



# Senioris visio: C. G. Jung's Refiguration of Philemon

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## Abstract

Carl Gustav Jung's *Red Book* (2009) is a literary record of a period of self-experimentation Jung carried out between 1913 and 1916 by means of a technique he would later call 'active imagination': Jung would allow himself to 'drop' into a fantasizing state and then observe the images that emerged from the unconscious. If he happened to encounter a talking figure, he would try and interact with them. One of such figures was Philemon, an intriguing reinvention of the models from both Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Goethe's *Faust*. Jung's refiguration of Philemon illustrates Jung's engagement not only with these two works, but also with late antique magical, alchemical and Hermetic writings, as well as classical scholarship dedicated to them. Even though it is widely recognized that Philemon played a central role in Jung's psychological formulations after his break from Freud in 1912, this figure seems to have received no sustained attention in the scholarship on the reception of Greco-Roman antiquity in depth psychology. This article offers an investigation of how Jung's refiguration of Philemon relates both to Jung's psychological research prior to his first encounter with this character and to the path it followed after this encounter took place with regard to the archetype of the 'wise old man'.

## Introduction

Carl Gustav Jung's *Red Book* or *Liber Novus*, which was made available to the public in 2009, has been described as 'a literary work of psychology'.<sup>1</sup> The word 'literary' encourages us to consider its complex allusive substructure and to enquire further into its 'literary' dimensions. The *Red Book* originates from entries Jung made

<sup>1</sup> S. Shamdasani, *Jung Stripped Bare by his Biographers, Even*, London & New York, 2005, p. 25, n. 59; C. G. Jung, *The Red Book: A Reader's Edition*, transl. M. Kyburz, J. Peck and S. Shamdasani, ed. S. Shamdasani, New York & London, 2009 (hereafter *LN*). Unless otherwise indicated, all works by Jung are quoted from *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, ed. Sir H. Read, M. Fordham, G. Adler and W. McGuire, transl. R. F. C. Hull, 21 vols, Princeton, 1953–1983 (hereafter *CW*).

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between 1913 and 1916 in the *Black Books*, now also available to the wider public.<sup>2</sup> These writings were subsequently ‘transcribed into a calligraphic volume’ with illustrations, which was left incomplete.<sup>3</sup> The entries which form the basis of *Liber Novus* are the written records a long period of self-experimentation with a technique Jung would later call ‘active imagination’ and apply to his therapeutical practice. Jung explained the technique in a letter to one of his patients, John Layard:<sup>4</sup>

(...) start with any image, for instance, just with that yellow mass of your dream. Contemplate it and carefully observe how the picture begins to unfold or change. Don’t try to make it into something, just do nothing but observe what its spontaneous changes are. (...) Hold fast to the one image you have chosen and wait until it changes by itself. Note all these changes and eventually step into the picture itself and, if it is a speaking figure at all, then say what you have to say to that figure and listen to what he or she has to say. Thus you give a chance to your unconscious to create its own figures into visibility where your conscious can deal with them. Thus you can not only analyse your unconscious but you give your unconscious a chance to analyse yourself (...).<sup>5</sup>

Having compared Jung’s presentation of his fantasies in the *Black Books* and in the *Red Book*, Shamdasani observes that they ‘were faithfully reproduced, with only minor editing and division into chapters.’<sup>6</sup>

What one encounters in the *Red Book*, insofar as it is an embellished record of ‘active imagination’, is not a detached analysis of the images and figures that Jung encountered in his self-experimentation, but rather a literary portrayal of them. This can be seen with particular clarity in the case of Jung’s engagement with Philemon. Philemon’s appearance in Jung’s mind on 27 January 1914 (the first of many such appearances) is retold in the second book of *Liber Novus*. Like the character from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* (VIII.611–724), Jung’s Philemon is an old man who lives with his spouse Baucis in a ‘small house in the country’.<sup>7</sup> The couple’s old age had been emphasized in Ovid:

*sed pia Baucis anus parilique aetate Philemon  
illa sunt annis iuncti iuvenalibus, illa  
consenuere casa...* (Ov. *Met.* VIII.631–33)

<sup>2</sup> C. G. Jung, *The Black Books*, ed. S. Shamdasani, transl. M. Liebscher, J. Peck and S. Shamdasani, 7 vols, New York & London, 2020.

<sup>3</sup> Shamdasani in Jung, *Black Books* (n. 2 above), vol. 1, p. 12.

<sup>4</sup> Jung also referred his patient to what he had written about the method in his ‘The Relations between the Ego and the Unconscious’ (see Jung, *CW* 7 [n. 1 above], §§366–370), even though this essay does not use the expression ‘active imagination’. Jung uses the expression in his ‘Tavistock Lectures’, delivered in London from 30 September to 4 October 1935 (see Jung, *CW* 18, §4, §§390–400), and in Jung, *CW* 14, §§390–400. On Jung’s own use of the technique, see S. Shamdasani, ‘Jung’s Practice of the Image’, *Journal of Sandplay Therapy*, 24(1), 2015, pp. 7–21.

<sup>5</sup> C. G. Jung, *Letters I: 1906–1960*, ed. G. Adler in collaboration with A. Jaffé, transl. R. F. C. Hull, London, 1973, p. 460.

<sup>6</sup> Shamdasani in Jung, *LN* (n. 1 above), p. 30.

<sup>7</sup> Jung, *LN* (n. 1 above), p. 395.

But in that cottage Baucis, old and good  
 And old Philemon (as old as she)  
 Had joined their lives in youth, grown old together...<sup>8</sup>

Perhaps predictably, Jung's Philemon is a much more layered and psychologically intriguing character than the one who appears in Ovid. In the *Red Book*, Philemon becomes a semi-retired magician possessed of a domestic cupboard full of literary interest (this will be discussed in due course). His magical rod sits in this cupboard together with 'the sixth and seventh books of Moses and the wisdom of ἙΡΜΗΣ ΤΡΙΣΜΕΓΙΣΤΟΣ [Hermes Trismegistus]'<sup>9</sup> -- two elements that evoke what Jung calls Philemon's 'Egypto-Hellenic atmosphere with a Gnostic coloration'.<sup>10</sup> This is an extraordinary and, on first glance, improbable embellishment of a figure who is often reduced to social status, age and goodwill. Philemon's most generous hospitality toward Jupiter and Mercurius while the gods are still disguised as mortals -- as he and Baucis tend to the gods, *super omnia vultus / accessere boni nec iners pauperque voluntas* (Ov. *Met.* VIII.677–678) -- is also subverted in the *Red Book*.<sup>11</sup> The old man greets Jung 'awkwardly' and is reticent about Jung's interest in learning magic from him: 'What should I tell you about? There is nothing to tell', Philemon says curtly.<sup>12</sup> To put it briefly, Philemon undergoes what Hardwick has called 'refiguration': the Ovidian model is not passively followed, but substantially reworked.<sup>13</sup>

With regard to the literary quality of *Liber Novus*, Shamdasani observed in conversation with Hillman that in the *Red Book* Jung 'has to use a language that conveys, that evokes the emotional power of the experiences in question'.<sup>14</sup> These powerful inner experiences would exert an enormous impact on Jung's psychological works:

The years (...) when I pursued the inner images, were the most important time of my life. Everything else is to be derived from this. (...) My entire life consisted in elaborating what had burst forth from the unconscious (...). Everything later was merely the outer classification, the scientific elaboration, and the integration into life.<sup>15</sup>

Though unpublished during Jung's lifetime, the *Red Book* lies at the centre of Jung's 'fantasy thinking' and 'directed thinking' (to use his own distinction), both of which

<sup>8</sup> I quote from the English translation in Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, transl. A. D. Melville, Oxford, 1986.

<sup>9</sup> Jung, *LN* (n. 1 above), p. 397.

<sup>10</sup> Jung in S. Shamdasani, *C. G. Jung: A Biography in Books*, London & New York, 2012, p. 104.

<sup>11</sup> 'And—over all—a zeal, not poor nor slow, / And faces that with smiling goodness glow' (n. 8 above).

<sup>12</sup> Jung, *LN* (n. 1 above), p. 398.

<sup>13</sup> L. Hardwick, *Reception Studies*, Oxford, 2003, p. 10.

<sup>14</sup> J. Hillman and S. Shamdasani, *Lament of the Dead: Psychology after Jung's Red Book*, New York, 2013, p. 193.

<sup>15</sup> Jung, *LN* (n. 1 above), p. vii.

were complexly intertwined.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, it was no overstatement when Shamdasani claimed in 2009 that ‘there can be few *unpublished* works that have already exerted such far-reaching effects upon twentieth-century social and intellectual history as Jung’s *Red Book*, or *Liber Novus*’.<sup>17</sup>

Jung’s refiguration of Philemon was as engaged with ancient literary sources as it was with the intellectual foundations on which Jung’s psychology rest. As will be discussed here, it illustrates Jung’s immersion in a whole series of writings other than Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* (both ancient and modern): Goethe’s *Faust*, late antique magical, alchemical and Hermetic literature, as well as classical scholarship dedicated to these texts. Even though it is widely recognized that Philemon played a central role in Jung’s psychological formulations after his break from Freud in 1912 -- Jung went as far as to say that Philemon had actually ‘taught’ him ‘psychic objectivity, the reality of the psyche’ -- this figure seems to have received no sustained attention in the scholarship on the reception of Greco-Roman antiquity in depth psychology beyond Shamdasani’s explorations in his editorial work on Jung.<sup>18</sup> The following is an investigation of how Jung’s refiguration of Philemon relates both to Jung’s psychological research prior to his first encounter with this character and to the path it followed after this encounter took place.

## Jung’s Receptions of Ovid

In 1909, at a time when he was still working with closely Freud, Jung had a dream. In this dream, Jung found himself in the upper story of a house ‘furnished with fine old pieces in rococo style.’<sup>19</sup> Each time Jung descended a floor, he seemed to go further back in history: below the rococo-styled floor was one with medieval furnishing; from the medieval story, Jung descended ‘a stone stairway that led down into the cellar’, the walls of which ‘dated from Roman times.’ Below the cellar were

<sup>16</sup> Jung claims that there are two types of thinking (Jung, *CW B* [n. 1 above], §§6–57). ‘Directed thinking’, on the one hand, is ‘thinking with words’ (ibid., §23), ‘a process of psychic assimilation’ (ibid., §16). To Jung, ‘the most beautiful expression of directed thinking is science’ (ibid., §29). In ‘fantasy thinking’, on the other hand, ‘thinking in the form of speech ceases, image crowds upon image, feeling upon feeling’ (ibid., §27). Jung adds that this kind of thinking is usually referred to as ‘dreaming’ (ibid.). While the former is ‘troublesome and exhausting’ (ibid., §28), the latter ‘goes on without trouble, working spontaneously’ (ibid.).

<sup>17</sup> Shamdasani in Jung, *LN* (n. 1 above), pp. 1–2.

<sup>18</sup> C. G. Jung and A. Jaffé, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, transl. R. Winston and C. Winston. New York, 1989, p. 183 (hereafter *MDR*). Shamdasani in Jung, *LN* (n. 1 above), pp. 24–25; pp. 77–78; p. 396, n. 396; Shamdasani in Jung, *Black Books* (n. 2 above), vol. 1, pp. 33–34; vol. 4, p. 228, n. 101; vol. 4, p. 230 nn. 104–106. For receptions of Greco-Roman antiquity in psychoanalysis, see L. Keenan, *The Ancient Unconscious: Psychoanalysis and the Ancient Text*, Oxford, 2019; V. Zajko and E. O’Gorman, *Classical Myth and Psychoanalysis*, Oxford, 2013; R. Armstrong, *A Compulsion for Antiquity: Freud and the Ancient World*, New York & London, 2005. On Jung’s reception of Plato, see P. Bishop, *Reading Plato through Jung*, Cham, 2023.

<sup>19</sup> All quotations of Jung’s ‘house dream’ are in Jung & Jaffé, *MDR* (n. 18 above), p. 159. On this famous dream, see P. Bishop, ‘Digging Jung: Analytical Psychology and Philosophical Archaeology’, *History of European Ideas* 48(7), 2022, pp. 960–979. Further bibliography see Bishop, ‘Digging Jung’, p. 972, n. 6.

narrow stone steps 'leading down into the depths', where Jung found a low cave with 'scattered bones and broken pottery, like the remains of a primitive culture.' The dream reignited Jung's interest in archaeology, contributed to his growing interest in mythology and became a stepping stone towards his theory of the collective unconscious.<sup>20</sup> Jung talks about how he subsequently devoured the four volumes of Friedrich Creuzer's *Symbolism and Mythology of the Ancients*, encountering 'centaurs, nymphs, satyrs, gods and goddesses, as though they were patients and I was analyzing them'.<sup>21</sup> The outcome of this period of intensive research was *Transformations and Symbols of the Libido* (CW B), the work published in two instalments that famously contributed to Jung's break from Freud.<sup>22</sup> There, Jung advocated 'widening the conception of libido'<sup>23</sup> which had already been proposed by Freud. As Shamdasani states about this crucial work of psychology:

In this work, Jung synthesized nineteenth-century theories of memory, heredity, and the unconscious and posited a phylogenetic layer to the unconscious, still present in everyone, and consisting of mythological images. For Jung, myths were symbols of the libido and they depicted its typical movements. He used the comparative method of anthropology to draw together a vast panoply of myths, and then subjected them to analytic interpretation. (...) He claimed that there had to be typical myths, which corresponded to the ethnopsychological development of complexes.<sup>24</sup>

Containing over two hundred and fifty transformation-themed stories, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* would have been a very useful source of mythological material for the preparation of this work on 'transformations' of the libido. In fact, Ovid was among the main ancient authors featuring in the school curricula under which Jung studied in his early years in Basel.<sup>25</sup> In his personal library, Jung kept a miniature book of Ovid's works in Latin from his school days (an annotation in the inner cover dates it to 1894, before he left school in 1895 -- see Fig. 1). That volume would have been easy to carry anywhere. Given that Jung travelled to the United States with Freud in 1909 and started travelling quite frequently to lecture from 1910 onwards, one wonders if he might not have conveniently taken the little book with him to do his research. In fact, of the total of five occurrences of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* listed in the General index of Jung's Collected Works, four are located in *Symbols of Transformation* (CW 5), the revised 1952 version of *Transformations and Symbols*

<sup>20</sup> Jung & Jaffé, *MDR* (n. 18 above), p. 158.

<sup>21</sup> C. G. Jung, *Introduction to Jungian Psychology: Notes of the Seminar on Analytical Psychology Given in 1925*, ed. S. Shamdasani, Princeton, 2012, p. 24; F. Creuzer, *Symbolik und Mythologie der alten Völker, besonders der Griechen*, 4 vols, Leipzig, 1810–1812.

<sup>22</sup> C. G. Jung, 'Wandlungen und Symbole der Libido', *Jahrbuch für psychoanalytische und psychopathologische Forschungen*, vol. 3, 1911, pp. 120–227; C. G. Jung, 'Wandlungen und Symbole der Libido, II', *Jahrbuch für psychoanalytische und psychopathologische Forschungen*, vol. 4, 1912, pp. 162–464.

<sup>23</sup> Jung, *CW B* (n. 1 above), §219.

<sup>24</sup> Shamdasani in Jung, *Black Books* (n. 2 above), vol. 1, p. 14.

<sup>25</sup> G. Domenici, *Jung's Nietzsche: Zarathustra, The Red Book, and "Visionary" Works*, Cham, 2019, p. 4.

of the *Libido* (all of which are already present in the second instalment of the first edition).

That someone working in the field of psychology would be interested in Ovid is hardly surprising. As Martindale says, Ovid ‘has long been valued for his acuteness as a psychologist (...), as a poet interested in many facets of human behaviour’.<sup>26</sup> Challenging certain readings of the *Metamorphoses*, Barsby claims that ‘the human interest of the *Metamorphoses* is more psychological than philosophical’.<sup>27</sup> As ever, though, Jung behaved in slightly unpredictable ways when he read Ovid. Not a single one of his references to the *Metamorphoses* is about the interior of Ovid’s most psychologically intriguing characters (one immediately thinks of Medea’s inner conflicts or Bybli’s incestuous cravings for her brother).<sup>28</sup> Rather, his ongoing argument about the libido meant that his attention was drawn to characters and situations that he found typical in some way. One of the Ovid myths discussed in most detail is that of Caeneus (Ov. *Met.* XII.146–535), originally a maiden called Caenis turned into a man with impenetrable skin by Neptune (Ov. *Met.* XII.205–597) and who, later in battle, is only defeated when entirely covered in trees (Ov. *Met.* XII.510–521). Caeneus would have emerged from the pile as ‘a bird with golden wings’ (Ov. *Met.* XII.525). Here, Jung turned to Roscher’s association of this bird with the golden plover (*Charadrius pluvialis*), who ‘proclaims the approaching rain’.<sup>29</sup> Jung does not mention the obvious: that Caenis’s desire to become a man derives from the psychologically traumatic experience of being raped by Neptune. Instead, he alludes to the passage in Pindar (166f.) where Caeneus splits the earth with his straight foot and recognises in the myth

the typical constituents of the libido myth: original bisexuality, immortality (invulnerability) through entrance into the mother (splitting the mother with the foot, and to become covered up) and resurrection as a bird of the soul and bringer of fertility (...).<sup>30</sup>

His other comments on the *Metamorphoses* are more obviously ‘Jungian’ (insofar as that term can be used) in that they refer to ‘primordial images’ (‘Urbilder’; from 1919, Jung starts employing ‘archetype’ as well). Iacchus (Ov. *Met.* VIII.18–20) is discussed as a type of *puer aeternus*.<sup>31</sup> A passage that alludes to Ceres’s affair with Iasion (Ov. *Met.* IX.423) follows Jung’s comment about ‘a ritual marriage (...) celebrated (...) in mother earth’.<sup>32</sup> Here, one sees the first outlines of Jung’s archetypes

<sup>26</sup> C. Martindale, ed., *Ovid Renewed: Ovidian Influences on Literature and Art from the Middle Ages to the Twentieth Century*, Cambridge, 1988, p. 17.

<sup>27</sup> J. Barsby, *Ovid*, Oxford, 1978, pp. 34–35.

<sup>28</sup> For Medea, see Ov. *Met.* VII.11–71. For Byblis, see Ov. *Met.* IX.439–665.

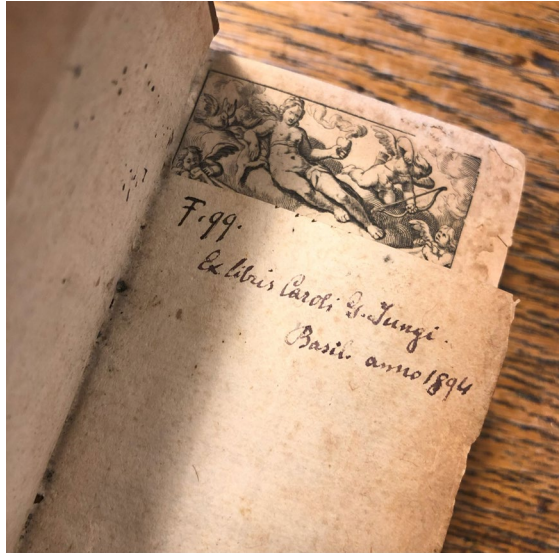
<sup>29</sup> Jung, CW B (n. 1 above), §451. W. H. Roscher, *Ausführliches Lexikon der griechischen und römischen Mythologie*, 6 vols, Leipzig, 1884–1937.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, §452.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, §535.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, §537.

**Fig. 1** Jung's personal copy of Ovid, *Opera*, Amsterdam, 1630



of the child and the mother, both of which would be later explored in Jung's collaboration with the classical scholar Károly Kerényi.<sup>33</sup>

Because Philemon and Baucis are turned into trees at the end of Ovid's tale (*Ov. Met.* VIII.712–720), it is worth noting that two of the four allusions to Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in *Transformations and Symbols of the Libido* involve trees, which are discussed at length. 'It is well known that trees have played a large part in the cult myth from the remotest times.'<sup>34</sup> Jung explains 'the various meanings of the tree—sun, tree of Paradise, mother, phallus—(...) by the fact that it is a libido-symbol'.<sup>35</sup> To Jung, 'the typical myth tree is the tree of paradise or of life', and 'the cross of Christ is the tree of life, and equally the wood of death. (...) *The dead are delivered back to the mother for rebirth.*'<sup>36</sup> Hence Jung comments on the passage of the *Metamorphoses* which mentions the love of the Great Mother Cybele for the tree into which Attis hardened (*Ov. Met.* X.104–105) as an example of 'burial in the mother'.<sup>37</sup> Even though he does not mention Philemon and Baucis in *Transformations and Symbols of the Libido*, Jung might have revisited their story as part of this general fascination with trees and arboreal imagery (which he insistently interpreted as rich symbols which could be incorporated into psychological speculation), especially because the couple turns into trees right at the moment of their deaths: their transformation is a type of rebirth granted to them by the gods in exchange for their goodwill.

<sup>33</sup> C. G. Jung and K. Kerényi, *Einführung in das Wesen der Mythologie*, Amsterdam, 1941.

<sup>34</sup> Jung, *CW B* (n. 1 above), §358.

<sup>35</sup> Jung, *CW 5* (n. 1 above), §329.

<sup>36</sup> Jung, *CW B* (n. 1 above), §358. Italics in the original.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, §682.

Jung actually associated his first deliberate plunge into the unconscious with material he had been reading in preparation for *Transformations and Symbols of the Libido*. Sitting on his desk on 12 December 1913 (just over a month before Philemon's first appearance), Jung 'resolved upon the decisive step', let himself 'drop'<sup>38</sup> and experienced a vision that he interpreted as 'a hero and solar myth, a drama of death and renewal, the rebirth symbolized by the Egyptian scarab':<sup>39</sup> all themes Jung had researched for his work. To Shamdasani,

(...) the self-experimentation that he [i.e. Jung] undertook through exploring his own fantasy thinking was in part a direct response to theoretical questions raised by research that culminated in *Transformations and Symbols of the Libido*.<sup>40</sup>

That Jung let himself 'drop' into the unconscious while sitting on his desk is a reminder that 'Jung's self-experimentation was largely undertaken while seated in his library'.<sup>41</sup> Thus, he was actually surrounded by the very books he used in his research for *Transformations and Symbols of the Libido*. Jung mentions reading a book when recalling an involuntary vision, also of 1913: 'I was traveling by train and had a book in my hand that I was reading. I began to fantasize, and before I knew it, I was in the town to which I was going.'<sup>42</sup> Although it cannot be confirmed that Ovid's *Metamorphoses* was among the books that Jung was reading (either while travelling or while sitting on his desk) when he dropped into such fantasizing states, the two trees standing closest to Philemon in his image in the *Red Book* certainly pay tribute to the couple from Ovid's myth 'who once took in the Gods as they wandered the earth when everyone else refused them lodging'<sup>43</sup> (see Fig. 2).

Admittedly, Jung's encounter with Philemon has as much to do with Ovid's *Metamorphoses* as it has with Goethe's *Faust*. Jung's interest in Goethe was both biographical and literary. Intriguingly, he was exposed to a legend which suggested that he might actually have been Goethe's great-grandson.<sup>44</sup> However, this seems to have made no greater impression on him than Goethe's main *opus*, the long Mephistophelian poem *Faust*. Jung once claimed that he took Faust's heritage as 'my heritage, and moreover as the advocate and avenger of Philemon and Baucis'.<sup>45</sup> At the core of this claim lies the episode from *Faust II* where Faust's building of a city leads Mephistopheles to burn down Philemon's and Baucis's home (with the couple in it). The perpetual association of Goethe's *Faust* with Ovid's story of the couple is given spiritual expression in the tower that Jung built for himself in Bollingen, where he wrote an inscription in Latin which reads: 'Philemon's

<sup>38</sup> Jung & Jaffé, *MDR* (n. 18 above), p. 179.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Shamdasani in Jung, *Black Books* (n. 2 above), vol. 1, p. 15.

<sup>41</sup> Shamdasani, *A Biography in Books* (n. 10 above), p. 49.

<sup>42</sup> Jung, *Introduction to Jungian Psychology* (n. 21 above), p. 44.

<sup>43</sup> Jung, *LN* (n. 1 above), p. 407.

<sup>44</sup> See P. Bishop, *Carl Jung*, London, 2014, pp. 22–40.

<sup>45</sup> Jung, *Letters I* (n. 5 above), p. 309.



Sanctuary, Faust's Repentance'.<sup>46</sup> Interestingly, Ovid was given credit by Jung in relation to *Faust* when credit was denied by Goethe himself:

My Philemon and Baucis (...) have nothing to do with that renowned ancient couple or the tradition connected with them. I gave this couple the names merely to elevate the characters. The persons and relations are similar, and hence the use of the names has a good effect.<sup>47</sup>

Goethe's strangely tacit use of Ovid, almost making of him a secret ancient source, was not uncommon. Throughout the nineteenth century, Ovid's reputation had been compromised by what Vance has called the period's 'enthusiasm for moralising biography':<sup>48</sup> Ovid's recurrent use of erotic themes in his poetry (and the possible role that poetry might have played in his exile) made him, to some, 'a degenerate poet in a degenerate age'.<sup>49</sup> At the same time, Ovid 'continued to be part of what every schoolboy knew, a common starting-point for the study of Latin poetry'.<sup>50</sup> The result of these contrasting attitudes was the use of Ovid as a 'highly convenient' but 'barely acknowledged source of (...) myths and legends'.<sup>51</sup> Jung, however, 'would give the earth to know whether Goethe himself knew why he called the two old people "Philemon" and "Baucis"',<sup>52</sup> and thought that 'vestiges' of Ovid were part of the answer:

*Ad Philemon and Baucis*: a typical Goethean answer to Eckermann! trying to conceal his vestiges. *Philemon* (φιλημα [philema] = kiss), the loving one, the simple old loving couple, close to the earth and aware of the Gods, the complete opposite to the Superman Faust, the product of the devil. Incidentally: in my tower in Bollingen is a hidden inscription: *Philemonis sacrum Fausti poenitentia* [Philemon's Sanctuary, Faust's Repentance]. When I first encountered the archetype of the old wise man, he called himself Philemon.<sup>53</sup>

The use of 'vestiges' is significant here, as this word not only implies a perception of literary continuity from past to present (the very idea of 'tradition' which Goethe rejects above), but also evokes the archaeological image from Jung's house dream (see above) that, to him, was analogous to the structure of the Psyche itself: 'cultural history' is a 'history of successive layers of consciousness'.<sup>54</sup> In fact, Jung's reaction to Goethe's overlooking of Ovid echoes his reaction to Faust's overlooking of

<sup>46</sup> *Philemonis sacrum Fausti poenitentia*.

<sup>47</sup> Goethe in J. W. Goethe, *Faust*, transl. W. Arndt, New York, 1976, p. 428. See Shamdasani in Jung, *LN* (n. 1 above), p. 396, n. 264.

<sup>48</sup> N. Vance, 'Ovid and the nineteenth century', in *Ovid Renewed* (n. 26 above), pp. 215–231 (216).

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 215.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> Jung, *Letters I* (n. 5 above), p. 310.

<sup>53</sup> Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Yale University, YCGL MSS 21, 'Alice Raphael Papers. Series II: Correspondences', letter from C. G. Jung to A. Raphael, 7 June 1955. See Shamdasani in Jung, *LN* (n. 1 above), p. 396, n. 264.

<sup>54</sup> Jung & Jaffé, *MDR* (n. 18 above), p. 161.

Philemon and Baucis in Goethe's work: Jung's inner figure of Philemon 'became (...) an acknowledgement of what Faust had overlooked (...). Respect for eternal human rights, the appreciation of the ancient and the continuity of culture and history of ideas.'<sup>55</sup>

The ancient 'vestiges' of Ovid that Jung identifies in *Faust* are inevitably entrenched not only in his interpretation of Goethe's work, but also in his own experience of Philemon in his active imagination. This is what Jung's comment about Philemon and Baucis being 'close to the earth and aware of the Gods' (see above) suggests. Jung seems to have been invested in the pagan world of the *Metamorphoses* as a preferable alternative to the satanic world of *Faust*, as his account of his arrival at Philemon and Baucis' home suggests. Jung finds a 'small house in the country fronted by a large bed of tulips',<sup>56</sup> where Philemon and Baucis live. Jung also says that their interests 'seem to have become narrow, even childish.'<sup>57</sup> Their routine consists of the simplest and most harmless ways of engaging with nature: 'they water their bed of tulips and tell each other about the flowers that have newly appeared.'<sup>58</sup> Jung's account of this first encounter with Philemon in the *Red Book* is followed by a sort of commentary in which the world of the Christians seems a lot more menacing than the pagan world of the *Metamorphoses* inhabited by these two characters. Jung says to Philemon: 'you live with flowers, trees, and birds, but not with men', 'the Christian animals' who 'did not love your pagan humanity'.<sup>59</sup> Jung rejects Goethe's aggressive, 'Superman' Faustian model and reclaims some of Philemon's innocent dignity through the pagan Ovid. Jung's sanctuary for Philemon in the Bollingen tower does the same by restoring Philemon's much better fate in the *Metamorphoses*:<sup>60</sup> that of someone whom the Gods 'thanked (...) by transforming your house into a golden temple'.<sup>61</sup> 'I did not see that your hut is a temple', Jung writes, 'and that you, ΦΙΛΗΜΩΝ, and ΒΑΥΚΙΣ, serve in the sanctuary.'<sup>62</sup>

After encountering Philemon in his active imagination exercises, Jung would go on to experience this figure in different ways, or retrospectively associate certain experiences with Philemon (a very different phenomenon). In a passage that never made its way into the calligraphic volume of the *Red Book*, Jung says that he once 'heard the voice of ΦΙΛΗΜΩΝ',<sup>63</sup> but Shamdāsani observes that, in Jung's original entry in *Black Books* 5, 'the voice is not identified as Philemon's'.<sup>64</sup> Jung also accounts for the transformations that Philemon underwent over time: 'ΦΙΛΗΜΩΝ

<sup>55</sup> C. G. Jung and A. Jaffé, *The Original Protocols for Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, ed. S. Shamdāsani, Princeton, forthcoming (hereafter *MP*), 22 November 1957.

<sup>56</sup> Jung, *LN* (n. 1 above), p. 395.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 396.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 410–411.

<sup>60</sup> Many thanks to Prof. Shamdāsani for bringing this to my attention.

<sup>61</sup> Jung, *LN* (n. 1 above), p. 407.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 483.

<sup>64</sup> Shamdāsani in Jung, *LN* (n. 1 above), p. 483, n. 40. The writings that Jung probably intended to have incorporated into the calligraphic *Red Book* are published in the reader's edition under 'Scrutinies' (*ibid.*, pp. 461–553).

has (...) become different. He first appeared to me as a magician who lived in a distant land, but then I felt his nearness'.<sup>65</sup> 'Nearness' seems like an understatement when Jung says that 'Philemon (...) was (...) terribly real to me', and that he 'walked up and down in the garden with him'.<sup>66</sup> Jung's various interactions with and retrospective reflections on Philemon seem to have led to some chronological confusion. This is how Jung describes a dream he had in which Philemon appeared with kingfisher wings (which is how he is depicted in one of the images of the *Red Book* -- see Fig. 2):

His [i.e. Philemon's] figure first appeared to me in the following dream. There was a blue sky, like the sea, covered not by clouds but by flat brown clods of earth. It looked as if the clods were breaking apart and the blue water of the sea were becoming visible between them. But the water was the blue sky. Suddenly there appeared from the right a winged being sailing across the sky. I saw that it was an old man with the horns of a bull. He held a bunch of four keys, one of which he clutched as if he were about to open a lock. He had the wings of the kingfisher with its characteristic colors.<sup>67</sup>

Even though Jung describes this dream as Philemon's first appearance, evidence from his personal documents indicates that this dream actually happened five years after Jung first stood at Philemon's garden gate, 'in early January 1919.'<sup>68</sup>

In any case, Jung could not understand the 'dream-image' ('Traumbild') and decided 'to paint it in order to impress it upon' his 'memory' (see Fig. 3).<sup>69</sup> Then, he reports, something astonishing happened:

During the days when I was occupied with the painting, I found in my garden, by the lake shore, a dead kingfisher! I was thunderstruck, for kingfishers are quite rare in the vicinity of Zürich and I have never since found a dead one. The body was recently dead—at the most, two or three days—and showed no external injuries.<sup>70</sup>

This was a major instance of what Jung called 'synchronicity' (in short, a 'meaningful coincidence'). Jung would later develop the concept in more detail.<sup>71</sup>

The essentially visual character of Jung's later experience of Philemon as a winged being, and the fact that Jung is so often associated with visual symbolism, brings us back to Ovid. Famously, Ovid announces in the first verse of the *Metamorphoses* that his poem centres around *mutatas... formas* ('changed forms', *Ov. Met. I.1*): the emphasis on the visual is blatant. Martindale claims that 'Ovid's imagination

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 483.

<sup>66</sup> Jung, *MP* (n. 55 above), 12 October 1957.

<sup>67</sup> Jung & Jaffé, *MDR* (n. 18 above), pp. 182–183.

<sup>68</sup> Shamdasani in Jung, *Black Books* (n. 2 above), vol. 7, p. 195, n. 128.

<sup>69</sup> Jung & Jaffé, *MDR* (n. 18 above), p. 183. German original in C. G. Jung and A. Jaffé, *Erinnerungen, Träume, Gedanken*, Zürich, 1962, p. 186 (hereafter *ETG*).

<sup>70</sup> Jung & Jaffé, *MDR* (n. 18 above), p. 183.

<sup>71</sup> Jung, *CW* 8 (n. 1 above), §§816–997.



Fig. 2 Philemon in the calligraphic *Red Book*, fol. 154. © 2007 Foundation of the Works of C.G. Jung, Zürich

is frequently of a plastic or visual kind, which helps to account for this influence on painters or sculptors.<sup>72</sup> Thus, the *Metamorphoses*, alongside ‘Holy Scripture, Homer and Virgil’, became ‘the source for most of the visual art produced until the later eighteenth century.’<sup>73</sup> Jung owned a book based on the *Metamorphoses* where text and image stood side by side: the seventeenth-century *Metamorphoses d’Ovide en rondeaux* by Isaac de Benserade.<sup>74</sup> Each ‘rondeau’ (a poem with a refrain that repeats the opening words of the first verse of the first stanza) is a summary of an Ovidian story from the *Metamorphoses* accompanied by an illustration referring

<sup>72</sup> Martindale, *Ovid Renewed* (n. 26 above), p. 6.

<sup>73</sup> N. Llewellyn, ‘Illustrating Ovid’, in *Ovid Renewed* (n. 26 above), pp. 151–166 (151).

<sup>74</sup> I. de Benserade, *Metamorphoses d’Ovide en rondeaux*, Paris, 1697. In fact, Jung used an illustration of the world in a state of chaos explicitly based on Book I of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* from another book he owned (M. de Marolles, *Temple des Muses*, Paris, 1733) more than once: in his 1936 *Eranos* lecture “Die Erlösungsvorstellungen in der Alchemie” (later expanded in Jung, *CW* 12 [n. 1 above]), where the image also appears; see fig. 162) and in a 1939 lecture at ETH Zürich (C. G. Jung, *Psychology of Yoga and Meditation*, ed. M. Liebscher, Princeton & Oxford, 2020, p. 154).

to the episode in question. At times, the refrains of *Metamorphoses en rondeaux* nudge the reader into seeing Ovid's stories as examples of good or bad moral behaviour, which is certainly the case of the refrain chosen for Philemon and Baucis: 'les bonnes gens'. The volume seems to capture what, to Llewellyn, made the *Metamorphoses* so suitable to the visual arts: its 'potential for moralising' and its 'potential for decoration.'<sup>75</sup>

Another story from the *Metamorphoses* that this book owned by Jung renders in a morally approving tone is that of Alcyone (Ov. *Met.* XI.410–748): its refrain is 'ce bel exemple'. Ovid tells the story of Alcyone, the wife of a benevolent king named Ceyx who decides to travel by sea to consult an oracle (Ov. *Met.* XI.410–414). Alcyone unsuccessfully tries to stop Ceyx because she had seen shipwreck debris washed ashore (Ov. *Met.* XI.427–428). After Ceyx drowns in the sea, Alcyone is sent a dream where an image of Ceyx (*Ceycis imagine*, Ov. *Met.* XI.587) tells her that her great fear had materialized. As Alcyone wakes up, she sees the king's dead body ashore. The gods take pity on them, and turn both of them into birds (... *ambo / alite mutantur*, Ov. *Met.* XI.741–742) which have long been associated with kingfishers. This association appears under 'Alkyone' in Roscher's lexicon of Greco-Roman mythology, which was often referred to by Jung.<sup>76</sup> The affinities between the Philemon and Baucis and the Alcyone and Ceyx stories are clear. Both feature loving, benign couples willing to die together (Ov. *Met.* VIII.709–710; XI.442–443). Winning over the sympathy of the gods, each couple undergoes the same transformation. Ceyx's storyline is also another instance of a rebirth type of transformation. The similarities between Jung's account of the lake episode and the Ovidian tale, in turn, are far more specific in that they both feature dead bodies washed ashore: one of a kingfisher and the other of a man who is about to become one, both of which are prefigured in a dream-vision. Taking this into account, the similarity between the painting Jung made of Philemon in relation to his dream (see Fig. 3) and the illustration of Alcyone in *Metamorphoses en rondeaux* seems striking (see Fig. 4).

What is one to make of these parallels? Any answer is, to a certain degree, speculative. To my knowledge, there is no evidence which might help ascertain when Jung acquired his copy of *Metamorphoses en rondeaux*. However, it seems highly likely that Jung already knew Alcyone's story when he had his dream in 1919, either from his time at school or from his research for *Transformations and Symbols of the Libido*: he does mention the theme of rebirth as a bird when citing from the *Metamorphoses*, after all (see above). It is not implausible, then, that this other Ovidian story played some sort of role in how Philemon later obtained kingfisher wings and in how sea water and sky became blurred as Philemon 'floated' ('schwebte' -- on water or in the air?) in Jung's dream.<sup>77</sup> In any case, Jung was specific about the destination of the dead kingfisher that he found by the lakeshore: 'I had it stuffed and installed it in my library.'<sup>78</sup> This is another instance of Jung bringing together

<sup>75</sup> Llewellyn, 'Illustrating Ovid' (n. 73 above), p. 155.

<sup>76</sup> Roscher, *Lexikon* (n. 29 above), vol. 1, pp. 250–251.

<sup>77</sup> Jung & Jaffé, *ETG* (n. 69 above), p. 186.

<sup>78</sup> Jung, *MP* (n. 55 above), 28 June 1957.



**Fig. 3** Jung's painting of Philemon floating across the sky. © 2007 Foundation of the Works of C.G. Jung, Zürich

events of major psychological significance with the contents of his (highly suggestive) library.

### **Jung's Engagement with Greco-Egyptian Magical and Alchemical Literature**

At this point, one must remember the fact that Philemon also had a library of sorts in his cupboard, the contents of which point to something altogether different from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*:

He [i.e. Philemon] was probably only a magician by profession, and he now appears to be a pensioned magician who has retired from service. His desirousness and creative drive have expired and he now enjoys his well-earned rest out of sheer incapacity, like every old man who can do nothing else than plant tulips

and water his little garden. The magical rod lies in a cupboard together with the sixth and seventh books of Moses and the wisdom of ΕΡΜΗΣ ΤΡΙΣΜΕΓΙΣΤΟΣ [Hermes Trismegistus]. ΦΙΛΗΜΩΝ is old and has become somewhat feeble-minded. He still murmurs a few magical spells (...). But it is uncertain if these spells are still correct and whether he understands their meaning.<sup>79</sup>

Jung's downplaying of Philemon's magical powers makes it tempting to see these attributes as revealing nothing but hocus-pocus (the sort of speculative or fanciful intellectual work which critics have long claimed to find in Jung's own writings). Still, the fact that both Moses and Hermes Trismegistus are mentioned amongst the books in Philemon's cupboard is far from arbitrary. Jung was always fascinated by composite figures. Hermes 'Trismegistus' (literally 'thrice-greatest') emerges from the syncretism of the Egyptian god Thoth and the Greek god Hermes; the epithet is first attested in the second century CE (Philo of Byblos *fr.* 2 810.3; Athenagoras *Leg.* XXVIII.6) and became closely associated with magical and Hermetic writings in the Roman period.<sup>80</sup> Even though the sixth and seventh books of Moses probably refer to a grimoire first published in 1849 by Johann Schiebel, Moses was linked to magic from as early as Pliny (*Naturalis historia* XXX.11).<sup>81</sup> Ferguson (1906), of which Jung had both volumes, associates Moses with alchemy and mentions instances in which 'Hermes and Moses were identified'.<sup>82</sup>

Jung encountered a great deal of classical scholarship on ancient magic, alchemy, and Hermetism at a time when these (deeply intertwined) phenomena became zones of considerable scholarly speculation. Abrecht Dieterich's *Abraxas* (1891) engaged with the fourth-century CE Greco-Egyptian magical papyrus Leiden J 395 (= *PGM* XIII Preisendanz).<sup>83</sup> Also in the late nineteenth century, chemist Marcellin Berthelot and classical philologist Charles-Émile Ruelle collaborated in the comprehensive *Collection des anciens alchimistes grecs*.<sup>84</sup> This three-volume collection included an introduction, the Greek text and a French translation of early alchemical writings spanning from the first century CE to later Byzantine commentaries. Richard Reitzenstein's *Poimandres* (1904) dealt with the *Corpus Hermeticum* with special

<sup>79</sup> Jung, *LN* (n. 1 above), p. 397.

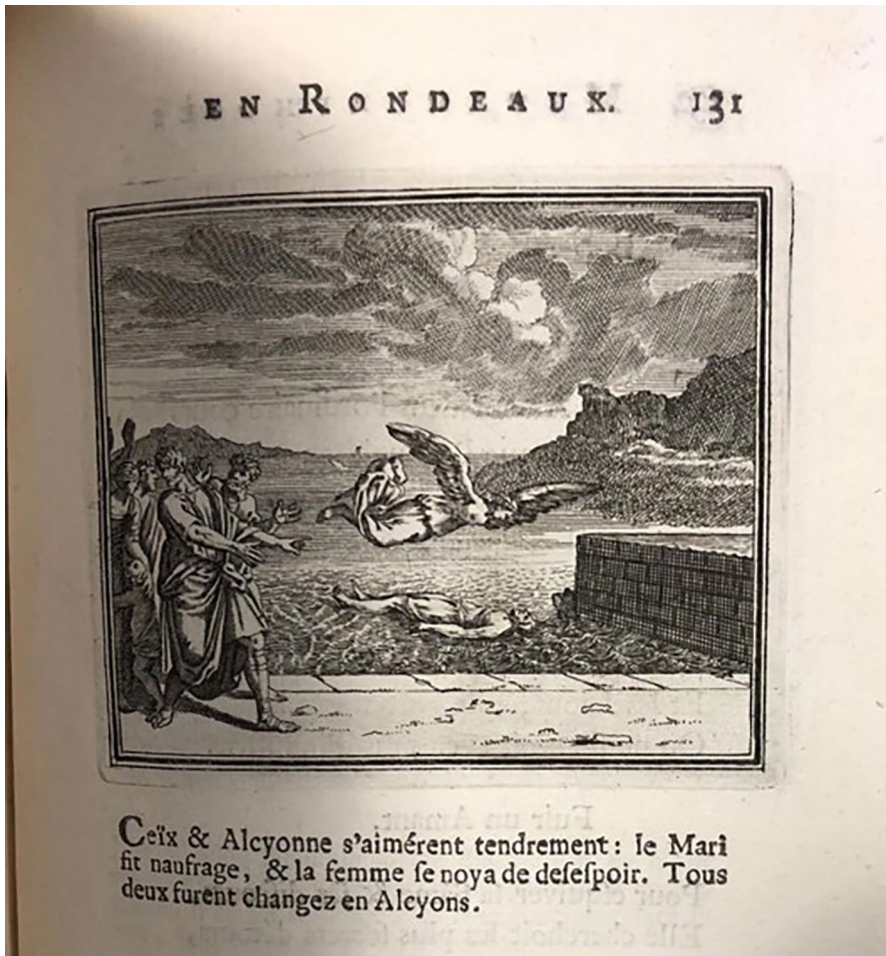
<sup>80</sup> See G. Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes: A Historical Approach to the Late Pagan Mind*, 2nd edn, Princeton, 1993, pp. 22–31; pp. 216–217. Ancient Hermetic writings are sometimes divided into philosophical and technical *Hermetica*. While there is evidence for the circulation of some of the philosophical *Hermetica* (*Corpus Hermeticum* [= *C. H.*]) in collection form during late antiquity, there is no such evidence for the technical ones, nor a centralized manuscript tradition (see Fowden, *Egyptian Hermes*, pp. 1–11).

<sup>81</sup> For Jung and Schiebel, see Shamdasani in Jung, *LN* (n. 1 above), p. 396, n. 264. For Moses and magic in Greco-Roman antiquity, see J. G. Gager, *Moses in Greco-Roman Paganism*, Atlanta, 1972, pp. 132–161.

<sup>82</sup> J. Ferguson, *Bibliotheca Chemica: A Catalogue of the Alchemical, Chemical and Pharmaceutical Books in the Collection of the Late James Young of Kelly and Durriss*, 2 vols, Glasgow, 1906, vol. 2, p. 113.

<sup>83</sup> A. Dieterich, *Abraxas: Studien zur Religionsgeschichte des spätern Altertums*, Leipzig, 1891; K. Preisendanz, ed., *Papyri Graecae Magicae: Die griechischen Zauberpapyri*, 2 vols, 2nd edn, Stuttgart, 1973–4.

<sup>84</sup> M. Berthelot and C. Ruelle, eds, *Collection des anciens alchimistes grecs*, 3 vols, Paris, 1887–1888 (hereafter *CAAG*).



**Fig. 4** Alcyone flying across the sky in Jung's copy of Benserade, *Metamorphoses d'Ovide en rondeaux*, p. 131

attention paid to *Poimandres* (= *C. H.* 1), which is usually the first hermetic writing to feature in the manuscripts (see n. 80 above).<sup>85</sup>

Jung owned copies of all of these works. Unsurprisingly, Jung's own personal library can be used to illuminate Philemon's own 'cupboard-library' and how Philemon evokes a composite 'Egypto-Hellenic atmosphere with a Gnostic coloration' (see above).<sup>86</sup> Jung felt a sense of 'spiritual kinship' with the Gnostics, 'to whom the figure of Philemon also belongs.'<sup>87</sup> Jung's use of the plural is significant here,

<sup>85</sup> R. Reitzenstein, *Poimandres: Studien zur griechisch-ägyptischen und frühchristlichen Literatur*, Leipzig, 1904.

<sup>86</sup> Jung in Shamdassani, *A Biography in Books* (n. 10 above), p. 104.

<sup>87</sup> Jung, *MP* (n. 55 above), 20 June 1957.



for even in antiquity, the term 'Gnostic' did not refer to a 'united movement':<sup>88</sup> there were almost as many 'Gnostic' doctrines as there were 'Gnostics' (*multitudo Gnosticorum*) sprouting out of the ground like mushrooms (*uelut a terra fungi manifestati sunt*, Irenaeus *Against Heresies* 1.29). Their witnesses 'take pleasure in noting that each new system deviates from the last', sharing little more than the general 'teaching that we are (...) spirits imprisoned in matter; *gnôsis* is held up by all as the means, and the *sine qua non*, of liberation.'<sup>89</sup> The aforementioned scholarly works with which Jung was familiar dealt with late antique material (Jung was very much interested in 'the hiatus between the age of chivalry and antiquity'<sup>90</sup>) that was vaguely suited to such 'Gnostic' views.

Dieterich's *Abraxas* is likely to have played a role in shaping how Jung perceived this all-important figure of Philemon. Featured in *Transformations and Symbols of the Libido*,<sup>91</sup> 'Jung studied this work closely early in 1913'.<sup>92</sup> This means that Jung was deeply familiar with *Abraxas* before Philemon's first appearance. Dieterich approximates magic to Gnosticism from the first pages of his work, claiming that magic 'was the Gnosis of the people'.<sup>93</sup> The Greco-Egyptian magical papyrus at the centre of *Abraxas* preserves two versions of a text called 'The Eighth Book of Moses' (*PGM* XIII.1–343 & 343–646). To Dieterich, 'such merging of Greek and Jewish elements' can only point to Egypt.<sup>94</sup> The contents of this 'book' certainly perform such hybridity, however clumsily: the practitioner is instructed (in Greek) to write down utterances in Hebrew and Egyptian that, according to Betz, reveal the author's poor knowledge of both.<sup>95</sup> In any case, there are references to Hermes in both versions of the 'Eighth Book of Moses' (*PGM* XIII.20; 488; 496), including an accusation that Hermes plagiarized it (*PGM* XIII.14–15). This hints at authors and readers of magical handbooks attributed to Moses and Hermes rubbing shoulders in antiquity: it is no wonder, then, that they do in Philemon's cupboard.

Even though Jung wrote about alchemy more profusely only after 1928 (when he received a copy of the Chinese alchemical writing *The Secret of the Golden Flower*), the references to Zosimos of Panopolis (a late third/early fourth-century CE Egyptian alchemist) and Berthelot and Ruelle's edition in *Transformations and Symbols of the Libido* show that Jung's interest in the subject started much earlier than is often acknowledged.<sup>96</sup> The context brought forth by Berthelot and Ruelle in relation to alchemy clearly overlaps with the one brought forth by Dieterich in relation to magic. They associate the earliest alchemical writings, attributed to Democritus,

<sup>88</sup> M. Edwards, *Religions of the Constantinian Empire*, Oxford, 2015, p. 148.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.148–149.

<sup>90</sup> Jung, *MP* (n. 55 above), 20 June 1957.

<sup>91</sup> Jung, *CW B* (n. 1 above), §331, n. 13.

<sup>92</sup> Shamdasani in Jung, *LN* (n. 1 above), p. 517, n. 93.

<sup>93</sup> Dieterich, *Abraxas* (n. 83 above), p. 2.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 137.

<sup>95</sup> H. D. Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation, Including the Demotic Spells*, 2nd edn, Chicago & London, 1992, p. 174, n. 21.

<sup>96</sup> e.g. Bishop, *Carl Jung* (n. 44 above), p. 19. Jung mentions Zosimos in *CW B* (n. 1 above), §233 (Berthelot & Ruelle in n. 36); §234; §317, n. 78; §493; §593, n. 107; §598.

to ‘des écoles gréco-égyptiennes’ and, significantly, this passage is bracketed in Jung’s personal copy.<sup>97</sup> To them, many of the alchemical authors ‘étaient des gnostiques, des païens et des juifs’;<sup>98</sup> the three terms are underlined in Jung’s volume. Either before or around the time of Zosimos, they claim, ‘ont été écrits les fragments attribués à Hermès’ and ‘les écrits du Pseudo-Moïse’.<sup>99</sup> This passage, which puts the names associated with Philemon in the same list, is also bracketed in Jung’s copy of Berthelot and Ruelle.

The writings by Zosimos that Jung mentions in *Transformations and Symbols of the Libido* are normally referred to as ‘Visions’ (Zosimos, *Memoirs* X–XII).<sup>100</sup> In the first of this series of dream-visions, Zosimos sees a sacrificing priest on the top of an altar in the form of a bowl and hears his voice coming from above.<sup>101</sup> In the second dream, Zosimos sees the same altar-bowl with a great number of people burning in it.<sup>102</sup> Jung parallels this ‘especially important alchemistic vision of Zosimos’ with a collaborator’s patient’s ‘symbolism of boiling’: ‘This patient used (...) water to express mother.’<sup>103</sup> Zosimos also seems to have found his way into Jung’s active imagination experiments even before Philemon properly came into the picture. On 25 December 1913, Jung describes a vision of Elijah, out of which, Jung claimed, Philemon developed.<sup>104</sup> It reminds one of Zosimos’ dream-vision of the priest: ‘I catch sight of the prophet high above me.’<sup>105</sup> Echoes of Zosimos become clearer as Elijah ‘climbs (...) to a very high summit’ and is followed by Jung.<sup>106</sup>

On the peak we come to some masonry made of huge blocks. It is a round embarkment on the summit. Inside lies a large courtyard, and there is a mighty boulder in the middle, like an altar. The prophet stands on this stone and says: ‘This is the temple of the sun. This place is a vessel, that collects the light of the sun.’<sup>107</sup>

However minor Jung’s comments on Zosimos in *Transformations and Symbols of the Libido* are, the above suggests that the impression left by the alchemist’s dream-visions was not, and that those impressions came much earlier than Jung’s writing specially dedicated to them.<sup>108</sup>

<sup>97</sup> Berthelot & Ruelle, *CAAG Introduction* (n. 84 above), p. 201.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 202.

<sup>100</sup> I follow the edition by M. Mertens, *Les Alchimistes grecs. Tome IV: Zosime de Panopolis. Mémoires authentiques*. Paris, 1995. The translations from the Greek are mine.

<sup>101</sup> ὄρω ἱερουργόν τινα (...) ἐπάνω βωμοῦ φιαλοειδοῦς. (...) καὶ φωνῆς ἀνωθεν ἤκουσα... (Zos. *Mem.* X.2.17–20).

<sup>102</sup> εἶδον τὸν αὐτὸν φιαλοβωμὸν καὶ ἐπάνω ὕδωρ κοχλάζον καὶ πολλὸν λαὸν εἰς αὐτὸν ἄπειρον ὄντα (Zos. *Mem.* X.3.44–46).

<sup>103</sup> Jung, *CW B* (n. 1 above), §233.

<sup>104</sup> Jung & Jaffé, *MDR* (n. 18 above), p. 189.

<sup>105</sup> Jung, *LN* (n. 1 above), p. 194.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 195.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>108</sup> Jung, *CW 13* (n. 1 above), §§85–144.

Furthermore, Zosimos' alchemical writings relish in a mixture of Greek, Egyptian and Hebraic references that reminds one of Dieterich's *PGM XIII* and Philemon's eclectic sample of books. This is particularly true of Zosimos' *On the Letter Omega* (Zos. *Memoir I*), the Greek edition and French translation of which are both annotated in Jung's personal copy of Berthelot & Ruelle. In this rather convoluted treatise, Zosimos presents a doctrine of the 'First Human', who 'is called Thoth among us and Adam among them', thus unambiguously identifying as an Egyptian writing in Greek.<sup>109</sup> Jung underlined both 'Toth' and 'Adam' in Berthelot and Ruelle's French translation of this passage.<sup>110</sup> Zosimos' distinction between the 'earthly man' and the 'spiritual man', who lets go of his flesh and becomes spirit by means of searching for himself and getting to know God (Zos. *Mem. I.7.57–67*), has 'Gnostic' resonances.<sup>111</sup> Zosimos also talks of Hermes as one 'who translated all the Hebrew into Greek and Egyptian'.<sup>112</sup> 'Hermes' is also underlined in Jung's copy of Berthelot and Ruelle's French translation of this passage. That Zosimos attributes part of his doctrine to 'the sacred books of Hermes' (αἱ ἱερὰ Ἑρμοῦ βιβλοὶ, Zos. *Mem. I.15.147–148*) is indicative of the kindship between 'Gnostic' and 'Hermetic' traditions.

In short, Jung's refiguration of Philemon is as indebted to his receptions of these primary sources from the first centuries of the Common Era as to the scholarly interpretations they were given during Jung's lifetime. Philemon's affinities with these highly eclectic writings -- where the boundaries between Greek and Egyptian, between pagan and scriptural, are far from clear -- may also have contributed to Jung's perception of him as a figure who transcends all such categories and more:

Oh ΦΙΛΗΜΩΝ, you are no Christian. (...) You are no Christian and no pagan, but a hospitable inhospitable one, a host of the Gods, a survivor, an eternal one, the father of all eternal wisdom. (...) You know, Oh ΦΙΛΗΜΩΝ, the wisdom of things to come; therefore you are old, oh so very ancient, and just as you tower above me in years, so you tower above the present in futurity, and the length of your past is immeasurable. You are legendary and unreachable. You were and you will be, returning periodically. Your wisdom is invisible, your truth is unknowable, entirely untrue in any given age, and yet true in all eternity (...).<sup>113</sup>

The impossibility of constraining Philemon in either past, present or future and his paradoxical nature point to what this kind of figure would become in Jung's psychological writings: an archetype.

<sup>109</sup> καλεῖται ὁ πρῶτος ἄνθρωπος [ὁ] παρ' ἡμῶν Θωθὸς καὶ παρ' ἐκείνοις Ἀδάμ (Zos. *Mem. I.87–88*).

<sup>110</sup> Berthelot & Ruelle, *CAAG Traduction* (n. 84 above), p. 223.

<sup>111</sup> Mertens, *Zosime de Panopolis* (n. 100 above), p. 75, n. 36. Jung introduces Zosimos as a 'Gnostic' in Jung, *CW 13* (n. 1 above), §85.

<sup>112</sup> (...) Ἑρμῆν ὃς ἡρμήευσε πᾶσαν τὴν Ἑβραϊδα Ἑλληνιστί καὶ Αἰγυπτιστί (Zos. *Mem. I.65–86*).

<sup>113</sup> Jung, *LN* (n. 1 above), pp. 408–410.

## Impact of Philemon on Jung's later psychology

In his 'The Phenomenology of the Spirit in Fairytales' (1948), Jung justifies the scientific limitations of psychology on the grounds that the psyche cannot be observed from 'an Archimedean point outside': 'only the psyche can observe the psyche.'<sup>114</sup> Jung claims that 'the phenomenon we call spirit' is 'of an archetypal nature' because dependent 'on the existence of an autonomous primordial image which is universally present in the preconscious makeup of the human psyche.'<sup>115</sup> To Jung, one of the possible manifestations of 'spirit' was precisely the archetype of the 'wise old man', which, Jung claimed, first appeared to him as Philemon while he was observing his own psyche from within by means of active imagination: 'when I first encountered the archetype of the old wise man, he called himself Philemon' (see above). Indeed, it is hard to read the following lines without having Philemon in mind:

The figure of the wise old man can appear so plastically, not only in dreams but also in visionary meditation (or what we call 'active imagination'), that, as is sometimes apparently the case in India, it takes over the role of a guru. The wise old man appears in dreams in the guise of a magician, doctor, priest, teacher, professor, grandfather, or any other person possessing authority.<sup>116</sup>

Philemon appears in Jung's active imagination not only as a magician, but also as a potential teacher of the magical arts. Jung laments to Philemon that 'the last college of magic was closed long ago. Today', Jung says, 'no professor knows anything anymore about magic.'<sup>117</sup> He cries: 'old man, I want to learn.'<sup>118</sup> Philemon resists at first, until he finally imparts teachings that, nonetheless, are not altogether satisfying to Jung:

**Φ:** "(...) Above all, you must know that magic is the negative of what one can know."

**I:** "That, too, my dear ΦΙΛΗΜΩΝ, is a piece of knowledge that is hard to digest and causes me no small pain. The negative of what one can know? I suppose you mean that it cannot be known, don't you? This exhausts my understanding ['Begreifen']."

**Φ:** "That is the third point that you must note as essential: namely, that there is nothing for you to understand."

(...)

**Φ:** "Magic is neither to be taught nor learned. It's foolish that you want to learn magic."

**I:** "But then magic is nothing but deception."

**Φ:** "Watch out—you have started reasoning again."

**I:** "It's difficult to exist without reason".

<sup>114</sup> Jung, *CW* 9.1 (n. 1 above), §384.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, §396.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, §398.

<sup>117</sup> Jung, *LN* (n. 1 above), p. 399.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 398.

Φ: "And that is exactly how difficult magic is."<sup>119</sup>

The fact that Philemon's teaching arouses suspicion of deception in Jung is worth noting. Jung claims that one can never ascertain 'whether the spirit-figures (...) are morally good'; 'often they show all the signs of duplicity, if not outright malice.'<sup>120</sup> This is not necessarily a bad thing for Jung. Rather, this ambiguity is attributed to the inaccessibility of 'the grand plan on which the unconscious life of the psyche is constructed (...) to our understanding ('Einsicht')'.<sup>121</sup>

Jung's conversation with Philemon about magic and the limitations of his own reasoning is relevant to a point that Jung stresses about the circumstances under which this archetype would normally appear and the character that it would take. To Jung, the figure of the wise old man

(...) is himself this purposeful reflection and concentration (...) that comes about spontaneously in the psychic space outside consciousness when conscious thought is not yet—or is no longer—possible. The concentration and tension of psychic forces that the intervention of this archetype can produce have something about them that always looks like magic.<sup>122</sup>

Jung insists on how 'the spontaneous objectification of the archetype' of the wise old man can provide things that conscious will alone often cannot, such as 'uniting the personality to the point where it acquires this extraordinary power to succeed' and bringing 'knowledge of the immediate situation as well as of the goal.'<sup>123</sup> The resulting 'enlightenment and untying of the fatal tangle', he repeats, 'often has something positively magical about it'.<sup>124</sup> Coincidentally or not, what Jung means by 'magic' here is as unclear as Philemon's statements about it.

Jung's point about how the 'the spirit is quite capable of staging its own manifestation spontaneously'<sup>125</sup> means that the subject experiencing this phenomenon has no control over it:

Even if one accepts the view that a self-revelation of spirit—an apparition for instance—is nothing but an hallucination, the fact remains that this is a spontaneous psychic event not subject to our control. At any rate it is an autonomous complex, and that is quite sufficient for our purpose.<sup>126</sup>

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., pp. 400–401.

<sup>120</sup> Jung, *CW* 9.1 (n. 1 above), §397.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.; or, to use Jung's preferred term in his interaction with Philemon, our 'Begreifen'. See Jung, *Das Rote Buch: Der Text*, Zürich, 2009, p. 411 (see above).

<sup>122</sup> Jung, *CW* 9.1 (n. 1 above), §402.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., §404.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., §395.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., n. 6.

As an autonomous figure, ‘spirit is always an active, winged, swift-moving being’<sup>127</sup> with a ‘*deus ex machina* quality’.<sup>128</sup> If Jung’s comments about the ‘spirit’ as a ‘wise old man’ are reminiscent of Philemon’s 1914 appearance as a magician, these general remarks seem to gesture toward Philemon’s 1919 appearance with kingfisher wings. There was no ambiguity about Jung’s experience of Philemon as an autonomous figure in his own psyche: ‘I observed clearly that it was he who spoke, not I.’<sup>129</sup>

The insistence on the ‘spontaneous’ manifestation of this archetype is of course curious in light of the discussion carried out thus far about how Jung’s Philemon seems permeated by Ovid, Goethe, Greco-Egyptian magical literature and Zosimos. That Jung’s readings of the latter two were mediated by the scholarship of Dieterich, Berthelot and Ruelle brings us back to Reitzenstein’s *Poimandres*, briefly mentioned in the previous section amongst the scholarly works owned by Jung. The inner cover of Jung’s personal copy of *Poimandres* indicates that the acquisition of this book occurred in 1912 and therefore antedates Philemon’s first appearance in 1914. Jung bracketed a passage where Reitzenstein mentions ‘Egypto-Hellenic Revelation Literature’ and Arabic alchemy’s indebtedness to its Egypto-Greek antecedent.<sup>130</sup> The same page where Jung bracketed a passage on the afterlife of ‘Egypto-Greek mysticism’ has a footnote where a certain ‘βιβλος σεληνιακή of Moses’ is claimed to correspond with ‘the *liber Lunae* of Hermes’.<sup>131</sup>

As *Poimandres* does not seem to be mentioned in *Transformations and Symbols of the Libido*, it is not certain whether these marginalia are yet another possible source for Philemon’s ‘Egypto-Hellenic atmosphere’ or indications of Jung’s attempt to make sense of Philemon retrospectively. An annotation made on page 361 of Jung’s copy of *Poimandres*, however, seems more telling. Jung bracketed a passage where Reitzenstein compares Zosimos’ visions with a vision of Hermes Trismegistus as an old man in possession of a book in the *Book of Crates* (a ninth-century Arabic alchemical treatise); Jung also wrote *senioris visio* (‘vision of an older man’) on the margin (see Fig. 5).<sup>132</sup> Another bracket was placed where Reitzenstein compares this vision of Hermes Trismegistus with a passage from the early Christian work *The Shepherd of Hermas* where the protagonist has a vision of a woman holding a book. These references overlap with the following ones Jung makes when discussing the archetype of the ‘wise old man’ in ‘Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious’ (1954):

Modern man, in experiencing this archetype, comes to that most ancient form of thinking as an autonomous activity whose object he is. Hermes Trismegistus or the Thoth of Hermetic Literature, Orpheus, the Poimandres (Shepherd

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., §389.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., §391.

<sup>129</sup> Jung & Jaffé, *MDR* (n. 18 above), p. 183.

<sup>130</sup> Reitzenstein, *Poimandres* (n. 85 above), p. 365.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., p. 190.

<sup>132</sup> For the French translation of the *Book of Crates* from which Reitzenstein quotes, see M. Berthelot, R. Duval, R. et al., eds., *La Chimie au moyen âge*. 3 vols, Paris, 1893, vol. 3, pp. 44–75.

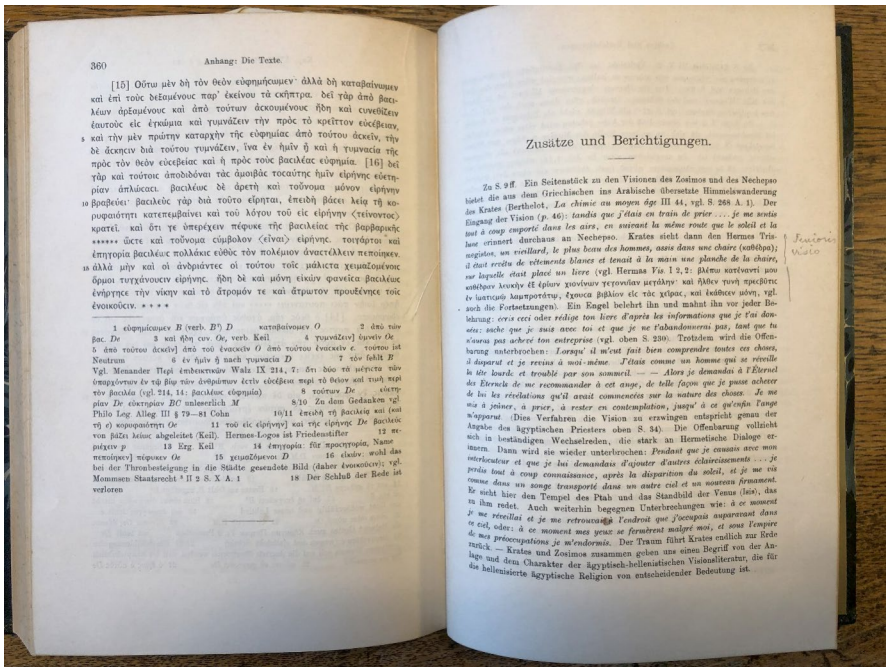


Fig. 5 Jung's personal copy of Reitzenstein, *Poimandres*, Leipzig, pp. 360-361

of men) and his near relation the Poimen of Hermes, are other formulations of the same experience. If the name “Lucifer” were not prejudicial, it would be a very suitable one for this archetype. But I have been content to call it the *archetype of the wise old man, or of meaning*.<sup>133</sup>

The reference to Hermes Trismegistus and those might signal that Jung's ‘*senioris visio*’ is a later annotation made in preparation for ‘Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious’. ‘Poimen of Hermes’ refers to the *The Shepherd of Hermes*: ‘Poimen’, of course, is a transliteration of ‘shepherd’ (ποιμήν), and ‘Hermes’ alludes to the associations made between this early Christian writing and Hermetic literature not only by Reitzenstein, but also by Mead in his *Thrice-Greatest Hermes* in the self-descriptive chapter “Hermas” and “Hermes”.<sup>134</sup> ‘Poimandres’ is the name of the figure that self-reveals to the protagonist of the writing from the Hermetic corpus that inspired the title of Reitzenstein’s work (*C. H.* 1, often referred to as ‘Poimandres’). In other words, Philemon is as much of a product of a number of readings that Jung undertook up to early 1914 as he is an underlying reference point in Jung’s subsequent readings of ancient revelatory literature in

<sup>133</sup> *CW* 9.1 (n. 1 above), §79. Likewise, in the protocols of Jung’s interviews with Jaffé: ‘Philemon is the spiritual aspect, he is “the meaning”’ (Jung, *MP* [n. 55 above], 28 June 1957).

<sup>134</sup> Reitzenstein, *Poimandres*, pp. 11–13; pp. 33–36; G. R. S. Mead, *Thrice-Greatest Hermes*, London and Benares, 1906, vol. 1, p. 369ff. Jung’s personal copy of this volume of Mead is annotated.

his search for an epistemologically credible way of presenting the findings of his self-experimentation.

## Conclusion

In the commentary following Philemon's first appearance in the *Red Book*, Jung earnestly says to the peasant turned teacher of magic: 'you are a vessel of fables.'<sup>135</sup> Indeed, Jung's refigured Philemon has proven to be an intriguing encapsulation of the wide-ranging literature Jung had been reading while preparing *Transformations and Symbols of the Libido*. Jung clearly negotiates the models of Philemon provided by Ovid and Goethe. Jung purges Mephistopheles's crime against Philemon and Baucis in *Faust* by reclaiming the dignified treatment they are given in the *Metamorphoses*: not only in an abstract sense by alluding to their sanctuary in the *Red Book*, but in a concrete sense by paying homage to Philemon in his Bollingen tower. At the heart of Philemon's refiguration is also a literature as composite as Jung's experience of him. Eclectic writings from the beginning of the Common Era such as the magical 'The Eighth Book of Moses' and the alchemical visions of Zosimos of Panopolis (as well as the scholarly interpretations they were given during Jung's time) are very likely to have played a role in layering Jung's Philemon with a very different type of paganism from the one in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. At the same time, Jung's subsequent engagement with this revelatory literature in his psychological works was deeply impacted by his encounters with Philemon. In fact, Jung seems to have found in this type of literature a way of indirectly addressing his experience of Philemon in his presentation of the archetypal manifestations of 'spirit' in his psychological writings. Other literary sources that go beyond the scope of the present article may also be at play, e.g. Shakespeare's Prospero, known for his magical books and staff, as well as for renouncing his magic in a speech greatly indebted to Medea's in the *Metamorphoses* (*Ov. Met.* VII.192–206).<sup>136</sup>

And yet, Jung's ever-changing relationship with Philemon is much more complex than the sheer reinvention of variegated literature. Philemon's appearance occurred in what was essentially a practical experiment, and Jung's later formulation of the archetype of the 'wise old man' was far from being based on canonical literature alone: it also took examples from folk fairytale, dream reporting, and his own therapeutic practice. In Jung's imagination, Philemon also seems to have been more than just a talking figure: in another passage that never made it into the calligraphic *Red Book*, Jung speculated that 'probably the most part of what I have written in the earlier part of this book was given to me by ΦΙΛΗΜΩΝ.'<sup>137</sup> 'This book' almost

<sup>135</sup> Jung, *LN* (n. 1 above), p. 411.

<sup>136</sup> W. Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, 5.1.33–57. See M. Dobson, ed., *The Oxford Companion to Shakespeare*, Oxford, 2011, pp. 470–471; S. J. Garrison, 'Medea's Afterlife: Encountering Ovid in *The Tempest*', *Ovid and Adaptation in Early Modern English Theatre*, ed. L. S. Starks, Edinburgh, 2019, pp. 113–128. Jung owned a 1947 English edition of Shakespeare's complete works.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 483, i.e. in 'Scrutinies' (see n. 64 above).



certainly refers to *Liber Novus*.<sup>138</sup> In retrospect, Jung seems to have considered Philemon to be at once a character within and a co-creator of *Liber Novus*. More remains to be said about Philemon's role in another creative work by Jung, namely the *Seven Sermons of the Dead* (1916). Further investigations of Philemon in Jung's creative writings can certainly shed further light into his significance within Jung's psychological works beyond the archetype of the 'wise old man' or 'spirit'. Without a doubt, Philemon still has a lot to teach us.

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<sup>138</sup> See Shamdasani in Jung, *LN* (n. 1 above), pp. 106–109 and n. 64 above.