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The Archetype of the Bastard in Ševčenko's Poetry

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Three discoveries by Carl Jung have had a profound influence on literary criticism—the collective unconscious, the archetypes, and the *anima*. Apart from the personal unconscious there is in everybody, according to Jung, a deeper layer of the collective unconscious, from which consciousness has developed. “The contents of the collective unconscious are known as *archetypes*.”¹ Although these are unknown, they may be apprehended in our consciousness as “primordial images” or “inborn forms of intuition,” revealing certain typical symbols common to the human race or to a certain culture. Ancient as they are, they may be modified by the individual consciousness and by the era in which they happen to appear. Yet another discovery was that of the feminine element (*anima*) in the unconscious of a man and of a masculine element (*animus*) in a woman. These complementary elements in human personalities are at the same time archetypes. In a man “the compelling power of the *anima* is due to her image being an archetype of the collective unconscious, which is projected onto any woman who offers the slightest hook on which her picture may be hung.”²

The effect of these revelations (clinical research has made it difficult to regard them as mere hypotheses) on our understanding of creative processes has been very far-reaching. An entire school of literary criticism in Western Europe and America followed these Jungian precepts. From the pioneering work of the English critic Maud Bodkin, *Archetypal Patterns in Poetry*, first published in 1934, to the German Erich Neumann, the American Philip Wheelwright, and the Canadian Northrop Frye, to mention only a few, critics in the West have used new approaches to literary analysis based to a greater or lesser degree on Jung's original discoveries. Frequently they use psychology merely as a point of departure for literary theory, and their criticism cannot be described as psychological. They deal chiefly with the literature of the West, advancing a new concept of literature as a “reconstructed mythology.”³ In the Soviet Union Jung's influence has been negligible because his theories are regarded as reactionary. From time to time literary studies have appeared in Russian and other languages of the USSR which have touched on some problems of interest to “Jungian”

criticism (folk motifs, recurrent themes, imagery). By and large, however, this new field has remained unexplored.

Jung himself was interested in literature and left some acute observations on the nature of literary creation, e.g. :

Art is a kind of innate drive that seizes a human being and makes him its instrument. The artist is not a person endowed with free will who seeks his own ends, but one who allows art to realize its purposes through him. As a human being he may have moods and a will and personal aims, but as an artist he is "man" in a higher sense—he is "collective man"—one who carries and shapes the unconscious, psychic life of mankind.⁴

Having thus rejected Freud's concept of the artist as deriving his art from his personal experience, Jung emphasized the impersonal and intuitive origin of art. The artist was to him a seer and a diviner, not only of universal human values, but also of his national culture which represented a fragment of the racial heritage. "A work of art is produced that contains what may truthfully be called a message to generations of men. So *Faust* touches something in the soul of every German."⁵ Still referring to Goethe he reiterated :

Here it is something that lives in the soul of every German, and that Goethe has helped to bring to birth. Could we conceive of anyone but a German writing *Faust* or *Also sprach Zarathustra*? Both play upon something that reverberates in the German soul—a "primordial image," as Jacob Burckhardt once called it—the figure of a physician or teacher of mankind. The archetypal image of the wise man, the saviour or redeemer, lies buried and dormant in man's unconscious since the dawn of culture; it is awakened whenever the times are out of joint and a human society is committed to serious error.⁶

One does not have to agree with all of Jung's intricate arguments to see in his aesthetics a kernel of truth about art—that artists are but instruments of a great force beyond their control. They may live, in Northrop Frye's words, in a "world of myth, an abstract or purely literary world of fictional and thematic design, unaffected by canons of plausible adaptation to familiar experience."⁷

Long ago, critics of Taras Ševčenko's poetry noted the presence in his works of certain dominant themes which set him apart from his contemporaries. They ascribed this to Ševčenko's *narodnost'*, his dependence on the folk motifs of the Ukraine. Yet even early researchers detected more than mere dependence. Writing in 1898 Sumcov argued :

Ševčenko's *narodnost'*, like that of Puškin and other great poets, consists of two related elements: (a) an external *narodnost'*, borrowings and imitations, and (b) an inner *narodnost'*, inherited psychically. It is not difficult to determine the external, borrowed elements; to do this it is sufficient to acquaint oneself with ethnography and to find direct sources in folk tales, beliefs, songs, and customs. It is very difficult—and to do it fully, impossible—to determine the inner psychological folk elements.⁸

Kolessa⁹ and Komarynec' quoted Sumcov with approval, although both denied that there was a clear demarcation line between the inner and the outer elements. The latter contended that Ševčenko inherited his *narodnost'* from the "toiling masses."¹⁰ Yet Sumcov unwittingly put his finger on the existence of archetypes in Ševčenko's poetry. Its "external" *narodnost'* is only a manifestation of a deeper layer of primordial images rooted in the collective unconscious.

Some of Ševčenko's archetypal motifs are very prominent, recurring constantly in his poems from 1839 to 1861, that is, throughout his writing career. The archetype of the mother is the most striking, and a complete study of it would easily fill a book. Today, interest in this archetype is very active among psychologists, anthropologists, and literary critics.¹¹ Many of them accept, with reservations, the importance for our culture of the matriarchy which predated our patriarchal society and which was first pointed out by Bachofen.¹² The remains of the matriarchal order may be seen today, not only in the great civilization of the Mediterranean, but also in India and North America. Moreover, they act as sources of artistic creativity for modern man, who in defense of the mother "like the hero of myth stands in conflict with the world of the fathers, i.e., the dominant values."¹³

Ševčenko's image of the mother is many-sided. She is good mother earth, the protectress of the family hearth, but above all the seduced girl, *pokrytka*.¹⁴ In the latter role she is the heroine of his long poems "Kateryna" (1838), "Najmyčka" (The Servant Girl, 1845), "Tytarivna" (The Sexton's Daughter, 1848), "Maryna" (1848), "Vid'ma" (The Witch, 1847–1858), and "Marija" (1859). Several other poems also touch directly on seductions. Customary explanations of these poems solely in terms of the influence of Sentimentalism (Karamzin) and Ševčenko's preoccupation with the wretched social position of the woman serf are inadequate. A new approach is needed in order to explore these phenomena—which are unquestionably archetypes. For reasons of space, I will focus attention on the archetype of the bastard.

In literature the bastard, as a product of an illegitimate union, is an offshoot of the mother archetype. There is no doubt that Ševčenko's social conscience was troubled by the high incidence of illegitimacy among the Ukrainian peasantry. But to describe his depiction of the lot of the seduced girl merely as condemnation of the serfdom which had led to these abuses would be tantamount to the view that Milton's *Paradise Lost* is merely a picture of Puritan England. Similarly, one cannot forget that in Ševčenko's personal life seduction left a deep scar: his childhood sweetheart, Oksana Kovalenko, was seduced by a Russian soldier, a fact recorded by the poet several times, above all in his poem "My vkupočci kolys' rosly" (We Grew Up Together Once, 1849). Yet this alone cannot account for his involvement with the bastard theme. The reasons lie much deeper.

The nature of the archetypes is such that they overlap and interpenetrate.¹⁵ Their secretions create a web of images, thoughts, and feelings ranging from good to evil, beautiful to ugly. The archetypal mother, according to Neumann, has three forms: the good, the terrible, and the good-bad mother.¹⁶ The same is true of Ševčenko's bastard, *bajstrjuk*. Although most frequently he appears as a tragic and lost figure, there are many other roles for him.

In the very first poem by Ševčenko, the ballad "Pryčynna" (The Bewitched Woman, 1837), a hint is given that the small children who come out to play at night on the banks of the Dnieper may be spirits of bastards. They are water sprites, former "unbaptized children." Such creatures are common in other folk legends connected with the mother archetype. "In all of them," writes Neumann, "the character of enchantment leading to doom is dominant."¹⁷ In Ševčenko's poem they set the mood for tragedy. In another ballad, "Utoplana" (The Drowned Maiden, 1841), there is no doubt that Hanna, the beautiful daughter of a widow, is a bastard. Her mother, who loved the Cossacks, cannot see her own daughter grow up to be a beautiful girl and a possible rival. In a fit of jealousy she drowns her and loses her own life as well. There are no social or moral overtones here. The entire poem reflects the spirit of many folksongs which are quite detached in their attitude toward illegitimacy. They go back to pagan times, when the very concept of illegitimacy was absent. In the matriarchal society (in the Ukraine strong traces of matriarchy date from the period of the so-called Trypillja culture, 3000–1700 B.C.), sexual relations were such as to make the father of the child unimportant. An "illegitimate" child was fatherless, and therefore he belonged entirely to the mother. The role of the woman as the leading partner—and her relationship not to the husband but to the child—dominate much of Ukrainian folklore. Capturing and seducing girls at Easter rites and wedding ceremonies is amply recorded in folksongs.¹⁸ There is no moral censure attached to these "games," and illegitimate children mentioned in this connection are mentioned vaguely but tenderly.¹⁹

Not all folklore is amoral. Many Ukrainian songs about the seduced girl (*pokrytka*) are permeated by Christian morality, though here and there pre-Christian traces may be seen. In his study of this theme, Volodymyr Hnatjuk concentrated on the song about a girl who drowned her child.²⁰ All fifty-one variants of the song depict the girl drowning her illegitimate child and being punished for her crime. Though sometimes defiant, the girl is inevitably found out and severely punished. Hnatjuk dates the song to the sixteenth century.

Ševčenko was influenced by the attitudes of songs such as these though he did not imitate them very closely. His most moving poem about a

pokrytka, "Kateryna," is built on the theme of the suffering inflicted on the heroine by punishment. Her father and mother turn her out of their ancestral home because of the shame she brought on them. They are cruel but just in the eyes of society.²¹ Not only is there no chance of reconciliation between Catherine and her parents, but there is no future for her child. She loves and protects him, but when his father refuses to recognize him, she abandons the child and drowns herself. The poignancy of the child's fate is underscored: "Ščo zostalos' bajstrjukovi? / Xto z nym zahovoryt'? / Ni rodyny, ni xatyny; / Šljaxy, pisky, hore . . ." [What is there left for the bastard? Who will speak to him? No family, no home; Only roads, sands, and grief . . .].²²

In the poem "Najmyčka" the bastard finds his way back to society. His mother abandons him and becomes a maid to the old couple who adopt him. Hiding her identity, she becomes *de facto* his mother. Her penance is accepted, and Marko, her son, is redeemed. In most poems written between 1847 and 1858, however, the evil of illegitimacy is seen to be unrelieved. It is so in "Osyka" (Aspen, 1847, rewritten as "Vid'ma" [The Witch] in 1858), "Tytarivna," and "Maryna," where the girls are seduced by landlords. One may doubt that the observation expressed by a student of family archetypes in literature applies to Ševčenko. Sven Armens wrote, "The symbolic rape leads, without doubt, only to social chaos, the destruction of the weak and innocent; but the latter motivation, with its implication of a more permanent union, suggests the possibility of some enduring fount of tenderness, a gift transmitted by human male and female to their offspring."²³ This tenderness is lacking. On the contrary, an agony of cosmic proportions is symbolized by Ševčenko in the figure of the bastard.

Either the mother abandons her child or the bastard turns against his mother ("U našim raji na zemlji" [In Our Earthly Paradise], 1849). The most precious image of the "young mother and her small baby" is destroyed, and the poet displays an almost masochistic delight in showing the horrors of the demolished family order. This mood of universal gloom touches at times on the national theme, for Ševčenko regarded the Ukraine as a seduced woman and considered the Russian masters of the Ukraine to be "Catherine's [the Second] bastards," who like locusts despoiled his country. The mother image of one's country is an echo of the matriarchal order. Perhaps Ševčenko was aware of the feeling that "agricultural countries do not make history" but rather "suffer it (*Geschichte erleiden*)."²⁴

Yet, deep as it is, the darkness is not total. In an early work of Ševčenko, *Hajdamaky* (1841), the bastard Jarema Halajda finds freedom during the peasant uprising. Rebellion brings him out of the lower depths (servant in a tavern) to the very top of the new revolutionary order. In a short time "his wings grew," and he became a bloodthirsty avenger of his

people. His triumph was short-lived. The outburst of hate and violence, however justified, brings no solution.

The poem in which Ševčenko attempted a “solution” to the bastard theme is “Marija.” Written after the poet’s return from a ten-year exile, “Marija” is one of his finest works. Myopic critics have often ignored it and labelled it “antireligious.” It is nothing of the kind. There is a deep serenity and wisdom in this poem which is a true apotheosis of motherhood. Yet the strangest twist in the retelling of the familiar Biblical story is that Ševčenko rejects belief in the Immaculate Conception and makes Jesus the son of Mary and a young wandering prophet. The daring concept of making Jesus an illegitimate son of Mary can be understood only within the archetypal framework. What had always been the fruit of the darkest evil has turned into the vessel of the greatest good. Divinity itself has sprung from human frailty. Human love has been vindicated. True, the Messiah suffers defeat and is crucified. But his message is invincible. The union of mother and child is not transcendental, but valid here on earth for all of us.

Все упованіє мое
 На тебе, мій пресвітлий раю,
 На милосердіє твоє,
 Все упованіє мое
 На тебе, мати, возлагаю.
 Святая сила всіх святих,
 Пренепорочная, благая!
 Молюся, плачу і ридаю:
 Возври, пречистая, на їх,
 Отих окрадених, сліпих
 Невольників. Подай їм силу
 Твогого мученика сина,
 Щоб хрест-кайдани донесли
 До самого, самого краю.²⁵

[All my hope in / You, my glorious Paradise, / In your mercy / All my hope I place / In you, Mother. / The holy power of all saints, / Immaculate and blessed, / I pray, I cry and weep: / Look on them, o purest, / On these wretched, blind slaves. / Give them the strength / Of your martyred son / So that they may carry their cross—their chains / To the very, very end.]

The sacrifice of the hero’s life, the proper center of the tragic vision, is not in vain because it occurs against a background of reverberations of the most cherished and most frequently abused act of love between man and woman. The myth of man-God, a son of woman, has been recreated in a great poem.

Recently Orest Zilyns'kyj remarked perceptively, though rather cryptically, that Ševčenko’s world is “anthropological and anthropocentric.”²⁶ These qualities invite a new approach to a poet who for too long has been

studied as a national bard and a peasant revolutionary. A new facet of his greatness will be revealed in the archetypal meaning of his poetry.

NOTES

- 1 C. G. Jung, "Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious," *Collected Works* (N.Y., 1959), IX, Pt. 1, p. 4.
- 2 F. Fordham, *An Introduction to Jung's Psychology* (London, 1966), 54.
- 3 Northrop Frye, *Fables of Identity* (N.Y., 1963), 38.
- 4 C. G. Jung, *Modern Man in Search of a Soul* (London, 1941), 195.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 191.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 197.
- 7 N. Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (N.Y., 1967), 136.
- 8 Н. Ф. Сумцов, "Главные мотивы поэзии Т. Г. Шевченко," «Из украинской старины» (Харьков, 1905), 85. First printed in *Kievskaja starina*, LX, No. 2 (1898).
- 9 Ф. Колесса, «Фольклорний елемент в поезії Шевченка» (Львів, 1939), 89.
- 10 Т. Комаринець, «Шевченко і народна творчість» (Київ, 1963), 76.
- 11 Erich Neumann, *The Great Mother* (N.Y., 1963); R. N. Anshen, ed., *The Family: Its Function and Destiny* (N.Y., 1959); Sven Armens, *Archetypes of the Family in Literature* (Seattle, 1966); Erich Fromm, *The Forgotten Language* (N.Y., 1951).
- 12 J. J. Bachofen, *Das Mutterrecht* (1891).
- 13 E. Neumann, *Art and the Creative Unconscious* (N.Y., 1959), 185.
- 14 *Pokrytka*, literally "the covered one," derives from the custom of covering the head of an unwed mother with a kerchief so as to remove her from the status of a girl to that of a married woman.
- 15 C. G. Jung, *Collected Works* (N.Y., 1963), XIV, 103.
- 16 Neumann, *The Great Mother*, 21.
- 17 *Ibid.*, 81.
- 18 М. Грушевський, «Історія української літератури» (Київ, 1923), I, 254–270.
- 19 О. Kolberg, *Wotyń* (Kraków, 1907).
- 20 Володимир Гнатюк, «Пісня про покритку що втопила дитину," «Матеріали до української етнології» XIX–XX (Львів, 1919), 249–389.
- 21 For an illuminating analysis of this and other poems by Ševčenko which center on woman, see M. Shlemkevych, "The Substratum of Ševčenko's View of Life," in V. Mijakovskij and G. Y. Shevelov, eds., *Taras Ševčenko, 1814–1861: A Symposium* (The Hague, 1962). Shlemkevych was aware of Jung's theories and applied them to some extent in his study.
- 22 Тарас Шевченко, «Повне зібрання творів у шести томах» (Київ, 1963), I, 39.
- 23 Armens, *Archetypes of the Family in Literature*, 44.
- 24 F. R. Schröder, "Die Welt der Mutter und die Welt des Vaters," *Germanisch-Romanische Monatsschrift*, XXXVIII (1957), 183.
- 25 Ševčenko, II, 353.
- 26 Орест Зілинський, "Кілька актуальних думок про Шевченка," «Дукля» II (1968), 141. Ševčenko's anthropocentric philosophy has been well discussed by Čiževskij in his article Д. Чижевський, "Шевченко й релігія," Т. Шевченко, «Повне видання творів» (Варшава, Львів, 1936), X, 329–347.