

Book Review

Rowland, Susan. *C.G. Jung in the Humanities: Taking the Soul's Path*. New Orleans: Spring Journal Books, 2010. ISBN 9781935528-029.

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In recent years Susan Rowland has emerged as one of the most influential voices in post-Jungian critical studies. Her recent book, *C.G. Jung in the Humanities: Taking the Soul's Path*, adds to her impressive list of previous publications. Written as an introduction to Jungian and post-Jungian ideas for graduate students in the humanities, *C.G. Jung in the Humanities* is a helpful overview of key concepts and approaches. Rowland's starting point—that Jung can be viewed not only as an influential pioneer in psychology but also something of a creative writer, an “artist of the soul,” as she calls him—should appeal to any serious student about to undertake graduate work in an area of the humanities (1). Having been so oriented, readers are then guided through seven chapters on Jungian topics that bear on the humanities in significant ways. These include expositions of core concepts such as the Jungian unconscious, individuation, and engagement with the Other, as well as insightful chapters on Jung as a cultural critic; the use of Jungian ideas in critical theory; the relationship between myth and history; the connections between science and religion; the issues of power and gender; and an important concluding chapter on the relevance of Jungian thought in the twenty-first century. Lucid prose, a thorough engagement with new scholarship, suggested further readings at the end of each chapter, and an informative glossary of core terms all combine to make *C.G. Jung in the Humanities* a valuable resource for those who seek to use Jungian ideas in their studies of the human experience. The work is by no means a monograph and should not be compared to Rowland's other brilliant studies in music, literature, film, painting, gender, and theory. Despite its introductory nature, however, the book clearly shows Rowland's striking erudition and critical depth. Even seasoned scholars will find much of value in her broad overview of how Jungian psychology can enrich the study of the humanities.

What is most striking about *C.G. Jung in the Humanities*, however, are the implicit and explicit arguments Rowland makes for the relevance of Jung's ideas in a post-humanist age. While so many scholars have dismissed Jungian psychology as a result of the excesses of so-called archetypal criticism and the widespread embrace of anti-foundationalism, it is important to note that most of Jung's complex concepts are still relevant, perhaps even more so today than ever before. While analytical psychology exists at the margins of contemporary scholarship, so much of Jung's wisdom, as Rowland compellingly demonstrates, proves relevant to current critical approaches.

Although many scholars have consigned Jung and the Jungians to the graveyard of essentialist thought, such a condemnation is misguided. Rowland makes this clear in, among other places, her discussion of the anima/animus archetypes. Whereas many scholars have washed their hands of the archetypes because Jung thought they were inherited patterns, or a kind of human essence that transcends culture, Rowland points to a deeper layer in the subtext of the idea of gendered being: Jung was an anti-essentialist in his notion that an engagement with the contra-sexual psychic Other leads to a breakdown of the simple binary of male/female in the individuating psyche. Regardless of the strength with which we may identify with one gender, we are always partly other; every man is a bit woman, and every woman partly man in Jung's self-deconstructing conception of gendered being. To call him a strict essentialist is to overlook this important element in his model of the psyche.

Jung's ideas are "contemporary" in other ways as well, according to Rowland. His stated endeavor was to demonstrate that reason, a tool of the willing ego, leads one away from the mysterious depths of the unconscious. A Jungian approach to psychotherapy aims to decenter rational logos. Jung's depth psychology thus anticipates the work of Derrida and the deconstructors, both in terms of content and form. Like Derrida's, Jung's writing style was not linear. Both thinkers used formal experiments with language in order to inscribe in their forms the nonrational content they were suggesting. To be sure, both used rational language, but they also tried demonstrate *unreason*, a term Foucault used in *Madness and Civilization*, by decentering the minds of their readers. Rowland insightfully characterizes Jung's writing style as being "spiral" in nature, that is, he often wound his way around a given theme and captured his ideas in analogy and metaphor, the stuff (not coincidentally) of poetry. He used evocative language so as to render some kind of access to the unconscious and give readers a glimpse in words of what could not be linguistically captured. Jung's use of the spiral essay form makes him something of a proto-deconstructor whose ideas also anticipated the theories and practices of reader-response criticism, as Rowland's discussion implies.

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Jung was also not such an essentialist that he denied the importance of history and culture as determinants of human experience, as so many scholars mistakenly believe. No doubt, he frequently identified “archetypal” connections among disparate entities and attributed their origins to a common psychic source. For all of his discernment of psychic patterns, however, he also stressed, as Rowland makes clear, the importance of historical context in the interpretation of the dreams, myths, fairy tales, artworks, and religious practices from which he derived so many of his ideas. Rowland stresses that a post-Jungian criticism useful to humanities scholars must recognize the importance of history and culture as major determinants of human experience. Although Jung claimed the archetypes are a kind of inherited psychic blueprint, he also argued that such patterns in themselves are entirely unknowable. What we can observe of an archetype is, more accurately in a Jungian lexicon, actually an archetypal *image* conditioned by time, culture, and history. It is impossible, in other words, to encounter an archetype outside of time, culture, and history. Still, Rowland does not drive the point to an untenable extreme, as so many historicists have done, by reducing the psyche to history. As she says in one of her most astute comments, the human psyche and the arts it produces are conditioned by history and culture but never entirely reducible to them. Jung thus recognized the historical contingency of all positions. In work with analysts or in writing about the connections between Native American and ancient Egyptian myths, he demonstrates an understanding that it is not possible to separate the observer from the observed. We are all embedded in a cultural matrix from which there is no escape. As Rowland points out, he knew this all too well, stressing the point in various ways in his writing.

Despite this justification of using Jungian psychology in a post-humanist age, Rowland does acknowledge some of the problems with Jungian thought. She rightly questions Jung’s colonialist attitudes towards “primitive” cultures; his problematic, ambivalent stance on women; and the unresolved issue of his relationship with Fascism. In some ways he was a product of his time, influenced by the historical currents that circulated through his culture.

On the other hand, as Rowland observes in the conclusion, his ideas have remained relevant not only in critical discourse but also in chaos theory, complexity science, and the new holism model informing ecology and ecocriticism. Although his thought was undoubtedly influenced by liberal humanism, he was also a proto-postmodernist who saw the value of decentering the psyche, questioning rationality, and reading grand Western narratives with a healthy suspicion in an attempt to retrieve the soul from the wasteland of modernity. Jung was a quantum thinker whose time was not fully able to accommodate the depths of his insight.

So what does all of this mean in an age in which so many scholars, even Derrida and several other influential Continental thinkers, have taken their cue from Freud? Perhaps it means the time is ripe for a return to Jung. Despite Northrop Frye and archetypal criticism, there never was a truly Jungian critical theory in mainstream academic discourse. Although Freud has exerted more influence in psychology and in scholarship in the humanities, Jung is more profound, and his thought has the potential to enrich many fields of study in the twenty-first century. His theory, as Rowland and many others have observed, leads to wholeness through confrontation with the Other; it leads, in other words, to a rediscovery of the soul. Freudian theory, on the other hand, has left a legacy of unhealthy suspicion in critical theory and a focus on diseased psychological states in psychology. While Positive psychologists in the last ten years have forcefully broken their Freudian fetters, scholars in the humanities have not done so (although there are exceptions here). *C.G. Jung in the Humanities* is a perfect beginning for such an endeavor. Perhaps it will inspire a new generation of scholars to take the soul's path into the mysterious locales Jungian theory makes accessible.