

The truth is out there, somewhere ...

Ronald Hayman's biography of C.G. Jung

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'Become who you are' does not imply that we should become smooth, harmonious and polished, but rather that we should become increasingly aware of what we are and of what is voiced by our personality and all its rough edges.

– Verena Kast (1992)

Why don't they understand me?

C G Jung, quoted in Jensen (1982), p 3

Ronald Hayman: *A life of Jung* (Bloomsbury, 1999)

There's something about biographies, stories about people's lives sometimes told by themselves, that seems to appeal to the public at large. If we are to believe Robin Dunbar (1997), these books, classified as non-fiction, are second only to novels in general popularity.

Some sceptics might say that biographies are often uncomfortably close to fiction, the written equivalent of a movie "based on a true story", a proposition some who have been written about in this way might support. For me, "based on a true story" means "don't expect any facts."

Others, like Arnold Ludwig (1997), point to each biographer's particular focus on the person they have chosen to study, observing that entirely different profiles of the same individual may be built up. If you are a post-modernist, this is no big deal; postmodernism is, after all, a literary creation. In some ways, that's a recipe for sloppy research and over-involvement of the author in the life being examined.

If you're interested in the notion of a core self as in Jung's typology, for instance, then this view is clearly less than satisfactory. Type can in fact give you an insight into a person's life otherwise not apparent.

Peter Guralnick's acclaimed study of Elvis Presley (1994), for instance, indicates to me clear preferences of ISFP, and, with his background, helps put Presley's life in context in terms of understanding his response to various situations, as well as indicating what might be a fact, and what might not.

Interestingly in the field of rock music, as in other fields, setting the record straight seems to be of importance. Al Kooper, a journeyman of

seminal influence in the field as a musician, producer and arranger (Dylan's 'Like a Rolling Stone'; Blood Sweat & Tears; Lynyrd Skynyrd etc) uses his updated autobiography (1998) to tell it like it is, sounding much like an STP as he names names and says what he did and didn't do, as well as what others did and didn't. John Cale, of the Velvet Underground and later solo escapades, does much the same thing in recounting his musical life, but from an NTP perspective. These are two of a number of examples.

C.G. Jung didn't want a biography written at all and his somewhat ghosted autobiography (the level depending on who you read), *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* was, like the C.G. Jung Institute in Zurich, produced and approved under pressure in the knowledge that people would write and talk about him anyway. His life probably has more things in common with Kooper's experience with women, for instance, than what one might think from this text.

Freud, of course, also has his hagiographers and detractors, and it's no surprise that the archives of both men won't be opened to researchers for some years. That leaves space for speculation by some writers; in Jung's case notably by Richard Noll (e.g. 1997), whose work suffers from inadequate comprehension of some of the symbolic material he addresses. Stevens (1999) is one who has addressed and refuted the more controversial of Noll's assertions.

There's a long list of biographers of Jung, each with their own purpose. Of his supporters, for instance, Barbara Hannah's work (1991) is genial and personal; Anthony Storr (1995) is somewhat psychoanalytical (as you would expect); Marie-Louise von Franz (1998) doesn't really refer to Jung the person at all; while Anthony Stevens (1999) chooses to my mind the most successful attempt at explaining this man, his life and his ideas.

There are other biographies and snippets, from those who knew him and those who did not. More often than not Jung has been assessed in print by those who see him as a renegade from the true wisdom of Freud, a view unsustainable historically in my opinion, notwithstanding its being presented as history as it was.

The latest cab off the rank in interpreting Jung is Ronald Hayman's *A life of Jung*. Hayman seems to be a professional biographer, mostly of literary people (Beckett, Proust, Pinter), with some other books on plays, acting and so forth (his original profession). That background didn't inspire my confidence before opening the book, as it looked like it might be Jung as celebrity being examined.

In the age of the celebrity, of course, salacious material is of prime importance. Hayman's biography was announced in part earlier this year by an excerpt in *The Age's* 'Good Weekend' entitled 'On the couch with Carl' (Jung didn't use one; his patients sat on chairs), focusing on Freud, and on Jung's liaisons with women in a not entirely accurate fashion. Not a good omen.

The book itself comes with an *X-Files* style cover which blacks out Jung's face against a greenish background, suggesting that his interest in the paranormal might be a focus. And it is, unfortunately without understanding of historical context. After all, Alfred Deakin, Prime Minister of Australia and a contemporary of Jung, was a spiritualist.

Hayman's initial prose is quite startling: a feeling of urgency and action, before we get down to the regular details of Jung's early life; then for some reason it disappears, an indication he may not be in control of his subject.

Here the interpretation is at once psycho-analytical and extremely critical. The young Jung, for instance, is criticised for not valuing his father's intellect. But intellect is different for different people. Jung was unable to receive adequate answers from his father, a Minister of the Swiss Reform Church, on issues of concern to him, such as the doctrine of the Trinity.

Understanding Jung as an INTP, as a matter of fact, would probably have helped. A lot of what is pathologised by Hayman in Jung's early life in particular seems normal INTP behaviour to me; other bits inferior function.

This flavour extends throughout the book. Many of Hayman's judgements (usually brief sentences) are unsustainable to me or not really connected with the text, and I believe this tactic detracts from the book. I saw no indication that he knew what he was talking about in terms of knowledge. It also becomes clearer the longer the book goes that he seems to be less sure about the psychological language he uses. This isn't the plain English version of Jung's life.

Hayman really struggles with much of the Freud–Jung period; the prose seems more of a cut-and-paste and for the first time you get the idea that he had a deadline to meet. He also does funny things, such as introducing William James as the elder brother of Henry James (conventionally you'd do the reverse) indicating that he doesn't really understand the former's status in the world of psychology at all. Other commentators have done this period better.

Perhaps this is an indication of Hayman's lack of depth of historical knowledge. He would do well to read Patrick Humphries' 1998 work on the musician Nick Drake for the setting of context. This is a bit damning really: although rock biographies are not exactly great literature, Humphries deals sensitively with his enigmatic subject, taking account of a range of perspectives and providing important historical data. Hayman doesn't get near this at all. I get the idea that he doesn't understand Jung the person sufficiently. His work suffers accordingly.

Jung's creative illness and the lead-up to *Psychological Types* follow the same treatment. Hayman compounds it all by having sections in each chapter that don't really relate, sometimes different time periods. He doesn't understand type, which isn't unusual – Storr himself states his own confusion elsewhere (1995), and even Andrew Samuels (1991) falls into the trap of not having read or thought widely enough on Jung's development of type ideas. Marie-Louise von Franz' *Psychotherapy* (1993) and *C.G. Jung Speaking* (1978) are useful texts in this respect. Hayman references the latter, but seems not to have looked at all of it.

Unhappily, the same method and result follow for Jung's activities in the 1920s and 1930s. His trips to Africa and to the Pueblo Indians in the US are dealt with rather perfunctorily, with some key insights being missed, one relating to the African experience being surprisingly placed near the end of the book. Perhaps Hayman read that information later but didn't revise the text. Jung's association or otherwise with the Nazis has been better dealt with elsewhere in terms of interpreting the evidence. It's hard to follow Hayman's line of thought throughout, really.

All in all the biography seems to be a collection of stories, not particularly well connected, and fitted in to preconceived judgements. I enjoyed more the latter parts, which gave me some data I hadn't encountered before; but at the end of it the feeling was relief, and dissatisfaction about the work itself as an opportunity lost.

In presenting his overall themes of Jung and religion, spiritualism and the women in his life, Hayman takes little account of the development of his thought (naturally involving some contradiction); the connection of his definition of empiricism with the so-called new science; and his introversion, which Hayman seems not to take seriously. He also can't seem to work his way through archetypes: not surprising as he doesn't reference Stevens' seminal work on that topic (1982), nor for that matter anything of Stevens' at all, which is a serious omission.

He picks up Storr's point about defining Jung's ideas as a religion, interestingly without reading Storr's brief book on Jung. The religion charge can be true for any other idea, including the MBTI, or economic rationalism for that matter, and it's clear that Jung was a charismatic figure as well as obnoxious, reckless and destructive of others' lives at times.

What is also clear, but not commented on other than in terms of wealth, is that the group who surrounded Jung were not your normal everyday people – quite eccentric, in fact; a closed world where everybody psychologises everyone else. One has to see Jung in that context.

The bibliography, at just over six pages, is somewhat short for a 450 page work, with no Stevens and very little Storr. It reveals only secondary sources; there's no indication anyone who knew Jung was contacted by the author. The book also carries an endorsement by Storr; perhaps the language was familiar and the octogenarian was able to read between the lines.

At some stage someone will write a biography of Jung without all the pathologising. In order to do that, as I suggested above, there has to be recognition that we are dealing with a different person associated with a group who seem to have spent a lot of their time “talking shop.”

David Tacey suggests that a “rational mind” approach is inadequate to the task of explaining Jung and his ideas. That's true in some senses, but I can hear a conventional cop-out from a Jungian, and a limited definition of what “rational mind” is. I think the main difficulty is that people like Hayman don't take the trouble to work out what Jung actually did and said, nor to work through the deceptions and inconsistencies like looking at any other person.

Until we get to that, look at Stevens, Hannah, or Storr's brief view. ☒

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