



The Basel painting in the Jung Family Collection

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Dedicated to the memory of Lionel Gossman, author of *Basel in the Age of Burckhardt*,
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Perhaps the most significant recent development in the Jungian field has been a closer look at his development as an artist. This is in direct contradiction to his caveat that what he was producing was “nature” not “art.” The publication of the Red Book meant that the entire corpus of his pictures were now available. This was followed by *The Art of C.G. Jung*, which presented a range of what he had created in different media, the most eye-opening of which were his wooden sculptures. But how was his nature nurtured? What were the formative aesthetic experiences that shaped what he later called his daimon? He reminisced about the parlor in his boyhood home, the parsonage near Basel, speaking of an “old painting in that room which now hangs in my son’s house: a landscape of Basel dating from the early nineteenth century.” (*Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, 16)

In illustrating Jung’s artistic development, I have previously featured the following painting by Carl Gustav Carus, (Figure 1) whom Jung refers to as a forerunner of a genre immensely popular with middle-class families throughout the German-speaking world.



Figure 1 *“Landscape at Sunset” (c. 1830), Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.*

I was surprised to learn that the painting Jung was referring to was actually a much more intriguing work, an urban/topographic landscape seen from an entirely different point of view. (Figure 2)



Figure 2 “Basel Landscape”, private collection.

It is a work by Sebastian Gutzwiller (1798-1872), an Alsatian artist who had studied in Paris before returning to his home region where he was commissioned for a number of church altarpieces in the influential Nazarene style. A Catholic, he eventually settled in Basel where he married a Protestant and supported his family of four daughters and one son by painting portraits. That he did one for a Preiswerk family patriarch (from Jung’s maternal ancestry), attests to his popularity among the city’s leading citizens.

Andreas Jung said the following about the painting. “The painting by Gutzwiller is dated ‘Gutzwiller d’Alsace, 1835’. All I know about the painting is that it is mentioned in the *Erinnerungen* [*Memories, Dreams, Reflections*]. And my father [Franz] has identified the mountain range in the background as the ‘Gempenstollen’. The painting is highly unusual for the time of its creation, it is almost like a still life, a view out of an attic window. This could point to the fact that it was commissioned. The artist could have stood in the attic of the house of K.G. Jung-Frey (1794-1864) in the Elisabethenstr. 9 or not far from there. Then the provenance would be very easy – from Karl Gustav to Paul to C.G. Jung.” (translation by Thomas Schweighofer)

To appreciate the painting, its composition and constituent elements need to be considered. The dormer window frame creates a picture-within-a-picture, a panoramic view across rooftops to a street and the mountains beyond. Great attention is paid to the physical details of the immediate attic space. The plaster is aging and there is a rope wrapped around a beam along with a branch cut to be used as a prop for the shutter; a solitary insect stands in the middle of the window sill. Late-afternoon shadows cut across the tiled roofs of the maze of neighboring buildings. A street runs south through suburbs with the Gempenstollen range of the Jura Mountains in the distance bathed in late-afternoon sunlight.

Jung was always interested in the psychology of the issue at hand, so we need to delve into the emotional impact that this painting had on him. “Often I would steal into that dark, sequestered room and sit for hours in front of the pictures, gazing at all that beauty.” The Reformed church across the street where Jung attended his father’s services was image-less, its white-washed walls the legacy of Reformation iconoclastic

destruction. The suppressed Protestant religious imagination was to find its new home in the family parlor, which became a shrine in the new temple of Art. Gutzwiller's best-known painting captures a house where one could sit cozily surrounded by books, pets, family portraits and art prints.



Figure 3 “Family Concert” (<https://kunstmuseumbasel.ch/en/collection/collectiononline>)

Although young Carl “sees” the painting in this zone of physical/psychological domesticity, he only “realizes” its deeper meaning when he takes his carved pencil-case manikin up several flights of stairs into the “forbidden attic at the top of the house.”

(*Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, 21) Here is another world, an uncanny one that is light years away from that of the parlor. It is a liminal space long draped in fairy tale mystery. At the time Gutzwiller was active, attics were in the process of being converted into garrets and rented to impoverished young artists. To traditional associations like “storage-memories-spinning wheels-cobwebs-spooks” were now added the “dreams” of an emerging bohemian generation.

Can trace elements of this painting be found in any of his own artwork? I think so and offer works from two different phases of his life as evidence. The first is a landscape that he painted during the years of his psychiatric training.



Figure 4 “*Twilight*” (C.G. Jung: *Word and Image*, 43).

It was inspired by his familiarity with the Jura countryside that began with a childhood visit to Arlesheim, the former country estate of the bishop of Basel, and continued with adolescent hiking trips. While writing *Transformations and Symbols of the Libido*, he connected prehistoric soul stones found in the area to his manikin and painted stone, an association that gave him further felt proof of the existence of an art impulse hard-wired into the human psyche.



Figure 5 “Mandala Over Switzerland” (*The Red Book*, 125).

The lower zone of this picture is unique in Jung’s work in that it’s a folk-art representation of Basel and its environs. Jung here reverses Gutzwiller’s point-of-view

by hovering over one of army bunkers built in the heights of the Jura during World War One in anticipation of a possible French flanking maneuver against Germany. The road now leads to, not away from the Rhine port city. All in all, Jung's take-away from his experience of the Gutzwiller painting was that a creative secret needs a safe-space to unfold, an interior place be it an attic, a study, or a tower that paradoxically opens up one's imagination to wider horizons.

Works Cited

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