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***A MODE OF SELF-PORTRAYAL IN ROBERT PENN WARREN'S
ELEVEN POEMS ON THE SAME THEME,
VIA JUNG'S SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL THEORY OF ARCHETYPES***

Keywords: Robert Penn Warren, Jungian psychology, individuation of self, hermeneutics, William James

Abstract: Via a Jungian socio-psychological analysis, the unique act of authorial self-portrayal in American poet Robert Penn Warren's *Eleven Poems on the Same Theme* is revealed, pointing to theoretically important problems of identity vis-à-vis the archetypes of the shadow, the change, the self and the process of individuation. As Warren's main concern is man's fallen condition, a hermeneutics of the shadow has been fully exploited for identifying and explaining the individual's inner hidden negative resources and his potential for acknowledging them by bringing them to conscious view.

A good starting point for understanding the American poet Robert Penn Warren is his conviction that "a piece of literature... should intensify our awareness of the world and of ourselves in relation to the world, in terms of an idea, a view" (Strandberg 37). Warren's mythical view is focused on the Fall of man. Dissatisfied with man's fallen condition Warren carries this topic into the zone of the psyche. Through the theme of "the Undiscovered Self," he approaches the individual's inner hidden unconscious resources, which, in Jung's opinion, if they are brought to conscious view, they could help him overcome the extreme sadness and melancholy he suffers from.

William James was the first to underline the importance of the discovery of the unconscious mind. According to James, the subconscious is the source of both divine and demonic propensities of both mystic revelations and pathological behavior. Freud, on the other hand, considers the mystic possibility illusory and claims that the subconscious is the source of the irrational impulses resulting from man's primitive nature and savage origins.

It is Jung who promotes the concept of the Undiscovered Self. Although Warren wrote his *Eleven Poems on the Same Theme*¹ (1942) focused on the theme of the undiscovered self twenty years before Jung's psychological contribution, Jung provides us the relevant explanatory terminology for clarifying Warren's poetry. Jung states that "the evil, the guilt, the profound unease of conscience, the obscure misgivings are there before our eyes, if only we would see... None of us stands outside humanity's black collective shadow. Whether the crime lies many generations back or happens today, it remains the symptom of a disposition that is always and everywhere present and one would therefore do well to possess some imagination in evil, only the fool can permanently neglect the conditions of his own nature" (136).

The collocations "imagination in evil" and "black collective shadow" make us contemplate, in interpreting Warren's poetry, a hermeneutics of the shadow, which would try to discover its source and various possible interpretations given to it (Bucui 141). Warren juxtaposes the conscious and the unconscious in his *Eleven Poems*; the former is hinted at through the pronoun "you," while the latter, through the word "shadow." The shadow is present in the poem "Monologue at Midnight," representing the hidden, inexpugnable, original psychic guilt:

¹ Due to unavailability of this primary text, Standberg's work was employed as the most reliable secondary source for citations.

And always at the side, like guilt,
Our shadows over the grasses moved,
Or moved across the moonlit snow.
And move across the grass or snow.
Or was it guilt? Philosophies
Loll in their disputations ease (in Strandberg 142).

Warren construes man's fallen condition through the welding of Jungian "shadow" and a sense of guilt which becomes pervasive moving across the grass and moonlit snow. In "End of Season," "you" – the conscious self contemplates the water washing our guilt and setting us apart from the sinful fallen world.

For water wash our guilt and dance in the sun.
And the prophet, hairy and grim in the leonine
Came down to Jordane, toward moon-set de Leon
Wake while, squat, Time clucked like the darling ape,
And Dante's duca, smiling in the blessed clime,
With rushes, sea-wet, wisped from that sad brow the infernal grime (141).

As water stands for the unconscious, the washing of guilt symbolically stands for acknowledging our sins by bringing them to conscious view. The collocations "wisped from that sad brow the infernal grime" suggests newly acquired purity through having acknowledged our sins. And yet, since the deeper self is only superficially acknowledged, the previous dual sinful and pure identity still haunts us: "But the mail lurks in the box at the house where you live," and you still wear the usual human "smudge of history." The demand formulated by the poet is that "a new language" must be learnt in order to preserve the purity acquired through the conversion of the old sensual being into a new human being aware of one's resurrected self. The new language is that of love, of empathy. For otherwise "all our conversation" is "index to our common crime."

In the poem "Crime," the Jungian shadow is present through suggestions of the demonic inner tendencies. The demonic is intuitively alluded to through the image of a mad killer who tries to recollect the murder he committed. As his act is originated in his subconscious, he could not even remember who the victim was. In spite of his crime, he possesses some sort of emotional innocence that arises from his pure motivation. "All he asked was peace. Past despair and past the uncouth. Violation, he snatched at the fleeting hem, though in error..."

The mad Killer's action is totally different from that of the conscious self. The latter's slaying of the shadow is a deliberate gesture done in vanity. The conscious self will have to remember having slain the shadow, the unconscious part. This is due to the fact that the sacrificed self looks capable of being resuscitated if memory "should thaw the corpse":

And envy him, for though the seasons stammer
Past pulse in the yellow throat of the field-lark,
Still memory drips, a pipe in the cellar-dark,
And in its hutch and hole, as when the earth gets
The cold heart heaves like a toad (143).

It follows only natural that the resources of the unconscious self, which remains subsumed, will keep threatening the real identity. Warren, an expert in the chemistry of the self, contemplates the reunion between the conscious self located in the "attic" with the unconscious self buried in the cellar:

The cold heart heaves like a toad, and lifts its brow
With that bright jewel you have no use for now,
While puzzled yet, despised with the attic junk the letter
Names over your name, and mourns under the dry rather (143).

In the poem entitled “Original Sin. A Short Story,” Warren again puzzles and frightens his readers through the paradoxical unconscious self, which continues to keep company to the rational one, no matter how much the latter tried to get rid of it.

Nodding, its great head rattling like a gourd,
And locks like seaweed strung on the stinking stone,
The nightmare stumbles past...
You thought you had lost it when you left Omaha
But you met it in Harvard Yard as the historic steeple
Was confirming the midnight...(143).

And yet, in the second part of the poem the shadow, the unconscious self, seems to be detached from the conscious one never intending “to shame you before your friends,” having “nothing to do with your public experience or private reformation.” The two negative signifiers “never” and “nothing” suggest, following Buciu's terminology, the “aesthetic nirvanization of the self,” namely the supreme unconscious self completely harmless to one's real public identity.

Locked out of the rational conscious self, it can only hang around “like a mother rises at night to seek a childhood picture. Or it goes to the backyard and stands like an old horse cold in the pasture,” Strandberg suggests that Warren was often inclined to associate the unconscious self with old people or with beasts. He further claims that the old people have got used to accepting their condition of fallen beings in a fallen world (145). Nevertheless, such people, reminders of the fallen self, will always be reminders of the “original sin” and, consequently, of one's true identity, as his grandpa does in the same poem.

You thought you had lost it (the shadow self)
When you left Omaha
For it seemed connected with your grandpa, who
Had a wan on his forehead and sat on the veranda
To finger the precious protuberance, as was his habit to do (144).

Even if it is only a deep uneasiness experienced by the conscious self while denying his unconscious part, the latter knows the true identity of the conscious self: “You have moved often and rarely left an address/ But it has not died, it comes, its hand childish, unsure.” Such lines prove that Warren's concern with problems of sincerity and self-mystification seems to be only a problem of surviving in the modern world.

But yet, self-mystification brings about some unknown psychic illness, due to the sense of intense guilt and self-estrangement in the poem “Pursuit.” Estranged and guilty, “the corner hunchback stares from the thicket of his familiar pain, like a fawn that meet you a moment, wheels, in imperious innocence is gone.” And likewise, the old people, among whom the “feverish Old Jew stares stern with authority/ Till you feel like one who has come too late, or improperly clothed, to a party.”

As concerns the authorial social saturated self, it goes to a doctor in order to be cured of some intense unknown psychic illness. The doctor is unable to identify the disease and only recommends him to change “the scene” and go to Florida resort country. There, the conscious self enriches its moral experiences and reaches the conclusion, that the less favored, the so-called “Dirty,” those who apprehend the moral pollution and compromises and who are likely to pass through stages of spiritual development by surfacing their dark inner resources, might possess the secret knowledge for curing the illness. Disappointed and lonely, he decides that the only change of scene must be “A change of love: if love is a groping Godward, though blind, no matter what crevice, cranny, chink, bright in dark, the pale tentacle find.”

If the poem entitled “Pursuit” deals with imagination at work in the “seraphic” (147) zone, the poem “Terror” reiterates Jung's concept of “imagination in evil,” construing the massacres of World War

II as a form of manifestation of mankind's dark collective shadow. Such an interpretation brings Jung and Freud together, the latter claiming that "the primitive, savage and evil impulses of mankind..... wait for opportunities to display their activity" (in Strandberg 147).

The real motivation of people's waging wars, identified by Warren behind the slogans and ideologies of some political leaders, is encapsulated in the verses "They fight old friends for their obsession knows/ Only the immaculate itch, not human friends or foes." Buciu's triad "denunciation, enunciation, transfiguration" (218) can be also applied to interpreting this poem. Denunciation of mass violence during the World War II is directly associated with the enunciation of one significant truth of the modern age, the fact that we are "born to know adequate definition of terror," as the ultimate terror means the confrontation with one's shadow, with one's unconscious self. The awareness of lack of identity, of the impossibility of self-unification reverberates in the last two lines, "But you crack nuts, while the conscience-stricken stare/Kisses the terror, for you see an empty chair" (148).

The construction "conscience-stricken" can be interpreted from a double perspective. First, the author implies complicity and indulgence on the part of each individual who thus appears responsible for "the empty chair." Second, if we follow Buciu's terminology, the construction "conscience-stricken" reveals a certain amount of awareness. Awareness leads us to another concept taken from Buciu, that of the "ethics being founded on aesthetics" (55). The ethical basis of Warren's poem *Terror* reveals the concept of transfiguration through art. The truths about ourselves can only artistically be uttered in the sense that possibility for man's redemption, "the groping Godward, though blind" can be accomplished by the reunion of selves, of all selves.

The Ballad of Billie Potts reiterates the theme of identity interweaving the narrative ballad structure with the meditative verse. It is patterned according to a musical composition containing a "fugue-like arrangement" (Strandberg 149). The beginning of this long poem is rich in mythical connotations due to its setting in the land between the rivers, which stands for ancient Mesopotamia. On the other hand, the characters can be related to the story of the Garden of Eden. Big Billie Potts is depicted as an "American Adam" (150), while his wife resembles Eve, through instigating her husband to murder their disguised son, Little Billie. At first he is introduced as an innocent vulnerable adolescent, closely connected with his family: "He was their darling."

The sense of tragic, depressive scattering of energies arises from Billie's growing into true manhood, which necessarily implies the loss of innocence. This dramatic growth is grotesquely commented upon by Warren: "With blood on his shirt and snot in his nose/And pee in his pants, for he'd wet his clothes" (151). Such an un-heroic deed imposes the acquisition of a "new" name, a "new" identity, a "new" innocence during a ten-year stay somewhere out West.

In the end, incapable of accomplishing his inner transformation he gets back to his "old shell of self" determined to recover his lost original identity. Two "Narcissus scenes" (151) reveal Billie in the excitement of searching his true identity by searching his true image reflected in a stream's water which "coils" and darkly reflects that image. So, Billie goes to another spring where he used to drink water as a child and where he hopes to rediscover his vanished "child-self" (152) reflected in the still waters of the pool which peacefully and unknowingly looked back at him.

But perhaps what you lost in the pool long ago
When childlike you lost it and then in your innocence rose to go
After kneeling, as now with your thirst beneath the leaves
And years it lies here and dreams in the depth and grieves,
More faithful that mother or father in the dark of the leaves (152).

But what he learns is that the vanished child-self can no longer be recovered. Moreover, Billie's search after his lost innocence and identity ends with the acquisition of the terrible knowledge of the Jungian shadow. Here, it is represented by his own father "who is evil and ignorant and old" and who offers him no solution for rediscovering the lost parental paradise, but death.

And there is the spring in the dark of the trees,
 And one star in it caught through a chink...
 Little Billie gets down on his knees
 To sup the water at his ease
 And the star is gone but there is his face
 Just help yourself Big Billie said,
 There set the hatchet in his head (153).

If we focus our attention on the “hatchet’s” scene, where the parents horrified discover that the stranger they killed for money is actually their son, we come to learn what Buciu called “the limitations of the knowledge of identity,” namely “inward depravity” (153) and the Jungian shadow. The death of Little Billie closes the narrative ballad, and Warren introduces the true main character of this poem – the “you” from the poem’s parenthetical parts. He argues that it is not Billie, but “you” that the poet has been speaking to all this time. “You” stands for the “Clean” innocent part of one’s identity, totally unaware of its relation to the Jungian shadow – our dark hidden part.

Moreover, Warren’s narrator lines up his identity with “you,” both representing two innocent observers who thoroughly search the meaning of the past crime from a present perspective. The dark gloomy implications of the past events are reflected in the savage beast imagery. Both the narrator and “you” seem to be hardly touched by those events because of the time gap, which separates past events from those of the present. “You” appears to be little-by-little affected because “you” realize “you” can not change your fate.

There was a beginning but you cannot see it
 There will be an end but you cannot see it
 And speculation rasps its idiot nails
 Across the dry slate where you did the sum
 The answer is in the back of the book but the page is gone
 And Grandma told you to tell the truth but she is dead (153).

Starting with the fourth parenthetical stanza, the distance between Billie Pott and “you” vanishes and the stanza ends: “Under the green leaf’s translucence the light bathes your face/Think of yourself at dawn. Which one are you? What?” (153). In the fifth parenthetical stanza “you” identify with Billie during his exile and share his “new” identity. In the sixth parenthetical stanza Little Billie and “you” get back home. Moreover “you” have become well aware of the approaching death and of the fact “you” have looked for and acknowledged the meaning of the “missing” shadow (156). In spite of the fact that “your conscience was easy and you were assured of your innocence,” you found out that something was missing and cried “Why, I’m not in it at all.” Consequently, “you” accompany Billie to his father’s house only to witness the hatchet blow which is deadly to him. Through such a gesture the father has revealed his fallen condition and “you” will finally grasp the most important element of your identity, which helps you acknowledge who you actually are. Mystical allusions reverberate from this stanza:

And you, wander, back
 After the striving and the wind’s word,
 To kneel
 Here in the evening empty of wind or bird,
 To kneel in the sacramental silence of evening
 At the feet of the old man
 Who is evil and ignorant and old (154).

“You,” as Billie’s alter ego, or the Jamesian ideal self or Freudian superego, have thus come to acknowledge the id or the shadow in a setting colored by religious imagery. The sacrifice takes place in the sacramental silence of evening “which is empty of wind or bird”; here the son humbly kneels at the

feet of the old man who is “evil and ignorant and old.” Strandberg has identified in the scene of the son bending his head to the hatchet in the fearful silent evening “overtones of Christ in Gethsemane” (157).

In the last part of the poem, Warren reiterates his need for a change of scene – which necessarily must be a change of love. Strandberg comments that such a change necessarily implies acceptance of “osmotic connections” and identification of one’s identity through “participation in the whole of nature” (146).

The bee knows, and the eel’s cold ganglia burn,
And the sad head lifting to the long return,
Through brumal deeps, in the great unsolsticed coil,
Carries its knowledge, navigator without star,
And under the stars, pure in its clamorous toil,
The goose hoots north, where the starlit marshes are.
The salmon heaves at the fall, and, wanderer, you
Heave at the great fall of Time
Back to the silence, back to the pool, back.
To the high pool, motionless, and the
unmurmuring dream (160).

Such “osmosis” with others is extremely difficult because material concerns under its various forms luck, age, sex, family, substantial economic, social, professional issues are satisfactorily sustaining your false identity artificially and conventionally constructed. In the end, finding these conventional issues totally unsatisfactory, “you” accept to be united to the whole animate forms of creation. The beasts, which represent “the wild essences” (Scrima 142) of the universe mingle with the anonymous forbearers “the spiritual essences” (142).

Binding the material with the spiritual, the natural and the human, Warren has created what Whitman called a sort of “inverted mysticism” (in Strandberg 162). Such a perfect communion between the natural and the human, the material and the spiritual, can also be interpreted as standing for the sacred, the sacred as “the all-embracing real,” in Eliade’s terminology (Dima 33). Such a picture stands for real art. Without regarding art as a refuge from life but as a picture of it, life lived as Warren has depicted it makes us regard him as a “finished” exquisite artist possessing a fully developed technique and point of view, both employed for writing and rewriting his artistic self.

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