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Encounter with Shadow and Its Manifestations in Fairy Tales and Literature

Abstract: Shadow is one of the basic concepts of analytical psychology, a structure with its archetypal basis, related to the contents separated from the conscious part of personality. Most often those are instinctive and inferior contents of sexual and aggressive nature, but also talents and potentials that are removed from the field of consciousness. We can talk about personal and archetypal Shadow that is manifested through different social phenomena of projecting negative and inferior content on marginal groups. Shadow as a universal and omnipresent structure can be recognized in myths, fairy tales and literature. Its presence in cultural heritage offers possibility for therapeutical work to clarify to our clients both its contents and the levels of integration, using amplification. In this paper, I will illustrate some of the manifestations of archetypal and personal Shadow.

Keywords: Shadow; literature; amplification; archetype.

Introduction

Shadow is one of the basic concepts of analytical psychology, a key to both defining the identity of a person as well as to establishing and maintaining the relationship with others.

Most generally, the concept of shadow, that originated from the work of Jung,¹ represents all the contents, impulses and needs that are negatively valued and therefore rejected and placed in unconscious. Most frequently, the contents of Shadow are connected to aggressive and sexual impulses that are unacceptable or frightening, though there are other contents as well. Through early development, a child accepts positively valued aspects of his own functioning, and they become the part of conscious identity or Persona, while the unacceptable aspects fall into shadow of unconscious. Shadow, as well as every other complex, implies archetypal basis as well as personal experience.²

¹ Cf. Karl Gustav Jung, *Psihološki tipovi* (Beograd: Matica Srpska, 1977).

² Cf. Karl Gustav Jung, *Dinamika nesvesnog* (Novi Sad: Matica Srpska, 1978).

According to the theory of analytical psychology, the inner world of a man consists of many different psychological instances – complexes that can be described as series of sub-personalities that act more or less autonomously.³ There is Ego- complex but there is also a large number of other complexes that connect to certain parts of psychological energy. Depending on the level of their integration, they act more or less autonomously. Every complex has archetypal potential, and we are made of often opposing contents that, when faced with each other, may lead towards the inner conflict. One of the typical pairs of divergent opposites is the pair Shadow–Persona.⁴ Those are complementary structures and they appear within every person. Shadow relates to what is under the surface, under the conscious level, while Persona is the face we show to others in certain social situations.⁵ Complexes appear with the interaction of the archetype and specific experiences (strong of less intensive), from the relationships with persons from the family or social surroundings, and generally through the experience of a person.

The instance that appears during personality development cannot be controlled by Ego and it stays covered from the “field of view” of the conscious Ego. We could understand Shadow more as psychological space⁶ than as a psychological structure.

In the process of adaptation to the outer world, Ego engages Shadow to act through the activities that are unacceptable for the consciousness, while personality cannot fall into the moral conflict.⁷ Without the knowledge of Ego these instances act from Shadow. These contents are not available to introspection and it is very difficult for a person to recognize them as his or her own conscious decisions or choices, and often taking defensive stance towards them, projecting them into other persons.

In therapeutic work, we mainly meet personal Shadow that is separated from the dominant ego identity. One of the therapeutic aims is to provide safe space where we can reconsider the content of Shadow, which opens the possibility to integrate some rejected content.⁸ The content of Shadow doesn't necessarily have to be connected to some unpleasant and unacceptable content. It can also be connected to some unrealized talents and potentials that can, if remaining suppressed or detached for a long time, provoke certain halts in development, i.e. psychological problems. Shadow can be a source of creativity and productivity. These inhibited talents and abilities are placed in Shadow and they are called bright Shadow.⁹

It is very important to accept not only contents of Persona, expressed mostly through Ego ideals, but also through Shadow contents that in most cases are not the

³ Cf. Jolande Jacobi, *Complex/Archetype/Symbol in the Psychology of C. G. Jung* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959).

⁴ Cf. Murray Stein, *Jung's Map of the Soul* (Illinois: Open Court Chicago and La Salle, 1998).

⁵ Cf. Michael Fordham, *The Self and Autism* (London: Heinemann, 1976).

⁶ Stein, *Jung's Map of the Soul*.

⁷ Cf. Carl Gustav Jung, *The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche*, Collected Works Volume 8 (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969).

⁸ Cf. Steve Page, *The Shadow and the Counsellor* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999).

⁹ Cf. Edward Whitmont, *The Symbolic Quest! Basic Concepts of Analytical Psychology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987).

same as evil and destruction.¹⁰ Through Shadow a person can meet some of the contents that have been detached for a long time from his or her conscious ego, to awaken much creativity and movement, to widen the possibility of different choices and to step out from the trap of determination by the hidden contents of Shadow.¹¹ The conflict between the opposing contents, in this case between Shadow and Persona, can produce a certain crisis, but this crisis can have positive effects to personality growth and development, while the symptom can mean a chance for a new developmental challenge as well.¹² The psychological third can appear only when this system is brought into the state of crisis, and when the problem cannot be overcome the old way.

Apart from the personal, we can also discuss the archetypal Shadow, which has the archetype of evil in its core¹³ and it appears as such in myths, legends and fairy tales.

Jung himself discusses this topic, saying that the Shadow is not too difficult to look through, if a person tries to understand it with a certain amount of self-criticism. However, this statement is true only to the extent to which contact with the Shadow is personal. Jung continues by saying that presenting Shadow as an archetype brings the same difficulties one may face when trying to understand Anima and Animus. Jung then rephrases, and speaks about evil. When understanding the nature of his own relative, a man views evil inside a domain that is still bearable and possible for a human. However, looking directly into the eyes of the absolute evil, is as rare and as upsetting as trying to understand Anima and Animus.¹⁴

In his late works, Jung modifies this attitude and all the instinctive and unconscious contents connects to Shadow to a certain extent.

Luckily, breakthrough of archetypal Shadow is uncommon, and it can be recognized in dark mischiefs that have no sense and can never be completely explained with personal history or with pathology of the perpetrator. Numerous destructive social phenomena can be interpreted as breakthrough of archetypal Shadow, through collective projections on marginal groups which became the object of collective projections in certain social contexts. Without any direct contact or direct experience, people tend to attribute certain dark or inferior characteristics to those groups, followed by strong emotional reactions of anger, hatred and disgust.

The social phenomena of “stigmatization” of marginal groups are the projections of the collective Shadow, and complicated withdrawal processes of these “collective” projections open the possibility to develop society that is more humane and of a higher quality.

Cultural heritage and different forms of artistic presentations can also be interpreted and connected to the concept of Shadow, which proves its universality, archetypal conditioning and omnipresence.

¹⁰ Cf. Karl Gustav Jung, *Aion* (Beograd: Atos, 1996).

¹¹ Cf. Joseph L. Henderson, *Shadow and Self: Selected Papers in Analytical Psychology* (Wilmette, Illinois: Chiron Publications, 1990).

¹² Cf. Stein, *Jung's Map of the Soul*.

¹³ Cf. Marie-Louise von Franz, *Shadow and Evil in Fairy Tales* (Boston & London: Shambhala, 1995).

¹⁴ Cf. Karl Gustav Jung, *Analitička psihologija: Predavanja sa Tavistoka* (Beograd: Zavod za udžbenike i nastavna sredstva, 2002), 64.

The concept of Shadow can be recognized in different cultural fields, in arts and mythology. Numerous analytical therapists deal with the connection between the concept of Shadow and the artistic creativity.¹⁵

An important technique of analytical psychotherapy is amplification. Amplification supposes the use and application of mythological, historical, sociological and cultural parallels to explain and widen metaphorical content of dream symbolism and some other experience that the client brings to analysis.¹⁶

In this paper, I will present the presence of Shadow in cultural heritage through the example of one fairy tale and one novel, giving another confirmation of universality and archetypal conditioning of this concept.

Shadow in literature

Through the short analysis of the book *We Need to Talk About Kevin* by Lionel Shriver,¹⁷ I will attempt to show the phenomenology of Shadow on the archetypal level. In a series of letters, the main character Eva addresses her loving (late) husband Franklin, and through the dialog with her own self she attempts to understand the tragedy that happened to her – a tragedy that has neither the answer “why” nor the explanation that could be confirmed by any diagnostic or psychodynamic arguments. Through this moving confession, being brutally honest, Eva attempts to understand her role in creating the hell, which transformed their minor son into a murderer. Without reason, Kevin ruthlessly and brutally killed nine children in his high school, his father and sister, and left her in life, as she says herself, charging her with the biggest punishment, that will take her through difficult process from revenge to forgiveness, from guilt to acceptance. The inability to understand extreme destruction and to answer the question why are the main characteristics of the manifestation of the archetypal shadow.¹⁸

Through deep and moving confrontation with her deepest shadowy side, she recognizes that even before she got pregnant, she felt her potential child as a burden and a torment. On her first encounter with him, right after birth, she felt a void that she tried to mask with excitement. During the whole time of Kevin’s growing up, she was faced with the destruction and hatred of the child that was growing up alongside her and that she actually never managed to forge a relationship with. On the other hand, she reconsiders the relationship of her husband Franklin who again, because his own inability to see (his own shadow), neglects very obvious signs of growing psychopathy of his own child. At first it resembles childish misbehavior, but over time becomes more malicious. Actually, throughout the book she speaks about things she

¹⁵ Cf. Mario Jacoby, *Jungian Psychotherapy and Contemporary Infant Research* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999).

¹⁶ Cf. Endrju Samuels, *Jung i njegovi sledbenici* (Beograd: Zavod za udzbenike i nastavna sredstva, 1999).

¹⁷ Cf. Lajonel Šrejver, *Moramo da razgovaramo o Kevinu* (Beograd: Laguna, 2003).

¹⁸ Cf. Jung, *Analitička psihologija: Predavanja sa Tavistoka*.

really felt and the things she was actually ready to admit. The story of Kevin (a boy from a wealthy American family where everything was “more than optimal”) can be understood as a metaphor for a tragedy of surrounding, country, value system, where everything goes “as it should” – a system in which everything can be bought or compensated, except the sense and the purpose of life. In this image, the optimal family is a personification of the collective Persona. On the other hand, Kevin is a personification of a non-being, of collective Shadow;¹⁹ having no sense and purpose, and no matter which psychological or sociological explanation we offer- we are at a dead end, because it is not enough to explain the destruction he was radiating throughout his whole life, and that escalated with the tragedy. Exactly that confusion and astonishment, with the complete absence of both the explanation and the answer to “why”, introduces the archetype of evil that found Kevin as a channel to manifest through.

This is how Eva describes the encounter with her son after her ruthlessly performed the crime: “I wished to scream: ‘What did you do?’ But that banal question was not egoistically rhetoric, mocking of parental resignation. I would soon find out the details. And I knew that the conversation with him can be nothing but absurd.”²⁰

By using this encountering of Eve and Kevin as an example, we can more clearly understand what Jung referred to as a meeting with the archetypal Shadow, which in its core has the archetype of Evil.²¹

“Someone else’s son”, who, using a crossbow, killed his friends, his father and sister the embodiment of archetype of evil, a cruel god of destruction, something incomprehensible and unexplainable to one’s mind.

The quote I will finish with says that Eva finally accepted what happened to her:

I know only this: that my son was born on April eleventh nineteen eighty-three and that I felt nothing. Once again, the truth is always much bigger than we understand. When this newly born fidgeted on my breast, restraining from them with such disgust, I rejected him scornfully in return – though he was fifteen times smaller than me, it seemed accurate to me. Since then, the two of us have been fighting with undiminished ferocity that I almost admire. But it is certainly possible to gain love by tempting antagonism to the utmost limits, to become closer to someone by rejecting him. Because, three days before his eighteenth birthday, I can finally say that I am too exhausted, too confused and lonely to continue fighting, and though it might be out of despair or laziness, I even love my son. He has five more hard years in a jail for adults, and I can’t guarantee who will go out from there. But in the meantime, there is one more room in my functional apartment...²²

¹⁹ Cf. Franz, *Shadow and Evil in Fairy Tales*.

²⁰ Šrejver, *Moramo da razgovaramo o Kevinu*, 432.

²¹ Cf. Jung, *Aion*.

²² Šrejver, *Moramo da razgovaramo o Kevinu*, 452.

It was as if the embryo of that transpersonal destruction had been there from the very beginning. The negative Mother complex appeared in the first encounter with Kevin.²³ It was as if Eve had deeply, unconsciously felt that such a child would be difficult to love and accept, way before the destruction itself appeared.²⁴

It is difficult to accept the responsibility for the activated the archetype of evil. It is difficult to live with tearing up guilt if we were, in any way, an “accomplice” in this constellation. In those situations, we can never completely answer the question “why?”, because this question is asked by our conscious Ego trying to explain transpersonal content. But it is very important to try to understand a part of our own role and responsibility because this will enable us to continue with our own life, naturally, never forgetting the burden we carry.

Shadow in fairy tales

There is almost no fairy tale where we don't meet some manifestation of Shadow. In this paper, I will present the interpretation of well known fairy tale *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, using the methods of fairy tale analysis.

There are many definitions of fairy tales, and they have been brought back to cultural heritage with the persistent work of two famous scientists, The Brothers Grimm, Jacob and Wilhelm, who collected and published the book of German folk fairy tales, saving this priceless cultural treasure from oblivion and decline. In our region, Vuk Karadžić and Veselin Čajkanović recognized and saved a part of our valuable cultural heritage, collecting and recording Serbian fairy tales. The sources of fairy tales are not only found in fantasizing or intellectual world of the individuals, fairy tales are also collective, universal creations of certain cultural regions, they are the part of the inner world of man, they represent one of the oldest, most archaic self-descriptions of the soul, and their sources are situated in the universal matrix of humankind.

Jung understood fairy tales as “specified archetypes”. They are the medium through which archetypes appear, they follow and symbolize the key developmental stages, i.e. the phases of individuation, while psychological value and purposefulness of fairy tales have a universal character. Dr Marie-Louise von Franz²⁵ was the one to deal the most, in the frame of analytical psychology, with the method of amplification (intensification and deepening) of the psychological meaning of the clinical material, using fairy tales' symbolism. There are several main guidelines in the fairy tale interpretation that I will present shortly after I explain the method of amplification.

It is about the method of the interpretation of psychological processes and contents that tries to place certain phenomenon and experience into universal context, naturally after both analyzing all personal meanings and associations and explaining the personal context of the client.

²³ Cf. Erih Nojman, *Velika majka* (Beograd: Fedon, 2015).

²⁴ Cf. Mara Sidoli, *The Unfolding: Self-Separation and Individuation* (Boston: Sigo Press, 1989).

²⁵ Cf. Marie-Louise von Franz, *Interpretation of Fairy tales* (Dallas: Spring Publications, 1970).

Analysis of a fairy tale, as a specific shape of the “archetypal story” suggests the following steps: we first start from the exposition (similar to dream analysis) – discovering both time and space, and the context of this archetypal story. Actually, in fairy tales, already through the introduction: “Once upon a time”, “Long ago” or “Once there was a ...” timelessness and spacelessness are very directly emphasized. This directs us towards both eternal and undefined omnipresent and collective unconscious that isn’t defined anywhere. The following thing we have to pay attention to when analyzing fairy tales are present and especially absent characters. The following important step in the interpretation is the very beginning of the problem – the way the problem starts, the main participants in the problem, the type of the problem and its nature. This initial phase actually suits the state of the psyche, when the psyche is stuck because of the activity of a certain complex. Processes of enantiodromia are typical for fairy tales, i.e. rhythmical exchange of the conflict and the resolution; black and white; good and evil; negative and positive. At the beginning of almost every fairy tale, the main character or a character very close to him is somehow stuck – in a trap, in a hopeless situation –while the goal of the most generally speaking is: enlightening, overcoming this initial block on one higher level. Actually, the thing is about some kind of disharmony, disbalance inside the psyche. This state is a result of the individual neurosis that is disturbing dialectical opposition of conscious and unconscious. “Enchantment” is a very frequent motive in fairy tales. If we translate this motive in psychological language, the enchanted character resembles a person from a real life that went through some kind of disruption of the activity of a complex, which consequently leads us to completely dysfunctional and inappropriate functioning. The activity and the state of one complex cannot be observed separately from the others, because they are in a constant interaction.

Marie-Louise von Franz states that being enchanted in fairy tales does influence some parts of the psyche, but rather the psyche as a whole. As damage occurs, it influences the whole psyche rather than just its particular parts, because the complexes all live inside a social order which is organized by the soul itself. For this reason, the motive of enchantment, as well as its cure, are topics of interest for us.²⁶

I will come back to this motive of enchantment when I begin analyzing the content of Shadow in fairy tales. The following step in fairy tales’ analysis is the analysis of peripeteia or the conflict of the fairy tale, which can be either very short or very long, and sometimes one conflict can even transform into another. Climax is the phase of the conflict culmination. That is the crucial moment where the things can go either completely wrong or towards the happy ending. There is resolution at the end of fairy tale. The key phase of a fairy tale understanding is its psychological interpretation. This process consists of translating the amplified story in psychological language, i.e. comparing it to a specific situation from a real life of a patient. Two main aims of the psychological interpretation of fairy tales are: creating a channel for the unconscious content to come undisturbedly to consciousness, as well as to help the client to symbolically understand unconscious content and reach lower or higher

²⁶ Cf. Marie-Louise von Franz, *Redemption Motifs in Fairytales* (Toronto: Inner City Books, 1980).

level of compatibility of his own inner unconscious processes. Most of fairy tales try to describe individuation process, but some of them spend more time on and emphasize the plot description with some specific complexes.

Using the example of the fairy tale *snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, I will try to explain the work on the content of Shadow with the method of fairy tales analysis. As it was already explained, every character in this fairy tale represents certain autonomous complexes of the universal character, which makes him typical for all human beings.

Soon after the idyllic beginning of a fairy tale, a dramatic turnover appears – a wonderful girl was born, skin white as snow, lips red as blood, and hair black as ebony. But very soon, her nurturing queen mother gets ill and dies (falls into unconscious), and the evil stepmother appears – Shadow appears and tries to destroy Snow White with a whole range of peripeteias (Ego in development). There are also powerless aspects of animus: nine men (king, hunter and seven dwarfs) who represent father figures inside Snow White's personality.

Psyche is at the dead end – Snow White's mother dies, and the presentation of a father is colored by inferiority that cannot protect her from the Shadow of motherhood – evil stepmother (a personification of Shadow) that is trying to ruin Snow White (Ego) with her rushes of anger. This constellation of Shadow and a weak animus actually want to relocate and disintegrate Ego.

The conflict starts when Shadow (evil stepmother) starts considering her growing Ego as a threat, but the first level of masculine consciousness starts appearing from that conflict between Ego and Shadow: the character of a hunter, who will neither kill Snow White (as Shadow ordered) nor help her. He will leave her in a forest full of beasts. The other contents of Shadow are instinctive animal, but developmentally advantageous. Her "wandering through wilderness" is a transit state of Ego, in the same time being both frightening and a special aspect of initiation, necessary for ego to come to the next developmental phase. Jung discusses this saying that in the mentioned developmental stage, unknown inner forces influence ego. Therefore, its freedom becomes limited and Ego completely detaches itself from a normal life.²⁷

In the next phase of the conflict, Ego becomes more mature and aware, and more defined. Snow White stays in a little house in a forest. Greater maturity of both the male and female principles inside of psyche is reflected through the agreement of Snow White and the dwarfs on their mutual help and collaboration.

However, the more mature and more integrated Ego is the more seductive and more hidden Shadow becomes. It uses the weaknesses of Ego that leads Snow White to carelessness (a blind spot in recognizing the danger that threatens to once again ruin *I*. The Shadow is not the threatening evil queen; it is a poor hunchbacked woman who offers a red apple to Snow White. In the fairy tale, Snow White stops (Ego is testing reality), but only for a moment, before she uncritically falls once again into a trap placed by Shadow. It is interesting to see Shadow transforming to "trick" a more mature and more integrated Ego.

²⁷ Cf. Carl Gustav Jung, *The Spirit in Man, Art and Literature*, Collected Works Volume 15 (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966).

It seems that Shadow finally overpowered Ego: Snow White lies dead “poisoned” on the death bed, while faithful dwarfs are protecting her and crying for her. This presentation can be connected to the therapeutic process where a client is totally crushed by the content of Shadow and overwhelmed by it, not only with its content but also with facing the unconscious processes that he doesn’t want to see. Therapists have often the role of a “dwarf” that cannot “make something alive” (to solve a problem, stop the suffering), but they can provide for, they can “preserve” safe space where the change happens.

Suddenly, as it usually happens in fairy tales, the prince appears from the forest (from the unconscious). Sleepy Ego gets a chance to cure itself using the integration of masculine principles that make him stronger and more integrated. When the prince (animus) gets the space for the integration into the female psyche, that unity that empowered Ego can open the space for the dialogue with Shadow, and the following step can be Shadow’s integration. That psychological situation is considerably different from the one from the beginning of the fairy tale. At the beginning, there was a threat for Ego to be completely sucked in and disintegrated by the regressive attacks of Shadow (personified in the character of the evil stepmother). While now, after the process of both facing this content and integrating animus (opinion, estimation, active Ego, willing principle), empowered Ego is able to integrate Shadow. Only after this processes of recognizing and integrating, Shadow stops being a source of potential Ego destruction. In the end, Snow White invites the evil stepmother to her wedding – the stepmother exists, co-existing with Ego, and the space is opened for it to present all its bitterness and misery, but when it appears in the daylight, everything becomes less harmful.

This fairy tale describes a difficult and long path of individuation, especially when it comes to facing the traps of Shadow and its destructive inflow, but also with confrontation and finally integrating these contents. Collective experience actually gives us a road on one side, but also gives us hope that it is possible to live through and survive this tormenting process until the end.

It is very important to both understand Shadow and integrate its content, because this is how we become whole and responsible for the content we carry in ourselves. We project that content less to other persons or groups and contexts. That lessens the polarization and leads to balance both internally and in different interpersonal and intergroup relations. The presence of Shadow in cultural heritage witnesses about its universality, archetypal conditionality and omnipresence. It enables us to recognize it and to connect to it not only within our personal context and experience.

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