

## **From War Neuroses to Freudian Thanatos and Jungian Shadow Archetype**

Marius Dumitrescu\* and Gabriela F Dumitrescu\*\*

\* Faculty of Philosophy and Social Science, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi, Romania. Email: *dumitrescu.marius66@yahoo.com*

\*\* Department of Pathology, Prof Dr N Oblu Emergency Clinical Hospital, Iasi, Romania

### **Abstract**

World War I oriented medicine towards new medical fields and one of them was psychoanalysis. By treating the former soldiers who had retreated from the battlefield due to powerful head trauma, Sigmund Freud recognised the significance of psychic factors in the production of neurotic disturbances. This paper analyses how Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) and Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961) understood the idea of the unconscious seen as the seat of aggressive drives that disrupt the activity of human consciousness.

Firstly, the paper will show how, during World War I, Freud, analysing war neuroses, observed the manifestations of human aggression and came to understand the existence of the death drive (*Todestrieb*). Using psychoanalysis to explore the dark side of consciousness, seat of hatred and aggression, he discovered something disturbing, namely: the instinct to kill. Secondly, it will show that these ideas had a great influence on Jung who, in the aftermath of the war and the rise of Nazism, but especially through his reflections on the horrors of World War II, developed a much deeper view on aggression, correlating it with the idea of a collective unconscious that transcends the individual context of existence. Aggression, in Jung's vision, can be identified in the archetype of shadow, which, however, sends us to that area of prehuman atavisms, to everything related to the discomfort in culture, already signalled by Freud.

The authors conclude that Freudian and Jungian research on human aggression could constitute the theoretical-philosophical basis of ethology.

### **Keywords**

Psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, Carl Gustav Jung, Death drive, Shadow archetype, First World War

## **Introduction**

From a medical point of view, the soldiers who participated in the battles of World War I (WWI), also known as the Great War, were not only affected by infectious diseases, such as malaria,<sup>1</sup> or tetanus,<sup>2</sup> and chemical poisoning with chlorine and phosgene,<sup>3</sup> or mustard gas,<sup>4</sup> along with the physical trauma,<sup>5</sup> but their psyche also suffered. Thus, medicine was oriented towards new medical fields, one of them being psychoanalysis, the value of which appeared when the significance of psychic factors in the production of neurotic disturbances was recognised.

In this paper we analyse how Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) and Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961) understood the idea of the unconscious seen as the seat of aggressive drives that disrupt the activity of human consciousness.

## **Complex forms of aggression from the Freudian death drive perspective**

### ***The encounter with the Sphinx or the Freudian discovery of war-induced traumatic neurosis***

Before WWI, Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis, did not realise the aggressive potential of the human being and developed a theory of *libido* seen as an energy related to Eros, the Greek God of erotic love, to sexuality, thus placing the substrate of the human psyche in the field of instincts.

During WWI as he was a neurologist working with mentally traumatised ex-soldiers, Freud observed the manifestations of human aggression and came to understand the existence of the death drive (*Todestrieb*).

By analysing war-induced psychic trauma, Freud was able to understand the connection between the affected human psyche and certain dysfunctions at the somatic level. Using psychoanalysis to probe the dark side of consciousness, the headquarters of hatred, and of aggression, he discovered the human instinct to kill. He observed the phenomenon of repetition of his patients' psychic trauma, namely that many times the subjects tended to reconstruct their traumatic experiences.

However, Freud was involved in the drama of WWI as three of his sons; Martin, Ernst and Oliver, served in the military.<sup>6</sup> In addition, Freud himself had gone

---

<sup>1</sup> Miller S. An Army Doctor's Account of Malaria Prevention during the 1914-18 War. *Topics in the History of Medicine*. 2023; 3: 120-132.

<sup>2</sup> Wawrzynczak EJ. Fighting the Unseen Foe: Tetanus, Anti-tetanus Serum and the Royal Army Medical Corps in World War I. *Topics in the History of Medicine*. 2023; 3: 157-185.

<sup>3</sup> Fitzgerald GJ. Chemical Warfare and Medical Response During World War I. *American Journal of Public Health*. 2008; 98(4): 611-625.

<sup>4</sup> Vilches D, Albuquerque G, Ramirez-Tagle R. One hundred and one years after a milestone: Modern chemical weapons and World War I. *Educación Química*. 2016; 27: 233-236.

<sup>5</sup> Scotland T. Management of Wounds Sustained by British Forces on the Western Front, 1914-18. *Topics in the History of Medicine*. 2023; 3: 133-156.

<sup>6</sup> Dumitrescu M. The Relationship between Body and Soul from the Perspective of Freud's Psychoanalysis. *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences*. 2013; 92: 294-298.

through great personal drama, losing one of his three daughters, Sophie, who died on 25 January 1920.

The lack of food and medicine potentiated the great influenza pandemic, which had already been going on for two years, so that Sophie, like millions of other people,<sup>7</sup> became sick with a virulent and controversial influenza strain responsible for what was labelled ‘the Spanish flu pandemic’,<sup>8</sup> or ‘Spanish influenza pandemic of 1918–20’.<sup>9</sup> Sophie's influenzal disease was complicated with pneumonia and within four or five days she died in Hamburg where she lived, leaving behind her husband and two boys.

This ill-fated event is related by Freud in his letter to Pastor Pfister (1873-1956) on January 27, 1920:

On the same afternoon we received the news that our dear Sophie in Hamburg had been snatched away by influenzal pneumonia, snatched away from glowing health, from her busy life as a capable mother and loving wife, in four or five days, as if she had never been. We had been worried about her for two days but were still hopeful. From a distance it is so difficult to judge. The distance still remains. We could not, as we wished to go to her at once when the first alarming news came, because there were no trains, not even a children's train. The undisguised brutality of our time weighs heavily on us.<sup>10</sup>

Apparently, Freud did not seem to be affected by his daughter's death. On February 4, 1920, he wrote to the psychoanalyst Sandor Ferenczi (1873-1933):

Dear Friend, please don't worry about me. Apart from feeling rather more tired I am the same. The death, painful as it is, does not affect my attitude toward life. Deep down I sense a bitter, irreparable narcissistic injury. My wife and Annerl are profoundly affected in a more human way.<sup>11</sup>

However, a few months later, in *Jenseits des Lustprinzips (Beyond the Pleasure Principle)*, published in the summer of 1920, Freud asserted that, in fact, subjects with traumatic neurosis ‘are more concerned with *not* thinking of’ the accident that caused the traumatic neurosis.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> Chorba T, Breedlove B. Concurrent Conflicts – the Great War and the 1918 Influenza Pandemic. *Emerging Infectious Diseases*. 2018; 24(10): 1968–69.

<sup>8</sup> Berche P. The Spanish flu. *La Presse Médicale*. 2022; 51(3): 104-127.

<sup>9</sup> Khan S, Huremović D. *Psychology of the Pandemic*. In: Huremović D (ed). *Psychiatry of Pandemics: A Mental Health Response to Infection Outbreak*. Cham, Switzerland: Springer; 2019. p.41.

<sup>10</sup> Freud S. Letter to Oskar Pfister, January 27, 1920. In: Freud S. *Letters of Sigmund Freud*. Selected and edited by Ernst L Freud, translated by Tania Stern and James Stern. New York: Dover Publications; 1992. p.327-328.

<sup>11</sup> Freud S. Letter to Sandor Ferenczi, February 4, 1920. In: Freud. *Letters of Sigmund Freud*, 1992 (Note 10). p.328-329.

<sup>12</sup> Freud S. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Translated and newly edited by James Strachey. Introduction by Gregory Zilboorg. New York/London: W.W.Norton & Co; 1961. p.7.

According to the historian Peter Gay (1923-2015), there was an initial draft of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* before Sophie's death.<sup>13</sup> But the painful event of January 1920 led him to rethink the project, somewhat broadening the concept of the death drive to the post-war traumatic neuroses of civilians, including the negative experiences of children, and also of parents, respectively himself, who had found themselves helpless as death had taken away the child he loved so much. Thus, his pain as a father who had lost his beloved daughter was sublimated in the essay he was working on. This work underwent changes, so that it appeared in the summer of 1920, in a new version in which were included some new paragraphs presenting episodes of his private life, with special references to Sophie's family. In fact, these episodes are announced from the beginning of the essay: 'we have arrived at these speculative assumptions in an attempt to describe and to account for the facts of daily observation in our field of study'.<sup>14</sup>

When describing traumatic neurosis, he classified it into war neurosis and peacetime neurosis. By psychoanalysing himself, he identified the mechanisms of the traumatic neurosis caused by Sophie's death. On February 4, 1920, Freud wrote to Sandor Ferenczi: 'For years I was prepared for the loss of our sons; now it is our daughter'.<sup>15</sup> The real meaning of these words can be identified later in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* when the author of the essay stated that ordinary traumatic neuroses are different from anxiety and fear and that they arise as a result of 'the factor of surprise'. He defined some terms related to traumatic neuroses in order to identify this 'factor of surprise'. 'Anxiety describes a particular state of expecting the danger or preparing for it, even though it may be an unknown one'. Freud experienced this state when he believed that one of his sons might be killed in the war. 'Fear requires a definite object of which to be afraid'. Freud also experienced the fear of what war itself meant: 'Fright, however, is the name we give to the state a person gets into when he has run into danger without being prepared for it; it emphasizes the factor of surprise'.<sup>16</sup> In Freud's case, the surprise was the death of Sophie, who until then had been 'in glowing health', with 'a busy life as a capable mother and loving wife'.<sup>17</sup>

With the death of Sophie, Freud realised the existence of thanatic forces (see below) that are categorically beyond the power of man to understand them. It is like a whole experience that Oedipus lives in front of the Sphinx and it is projected in a condensed manner on Freud with Sophie's death. He, the scientist, with a special intellectual power, who had an answer to any challenge, 'the confirmed unbeliever', had to admit his defeat in front of a destiny that overwhelmed him.<sup>18</sup> He bitterly confessed that the tragic event actually took him by surprise, because he had concentrated all his mental affectivity more on the possibility of the loss of the boys fighting at the front and had not anticipated the possibility of the daughter's death, the one sacrificed by forces that exceeded the scope of his interpretations and anticipations.

---

<sup>13</sup> Gay P. *Freud: A Life for Our Time*. Anchor Books; 1989. p.395

<sup>14</sup> Freud. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 1961 (Note 12). p.1.

<sup>15</sup> Freud. Letter to Oskar Pfister, January 27, 1920 (Note 10).

<sup>16</sup> Freud. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 1961 (Note 12). p.6.

<sup>17</sup> Freud. Letter to Oskar Pfister, January 27, 1920 (Note 10).

<sup>18</sup> Freud. Letter to Sandor Ferenczi, February 4, 1920 (Note 11).

Freud believed that through the essay *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* he demonstrated what aggression means and how man can relate to it. The Oedipus complex means the encounter with destiny. In Freud's vision, it was the encounter with those forces that come from the deep layers of the unconscious and that go beyond consciousness, always managing to impose themselves on it and at certain moments even managing to put it in perplexity. Oedipus is the one who, through his wisdom, passes the Sphinx, which metaphorically reflects the gate to the irrational, to the unconscious, the place where the hero meets his deepest complexes, marking the killing of his father and more seriously, the discovery of sexuality with his own mother.

The same thing happens with Freud when, believing that he understood the death drive and that he had overcome the Sphinx, namely WWI, he opened the door to the post-war irrationality, marked by the unexpected death of Sophie, thus making him able to identify, based on his own experience, the enormous power of unconscious forces that manifest themselves beyond the frames that reason can understand. More precisely, reason could understand and justify the death drive in wartime, but it was much harder to manage, to understand, when the death drive manifested itself in a highly destructive way in peacetime. Thus, 'unbeliever' Freud discovers through Sophie's death the power of destiny, of the irrational forces that control people's fate.

The work *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* finds its full expression only with the integration of the fragments that recall Sophie's life and death, thus truly marking the amplitude of the thanatic principle and human helplessness in front of it.

That fragments are delimited from the previous text by a space left free, precisely to attract attention, and refer to the precise context of the disappearance of Sophie, who was also a victim of the war, similar to the soldiers killed on the battlefield. She was one of the millions of civilians killed by the influenza virus,<sup>19</sup> an instrument of death far more effective than cannons, machine guns or bayonets.

In the same fragments, the common traumatic neurosis of the child who had lost his mother was also analysed, since Freud psychoanalysed his own grandson, who: 'was greatly attached to his mother, who had not only fed him herself but had also looked after him without any outside help'.<sup>20</sup> Sophie is not mentioned in the text by name, but she is identified with a mother whom he knew personally, because he 'lived under the same roof as the child and his parents for some weeks'.<sup>21</sup> The story begins when the child, aged one and a half years, played the game of the appearance and disappearance with a 'wooden reel with a piece of string tied round it', marked by the formula 'o-o-o-o', which means the German word *fort* (far away), when the object disappeared, and then shouted gladly the German word '*Da!*' ('There!') when the object reappeared. Freud concluded that the throwing of the object satisfied a child's impulse, which was suppressed in his current life to take revenge on his mother when she left home for several hours, an event perceived by him as a separation.

Freud continued the story by showing that a year later, the same boy was throwing toys on the floor, exclaiming: 'Go to the front!' because he already knew that his father was at the front and this absence did not bother him at all. He really wanted his father

---

<sup>19</sup> Berche P. The Spanish flu. 2022. (Note 8). p.104-127.

<sup>20</sup> Freud. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 1961 (Note 12). p.8.

<sup>21</sup> Freud. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 1961 (Note 12). p.8.

away from him because he could enjoy possession of his mother. The mother's story continued When this child was five and three-quarters, his mother died. Now that she was really 'gone' ('o-o-o'), the little boy showed no signs of grief. It is true that in the interval a second child had been born and had roused him to violent jealousy.<sup>22</sup>

This brief history now turns out to be the true story of Sophie Halberstadt-Freud who had a husband away at the war and had two children at the time of her death, one almost six years old and one thirteen months old. As Freud himself wrote in his letter to Pastor Pfister on 27 January 1920: 'Sophie leaves behind two boys, one aged six and the other thirteen months, and an inconsolable husband who will have to pay dearly for the happiness of these seven years'.<sup>23</sup>

At that moment, Freud became, as he wrote in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, an adherent of Manichaeism, a dualistic religious system based on a supposed primeval conflict between light and darkness. Starting with that precise moment after WWI, when he understood that there was a principle of death. Even if this term was not mentioned anywhere in his written texts as Thanatos, probably because he wanted to avoid it, Freud used it in conversations with his disciples.

Sophie's death somewhat confirmed the ideas Freud had already developed in the wartime years about the death drive or Thanatos. So, the essay *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* certainly had a special emotional charge for Freud, because it was the expression of an experience lived more than ever on a personal level.

Until then, Freud had only developed a theory of the *libido*, the energies of life centred on sexuality. The pathology of these energies led him to understand the phenomenon of hysteria as a disturbance in the possibility of consciousness to repress the illicit contents of unconscious drives. But, in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud noted:

The symptomatic picture presented by traumatic neurosis approaches that of hysteria in the wealth of its similar motor symptoms but surpasses it as a rule in its strongly marked signs of subjective ailment (in which it resembles hypochondria or melancholia) as well as in the evidence it gives of a far more comprehensive general enfeeblement and disturbance of the mental capacities.<sup>24</sup>

Thus, studying the psychic trauma caused by WWI, Freud concluded that traumatic neurosis is a kind of hysteria that targets the illicit contents that come from the death drive and that can no longer be repressed by the unconsciousness.

### ***Two fundamental and opposing drives: Eros and Thanatos***

As a student, Freud worked for some years in the Physiology Laboratory of the University of Vienna, together with Professor Ernst Brücke (1819-92), comparing

---

<sup>22</sup> Freud. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 1961 (Note 12). p.10.

<sup>23</sup> Freud. Letter to Oskar Pfister, January 27, 1920 (Note 10).

<sup>24</sup> Freud. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 1961 (Note 12). p.6.

the function of the human brain with that of other vertebrates and different animals.<sup>25</sup>

At the end of the nineteenth century, physiology, as a discipline, separated from anatomy,<sup>26</sup> and Freud began to investigate the *active forces* of living matter, and not its morphology.<sup>27</sup> In the work *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, he made an important discovery, that there are instincts that tend towards death, and others, the sexual ones, that seek and always succeed in renewing life. Freud emphasised the fact that there is always a battle between these instincts; ‘the opposition between the ego or death instincts and the sexual or life instincts’.<sup>28</sup> The idea of the existence of the two fundamental and opposing drives is proposed: Eros and Thanatos, sexuality and aggression. In the Freudian sense, the death drive (*Todestrieb*) is the drive towards death, towards self-destruction and the return to the inorganic. In Freud’s view, death instinct is ‘... the first instinct [that] came into being: the instinct to return to the inanimate state’,<sup>29</sup> but, later on, he elaborates on the hypothesis that ‘the ego-instincts arise from the coming to life of inanimate matter and seek to restore the inanimate state’.<sup>30</sup> From these statements it can be inferred that: ‘the aim of all life is death’.<sup>31</sup> Freud concluded that people have an unconscious desire to die and that this desire is largely tempered by life instincts.

In the aftermath of WWI, Freud concerned himself with ‘the dark and dismal subject of the traumatic neurosis’ and admitted, with bitterness, that man possesses an irresistible orientation towards death, towards destruction.<sup>32</sup> He referred to the ‘death drive’ as a force that tends to distort the life of an organism. The death drive opposes Eros, the tendency towards survival, towards propagation, towards sexuality and other creative, life-producing impulses. The death drive is sometimes referred to as Thanatos in post-Freudian thought, complementing the concept of Eros, although this term is not found in Freudian writings, being introduced later by post-Freudian psychoanalysts.<sup>33</sup> The use of the terms Eros and Thanatos emphasises the character of universal principles that the two categories of drives that occur in the Freudian conception.

---

<sup>25</sup> Dumitrescu M. Psihanaliza aplicată în filosofie și artă. *Iasi: Sedcom Libris SA*; 2014. p.18.

<sup>26</sup> Westerhof N. A short history of physiology. *Acta Physiologica*. 2011; 202: 601–603.

<sup>27</sup> Dumitrescu M. Psychoanalytic perspectives about aggression as the death drive (*Todestrieb*). In: Țârdea TN (ed). *The Survival Strategy in terms of bioethics, anthropology, philosophy and medicine. Collection of scientific articles, Volume 25*. Chisinau: CEP Medicina; 2019. p.164-168.

<sup>28</sup> Freud. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 1961 (Note 12). p.38.

<sup>29</sup> Freud. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 1961 (Note 12). p.32.

<sup>30</sup> Freud. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 1961 (Note 12). p.38.

<sup>31</sup> Freud. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 1961 (Note 12). p.32.

<sup>32</sup> Freud. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 1961 (Note 12). p.8.

<sup>33</sup> Dumitrescu. Psychoanalytic perspectives, 2019 (Note 27). p.164-168.



Figure 1. Freud's house in London. Left: House entrance from its garden; Right: Freud's psychoanalytic couch that was brought here from his house in Vienna in 1938. Freud Museum in London. Author's personal photo archive, July 2017.

### ***The death drive sets the limits of a civilization***

In the ten years following WWI, when the new nations of Europe were suffering from disease, hunger and homelessness, but when the continent's economy was just beginning to recover, Freud, using his couch as an essential component of psychoanalysis (Figure 1), continued to analyse the unconsciousness of his patients. He constructed the theory of the relationship between Eros and Thanatos on the foundations established in the study *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. He applied his new theoretical concept to the difficulties Western civilizations were encountering, in *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur (Civilization and Its Discontents)*, published in 1930. In this work, the author again emphasises the existence of two drives:

... the instinct preserving the organic substance and binding it into ever larger units, and another in antithesis to this, which would seek to dissolve these units and reinstate their antecedent inorganic state; that is to say, a death instinct as well as Eros; the phenomena of life would then be explicable from the interplay of the two and their counteracting effects on each other.<sup>34</sup>

In the Freudian view, there is a permanent struggle between Eros and Thanatos not only at the individual level, but also at civilization level, especially Western. Throughout history, civilization has progressed due to the action of two antagonistic forces: on one hand, there was the unifying force or Eros, which joined isolated individuals, families, tribes, peoples or nations into a vast oneness which we call humanity, and, on the other hand, there is the opposite destructive force, the death drive, the 'natural instinct of aggressiveness in man, the hostility of each

---

<sup>34</sup> Freud S. *Civilization and Its Discontents*. Authorized translation by Joan Riviere. In: Jones E (ed). *The International Psycho-Analytical Library. No. 17*. London: Hogarth Press and The Institute of Psychoanalysis; 1930. p.97.



one against each one', which seeks to disintegrate biological and social units.<sup>35</sup> Human development and societal progress evolve from this logical struggle between the instinct of life and the instinct of destruction, that is between Eros and Death.

In *Civilization and Its Discontents*, undoubtedly influenced by the realities of WWI, Freud extensively analyses the meanings of the death drive. He considers that this drive is the source of 'the natural instinct of aggressiveness' as it is a primitive and autonomous instinctive disposition of the human being and thus opposes the progress of civilization.<sup>36</sup> In Freud's view, death drive is the instinct of destruction that brings to light the deepest forces of our nature, and thus man becomes a singular being, who commits auto-aggression, or suicide, causing harm against himself, but also intraspecific aggression, as he attacks members of his own species, thus producing injuries to another human being.<sup>37</sup> Freud was deeply troubled by this discovery, especially because, until that moment, he had not even considered it, as he was developing only a theory of *libido*, of Eros as a drive of species preservation.

Freud's analysis of the death drive is seen as a destructive one and led him to two conclusions:

(1) The energy created by the death drive at the individual level leads to self-destructive behaviour that will eventually lead to the dissolution of that living being. The self-destructive effect becomes much stronger when there is 'a cessation of aggression against the outside world', because in this situation the tendency towards self-destruction is strengthened and this tendency is constantly active in all forms.

(2) The death drive can direct its destructive energy outside the individual, into the outside world, and towards the other members of his species, or against other living beings or non-living objects, manifesting itself as aggression or violence.<sup>38</sup>

In recent years, dictionaries define violence as any physical attack of great intensity on a human being, carried out with the intention of harming, causing pain or suffering, or even killing the person. Similar attacks on other living beings or on certain categories of things, which constitute a person's private property, are also considered acts of violence.<sup>39</sup> On the other hand, aggression is defined as a harmful action, an offensive mental activity or a hostile attitude towards others or even

---

<sup>35</sup> Freud. *Civilization and Its Discontents*, 1930 (Note 34). p.102.

<sup>36</sup> Freud. *Civilization and Its Discontents*, 1930 (Note 34). p.102-103.

<sup>37</sup> Dumitrescu. *The Relationship between Body and Soul*, 2013 (Note 6). p.294-298.

<sup>38</sup> Freud. *Civilization and Its Discontents*, 1930 (Note 34). p.97-98.

<sup>39</sup> Outhwaite W (ed). *The Blackwell Dictionary of Modern Social Thought*. Second Edition. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing; 2003. p.725.

towards the person himself, but without causing such destructive effects as violence.<sup>40</sup> As such, violence is the cruellest manifestation of aggression.<sup>41</sup>

Freud claims that the death drive and aggressiveness, respectively, represent intrinsic tendencies of the human being, which cannot be eliminated, but can be diverted or sublimated. The human being can control aggressiveness especially by strengthening the moral consciousness, the Super-Ego. But when the feeling of guilt appears at the level of the Super-Ego due to killing another member of its own species, the human being develops a feeling of anguish.

The father of psychoanalysis states that, once this supreme court, the Super-Ego, sets in, then a 'tension between the harsh super-ego and the ego' would develop and the sense of guilt would appear. However, the guilt expresses itself as a need for punishment. In that moment is installing the super-ego's aggressivity,<sup>42</sup> as 'the super-ego torments the sinful ego with the same feelings of dread and watches for opportunities whereby the outer world can be made to punish it'.<sup>43</sup> This process is inherent in civilized life: 'Civilization therefore obtains the mastery over the dangerous love of aggression in individuals, by enfeebling and disarming it and setting up an institution within their minds to keep watch over it, like a garrison in a conquered city'.<sup>44</sup>

### ***Pathogenesis of traumatic neurosis in Freud's view***

Freud had already described the 'protective shield against stimuli' in his work, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, published only two years after the end of WWI as a result of observing and treating patients with psychological war trauma, both soldiers and civilians. He stated that 'protection against stimuli is an almost more important function for the living organism than reception of stimuli'.<sup>45</sup>

In the Freudian view, the emergence of the neocortex in humans, an anatomical structure consisting of the six layers of neurons involved in higher-order brain functions, such as sensory perception, cognition, motor command generation, spatial reasoning, and language, would have appeared during human evolution as a first system of protection against environmental stimuli, which were becoming stronger and more numerous than the primitive psyche could cope with.

On the other hand, the second protective shield consists of the sense organs, which present special arrangements in order to ensure 'further protection against excessive amounts of stimulation and for excluding unsuitable kinds of stimuli'.<sup>46</sup> These anatomical structures also intervene to provide 'only small specimens of the external world' to the brain.<sup>47</sup>

---

<sup>40</sup> Harding C (ed). *Aggression and destructiveness: psychoanalytic perspectives*. London: Routledge; 2006. p.3-4.

<sup>41</sup> Dumitrescu. *Psihanaliza aplicată în filosofie și artă*, 2014 (Note 25). p.99.

<sup>42</sup> Freud. *Civilization and Its Discontents*, 1930 (Note 34). p.129.

<sup>43</sup> Freud. *Civilization and Its Discontents*, 1930 (Note 34). p.125.

<sup>44</sup> Freud. *Civilization and Its Discontents*, 1930 (Note 34). p.105.

<sup>45</sup> Freud. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 1961 (Note 12). p.21.

<sup>46</sup> Freud. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 1961 (Note 12). p.22

<sup>47</sup> Freud. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 1961 (Note 12). p.21.

Neurosis occurs when the third protective barrier, represented by consciousness or reason, is altered under the pressure of certain stressful factors that threaten the subject's life. Thus, the individual will have panic attacks or it is possible that the consciousness begins to unfold a semantic excess, which is then turns into delirium. Thus, Freud noted: 'we describe as "traumatic" any excitations from outside which are powerful enough to break through the protective shield'.<sup>48</sup> So, he established a psychoanalytical definition of the common traumatic neurosis: 'a consequence of an extensive breach being made in the protective shield against stimuli'.<sup>49</sup> For Freud, traumatic neurosis is the direct consequence of the destruction of the coherence and stability that the Super-Ego provides to the human psyche. Therefore, in Freudian perspective, traumatic neurosis related to war is, in fact, a direct result of an insufficiency of the ego function due to an 'injury to the ego' as 'the patient's resistance arises from his ego'.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, Freud clearly defines 'war neuroses' as 'traumatic neuroses which have been facilitated by a conflict in the ego'.<sup>51</sup>

The consequence of this alteration of the supreme court of control manifests itself in the disruption of the repression process and even, *in extremis*, in difficulties related to the process of the constitution of conscience and the identification of moral principles, norms and what is related to legality and common sense in general. Thus, wars, economic crises, plagues, can generate at the social level distrust in civilization and in the social order that generates it, but on a particular, individual level these tragic events produce what Freud identified as traumatic neurosis, which is different from psychosis.

### **Aggression and the collective unconscious**

Until Freud, the dispute was centred on the origin of ideas, which were considered either innate or acquired through conventions assumed by the subject. Beginning with Carl Gustav Jung, the emphasis falls on a pre-conceptual existential level: that of basic behaviours, seen as the main source of the unconsciousness. These ideas lead Jung, Freud's 'beloved son', to the theory of complexes and archetypes.

Archetypes are fundamental and universal themes that exist in the collective unconscious and represent all the signs, symbols, or patterns of thinking and/or behaving inherited from our ancestors. Jung identified various archetypes in human psyche and defined them as unconscious, innate behavioural structures, which come to organise and orient the visible part of the human psyche, respectively consciousness, some of them being: 'the shadow, the wise old man, the *anima* in man and the *animus* in woman'. All these archetypes constitute the human collective unconscious,<sup>52</sup> thus setting it apart from the personal, individual unconscious of Freudian psychoanalysis.

---

<sup>48</sup> Freud. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 1961 (Note 12). p.23.

<sup>49</sup> Freud. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 1961 (Note 12). p.25.

<sup>50</sup> Freud. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 1961 (Note 12). p.20.

<sup>51</sup> Freud. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 1961 (Note 12). p.33.

<sup>52</sup> Dumitrescu. *Psihanaliza aplicată în filosofie și artă*, 2014 (Note 25). p.208.

Freud did not accept Jung's concepts of collective unconscious and his theory of the archetypes, but Freudian psychoanalysis, as its founder understood it, came to its end.

No one will know what *anima* or *animus* looks like, but based on these archetypes, we fall in love, looking outside for elements that conform to them. If, in Plato's (c427–348 BCE) philosophy, ideas were metaphysical instances acting from outside the subject, the archetypes of the collective unconscious are inside the subject, at a level to which consciousness has access only passively.



Figure 2. The former residence of Carl Gustav and Emma Jung-Rauschenbach. Top left: Main entrance; Top right: The house portal with the famous inscription which is a code for the way in which Jung understood the collective unconscious in the sense of the opening of the human being to the sacred dimension of his existence: ‘VOCATUS ATQUE NON VOCATUS DEUS ADERIT’ (‘Called and not called, God will be there’); Bottom: The facade of the house from Lake Zurich. Museum Haus C.G. Jung in Küsnacht. Author’s photo archive, April 2023.

Jung, the Swiss psychoanalyst and Sigmund Freud's natural successor, lived near Zürich, in Küsnacht (Figure 2), and was working as a senior doctor in Bürghölzli sanatorium or the Psychiatrische Universitätsklinik Zürich (Psychiatric University Hospital Zürich), where he practiced psychiatry from 1900 to 1909 (Figure 3).



Figure 3. Bürghölzli sanatorium or the Psychiatrische Universitätsklinik Zürich (Psychiatric University Hospital Zürich). Left: The main entrance to the hospital; Right: The side facade of the hospital with the pavilions. Author's photo archive, April 2023.

Jung refined the concept of sexuality and believed that it included, in addition to the sexual function, both ‘the biological phenomena correlated with sexual function in the strict sense, such as pregnancy, birth, natural selection, protection of offspring, and so on’, but also ‘innumerable psychological phenomena; associated, such as ; ‘the extraordinary importance of fantasy in preparing and perfecting the sexual function’.<sup>53</sup> Therefore, he points out, ‘we might identify sexuality with the instinct for the preservation of the species, which in a certain sense may be contrasted with the instinct of self-preservation’,<sup>54</sup> and we must not only have in mind ‘the physical sensations and functions which are ordinarily connoted by that word [sexuality]’.<sup>55</sup> Sexuality will, therefore, begin to take shape in the form of a theoretical concept, with multiple meanings, not only related to reproduction, but also to everything that represents the energetic support of life, by identifying pleasure as a barometer of vitality.

### ***Aggression and the Jungian shadow archetype***

Starting from the theory of unconscious drives discovered by Freud, Jung developed a much more disturbing vision of aggression, correlating it with the idea of a collective unconscious that goes beyond the individual context of existence.

Jungian archetypes are, like Plato's ideas, generative realities; they stand behind our concrete way of creating phantasms, of giving meaning and significance to

---

<sup>53</sup> Jung CG. Freud and psychoanalysis. In: Read H, Fordham M, Adler G (eds). *The collected works of C.G. Jung, Volume 4*. Translated by R.F. Hull. New York: Pantheon Books; 1961. p.103.

<sup>54</sup> Jung. Freud and psychoanalysis, 1961 (Note 53). p.104.

<sup>55</sup> Jung. Freud and psychoanalysis, 1961 (Note 53). p.104.

symbols, of ultimately directing certain standard behaviours. Thus, for Jung, aggression, the dark side of the human personality that consciousness rejects, is called the shadow archetype.

Analysing the rich symbolism of the Self, Jung introduced the shadow archetype at length in one of his major works, entitled *Aion: Researches into the Phenomenology of the Self*, published in 1950, five years after the completion of World War II (WWII). In this book he reflected on the causes of the two world wars, of destructive evil in general, which he correlated with everything that came from the shadow archetype.

Right from the foreword of this book, Jung warns his readers that he is writing it 'as a physician, with a physician's sense of responsibility', and not as a partisan or a scholar.<sup>56</sup> Jung makes this mention precisely to advise his readers that, despite the philosophical, historical, and cultural elements of this work, in fact he is aiming at a medical matter that takes into consideration 'the change of psychic situation within the Christian aeon', which manifests itself through violence, with the help of the theory of archetypes, as a destructuring of the Self, of the inner balance ensured by the placement of the psychic centre in the consciousness.<sup>57</sup>

As such, Jung presented a theory of aggression through the 'dechristianization of our world, the Luciferian development of science and technology, and the frightful material and moral destruction left behind by the second World War'.<sup>58</sup> For Jung, a primary source of the violence marked by the idea of the shadow archetype appears precisely when the hierarchy is reversed, and the unconscious, with its drives, takes the control of the human psyche. He mentions that the shadow archetype is opposed to the Self, which he considers to be the centre of the human psyche as the Ego is the centre of consciousness. The Self involves both the Ego, as the centre of consciousness, but also the unconscious which houses the universe of drives, complexes and archetypes. Jung considered that:

Whereas the contents of the personal unconscious are acquired during the individual's lifetime, the contents of the collective unconscious are invariably archetypes that were present from the beginning. The archetypes most clearly characterized from the empirical point of view are those which have the most frequent and the most disturbing influence on the ego. These are *the shadow*, *the anima*, and *the animus*. The most accessible of these, and the easiest to experience, is *the shadow*, for its nature can in large measure be inferred from the contents of the personal unconscious.<sup>59</sup>

The shadow archetype could be found in those aspects that, naturally, we do not accept as ours because they cause us an intense feeling of fear, precisely because they belong to us, like the shadow we cannot escape. The shadow is somewhat opposed to the Self because it slides the human psyche towards its unconscious

---

<sup>56</sup> Jung CG. *Aion: Researches into the phenomenology of the self*. Second Edition. Translated by R.F.C. Hull. New York: Pantheon Books; 1959. x

<sup>57</sup> Jung. *Aion: Researches*, 1959 (Note 56). p.9.

<sup>58</sup> Jung. *Aion: Researches*, 1959 (Note 56). p.36.

<sup>59</sup> Jung. *Aion: Researches*, 1959 (Note 56). p.8.

structures, ruining the life of consciousness, including moral consciousness. 'The shadow is a moral problem that challenges the whole ego-personality, for no one can become conscious of the shadow without considerable moral effort. To become conscious of it involves recognising the dark aspects of the personality as present and real.'<sup>60</sup> All these compulsive contents of the shadow archetype, usually illicit, are difficult for the consciousness to accept, so they are transferred to another reality, imaginary or real. As such, abominable acts are attributed to an imaginary construct, which may be the devil. For Jung, this space of deep millennial frustrations hides the most prolific product of the shadow archetype, namely the devil with his entire retinue of characters, from which the Antichrist could not be missing.

If the Self, as the totality of the psyche that finds harmony between its structures, has Christ as its expression of perfect manifestation, at the opposite pole, the shadow archetype, which reflects the maximum tension between the unconscious and consciousness, has as its cultural expression the devil and his historical product, the Antichrist.

In this sense, trying to decode certain epiphanies of the Antichrist, Jung will refer to Nero and then to the modern reformers, starting with Luther and continuing with the 'Secondary Antichrist', which arose from the rebellious spirit of the French Revolution after 1792 and reaches its final point of its historical materialisation with Adolf Hitler.<sup>61</sup> The devil, a name that the shadow archetype can obtain through transference, becomes the expression of those illicit tendencies, which only the evil character can bring to light, thus absolving the conscience of any guilt.

For Jung, the symbolism of the devil becomes a matter that refers to self-discovery related to the intimacy of the person, to his relation to what he really is; it is, definitively, a matter of knowledge and self-acceptance in what is occult, illicit and opposed to conscience.

The shadow archetype includes all those irrational contents that oppose the human in us and send us more into the area of a non-human experience. The Jungian definition of the shadow archetype can be found, but in an exaggerated form, in the personality of the main character from Robert Louis Stevenson's novel, suggestively titled *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*:

... the shadow ... (has) an emotional nature, a kind of autonomy, and accordingly an obsessive or, better, possessive quality. Emotion, incidentally, is not an activity of the individual but something that happens to him. Affects occur usually where adaptation is weakest, and at the same time they reveal the reason for its weakness, namely a certain degree of inferiority and the existence of a lower level of personality. On this lower level with its uncontrolled or scarcely controlled emotions one behaves more or less like a primitive, who is not only the passive victim of his affects but also singularly incapable of moral judgment'.<sup>62</sup>

---

<sup>60</sup> Jung. *Aion: Researches*, 1959 (Note 56). p.8.

<sup>61</sup> Jung. *Aion: Researches*, 1959 (Note 56). p.102.

<sup>62</sup> Jung. *Aion: Researches*, 1959 (Note 56). p.8.

Thus, it can be concluded that this archetype actually existed in English literature long before its Jungian definition. In this gothic novel, the character distinguished himself by a fragile balance between consciousness and the instinctive unconscious, thus causing the character's personality to be extremely unstable and, thus, a dual personality emerged. When the shadow archetype took the control of psyche, Mr Edward Hyde was reaching extreme aggression, culminating in the killing of his fellow humans, but when the character was returning to the state dominated by the Self, Dr Henry Jekyll had no memory of that event, just as he confessed at the end of his life:

Some two months before the murder of Sir Danvers, I had been out for one of my adventures, had returned at a late hour, and woke the next day in bed with somewhat odd sensations. It was in vain I looked about me; in vain I saw the decent furniture and tall proportions of my room in the square; in vain that I recognised the pattern of the bed curtains and the design of the mahogany frame; something still kept insisting that I was not where I was, that I had not wakened where I seemed to be, but in the little room in Soho where I was accustomed to sleep in the body of Edward Hyde.<sup>63</sup>

The shadow archetype took its inspiration from the Freudian concept of the unconscious: 'the shadow ... can in large measure be inferred from the contents of the personal unconscious',<sup>64</sup> Thus, it could signify that area of prehuman atavism, primitive behaviour akin to animal behaviour, in all that concerns the 'discontents' with the civilization, as had already been pointed out by Freud long before Jung. Choosing the name shadow archetype, Jung insists on the character of an element dependent on something without which it cannot exist. Thus, the shadow archetype is a projection of the Self.

In the manifestation of the shadow as the devil or as his historical agent under the title of Antichrist, Jung also saw the archetypal source of the total, irreparable destructions that marked the dramatic events that characterised the two world wars.

In 1950, when writing his study dedicated to the symbolism of the Self, Jung reflected on three post-war realities that brought the drives discovered by Freud to their maximum heights, namely the holocaust, the Hiroshima bomb and the Soviet gulag. All these realities tested and highlighted, each in its own way, what Freud theorised in his works, such as *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and *Civilization and its Discontents*, as the death drive, as Thanatos.

Thus, through the shadow archetype, which affects consciousness to the point of its ruin, Jung actually re-signifies Freud's theory regarding the relationship between Eros and Thanatos.

---

<sup>63</sup> Stevenson RL. *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. London: Longmans, Green, and Co; 1886. p.120.

<sup>64</sup> Jung. *Aion: Researches*, 1959 (Note 56). p.8.



## **Conclusion**

Despite the disagreements between Freud and Jung on the nature of the unconscious, there seems to be a lot of common ground regarding the relationship between Eros and Thanatos.

The experience accumulated by Freud in the context of the WWI as a doctor who dealt with frontline trauma highlighted the aggressive drives of the human being that can, in certain contexts, overwhelm the consciousness, effectively overturning all the subject's moral landmarks.

Jung took these ideas about the aggressive drives from his spiritual master and, in the immediate aftermath of WWII, placed them in a larger, trans-subjective, historical, and even somewhat mystical dimension. Thus, aggression, considered a drive by Freud, becomes for Jung an expression of an archetype that can generate, in certain contexts, behavioural patterns that can be found behind some symbolic and mythological structures, such as that of the devil or the Antichrist.

If Freud was more fascinated by the psychic evolution of the individual, Jung tried to extend this problem to the level of the species, of humanity in general, which is not exempt, in its development, from syncope, regressions, destructions and returns.

Finally, we conclude that Sigmund Freud initiated the research on human aggression, but without Jung's contribution contemporary research in the fields of ethology and sociology we certainly would not have had a theoretical-philosophical basis to motivate their development.

## **Biographical Details**

Professor Marius Dumitrescu is a graduate of the Faculty of History and Philosophy from Iasi, Romania, in 1989. His research is in Freudian psychoanalysis. He has published several books, *Psychoanalysis applied in philosophy and art*, and *Dante, Freud, and Dali: What They Might Have in Common? Psychoanalytic Reflections on Dante's Inferno*. He has an academic interest in the history of medicine and is co-author of an article about the mysterious 'mental illness' of Blaise Pascal.

Dr. Gabriela Florenta Dumitrescu, MD, PhD, is a senior pathologist at Prof Dr N Oblu Emergency Clinical Hospital, Iasi, Romania. She has an interest in the history of medicine and is the co-author of articles exploring analogies between certain neuroanatomical terms and Roman household objects, the discovery of the circle of Willis as a result of using the scientific method in anatomical dissection, biblical description of spinal and neurosurgical pathology, and the history of the optic chiasma from antiquity to the twentieth century.

## **Acknowledgements**

We thank the Editorial Team of *Topics in the History of Medicine* for help in revising the manuscript.

## **Sources of Funding**

The authors did not receive any funding in support of this work.

Dumitrescu M and Dumitrescu GF. From War Neuroses to Freudian Thanatos and Jungian Shadow Archetype. *Topics in the History of Medicine*. 2024; 4: 72-89.

*Topics in the History of Medicine* is an Open Access publication of the British Society for the History of Medicine made available under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International Licence which allows unrestricted redistribution in any medium or format for non-commercial purposes provided the original work is properly credited. <https://bshh.org.uk>

© *The Author(s)*, 2024.