



Applied Literature and New Jungian Reading: a Case study of Camilla Gibb's Novel, *Sweetness in the Belly*

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Abstract

The field of Applied Literature is concerned with the practical usages of literature, including the potentials of literature to empower and transform individuals. Jungian criticism, with its suggestions of the possibility of individuation and self-actualization in individuals, has been an important source for scholars in the field of Applied Literature for healing. Still, the traditional Jungian approach to literature has been criticized in recent years, especially due to its apparent universalist assumptions and its insensitivity to context-specific issues in texts. For the same reason, New Jungian critics have been recently exploring the possibilities of reconciling Jungian concepts with more context-oriented literary theories. This paper, then, in accordance with this new trend, attempts to do a New Jungian reading of a contemporary postcolonial novel, *Sweetness in the Belly*, by Camilla Gibb, as a case study, to investigate the potentials within this approach of extension of Jungian ideas and dialogue with other more modern literary theories after poststructuralism. The research benefits from the views of New Jungian critics as well as the theories in relation to the identity issues of migrants. The paper is concluded with the proposition that, as the exploration of this novel testifies, the New Jungian approach as well as the contemporary fiction of identity construction can prove as valid resources for Applied Literature for healing.

Keywords: Applied Literature, New Jungian Criticism, Individuation, Identity, *Sweetness in the Belly*

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: Tuesday, August 21, 2018

Accepted: Monday, November 26, 2018

Published: Thursday, February 7, 2019

Available Online: Saturday, February 2, 2019

DOI: 10.22049/JALDA.2018.26324.1087

Introduction

In a world fraught with wars, tensions, inequalities, and mostly human-induced sorrows, it is crucial to think about ways to alleviate the sufferings of human beings. Helping people get out of the abysses of depression, disillusionment, and inaction is highly demanded. It is indeed vital to put all the achievements of human beings in science and humanities at the service of offering the people of the world some peace of mind and some measure of happiness. The field of Applied Literature, which is concerned with the practical usages of literature, in one of its branches focuses on this pressing need and on the transformative powers of engaging with literature for healing, self-actualization, and consolation. As Susanna Marie Anderson (2014) puts it:

Applied Literature ... intersects with the helping professions and is concerned with practical applications rather than abstract theoretical concerns. The field ... includes numerous approaches where professionals from various disciplines are consciously harnessing the transformative power of literature. Modalities explored within the scope of this research study include Bibliotherapy, Poetry Therapy, Personal Mythology work in Depth Psychology, and work being done in Education, Arts in Corrections and Arts in Medicine programs. (p. 89)

An important source employed by those interested in Applied Literature which is aimed at readers' self-actualization is the depth psychology of Carl Gustav Jung and his followers, such as Joseph Campbell and Carol S. Pearson. Jungian psychology is important to Applied Literature for healing because firstly it highlights the significance of archetypes and myths in the exploration of the human psyche. Jung (1953) defines archetypes as

...systems of readiness for action, and at the same time images and emotions. They are inherited with the brain structure – indeed they are its psychic aspect. They represent, on the one hand, a very strong instinctive conservatism, while on the other hand they are the most effective means conceivable of instinctive adaptation. (CW 10, par. 53)

Jungian archetypes are defined as “universal symbols” (Guerin, Labor, Morgan, Reesman & Willingham, 2005, p. 84); Harmon and Holman (2000) interpret them as “a group of ‘primordial images’ shaped by the repeated experience of our ancestors and expressed in Myths, religions, dreams, fantasies, and literature” (p. 34). Identifying these archetypal patterns in literature, among others, in Anderson’s view can help people see their commonalities with other human beings and have “an evolving sense of embeddedness in the community of universal human experience” (Anderson, 2014, p. 93); thus, this identification makes people feel that they are not lonely in the world. Secondly, Jungian psychology strongly suggests the possibility of individuation. Jung (1953) thus defines individuation: “In general, it is the process by which individual beings are formed and differentiated; in particular, it is the development of the psychological individual as a being distinct from the general, collective psychology” (CW 6, par. 757). In this process, the unconscious forces and conscious ones become assimilated and balanced with each other and an individual

“experiences fulfillment of one’s capacities and the development of the self” (Schults & Schults, 2009, p. 115). Literature can provide many examples of these stories of the development of the self, particularly in the genre of Bildungsroman, the subject of which is “the development of the protagonist’s mind and character, in the passage from childhood through varied experiences—and often through a spiritual crisis—into maturity, which usually involves recognition of one’s identity and role in the world” (Abrams, 2009, p. 229). Still, in some versions of this form, the journey is one from immaturity, at any age, to maturity rather than from childhood to maturity. Applied Literature for healing, taking advantage of Jung’s theory of Individuation as well as his other theory of ‘Active imagination’, can make a capital of such stories. Active imagination, as Rowland (2002) explains, is a therapeutic method proposed by Jung through which a patient is asked to fantasize about an image. This image can be an image from dreams or cultural or artistic images; Rowland, restating Jung’s views, goes on to say that, active imagination can bring to the consciousness of a person his/her unconscious material and in this way individuation is promoted” (p. 225). A literary text as a cultural product can create mental images; therefore, reading literature can enhance active imagination and touch the unconscious recesses, accelerating the process of individuation (Rowland, 2002, p. 196). Accordingly, we get the clue about the relationship between Applied Literature, active imagination, and individuation; it can be claimed that if a text is mainly focused on development of self and identity, it is possible that through the process of active imagination, some unconscious capabilities of the reader come to the fore; as a result, self-actualization or individuation can be accelerated.

Jung proposed his ideas in the middle years of the 20th century, and, since then, there have been numerous interpretations as well as criticisms of his views. In psychology, in recent years, we can see a revival of interest in Jungian Analytical psychology (Schults & Schults, 2009); however, recent literary criticism especially with its poststructuralist bend shows little enthusiasm in the application of Jungian ideas to literature. It is especially such because, as Rowland (2002) suggests, the traditional Jungian criticism tends to seek transhistorical archetypes in literary texts and, in an essentializing manner, believes in archetypal images as “transcultural constants” (p. 3); therefore, when it comes to texts and movements which are deeply imbedded in history and culture, we face problems. In fact, traditional Jungian literary criticism “exploits the notion of collective unconscious to theorize a human essence independent of history and culture” (Rowland, 2002, p. 4). Still, Jungian psychology/criticism, due to the exceptional insights into human psyche and also literary texts it can provide, cannot be ignored. By considering it as old-fashioned, the literary researchers deprive themselves of the many possibilities that this criticism offers. New Jungian criticism, an emerging branch of Jungian criticism attempts to offer a solution to this problem. In the last quarter of a century or so, a number of literary studies have attempted to engage with Jungian ideas from a fresh perspective (Brooke, 1991, 1999; Gallant, 1978, 1996; Bishop, 2002; Dawson, 2004; Rowland, 1999/2002, 2005; and Tacey, 1988, 2006). This branch engages with Jungian ideas critically, uses their potentials, reinterprets them, criticizes them and in this way extends their possibilities of usage to literary criticism. New Jungians especially focus on the possibilities within Jungian criticism of reinterpretation and

of dialogue between other literary theories and Jungian theory. In other words, New Jungians try to avoid the universalist assumptions of traditional Jungian reading by reinterpreting the basic Jungian ideas, a reinterpretation that can be closer to a true understanding of these ideas. In fact, the New Jungians suggest the possibility of combining the Jungian psychology and new context-based criticisms, of reinterpreting and extending them and using the potentials of both, for a more enriching appreciation of literature. In this way, Applied Literature based on Jungian psychology can also benefit from both this revival of interest in Jungian criticism and all these reinterpretations and reimagining of these theories.

As New Jungian reading is still in its early stages of development, not many literary texts have been examined under the light of this approach. The present paper attempts to do a New Jungian reading of a postcolonial novel, Camilla Gibb's (2006) *Sweetness in the Belly*, as a case study, to investigate the potentials within this approach of extension of Jungian ideas and of dialogue with other more modern literary theories after poststructuralism. This paper also argues how Applied Literature, especially Applied Literature for healing, will benefit from this recognition of the New Jungian reading in the academy. In addition to a range of theories about identity which will be drawn on, the paper especially depends on Susan Rowland's (1999/2002) ideas in her groundbreaking text, *C.G. Jung and Literary Theory: The Challenge from Fiction*. In what follows, then, after an introduction to the novel, first a brief analysis of Lilly's religious identity, based on more recent literary theories, will be offered; then, a New Jungian reading of the text will be attempted, and the viability of this application to a postcolonial text will be reiterated. Finally, through the exploration of the case of Gibb's (2006) *Sweetness in the Belly*, it will be argued that this new approach to Jungian Criticism can have positive contributions to other literary theories, enhancing them, and getting enhanced in the process. This discussion is followed by the argument on the relationship between Applied Literature and this new application of Jungian criticism.

Discussion

Sweetness in the Belly by Camilla Gibb (2006) is the story of a Muslim woman of British origin who has lived her life in Africa and in England. She has lived as a child in Morocco, as a teenager in Harar, Ethiopia and, as an adult as a refugee, in London. We come to know that her parents died in Morocco, leaving Lilly to the care of Great Abdul, a Sufi master, who introduces Lilly to the Quran and Islam, teaching her both the orthodox Islam and Sufism, with the latter having a priority in his teaching. When because of political turmoils, she is sent to Harar, Lilly becomes the local Quran teacher of the children there. Her rather uneventful and calm life in Harar soon becomes disturbed when she meets and falls in love with Aziz Abdelnasser, a young doctor from the local hospital. Aziz and his attractions provide a challenge to Lilly's way of life, way of thinking, and her religious views. Political unrest once again strikes Harari people's lives and Aziz sends Lilly to London, although he himself stays in Ethiopia. In London, Lilly works as a nurse in a nearby hospital, which is the local hospital for the Ethiopian, mostly Muslim, refugees.

There, she and a friend start running a voluntary office which sets out to unite family members and locate missing individuals. There is no news from Aziz and Lilly is depressed without him. She keeps on refusing the amorous approaches of a young Indian doctor at the hospital. Finally, one day, after 17 years of waiting, she learns that Aziz has been killed in the war. She learns this, but she lives on. A new Lilly is ready to start a new life.

Because of the nomadic nature of her life, Lilly's Muslim identity has become an important facet of her identity; As Santesso (2013) puts it, "In the absence of any ethnic or geographical attachments (Morocco was more or less a random stop in her family's travels), she quickly discovers that religion can aid in the development of a sense of belonging" (p. 138). In the novel, Lilly says, "I was not always a Muslim, but once I was led into the absorption of prayer and the mysteries of the Qur'an, something troubled in me became still" (Gibb, 2006, p. 9). That is the reason why in this paper, the focus is on the development of Lilly's religious identity rather than on her national, racial, or other facets of identity. In Harar, Lilly feels settled in her Sufi Muslim practices and identity. However, Lilly's understanding of herself as a Muslim does not remain unchallenged. Aziz, the voice of reason and individualism in the novel, is the figure who interrupts her ascetic adherence to religion and introduces reason, earthly love and the possibility of flexibility of interpretation into it. This challenge is a painful but eventually appealing one to Lilly. In London also, when she feels more at home with Sufi practices of Islam, which she had learned in Harar, she confronts the views of London Imams or religious leaders who denigrate regional practices and look upon local versions of Islam as superstitions and call for a uniform version of Islam without all these local coloring. For this immigrant Muslim who has found her sanctuary in the Islam she knew, this invitation to a universalized Islam provides a more troubling challenge and one which disorients her (Santesso, 2013, p.151). Still, towards the end of the novel, she comes to a point when she decides to resist the views about religion imposed on her and sticks to an understanding she is comfortable with, though it is a rather unorthodox understanding:

to become as orthodox as this Imam demands, I would have to abandon the religion I know. He's asking for nothing less than conversion. Why would I do such a thing? My religion is full of colour, possibility and choice; it's a moderate interpretation, one that Aziz showed me was possible, one that allows you to use whatever means allow you to feel closer to God, be it saints, prayer beads, or qat, one that allows you to have the occasional drink, work alongside men, go without a veil when you choose, sit alone with an unrelated man in a room, even hold his hand, or even dare I say it, to feel love for a Hindu. (Gibb, 2006, p. 404)

It is only then that she also calls England her home; she moves to another apartment, and she is ready to accept her Hindu suitor and some sort of integration into community happens for her. In other words, it is after settling with her religious identity that she feels settled with herself and with life.

In analyzing Lilly's religious identity, we can first draw on poststructuralist and postcolonial theories of identity. Poststructuralists, focusing on the discursive nature

of the construction of identity, especially emphasize the nonfixity and fluidity of identity and oppose the notion of identity's having an essence. In fact, poststructuralists conceive identity as "'becoming' rather than 'being', evolving, and always in a state of being re-constructed" (Dillon 1999, p. 250). This understanding of identity is applicable to Lilly as we can see that her identity is not fixed and, and as explained earlier, her understanding of who she is and whether she belongs to different Muslim groups she faces in her life changes as the novel develops. However, a postpositivist understanding of identity suggests that identity, though affected by the available discourses and not fixed, is not completely free-floating and is based on certain features of the subject's context and finally personally interpreted. As Linda Alcoff and Satya P. Mohanty (2006), prominent postpositivist critics, argue, identities "are always subject to an individual's interpretation of their meaningfulness and salience in her or his own life" (p. 6). Paula Moya (2002), another postpositivist critic, defines identities as "context-specific ideological constructs" (p. 86). According to this postpositivist model, in the case of Lilly, these constant features of her life context are the Quran and the spirituality of Islam, and finally she is the one who personally interprets her identity for herself, an interpretation which is at odds with the orthodox one. In the exploration of Lilly's identity, arguing in postcolonial terms, first her having a diasporic and hybrid identity can be pinpointed: she is a Muslim European in Harar and a person with Harari culture in London. She is someone who keeps the Harari customs in England and upholds the Western individualism in her practice of Islam, and, as the novel develops, she finally accepts this hybridity of her identity. As McGregor (2009) puts it, "the novel foregrounds Lilly as a hybrid subject whose complex and liminal subject position—in terms of race, nationality, and religion—questions static and consumable constructs of identity" (p. 96). Moreover, she suits the definition of a transnational character as "someone who out of necessity has become adaptable to new environment settlement" (Rodriguez, 1996, p. 33). Her life requires her to change several locations, and she has the skills to easily adapt herself to all situations and be tolerant of different views. However, her transnationalism/cosmopolitanism is a unique one as it has the element of tolerance, but, unlike the transnationalism of many transnational/cosmopolitan subjects, it does not include the elimination of regional bonds, and as Santesso (2013) also observes, it resists the demands of uniformity in understanding and practice of Islam made by London Muslim Leaders in the mosques. She tries to keep her regional ties and on the whole her transnationalism is closer to "regional cosmopolitanism", and finally is uniquely hers (p. 143).

Now the question is how we can benefit from the Jungian psychology and criticism in this interpretation. We can do a New Jungian and not a traditional Jungian reading of this text by extending ideas in Jungian theory. First, we can recognize some Jungian archetypes in this text. As an example of how this reinterpretation of Jungian ideas can make the application of Jungian theory to texts with for instance strong postcolonial bends, such as Gibb's text, possible, the new Jungian critics such as Rowland argue that unlike the traditional reading of Jungian texts, we should not think of archetypes as images but as potentials for image making and the images made depend on the culture and society. In fact, referring to

archetypes, Jung himself states that, “It is not ... a question of inherited ideas but of inherited possibilities of ideas” (Jung, 1953, CW 9, par. 136). In Rowlands’ (2002) words, “archetypes in the mind are potentials for image formation but formless in themselves. Any archetypal expression must therefore require material from the subject’s personal history and culture for anything to be represented at all” (p. 5). Hence, we can talk about archetypes that make sense in contemporary postcolonial conditions. Some important Jungian archetypes include quest, caregiver, innocent, wise old man, and hero. In the postcolonial condition and for the migrants in the world, the quest is often one for identity and settlement, and this is indeed Lilly’s quest. Lily, in her attempt to locate the migrants and reunite them with their family, is the new manifestation of the archetype of care-giver. Aziz, who is wise and serene and logical, is the wise old man, and finally Lilly, after going through a lot in Ethiopia and in England and completing her quest of identity, outgrows her roles as innocent and caregiver and becomes the new hero of the postcolonial times. This new version of the archetype of hero is also able to find her way in the midst of all pressures, and she is the one people can depend on. The widespread appeal of this novel can also be attributed to the novel’s manifestation of some archetypal patterns, the recognition of which by the reader can strike some chords in him/her.

Also, and mostly related to the subject of identity development as the main focus of this paper, when we are talking about Lilly’s identity development, we can think about its resemblance with the process of Jungian individuation. Individuation, in a sense, means saying no to authority, achieving our uniqueness, and the deconstruction of the ego by the unconscious drives. With the extension of the application of individuation and reinterpreting it in the context of postcolonial identity clashes, we can suggest that Lilly’s special interpretation of her identity, which is a negation of the forces which wanted her to adopt that uniform version of religious identity, or her personally interpreted identity, is in line with the character of an individuated person. In this process of identity development or in Jungian terms, individuation, she becomes aware of the unconscious forces in her psyche and of her fears and her longings and integrates them into her consciousness: she begins to exercise her reason, which is the Jungian animus and strives for spirituality as preferred to political conformity, and she faces her fears of non-conformity and isolation, which can be considered her shadow, and she finally achieves her uniqueness in her understanding of identity, and eventually some psychic health is achieved for her. On the whole, it can be strongly claimed that through the extension and reimagination of Jungian ideas, as New Jungians do, the transcultural aspect of the traditional Jungian reading can be removed, and Jungian ideas can be applied to all texts the interpretation of which is closely linked with their specific culture and context, such as Gibb’s text, *Sweetness in the Belly*.

So far the development of Lilly’s identity was examined through some different critical lenses and the suggestion was also made that Jungian criticism, with some extension of interpretation, can be applied to a contemporary postcolonial text. Now in what follows some other advantages of incorporating the Jungian reading in its reinterpreted and extended form, or the New Jungian reading, will be focused on.

In all these different analyses of identity formation, offered in this paper, we reached a similar point. In the postpositivist reading of the settlement of identity and in our exploration of hybridity and transnationalism in Lilly, we noticed how she reaches a more or less stable point when she accepts her unique identity; however, it is through using Jungian criticism that we can explain why this point is a stable point. It is so because, based on Jungian depth psychology, the protagonist of the novel has reached the psychic health, and the good feeling she has derives from that. This will be a type of finishing touch and a completion for literary criticism offered by Jungian psychology. In fact, in other interpretations, no reference to her psychic state was made, but drawing on Jungian psychology, we are convinced of this sort of health. In other words, the New Jungian reading, in a complementary manner can be applied along with different critical lenses to texts which involve some development of identity. Meanwhile, both identity and psychic health can be disrupted and this settlement cannot be for ever, a point which poststructuralist theory contributes to the ideas about identity. At this point, in a dialogue with Jungian theory, especially the traditional version of that, both a criticism and an extension is possible. There is criticism in the sense that the traditional Jungian criticism does not usually go further when individuation of characters happens and is mute about the further development of the self. There is also extension in the sense that the very concept of individuation and Jung's construction of identity is of a subject "always 'in process', of making and remaking" (Rowland, 2002, p.28), and a reimagination of original Jungian concepts highlights for us this innate capacity of Jungian criticism; therefore, Jungian theory, in a comprehensive analysis, does not contradict poststructuralism. What is happening here is a mutual enrichment and criticism between Jungian criticism and other approaches to criticism. As we see, with texts which are especially context-bound, a critical engagement with Jungian psychology can be insightful. Thus, the New Jungian readers can use this potential for all works which first and most are supposed to be criticized in, for instance, feminist or postcolonial terms, without being concerned about the universalist assumptions of this school. In fact, Jungian criticism can always remain at least in the background: it can explain why certain characters and certain works appeal to us. It can explain why settlement with identity, if taken for psychic health, can be an aim to strive for.

Conclusion

Back to the subject of Applied Literature, this extension of the uses of Jungian criticism through New Jungian reading, in different ways, can be at the service of the field of Applied Literature for healing and self-actualization (Ramazani, 2016, p. 128). First of all, this new application gives more validity to an important approach and resource in Applied Literature, the Jungian criticism. Then, it testifies to the fact that a range of texts, not just the myths and timeless texts can be approached and analyzed through Jungian psychology, especially texts which in one way or another involve a development, whether in gender identity or in religious identity or in national identity or other facets of identity. Related to this last point, a New Jungian reading can remind us once more of the innate links between literary theory and Jungian psychology, including the very close relationship between reader-response criticism and Jungian criticism. Wolfgang Iser (1978), an important proponent of

reader-response criticism, says, “The significance of the work, then does not lie in the meaning sealed within the text, but in the fact that the meaning brings out what had previously been sealed within us” (p. 157). This idea of Iser’s is very close to Jung’s idea about literature according to which reading literature enhances our active imagination and touches the unconscious forces in us and can transform us. In other words, based on these two approaches, literature can create and construct the reader, and an individuated or self-actualized fictional character, can potentially affect its reader and create a reader prone to self-actualization, all the more to the benefit of Applied Literature for transformation and healing (Ramazani, 2016, p. 125).

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