

Wang, Yi-Jie 王奕潔

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The Tragedy of Dr. Jekyll: His Failure to Achieve Individuality

*“In each of us are resided two separate natures, two distinct personalities: one dark, one light; one good, one evil. Now, it is the curse of mankind that theses two extremes shall be constantly at war.”*¹

In the Broadway musical *Jekyll and Hyde*, Dr. Jekyll saw the misery of mankind through his eyes, yet he could never look into himself and realize how he was desperately trapped by his futile effort to separate the contradictory elements which long inhere in our collective unconscious and in our human nature.

Carl Jung believed that the collective unconsciousness inherent in mankind can be found in archetypes. As he indicated, archetype is “the universal image that has existed since the remotest time.”² By tracing back our history, he thus concluded that there are three dominating archetypes composing the self: the persona, the shadow, and the anima. In the self dwells the human disposition longing for maturity, perfection as well as a sense of wholeness. A psychologically healthy person can grow and live harmoniously with these three fundamental elements hidden in human psyche, in which process (that is, individuality) he must integrate these different sides of himself. If we employ these three elementary archetypes (the persona, the shadow,

and the anima) to examine the tragedy of Dr. Jekyll, we can realize how and why he fails in the process of achieving individuality.

The first element concerned is the persona. According to Carl Jung, the persona is “a complicated system of relations between individual consciousness and society, fittingly enough a kind of mask, designed on the one hand to make a definite impression upon others, and, on the other, to conceal the true nature of the individual.”³ The keynote of this musical is this: “It’s all of a façade.” The façade is the persona, which enables us to disguise our true selves successfully in ordinary society. The persona is the mask that we wear and show to others we meet in our daily life.

In this story, Dr. Jekyll was depicted as a man from the upper class. He usually appeared in a decent suit, with tidy hair, and in an air of conceit and confidence. He audaciously declared on the occasion of his research presentation, “It is clear to me now that we have the power to divide these two primitive duality (good and evil) into a separate component, to isolate what is functional and what dysfunctional and to control these two elements forever.”⁴ His aspiration is to relief human sufferings by controlling good and evil in human nature. However, we will slowly find out that his persona is ironically manifested in his idealism to be a savior of mankind.

By taking himself as the subject of the experiment, his shadow accidentally emerged. Contrary to his expectation, the medicine elicited the darkest side of his heart, a monster that had long abided in his unconsciousness. Carl Jung noted that it was a frightening thought that “man also has a shadow side to him, consisting not just of little weaknesses and foibles, but of a positively demonic dynamism. The individual seldom knows anything of this; to him, as an individual, it is incredible that he should ever in any circumstances go beyond himself.”⁵

When the shadow was first released from his body and mind, the shadow murmured with a trembling, agog voice, “Free!” The shadow of Dr. Jekyll is self-named “Hyde,” which is a homophone of “hide.” It is the opposite personality Dr. Jekyll had long repressed. In the musical, to outstand the contrast between Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, half of Hyde’s face was covered by his untidy, kinkily hair; he was crooked, wearing an untailed fur, demonstrating a primitive, dark, uncivilized, animal-like image. Another difference between Jekyll and Hyde is that the former used right hand while the latter used left hand, so as to symbolize the traditional concept about the distinction of good and evil. After the shadow was released, the power of Hyde was getting stronger and his wickedness was even nurtured with bloody crimes and murders.

Another archetypal element mentioned earlier is the anima. Through elaborate plot design, Dr. Jekyll's anima is externalized onto two feminine images, Emma and Lucy. The plot particularly emphasizes on the relationship between Jekyll and his fiancée, Emma and that between he and Lucy, a girl working in the Red Rate pub. According to Jung, with strong feminine qualities, the anima is the "soul image," the life force which inspires one to act righteously. To Jekyll, Emma was a part of his anima. She accepted him with all her heart and supported him thoroughly, always showing him the right path beyond. During the toughest time when he was tortured and tormented by his dual personality, he talked to Emma in a low grave voice, "Emma, don't abandon me. In God's name I've never needed you more."⁶ Emma is the one who constantly reminded him of light and hope; nevertheless, she is actually only one part of his anima. In the musical, she was depicted as a clever and independent woman. Although Emma is tender and considerate enough, her masculine characteristics are verily stronger than her feminine characteristics. In this sense, Emma's animus indeed outweighs her feminine characteristics.

On the other hand, since the anima bears feminine characteristics, its quality is often regarded as irrational, emotional and sensitive. It can be summed up in one word, passion: Jekyll's passion to eliminate evil from mankind and Hyde's passion for life and desire. By carefully analyzing the characters of the two leading actresses, we can

find out that Lucy is quite different from Emma. She is a passionate woman longing to love and to be loved. She mechanically obeyed Hyde while she was secretly in love with Dr. Jekyll. Before Hyde, she was like a trapped deer and a frightened bird deprived of freedom; before Dr. Jekyll, she was fragile and timid, exerting typical feminine charm. In the personality of Lucy thus fully manifested the passionate side of Jekyll's anima. In fact, Emma represents the soul image of anima while Lucy stands for the passionate side of anima in Jekyll. The mixture of the two conflicting natures in the anima deepens the in-coordinate personalities of Jekyll and Hyde.

These two perspectives of contradictories, the contradictory between the shadow and the persona as well as the contradictory between the two distinct characters in Jekyll's anima, inevitably lead to the insolvable conflict between Jekyll and Hyde. Carl Jung described aptly how dangerous the situation could be. He noted,

“The change of character brought about by the uprush of collective forces is amazing. A gentle and reasonable being can be transformed into a maniac or a savage beast. One is always inclined to lay the blame on external circumstances, but nothing could explode in us if it had not been there. As a matter of fact, we are constantly living on the edge of a volcano, and there is, so far as we know, no way of protecting ourselves from a possible outburst that will destroy everybody within reach.”⁷

The play ends in the wedding ceremony of Jekyll and Emma. However, on this very occasion for blessings and benedictions, Hyde the shadow broke out from Jekyll's weary soul, unveiling the darkest and ugliest side of Jekyll to Emma, from whom he

wished to hide most. Due to his incapability to get rid of uncontrollable Hyde the shadow, Jekyll committed suicide.

Eventually, Jekyll failed to balance in the self these three powerful elements: persona, shadow, and anima. He also failed to discover and accept the distinct aspects of one's personality. The tragedy of Dr. Jekyll lies in that he is too stubborn and arbitrary to assume the possibility of annihilating all evil in human nature which long indwells there since the remotest history. He ultimately failed in the process of individuality for none can ever resist the overwhelming power of the collective unconsciousness, which inevitably encompasses good and evil.

Notes:

1. Stevenson, Robert Louis (2001). *Jekyll and Hyde: the Musical*. Published by Broadway Television Network.
2. Dobie, Ann. B (2002). *Theory into Practice: An Introductory to Literary Criticism, Psychological Criticism*. USA: Thomas Learning. P56-58.
3. "The Relations between the Ego and the Unconscious" (1928). In *CW 7: Two Essays on Analytical Psychological*. P305.

4. Stevenson, Robert Louis (2001). *Jekyll and Hyde: the Musical*. Published by Broadway Television Network.
5. "On the Psychology of the Unconscious" (1912). In *CW 7: Two Essays on Analytical Psychological*. P35.
6. Stevenson, Robert Louis (2001). *Jekyll and Hyde: the Musical*. Published by Broadway Television Network.
7. "Psychology and Religion" (1938). In *CW 11: Psychology and Religion: West and East*. P25.