DOI: 10.9744/kata.16.2.87-92

ISSN 1411-2639 (Print), ISSN 2302-6294 (Online)

OPEN ACCESS

http://kata.petra.ac.id

The Fall of Emily Grierson: A Jungian Analysis of *A Rose for Emily*

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the tragic life of Faulkner's Emily Grierson, a life dominated by patriarchy and traditional Southern social values, which concludes with her living as a lonely recluse in her family's decaying aristocratic house for more than forty years until her death. The key of the tragedy is her father, who isolates Emily from the outside world and tortures her with traditional patriarchal rules and Southern family duty. Emily is expected to lead a life like other girls; however, under the burden of old-fashioned, patriarchal responsibilities, her inner world collapses. This study uses the Jungian concepts of archetypes, persona and shadow, anima and animus to interpret Emily's transitions and her fall. By examining the process through the lens of Jungian theories, the aspects that affect her fall in the patriarchal, aristocratic society, as well as the inherited social values, can be revealed and specified.

Keywords: Patriarchy, traditional Southern social values, Jungian analysis, archetypes

INTRODUCTION

William Faulkner, the author of the short story *A Rose for Emily*, was born in the state of Mississippi. The state's history and culture inspired him and is reflected in several of his literary works, such as *The Sound and the Fury* and *As I Lay Dying*. He is a representative American writer and Nobel Prize laureate. Given that the revolution occurred in the late 18th century and the decline of the Southern economy in the late 1860s, by creating the character of Emily Grierson, a southern woman tortured by the traditional patriarchy of her environment and forbidden love, Faulkner expresses his pity and love for his birthplace, as well as a nostalgia for the past. Faulkner was born more than three decades after the end of slavery, which was abolished after the Civil War. On September 22, 1862, Abraham Lincoln, the sixteenth President of the United States, issued the Emancipation Proclamation, which went into force in January 1863, abolishing slavery and freeing slaves in the North (Masur, 2012). The abolishment of slavery also disrupted the landowner-oriented economy. Being born in a wealthy family, Faulkner witnessed the continued decline of Southern aristocracies and the tragic position of black and white Americans, which inspired his series of works set in his invented locale of Yoknapatawpha County.

Most of Faulkner's novels and short stories deal with the vicissitudes of the society of the American South, the falling of aristocracies, and nostalgia for the Old South. Emily Grierson and the townspeople are traditional American Southerners clinging to the South earlier glory. They are resistant to change, and hence are stuck in the collective unconsciousness of the memorable glory of Southern aristocrats, the Old South that would never be back.

THE SOUTH AND THE COLLECTIVE UNCONSCIOUS

Coined by Jung, collective unconscious is a term used in analytic psychology, representing part of the unconscious mind. Based on Jung (1968), the collective unconscious is the deepest layer of the psyche, beneath the personal unconscious and ego/consciousness. The collective unconscious is related to the *unus mundus*, an underlying unified psychophysical reality that everything emerges from and finally returns to, a realm of archetypal forms common to all human beings (Casement, 2001; Christopher & Solomon, 1999). Since the collective unconscious is associated with cultural and social factors and can be expressed through archetypal images as commonly accepted symbols, myths, or truths of any particular time or period, it can be used to interpret an individual's

initiation and socialization into the gender role expected of him or her in the development of identity (Christopher & Solomon, 1999). The collective unconscious can be formed immutably through immersion in certain cultures and social values; therefore the same collective unconscious is shared by all those human beings who share the same cultural and social values (Christopher & Solomon, 1999). In other words, the culturally bounded collective unconscious is shared by those with similar experiences, opinions, and values. As Robinson (2010) said, if a group of people live in the same culture, they may share similar experiences, behavior patterns, and social values. These experiences, behaviors, and social values are known as the collective cultural unconscious or cultural archetypes (see Figure 1).

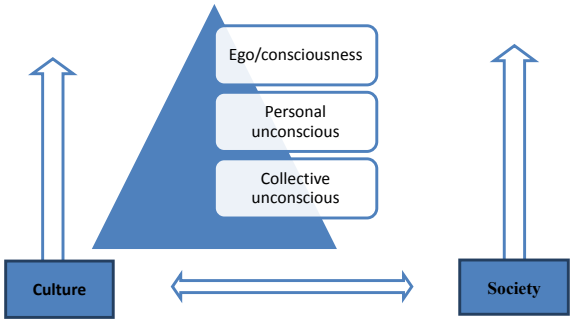

Figure 1. The relationship of collective unconscious, personal unconscious, and ego/consciousness under the influence of culture and society (adapted from Christopher and Solomon's (1999) model)

There are some perceived qualities in each collective cultural unconscious or cultural archetype which can be used to evaluate and assess a certain group of people with the same collective memory by what that society or community has experienced. The history of the antebellum South—the world of aristocratic honor, wealthy plantation owners and slavery—remained rooted in the collective memories of Southern communities long after the Civil War (Du, 2007). Therefore, in the story of "A Rose for Emily," when Emily Grierson, a symbol of the Old South, passes away, the whole town attends her funeral "through a sort of respectful affection for a fallen monument" (p. 29). As Du (2007) describes, she is the symbol of the past, and her death signifies the final separation from the past.

ARCHETYPES, PERSONA/SHADOW, ANIMA/ANIMUS, AND EMILY GRIERSON

The contents of the collective unconscious are called archetypes. Jung (1968) defined archetypes as primordial patterns of behaviors which can be copied or emulated by all human beings. As Casement (2001) said, archetypes are an inherent part of the psyche, giving rise to patterned tendencies of thoughts and behaviors. The values and viewpoints of human beings are potentially influenced by archetypes that represent different time periods of identification and memory (Matthews, 2002). Based on Jung, archetypes are passive reflections of higher levels of being, be it the creator or the unconscious. However, they become active when they are applied to the phenolmenal, sensory, or conscious worlds, as a reflection of the spiritual world—that is, the *unus mundus*, as Jung (1968) called it. Through the interaction of archetypal images, there come archetypal paradigms of universal symbols, myths, and motifs, such as the shadow, the anima/animus, the great mother, et cetera (Jung, 1968; Matthews, 2002; Neumann, 1955).

Persona is a word derived from the Latin, originally referring to the theatrical masks worn by actors in ancient Greece and Rome their performances to signify their roles (Palmer, 2003). Jung defined the persona as the social face an individual presented to the world, allowing him or her to make a positive impression on others while concealing his or her true nature (Jung, 1971). The persona can be revealed in dreams in the disguise of a variety of forms. According to Jung (1989), all human beings wear masks, having certain personas through which to negotiate with the outer world for survival. It could be said that the persona is a human's publicly displayed appearance, linking that person with the social world (Zhu & Han, 2013). According to Palmer (2003), when individuals become dominated by the persona they hide behind, using a public image to flexibly adapt to the outer world, they may suffer from delusions or an inferiority complex, resulting in an inability to relate to others and to accept the complementary sides of themselves. They may find it difficult to remove the mask and live in reality (Jung, 1971). When wearing a mask becomes a habit, an individual may lose sight of his or her true self, thus causing an identity crisis.

In contrast to the persona, the shadow refers to the inferior traits, animalistic instincts, or the unconscious part of the personality that individuals do not want to reveal to others (Jung, 1938). It is always suppressed or controlled, but can be released under great stress. The less the shadow embodied in individuals' consciousness, the more dangerous the shadow is.

Opposed to the dangerous functions of the shadow archetype, Jung (1977) described the anima and the animus as two archetypes meditating between the ego and the inner life. Both refer to the domain of the unconscious transcending the personal psyche. As

Christopher and Solomon (1999) explain that anima is the feminine image in a man's psyche, while the animus is the masculine image in a woman's psyche. Every individual may have psychological features of the opposite sex, one being consciously expressed and one being hidden unconsciously, in order to maintain equilibrium and understanding between men and women (Zhu & Han, 2013). Men who only show their masculine features and hide their feminine ones become unconsciously fragile and sensitive, while women who only show their feminine features and repress their masculine traits become unconsciously strong and stubborn. Hence, it may be said that an individual with an imbalanced anima or animus might suffer mental disorder.

In "A Rose for Emily," Mr. Grierson, Emily's father and the support of the Grierson family, tries to live in the old aristocratic honor, although the family's circumstances have deteriorated since the Civil War. When her father is alive, he chases off every suitor that comes near her, denying Emily the choice of taking up the traditional role of wife and mother and isolating her from the townspeople. Without a mother image, Emily has to turn to her father's image for identity development, resulting in her animus becoming chaotic and ambivalent, torn between living up to her family's heritage of aristocratic honor and the desire to be a loving and beloved wife and mother. Her father expels all her suitors, because he thinks that "none of the young men were quite good enough for Miss Emily and such" (p. 32). Having been isolated from the outside world by her father, Emily is not able to fit into the life of the town, but retreats to her archaic aristocratic honor for survival and identification. Mr. Grierson's looming presence, a symbol of that honor, is everywhere in the house, in the "crayon portrait" on "a tarnished gilt easel before a fireplace" (p. 30).

It is in this circumstance tha Emily lives, so that the animus influences the kind of man Emily falls for. She is frustrated in every attempt at courtship until she meets Homer Barron, a man who pays attention to her but is ultimately unwilling to marry her. Homer must have shared the same features as her animus: "a Yankee—a big, dark, ready man, with a big voice and eyes lighter than his face"; boys would "follow in groups to hear him cuss the niggers"; he was a man who "would be in the center of group" (p. 33). The townspeople who witness this courtship, are divided in their opinion, as some are of the opinion that they "were glad that Miss Emily would have an interest", but others have the opinion that "a Grierson would not think seriously of a Northerner, a day laborer" (p. 33).

Although the townspeople pity Emily, Homer is an unlikely match for Emily as there is a big gap between them in term of their social class and origins. Emily family's was once wealthy and she still has family members in Alabama who would not approve of her marrying Homer. Therefore, the ladies and old people begin to gossip about him as well as Emily, saying that, "Poor Emily. Her kinsfolk should come to her" (p. 33) as if she needs to be saved from Homer.

PATRIARCHAL AND NOBLE ARCHETYPES

The definition of patriarchy changes depending on the cultural context in which it is discussed; however, there is an agreement that patriarchy always functions through men exerting control over those (particularly women and younger people) around them (Johnson, 2005). In order to be able control others, men are supposed to be strong, rational, knowledgeable, invulnerable, independent, and unemotional. These masculine, patriarchal qualities are not expected in women, who are expected to be tender, fragile, emotional, voiceless, and submissive. "Control" becomes the means to bring order out of chaos, to protect men who are threatened by competition and who want to prove their manliness in order to gain respect. Consequently, the inevitable outcome of patriarchy is the oppression of women (Johnson, 2005). Women who demonstrate patriarchal characteristics are at best criticized and at worst severely punished by others in the patriarchal society. This concept underpinned the control persecution of women in the American South—they were forced to be submissive to men in the patriarchal system (Du, 2007). Moreover, in a patriarchal society, the father has the absolute right to decide on family affairs. Emily is the victim of her father's patriarchal and aristocratic dominance. Even after his death, she cannot escape his domination. The narrator describes Emily's relationship with her father in the following terms: "We had long thought of them as a tableau, Miss Emily a slender figure in white in the background, her father a straddled silhouette in the foreground, his back to her and clutching a horsewhip, the two of them framed by the back flung front door" (p. 32). The horsewhip represents the dominant power of a patriarch over his daughter, fragile and small, retreating into the background. Emily is an object, controlled by her father, who carries a horsewhip. Because of Emily's upbringing in a patriarchal Southern community, her animus prompts her to emulate the most intense masculine characteristics. Even though born in a noble and well-esteemed family, Emily is nonetheless constrained by the pernicious moral codes of the patriarchy system in order to make peace with the system (Du, 2007). Her father's death, releases her from the patriarchal prison,

yet she cannot escape her father's patriarchal presence in the form of the image in "the parlour" (p. 30), "as if that quality of her father which had thwarted her woman's life so many times had been too virulent and too furious to die" (p. 34).

Being an aristocratic woman, she is constantly aware of, and is reminded by the townspeople of her aristocratic heritage: a woman with "noblesse oblige" (p. 33), while at the same time, she is irritated by the burden of patriarchy and aristocracy. After her father's death, Emily cuts her hair short, "making her look like a girl, with a vague resemblance to those angels in colored church windows—sort of tragic and serene" (p. 32). It was the fashion for women to keep their hair long and bound up close to the head until the early twentieth century, but for Emily, long hair symbolizes the patriarchal chain that has oppressed her all her life. Her short-cut hair signifies her determination to escape patriarchal oppression in a "sort of tragic and serene" way (p. 32). However, the burden of the scar and inherited burden caused by the patriarchy and her aristocratic heritage remained a negative influence on her animus. As a woman with "noblesse oblige" (p.33), she is destined to be watched, especially when she dates a Yankee. The townpeople whisper and gossip about the love affair, regarding it as a scandal.

As soon as the old people said "Poor Emily," the whispering began. "Do you suppose it's really so?" they said to one another. "Of course it is. What else could…" This behind their hands; rustling of craned silk and satin behind jalousies closed upon the sun of Sunday afternoon as the thin, swift clop-clop of the matched team passed: "Poor Emily" (p. 33). Despite the decay of the Grierson family, the older townspeople feel that being from a higher social class, Emily should fulfill her duty befitting to her family's aristocratic status.

EMILY'S DISTORTED IDENTITY

If an individual sticks to his/her publicly displayed appearance too much, the persona becomes "inflated" (Zhu & Han, 2013). When the townspeople criticize Emily and the Griersons, thinking that the Griersons held themselves a little too high for what they really were. None of the young men were quite good enough for Miss Emily and such (p. 32). . . . she carried her head high enough—even when we believed that she was fallen. It was as if she demanded more than ever the recognition of her dignity as the last Grierson; as if it had wanted that touch of earthiness to reaffirm her imperviousness (p. 33).

Despite the rumors and gossip and her duty to her family, Emily spares no expense in buying Homer the things that a man of her own class would have. She goes "to the jeweler's and ordered a man's toilet set in silver, with the letters H.B. on each piece. Two days later we learned that she had bought a complete outfit of men's clothing, including a nightshirt" (p. 34). The articles she buys for Homer are of a man's private use, thus it signifies how she is determined to marry him. Emily experiences the feeling of being in love when they are together "on Sunday afternoons driving in the yellow-wheeled buggy" (p. 34).

Being from a once wealthy family, in order to satisfy the townspeople's expectations, Emily worked very hard to put on the mask/persona to meet the social norms and standards formed by the community's patriarchal and aristocratic values. Besides the townspeople's continual attempt to remind her of her aristocratic heritage: a woman with "noblesse oblige" (p. 33), her cousins also come to talk her out of marrying Homer. Zhu and Han (2013) mention that in order to live up to what was traditionally expected of them, men often suppress their female aspect, and women their male characteristics. Hence, the persona may occupy and constrain the anima/animus. Also, the contradiction between persona and anima/animus may cause the anima/animus to overpower the persona, hence making the individual go to the other extreme.

When her father is alive, she is totally dominated by him; and he prevents her from marrying. After her father's death, she insists on marrying Homer to escape her destined patriarchal womanhood. She steps out, preparing to totally surrender to the invasion of northern industrialization, symbolizes by Homer. When she doscovers that Homer has no intention of marrying her, "because Homer himself had remarked—he liked men, and it was known that he drank with the younger men in the Elks' Club—that he was not a marrying man" (p. 34), Emily is totally out of control and becomes insane.

She finally has a psychological breakdown. Afraid that she is going to lose Homer and have to retreat to traditional Southern values, she decides to poison him in order to control him. She cuts off connections with the outside world, sleeping next to his dead body and living lonely and desperately until her death forty years later. She tears off her persona/mask and lets herself be possessed by her inner masculine personality, breaking the balance between her ego and her inner life. As mentioned, women of her time were taught to be warm-hearted, submissive, and understanding. Supposedly, Emily was expected to take

advantage of feminine characteristics to manipulate Homer into marriage: she "will persuade him yet" (p. 34). Bold emotions such as ambition, irritation, and domination should definitely be avoided and controlled. Overly possessed by her animus, Emily's personality is transformed; she gives into the prominent masculine characteristics that supposedly belongs to the opposite sex. Her animus fails to mediate between her ego and her inner life. Emily loses the sense of her own value and charms, determining to abandon the norms of her family (here the ego), and attempting to build a bridge to the unconscious masculine aspect of her female psyche. Possessed by her animus, Emily goes to the extremes and becomes paranoid; her animus keeps telling her that she should be strong, independent, and resolute. Women are expected to be sweet and submissive; therefore, in order to live up to social expectations, they are used to putting on obedient and submissive personas. Overly possessed by the unconscious masculine aspect of her female psyche, Emily is ultimately the victim of the conflict between her persona and her animus. In the meantime, Emily's anima loses its ability to mediate between the ego and the inner life, and her personality is devoured. Unable to believe that what she has done to her beloved is all in vain and lost in rage, Emily decides to use her masculine qualities to brutally take revenge upon Homer. Emily says to the druggist, "I want some poison," with "cold, haughty black eyes in a face the flesh of which was strained across the temples and about the eye sockets as you imagine a lighthouse keeper's face ought to look" (p. 33). She speaks resolutely to the druggist: "I want the best you have. I don't care what kind"; "I want arsenic" (p. 33). While the druggist is looking down at her, she looks "back at him," "stared at him, her head tilted back in order to look him eye for eye, until he looked away and went and got the arsenic and wrapped it up" (p. 33). She schemes to poison her beloved as she would a rat, in order to be with him forever.

The expectations of the patriarchal system and the townspeople require Emily to follow their laws and customs, to conform to the behavior patterns of the whole collective persona. She is trained to be a lady to fulfill the "noblesse oblige" (p. 33) of the Griersons. When she is betrayed by Homer, she loses her so-called "pure love," which is her only hope of living a fulfilled life after her father dies. Unfortunately, the pure love is turned into a contorted love, causing Emily's tragic change from a lady into a devil, killing Homer and keeping him with her for forty years until her death.

> Then we noticed that in the second pillow was the indentation of a head. One of us lifted something from it, and leaning forward, that faint and invisible dust dry and acrid in the nostrils, we saw a long strand of iron-gray hair (p. 36)

CONCLUSION

Although she is the last survivor of an aristocratic Southern family, being a woman, Emily cannot escape from the rigorous traditional principles of the patriarchy, but is regarded as a monument in memory of the social norms and standards formed by traditions and society—as the townspeople said, "alive, Miss Emily had been a tradition, a duty, and a care; a sort of hereditary obligation upon the town" (p. 40). When Emily passes away, the whole town attend her funeral "through a sort of respectful affection for a fallen monument" (p. 29); she represents the past, the old patriarchal, aristocratic society that existed before the Civil War. Torn between the demands of patriarchal, aristocratic social values and what she really wants, Emily never has a chance to control her fate and her own life, finally falling victim to her own repressed desires.

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