periodically by vibrantly colored illustrations that connect to the text sometimes by giving a visual representation of the described events and other times by providing a flurry of colors and contrasts. Towards the end, nearly every illustration is an abstract mandala, as Jung discovered his enduring love for this form of visual meditation and expression as he finished these books (Jung, 2009; Jung, 1963). In addition to the straight telling of the dreams and visions, Jung annotates and comments on each section. He does this in a mythological style, working the various visions and dreams into one continuous quest narrative. The written content of the text resembles a postmodern pastiche more than anything else in its appropriation of historical, mythological and theological frameworks, vocabularies and characters. Since the work was written without the benefit of that cultural context, it is very easy to empathize with Jung’s confusion when he asked himself what exactly it was he was doing.

*The Red Book* is a gigantic work both in significance and size, comprised of three distinct but connected books Jung wrote over the course of the rest of his life, and
between the symbol-rich stories, the references to worldwide mythology and religion, and
the profuse illustration, the entire book would be far too large a task to tackle in this (or
any one) project. I’m focusing instead on three passages that exemplify the difficult
navigation of narrative reconstruction.

**The Spirit of the Times and the Spirit of the Depths**

The first book of *The Red Book* begins by framing the rest of the work. After a
series of important dreams, Jung begins his exploration of the unconscious. The first
section is titled “The Way of What is to Come,” and is ‘set’ right before Jung sees the
rivers of blood that begin his journey into the unconscious. This sets things up pretty
ambiguously right off the bat. This section is included in the typewritten draft of *The Red
Book*, but not in the dream journals that it comes from. The dates and events given
throughout this section are accurate, however. It is reasonable to conclude that what is
recorded here mythologized version of the period between Jung’s dismayed discovery
that he had no myth to live by and his first visions of rivers of blood. This is significant
because it implies that Jung is using this section to intentionally give a frame of meaning
to the stream of visions to follow. The title itself—“The Way of What is to Come”—
reinforces this assertion. This makes this particular part of the narrative extremely
interesting and important: it is a mythological reframing of a life that gives meaning to a
series of frightening and nonsensical experiences.

I will be using Jung to signify Jung-the-narrator as a matter of convenience. As
earlier discussed, it is not best practice to assume that Jung is an “Author” whose life and
psychology are in control of the meanings of his work as a reader, but rather to view
Jung-the-narrator as a figure whose identity is bound up in and recreated with his work.
Practically, this is a caution against letting the meanings of the work stop with what we think we understand about the man who wrote it. A certain amount of summary is required in the pages to come; *The Red Book* has only been recently published, and it would be careless at this time to assume that the reader has any familiarity with the text.

After giving Christ-centered quotes from two prophecies and a gospel, Jung begins: “If I speak in the spirit of this time, I must say: no one and nothing can justify what I must proclaim to you” (Jung, 2009 p. 229). In this line, it is briefly possible to discern his relationship to the voices he will be describing: by “if I speak in the spirit of this time” he seems to indicate that the voices are separate autonomous entities within himself (Jung, 2009 p. 229). However, going forward, it is difficult to frame the discussions and interactions Jung-the-writer has with the other voices as simply a man talking to himself, so I will continue to use language that suggests all are separate.

Jung is confronted by the voices of two spirits: he calls them the “spirit of this time” and the “spirit of the depths” (Jung, 2009, p. 229). The “presumptuous” spirit of the time “would like to hear of use and value,” and Jung agrees: “I also thought this way, and my humanity still thinks this way.” The spirit of the depths is a far more threatening figure, which “forces [Jung] nevertheless to speak, beyond justification, use, and meaning” despite his attempts to “hold that other spirit away” (ibid.) The spirit of the depths is also far more powerful, and he attacks Jung’s sensibilities: “He took away my belief in science, he robbed me of the joy of explaining and ordering things, and he let devotion to the ideals of this time die out in me. He forced me down to the last and simplest things” (ibid). The spirit of the depths thoroughly strips Jung of his abilities, constructs, and agency. “He took my understanding and all my knowledge and placed
them at the service of the inexplicable and the paradoxical. He robbed me of speech and writing for everything that was not in his service, namely the meeting together of sense and nonsense, which produces the supreme meaning” (ibid.). According to Jung, there was very little choice involved at this point. His skills of language had already been enslaved by the spirit of the depths, who forced Jung to submit by stripping him of his human faculties and putting them at the service of paradox and confusion. We can see here reflected that the Jung writing *The Red Book* gives far more weight to the terror of the experience than the Jung dictating *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* decades later. He also begins to set up one of the chief themes, that of a contrast between meaning and madness, in a poetic aside: “*The image of God has a shadow. The supreme meaning is real and casts a shadow. For what can be actual and corporeal and cast no shadow? The shadow is nonsense. It lacks force and has no continued existence through itself. But nonsense is the inseparable and undying brother of the supreme meaning*” (ibid.). (Throughout, when Jung refers to God, he is referring to an archetypal soul-image; very important, but not the same all-powerful God that the name conjures up.)

The two spirits are roughly analogous to Jung’s Personalities #1 and #2, with the first familiar, ever-changing in the face of new fashions of thought and the second eternal, mythical and intimidating. In turn, they speak for and against individualism. The spirit of the time whispers to Jung that the image of God the supreme meaning that he witnesses “is you and only you,” but the spirit of the depths rebuts him, telling Jung “You are an image of the unending world” (Jung, 2009, p. 230). An interesting distinction begins to form between the message of individualism that the spirit of the times promotes here—that true meaning is all internal, with links to solipsism and radical
constructivism—and the message he will later plead with the reader to hear, that the individual is in its true unforced nature a part of the same integral universe as every other being.

This first section is an exchange between the two spirits that sets up the themes and intentions of the rest of the book. From a personal construction standpoint, it is important that this section was written after the dream journals: through this section, Jung creates an intentional framework from which to interpret his experiences with the unconscious. In the text, it sets a stage that is simultaneously cosmic and mundane, befitting a work in which the lines between fact and fiction, history and myth are blurred beyond recognition. The exchange takes place between three figures, but the two Spirits never speak to each other, though each does respond to the other’s arguments.

As the exchange begins, Jung, already experiencing the threat of psychosis, is amenable to the Spirit of the Times. “The spirit of our time spoke to me and said: ‘What dire urgency could be forcing you to speak this?’ This was an awful temptation. I wanted to ponder what inner or outer bind could force me into this, and because I found nothing that I could grasp, I was near to making one up” (ibid.) The spirit of the time is clearly familiar with the basic tenets of psychoanalysis, and appeals to Jung’s professional talent for discerning a cause for a symptom. It is an open-ended academic question, which makes Jung’s spiritual labeling of it as an “awful temptation” more striking. He is writing himself in retrospect. Does this term come from a dread of what-might-have-been, contrasted with the success he had by eventually pursuing the depths? Or is he showing that even at this time, it was clear his allegiance should be owed to the depths?
Shortly, Jung is confronted with the spirit of the depths, who construes the situation differently:

But with this the spirit of our time had almost brought it about that instead of speaking, I was thinking again about reasons and explanations. But the spirit of the depths spoke to me and said: ‘To understand a thing is a bridge and a possibility of returning to the path. But to explain a matter is arbitrary and sometimes even murder. Have you counted the murderers among the scholars?’

(ibid.)

This is a remarkable statement. The spirit of the depths sets “understanding” as a contrasting construct to “explaining.” It is indicated that Jung will not be able to “return to the path” if he chooses to ruminate on “reasons and explanations” for his thoughts rather than following the spirit of the depths towards a kind of understanding that Jung cannot express to his liking in words (Jung, 2009; Jung, 1963). There is also a moral framework added. Since the reader has already met two autonomous ideas (the debating spirits), the spirit of the depths’s claim that explanation is “murder” makes sense in its own context. Again, the spirit of the depths holds all the power; his argument is so persuasive that it leaves no room for an actual choice. Either Jung continues to explain things and becomes a murderer lost forever in his madness, or he begins to build bridges of understanding that might afford him a way out.

The spirit of the time’s response then pulls out all the stops and puts Jung’s behavior into his contemporary social and professional context:

But the spirit of the times stepped up to me and laid before me huge volumes which contained all my knowledge. Their pages were made of ore, and a steel stylus had engraved inexorable words in them, and he pointed to these inexorable words and spoke to me, and said: ‘What you speak, that is madness.’

It is true, it is true, what I speak is the greatness and intoxication and ugliness of madness.

(Jung, 2009, p. 230)
In this passage, it is plain to see Jung struggling to make sense of his experience in the context of the spirit of the times, which encourage him to reduce his experiences to parts through dissection. The spirit of the times does offer an explanation for Jung’s experience—he is going crazy—and Jung shows signs of accepting this evaluation, at least on its face. His language shows his distress—“It is true, it is true,” he repeats. There are two questions, however, that provide dissonance. One is whether this madness is the inexorable thing, engraved in ore and unchangeable, that the spirit of the times declares it is. The other is whether the substance of it matters or not. The argument of the spirit of the times (still the argument of the folk biomedical model) is that those behaviors and thoughts which are construed as the symptoms of mental disorder are inherently meaningless. The last ditch effort of the spirit of the times is not to argue against the spirit of the depths but to argue that Jung is crazy and should trust to the judgment of the times since he cannot trust himself.

In response to Jung’s cry that “what I speak is the greatness and intoxication and ugliness of madness,” the spirit of the depths stepped up to me and said: “What you speak is. The greatness is, the intoxication is, the undignified, sick, paltry dailiness is. It runs in all the streets, lives in all the houses, and rules the day of humanity. Even the eternal stars are commonplace. It is the great mistress and the one essence of God. One laughs about it, and laughter too, is. Do you believe, man of this time, that laughter is lower than worship? Where is your measure, false measurer? The sum of life decides in laughter and in worship, not your judgment.”

(Jung, 2009 p. 230)

In response to the spirit of the time’s argument that Jung’s ideas are madness and so are meaningless, the spirit of the depths responds, in short, that Jung’s ideas are madness and so they are meaningful. Madness—what he speaks, since his language was
placed at the service of nonsense and paradox—*is*. The attributes of his ideas that Jung was lamenting were signifiers of meaninglessness and madness—greatness, intoxication, and ugliness—are, according to the spirit of the depths, the ruling force of humanity. The world is much stranger than Jung has dared to see thus far, and if he buys the spirit of the time’s story, he will not be able to go on. After this, the spirit of the times disappears. Jung’s humanity, which had previously identified with the spirit of the times, comes back to him, apparently released or abandoned. It laments that when Jung speaks the words of the spirit of the depths, Jung lays “coldness of desolation” on his humanity, and his humanity pleads with him to “reflect on the destruction of being and the streams of blood from the terrible sacrifice that the depths demand” (ibid.). This foreshadows the physical proof that the spirit of the depths is involved in greater human affairs that Jung is about to request.

The proof comes in the form of Jung’s visions of rivers of blood, seen on the train to his mother-in-law’s birthday party in Schaffhausen (Jung, 2009). As a conclusion to the introductory section, this jostling of images from myth and everyday activity shows how the rest of the work will proceed. The claim of the spirit of the depths, that the frightening underworld Jung finds himself in is in fact interwoven with the mundane, begins to be proven. As Kelly put it, though “it has long been customary and convenient to distinguish between ‘mental’ and ‘physical’ facts. …It is becoming increasingly clear, however, that we have on our hands two alternate construction systems, which can both be applied generously to an ever increasing body of the same facts” (Kelly, 1955, p. 10). The interpretive spirit of the depths has as much right to live in the everyday world as does the explanatory spirit of the time. “The realms overlap” (ibid.).
Jung concludes with a postlude exhorting the reader not to look for too much meaning for themselves in the text: “It is no teaching and no instruction that I give you… The signposts have fallen, unblazed trails lie before us” (Jung, 2009, p. 231). He goes on to establish what in an earlier draft he labeled the “grounds and aims” of the text:

Giving laws, wanting improvements, making things easier, has all become wrong and evil. May each one seek out his own way. The way leads to mutual love in community. Men will come to see and feel the similarity and commonality of their ways. Laws and teachings held in common compel people to solitude, so that they may escape the pressure of undesirable contact, but solitude makes people hostile and venomous. Therefore give people dignity and let each of them stand apart, so that each may find his own fellowship and love it. Power stands against power, contempt against contempt, love against love. Give humanity dignity, and trust that life will find the better way. The one eye of the Godhead is blind, the one ear of the Godhead is deaf, the order of its being is crossed by chaos. So be patient with the crippledness of the world and do not overvalue its consummate beauty. Jung, 2009 p. 231

I believe this first section of The Red Book is one of the most important of the whole piece. Written in the style of the later myth-like visions, but set in the narrative before the visions began in force, Jung seems to have translated his struggle of that time of his life into a myth of interpretation that shapes what will come after. This myth is much less adventurous and more dialectic than some of the later stories, and it takes more the form of a story like Job. Thrown into a situation beyond his control, Jung—or as the spirit of the depths calls him, “Man of this time”—is tempted and led by opposing voices, both of whom are more powerful than he is alone. Jung closes with a series of imperatives to the reader not to look for an example in his work but to seek within themselves and to let others do so as well. The title of the section, “The Way of Things to Come,” shapes the reader’s perception of the coming stories. It frames the coming
onslaught of myth, fairy tale, romance, and horror stories as an elaboration on this first debate. Later, Jung-the-narrator will spend time in libraries, madhouses, and temples, speaking to gods, prophets, and devils, but the meaning the reader can construct from all of this is structured by this original debate between the spirit of the time and the spirit of the depths.

**Connections**

Jung’s hope that in solitude, people will gain access a view of themselves as part of an integral whole with others—as the depths suggested, “an image of the unending world”—is echoed in his call to respect the realities and meanings of others. “Give humanity dignity, and trust that life will find the better way” (ibid.). This expresses in one beautiful line the impetus behind Kelly’s corollary of choice in alternativist constructivism. This suggested that given two alternatives, people will choose the construct that allows for them to “continue to evolve, develop, grow, change, elaborate, and so forth” (Leitner, 1988 p. 256). In his journey through madness, Jung does not cease to grow and change constructs. “[Kelly] does not say that ‘psychotics’ or ‘borderlines’ do not make the elaborative choice while ‘neurotics’ do. Rather, he assumes that all people choose in the direction of perceived elaboration or growth…” (ibid.). At the end of “The Way of Things to Come,” Jung transitions a verse that provides a transition from this introductory section to the transcriptions of the dreams and visions themselves. This interlude to his visions is a plea to let others explore themselves in the same way and the assertion that the growth that can come from such an exploration. Obviously he is not suggesting that everyone go mad; but that people should
be given “dignity” and the agency to do as they choose internally, with the assurance that their inner drive is to restore meaning, to “find a better way.”

So what are we to make of Jung’s position as a modernist psychologist from his personal narrative of madness? His depiction of the spirits’ debate, and especially the character of the spirit of the time, raises many interesting points about the historical and intellectual context he was writing in. Specifically, it puts the text far outside the positivist realm that Gergen and others in psychology claim was modernism. Instead, it places The Red Book in a modernist context of a loss of faith in cultural structures, edging into postmodern thought. The spirit of the time is obsessed with explanations and causes, and it believes they can all be found within the individual person. It “would like to hear of use and value” (Jung, 2009, p. 229). This spirit matches up pretty well with the popular model of modernist psychology: “For modernists, reality is single, stable, and in principle knowable—qualities that modern psychologists attribute to the ‘self’ as part of this same natural order” (Neimeyer, 2000, p. 5). But it is clear that not only does Jung see this perspective as a “temptation” rather than the truth, he sees it falling out of favor in general society.

But can this accurately be called a modernist sentiment? Both Jung and Neimeyer, here, are using this framework of knowledge only as a contrast to a proposed new framework. Both psychology’s ideas of modernism and Jung’s construct of what might be called pre-modernism act as straw men. Recall Jung’s theory that “Every period has its bias, its particular prejudice and psychic ailment… it has its own limitations of conscious outlook, and therefore requires a compensatory adjustment. This is effected by the collective unconscious that a poet, a seer or a leader allows himself to
be guided by the unexpressed desire of his times” (Jung, 1933, p. 166). Jung includes himself in the poets and seers, “each of [whom] speaks with the voices of thousands and ten thousands, foretelling changes in the conscious outlook of his time” (p. 167). Among his contemporaries were more of these ‘seers,’ and these were the modernists.

“Perceiving a gap between the meaningful inner life of the individual consciousness and an outer world that shapes that inner life but seems in itself devoid of spiritual meaning, the modernists sought a means to bridge that gap, to glean a meaning form that apparently senseless outer world” (Lewis, 2000, p. 4). Jung’s preferred version of himself as a spiritual outsider, shouting in the wilderness, might have us believe he is alone when historically he is not. Or rather, he may have been one of several voices in the wilderness, which “appear today as great canonical figures of their respective national literatures” but whose identities were shaped in their own time by “their marginality” (Lewis, 2000, p. 11). Shaped in their creation of modernism, the modernists shared an identity as “‘exiles and émigrés’” (ibid.). They sought, in different ways, to different degrees, the same binding of meaning to nonsense that obsesses Jung throughout The Red Book.

The clearest ways in which The Red Book reflects modernist sensibilities comes in the delineation of the state of the world Jung gives in the postlude to the opening section. “The signposts have fallen, unblazed trail lies before us,” he writes. “Giving laws, wanting improvements, making things easier, has all become wrong and evil” (Jung, 2009, p. 231). Jung feels forced away from the values that connect him to the world: the depths “took away [his] belief in science… robbed [him] of the joy of explaining and ordering things, and … let devotion to the ideals of this time die out in [him]” (Jung,
2009, p. 229). This clearly relates to Lewis’s claim that the modernist narrator “understands the mere conventionality of the fallen world. It is only by rejecting society’s conventions and retreating to a private realm of authentic values that the characters hope to regain a measure of freedom” (Lewis, 2000, p. 26). Jung’s disillusionment with science and explanation echoes “the immediate intellectual context of this crisis, of which the modernist novelists were aware in varying degrees... the ‘revolt against positivism’ of the 1890s” with positivism used “to designate ‘the whole tendency to discuss human behavior in terms of analogies drawn from natural science’” (Lewis, 2000, p. 58). Professionally, Jung had already shown a distrust for “cut-and-dried diagnoses” that were “rubber-stamped” onto clients with no concern for “the personality of the patient, his individuality” (Jung, 1963, p. 114). Jung’s suspicion of the system of psychiatry fits into a larger movement of disillusionment that suspected “the ideals of a neutral justice, rule of law, and universal standards of right conduct are little more than the totems of a particularly successful cult whose time is running out,” and his loss of connection to the nationalist ideals of his time echoes the growing sense of unease that the “‘national idea’ had no future” (Lewis, 2000, 124-125). Psychological theorists seek to establish a postmodern psychology by bashing modernism, but they mistake the popular ideas and products of a time period for the groundswell of changing intellectual context the humanities refer to by using the same word. *The Red Book* contains themes of disillusionment and relativism. These themes fit into a modernist framework, but this does not mean they should be dismissed by psychologists striving for postmodernism.

In fact, *The Red Book* is in some ways strikingly postmodern. The form of the piece resembles an early form of the postmodern pastiche. One of the hallmarks of the
pastiche is using “speech in a dead language” (Jameson, 1991 p. 197). Jung writes in several uncommon languages: high German, Latin, Greek. In addition to the old languages, he uses a voice which seems to belong in the book of Ezekiel—what he refers to as “the language of high rhetoric, even of bombast” (Jung, 1963 p. 178). Jung chose to use this old-fashioned, high-flown style because it fit the voice of the ancient archetypes he conversed with. It was in direct contrast to his usual professional voice, and he admitted it was a style he found “embarrassing… it grates on my nerves, as when someone runs their nails down a plaster wall, or scrapes his knife against a plate” (ibid.). Visually, the text is written in the style of a medieval illuminated manuscript. These choices—using dead languages, an antique voice, and a presentation that directly evokes scripture—dramatically forecast this aspect of the pastiche. They also contribute to an impression of historicism, intentional or not, defined as “the random cannibalization of all the styles of the past, the play of random allusion, and in general…the increasing primacy of the ‘neo’” (Jameson, 1991 p. 197). Jung was raised by a minister and had a strong classical education, and probably the jumps from myth to myth in The Red Book were not as startling for him as writer as they are for the contemporary reader. Nevertheless, the reader’s response to the text matters, and the current readers of The Red Book are assailed with references and allusions to myths, characters and beliefs from wildly disparate cultures. One aspect that sets The Red Book somewhat apart from the postmodern pastiche is the idea of the ‘neo’ or new being central. While Jung makes modernist comments about unblazed trails that frame the book as a search for a new path, his focus is on connecting in a profound way to the myths of the past, not using them to prove a contemporary point. Whether he had the same intentions or not, however, The
Red Book produces many of the same results as the pastiche. When Jung-the-narrator encounters Elijah, Salome, Philemon, or Satan in his journeys, the reader responds not just to the character on the page but to the character’s many cultural meanings. Jung’s juxtaposition of his own autobiographical self with figures of myth and legend “operates powerfully and systematically to reify all these characters and to make it impossible for us to receive their representation without the prior interception of already-acquired knowledge” (Jameson, 1991 p. 201). The jostling of the ‘real’ and fictive that defines the postmodern pastiche is shown in the structure, voice, presentation, and content of The Red Book. Some of Jung’s first and most unsettling dreams when he broke from Freud followed a theme of things that should be dead being not quite dead—a mummy moving a finger, an armored crusader strolling through town. Through this pastiche style, he brings that uncanny sense of the living dead into the language and structure of his work.

The other strongly postmodern element of Jung’s writing in The Red Book is his distrust and dissection of language and meaning. As previously noted, Jung wrote The Red Book in several different languages, all unfamiliar, calling attention to the idea of language right at the beginning. A postmodern idea important to narrative constructivist psychologists is that “we language our experience into being” (Brown & Augusta-Scott, 2007 p. 179). In other words, experience does not have meaning separate from that which we give it, and we make meaning by way of language. In “The Death of the Author,” Barthes points out the role of language from across the aisle: “a text consists of multiple writings, issuing from several cultures and entering into dialogue with each other, into parody, into contestation,” eventually given meaning “not in its origin [but]… in its destination” (Barthes, 1967). Rather than trying to connect the language we receive
to some reality of a meaning-making Author behind it, Barthes suggests that texts, which are naturally contradictory, find meaning as they are received by the reader. The reader, freed from the critical impulse to discover the Author “(or his hypostases: society, history, the psyche, freedom) beneath the work” is able to make meaning from the language alone (ibid.). Language and its simultaneous tenuousness and power is a strong theme throughout The Red Book, from the spirit of the depths claiming Jung’s language in the opening act on. In the second book of The Red Book, Jung connects to this idea in a dramatic and gruesome fashion:

With a painful slice I cut off what I pretended to know about what lies beyond me. I excise myself from the cunning interpretive loops that I gave to what lies beyond me. And my knife cuts even deeper and separates me from the meanings that I conferred upon myself. I cut down to the marrow, until everything meaningful falls from me, until I am no longer as I might seem to myself, until I know only that I am without knowing what I am.
(Jung, 2009 p. 306)

In this scene, Jung commits metaphorical suicide, stripping himself first of his knowledge of the world, then of the “cunning interpretive loops” of language and theory that he used to derive meaning from the outside world, then on his own self. In order to gain meaning in a postmodern world, we must “language our experience into being,” and Jung proves this by performing the opposite: he un-interprets his way out of being, until he no longer knows what he is (Brown & Augusta-Scott, 2007 p. 179).

Jung’s misgivings with language continued on into his professional literature after his experiences with The Red Book. Barthes declares that criticism that emphasizes a psychological cause for the substance of art makes an end to the meaning; in a mirror image, Jung argues the art of the period that was being designed to model current psychological theory aborted the meaning-making (Barthes, 1967). “In dealing with the
psychological mode of artistic creation, we never need ask ourselves … what it means. But this question forces itself upon us when we come to the visionary mode of creation. … We are reminded of nothing in everyday, human life, but rather of dreams, night-time fears and the dark recesses of the mind that we sometimes sense with misgiving” (Jung, 1933 p. 158). Both come to the conclusion that the question of what a given work means is provoked only in the absence of an imposed meaning from the Author.

*The Red Book* is a work that defies simple categorization and invites integrative interpretation. In order to reach a useful integration of perspectives, it is necessary that constructivist psychology come to an understanding of modernism and postmodernism that will allow for meaningful dialogue with the thoroughly established humanities perspectives on these intellectual movements. *The Red Book*, as a shared text between these disciplines, makes the necessity of integration clear, provides a stage on which it can be achieved, and shows how fruitful such a relationship could be. As a personal narrative of a journey through madness, it shows the ways in which the construction of a text can contribute to the reconstruction of the self.
References:


CONCLUSION

Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle.
Plato

So let the voyager go. He has tipped over and is sinking, perhaps drowning; yet as in the old legend of Gilgamesh and his long, deep dive to the bottom of the cosmic sea to pluck the watercress of immortality, there is the one green value of his life down there. Don’t cut him off from it: help him through.
Joseph Campbell

Madness is a personal, cultural, and social problem and it needs a personal, cultural, and social solution. Personal construct psychology can show us that the ways in which we make sense of the world in general can also help us make sense of madness. In order to address the sociocultural aspects of this issue, however, work will also have to be done to restore power, agency and legitimacy for people whose social and cultural identities have been hurt by labels of mental disorder. Once madness makes sense, it no longer carries the full stigmatizing weight of madness; once a mad person can be understood, they can be socioculturally legitimimized as a person. Personal narrative in creative nonfiction can provide a powerful tool for recasting personal identity while establishing a new connection, based on creative power rather than to the social and cultural world. In Carl Jung’s life and his Red Book, we can trace one man’s journey through madness and see the tremendous amount of meaning he was able to bring back from it to share with the world. Madness is not magic. It does not grant people creativity or genius. Madness is scary, but madness is human. Mad people are people. When we construe mental disorder as inhuman, we rob our fellow human beings of a voice in humanity. The most profound meaning Jung derived from his madness may be among the simplest: “Give humanity dignity and trust that life will find the better way.”