

# Brief Analysis of Sinclair's Individuation in *Demian* Based on Archetypal Approaches

XIONG Shu-lin

Department of Foreign language, Wuhan University of Technology, Hubei, China, 430070

*Demian: The Story of Emil Sinclair's Youth* is one of Hesse's most representative works, which tells the story of the protagonist Sinclair's arduous journey to find his inner self. Greatly influenced by C.G. Jung, a famous 20th century psychologist and the founder of archetypal approaches, Hesse integrated the knowledge and experience gained from psychoanalysis into his literary creations. Based on archetypal approaches such as shadow and anima, this paper will analyze the protagonist Sinclair's individuation, or self-growth in other words, so as to prove that people can find more ways to get out of spiritual dilemma for themselves in modern times, and also realize the unity of self-worth and social value.

*Keywords:* *Demian*, individuation, archetypal approaches

## Background

Regarded as the "last knight" of German romanticism, Hermann Hesse devoted his whole life to literary creation, providing us with insightful masterpieces as well as psychological analysis cases. Since his youth, neurasthenia and melancholia troubled him all the time. To fight against these mental diseases, he did much psychoanalysis with the aid of C.G. Jung. Psychoanalysis not only helped him get through psychological crisis, but also influenced him to re-examine the meaning of life.

There is also a constant theme in his works—individuation. It is the process of integrating the unconsciousness into consciousness. Characters in his novels all tried to discover what the meaning of their existence is by doubting themselves and deconstructing things they used to be sure of. From *Peter Camenzind* to *Steppenwolf* then to *The Glass Bead Game*, Hesse always took a stand for individuation.

Based on archetypal approaches, this research will analyze the protagonist Sinclair's individualization in *Demian*, so that we will have a deeper understanding of this novel, thus finding more ways to get out of spiritual dilemma for ourselves in modern times, and becoming a full-fledged person in society.

## The Way of Individuation

Individuation is a psychological growing up, the process of discovering those aspects (archetypes) of one's self that make one an individual different from other members of the species. It is essentially a process of recognition—that is, as one matures, the individual must consciously recognize the various aspects, unfavorable

as well as favorable, of one's total self. This self-recognition requires extraordinary courage and honesty but is absolutely essential if one is to become a well-balanced individual.

### **Shadow**

The shadow is the darker side of our unconscious self, the inferior and less pleasing aspects of the personality, which we wish to suppress. "Taking it in its deepest sense," writes Jung in *Psychological Reflections*, "the shadow is the invisible saurian tail that man still drags behind him". The most common variant of this archetype, when projected, is the Devil, who, in Jung's words, represents the "dangerous aspect of the unrecognized dark half of the personality" (Jung, 1966, p. 94). But it isn't completely negative. It contains lots of human nature and is the cradle-land of the best things and the worst things in us. One needs encouragement to deal with it. And if one wants to turn mature, he needs to face and control it.

Sinclair was torn between two worlds. Born in a good family, he should absolutely belong to the brightly lit world like his parents and sisters which symbolizes love, education, and responsibility. Nevertheless, he was meanwhile exposed to the evil world: Sometimes he did bad things like losing temper and fighting. He had complex feelings towards that world. On the one hand, his goal was to turn into someone like his parents; on the other hand, evilness and cruelty seemed to be more attractive to him.

In this novel, Franz Kromer is the embodiment of Shadow: His father was a drunkard and his whole family had a bad reputation. So he was a boy from the evil world. Sinclair's first impression and sentiments about Kromer were just the same as what he thought of the dark world: "I felt uneasy around him, not because I knew my father would have forbidden what we were doing, but because I was afraid of Franz himself. Still, I was glad he accepted me and treated me like the others" (Hermann, 2008, p. 7). To fit in with his clique, Sinclair made up a story about stealing the apples, boasted about a crime as though it were a great accomplishment, and described himself as a "hero". However, beyond Sinclair's expectation, this bragging story put him into a passive position: Kromer took this opportunity to squeeze money from him. Forced and helpless, he began to lie, to steal money from his money box in his mother's room. If Sinclair had hovered on the edge of the dark world before, now he stepped straight into it. And life between light and darkness results in his psychic conflicts whereas his self-growth should take the latter into account.

### **Anima**

The anima is the most complex of Jung's archetypes. It is the "soul-image", the spirit of a man's *élan vital*, his life force or vital energy. In the sense of "soul," says Jung, anima is the "living thing in man, that which lives of itself and causes life. Were it not for the leaping and twinkling of the soul, man would rot away in his greatest passion, idleness" (Jung, 1968, pp. 26-27). Jung gives the anima a feminine designation in the male psyche, pointing out that the "anima-image is usually projected upon women" (in the female psyche this archetype is called the animus). In this sense, anima is the contra-sexual part of a man's psyche, the image of the opposite sex that he carries in both his personal and his collective unconscious. There are four phases in the evolution of Anima: Eve, Helen, Mary, and Sophia. In *Demian*, Sinclair met three women successively: his mother, Beatrice and Eve, which correspond to three of the four stages.

### **Eve**

The first is Eve, named after the Genesis account of Adam and Eve. It deals with the emergence of a man's object of desire. The Anima is completely tied up with women as providers of nourishment, security, and love. The man at this Anima level cannot function well without a woman, and he is often impotent or has no sexual desire. Beyond doubt, this archetype is Sinclair's mother. With a soft mind, she was sentimental and considerate. As an important character during Sinclair's upbringing, she contributed to the formation of Sinclair's personality. When Sinclair confessed the theft things he had done, she didn't understand but forgave him with good grace. His mother was the warmest existence in his family which belonged to the bright world, and also the only one who perceived his changing character because of Kromer's entanglement. Moreover, it is due to his excessive dependence on his mother that he became sensitive and vulnerable after he came to high school.

### **Helen**

The second is Helen, an allusion to Helen of Troy in Greek mythology. In this phase, women are viewed as capable of worldly success and of being self-reliant, intelligent, and insightful, even if not altogether virtuous. The synonym of this stage is beauty and romance, expressed as sexual characteristics. The second woman in his life whom he met in the park named Beatrice is the archetype of Helen. Actually, he never said a single word to her, and yet, she had the deepest influence on him. When Sinclair went to high school in another city, he felt lonely even though he was with his companions. Lack of Demian's guidance and his former religion, he began to fool around with Alfons Beck who taught him to drink, told him his love affairs. It turns out that he was often seriously punished and his father got alarmed by his host's letters. Seemingly drinking and showing off brought him pleasure, but he didn't long for such a life, and he didn't know how to change this situation.

Just when he was desperate, a tall and thin lady appeared. Sinclair fell in love with her at the first sight and named her Beatrice. In possess of something to adore and to love, Sinclair tried to rebuild another "world of light", an altar, where he wouldn't run away or return to his mother's arms, where he wouldn't listen to anything forbidden or dirty, and where everything was pure, noble and dignified. What's more, Beatrice encouraged him to paint. Painting, in Jung's view, is one of the approaches that brings "a mass of unconscious material to light" because it means a breaking down of the inhibiting qualities of the conscious "which either limits or suppresses the unconscious" (Jung, 1968, p. 190). When Sinclair managed to paint Beatrice's face, he found that the person in the portrait was not her, but another person he was very familiar with. "It struck me as a kind of idol or icon or sacred mask--half masculine, half feminine; ageless; strong-willed and dreamy at once; rigid and at the same time secretly vital and alive" (Hermann, 2008, p. 65). "The feeling gradually came over me that this was not Beatrice and not Demian, but rather—myself" (Hermann, 2008, p. 67). This portrait changed from abstract to concrete, transformed from Beatrice to himself which reflects his unconsciousness full of contradictions and also reflects his desire to merge them. In the end, the integration was achieved. Maybe we can't speculate whether this woman existed in his life or not, maybe she was just Sinclair's imagination, but she guided him to rediscover the path to the inner self as a kind of spiritual power.

### Mary

The third phase is Mary, named after the Christian theological understanding of the Virgin Mary, Jesus' mother. At this level, women can now seem to possess virtue by the perceiving man (even if in an esoteric and dogmatic way), in as much as certain activities deemed consciously immoral cannot be applied to her.

The archetype of this stage is Eve (aka Frau Eva of the original version). There exist many opposing characteristics in her: "It was her: the large, almost masculine figure, resembling her son; the signs of maternal love, strictness, and deep passion in her features; beautiful and enticing, beautiful and unapproachable, demon and mother, fate and lover" (Hermann, 2008, p. 106). Sinclair is also full of complex emotions for Eve: On the one hand, she gave him motherly care and led him deeper into himself ; on the other hand, he was full of desire and lust for her. Then Eve told him two fairy tales. One is that a boy was in love with a star, but fell to pieces when he jumped towards it at the beach. The other is that a man fell in love with a woman crazily but he was lost to the world. Then he won not only the woman but also the whole world by using his power of love. Eve made him aware that one's fortune was up to himself, so it was unwise to lose himself in love. At this time, World War I was going to break out, and Eve hoped that Sinclair could return to reality and integrate the inner world with it. Finally he combined himself with the external situation and resolutely went to the battlefield to achieve a new life.

### Conclusion

Hesse once said that one's individuation is composed of three phases: the first phase is to realize two opposite worlds and to face the dilemma that a choice can't be made; the second phase is to have a deeper understanding of it, and to be more and more confident in his inner thoughts and strength; the last phase is to combine his mind with his actions, to get reborn. These inner trajectories are vividly reflected in *Demian*.

No matter Kromer, the archetype of Shadow, or his mother, Beatrice and Eve, the archetypes of Anima, they all provided Sinclair with a lot of help on his way of initiation. And everyone's process of growth should be like this. The two sides of personality are opposite but unified. They continue to develop and transform, and eventually return to a whole.

### References

- Hermann, H. (2008). *Demian: The story of Emil Sinclair's youth*. Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House.  
 Jung, C. G. (1966). *Two essays on analytical psychology* (2nd ed.). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.  
 Jung, C. G. (1968). *The archetypes and the collective unconsciousness* (2nd ed.). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.