



Tracing Shadow/Persona Via Sex & Sexuality: A Jungian Reading of Christabel

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Abstract- This paper attempts an analysis of Coleridge's *Christabel*, focusing exclusively on the character of Christabel. Further, the analysis is Jungian in nature which investigates the persona and shadow aspects of the personality of the said character revealed in the text through the sexual deeds, gestures and thoughts. In addition, I confine myself to the analysis of part I of the poem only. For the purpose, as theoretical background, a brief overview of the Jungian theoretical apparatus is given. The analysis shows that, within the poem's text, sex and sexuality prove significant both as trigger for and indicator of the shadow/persona dichotomy in the character.

Key words: Christabel, Persona, Shadow, Sex, Sexuality

I. INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

"He who can define [his poetry] could "unweave a rainbow;" he who could praise it aright would be such another as the poet. The " Christabel," the " Kubla Khan," with one or two more, are outside all law and jurisdiction of ours. When it has been said that such melodies were never heard, such dreams never dreamed, such speech never spoken, the chief thing remains unsaid, and unspeakable. There is a charm upon these poems which can only be felt in silent submission of wonder."

(Algernon Charles Swinburne)

According to KirenToor (2004), the notion that Coleridge was a dream weaver, a composer and maker of dreams is encouraged by the poet's own association of poetry with dreams, of the poetic process with the dream process. Poetry, Coleridge tells is a 'waking dream.' Understandably, therefore, most of his poems offer a psychological, particularly Jungian reading. This essay is one such attempt to analyze the poem *Christabel* from Jungian perspective, allotting particular focus to Persona and Shadow as Jungian concepts. The analysis is further limited to two characters, namely Christabel and Sir Leoline.

Christabel is the story of Christabel, an isolated girl on the cusp of womanhood. The poem begins as Christabel leaves her father's castle to pray for her "betroth'd Knight" (Coleridge, line 28). When she enters a wooded area, a strange woman appears from behind a tree and introduces herself as the Lady Geraldine. Pleading for Christabel's assistance, Geraldine tells a story of her own abduction and escape and easily manipulates Christabel into helping her gain access to the castle. Once inside, Geraldine exerts her power, casting a spell over Christabel while she sleeps. When Geraldine is subsequently introduced to Christabel's father, Sir Leoline, she blinds him. Under the thrall of Geraldine's spell, Christabel is unable to warn her father of Geraldine's treachery. He casts Christabel aside and the poem ends in a fragmentary form with Christabel on the floor watching her father escort Geraldine from the room.

Coleridge believed that "every power in nature and in spirit must evolve an opposite, as the sole means and condition of its manifestations: and all opposition is a tendency to reunion," which he termed as "the universal law of polarity". This principle is conspicuous in Jung's (1968) delineation of the shadow:

“...there is no light without shadow and no psychic wholeness without imperfection. To round itself out, life calls not for perfection but for completeness; and for this the “thorn in the flesh” is needed, the suffering of defects without which there is no progress and no ascent.”

According to Jung (1968), the shadow represents whatever diabolical force a man must encounter and overcome in his quest for individuation; according to Jung, it is the first hurdle in this quest: “To become conscious [of the shadow archetype] involves recognizing the dark aspects of the personality as present and real.” This act, he claims, is the essential condition for all self knowledge. Awareness of the dark side of the self is essential for wisdom and individuation. A man does not attain fulfillment in spite of his oxymoronic nature but because of and through it. In *Aion: Researches into the Phenomenology of the Self*, Jung (1968) concludes that light and shadow form “a paradoxical unity”. Any attempt to escape, evade, dismiss or minimize one's shadow tends to inhibit self-actualization, cause stagnation, and smother growth. The shadow's influence cannot be healthily ignored, for it is the indestructible unconscious part of the personality. This force, however, can be integrated and utilized, as Edward C. Whitmont (1969) discloses:

“We can refuse to face it . . . we can try to eliminate it . . . we can refuse to accept responsibility for it . . . or we can “suffer” it in a constructive manner, as a part of our personality which can lead us to a salutary humility and humanness and eventually to new insights and expanded life horizons.”

Jung identified Freud's notion of the id with the shadow.

The specific contents and qualities that go into making up this internal structure, the shadow, are selected by the process of ego development. What ego-consciousness rejects becomes shadow; what it positively accepts and identifies with and absorbs into itself becomes a part of itself and of the persona.

To Jung, persona is a mere “functional complex ... by no means identical to the individuality”, the way of how we present or face to the world. It is a mask which protects the ego from negative images and according to post-Jungians, it is sometimes considered as a dynamic or structural component of the psyche. According to Jung's writings, the original meaning of the word “persona” is a mask to make sure an actor could act well in a play (Jung, 2003). There are also two paronyms: “person” and “personality”. Theoretically, the persona makes a person have a certain kind of personality, but this personality may not be his real personality. Persona is just a person's publicly displayed appearance, the purpose of which is to gain a social permission. It also has another name “conformity archetype”. Only when the archetype is beneficial for the individual and the nationality can it be a person's instinctive nature. Persona is essential for a person's survival, and is basic for social and public life. It makes us get along well with the others even someone we dislike, and makes a person's aim come true. For example, if a young man wants to gain achievement in his company, he should first know what kind of role he should play in the company, and what he should pay attention including behavior, appearance, modesty, his policy, his car, his wife as well as some other factors which are important to the company. And of course, he should first be hard-working, reliable, active, but all these are just a part of persona. If a young man cannot play his role well in the company, he will not get any promotion and even be fired. Everyone may have one different persona, at work, at home, or with friends. They could change their masks, and all these masks make his adaptation to different situations in different ways. People have seen this as a key condition, but before Jung, it is not mentioned. This adaptation is an instinctive archetype. Persona sometimes is beneficial, and sometimes harmful. If a person is too much addicted to the role he is playing, the other aspects of his personality would be excluded. He will stay in a very tense state because his strong persona is contradicted with his other weak sides in his personality. If a person confirms his persona too much, it is “inflation”. He will be proud of what he is trying to be or act, and enforce this role to others. All the laws and customs actually are the display of collective persona. These laws and customs enforce some certain behavior patterns to the whole collective without the consideration of the need of the individual, which means that inflation of persona will do harm to people's psychological factors. On the other hand, the victims are also themselves for the inflation ones. If they could not get what they require, they would feel pessimistic and pitiful for themselves. Jung has enough time and condition to make research on the bad effect of people with inflation for most of his patients are victims of inflation. All these patients are from high occupations, but they suddenly find that their lives are very empty and meaningless. Usually when they come to the middle age, they feel the crisis from the persona of inflation. The therapy of the patients is to restrain the persona of

inflation, and free all the other personas, no matter good or bad. Therefore a way should be sought to keep balance among all the personas.

The Shadow/Persona Dichotomy in *Christabel*: A Jungian Reading of The Text

The atmosphere of the poem is not only gothic; the opening lines remind one of fairytales introductions, with the clock striking midnight hour and the owls howling. The gothic and the supernatural is quite evident for the reader, as "The night is chilly, but not dark." (L 15), and:

The moon is behind, and at the full;

And yet she looks both small and dull. (L 18,19)

Christabel, a young woman, leaves her father's castle and goes into the wood on a nippy night with the intention to pray for her fiancé who is far away. She dreams of him on the previous nights and, though no contents of the dreams are given, as suggested by Jasenka Kapetanovic (2014), it may be presumed that the dreams are of sexual nature. I propose that not only are her dreams most probably of erotic nature, it is under the spell, so to speak, of those dreams that she leaves the castle secretly at midnight. This in my opinion is the first indication, as far as the text reveals, of the presence of strong shadow elements in her personality. Further, I propose that she is already feeling a kind of guilt on account of those dreams, and this is her chief motivation behind her visit to the woods, besides her worries for her lover's wellbeing. In other words, her strong and well established persona- that of a respectable woman who conforms to the standards of society- is already *in action*, shielding against and suppressing her shadow. To pray is religious in nature: Christabel is trying, very consciously, to deny the shadowy sexual half of her personality.

Further in the story, while Christabel is praying before a great oak tree, she hears moans from the other side of the tree. This is her meeting with Geraldine, the mysterious lady. She is described thus by Coleridge:

"There she sees a damsel bright,

Dressed in a silken robe of white,

That shadowy in the moonlight shone:

The neck that made that white robe wan,

Her stately neck, and arms were bare;

Her blue-veined feet unsandaled were;

And wildly glittered here and there

The gems entangled in her hair.

I guess, 't was frightful there to see

A lady so richly clad as she-

Beautiful exceedingly!"

In these lines Geraldine is described in bodily terms. Her neck, feet and arms are bare, while the rest of her body is covered with a white robe. Her neck is bare and stately, making even her white robe look wan. The story she tells Christabel contains gaps, and it can be inferred from these gaps that Geraldine is a victim of gang rape. To speak in Jungian terms, then, Geraldine might as well be a projection of Christabel's own fear of

such tragedies. Thus, as Taylor, A. (2002) has argued, Geraldine is possibly only a projection of Christabel's fear of rape, a projection of her dream, or an aspect of her personality. Even if one disagrees with Taylor, it is beyond doubt that the encounter has influenced Christabel.

Once inside the castle, Christabel is completely under Geraldine's charm, and she eventually invites the (un)welcome guest. Offering someone to share one's bed is an explicitly sexual gesture, and this again reveals Christabel's shadow figure that till that day was lurking in the darkness, unknown to her. From here onwards, it is Geraldine- and probably more so- Christabel's shadow that, in a manner of speaking, occupies the stage. In fact, it is very significant that Coleridge reveals the state of mind of both the ladies the way he does:

So, free from danger, free from fear,

They crossed the court: right glad they were. (Part I, L 129-30)

The lines quoted above are repeated at the close of the same stanza. My contention is that not only does repetition serve the purpose of amplification, 'danger' and 'fear' are the key words here. It is primarily our fear of authority (parental, social, moral etc) and the danger of being exposed and our 'good' names soiled that helps generate the birth and development of the shadow personality, at least the negative shadow. So, in these lines, there is clear indication of the fact that the persona complex of Christabel takes the backseat in the absence of authority, and her darker side, the shadow takes the driving seat.

Finally there is the scene where the two ladies share a bed. As maintained by Spatz, (1975), Christabel is too excited about consummating their relationship to sleep. We see Christabel as not only willing but actually encouraging Geraldine towards the deed. As stated earlier, her shadow at this point in her personal drama has attained such stature that it is almost impossible for her persona, the somewhat conscious part of her personality, to take matter in hand anymore. And what is doomed to happen happens!

Again, the conclusion to the first part is significant. The poem reads:

A star hath set, a star hath risen,

O Geraldine! since arms of thine

Have been the lovely lady's prison. (part 1)

The conclusion is usually explained as the aside of the unknown speaker of the poem. I, however, propose that the conclusion part, particularly the lines quoted above should be read as a soliloquy of a special kind: the so-called speaker/narrator of the poem does not tell the reader anything about what actually happened that night, thereby giving the impression that the speaker/narrator is, or at least speaks for, Christabel. In other words, it is in fact Christabel speaking of her two states of mind (A star hath set, a star hath risen), her persona and her shadow, though, on the surface the lines may seem to be spoken by an unidentified, impersonal speaker/narrator referring to the passing night and the approaching day. Thus this again, in my opinion, is an indication of the two aspects of her personality.

II. CONCLUSION

The analysis supports the idea of the somewhat split personality of Christabel. Though she belongs to the aristocracy and is cultured, so to speak, under extraordinary circumstances the energy or libido (to use Jung's terminology) that her shadow has overpowers her absolutely. The persona she has maintained all her maiden life shatters to pieces and she is stranger to the Christabel that she was the night before. It is pertinent to presume that had Coleridge chosen to complete this unfinished masterpiece, it would have been even more telling in revealing the working of the unconsciousness.

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