THE SHADOW ARCHETYPE: CASTING LIGHT ON EVIL

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ABSTRACT

One of the greatest contributions to the understanding of the phenomenon of evil, a phenomenon that has plagues humanity since its beginnings and intrigued the minds of the greatest thinkers in history, has been provided by the Swiss psychiatrist Carl Gustav Jung. In his theory of the collective unconscious, where the archetypes reside, Jung devoted particular attention to the archetype of the Shadow, one that actualizes the issue of evil more than any other archetype. All archetypes (and other concepts in Jung's theory in general) undeniably operate on a continuum of polarities, ranging from saintly good to pure devilish, yet the Shadow is most readily recognized as the one most directly associated with evil. This paper is going to present, first, a historical overview of the development of the idea of the origin of evil, followed by a definition of the Shadow archetype as well as the psychological mechanisms that contribute to the formation of the personal and collective Shadow in order to aid the understanding of both the psychological creation of our notions of evil and the most acceptable ways of understanding and dealing with it. Finally, we are going to present the most famous actualizations of the Shadow archetype in English literature.

Keywords: *evil, Shadow, archetypes, Carl Gustav Jung, psychology, literature.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The problem of evil has plagued the minds of great thinkers, philosophers, people of all religions and even people of no religion, since the beginning of time. Good and evil are inextricably woven into the human experience and are both of essential importance to our personal and collective advancement. Many theories have been proposed as to the origin and definition of evil, with the generally accepted belief that evil is the polarity or the other side, of good. Theorists of psychology have also given their contribution to the understanding of this phenomenon and this paper will provide an overview of an aspect of Carl Gustav Jung's theory that is directly linked to this issue. Before the psychologists, however, philosophers spent centuries developing the ideas about the origin of evil, and some of those are given in Lars Fr. H. Svendsen's book *A Philosophy of Evil*, originally published in 2002.

2. THE PHILOSOPHY OF EVIL

Svendsen categorizes the traditional definitions of the origin of evil into four theodicies: the *privation* theodicy, the *free will* theodicy, the *Irenaean* theodicy and the *totality* theodicy. A theodicy is a justification of God, although not always from a Christian standpoint as these ideas are to be found in pre-Christian thought as well. The Greeks are among the first pre-Christian theoreticians of evil. Plotinus, who supports the privation theodicy, for example, claims that "evil has no actual being. Instead, evil is simply a *lack* of the good" (in 2010, p.46). What is good, according to him, is "the first source, The One […] but the farther you move from the source, the nearer you come to evil" (ibid.) only to conclude that "matter itself must be purely evil" (ibid.). This is only one of many theories that will continue to insist on the body/soul dichotomy that persistently demonizes the body/matter and deifies the soul.

Any discussion on evil must include St. Augustine who agrees with Plotinus that evil is merely a lack of good, but he also insists that "there's nothing evil in nature" (in 2010, p.47) thus disagreeing that matter is evil. Similarly, Thomas Aquinas agrees that evil is a lack but not a general one, for example, one cannot call a person evil for lacking wings for people were never intended to have wings in God's creation, but should a bird lack wings, then that would be against its very nature. Thus, for Aquinas "it is evil to diverge from the nature God intended us to have" (ibid.).

These supporters of the privation theodicy dealt with the ontological status of evil, and they contributed to the idea of evil by ascertaining that it has no being so, even now, in the 21st century, we can agree with Svendsen that evil is "not a *thing* […] but a *characteristic* of something, not something that exists in its own right" (p.48)

The free will theodicy was first suggested by Plato according to whom God is innocent of evil and the source of evil must be elsewhere, namely in the choices that *we,* humans, make. Similarly, St. Augustine confirms that "evil actions stem from an evil will, but […] evil will itself has no root cause" (p. 49). There are numerous problems that do not warrant the free will theodicy a valid support in the discussion of the origin of evil or, as Svendsen says, "we simply cannot use the existence of evil to derive the value of freedom" (p. 50). Jung himself also "allows for the existence of choice and therefore of free will" (in Fontana 2003, p.102).

The totality theodicy again includes some of the same thinkers, such as Plato and St. Augustine, but also some more recent philosophers and writers, such as Alexander Pope, John Milton, Jean Jacques Rousseau, Baruch Spinoza, Johann Wolfgang Goethe, and can be summarized as follows "all that exists may appear to be evil, but in reality it is actually good, since it forms a necessary part of a *totality* that's good" (p. 55). We are going to see, following our discussion on the Shadow archetype, how Jung concurs with this view and sees this archetype and its integration as simply a step towards building a healthy whole of the personality. In other words, in order for humankind to advance, we must strive to achieve totality or individuation – in Jung's terms, or self-actualization – in Maslow's terms[7]; the first step on the road to individuation is integrating one's Shadow contents. Therefore, without the acceptance of our dark side there can be neither personal nor collective progress.

The perception of what is evil and how we approach/handle it is both primeval, yet flexibly adaptable to the current times. Stevens (2002, p.272) writes of Carl Kerenyi's study of evil in mythology which indicates that man considers everything which kills or destroys to be evil—unless it is done in the interests of the group. Thus

[11] A step beyond the highest achievement of self-actualization in Maslow's pyramid has recently been added to include self-transcendence.

> "Once a band of strangers has been identified as threatening, the archetype of evil is automatically projected on to them and they become Untermenschen to be destroyed: the projection is the justification of the act […] That Christ's injunction to love our enemies has met with so little success is because it would seek to override the *archetypal programme ingrained in our genes* (my italics) —the programme which dictates that we beware of the stranger, clearly designate the common enemy, and find friends to fight him with."

Interestingly, even though many of the theories do not support the idea that evil itself is inherent, Kerenyi calls the human reaction towards undesired either subjects, objects or contents, a programme ingrained in our genes. It might be worthwhile to further look into this statement and the extent to which our reactions against the Other, in the way of projection, are indeed ingrained.

3. THE SHADOW ARCHETYPE

Jung has written about many archetypes, both personified and of transformation, that inhabit the collective unconscious and one of them is the Shadow archetype. This archetype is perhaps the most studied by both Jung himself as well as his followers and has recently also come to attention as a psychological practice called "shadow work" in order to enhance a person's wellbeing by bringing suppressed contents to consciousness. So, what is the Shadow and how does it actualize the problem of evil?

Perhaps the most felicitous choice of description of the Shadow as related to the concept of evil, in our opinion, is given by David Fontana, in his book *Psychology, Religion and Spirituality,* in which he says that "the *potential* (my italics) for evil *resides* (my italics) in what [Jung] termed the *shadow*" (2003, p.172). Therefore, evil is seen as just a potential, just like any other, not something that is a given, emphasizing the free will and choice aspect, as Jung intended it, and following in the lines of the free will theodicy. Further, this potential is seen as residing in the Shadow, suggesting it is rather confined and it is confined to this particular part of our personality.

Jung spent much of his life working with the Shadow and emphasizing its importance in the structure of the personality. He even went to far as to say that "the meeting with oneself is, at first, the meeting with one's own shadow" (Jung 1968, p.21). One of his followers, Barbara Hannah (2000, p.77) said that "whatever ground we can reclaim from the shadow is firm and fertile ground that enables us to commence building the house founded on the rock. In contrast, everything built only on the light side of the ego complex or on the persona, invariably turns out to have been built on sand". These quotes emphasize the great importance this archetype has but what are its origins?

Jung says of the Shadow that it is "the most accessible […] and the easiest to experience […] for its nature can in large measure be inferred from the contents of the personal unconscious" (1959, p.8). The personal unconscious is "a more or less superficial layer of the unconscious [that] is undoubtedly personal" (1968, p.3) and contains no archetypal content because this type of content is to be found beneath it, in the realm of the collective unconscious. Particularly during our formative years, when aspirations, instincts, desires and needs as well as qualities are being repressed, the psychic energy of these phenomena is not/cannot be lost, but continues its existence in the unconscious:

> „The psychic energy that appears to have been lost in this way in fact serves to revive and intensify whatever is uppermost in the unconscious— tendencies, perhaps, that have hitherto had no chance to express themselves or at least have not been allowed an uninhibited existence in our consciousness. Such tendencies form an ever-present and potentially destructive 'shadow' to our conscious mind. Even tendencies that might in some circumstances be able to exert a beneficial influence are transformed into demons when they are repressed. " (Jung 1964, p.93)

We cannot be but reminded of what J.R.R. Tolkien famously said – "nothing is evil in the beginning" (2019, p.349) and Robert A. Johnson similarly claims that:

> "we all are born whole but somehow the culture demands that we live out only part of our nature and refuse other parts of our inheritance. We divide the self into an ego and a shadow because our culture insists that we behave in a particular manner" (1991, p. 7)

Most cultures characterize these unacceptable elements or contents as the animal nature or the beast in humans. Partially, it is also our Shadow. Some characteristics of relevance for the Shadow are the following:

1. The most important quality of the Shadow is that it is an identity structure.
2. As the Shadow is a possible Ego or an Ego that might have been, it (in the dreams and fantasies) are of the same sex as the Ego – male for men and female for women.
3. The Shadow is projective[8], i.e. "if shadow integration is not achieved, the shadow contents tend to be projected onto others (usually of the same sex as the ego) and offer irrational impediments to easy interpersonal relationships (Hall 1983, p.73).

Even though the Shadow has a usually negative connotation, it does not contain only negative impulses and lacks, and this is true in particular because its acceptance and integration is a necessary condition for the psychological health of each individual. It allows us to remain objective, reminding us of our incompleteness and completing our personality with complementary characteristics.

In the words of Marie-Louise von Franz (1915-1998), who continued Jung's work on the archetypes, especially in dreams and fairy tales, the Shadow does very often "manifest a slightly inferior or opposing quality in relation to the "I" of the dreamer" (in Boa 2005, p.33). As an example of the Ego and the Shadow, she takes Don Quixote and Sancho Panza - one utterly unreal and filled with fantasies, and the other a man of flesh and blood, with both feet firmly on the ground – to show how the two cannot exist one without the other.

It is understandable that the Shadow is mainly defined through negative elements because we all, in the course of our entire development but particularly in our childhood and formative years, identify with characteristics which are acceptable by our parents and the environment. As Jacoby puts it,

> "we cannot simply equate shadow with that which is absolutely negative or evil. It is only the 'negative' of the image which we make of ourselves. And that image is closely linked to the experiences of early childhood, to our upbringing and our collective values, all of which greatly determine our personal development." (1985, p. 153-154)

It does, therefore, happen, and not that rarely, that some people accept and live their worst characteristics thus making the Shadow positive and filled with acceptable qualities. The criminals, for example, have a Shadow containing positive human attributes, such as kindness, compassion, altruism. Or, in another example, if one heavily emphasizes thinking, their feelings will be relatively underdeveloped and rather inferior. Whichever aspect of the polarities of human characteristics is accepted and dominant, the other becomes part of the Shadow. The Shadow, however, remains and always is, an integral part of the whole or of the totality of personality:

> „If it has been believed hitherto that the human shadow was the source of all evil, it can now be ascertained on closer investigation that the unconscious man, that is his shadow, does not consist only of morally reprehensible tendencies, but also displays a number of good qualities, such as normal instincts, appropriation reactions, realistic insights, creative impulses, etc. on this level of understanding, evil appears more as a distortion, a deformation, a misinterpretation and misapplication of facts that in themselves are natural. " (Jung 1959, pp. 266-267)

[12]Disapproval/disagreement of others has other sources as well and not just the projection of unconscious psychological content.

The Shadow comes to light in our dreams and fantasies, in situations when we are tense, upset or under stress, and this is when the 'other side' od our personality shows itself. According to von Franz (in Boa, pp. 83-85) in our dreams, it may be anthropomorphic, but may also appear as a raging animal, an unseen thief, a dangerous enemy, but because in itself the Shadow is not necessarily evil, it may appear as a primitive person as well, one who is not evil per se. Another distinction worth making, not just with the Shadow archetype, but all archetypes in general is that their nature is dual, or each exists as both a personal aspect as well as a collective one, even though all archetypes originate in the collective unconscious.

The nature of the Shadow and the nature of evil is written about, talked about, preached about and condemned, but very little is said about accepting the Shadow because such acceptance is very difficult and part of a greatly uncomfortable process or, in the very famous words of Jung, "one does not become enlightened by imagining figures of light, but by making the darkness conscious. The latter procedure, however, is disagreeable and therefore not popular" (1968, vol.13, para.335).

The negative aspect of the Shadow inevitably actualizes the complex issue of evil. Jung says that it is generally easy to see one's personal Shadow, with the help of some self-criticism, but when it comes to coming face to face with the archetype of the collective Shadow, it is "a rare and shattering experience […] to gaze into the face of absolute evil" (1959, 10) because, for him, speaking from a psychological point of view, evil is a projection of the collective Shadow archetype and as such, it can become an objective reality.

4. EVIL AS A PROJECTION OF REPRESSED CONTENT

A fascinating aspect of the phenomenon of unaccepted psychological contents, are the mechanisms of ego defense that ensure repressed contents stay repressed and our Shadow remains in the dark and below the levels of consciousness. These mechanisms include projection, intellectualization, reactive formation, displacement, repression and denial, the final two being the primary mechanisms (Stevens 2002, pp.271-274).

We previously mentioned that the Shadow is projective - projection is a defense mechanism by which we disassociate with and project onto others what is unacceptable in ourselves, leading to the prejudice and demonization of not just individuals but groups and ideas as well. Rationalization provides bad excuses for bad and impulsive deeds and words. Intellectualization dissolves potentially explosive emotional contents by using dry abstract terminology and theorizing, leading away from the danger zone. Reaction-formation is a mechanism that is active since earliest childhood and it helps us present ourselves in complete opposition to how we feel inside, thus repressing genuine psychological contents. Displacement is also an interesting mechanism with the help of which when we feel in a given situation or towards a certain person contents that are dangerous to express, we displace those contents towards situations or people who are weaker or more helpless and there we express those negative emotions. This principle exists in the animal kingdom as well and with people it leads to the scapegoat syndrome. In this syndrome also, when there is no external enemy towards which people might displace their aggression, they find someone weaker in their own group and sacrifice him/her. A prime example of this are the witch hunts or genocides and religious persecutions. All of these defense mechanisms attempt (and most of the time very successfully manage) to keep the Shadow well below the threshold of consciousness.

Thus, all personal qualities that are repressed come to form the personal Shadow and all qualities that are denied on a community or global level, form the collective Shadow. Or, in the words of Whitmont (in Zweig et al. 1991, p.15) "the shadow is projected in two forms: individually, in the shape of the people to whom we ascribe all the evil; and collectively, in its most general form, as the Enemy, the personification of evil".

This makes for a fascinating overview of how certain aspects of the Shadow are actualized in certain historical periods – if in the time of Freud the repression of sexuality brought to light the erotic demons,

today, over a century later, what is actualized is the thirst for power and destruction, by means of repressing them in the name of civilization and modernity; and this will change over time, as each age has qualities it finds unacceptable. We also witness, on a daily basis, the projection of the collective Shadow on certain nations or ideas and the instigation of wars around the globe. In the words of Fontana,

> "by humankind's failure to acknowledge the shadow within each of us it becomes, like all unacknowledged archetypes, projected outwards on to others. It becomes an adversary as in the myth of Satan, and is apparent in the human tendency to demonize other countries, ethnic minorities, other religions, other political parties, business competitors, and even next-door neighbors." (2003, p.99).

The force, the power with which we repress contents into the unconscious is of strength beyond anything we can measure and Sigmund Freud was the first to write about it, particularly in the context of effective development of the Super Ego in children and the fear of castration as the primary motivation for this development. Recent research has moved away from this theory and is now considering several other theories, one of which, by John Bowlby (1982) claims that:

> "the impetus to effective superego development is […] fear of being abandoned by mother for being unacceptable. The horrendous prospect of being totally rejected because of some partial revelation of the Self is at the bottom of all feelings of guilt, all desire for punishment, and all longings for atonement and reconciliation." (in Stevens 2002, p.246)

This is reason enough for unacceptable contents to be repressed, all in the effort to be accepted and loved by the primary caretaker.

5. THE SHADOW ARCHETYPE IN ENGLISH LITERATURE

Archetypal images as expressions of archetypes, are to be found in dreams and fantasies, in myths and fairy tales and, consequently, in literary works as well. Perhaps the most enduring theme of literature has been the battle between good and evil and literary villains have long been a fascination of the reading audiences. These villains often embody the Shadow archetype, although the characteristics they embody vary according to the age they are created in and the author who created them. It is worth noting that the Hero/Shadow conflict in literature expands to more than just the personal/collective archetype dichotomy to include both exteriorized and internalized conflicts.

Jung once called the conflict between the Ego and the Shadow a "battle of deliverance" and this conflict is expressed by "the contest between the archetypal hero and the cosmic powers of evil, personified by dragons and other monsters" (1964, p.118). Monsters – be they theriomorphic or anthropomorphic – abound in all literature and English literature is no exception.

The hero Beowulf and Grendel are one of the best examples in which the Shadow contents of Beowulf are actualized in an actual monster, making the confrontation more direct. Another excellent example of the Shadow archetype is found in Robert Louis Stevenson's Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde in which the doctor, who famously said that "man is not truly one, but truly two" (1886, p.106) literally turns into an embodiment of his own Shadow and gets to live out his dark impulses as an alter-ego. Mary Shelley's Frankenstein has a monster embodying the collective Shadow of Victorian England with all its strict rules and prohibitions and a censorship on sensitivity.

Perhaps the most enduring of all monsters, extending its relevance through centuries, including our current one, is the vampire. As a literary character, it has been the embodiment of collective Shadow content, evolving as our ideas of unacceptability changed – if, in fin de siècle literature, it was the embodiment of the fears and desires of pre-Victorians and Victorians, in the characters of Count Dracula, Carmilla, Lord Ruthven, it is now, in 21st century, quite evolved from these characters to reflect modern society's efforts at inclusion of the Other. Similarly, the witches as embodiments of Shadow contents in the infamous witch hunts and witch trials, have been a favorite go-to character for projections of unacceptable female traits.

The Dark Lords of literature are Shadow characters with superhuman powers, usually wizards, as are the most famous Sauron from J.R.R. Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings Trilogy, and Valdemort from J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter saga. They both embody personal and collective Shadow traits and warn against the succumbing to our dark desires and impulses, generally for power and dominion. And who better to be the personification of the Shadow of brilliant Sherlock Holmes but the equally brilliant Moriarty?
William Shakespeare has also famously created a host of memorable embodiments of the Shadow archetype in Lady Macbeth, Iago, King Lear, Richard III, Claudius, Shylock, to name but a few. The list goes on and on, as literary portrayal of archetypes is the most wholesome and the safest way to be dealing with unwanted psychological contents.

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