

The Astrological World of Jung's *Liber Novus*

Daimons, Gods, and the Planetary Journey



LIZ GREENE

ROUTLEDGE

THE ASTROLOGICAL WORLD OF JUNG'S *LIBER NOVUS*

C.G. Jung's *The Red Book: Liber Novus*, published posthumously in 2009, explores Jung's own journey from an inner state of alienation and depression to the restoration of his soul, as well as offering a prophetic narrative of the collective human psyche as it journeys from unconsciousness to a greater awareness of its own inner dichotomy of good and evil. Jung utilised astrological symbols throughout to help him comprehend the personal as well as universal meanings of his visions.

In *The Astrological World of Jung's Liber Novus*, Liz Greene explores the planetary journey Jung portrayed in this remarkable work and investigates the ways in which he used astrological images and themes as an interpretive lens to help him understand the nature of his visions and the deeper psychological meaning behind them. Greene's analysis includes a number of mythic and archetypal elements, including the stories of Salome, Siegfried and Elijah, and demonstrates that astrology, as Jung understood and worked with it, is unquestionably one of the most important foundation stones of analytical psychology, and an essential part of understanding his legacy.

This unique study will appeal to analytical psychologists and Jungian psychotherapists, students and academics of Jungian and post-Jungian theory, the history of psychology, archetypal thought, mythology and folklore, the history of New Age movements, esotericism and psychological astrology.

Liz Greene is a Jungian analyst and professional astrologer who received her Diploma in Analytical Psychology from the Association of Jungian Analysts in London in 1980. She holds doctorates in both Psychology and History, and worked for a number of years as a tutor in the MA in Cultural Astronomy and Astrology at the University of Wales, Lampeter. She is the author of a number of books, some scholarly and some interpretive, on the relationships between psychology and astrology, Tarot, Kabbalah, and myth, and of *Jung's Studies in Astrology* (Routledge).

And as I was ascending the fourth step, I saw, to the east, one approaching, holding a sword in his hand. And another [came] behind him, bringing one adorned round about with signs, clad in white and comely to see, who was named the Meridian of the Sun. And as they drew near to the place of punishments, he who held the sword in his hand [said]: ‘Cut off his head, immolate his body, and cut his flesh into pieces, that it may first be boiled according to the method, and then delivered to the place of punishments’. Thereupon I awoke and said: ‘I have well understood, this concerns the liquids in the art of the metals’. And he who bore the sword in his hand said again: ‘You have completed the descent of the seven steps’.¹

—Zosimos

Astrologically . . . this process [alchemy] corresponds to an ascent through the planets from the dark, cold, distant Saturn to the sun . . . The ascent through the planetary spheres therefore meant something like a shedding of the characterological qualities indicated by the horoscope . . . The journey through the planetary houses, like the crossing of the great halls of the Egyptian underworld, therefore signifies the overcoming of a psychic obstacle, or of an autonomous complex, suitably represented by a planetary god or demon. Anyone who has passed through all the spheres is free from compulsion; he has won the crown of victory and become like a god.²

—C.G. Jung

Notes

- 1 Zosimos, *The Visions of Zosimos*, III.v, trans. A.S.B. Glover, from the French translation by C.E. Ruelle in Marcellin Berthelot, *Collection des anciens alchimistes grecs*, 3 volumes (Paris: G. Steinheil, 1887–88), pp. 117–42. This translation appears in the English translation of Jung, CW13, ¶85–87. For the German version of CW13, Jung translated Ruelle’s French into German himself.
- 2 Jung, CW14, ¶308.

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Daimons, Gods, and
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A NOTE ON REFERENCES

The works of C.G. Jung cited in the text are referenced in the endnotes by the number of the volume in *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, followed by the paragraph number. For example: Jung, CW13, ¶82–84. Full publishing information is given in the Bibliography. Cited works by Jung not included in the *Collected Works* are referenced in the endnotes by the main title, volume if applicable, and page number, with full publication details given in the Bibliography. For example: Jung, *Visions Seminars* I:23. Jung's autobiography, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, is referenced in the endnotes as *MDR*, with full publication details given in the Bibliography.

The works of Plato and other ancient authors cited in the text in an English translation are given in the endnotes according to the title of the work and its standard paragraph reference, with full references including translation and publication information given in the Bibliography. For example, Plato, *Symposium*, 52a–56c; Iamblichus, *De mysteriis*, I.21.

When a cited work has a lengthy subtitle, only the main title is given in the endnotes along with publication details and page reference, but the full title is given in the Bibliography.

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INTRODUCTION

Close encounters of the daimonic kind

They [the daimons] are the envoys and interpreters that ply between heaven and earth, flying upward with our worship and our prayers, and descending with the heavenly answers and commandments . . . They form the medium of the prophetic arts, of the priestly rites of sacrifice, initiation, and incantation, of divination and of sorcery, for the divine will not mingle directly with the human, and it is only through the mediation of the spirit world that man can have any intercourse, whether waking or sleeping, with the gods. And the man who is versed in such matters is said to have spiritual powers.¹

—Plato

What I call coming to terms with the unconscious the alchemists called ‘meditation’. Ruland says of this: ‘Meditation: The name of an Internal Talk of one person with another who is invisible, as in the invocation of the Deity, or communion with one’s self, or with one’s good angel’. This somewhat optimistic definition must immediately be qualified by a reference to the adept’s relations with his *spiritus familiaris*, who we can only hope was a good one.²

—C.G. Jung

In the autumn of 2009, a new work by C.G. Jung, titled *The Red Book: Liber Novus*, was posthumously published in a beautiful hardback edition, with the original calligraphic text and paintings impeccably reproduced along with a translation, appendices, and voluminous notes.³ Close to the time of his death in 1961, Jung emphasised the crucial importance of the period of his life when he was engaged in creating *Liber Novus*:

The years when I was pursuing my inner images were the most important in my life – in them everything essential was decided. It all began then; the

2 Close encounters

later details are only supplements and clarifications of the material that burst forth from the unconscious, and at first swamped me. It was the *prima materia* for a lifetime's work.⁴

Liber Novus, known as *The Red Book* because of its red leather binding, was Jung's careful revision of a series of private diaries, known as the *Black Books*. He worked continuously on the material from 1913 – the time of his public break with Freud – to 1932. Virtually every page of the work contains a meticulously executed painted image, and the calligraphic writing, mimicking a medieval manuscript complete with illuminated letters at the start of each section, is itself a remarkable piece of craftsmanship. The dominant narrative of *Liber Novus* is Jung's journey from an inner state of alienation and depression to the restoration of his soul, through the long and painful process of integrating a seemingly irreconcilable conflict within his own nature: the dichotomy between reason and revelation, outer and inner worlds, facts and prophecies, and between the scientist and the visionary, both of whom he experienced as authentic, demanding, and mutually exclusive dimensions of his own being. But the resolution of Jung's personal conflict is only one dimension of the work. *Liber Novus* is also a prophetic narrative of the collective human psyche as it journeys from unconsciousness to a greater awareness of its own inner dichotomy of good and evil, on the eve of the passage from one great astrological Aion, that of Pisces, into the next, that of Aquarius.

During the period of his life when Jung was creating this extraordinary visionary work, he was deeply engaged in the study of a number of religious currents from antiquity. The extant literature generated by these currents – Gnostic, Hermetic, Platonic and Neoplatonic, Jewish, Orphic, Stoic, Mithraic – hint at or directly describe a cosmos symbolised by, and infused with, celestial patterns reflecting what was understood as *Heimarmene*: the astral compulsions that constitute fate. Jung referred to this ancient concept of fate frequently in his work, and he was also thoroughly immersed in the study of astrology, although this crucial dimension of his work is rarely discussed in the existing biographical literature.⁵ Inspired in part by the ritual practices described in late antique religious texts as a means of individual transformation, Jung began to formulate a psychotherapeutic technique that he later called 'active imagination'. This approach to the unconscious, which Jung preferred to articulate in psychological rather than religious language, appropriated methods systematically developed and described by the Neoplatonic philosopher-magicians of late antiquity, who were themselves well-versed in astrological lore. Although psychological terminology may be more appropriate for modernity, active imagination is virtually indistinguishable from what these older authors referred to as theurgy: 'god-work', or ritual practices facilitating a transformative encounter between the human soul and the realm of the divine through the medium of the imagination.

The visions of the *Black Books* were the concrete fruits of Jung's experiments in this liminal magico-psychological realm. His introduction to, and immersion in, astrological studies, as well as his development of the technique of active imagination,

are discussed in depth in my book *Jung's Studies in Astrology*. His involvement with astrology and its concomitant philosophical, religious, and theurgic currents appears to have helped him to contain, understand, and integrate the 'teeming chaos' of the visions he experienced and transcribed, first in the *Black Books* and then in the final, polished form he called *Liber Novus*.⁶ Jung's astrology was utilised in a number of ways: as a tool to ascertain innate psychological structures or 'complexes' and their archetypal roots within the individual and the collective; as a method of shedding light on other symbolic systems such as alchemy and Tarot; and as a form of hermeneutics to help him interpret his visions and relate them to both his own horoscope and the imminent psychological and religious changes in the collective psyche that he continued to anticipate with trepidation from the first decades of the twentieth century to the time of his death in 1961. Astrology also seems to have contributed inestimably to the formulation of his most important psychological theories: the archetypes, the psychological types, the complexes, and the process of individuation, which he believed could lead to an eventual integration of the whole personality.

Jung attributed the ideas behind all his later work to the period during which he worked on *Liber Novus*. Given the importance that astrology held for him, then and throughout his life, it is vital that some understanding of Jung's immersion in this liminal sphere of study and practice is included in any assessment of his life and work. The sources from which Jung drew his astrological knowledge, the religious and philosophical texts that he absorbed and cited in his letters, papers, and early publications as well as in the *Collected Works*, and the evidence of the depth of his involvement provided by the large collection of astrological works in his library and the astrological documents and horoscopes in his private archives, are covered in detail in *Jung's Studies in Astrology*. *Liber Novus* provides another and equally illuminating route into the ways in which Jung used his knowledge of astrology – particularly the mythic and symbolic dimensions – to structure, understand, and articulate the chaotic visionary material he recorded in the *Black Books*. *The Astrological World of Jung's Liber Novus* is an exploration of the planetary journey Jung portrayed in his remarkable work, and an investigation into the ways in which he utilised astrological images, many of them reflecting ancient theurgic and religious contexts, as an interpretive lens that could provide a symbolic framework within which the final polishing, honing, and illustrating of *Liber Novus* could be achieved.

Liber Novus is not an astrological textbook. There are no overt delineations of zodiacal signs, no direct references to planetary configurations, and no recognisable horoscopic interpretations. These, I have argued throughout this book, are all amply present in *Liber Novus*, but not in the 'cookbook' form that astrological students so often rely on as they learn to interpret horoscopes. Nor is *Liber Novus* an intellectually constructed, thinly disguised portrayal of the archetypal planetary journey of the soul that interested Jung so deeply in the Gnostic, Neoplatonic, and Hermetic literature of antiquity and the alchemical and literary works of the medieval and early modern periods, and which he equated with the individuation process. There is a planetary journey in *Liber Novus*, but it is intensely personal and follows no recognisable order of steps or stages. It more closely resembles a Wagnerian

opera with dashes of Mozart's *Magic Flute* thrown in, using an enormous range of musical instruments and a repetitive current of specific *leitmotifs* that weave a complex work impossible to reduce to any single tune. It is unlikely that Jung set about intending to create any kind of deliberate planetary structure in *Liber Novus*; rather, it seems, from his own descriptions, that the planetary daimons relevant to his natal horoscope pursued him, clothed in the garments of the inner conflicts of his personal life.

Despite the deeply personal nature of *Liber Novus*, Jung also recognised the universality as well as the intensely individual dimension of his visions, associating them with the kind of creative outpouring he believed to emerge from the artist when primordial experiences 'rend from top to bottom the curtain upon which is painted the picture of an ordered world'.⁷ *Liber Novus* presents a celestial soul-journey enacted through a cast of characters who are both celestial and earthy, and it describes encounters with what, in the late antique world, would have been understood as planetary daimons or planetary gods. *Liber Novus* reflects Jung's own journey from fragmentation – 'my soul having flown away from me'⁸ – to unity, and from the strictures of a determined and lopsided scientific rationality to what he understood as a rediscovery of the completeness of his full nature. It is a work full of pain, crises, despair, and hopeful vision, reflecting in different ways and on different levels the profound internal suffering of a man who was both a clear and rational thinker and a poetic visionary, and who could not, for many decades, find a way of reconciling these opposites within himself.

Liber Novus is also a magical work. I have described this dimension of the book in detail in *Jung's Studies in Astrology*. Rachel Elior, a scholar of late antique Jewish esoteric literature, describes magic as those ritual practices specifically concerned with developing and maintaining 'the system of bonds and relationships between the revealed and concealed worlds'.⁹ By Jung's own admission, this development and maintenance of bonds and relationships between revealed consciousness and the unrevealed unconscious was his primary concern, although for obvious reasons he preferred to use psychological language to describe it. Suggesting that active imagination is a theurgic ritual is not likely to appeal to today's more scientifically inclined segments of the psychological community, and not even within the apparently more open-minded world of analytical psychology; and it would hardly have won Jung applause in the psychiatric milieu in which he worked in the early decades of the twentieth century. It was through friends such as the Theosophist G.R.S. Mead and the astrologer John M. Thorburn, whom I have discussed at length in *Jung's Studies in Astrology*, that he found the kind of intellectual support he needed for his forays into the liminal world.

Jung was willing to explore any approach to the human psyche that yielded knowledge and helpful results, including the apparently disreputable worlds of astrology, magic, spiritualism, Theosophy, and ancient mystery cults. He drew on a large number of late antique and medieval works of magic and theurgy, and utilised ritual and its attendant symbols to invoke and explore his visions, always understanding these approaches as tools or techniques, and always pursuing that

psychological goal of wholeness or integration that he defined as the Self. The text and paintings of *Liber Novus* are replete with what the Neoplatonists referred to as *sunthemata*: those symbols that were believed to be the ‘tokens’ of a divine essence that the planetary gods themselves had embedded in manifest reality, and through which, utilising the instrument of the imagination as a bridge between human and divine, the individual could safely approach the eternal realm of what Jung understood as the archetypes. These *sunthemata* are not only magical; they are also astrological, in keeping with the ancient idea of cosmic sympathies that Jung later defined as ‘synchronicity’.

Jung was also not averse to learning whatever he could about the deeper levels of the psyche from the increasing interest in ritual magic that was burgeoning in the world around him in the early decades of the twentieth century, particularly those currents connected with the British ‘occult revival’ and its practitioners. G.R.S. Mead wrote extensively, not only about older ritual practices in Gnostic, Orphic, Hermetic, and Mithraic contexts, but also about the magical work emerging in his own Theosophical milieu. Various works by members of occult societies such as the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn provided further insights into the use of ritual for the generation of altered states of consciousness. The writings of the more notorious British magicians of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers, Aleister Crowley, Dion Fortune – do not appear in Jung’s library, although this does not necessarily mean he was unfamiliar with them, particularly since he acquired the works of other members of the Golden Dawn and its offshoots, such as Arthur Machen, A.E. Waite, and Algernon Blackwood. But Dion Fortune, who was herself strongly influenced by Jung’s early publications in English, expressed ideas about the purposes of ritual magic that might have come, with only slight alterations in a more neutral terminology, from the pen of Jung himself:

The racial past lives on in the subconscious mind of each of us . . . but it can be evoked to visible appearance in a manner which no orthodox psychologist is acquainted with. It is this evocation of the racial past which is the key to certain forms of ceremonial magic which have as their aim the evocation of Principalities and Powers.¹⁰

Jung did not believe, as many sociologists do today, that symbols are social constructs. Like the Neoplatonists and, closer to his own time, the German Romantic writers, he perceived symbols as ‘encountered’ or ‘discovered’, rather than generated by human activity to provide a form of social cohesion. For Jung, symbols were pregnant with an intrinsic ontological meaning, independent of culture or historical epoch; and astrological images, like those of alchemy, could therefore serve as imaginal intermediaries between consciousness and the unconscious as effectively today as they did in antiquity. Astrological images abound in *Liber Novus*, not only in the characters themselves, but also in the landscapes in which Jung encounters them. It seems that, like his Neoplatonic predecessors, Jung also understood

the evocative application of symbols in the service of enlarging consciousness as a viable tool to facilitate the breaking the chains of astral fate:

To the same degree . . . that individuation implies autonomy, this ‘compulsion’ of the complexes and the stars falls away.¹¹

Jung did not pursue this ‘autonomy’, for himself or for his patients, solely in order to achieve personal power, success, and worldly happiness, although, being human, no doubt such motives helped to fuel his efforts. But he viewed the process of individuation as a way of working with the unconscious compulsions symbolised by the natal horoscope in order to live more creatively its innate patterns and the complete individual it portrays. In order to achieve this, he seems to have placed great emphasis on developing the maximum possible cooperation with what the Neoplatonists understood as the personal daimon or ‘Master of the House’, whom Jung, in *Liber Novus*, called his ‘psychagogue’, Philemon.

The raw material for the three parts of *Liber Novus* was written between 1913 and 1916, and this ‘enigmatic stream’ was then revised and reshaped over a period of nearly twenty years.¹² The initial outpouring was genuinely spontaneous, although it was clearly impregnated, albeit unintentionally, with themes and images from the many mythological, philosophical, and astrological texts Jung had been reading. However, although the visions were spontaneous, the practical procedure of ‘exercises in the emptying of consciousness’, to allow the images to constellate and develop, was intentional.¹³ The first spontaneous ‘layer’ of *Liber Novus* seems to have lacked any deliberate inclusion of specific astrological symbolism or, for that matter, any intellectual reflection on the psychological meaning of the visions.¹⁴ They were simply recorded as they emerged. The more self-conscious aspects of the work, forming a kind of second ‘layer’, developed from 1916 onward, and it is here that specific astrological themes and *sunthemata* began to appear in a more constructed fashion, along with reflections on the psychological dimension of the visions.

Astrologically meaningful allusions involving Sun and Moon, as well as zodiacally significant creatures such as the lion, can be discerned in the primary, spontaneous ‘layer’ of *Liber Novus*. But Sun, Moon, and animals such as lions and bulls are not limited to zodiacal associations; viewed as symbols, they reflect a vast repository of meanings and connections to which astrology provides only one, albeit extremely rich and dynamic, point of entry. Although Jung was convinced that astrological cycles provided the basis for the earliest myths, and that astrology was ‘indispensable for a proper understanding of mythology’,¹⁵ it is unhelpful, and contrary to Jung’s own way of thinking, to assume that the only valid method of approaching myth’s manifold meanings is through astrological symbolism. Moreover, as Jung was already steeped in astrology from 1911 onward, the appearance of astrologically relevant material in the spontaneous layer of *Liber Novus* is no more surprising or contrived than if an astrological motif had appeared in a dream, since the basic analytic approach to dreams – and Jung understood his visions as ‘waking dreams’ – assumes that they use the stuff of the individual’s everyday personal life, including his or her spheres of intellectual interest, to clothe their deeper meaning.

The deliberate inclusion of precise astrological symbols surrounding particular characters seems to be related to Jung's use of astrology as a form of hermeneutics in the second 'layer' of *Liber Novus*. Jung understood hermeneutics as a method of

Adding more analogies to that already given by the symbol . . . The initial symbol is much enlarged and enriched by this procedure, the result being a highly complex and many-sided picture.¹⁶

Astrological symbols, used as a means of 'adding more analogies' to his visions, helped Jung to make psychological sense of them and connect them, not only to the patterns of his birth horoscope, but also to the larger cycles of the collective, such as the astrological Aions and their concomitant changes in religious representations. In fact, *Liber Novus* begins with a painting depicting the movement of the equinoctial point from the constellation of Pisces into that of Aquarius, the symbolic celestial reflection of an imminent changing of the Aions;¹⁷ Jung seems to have perceived his personal journey within the context of a greater collective journey that was about to arrive at what he understood as a dangerous crisis point. That Jung utilised astrological *sunthemata* in a form of theurgic work with the figures in *Liber Novus* is not mutually exclusive with his use of astrology as a hermeneutic tool to help him comprehend the personal as well as universal meanings of his visions, or, at the same time, as a method of understanding his own as well as his patients' psychic compulsions through the patterns of the birth horoscope. It is a reflection of the depth and extent of his astrological understanding that he was able to encompass the magical, symbolic, technical, psychological, and characterological dimensions of astrological symbolism without needing to restrict astrology to one 'right' or 'true' approach.

Although many of the figures in *Liber Novus* are identified by a name or appellation related to a mythic narrative, they were, at least by the time Jung began developing the second 'layer', understood by him to be aspects of his own psyche as well as archetypal dominants. When he wished to refer to his ego-consciousness or everyday self in the text, he referred to this self as 'I'. Some of the figures are minor supporting actors in the drama, while others play more dominant roles. Not all are given a visual description or illustrated by an image. Following is a list of the major *dramatis personae*, in the order of their appearance:¹⁸

- | | |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1 Jung's Soul | 12 The Librarian |
| 2 The Spirit of the Depths | 13 The Cook |
| 3 Siegfried the Hero | 14 Ezechiel the Anabaptist |
| 4 Elijah | 15 The Professor |
| 5 Salome | 16 The Superintendent |
| 6 The Red One | 17 The Fool |
| 7 The Old Scholar | 18 Phanes |
| 8 The Scholar's Daughter | 19 Philemon |
| 9 The Tramp | 20 The Serpent |
| 10 The Anchorite Ammonius | 21 The Hunchback |
| 11 Izdubar/the Sun | 22 Satan |

Although this specific number of figures may seem peculiarly relevant to scholars of Kabbalah or practitioners of the Tarot – there are twenty-two letters in the Hebrew alphabet, and twenty-two Major Arcana in the Tarot deck – the list of figures can easily be expanded, as there are other characters who appear briefly and then vanish without any direct encounter. In Book One of *Liber Novus*, for example, there is mention of a Scarab as well as a Youth, a Killed Man, and the Spirit of the Time. These figures are noted as part of a particular vision, but Jung engages in no dialogue with them. However, the relative brevity of the appearances of many of the figures is not necessarily a measure of their importance to Jung himself. Parallels between the figures, the painted images, and various symbolic systems apart from astrology, such as the Tarot and the Kabbalah, can be found in *Liber Novus*. Jung's painting of the unmistakably lunar 'veiled woman', for example, bears many similarities to A.E. Waite's image of the High Priestess of the Major Arcana of the Tarot, as well as to the Kabbalistic *Shekhinah*, who mirrors all the divine potencies – the ten *sefirot* – through the manifestations of Nature.¹⁹

These recognisable resonances with a number of symbolic systems are unlikely to be coincidental, as most belong to the second 'layer' of the work. Sonu Shamdasani has commented that the impact of Jung's mythological studies is clearly evident in *Liber Novus*, and many of the images and ideas expressed in the work 'derive directly from his readings'.²⁰ The same may be said of the astrological, Kabbalistic, and Tarot motifs that appear in relation to the figures. From Jung's own perspective, these parallels were relevant because the mythic human soul-journey – portrayed in different ways by the Major Arcana of the Tarot, the 'paths' of the twenty-two Hebrew letters connecting the ten *sefirot* of the Kabbalistic Tree, the stages of the alchemical *opus*, and the soul's ascent through the planetary spheres – is an imaginal expression of that archetypal interior process of development that Jung later called individuation, clothed in forms appropriate for particular cultural contexts at particular epochs of history.

In a review of *Liber Novus* written soon after its publication in October 2009, the American analytical psychologist Murray Stein suggested that an '*Agon*' (from the Greek *αγων*, a 'contest') forms the core of *Liber Novus*: 'Jung is wrestling with angels, light and dark', and each figure 'represents an aspect of Jung's psyche'.²¹ The interior, subjective dimension of these figures is inarguable – they are, after all, imaginal expressions of the psyche of one individual. But the more universal aspects of these beings are equally relevant, particularly in the context of Jung's deep involvement with late antique Gnostic, Hermetic, Orphic, Jewish, Mithraic, and Neoplatonic sources during the period he worked on *Liber Novus*. Jung understood these figures to be cosmological as well as personal, although he tended to use the term 'archetypal' to describe them. This apparent paradox of a simultaneously deeply individual yet universal pattern lies at the basis of Jung's understanding of the archetypes.

There is no reason to question the fact that the characters of *Liber Novus* were initially spontaneous or deliberately invoked fantasies that were allowed to develop in their own way, rather than beginning their lives as calculated conscious

constructions.²² Between 1913 and 1916, it seems that Jung was, in the language of the Neoplatonists, in the grip of a powerful daimon who demanded both images and words to make its voice heard. Jung's deeply disturbing experience of writing *Septem sermones ad mortuos* – Book Three of *Liber Novus*, which he later titled 'Scrutinies' – is testimony to just how ferocious a grip that daimon exercised.²³ But he continued to refine and shape the images until 1932, as well as honing the text and presenting it in calligraphic form for the final product he called *Liber Novus*. The care and detail with which he adorned his paintings with meaningful symbols created a fertile marriage between revelatory states and the deliberate conscious insertion of motifs significant not only to Jung personally, but also to those familiar with the lineage of these symbols through their historical unfoldment. Jung seems to have been fully aware of what he was trying to achieve with *Liber Novus*. In 1922, while he was still working on the text and images, he gave a lecture to the Society for German Language and Literature in Zürich on the subject of analytical psychology and its relation to poetry, and offered his views on the creative process:²⁴

The creative process, so far as we are able to follow it at all, consists in the unconscious activation of an archetypal image, and in elaborating and shaping this image into the finished work. By giving it shape, the artist translates it into the language of the present, and so makes it possible for us to find our way back to the deepest springs of life.²⁵

The images may be interpreted in many ways and through a number of symbolic and psychological frameworks, and it appears that Jung used these various frameworks himself to bring clarity to the material. The following chapters are an exploration of Jung's use of astrology to amplify the raw images of *Liber Novus*. But they are not meant to demonstrate that only astrological symbolism is relevant to the work; Jung's understanding of astrology was inclusive rather than exclusive, and embraced many related mythic and mantic approaches. Like dreams or the subtleties of Kabbalistic texts, *Liber Novus* will undoubtedly continue to be an inspiration for a variety of hermeneutical approaches by analytical psychologists, historians, astrologers, and magicians. But the astrological attributes of many of the figures are recognisable to anyone acquainted with astrology's history, language, and symbolism, and it seems that Jung deliberately inserted these attributes as he slowly refined his work. He 'recognised' the planetary figures when they emerged, and later gave them traditional symbolic attributes in keeping with their nature.

Jung was entirely capable of producing the kind of characterological descriptions found in the astrological textbooks of his time, and many of the figures in *Liber Novus* display temperamental qualities immediately recognisable in works by astrologers such as Alan Leo, whose books were of immense importance for Jung's study of astrology. The figure of The Red One, for example, is portrayed by Jung as cynical, critical, provocative, and inclined to argue about religious matters, and this is precisely what Alan Leo had to say about the planet Mars placed in the zodiacal sign of Sagittarius, as it was in Jung's natal horoscope.²⁶ But beyond this

kind of characterological analysis, Jung's method of amplifying symbols through other symbols, which he regularly applied to the dream material of his patients,²⁷ is also evident in his astrological interpretations. By relating a planet or zodiacal sign to mythic images and stories, he transformed the astrological signifier into a dynamic narrative revealing the core of an archetypal potency, with its intrinsic teleology and its multiple possibilities of expression.

It would appear that Jung deliberately avoided presenting the cast of characters in *Liber Novus* through direct astrological statements about the planets and their meanings. He was inclined to conceal explicit astrological references beneath a cloak of related symbols that revealed the same meaning but linked astrology to a broader mythic framework. This allowed his paintings greater aesthetic fluency and, perhaps equally important to him, provided some protection against the criticism of his colleagues. In the cosmological map he called *Systema Mundi*, for example, discussed in greater detail below in Chapter 7, the seven 'star-gods', designated by their traditional astrological glyphs in his original drawing in the *Black Books*, were represented as a group in the polished final painting by the *menorah* or seven-armed candelabrum, which the Alexandrian Jewish Platonic philosopher Philo explicitly described in the first century CE as a symbol of the planetary system:

And from this candlestick there proceeded six branches, three on each side, projecting from the candlestick in the centre, so as altogether to complete the number of seven . . . being symbols of those seven stars which are called planets by those men who are versed in natural philosophy.²⁸

Jung was familiar with Philo's writings and knew precisely what he was doing when he inserted the *menorah* into his painting. He was also familiar with the work of the astrologer Max Heindel, who explicitly equated the 'Seven Spirits before the Throne' with the 'Seven-Branched Candlestick' of the Jewish Tabernacle and the 'seven lightgivers or planets'.²⁹ For those unfamiliar with the planetary relevance of these celestial 'Spirits', however, the seven-armed candelabrum bears no astrological significance, and is either a traditional symbol of Judaism or simply something that provides light.

In *Liber Novus*, some of the planets do not seem to be clearly represented by a single character, but display their traditional attributes through several different figures; other planets do not appear to be present at all. Some of the characters combine the symbolism of more than one planet; some, such as the Hunchback – 'a plain, ugly man with a contorted face' who has poisoned his parents and his wife 'to honor God'³⁰ – do not have any recognisable astrological connections at all, but appear to have a greater affinity with one or another of the Major Arcana of the Tarot. Jung's Hunchback is 'a hanged man' who may be in Hell but has not encountered the devil. He could have a relationship to the Major Arcana card of the Hanged Man – Jung's interest in the Tarot is amply supported by his perception of the cards as a portrayal of the archetypal soul-journey³¹ – despite the fact that A.E. Waite, whose Tarot deck Jung seems to have favoured, declared that the card of

the Hanged Man is concerned with ‘the sacred Mystery of Death’ and the ‘glorious Mystery of Resurrection’, a far loftier description than Jung’s portrayal of a foolish and well-meaning but unintentionally destructive and self-destructive individual.³² The names of the seven traditional planets are never mentioned in *Liber Novus*, with the exception of Sun and Moon. However, the visual attributes, personalities, and landscape settings of figures such as The Red One, Salome, Izdubar, and Philemon reveal specific astrological associations that can be found in the modern astrological texts Jung was reading at the time, as well as in older works such as Ptolemy’s *Tetrabiblos*, with which Jung was familiar. Any effort at interpreting the astrology of *Liber Novus* requires a multifaceted approach, rather than a search for obvious parallels.³³

Astrologers hoping that the order of the figures whom Jung met will prove to reflect the traditional order of the planets in terms of their distance from the Earth – Moon, Mercury, Venus, Sun, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn – will be disappointed to find that Jung’s imaginal encounters do not adhere to any conventional astrological scheme. The order of his meetings with these figures seems to reflect a highly individual and spontaneous process of psychological confrontation moving toward an eventual goal of integration, later amplified through the hermeneutics of a symbolic planetary journey unique to the individual experiencing it, rather than a constructed sequence of universal stages or processes. The context is not that of technical horoscopic analysis, unless the horoscope is seen – as Jung himself saw it – as the symbolic map of a dynamic process beginning with the qualities of time reflected in the moment of birth, and unfolding its meaning in a labyrinthine pattern over the course of a lifetime. But if Jung’s gradual refining of *Liber Novus* reflects the intentional interpolation of astrological symbols representing his own highly individual planetary soul-journey, his disregard for the traditional planetary order has earlier precedents, especially the celestial ascent narratives of the Gnostics and the Mithraic initiates, with which he became deeply familiar during the time of writing *Liber Novus*. The highly subjective nature of these late antique narratives reflects not only specific cultural elements, but also the particular predisposition of the individual or group of individuals producing the narrative.³⁴ Henry Corbin (1903–1978), a renowned scholar of Islamic esotericism whose work was strongly influenced by Jung, commented that the cosmic ‘dramaturgy’ of the celestial ascent as portrayed in late antique and medieval texts is completely unrelated to any ‘pre-scientific’ astronomical explanation of the cosmos; it is a mode of comprehension that both transcends and precedes such external perceptions.³⁵ This might also be said of the soul-journey of *Liber Novus*. Because there is no recognised planetary or zodiacal order in which the figures in *Liber Novus* emerge, and because single planetary themes are often developed through more than one figure, the explorations in the following chapters of this book are also not arranged in any traditional order, but focus on particular characters and their relationships to other characters, and to Jung himself, in terms of the importance they seem to hold in the overall narrative.

The figures of *Liber Novus* are incorrigibly mutable, as befits living psychic entities. Some of them enjoy a series of incarnations in various guises, and they cross and recross each other’s paths and, at certain moments in the narrative, become

virtually indistinguishable from one another. Although there are many more figures in *Liber Novus* than there are planets, some are not as different from each other as they might seem. The figure of Elijah, for example, who appears early in Book One of *Liber Novus*, eventually emerges as Philemon, as Jung himself later noted,³⁶ and absorbs and transforms elements of the figures of the Old Scholar, the Librarian, and the solitary Anchorite, Ammonius, *en route*. All these *personae* present multiple aspects, dark and light, of the *senex* or ‘old man’, who, as Jung acknowledged, is invariably identified in alchemical iconography with the planetary god Saturn.³⁷ The giant Izdubar, who initially appears to Jung as a solar hero modelled after the Babylonian hero Gilgamesh, transforms into the Sun-god and then reappears as the Orphic deity Phanes; and in Jung’s first encounter with Izdubar, the giant bears the bull’s horns that Jung first described in *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, and initially painted in 1914, as an attribute of Philemon.³⁸

These figures do not embody a fixed astral fate. Astral fate, for Jung, was experienced as psychological compulsion, and to the extent that the figures in *Liber Novus* embody Jung’s own unconscious compulsions, their transformations reflect a gradual process of consciousness and integration. The figures seem to be images of archetypal principles specifically relevant to Jung’s life and, not coincidentally, to his horoscope. They bear mythic attributes as well as personal ones because they are archetypal:

The primordial image, or archetype, is a figure – be it a daemon, a human being, or a process – that constantly recurs in the course of history and appears wherever creative fantasy is freely expressed. Essentially, therefore, it is a mythological figure.³⁹

Jung’s figures are never static; they relate to each other in constantly changing ways, and exhibit many faces. And Jung himself, throughout *Liber Novus*, achieves new insights and experiences transformations through his encounters with them. Yet through Jung’s use of astrological hermeneutics, the figures become linked with his own birth chart, sometimes very specifically, and reflect his reliance on what Ptolemy referred to as the ‘seed’ moment, anchored in the unique qualities of time inherent in the moment of birth and bearing within it the ‘final cause’ of its existence: to become that which it has always potentially been.

For to the seed is given once and for all at the beginning such and such qualities by the endowment of the ambient [the heavens]; and even though it may change as the body subsequently grows, since by natural process it mingles with itself in the process of growth only matter which is akin to itself, thus it resembles even more closely the type of its initial quality.⁴⁰

Bearing planetary *sunthemata* in the details and colours of their clothing, physiognomy, and landscape settings, the figures of *Liber Novus* are daimons rather than personality traits, and their actions in Jung’s narrative depend on the nature of his