



National Press Building, #809
Washington, DC 20045
(202) 737-0127 tel / (202) 737-8406 fax
www.americanhungarianfederation.org / www.hungary1956.com

Swiss American Review

April 22, 1987

C.G. Jung: A Matter of Heart

By: Louis S. Segesvary, American Consul General (English version as published in the Neue Zürcher Zeitung, February 19, 1987)

The difficult and complex subject of psychoanalysis is a topic that does not lend itself easily to the linear movement and time constraints of film, especially to the demands of commercial film. Hollywood's expensive dramatizations of Freud's life in 1962 (directed by John Huston) proved to be both a box office and critical disappointment.

And while five other less ambitious films have been made on Freud, with limited public impact, nothing has been produced for commercial distribution on the life and work of C.G. Jung, who became the most famous, controversial, and influential of the original group around Freud after breaking with him to develop his own school of analytical psychology. Now such an attempt has been made in the United States; and although it was produced on a limited budget, it is a film long on charm and intellectual substance.

The film, entitled "Matter of Heart" (directed by Mark Whitney, script by Suzanne Wagner), may not appeal to those looking for a highly structured exposition that lays out Jung's life and work for them in an easily assimilable fashion. Presented in a sort of impressionistic stream of consciousness mode, the film offers a series of interviews with a number of colleagues, former patients, close friends, and relatives of Jung interspersed further by scenes of paintings, home, and nature. The film's technique seems to be to purposely eschew the standard voice over narrative typical of documentaries that provides continuity in favor of plunging the viewer directly into Jung's life and work with as little introduction and few transitional devices as possible, letting the various individuals speaking in the film and Jung's own words create their own effect and story line.

While this technique's advantage is that it engages the viewer immediately with some unusual personalities and the principal themes of the film, it does provide one potential drawback: for those unfamiliar with Jung's work or the history of psychoanalysis there can be difficulty in integrating the various segments with one another. Nonetheless, for those even only mildly acquainted with Jung's writings or with only a passing curiosity about them it need not be a handicap since as one American reviewer wrote, "it is the quality of talk that makes this necessarily cerebral picture worth seeing."

As is fairly well known, Jung's unique contributions to modern psychology began with his early experience as a novice psychiatrist at the turn of the century in the psychiatric clinic Burghölzli in Zurich when he resolved to break with conventional practice and began to listen seriously and intently to what his schizophrenic patients were saying to him. Rather than dismissing out of hand the heavily image and symbolic ridden sights and sounds dreamed up and poured out by his troubled patients, Jung took them seriously as riddles to be solved emerging from an inherent tendency in the psyche towards wholeness.

He was not to know that eventually he would have to face the very perils of madness himself and would have to come to terms with the phenomenological significance of his own eruptive and overpowering inner life. What Jung was to find and assimilate as the result of his inner journey contributed to the empirical basis for his analytical psychology.

The interview in the film with Jung and the shifting scenes featuring other figures offer various representations of the principal themes of Jung's crystallized concepts: the masculine and feminine principles, or the "animus" and "anima"; the differentiated psychological functions of thinking, feeling, sensation, and intuition; the effects of projection and transference in relationships; the phenomenon of synchronicity, or the coincidence of outer and inner events on the level of meaning even though not connected causatively; the collective unconscious, or the dimensions of the psyche holding man's common symbolic, psychological inheritance, including archetypes; and the dangerous power of the dark side or the "shadow" of the human personality.

Some of the noteworthy particularities of Jung's own life are touched upon in the film as well, including his fruitful and happy marriage to Emma Rauschenbach, his co-worker and mother of their five children, as well as his encounter with Toni Wolff, who played the role of his "soror mystica," as the alchemists would describe it. Also discussed are Jung's views of dreams in aiding individual personality growth and his fascination with alchemy as symbolic metaphor for approaching the wholeness of personality.

But the overriding theme that clearly emerges from this unusual film is the critical importance of the individual in relation to the future of civilization as we know it. The viewer cannot escape being reminded that in a very real and direct sense the pressing issue of good and evil in the world lies in his own soul also and not just in the exterior realm of other persons and events. "None of us stands outside humanity's black collective shadow," Jung has written soberingly. "Whether the crime lies many generations back or happens today, it remains the symptom of a disposition that is always and everywhere present."

For Jung the redemption of society is crucially linked to the affirmative development of the individual. "It is only too clear," he emphasizes, "that if the individual is not truly regenerated in spirit, society cannot be either, for society is the sum total of individuals in need of redemption." It follows then that Jung disparages mass movements and also the exaltation of the modern state. "With "the abstract idea of the modern state as the principle of political reality," warns Jung, "the individual is increasingly deprived of the moral decision as to how he should live his life."

Jung does not call into question the humane purposes of the modern welfare state, but he does clearly point to the spiritual dangers associated with the elevation of the state above the concrete individual and reducing him in the process to a statistical number.

In its broadest interpretation, Jung's work, with its acceptance of the power of numinous phenomena and transcendent symbolism to affect and transform individual lives, can be said more than anything else to have helped restore a sense of mystery and purpose to modern life that has been too much obscured by some of the narrow, one-dimensional notions of man promulgated in this century.

In his concern for the meaning of the life of the individual, he joins ranks with two other brilliant Swiss thinkers of major international importance, the 19th century historian from Basel, Jacob Burckhardt, and the 20th century protestant theologian, Karl Barth. All three reflect the most profound currents of Swiss cultural and intellectual traditions.

While Jung's writings have enjoyed wide-spread influence in the United States for some time, the producers of "Matter of Heart" say they were surprised at the depth of interest and curiosity that continues to exist there about his work. When "Matter of Heart" will be shown here in Jung's own Switzerland, it will afford an opportunity for cinema viewers to catch a glimpse into the life and work of this native son.

* * *

The new American Consul General for Eastern and Central Switzerland, Louis S. Segesvary, arrived in Zurich in Aug. 1986.

A career Foreign Service Officer, Mr. Segesvary has previously served in New York at the U.S. Mission to the United Nations, in Guatemala, and Colombia. Most recently he was a visiting Foreign Affairs Fellow at the Georgetown Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, D.C.

Mr. Segesvary holds degrees from the University of California at Berkeley, the University of Maryland, the University of Southern California, and has done post graduate work at Frankfurt University in West Germany. While at the United Nations, he was a frequent public speaker for the State Department on foreign policy themes. Also a writer, his published writings have focused on foreign affairs and education and literary topics.

* * *

The American Hungarian Federation® (AHF), a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization, was founded in 1906 in Cleveland, Ohio. The largest Hungarian-American umbrella organization in the United States, AHF is also among the oldest ethnic organizations in the country. AHF was established as an association of Hungarian societies, institutions and churches to "defend the interest of Americans of Hungarian origin in the United States." Over the past 100 years, AHF's mission has broadened to include support of people of Hungarian descent on both sides of the Atlantic and in the successor states of the Carpathian Basin. The American Hungarian Federation strives to unite the American Hungarian community through work that supports common goals. AHF is a national, non-partisan, independent umbrella organization representing the interests of its member organizations and the Hungarian American community.