

Giving *Wolf Solent* a Jungian twist

LATELY, I have been reading Carl Jung, for the first time. Jung's writings¹ are notoriously difficult to understand, and as the psychoanalyst Anthony Storr has commented², Jung seemed to have some difficulty writing as eloquently and beautifully as, for example, his once mentor and collaborator cum opponent, Freud. "I have such a hell of a trouble to make people see what I mean," Jung once said of himself.

In his book *Aspects of Wagner*³, the philosopher Bryan Magee writes that Richard Wagner "shows himself a... Jungian before Jung, for in [his opera] he expounds with unprecedented insight the psychic import of myth and dreams, and the use of symbols..." Reading Jung, I remembered Magee's words and that I had noticed this similarity between Wagner and Powys' works. It is as if *Wolf Solent* were, in the words of Robert Donington, "a happy hunting ground for Jungians," albeit Donington was talking about Wagner's *Der Ring Des Nibelungen*. It seems to me that from the very opening passage of *Wolf Solent*, we can sense the ubiquity of Jungian ideas. I will endeavour here to compare some aspects of John Cowper Powys' novel with Jungian theories, hoping to excite more thorough discussion.

He was now thirty-five, and for ten years he had laboriously taught History [...] living peacefully....

As it happened, his new post [...] brought him to the very scene of these disturbing memories;⁴

Anthony Storr writes that the Individuation Theory is Jung's major contribution to psychology. According to Jung, the meaning of Individuation is "...becoming an 'in-dividual' [...] it also implies becoming one's own self. We could therefore translate individuation as 'coming to selfhood' or 'self-realization.'"⁵ It is an inevitable part of the development that every adult must go through in some fashion. The aim of the individuation process is to free the adult man from the psychological forces and relationships that have shaped, restrained or directed his life as a young man. The psychoanalyst Elliott Jaques wrote about a noticeable crisis which occurs in life around the late 30's: "...I noticed a marked tendency towards crisis in the creative work of great men in their middle and late thirties... by taking random samples of 310 [artists] of undoubted greatness, or of genius"⁶.

¹ All quotes from Jung are taken from the *The Collected Works*, Bollingen Series.

² A. Storr, *C.J. Jung*, Viking Press, New York.

³ Bryan Magee, *Aspects of Wagner*, Oxford University Press, 1988.

⁴ J.C. Powys, *Wolf Solent*, Macdonald, 1961, p.2.

⁵ C. Jung, "The effects of the unconscious upon consciousness", in *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology*, Collected Works, vol. 7.

⁶ Elliott Jaques, "Death and the Mid-Life Crisis", in *Work, Creativity and Social Justice*, Heinemann, London, 1970.

Up to the age of 35-40, our life is influenced by various unconscious factors, as Jung describes them: "...subjective inner causes, opinions, convictions...". We experience life more in the subjective realm, becoming free of parental influence, look for love, establish ourselves professionally at work and so on. Now we are to step out of the subjective or the unconscious realm, ready to assert our conscious and objective self. Jung called these tasks "fulfilling our obligations", meaning I guess obligations to nature, by realizing our sexual goals, or by acquiring social position and power. These processes "...culminate in change of personality...[and] the irruption has been preparing for many years, often for half a lifetime..."

This 'sinking into his soul' — this sensation which he called 'mythology' — consisted of a certain summoning-up, to the surface of his mind, of a subconscious magnetic power...⁷

Sometimes it happens that two people have the same ideas, as for instance Alfred Wallace and Charles Darwin, who developed independently the basis for the theory of evolution. Wolf Solent's idea of *mythology* looks as if it came straight out of Jung. There is one difference: Jung writes of an un-conscious, while Powys refers to the sub-conscious, which, according to Jung "...is certainly open to misunderstanding..."⁸ because of its spatial or qualitative ("lower") connotations.

Men have always felt that beside our conscious experiences, that wakeful awareness, life is also comprised of an inner and unreachable realm. This inner realm is not directly accessible to us, but its manifestations can be observed and experienced indirectly, "...there exists a universal magical power (generally called *mana*) about which everything revolves"⁹. All human beings are basically the same; we all have the same bodily features, the same shape, and have a development process along similar lines. This is true all over the world; the most remote and isolated tribes share the same characteristics as the rest of humanity. This is also true over the ages, as shown by history and ancient books. People of many cultures separated either in time or place are physiologically similar, which means that we have psychological similarities too.

All over the world, any baby is born predisposed to respond to sights, sounds and smells that facilitate human interaction, turns his heads towards a human face, first of all towards his mother's. We develop through similar stages; males are always attracted to females (well, with some reservations) and so on. This "substratum of mind common to all men", as Storr puts it, is the source, or rather the mythological idea. Jung wrote that the unconscious psychological structures that all human beings share by nature, "consist of mythological motifs

⁷ Wolf Solent, p.8.

⁸ C. Jung, "On the Nature of the Psyche" in *The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche*, Collected Works, vol. 8.

⁹ C. Jung, "On the Psychology of the Unconscious", in *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology*, Collected Works, vol. 7.

or primordial images...”¹⁰. What we call *mythology* can actually be the projection of unconscious content. Jung’s example was the Mexican Pueblo tribe who “live by myth.” They believe that the sun is their father, that they must continuously worship him in order to reaffirm and assist him to maintain and benefit the world (it reminds me of similar Jewish ideas). Jung wrote that “...the ‘dignity’, the tranquil composure was founded [on] being the son of the sun; his life is cosmologically meaningful...”¹¹.

We have a “personal unconsciousness” which contains our own lost memories, the painful experiences, ideas, imprints of sensual perceptions that had never become conscious, etc. We have another unconscious level whose content is the “universal ‘thought-forms’ of humanity”¹². As an analogy to the “collective unconscious,” let us look at the structure of crystals. The molecules are arranged along some invisible axis, in a precise order. However, there is no real axis in the formation of crystals, albeit we can certainly perceive and talk about it. Such is the primordial content in the unconscious, shared by all human beings. This content gives rise to mythology, to religion (religion without creed), and can be looked upon as “the source of knowledge.”

It is interesting to note what Powys had written in *The Religion of a Sceptic* on the same subject:

And when we remember that these notions [of Mysteries] have emerged [...] out of the anonymous instincts of the race itself, it becomes possible enough that they may afford a clue to the hidden impulses of the universe...¹³

To me this is not a new-age notion. Reflecting on Jung’s view, I see that Powys also talks about the richness and unfathomable complexity of nature of which we are part. At the same time, we have an ability to transcend the subjective and “blind” mythologem, a capacity that actually emerges out of the very structure of the unconscious.

And then it was that Wolf became aware of another member of the family.

No sooner was he conscious of her presence than he felt himself becoming [...] speechless with astonishment...¹⁴

The first time Solent sees Gerda reminds us of Jung’s famous concept of Anima and Animus. Every male has a feminine aspect, an anima, which is “a very soft emotional life, often incorrectly described as ‘feminine’”¹⁵. Similarly, every female has “mannish” characteristics, or an animus. The anima and animus are unconscious structures of human psyche, and are part of human “nature”. One

¹⁰ C. Jung, “*The Structure of the Psyche*”, in *The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche*, Collected Works, vol. 8.

¹¹ C. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, Vintage Books, New York, quoted by Storr.

¹² “*On the Psychology of the Unconscious*”.

¹³ J.C. Powys, *The Religion of a Sceptic*, Village Press, p.28

¹⁴ *Wolf Solent*, p.58

¹⁵ “*On the Psychology of the Unconscious*”.

consequence of this concept is that none of us is either completely masculine nor completely feminine. The anima within males is an unconscious structure having a content of “the imago of woman (the soul image)”. By the same token, women’s animus has an unconscious content of a male image. As an illustration to the unconscious structure of the anima we can say that in order for man to be attracted to a woman, there must be a predisposition in him that will match the object of his attractions, and conversely in women.

In short, (unfortunately, too short), anima is an innate, inborn image of woman that every man has in his unconsciousness; conversely, animus is the image of man women have. The feminine image men have is supposed to combine with the feminine traits, those patterns of behaviour (in very general terms) which men have tried so much to suppress. The unconscious image of the woman is enhanced by man’s unwanted feminine traits. One interesting conclusion is that man will be attracted to women that actually match the image he has in his unconscious, therefore “in his love-choice, [man] is strongly tempted to win the woman who best corresponds to his own unconscious femininity... his own worst weakness.”

...having by good luck found a compartment to himself, Wolf Solent was able to indulge in such an orgy of concentrated thought...¹⁶

Now I may, in taking up an attractive topic, be stretching the Jungian ideas too much. The notion of sexual and erotic activities as the key and the way to knowledge is as ancient as human consciousness. For example, Alexis Sanderson wrote about the Hindu tantric cult, as expressed in the massive work of the theologian Tantraloka whose 29th volume is entitled *rahasyavidhiprakasana*, “An Exposition of the Secret Precepts”: “[the initiated]... could experience the power of transcendence through contemplative worship that involves not only consumption of meat and wine but [also] sexual intercourse.”¹⁷ Similar ideas can be found in other mystical and esoteric doctrines like Kabbalah (Jung was unique in his knowledge of Eastern culture). Eros as the binding force, the force that binds and unites “things” together is an old Greek idea. Freud is famous for ascribing to Eros the major role in the development of the human mind.

Jung described Freud’s theory, as one “[which] ...sought to prove that an overwhelming importance attaches to the erotic or sexual factor... [and] there is a collision between the trend of the conscious mind and the unmoral, incompatible, unconscious wish”¹⁸. The natural human instinct for sex is curbed by external limitation, social or cultural. However, Jung criticized Freud’s theory as being one-sided. Freudian development is more about sexual fulfilment, or its repression. Jung adds the elements of connecting and interacting between people (preferably of the opposite sex). As we saw earlier, man is born predisposed towards woman (and woman towards man), the same way we are ready for a world of air, water, and carbohydrates. Erotic desire is a fulfilment of our nature, hence we are led to the “wisdom of the body.” Jung criticizes the

¹⁶ *Wolf Solent*, p.1.

¹⁷ *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade, Macmillan Library Reference, 1986.

¹⁸ “*On the Psychology of the Unconscious*”.

reduction of human psyche to the Eros, because it goes only half way, “[for psyche] is *also* what it has made and will make out of them [the Eros etc.]” It is not enough to know the mainly uncontrollable processes that have affected our development and have shaped us; we have to consider the values associated with them and the way we will later use these values, for “...life does not have only a yesterday [...] life has also a tomorrow.”

Because this is only a brief and sketchy paper, and perhaps because I cannot resist another name-dropping, I will end here by quoting Roland Barthes, who wrote about the erotic characteristics of text. I think it is an apt description of the feminine quality of Powys’ prose and of Jung’s concepts of the consciousness and unconsciousness of our psyche:

The pleasure of the text is that moment when my body pursues its own ideas — for my body does not have the same ideas I do.¹⁹

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¹⁹ R. Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text.*, Hill and Wang; Rei edition, 1975, p.17.