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**Virginia Woolf's *To The Lighthouse*:
Lily Briscoe's Archetypal Behaviour**

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Abstract

The archetype is a psychosomatic concept that links body, psyche, instinct and image. Jung asserts that images evoke the aim of the instincts, implying that they deserve equal significance. Archetypes are recognized in outer behaviours, namely those that cluster around basic and universal experiences of life, like motherhood, birth, death and separation. They are also part of the human psyche and are observable to inner or psychic life such as anima, shadow, persona and so forth. Archetypal patterns are realized in the personality and are capable of infinite variations depending upon individual expression. To give archetypal expression to something is to interact consciously with the collective unconscious; i.e., to interact with the historic image in such a way as to give opportunities to the play of intrinsic opposing forces. In order to prevent psychic disproportions conscious and unconscious states are harmonious in a balanced person. Dissolution of the compromise between the conscious and the unconscious renders the opposition even more intense and results in psychic disequilibrium. When this tension becomes intolerable, a solution must be discovered and the only viable relief is a reconciliation of the two at a different and more satisfactory level. Thus, Lily Briscoe sees a harmony in Mrs. Ramsay that she would like to achieve but remains unable to until she realizes and overcomes the shortcomings in her personality. She achieves that harmony in her painting only when she imbibes the spirit of Mrs. Ramsay, after much thought over her strict feministic stance.

Keywords: Archetypes, conscious mind, unconscious, archetypal behaviour, conflict, disequilibrium and individuation.

Introduction

This paper is a study of the Jungian concept of individuation; i.e., of a person becoming himself or whole. It is a key concept in the Jungian psychology to the theories regarding personality development, as such it is linked to the Archetypes, Self and Ego. When a conflicting situation arises, the corresponding archetype is there in the unconscious, having a numinous quality it will attract contents of consciousness, which make it perceptible and capable of conscious realization. Thus, harmony for Lily Briscoe takes the form of Mrs. Ramsay, who represents the Great Mother. Individuation also emphasizes the synthesis of conscious and unconscious elements, self-experience and realization. Individuation aims at divesting the Self from the false faces of the Persona. After going through the process of individuation one is not isolated, rather it gathers the world round one.

Lily Briscoe's Archetypal Behaviour

The psyche “is, in fact, the only immediate experience we can have and the *sine quo non* of the subjective reality of the world. The symbols it creates are always grounded in the unconscious archetype, but their manifest forms are moulded by the ideas acquired by the conscious mind...” (Jacobi, 1999:74)

The novel begins with an influx of various characters, and all the characters appear to be in search of some completeness in their lives, which is possible only when there is a regular communication between the conscious and the unconscious. Therefore, from the beginning we get the idea that the unconscious repressed desires of man play a significant part in his life; and will somehow find its way out, in his behaviour. When these unconscious desires come in open conflict with consciousness, then there is a quest for trying to understand one's problem, and this brings about the process of individuation. Jacobi (1999) defines archetypes as “factors and motifs that arrange the psychic elements into certain images, characterized as archetypal, but in such a way that they *can be recognized only from the effects they produce*. They exist preconsciously, and presumably form the structural dominants of the psyche in general” (31). However, she warns that “one must constantly bear in mind that what we call ‘archetype’ is irrepresentable, but that it has effects, which enable us to visualize it, namely, the archetypal images” (35).

As such, Lily Briscoe, one of the characters in *To the Lighthouse*, feels dissatisfied with herself and her work as an artist. She is constantly in search of something that she lacks. The lack from the unconscious mind, when it impresses itself on the

conscious mind, takes the image of Mrs. Ramsay, the main character of the novel. For Lily, she is a symbol of fulfilment.

Thus for Lily, Mrs. Ramsay takes the form of the archetypal image of the “Great Mother” a personification of the feminine principle, with its fundamental capacity to nourish or devour. It also corresponds to Mother Nature. Therefore, it has positive and negative aspects. For Lily, it has taken the form in the positive aspect, which involves the creative aspect of the Great mother (Edinger, 2008:14).

Mrs. Ramsay is portrayed as a person who creates a harmonious atmosphere for all around her. She does this in her own womanly way, without being radical or contradictory especially to Mr. Ramsay or any of the male or female characters around her. She interacts with them in such a way, that she is never at loggerheads with any of the characters. Thus in her presence, the picture is always harmonious and most of the characters, mainly Lily Briscoe, view her as a redeeming angel. This is evident from the dinner scene in which Mrs. Ramsay manages to hold all the different characters together:

Raising her eyebrows at the discrepancy...Nothing seemed to have merged. They all sat separate. And the whole of the effort of merging and flowing and creating rested on her...and so, giving herself the little shake that one gives a watch that has stopped, the old familiar pulse began beating . . . (TTL, 126)¹

Mrs Ramsay starts talking to Mr. Bankes and Lily watches her conduct, the whole business of creating a harmonious picture:

How old she looks, how worn she looks, Lily thought, and how remote. Then when she turned to William Bankes smiling, it was as if the ship had turned and the sun has struck its sails again . . . (TTL, 127)

Lily as an artist has a great desire to paint a harmonious picture. After she receives taunting remarks from Mr. Tansley, when he says, “‘women can’t paint, women can’t write...’” (TTL, 75), the harmony that Mrs. Ramsay is able to create attracts her and now she endeavours to paint the essence of Mrs. Ramsay on her canvass. The lack within her own personality, i.e. her own radical feminist ways and ideas, prevent her from imbibing the spirit of Mrs. Ramsay. An archetype is a psychological instinct, when it is ‘expressed in conscious psychic material, an

¹ The abbreviation TTL is used throughout instead of *To The Lighthouse* (1927).

archetype...become[s] an “image” (Jacobi, 1999: 35). As such, Mrs. Ramsay becomes an archetypal image, who she now idealizes. This shows an archetypal behaviour in Lily.

In Lily’s case, it becomes the positive aspect of the archetypal image of the “Great mother” (Edinger, 2008: 6). This is how she views Mrs. Ramsay, hence the sense of fulfilment, harmony and creativity are associated with her. Thus, Mrs. Ramsay inspires in Lily the quest for those qualities, which have endeared her to all around her. The experience at the dinner table has caught hold of Lily Briscoe's mind as according to Whitmont:

[The] symbolic approach [to life] can mediate as experience of something indefinable, intuitive or imaginative, or a feeling-sense of something that can be known or conveyed in no other way since abstract terms do not suffice everywhere...to most people...the only comprehensible approach to reality lies in defining everything by means of literal, abstract, impersonal conceptualizations... (Whitmont, 1969: 16).

From Lily’s approach towards life, it is clear that she is a person who tries to understand things from the literal and rational point of view. Therefore, she fails to understand how Mrs. Ramsay’s character works. It is only when she pays heed to the urging of her unconscious mind, that she starts realizing the reality and significance of things around her.

The experience of coming across an archetypal image leaves a strong emotional impact on the individual ego. Such experiences transform the person and alter his views radically (Edinger, 2008:6). Thus after associating with Mrs. Ramsay, Lily starts noticing shortcomings in her personality. She, therefore, wants to be like Mrs. Ramsay as such she develops closeness towards Mrs. Ramsay, when she lays her head against Mrs. Ramsay’s knee:

[S]he knew knowledge and wisdom was stored up in Mrs. Ramsay’s heart. How then, she asked herself, did one know one thing or another thing about people, sealed as they were? Only like a bee, drawn by some sweetness or sharpness in the air intangible to touch or taste...for days there hung about her, as after a dream some subtle change is felt in the person one has dreamt of...as she [Mrs. Ramsay] sat on the wicker arm chair in the drawing room window she wore, to Lily’s eyes, an august shape; the shape of a dome. (TTL, 79-80)

The conflict in Lily's mind is created the moment Mr. Tansley taunts women for their inability to paint or write. Internally, she yearns for the completion of her picture. Lily is painting the picture of Mrs. Ramsay sitting at the window, and she strives to represent her with a purple triangular shape. However, hard she tries she remains unsatisfied due to the lack of a harmonious effect, which is her desire to achieve.

According to Clay, this conflict cannot be overcome by the conscious mind, which remains caught between the opposites. It requires a symbol or image to point out the necessity of freeing itself of its origins. Therefore, the unconscious mind creates a solution to the conflict, which is usually what the conscious mind longs for. This cannot be done without detaching itself from its origins. Thus, Lily's unconscious mind provides the archetypal image, in the form of Mrs. Ramsay who fascinates Lily and becomes the symbol that Lily's unconscious mind gets hold of. The redeeming effect of Mrs. Ramsay's character exerts its influence on her consciousness; and sustains Lily's endeavours to achieve harmony and thus resolve the conflict situation. This could not have been possible without the intervention of the unconscious mind (Clay, 2000: 7).

As long as Lily tries to imbibe Mrs. Ramsay's spirit in an extraverted manner through physical contact or imitation, her effort remains futile, for she says, "Nothing happened. Nothing! Nothing! as she leant her head against Mrs. Ramsay's knee" (TTL, 79). This was not the answer to the internal conflict in Lily's mind. Lily's rational mind still needed to mature and develop before she could understand how Mrs. Ramsay's effectiveness worked. Lily has not given her emotional and intuitive sides:

adequate moral value or conscious scrutiny; feelings are regarded as something that can be dispensed with, intuitions are not considered as "real". This is an approach which fails to help us towards the understanding of basic motivation; for ethos, morality and meaningfulness of existence [that] rest basically upon emotional and intuitive foundations. (Whitmont, 1969: 17)

As such, even her behaviour towards Mr. Tansley during the dinner was rather childish when she repeatedly taunts him to take her to the Lighthouse that annoys him. "Oh, Mr. Tansley," she said, "do take me to the Lighthouse with you. I should so love it" (TTL, 130). From Lily's words, it is evident that she only meant to tease him for his remarks against women. Later, she realizes the difference in her attitude and that of Mrs. Ramsay. She sees how Mrs. Ramsay without blaming her, gets Mr. Tansley involved in conversation by the sympathy she shows him and the

importance she gives him. This satisfies his ego and normalizes his temper therefore his retaliation stops:

Mr. Tansley raised a hammer: swung it high in the air; but realizing, as it descended, that he could not smite that butterfly with that instrument..." (TTL, 138).

Thus, from this experience, Lily gains "[p]sychic maturation" (Whitmont, 1969:129), and she, too, like Mrs. Ramsay asks Mr. Tansley kindly whether he would take her to the Lighthouse. Now, his egotism is relieved and the tension between them relaxes. Only when she sympathetically and intuitively tries to understand Mrs. Ramsay, does she reach the reality about her.

Similarly, Lily gains an insight into the matter of things only when she has shed off her one sided rationality and is able to think sympathetically. When Mr. Ramsay in sheer desperateness (after the death of Mrs. Ramsay) stands by her side in the hope of gaining some sympathy and attention, she fails to provide him any, which becomes a source of regret to her. According to Clay, when a character goes through the process of self-analysis, they embrace their darker side. This causes them shame in their own eyes and that of society, but at least they learn who they really are (Clay, 2000:7). Thus, Lily realizes her darker side; and admits that she had been non-sympathetic and rational to the extent of folly:

[T]here issued from him such a groan that any other woman in the whole world would have done something, said something -- all except myself' thought Lily, grinding at herself bitterly, who am not a woman, but a peevish, ill tempered, dried-up old maid presumably (TTL, 222).

Later, during this conversation she very spontaneously praises his boots, "What beautiful boots!" (TTL, 225). This little act of sympathy wins his heart and he smiles. Thus, Lily learns how Mrs. Ramsay was able to put things together without sacrificing her individuality.

Now that her intuition starts working and she looks at things with a toned down heart, the mystery of things open up before her. As Mr. Tansley had hurt her femininity, and she knew him as a person who always had "a purple book" (TTL, 149) under his arm, her unconscious mind associated the purple colour with the sting her ego had received from his negative remarks against women. Therefore, Lily tries to represent Mrs. Ramsay, who is a symbol of femininity and fulfilment by a purple triangle, in order to relieve her mind and defy the sting caused to her

femininity. The use of a few geometrical lines and a blur of purple hue resembling a triangle are suggestive:

What did she wish to indicate by the triangular purple shape, “just there”? . . . Why indeed? – except that if there, in that corner, it was bright, here, in this, she felt the need of darkness. Simple, obvious, commonplace, as it was, Mr Bankes was interested. Mother and child then — objects of universal veneration, and in this case the mother was famous for her beauty — might be reduced, he pondered, to a purple shadow without irreverence. (TTL, 81)

The purple colour and the triangle are not accidental. The purple colour (a combination of red and blue) “unites red’s fiery masculinity and blue’s cool femininity.”² And the triangle, a fundamental geometric symbol, is also associated with femininity through “the feminine pubic symbol.”³ The triangle may also be a reference to the cubist movement in art around 1910. Rosenblum (1966) points out that “Cubism proposed that the work of art was itself a reality that represented the very process by which nature is transformed into art.” Lily Briscoe’s “painterly creation resembles what has been called projection by the psychoanalysts” (53).⁴ Further, this process of painting resembles a psychological dialogue with herself, which “may have a therapeutic function in providing vast field for self-knowledge and psychic development” (53).⁵

Hence, when someone sitting at the window gives her the impression of Mrs. Ramsay, her creative faculty starts working and she quickly starts painting; this time with a deep conviction in her own feelings and intuitive powers regarding this experience. Thus, at last she is able to paint what she so long desired:

With a sudden intensity, as if she saw it clear for a second, she drew a line there, in the centre. It was done; it was finished. Yes, she thought, laying down her brush in extreme fatigue. I have had my vision. (306)

The process of individuation teaches her to satisfy herself, rather than the other. Her psychological dialogue with herself and the painting is over and she achieves individuation and wholeness — like the object of her painting, Mrs Ramsay.

² <http://www.umich.edu/~umfandsf/symbolismproject/symbolism.html/P/purple.html>

³ <http://www.umich.edu/~umfandsf/symbolismproject/symbolism.html/P/purple.html>

⁴ http://robertfrystudio.com/cms/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Kamila_Misiak_MA_thesis.pdf

⁵ http://robertfrystudio.com/cms/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Kamila_Misiak_MA_thesis.pdf

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