



An Interpretation of Chillingworth in *The Scarlet Letter* from the Perspective of Jung's Archetype Criticism

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Abstract— Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* is a literary canon in American literature. As a classic, this novel has already been interpreted in many ways, such as feminism, existentialism, ecofeminism and so on. However, as for the analysis of characters, the research of the novel *The Scarlet Letter* mainly concentrates on Hester or Dimmesdale, yet Roger Chillingworth hasn't been studied in depth. This essay is going to delve into the psychological process of Chillingworth's tragedy in *The Scarlet Letter* based on Jungian archetypal theory. This essay discusses Chillingworth's destruction, mainly attributes to the main archetypes of the "persona" and the "shadow" that manifest in him. The importance to realize and adjust one's archetypes to a balanced state for a healthy psyche is shown in this essay. Furthermore, by understanding Chillingworth's tragedy helps readers to avoid such kind of tragedies.

Keywords— *The Scarlet Letter*; archetype; persona; shadow; Chillingworth

I. INTRODUCTION

As the greatest literary achievement of Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter* has attracted attention and comment for a century in the field of American literature. Setting in the cruel moral atmosphere of Puritan society in New England in the 17th century, the novel takes the life of early immigrants in Boston, Massachusetts, on the east coast of the United States as the subject matter, and describes the love tragedy of Hester Prynne, a woman who commits the crime of adultery, which is strictly forbidden by Puritan rules. As Hester's former husband, Roger Chillingworth can be also seen as an important character in *The Scarlet Letter* who finally ends his life in tragedy. He is definitely a key figure who can reflect Hawthorne's social thoughts, but there is little research on him at home and abroad. His first appearance, the whole process of revenge and final death has promoted the development of the plot of the whole

novel. From his personal tragedy, the tragedy of the whole society can be seen to some extent. Thus, it is of great significance to analyze this key character.

II. CHILLINGWORTH IN THE LIGHT OF PSYCHOLOGICAL ARCHETYPE THEORY

In Jungian psychology, there are plenty of different archetypes including Anima and Animus, Persona, Shadow, and Self, which are important elements of the collective unconscious put forward by Jung.

The original meaning of the word "persona" is "a mask worn by an actor to enable him to play a particular role in a play" (Hall 48). It refers to the fact that individuals adapt to different identities by wearing different masks in society, and it is a side publicly displayed in society. "Persona" plays a very important role in daily life, such as mediating the relationship between individual and external world. If one

is too involved in his or her “persona”, the personality will become distorted. “It is precisely because persona is the publicly displayed side of a person that Jung calls it the ‘outer image’ of the spirit, and the anima and animus the ‘inner image’” (Hall 52). In the unconscious of the male, it finds expression as a feminine inner personality, which can be called Anima. On the contrary side, in the unconscious of the female, it is expressed as masculine inner personality, which is Animus. Everyone is born with certain traits of the opposite sex, and for the personality to be balanced, Anima and Animus must be allowed to develop fully in consciousness. If a man shows only his masculinity, his femininity will remain in the unconscious, such as weak, sensitive traits; and if a woman lives with too much femininity, she can be stubborn and willful in her unconscious. “Shadow” is the dark inside of one’s psyche. And it is the most authentic self after the individual has shed the persona. Shadow has two sides. It is both creative and destructive. It can bring destruction to a person’s mentality. Under the effect of the “shadow”, people unconsciously destroy the normal relationship with the people around him. “It is the birthplace of all that is best and worst in people, and that is especially expressed in same-sex relationships” (Hall 57). Like persona, if one is too involved in his or her “shadow”, the personality will become distorted as well. As for the Self, it is the last archetype put forward by Jung. According to Jung, the Self is the archetype of unity, organization and order, which “draws all other archetypes and their manifestations in consciousness and emotions to its surroundings and put them in a state of harmony” (Jung 88). The ultimate goal of all personality is full perfection and realization of self. Self can influence, regulate and restrict one’s personality, promote the maturity of personality, and make it more sensitive and open-minded, but this is not a simple task.

In the novel, Roger Chillingworth is a rather complicated man who marries Hester at first while he is too absorbed in his world of knowledge. Thus, the marital life of them is not so harmonious. Later, he finds that Hester has an illegitimate daughter when he is absent and determines to find out the real father of the little girl and want to take an action of revenge. Actually, he spends seven years to struggle with his persona and inner shadow, which is a kind of torture for him as well. In the later years of revenge, his

shadow is fully enlarged and almost dominates his emotion and action. Finally, when the truth comes out, he dies soon because his shadow no longer exists because for him it can be regarded as a loss of a goal of life.

An Analysis of Anima of Chillingworth

As I mentioned before, Anima refers to the female characteristic in a male and it has two sides in general, which can be positive or negative depending on people’s own choice. From the side of Chillingworth, the negative side of his anima works most of the time after he meets Hester with an illegitimate daughter. From his first appearance in the village, it is obvious that he doesn’t want to recognize Hester immediately when he finds that she is standing on the scaffold to be punished. Instead, he pretends to be a stranger to talk to the villagers in order to know more about it and at the same time warns Hester “when he found the eyes of Hester Prynne fastened on his own, and saw that she appeared to recognize him, he slowly and calmly raised his finger made a gesture with it in the air, and laid it on his lips” (Hawthorne 44). His thoughts and actions are not open and aboveboard, through which the existence of strong masculinity can’t be seen. Ordinarily, when a husband discovers his wife has an illicit affair with another man, and has a child out of wedlock, he would be in a rage and would shout and question her. But Chillingworth does not. His first reaction is anger, however, he soon “instantaneously controlled by an effort of his will, that, save at a single moment, its expression might have passed for calmness” (39). This can be seen as his choice to grin and bear it, and then he quietly asks the townspeople how things are going. Thus, it is a kind of reaction controlled by the negative side of his anima and so he chooses a temporary escape. This is largely caused by the negative side of his anima to a certain degree, which means he becomes hesitating, unable to decide what to do with Hester, and has a vague feeling in his mind.

Hawthorne compared Chillingworth’s coiled face of horror and fear to “a snake gliding swiftly” at the beginning of his appearance (17). In his later revenge against the priest, he was always on the dark side, peering into Dimmesdale’s heart like a snake. In Jung’s archetype theory, snake is an important archetype as well, which symbolizes feminine and evil. In this sense, Roger Chillingworth is more like a snake sneaking into Dimmesdale’s heart to explore the

secret. From another side, it also reflects the negative side of his anima because of the power of femininity. From the traditional view, a feminine has soft, silent force and as for Chillingworth it is more like this influence of Anima in him, which means the viper state that snakes and gropes slowly. Because of his lack of masculinity, his heart is actually in a relatively feminine state, not knowing what he should do to complete his revenge plan, only through this way of circuitous progress slowly groping. Due to the lack of his masculinity, his heart is in a state of suffering as a matter of fact. In addition, "Scholars who study Anima often cite a passage referring to anima's power, 'I am the mediator between the elements, who make them live in harmony with one another... I hold the power of life and death in my hands, and nothing can escape me' " (Li 133). Throughout his revenge on Arthur Dimmesdale, he seems to master everything and has a definite confidence on this revenge in his own opinion. Actually, this kind of confidence is coming from his anima. This confidence is evident at the very beginning of his talking with Hester, when he could not press her, "thou will not reveal his name?" (49), with a dark, self-assured smile on his face, and the idea that sooner or later Hester's lover would fall into his own hands, as if he were in control, and this is the power of Anima that Chillingworth seems forever in a state of firmness and self-assurance. In his own opinion, he has a definite confidence in this revenge, and, indeed, guesses from the outset the identity of Hester's lover, who, as he judges, "he be a man of fair repute" (49) and who, though not wearing the scarlet letter of shame on his dress, was engraved in his heart. This keen insight comes from the Anima power in him so that Chillingworth has the confidence to find him out.

At first, he finds some secrets in the privacy of Dimmesdale's heart, and he thinks to himself, "and yet no secret, such as the physician fancied must exist there, ever stole out of the minister's consciousness into his companion's ear" (77). Little by little, he finds some hints "that encouraged him" (80). Thus, Roger Chillingworth creeps into Arthur Dimmesdale's heart more often by using his dirty tricks to test his own finding. In an unguarded situation, the minister is bitten a little bit by Chillingworth and the venom slowly sinks in him, which tortures him very much spiritually. This kind of exploration can be said is the cause of his anima and Chillingworth wants to control

everything, especially his enemy Dimmesdale's life. Chillingworth finally acquiesces the secret of the minister, who, in his view, "the victim was forever on the rack; it needed only to know the spring that controlled the engine; - -and the physician knew it well!" (93). This is one of the reasons why after Dimmesdale's death, Roger Chillingworth dies soon. From this aspect of his anima, he doesn't have the enemy or something he can control, thus his life is meaningless. He would rather die than live this boring life.

An Analysis of Persona of Chillingworth

Persona is a key hub to regulate the relationship between individuals and society, and at the same time it hides the shadow of individuals under the persona. Old Roger Chillingworth takes on multiple personas to hide his true desires in order to survive in the village and pursue his revenge. In the village where Hester lives, no one knows the real identity of Chillingworth actually, except for his former wife Hester. The first appearance of him is like this: "There she beheld another countenance, of a man well stricken in years, a pale, thin, scholar-like visage, with eyes dim and bleared by the lamplight that had served them to pore over many ponderous books" (43), which is just Hester's memory of him on the day that Hester is punished in front of villagers. From this indirect description, it can be seen that he is an old man indulged himself into the knowledge too much, like a bookworm. It seems that Chillingworth is not a pleasant person or memory from this description. And later the first real description of his appearance seems to depict him like a stranger or an outsider of this village. As for villagers at that time, he is just a stranger and doesn't know much about what happened to the woman on the scaffold. And when he talks to "a townsman who stood next to him" (44), he pretends to act "in a formal and courteous manner" (44). This kind of pretending can also be seen as a mask he wears in order to infiltrate the village. However, this phenomenon is not true at all because he is the former husband of Hester and finds his wife has an illegitimate daughter suddenly. He is so furious about this and wants to find out the truth, so he pretends to be the new of the village to investigate the adultery. This persona is also accepted by the townsfolk, who feel that he is "new to town" (40) and "definitely not from here" (40) by asking questions, and thus successfully infiltrates the village.

As a matter of fact, in order to investigate the truth, he wears different masks to hide himself. Generally speaking, there are three kinds of Persona in Chillingworth. First of all, it is the most obvious, which is his profession—physician. He does most of the things under this persona. In the eyes of villagers, he is an excellent doctor and has a wide range of knowledge and “it was as a physician that he presented himself, and as such was cordially received” (74). As he first appears, few people know him. However, “He was now known to be a man of skill” (75) and there is even a rumor “that Heaven had wrought an absolute miracle, by transporting an eminent Doctor of Psychic, from a German university, bodily through the air, and setting him down at the door of Mr. Dimmesdale’s study” (75). Thus, the persona of physician goes well and hides his real identity to some extent. In addition, there is another persona of him, which is the medical adviser and friend of the minister Dimmesdale. Because of the two kinds of persona, he finally lives with the minister and finds the truth. As I just mentioned, due to his excellent medical skills, he becomes the medical adviser of Dimmesdale to cure him. Later, they two “came gradually to spend much time together” (76) and as time goes on, “intimacy, as we have said, grew up between these two cultivated minds” (77). Under the persona of Arthur Dimmesdale’s friend, Roger Chillingworth begins to probe into his hearts and find the secret in minister’s inner feelings. The so-called persona is a tool worn to hide the true identity. Jung points out that “people show different persona in different situations in real life, and the personality structure of people is a complex and changing whole. In order to adapt to the situation of reality, people unconsciously adjust their roles. Therefore, different personality traits are displayed” (Xiang 21). In order to conceal himself better, Chillingworth and Hester even comes to an agreement that no one should know of their previous marriage, and Hester promises to keep it a secret for him. He even throws away his former name and lives with the name of Roger Chillingworth. It means that he is going to hide himself from the start, and wear a mask to hide himself. Under the two kinds of persona, he delves himself into the village successfully and begins his plan of revenge. For him, persona is just a mask to hide his real identity from everyone.

Evidently, he succeeds in infiltrating the enemy under

the guise of the persona of physician and of Dimmesdale’s friend. As a physician, he could not even cure his heart disease and let it develop. Therefore, this is why his shadow becomes more and more powerful in the later period. At the same time, the persona of Dimmesdale’s friend he wears is expanding day by day. Jung believes that excessive expansion of a certain persona would lead to the destruction of personality structure. To some extent, Chillingworth's personality structure has been gradually destroyed, which also accelerates the increasingly revealing of his shadow.

An Analysis of Shadow of Chillingworth

Actually, persona and shadow are two corresponding archetypal images. People try their best to hide the shadow in their hearts while they decorate and dress up their persona in order to achieve their final goals of the shadow, just as Chillingworth does. In daily life, he always appears as a physician in order to hide his real feeling of revenge.

However, the shadow is the basic animal part of the subconscious human, deeply rooted in the history of human physical and psychological evolution. At the bottom of the personality is the animal nature, instinct race inheritance, including all passions, immoral desires, behavior and suppressed evil, etc. The “evil factor” in the shadow can make people into the mire of evil and can’t extricate themselves. If one is too addicted into the evil factor of shadow, he or she must go crazy because the two sides of him can’t balance. The occasion is well expressed by Chillingworth. It is clear to find his psychological changes through the development of the novel. He puts on his persona, and gradually disguises his true identity in order to find out Hester's lover, and it is because of the powerful effect of the shadow in his heart that he is luring him step by step into the abyss. And at the meantime, he has an acute sense and sight just as the description, “Yet those same bleared optics had a strange, penetrating power, when it was their owner’s purpose to read the human soul” (43). By reading this, it is sure that he is good at observing and exploring. When he and the minister become close friends, he finds something different and spares no efforts to “strove to go deep into his patient’s bosom, delving among his principles, prying into his recollections, and probing everything with a cautious touch, like a treasure-seeker in a dark cavern” (77).

Later, when he moves to the same house of

Dimmesdale, he gradually finds some hints that “The soil where this dark miner was working has perchance shown indications that encouraged him” (80). Even worse, he is just like “a secret enemy had been continually by his side, under the semblance of a friend and helper, and had veiled himself of the opportunities the afforded for tampering with the delicate springs of Mr. Dimmesdale’s nature” (100). He seems like a thief to further probe into the life of Dimmesdale, which is also controlled by his inner shadow. “He groped along as stealthily, with as cautious a tread, and as wary an outlook, as a thief entering a chamber where a man lies only half asleep, --or, it may be, broad awake, -- with purpose to steal the very treasure which this man guards as the apple of his eye” (Hawthorne 80). Day after day, he finally finds the secret of the young minister, “with what a wild look of wonder, joy and horror” (85). Then, his shadow totally steps out, regardless of his persona and he has got his revenge planned.

From then on, Chillingworth is dominated by his shadow and his persona is broken. As time goes on, his shadow prevails gradually and unconsciously and finally becomes his faith to live. He is not calm and gentle any more, instead he decides to “imagine a more intimate revenge than any mortal had ever wreaked upon an enemy” (86). At that time, he is totally crazy and his shadow of revenge unfolds in stark details. The shadow of Chillingworth finally comes up onto the stage and “all this was accomplished with a subtlety so perfect” (86). In the later revenge of Chillingworth, he has already given up his persona of a physician to show his shadow out. It can be expressed like this, “or it might well be that the physician was not careful then, as at all other times, to hide the malevolence with which he looked upon his victim” (94). In the eyes of Hester, he totally becomes an evil because “the former aspect of an intellectual and studious man, calm and quiet had altogether vanished, and been succeeded by an eager, searching, almost fierce, yet carefully guarded look” (102).

As I mentioned before, in the seven-year revenge, he has already lived with his shadow and the shadow of revenge has become his own life goal, which means the minister must be his pillars of survival. When his prey dies, his life is no longer meaningful at all. He loses his long-term dominant shadow and his steady streak of revenge comes to an end abruptly. The source from which the shadow is

nourished is suddenly gone—Dimmesdale’s confession has thrown him into a state of uncertain and complexed situation, “Old Roger Chillingworth knelt down beside him, with a blank, dull countenance, out of which the life seemed to have departed” (150). At the end of this story, when Dimmesdale confesses his crime in front of publics, the shadow of Chillingworth is broken as well, “he repeated more than once, ‘Thou hast escaped me!’” (150). “All his strength and energy—all his vital and intellectual force—seems at once to desert him; insomuch that he positively withers up, shrivels away, and almost vanishes from mortal sight, like an unrooted weed that lies wilting in the sun” (152), through which it is clear that the faith of him is gone and the whole person is numb and lifeless.

An Analysis of Self of Chillingworth

Because of long-term occupation of the evil factor of his shadow, Chillingworth aren’t able to achieve his self perfectly in the end although he has made some efforts to save himself. On the one hand, his shadow is too powerful that “old Roger Chillingworth was a striking evidence of man’s faculty of transforming himself into a devil, if he will only, for a reasonable space of time, undertake a devil’s office” (103). He nearly fails to find his self and dies soon after his enemy’s death.

However, before his death, there is a certain awakening in his conscience, which can be interpreted as his distribution of legacy. According to the book, “at old Roger Chillingworth’s decease (which took place within the year), and by his last will and testament... he bequeathed a very considerable amount of property, both here and in England, to little Pearl” (152). This bequeath can be seen as an important improvement in his life and also can be seen as a remedy because he spends much time on revenge and the whole personality becomes dark. Actually, this act, “seemingly illogical, is in fact a compromise between Chillingworth and himself” (Wei 148). Since he is oppressed by the shadow for a long time, and accustomed to surmise and ravage the spiritual world of others with the most sinister mind, then the reason why he leaves his fortune to Pearl seems to be a little bit weird. As a matter of fact, this can be interpreted from this aspect. After seven-year revenge on Dimmesdale, he must see the torture that the minister suffers. At first this torment of the minister is a pleasure to Chillingworth, for the evil shadow in his mind;

but with time going by, something miserable must be felt in his own heart; and so, on hearing the minister's public confession, Chillingworth rushes forward, seizes him by the arm, and says to him in a low voice, "Wave back that woman! Cast off this child! All shall be well! Do not blacken your fame, and perish in dishonor! I can yet save you!" (173). At this moment Chillingworth's Self steps forth to save the minister, to save his reputation. After the minister's death, there must be a hint of regret in old Roger Chillingworth's mind, thus Chillingworth decides to offer compensation. This revenge does harm to Hester and little Pearl in a sense due to the relationship between Hester and Dimmesdale. Just as Hester says, the four are "trapped in a maze of misery from which they could no longer get out" (122). In a meeting with Mr. Dimmesdale, Hester discovers the minister's terrible condition: "His nerves seemed absolutely destroyed. His moral force was abased into more than childish weakness." (107). Unable to bear Chillingworth's inner torment on Dimmesdale, Hester resolves to tell the truth to the young minister in order to ease his inner pain, "at whatever risk of present pain or ulterior consequences" (123), she never wavers, "Hester Prynne remained constant in her resolve to make known to Mr. Dimmesdale, at whatever risk of present pair or ulterior consequences, the true character of the man who had crept into his intimacy" (110). To some extent, Hester is anxious about Dimmesdale's condition. In the year which Dimmesdale dies, Chillingworth reflects what he has done on account of his own shadow and he must realize the serious problem. Thus, he makes such decision to give his fortune to Pearl to compensate for what he has done. From Jung's archetypal criticism, this action can be seen as an act to purify himself and achieve his self though it doesn't succeed at last. However, this can be seen as an improvement in the process of achieving his self.

Hawthorne's further development of the character Chillingworth's is, in part, an attempt to fulfil his seminal idea, recorded in his 1847 American notebook, "a story of the effects of revenge, turning the man who indulges it into a demon" (Stewart 121). Of course, by creating Chillingworth in *The Scarlet Letter*, it is a successful experiment for Hawthorne to carry out his seminal idea. "Chillingworth's crimes are not only cruel and treacherous, but also extreme and unforgivable" (VOGEL 3), Hawthorne

once concludes, "in a world, old Roger Chillingworth is a startling proof of man's ability to turn himself into the devil, if he will, for a reasonable period of time, to assume the devil's office" (VOGEL 3-4). Therefore, in Hawthorne's opinion, Chillingworth is definitely an evil man who can reflect the dark side of human nature, which means that he is a devil from hell. In fact, through the analysis of the reasons behind Chillingworth's crazy actions with Jung's archetype theory, it can be seen that Chillingworth also has a certain tragic color. He is a scientific character who is obsessed with academics and "absolutely advocates rationality and is willing to be the prisoner of intelligence" (Nie 249). In the early stage, he spends all his energy on increasing knowledge and developing intelligence. Ignoring the emotional concerns of his wife Hester, and later catching his wife standing in disgrace on the scaffold with her illegitimate daughter in her arms, he is gradually controlled by the powerful shadow, loses his reason, begins to take revenge, and walks towards the abyss from which he could never recover. In a way, he is sad, obsessed with knowledge, without emotional abundance, and controlled by his own powerful shadow, living a life of dead, literally turning himself from a wise man into a demon. By shaping this character, it can be seen that Hawthorne expresses the view that "it is dangerous to have a single scientific attitude towards life" (Zhao 257). Life should be colorful, and spiritual and emotional abundance should also be emphasized in daily life.

III. CONCLUSION

This essay uses the four archetypes of Jung's psychological archetype theory to analyze the key character Chillingworth in *The Scarlet Letter*. It can be seen that with the development of the plot of the novel, a series of psychological changes takes place in Chillingworth's heart. He becomes more and more fanatical and becomes a devil full of revenge. It can be seen from the whole analysis that, from the perspective of Jungian psychology, the main reason for Roger Chillingworth's final tragedy is his powerful shadow and the imbalance between his persona and shadow. Of course, his Anima also exerts a negative influence on his psychology to some extent, making him unable to realize his self and become a real person in society. Chillingworth, however, also has his own tragedy. He is not

a heathen villain, but also has his own difficulties. When he and Hester are newly married, he is too obsessed with knowledge and reason, lacks of emotional attention to his wife, neglects to coordinate various relationships around him, and his heart and emotions are empty. An obsession with revenge leads to the final tragedy.

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