



## Alma's psyche: The Battlefield of Opposite Drives in *Summer and Smoke*

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### ABSTRACT

*To Jung, literary works are media through which the archetypes of the collective unconscious manifest themselves. Summer and Smoke is a striking psychological drama that can be analyzed based on the Jungian psychoanalysis. So employing Jung's theories, the research aims at exploring the main archetypes hidden in the deeper layers of Alma's mind in Summer and Smoke. Although there have been some interpretations of this drama based on psychological aspects, the present research intends to explore this work more deeply for extracting new concepts in relation to Jung's collective unconscious theory. First, an introduction to the mentioned drama is stated. Then, Jungian archetypal theories will be applied.*

**Key words:** Anima/animus, persona, shadow, self, process of individuation

### INTRODUCTION

Jung is considered as a pioneer whose major theories help us to explore the dark depths of the human mind. His theories can be also regarded as a guide to self-realization and reaching wholeness in human being. Among the models of psychoanalysis, the Jungian psychoanalysis, as a more comprehensive model has been very influential in the field of literary criticism in recent years. Jung is mostly known for his collective unconscious theory. Jung detected collective unconscious, beneath the layers of personal unconscious, which consists of different archetypes\_ the fundamental psychic patterns common to all humans, which influence all of our experiences and behaviors.

As such the Jungian theory is mostly applicable to the works of Tennessee Williams the prominent American playwright whose *Summer and Smoke* (1948) has been called one of his great plays. *Summer and Smoke* is Tennessee Williams at his most passionate. In *Summer and Smoke* Williams reinforces the theme of isolation and loneliness as human psychological difficulties. Nelson comments on this aspect of the play: "summer and Smoke takes up the theme of loneliness and the need for a warm, meaningful relationship" (121). The play deals with the human inability to cope with the troublesome atmosphere, and to establish lasting bond. Alma and John appear as personifications of the human inability to dissolve individual world and interact meaningfully and lastingly with those who are the objects of love. . *Summer and Smoke* takes place in the fraught and overly sensitive mind of a young woman who slowly finds herself moving into spinsterhood. Alma's character (the virginal spinster) and John (the out of control sensualist) are essentially the two parts of Williams' existential coin. If the two could be brought into harmony one with the other, a genuine, beautiful human being would emerge. This of course will not be the case. As both characters wind up over compensating for their faults, they miss the possibilities of a rich relationship between them.

Williams is essentially a poet and in his best plays, like *Summer and Smoke*, he brings his poetic vision to the stories he tells. When he takes poetic pulse of a character, it shows us a little bit of ourselves in that character. *Summer and Smoke* was originally entitled *A Chart of Anatomy* when Williams began writing it in 1945. He wrote it and renamed it *The Eccentricities of a Nightingale* in 1964. This revision retained the same characters and setting, but Williams thought it was a different play from *Summer and Smoke*. He also believed that it was less conventional and melodramatic. The world of *Summer and Smoke* is inhabited by misfits and outcasts. Glorious Hill, the small Mississippi town where *Summer and Smoke* takes place, is like a version of the town of Clarksdale where Tennessee Williams grew up. Like Alma, Williams was raised in an Episcopal rectory where his grandfather was pastor of St George's Church. Lyon, Mississippi, where the fictional Dr John Buchanan Sr spends much of his time at the fever clinic, is actually a small town in Mississippi, near Tom's boyhood home of Clarksdale. Malaria, influenza and yellow fever were very real threats at the time the play is set.

### DISCUSSION

Using Jung's theories, *Summer and Smoke* is interpreted as a journey to self-knowledge. The would-be lovers are opposites in a conflict that is not the spirit/flesh dichotomy but the struggle to achieve a higher consciousness.

### 1. Traces of Persona in Alma

The persona represents your public image, and comes from a Latin word for mask. So the persona is the mask you put on before you show yourself to the outside world although it begins as an archetype, by the time we are finished realizing it, it is the part of us most distant from the collective unconscious (Walker 38). At its best, it is just the good impression we all wish to present as we fill the roles society requires of us. But, of course, it can also be the false impression we use to manipulate people's opinions and behaviors. And, at its worst, it can be mistaken, even by ourselves, for our true nature. Sometimes we believe we really are what we pretend to be.

Alma Winemiller in particular is yet another of Williams' southern women who is a product of an antiquated tradition. She is the reverend's daughter trapped by circumstances of conventional propriety which makes her unable to have a stable personality. Alma swings between two polarities- the prudery of her parents and the earthiness and philistinism of Dr. John who refers to the anatomy chart to define his attitude to man- the brain, the belly and the genitals- and no Alma- Spanish word for soul. On the other hand Alma's mother, Mrs. Winemiller, has had a mental break with reality and Alma has learned to live with this strange creature who is her mother.

In this household, then, Alma has multiple roles to play. As a result of being, at once, the daughter of her father and mother, sister and parent to her mother, and social head of the household for her father, Alma has no role that she desires for herself. In this respect, she deviates from Williams' delineation of the young southern gentlewoman as she is seen as the caretaker in the household in contrast to Blanche in *A Streetcar Named Desire* who depends on others for care. She has experienced different roles at home since her childhood, and then she has appeared in society with several social roles, personas. Alma has not chosen her social or personal roles, but she has been forced by her surroundings. Alma is imposed to attend to her parents' needs instead of her own, however, she becomes unable to break free and develop into a whole, independent person. Her persona must be thick shield that covers her ego. Her persona has developed during childhood, so it is the public image that she allows others to see.

As mentioned above, her persona is reflected in various roles such as caretaker, daughter, sister, and parent to her mother. Williams describes her in the stage directions:

Alma had an adult quality as a child and now, in her middle twenties, there is something prematurely spinsterish about her: an excessive propriety and self-consciousness is apparent in her nervous laughter, her voice and gestures belong to years of church entertainments...people at her own age regard her as rather quaintly and humorously affected- Her true nature is still hidden even from herself (qtd. in Rod Christensen 6).

In the first part, she tries to show a social persona, mask which is completely different from the public image which is appeared in the second part. While Alma cold self dominates summer, we see a different Alma in the second half of the play, winter. Just as the seasons change, so do Alma's masks. Her social role is largely determined by her father, as seen in scene one when he objects to her singing: "you sing extremely well, Alma. But you know how well I feel about this, it was contrary to my wishes and I cannot imagine why you wanted to do so" (136).

### 2. Traces of Shadow in Alma

In Jung's model, the shadow archetype is the embodiment of the individual's repressed impulses. The shadow is the negative side of the personality, the sum of all those unpleasant qualities we like to hide. Jungian psychology is directly influenced by the psychology of opposites. Any extreme force, by the nature of its own power, begets an equally powerful opposing force- just as every physical action in physics is countered by an equally powerful reaction. The need for an opposing force is crucial in Jungian psychology because the metaphysical ideal in this model is always a sense of balance, a state of equilibrium in which each part of the self is complemented by an opposing or conjoining part.

Alma ignores her shadow in the first part of the play and she seeks idealism which is beyond the dark side of man's. But she develops in the course of the play from a woman who lives in illusion of impossible aspiration and idealism into a woman who accepts reality about her inner dark side and actively seeks what she wants. John tells Alma that she has a doppelganger who is badly irritated. John's diagnosis is right that she has doppelganger personality. She is dualistic, disintegrated; outer and inner sides operate contrastingly in her personality. The truth lies in the balance of outer and inner

sides, her shadow and her real social appearance, not in one of them separated from the other one. John explains Alma's dualistic side in scene one when he states:

You swallow air when you laugh or talk. It's a little trick that hysterical women get into. You swallow air and it presses on your heart and gives you palpitations. That isn't serious in itself but it's a symptom of something that is. Well, what I think you have is a doppelganger! You have doppelganger and it is badly irritated (25-6).

Alma fails to realize the dark side of her psyche. The irony of her behavior is that her speech and her subsequent action betray her physical yearning for John. Her speech hides her true nature from herself and she develops into seeking just light side of her psyche and she does not accept John's idea about dark part of life. She rejects John's physical suggestions and interpretations because he thinks that these are not important to man. The following piece of conversation illustrates Alma's rejection of John's dark side behavior:

John: I know something else I could do. There are rooms about the casino...

Alma: what made you think I might be able amenable to such a suggestion?

John: I counted your pulse in the office...

Alma: I was ill and went to your father for help.

John: it was me you went to...fingers frozen stiff when I... (79).

She wants to repress her dark side and so she hastens to take a taxi, she is unable to face the truth that she has strong passion for John in the dark side of her psyche. She deceives herself by forcefully denying her inner feelings for John. Even after John has criticized her, Alma remains apparently unaffected. But in the second half of the play the fire within her, the inner feelings of her dark side which has been repressed become explicit. The earlier piece of conversation can be contrasted with the following piece to understand the change in Alma's psyche, her reverted behavior and John's shifted position. The twists are clear and Alma's earlier affectations are completely absent here. She is no more a lady; a delicate blue stocking committed to puritan tradition. The piece works as a striking contrast to the earlier one because it unveils Alma's underlying passion, her shadow:

Alma: ...It's no longer a secret that I love you. It never was. I loved you as long as the time I asked you to read the stone angel's name with your fingers... yes, it had begun that early, this affection of love... (92).

The problem with Alma is that although she desires to confront with her shadow in order to know it, but she is not able to do that.

### **3. Traces of Animus in Alma**

Animus is the male aspect present in the collective unconscious of women. It is responsible for certain characteristics stereotypically associated with the opposite sex. The animus may manifest itself as aggressive behavior in the woman. This opposite sex characteristic allows female sex to understand and react appropriately to the other sex. Biologically, the inner man expresses the presence of a minority of male genes in a woman. Although it is true that almost everybody falls in love or at least experiences sexual desire, few people are capable of realizing the projecting factor that has made the object of their desire desirable in the first place. In Jung's system the animus takes important roles.

In Alma's personality, the traces of animus show itself clearly since she is sometimes more than a woman. Although John early in the play makes her aware of her predicament, she also has an additional breakdown which has rendered her in a state of caretaker. She is the child of their household but her roles as a child have been ignored by her parents and she has been as a man responsible for her family. Alma is thus portrayed as the responsible caregiver taking on work as singing instructor in order to pay for her parents' upkeep. In this manner, the people close to her try to prevent her from entering the present.

Alma shows her masculine interests in her relation with John, Roger and salesman. Her tendency to dominate other people and control them is evidence which in this research has been discussed. Franze (1964) writes:

Just as the character of a man's anima is shaped by his mother, the animus is basically influenced by a woman's father. The father endows his daughter's animus with the special coloring of unarguable, incontestably true convictions. Convictions that never include the personal reality of the woman herself as she actually is (189).

Alma's role is largely determined by her father, as seen in scene one when her father objects to her singing. Her father takes her anxiety in favor of his own position and ultimately fails to see that his daughter is in fact stimulated by her performance. For a woman who is unaware of her masculine side, the animus can easily play the negative role of archetypal temptress and deceiver subtly luring her into

confusion and despair. As long as Alma remains unconscious of her animus, she also remains unaware to the opposite sex. Alma is strongly under the influence of Puritan thoughts and she thinks that having this masculine inside her psyche or the manifestation of it in society is against true affairs. Alma is unable to understand that her animus can be a fatal factor in her life and can be also helpful figure in her exploration of the psyche. As an ambiguous figure of the psyche, the animus has positive as well as negative roles to play in a woman's life. It triggers romance when it leads a woman to find a particular man outrageously attractive. Animus can only be realized through the presence of the opposite sex because only in such a relationship do projections become operative. In Jungian terms, Alma has unconsciously projected her animus onto John. Indeed, because he has been with her since childhood, he had already added significant elements to her image of the animus. Alma misses the opportunity of realizing and integrating her animus with a man on whom she has manifested her animus. Thus her unconscious demands are not met and she gets mentally repressed. Like other psychological structures, the animus takes a woman's attention to opposite sex and leads a woman to be in love with a man whom she finds extremely attractive. In the first part of the play, Alma is attracted to John but she is able to control her animus in right way. It is in the second part of the play that Alma fails to recognize the need to come to terms with her animus until it is too late.

#### **4. Self and process of Individuation**

In the process of individuation the individual integrates, at least to some degree, the inner world of split-off personalities based on unconscious identifications, withdraws projections, and realizes to some extent the archetype of the self, the foundation for the secure sense of self-identity. Individuation is the ultimate goal of human life, although Jungians are quick to admit that it is rare for anyone to realize it completely. So individuation is a process through which the individual tries to unify all his/her fragmentations. These fragmentations are, in fact, the opposites within us that must be reconciled. In this play, we can realize that there are some tensions in characters' life as the result of opposites. Jung believes that every individual is, originally, integrated. But because of her/his lack of knowledge about his/her unconscious, the integrity and cohesion of her/his psychic structure is lost and consequently she will be divided into so many fragmentations. Because these fragmentations are not in a harmonious relationship with each other, they can be regarded as opposites, each of which tries to attract the individual.

Thus in this story we are confronted with individuals who have lost their wholeness. Alma fails to realize the archetypes in her life, so the tensions in her life are not resolved and she does not realize her 'self'. Her family background, her reverend father, and the community around her impose a completely alien and snobbish concept of life and isolate her from the naturalness and originality of existence. Nothing and nobody around her allows her to live the way she wants to live. This imposition later on becomes an accustomed pattern of behavior for her. Her reaching after a standard and pure concept of life is her extremity. This disintegrates her life. Apparently she is well-composed and standard lady, but inwardly she is broken because she does not attune with the music of her life. Alma needs to realize her 'self'. She has to reach self-knowledge. Alma lives with identity imposed extremely on her; it is not true and sincere to her nature. She fails to identify what is her true self and what is the imposed self and she also denies fighting with the imposed self under some sweet and delusive terms. Every time Alma tries to realize an archetype, she fails and her tensions in life are not resolved and her suffering never comes to an end.

Alma suffers from the tensions between opposites, for example spirit and flesh, which originate from the archetypes of the collective unconscious. The only way to realize her 'self' is to achieve the process of individuation. She is not able to realize the central organizing principle of her psyche, so they have to endure a great suffering. In this play the real struggle is within Alma's self. It is between herself and herself; the two halves summer and winter clash in her and never allow her to settle. She recognizes that she is weak and divided. All this shows that Alma has even accepted the lack of her self-realization and the lack of harmonious relations between archetypes which are essential factors in self-knowledge and consequently wholeness.

#### **CONCLUSION**

Jung detected collective unconscious, beneath the layers of personal unconscious, which consists of different archetypes. Archetypes are fundamental psychic patterns common to all humans, which influence all of our experiences and behaviors. We can know about them just through their effects. The traces of the archetypes can be found in literary works. Therefore, literary works such as Williams'

*Summer and Smoke* can be analyzed within the models of psychoanalysis, especially Jung's. In each part of this play, Alma tries to realize one of the archetypes within herself. In the first part, Alma is encountered with her anima, but she is unable to realize it. The traces of persona can also be detected. In first part of the story, Alma is to some extent indifferent to her social personality and she tries to appear in society as others wish not as she herself desires to be. Again she fails to realize this archetype. Finally, she wants to know her shadow. But, we see that she refuses to be faced with this archetype, and accept it as a necessary part of her nature. Failed in realization of different archetypes, she cannot settle the tensions within her and reach self-knowledge. So her fragmentations, i.e. the opposites within her cannot be brought together. The lack of self-knowledge or self-realization is seen as the major cause for non-harmonious and abnormal behavior and reactions within Alma.

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