



Through Psychological Analysis of *The Glass Menagerie* -- Laura's Unsound Personality Causes

Qiu Minghui

Beijing International Studies University Graduate Student, Beijing

Received: 28 Nov 2022; Received in revised form: 19 Dec 2022; Accepted: 24 Dec 2022; Available online: 31 Dec 2022

©2022 The Author(s). Published by Infogain Publication. This is an open access article under the CC BY license

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Abstract— *Tennessee Williams was one of the three great American dramatists of the 20th century. The Glass Menagerie, which was produced in Chicago in 1994, took him from obscurity to fame. There are many ways to interpret the characters in The Glass Menagerie. This paper analyzes the personality structure of Laura from Jung's persona theory, and deeply reveals the reasons for the formation of the characters, so that readers can deepen their understanding of the text and the characters and reveal the complexity of the human spiritual world.*

Keywords— *Carl Jung, Laura, Personality, Persona theory, The Glass Menagerie*

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Tennessee Williams and The Glass Menagerie

Tennessee Williams' masterpiece *The Glass Menagerie* wins the 1945 New York Drama Critics' Circle award as "a new chapter in the history of the Western theater," and is a landmark in American theater history. The play centers on Tom's family, whose mother, Amanda, is a typical Southern lady who worries about her daughter's inability to enter marriage and her son Tom's alcoholism; his sister, Laura, who is disabled in an accident when she is young and spends her days playing with glass animal ornaments; and Tom, who works in a shoe factory but has dreams of becoming a poet. Tom is asked by his mother to introduce a boyfriend to his sister Laura, so he brings his colleague Jim home. Laura has a nice talk with him and goes out of her world but returns to the glass menagerie with the news that Jim is getting married.

To further study this work and examine the mental state of the characters in the drama, this essay will focus on Carl Jung's "persona theory" so that we can accurately acknowledge how Laura's personality developed. And through the analysis of the formation of Laura's personality and her living environment, we can get clues of what causes makes people to get stuck in such a tight situation and can explore the causes of unnormal personal personality.

1.2 The Persona Theory of Carl Jung

Carl Jung devotes his life to the research of psychology. According to Jung, "Personality" is ingredient-rich, which includes all conscious or subconscious thoughts, and feelings. The conscious, subconscious, and collective unconscious are the three levels that make up the complex hierarchy of interactions that constitutes the structure of personality. Meanwhile, the collective contains the personal unconscious and the collective unconscious. The former has some personal qualities, and the latter is a universal

existence. About this concept, Jung says that

“A more or less superficial layer of the unconscious is undoubtedly personal. I call it the personal unconscious. But this personal unconscious rests upon a deeper layer, which does not derive from personal experience and is not a personal acquisition but is inborn. This deeper layer I call the collective unconscious.” (Jung, 1969)

The personal unconscious has an intrinsic difference from the collective unconscious. Compared with the latter, it is engraved with personal experience and is a personal acquisition. The personal unconscious is made of complexes, whereas the content of the collective unconscious is archetypes. The collective unconscious “is anything but an incapsulated personal system; it is sheer objectivity, as wide as the world and open to all the world.” which provides a set of performed patterns for individual behavior.

There are a lot of archetypes, of which these three archetypes are widely discussed and universally exist—Persona, Anima and Animus, and Shadow, which are located at different levels of personality. Persona is the topmost layer of personality, and its literal definition implies that everyone must put on a mask in order to accomplish some fundamental objectives, for instance, communication, entertainment, work, living, and others. It is of paramount importance for people to have various masks to live so that they can get along well with other people and society. People with social attributes need far more than one Persona; multiple Personas ensure their normal life. At the same time, the relationship between Personas cannot be ignored. If one mask far overwhelms the others, it will lead to personality problems in one aspect or another. Imbalances in personality masks can lead to a variety of unhealthy psychological problems.

Anima refers to the feminine side of the man's psyche and Animus refers to the masculine side of the woman's psyche. Neither Anima nor Animus points specifically to a specific individual. Every man carries in his mind the eternal image of the feminine, which is not the image of a particular woman, but an exact image of the feminine. “Man

has developed his anima archetype by continuous exposure to women over many generations, and woman has developed her animus archetype by her exposure to men.” (Hall & Nordby, 1973) And this image of anima or animus are fundamentally unconscious, a genetic element of primitive origin engraved in people. It is the imprint of the whole of our ancestral experience of womanhood as if it were the accumulation or deposit of all the impressions that woman has ever given. Because this mental image itself is unconscious, it is often projected unconsciously onto a specific one, which is one of the main causes of erotic attraction or rejection. The individual whom the anima or animus repels becomes the target of its dislike or aversion; conversely, it creates eros.

“Shadow is equal with the animal quality while the persona is the social quality of the person.” (Huang, 2016) Shadow is an inherent component as opposed to Persona, which is a behavior norm that develops via social interactions and is the result of socialization and social adaptation. Shadow represents one's own gender and affects one's relationships with other people of the same gender; It is the most capable of holding one's most basic animal nature and is the most powerful and dangerous. Shadow is where the best and worst things in a person originate, especially expressed between people of the same sex. People usually use personas to suppress the power of the shadow. But the shadow is tenacious and will not succumb to repression. Shadow can't and shouldn't be killed for a person with no shadow at all is lifeless and shallow. When the ego and the shadow are in harmony with each other, the person is spirited. When the ego is weak and a person is faced with spiritual dilemmas and survival problems, the shadow will break through the ego and become powerful. So if a man/woman projects repressed shadow impulses onto the same person, they will not get along well with each other.

Personality is composed of many psychological elements, which are not statically and haphazardly stacked together but require a certain amount of psychological energy in order to construct and govern the personality. The personality as a whole constantly absorbs material and spiritual energy from the external world and transforms it into internal psychological energy. This psychological energy is "Libido", which Jung defined differently from

Freud, who considered Libido as sexual energy, while Jung considered Libido as universal psychological energy. Jung believes that human beings have a desire for perfection and thus have the drive and tendency to develop a sound personality, which is influenced by both the past and the future.

II. THE PERFORMANCE OF LAURA'S PERSONALITY

The outermost layer of personality is the persona, which is the side of a person that is publicly displayed to others, the external image that the world sees, and which aims to give a good impression to others. Carl Jung supposes consciousness has two aspects "attitudes" and "functions". (Wilde, 2011) And in the attitudes, he proposes two concepts Extraversion and Introversion. Laura as a typical introvert person is immersed in her own world, tending to create a rich spiritual world. So, she prefers to stay at home with her glass animals rather than go out and study in class. Laura has an introverted personality that is strongly influenced by the surroundings in which she is nurtured. Laura is shy, timid, inferior, and sensitive due to her closed-off upbringing, her dysfunctional family, and her physical flaws. Since the development of psychological issues is unquestionably intimately tied to the outside world, there are a number of elements that need to be taken into account when examining the construction of Laura's introverted personality, whether it be her personality mask, Anima, or shadow.

2.1 Persona of Sister and Daughter

Obviously, Laura lacks multiple personas. In the intricate social environment, the simple persona-owned Laura confines herself to a specific position, completely isolated from the outside world. Laura behaves exactly as her environment requires and is very well adapted to it. However, if she leaves this environment, she will have nothing to do and will not even be able to survive. Therefore, Laura relies on her environment and is reluctant to leave.

In the drama, there exist two most obvious personas of Laura—Sister and Daughter. The relationship between Laura and Tom is complex. Laura is the shackle that restricts her brother's pursuit of freedom, but she is also the only family member who understands Tom. As for Amanda,

Laura is the only member of the family who listens to her tales of growing up in the South and takes on board her mother's traditional expectations that she would marry into a respectable family. Therefore, Laura consciously assumed the role of intermediary in the family to maintain stability of the family. In the third scene, Tom has an argument with his mother, and after a heated argument, Tom is about to slam the door and throw his coat to the other side of the room, but accidentally hits Laura's small display of glass animals. Laura screams with sadness, so Tom helps to pick up the glass animals that fall on the floor, looking at Laura, as if to speak, but could not say. This episode fully expresses Tom's ambivalence. Tom has complicated feelings for Laura, who seems to be his last concern in this family. Tom's dedication also makes Laura feel guilty. Hence, although she understands that their family still needs her brother's support, she has always had a quietly supportive attitude when listening to his dreams. When the quarrel happens between Tom and Amanda, Laura will persuade her brother to say sorry and ease the stiff atmosphere at home so that the original living condition will not change. This pattern of family members getting along with each other is constantly deepening as these two personas (sister and daughter) become the main personas.

Jung expresses the function of Persona; "It enables one to portray a character that is not necessarily his own. The persona is the mask or facade one exhibits publicly, intending to present a favorable impression so that society will accept him." (Hall & Nordby, 1973) Laura can't make a living in this society because of the lack of multiple personas. She just has simple personas that are a mother's daughter and a brother's sister. When her mother goes to school to ask about her study condition, she knows Laura has left it. "She took the attendance book out and there was your name, unmistakably printed, and all the dates you were absent until they decided that you had dropped out of school." (30) the reason is that "I couldn't go back there. I — threw up — on the floor!" (32) It is clear that she does not have enough personas to cope with social life and academic life. Her sparse persona and crippled body make it impossible for her to integrate into social life.

Because of her inability, she refuses to contact other people so as to she can't develop normal social activities. Laura's one leg is shorter than the other, which causes her a

lot of trouble. In high school, she is late to class several times due to difficulty walking, often walking in after class in full view of everyone. She hesitates before going to school for fear that the brace she wears would touch the ground too loudly. Laura is overly concerned about her physical problems. She handles relationships cautiously, becomes increasingly timid and pessimistic, and becomes increasingly reluctant to participate in social activities. After that, Laura stops going to commercial school and visits art museums and zoos during school hours. She is always worried that she would be teased for not being able to walk up and down the stairs as normally as the other students.

Laura's mental problems are exacerbated by her physical disabilities. Due to the lack of regular social connection, Laura is unable to create different personalities that would adopt her social characteristics. So Laura always stays alone and escapes from the public. Amanda says: "I put her in business college — a dismal failure! Frightened her so it made her sick to the stomach. I took her over to the Young People's League at the church. Another fiasco. She spoke to nobody; nobody spoke to her. Now all she does is a fool with those pieces of glass and play those worn-out records." (52) Other people's impression of Laura is "Not quite all — in the eyes of others — strangers — she's shy and lives in a world of her own and those things make her seem a little peculiar to people outside the house." (64) Because of her locked living environment and disability, she cannot be positive to communicate with other people except her family numbers. When someone approaches her: "Laura sits up nervously as Jim enters. She can hardly speak from the almost intolerable strain of being alone with a stranger." (87)

The persona is somewhat deceptive and is necessary to produce human beings. It enables people to have good interpersonal relations, to get along with people, and is the basis of social life. The most obvious finding to emerge from Laura's various performances is that the single persona has greatly affected her normal life. She can't be able to integrate into society and keeps herself coop up in a small house, jealously maintaining the illusion of family harmony.

2.2 Ideal lover and Animus- Jim

Jung thinks that the anima has a preconception that it likes everything in a woman that is vain and boastful, lonely,

unsupported, lacking in self-confidence, and purposeless, while the animus chooses men who are valiant, intelligent, talented, and physically fit. Anima and Animus are the internal images of persona. Jung thinks that for Anima and animus, people aspire more to what they can't get:

"possession caused by the anima or animus presents a different picture. Above all, this transformation of personality gives prominence to those traits which are characteristic of the opposite sex; in men the feminine traits, and in women the masculine. In the state of possession, both figures lose their charm and their values; they retain them only when they are turned away from the world, in the introverted state, when they serve as bridges to the unconscious." (Jung, 1989)

The anima is the image of the female in the male mind, while the animus is the image of the male in the female mind; Each person has an ideal image of the opposite sex in his psyche, and each person aspires to perfection and strives to become a perfect person. The reason why Jim can temporarily drug Laura out of her isolated world is that Jim fits Laura's image of Animus. According to Jung, there exists one process calls projection. "projection is an unconscious, automatic process whereby a content that is unconscious to the subject transfers itself to an object so that it seems to belong to that object." (Jung, 1989)

In fact, Projection is an unconscious activity, which projects a subjective thing onto an objective one. The projection will not stop until it is discovered by conscious. What the subject doesn't know and what appears to not belong to the subject makes up the majority of the projection's substance. So Laura will project the image of an animus of her own onto one special one—Jim. Because women will first project the father's image unconsciously, and unconsciously look for their lovers like their father. "The first projection of the anima is always on the mother, just as the first projection of the animus is on the father." (Hall & Nordby, 1973) In the drama, although Laura's father doesn't appear and he just like the background of the drama and is mentioned by Amanda, his existence is of great significance. "This invisible father

comes to represent the spirit's desire for freedom and escape –imagination's urge to say "hello-goodbye" to the compromises and limitations of daily life...Tom and Laura have surely inherited this man's spiritual essence..."(Greiff, 1989)This father even though doesn't truly speak or act, is a person who influent his children a lot. So, there are many places in the drama, Tom wants to be a poetics and be free from his family to travel around the world. While Laura cannot leave her family, so she naturally envies these people who are free and enthusiastic like Jim who shares many similarities with her father.

In the first scene, the man in the picture is "a very handsome young man" and "ineluctably smiling".(4) In the words of Amanda, we can see Laura's father is a man always with a kind smile, who is so popular that Amanda chooses him to be her husband. And Jim is just like her father who is love smiling and is popular, Even when she introduces Jim to Amanda, what she says is "See his grin?"(9), so we can see Laura is unconsciously looking for a man like her father. "In high school, Laura had been as unobtrusive as Jim had been astonishing." (68) Jim is a popular figure like a star in high school, while Laura is an adolescent girl with low self-esteem, who could only follow Jim in silence and did not dare to ask Jim to sign the program. People will be caught by someone different from themselves because they may have some qualities they want to hold, especially Jim also upholds so many similar qualities to her father. Jim is enthusiastic, cheerful, and idealistic, which is completely different from Laura. The description of Jim is:

" I had known Jim slightly in high school. In high school, Jim was a hero. He had tremendous Irish good nature and vitality with the scrubbed and polished look of white chinaware. He seemed to move in a continual spotlight. He was a star in basketball, captain of the debating club, president of the senior class and the glee club and he sang the male lead in the annual light operas. He was always running or bounding, never just walking."(67)

Jim in Laura's eyes is charming and perfect. In the scene where two people are alone, the words used to describe Jim are "engagingly" (28), and "terribly

popular"(29) and Laura always has a worshipful demeanor, like "with reflective relish"(30). Jim is a man of great power, both physically and mentally. He is a basketball player in high school and is ambitious for the future by giving elocution lessons. Typically, women are more drawn to these males. And the image of Jim is justly the image of Animus in Laura's heart. "Yes. I liked one once. [She rises.] I came across his picture a while ago.....The operetta the senior class put on. He had a wonderful voice and we sat across the aisle from each other Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays in the auditorium."(9) He is so popular at school, which is completely different from her situation. That is one of the things that attracted her to him, in fact, she envies his ability to mingle with others. So when she learns from her mother that the male visitor is Jim, Lola's hard-earned courage to meet the male visitor collapses instantly.

At the same time, Jim wants to save her from her lonely world. Because of her physical disabilities, she chooses to stay at home and stay away from society. However, when Jim comes, he begins to drag her out of her small world. He Praises her: "In all respects — believe me! Your eyes — your hair — are pretty! Your hands are pretty!"(104) Jim is like the man God sent to save Laura, her first crush, and the man who briefly pulls her out of her false fantasy.

2.3 Shadow

The shadow is the most esoteric part of the personality, according to Jung: "The shadow is a living part of the personality and therefore wants to live with it in some form. It cannot be argued out of existence or rationalized into harmlessness. This problem is exceedingly difficult because it not only challenges the whole man but reminds him at the same time of his helplessness and ineffectuality."(28) As we mentioned before, Anima or Animus influence the relationship between the opposite sex, while Shadow influence the relationship between the same sex. People need to tame their animal spirits contained in the shadow, so they develop a strong persona to suppress it. The Shadow and the persona are related. The persona is what people want to show while the Shadow is what people want to hide. That is to say, the shadow is the part not acceptable or not yet acceptable.

Laura's shadow is her disabled body. In general,

Shadow will be projected to another person who has similarities with them. But, because of her closed living environment, Laura can't find other people to project. Laura projects her shadow onto the unicorn. Hence, Jim says that the unicorn is just like Laura. Laura is like the glass menagerie who is fragile and timid. In Laura's eyes, the horned unicorn and the other hornless horses are living creatures and get along harmoniously without quarrel, which symbolizes the relationship between the disabled Laura's fantasy of herself and the real world. Throughout the play, Laura is repeatedly depicted taking care of the glass animals, reflecting that she regards these glass animals as living creatures who share a lot of similarities with her. Laura is an escapist, and the unusual unicorn with one horn symbolizes Laura, who is out of step with the world and disabled. She naively believes that unicorns seem to get along well with other horses, just as she imagines herself to be living in harmony with the real world. But Laura does not realize that she is only escaping from reality, living in the small space she has imagined.

In Lara's personality, the shadow is too strong, there is no strong enough personality mask to suppress the shadow. So, she can't accept her disability and chooses to stay at home. As the unacceptable part, Laura always struggles with the flight between the persona of daughter and shadow. As a daughter, Laura has to cater to Amanda's anachronistic expectations, becoming a southern lady and marrying a good husband, which is impossible for her leg she knows. Because she grows up under her mother's education and knows that she is far from a southern lady. In the drama, with the expectation of Amanda, Laura suffers an amount of pressure. But she deems to disappoint Amanda.

Amanda is completely absorbed in the prosperity of the South. She mentions many times her southern life, "One Sunday afternoon in Blue Mountain — your mother received — seventeen! — gentlemen callers! Why sometimes there weren't chairs enough to accommodate them all. We had to send the nigger over to bring in folding chairs from the parish house."(28) She is proud of her southern life. Amanda doesn't change her southern thought but sticks to the family education following southern tradition. Let ladies marry a wealthy and kind man. Laura's unattractive appearance and slight disability in her leg are not a problem, but in the Southern culture, where women

are expected to please men with their looks and be dependent on them, a limp is a major flaw. This concept is also instilled in Laura by Amanda, which leads to her extreme inferiority complex and psychological disorder.

Usually, children's low self-esteem is related to their families. "It should be noted that the shadow is a social psychological concept because human beings estimate themselves in comparison to others." (Hietalahti, 2019)The relationship between Shadow and Ego is complex. When Shadow can't be accepted by ego and is repressed by ego, the people tend to form unnormal mental status. Laura is stuck in an Inferiority complex, and this point also is mentioned by Jim, "You know what I judge to be the trouble with you? Inferiority complex! Know what that is? That's what they call it when someone low-rates himself!"(97) Because of her Inferiority complex, she can't speak to strangers. When she first meets Jim in her home: "She pauses a second by the Victrola. Then she catches her breath and darts through the portieres like a frightened deer."(75)

At the same time, going to business school and being forced to date both exacerbated Laura's uneasiness. Laura does not want to worry Amanda, so she does not tell her about her withdrawal from school. When Amanda finds out the truth, Laura is overwhelmed with guilt. And Amanda as a southern lady who is obsessed with false prosperity, always emphasizes the importance of marriage and raises her daughter according to past habits. "Resume your seat, little sister — I want you to stay fresh and pretty — for gentlemen callers!" (24) Amanda gives Laura a mass of spiritual pressure. "Laura nervously echoes her laugh.....Seeing her mother's expression Laura touches her lips with a nervous gesture." (27-28) Laura will unconsciously react nervously to her mother's words and actions. Laura's attitude towards her mother is very complicated. The flight of persona and shadow can be shown when Amanda asked her to marry a good man, she replies that she is crippled. There is no doubt that she loves her mother, but driven by the shadow, she has the urge to reject her mother.

The shadow is an archetypal unconscious, a dark side hidden in the subconscious of everyone, a darker version of oneself within each individual. She thinks that she can't be accepted by society because everyone will notice her leg, so she decides to escape; however, when Jim visits her and

breaks the horned unicorn, she knows she is accepted, and he or others don't pay close attention to the noise her leg makes. In fact, Laura herself can't adopt her shadow. But, when she decides to accept it, the shadow in turn changes to one part of her persona.

Laura experiences "normal" life by talking and dancing with Jim at the cost of a broken unicorn. She picks up the unicorn she once cherished and says: "I don't have favorites much. It's no tragedy, Freckles. Glass breaks so easily. No matter how careful you are. The traffic jars the shelves, and things fall off them." (102) After talking and dancing with Jim, Laura begins to break the prison of her own and contact with the real world because she begins to accept the incomplete self. At the same time, her simple personas can not take responsibility for balancing the shadow, so Laura is struggle with the shadow's negative aspect. As long as she can continue to develop another strong persona and increase her contact with society, she will be able to fully transform the shadow into a part of the persona.

III. CONCLUSION

The Glass Menagerie as one of the most successful dramas in American theatre not only depicts a world in decay in the South but also represents a complex family during that period. This essay through psychoanalysis will provide the reader with a fresh perspective on the play and enables us to go more deeply into the hearts of the characters. Combining with Jung's Personality Theory, we can find many factors shaping a three-dimensional character. Laura is not such a character who sinks into her own world without reason. The reason why we can empathize with such a fragile character and give her our pity is that this character is created mixed with so many realistic factors. The archetypes as the main content of the collective unconscious are of great value to analyze so that we can realize the importance of complete and healthy archetypes and get universal inspiration.

Laura grows up in an incomplete family and is not complete in terms of persona. Because of her single personality mask, she is not able to integrate into society or communicate with the outside world. Self-inferiority complex and physical disability make Laura addicted to her imaginary world—the glass menagerie. The tragedy of

Laura is not only the tragedy of this family. It is more realistic in the general environment of ordinary people's life of helplessness and struggle. The tragedy of this family is caused by both the period and specific people. The mother clings to the past, the brother seeks adventure but must support the family, the sister is weak and defenseless, and the father flees the house.

Everyone is affected by their family and the social environment. Nowadays, so many people are influenced by their original family and their defects. Mental health is a growing concern. Through the analysis of Laura's personality, the importance of a complete personality is self-evident.

REFERENCES

- [1] 黄国胜. (2016). 隐藏的人格：一个心理咨询师的人格面具分析. 北京联合出版公司.
- [2] Greiff, L. K. (1989). Fathers, daughters, and spiritual sisters: Marsha Norman's night mother and Tennessee Williams's the Glass Menagerie. *Text and Performance Quarterly*, 9(3), 224-228.
- [3] Hall, C. S., & Nordby, V. J. (1973). *A primer of Jungian psychology*. New American Library New York.
- [4] Hietalahti, J. (2019). Carl Jung and the Role of Shadow and Trickster in Political Humor: Social Philosophical Analysis. *Comedy for Dinner and Other Dishes*.
- [5] Jung, C. (1969). The Archetypes and The Collective Unconscious (Collected Works of CG. Jung, 9(Part 1), 470.
- [6] Wilde, D. J. (2011). *Jung's personality theory quantified*. Springer Science & Business Media.
- [7] Williams, T. (2011). *The glass menagerie*. New Directions Publishing.