

AN ARCHETYPAL APPROACH TO SHARON DRAPER'S OUT OF MY MIND

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Abstract: The paper entitled "An Archetypal Approach to Sharon Draper's Out of My Mind" tackles the life experience of a brilliant and extremely gifted child suffering from cerebral palsy and the empathetic relation with her parents and some close family acquaintances, who help her surpass social and emotional frustrations. Our methodological grid consists of Pearson's twelve archetypes, valuable interpretative guides meant to awaken the main character's inner hero and facilitate the accomplishment of her aspirations.

Keywords:

The mind and the heart are the two terms often employed by Pearson in relation to his description of various archetypes, approached by us as unconscious contents embodied in archetypal images, and tackled in terms of their connection with the Ego, the Self and the Soul. Assuming that the Ego together with the Self and the Soul should hold an important position in our merging with the outer world, Pearson regards archetypes as those inner patterns through which the Ego should be "re-educated" (1991: 35), not eliminated.

Following Pearson's argument regarding the fact that each of us undertakes the life journey, and, that we should be properly trained lest we might fail, together with his conviction that various archetypes specifically contribute to teaching us how we can assume clear responsibilities in our life, I will closely examine Melody's evolution, in terms of her successfully playing her "social role" (Gilder 2003: 148) of a brilliant schoolgirl, despite her severe disability. Pearson posits that we all possess the archetype of the Innocent, the so-called "inner Innocent" (1991: 32). Even if Draper depicts Melody as a gifted child suffering from cerebral palsy, she is introduced as confidently relying on all those people concerned with her evolution, be they parents or teachers. Because she is often underestimated, even by her own mother, who sometimes is unable to realize her potential of recalling specific details related to every infomercial, mailing addresses, websites, names of actors and actresses, the exact time and channel for her favorite shows, in comparison with her father, who never speaks "baby-talk" (6) to her, Melody continues to hold them dear and trust them.

The same attitude on the part of Melody can be identified in her relation to the teachers, some of them rather incapable of empathetically reacting to her needs and inner challenges, for instance Mrs. Billups. Conversely, Mrs. Sharon fully recognizes her potential and regards her as "the star" (45), in the Spaulding Street Elementary School's special program for disabled children.

Fascinated by Pearson's elaboration of the inner Innocent's perceptual field in association with the "lost and regained paradise" (1991: 72), I embrace his suggestion of approaching this concept in terms of perceiving life as the "real vision," meant to help us liberate ourselves from "the world of illusions" (72).

Melody's world of illusions interrelates with her conviction that the Medi-Talker, named Elvira, will help her accomplish the transition from "inner speech" (Vygotsky qtd. in Palmer 2004: 93) to positive interrelation with other people. Later, it will facilitate her the opportunity to successfully lead her team to the "best score," appreciated by her as the supreme victory, meant to ensure her full recognition as concerns her potential and her perfect empathetic integration.

Melody's contemplation of the opportunity to become emotionally and socially integrated arises from considering Stephen Hawking and the computer he relied on as the best illustration of the fact that, if you are an exceptionally endowed person and if you are properly assisted by parents, teachers, or mentors such as Valencia at home or Catherine, at school, you can surpass physical barriers and enjoy full recognition of your inner gifts and respect.

Melody's reliance on Stephen Hawking, who can neither walk nor talk, and who is still regarded as the smartest person in the world, can be associated with the capacity of the inner Innocent to believe in miracles. It allows him to rely on "dreams, hopes, visions" (Pearson 1991: 75) and make them become true, even under the most disadvantageous circumstances.

Despite her "faith" and "fidelity" (1991: 76), as concerns her wish to accomplish her dreams without surrendering to external discouraging factors, her archetypal Innocent is "culpable for the fall" (76). The fall is regarded by Pearson as an opportunity to discover and face both good and evil and to willingly promote the former and restrain oneself from embracing the latter.

I will further turn into good account the "ethical effects of the shadow of innocence," commented by Pearson in relation to the Innocent's determination to guard his "innocent state of trust and optimism," and, to pathologically refuse to fall by "caviling at innocence" (1991: 76). The refusal to admit the possibility of falling, of experiencing failure has been interpreted by Pearson in terms of the refusal to disregard the parents or the teachers and their role as "reliable" (76) persons, meant to help him/her surpass difficulties and recover after unpleasant experiences.

The fact that the colleagues refused to accept her as part of the team, although it was her who helped them get "the best score," firstly annoyed Melody, secondly made her experience anger, inner darkness, utmost sadness, helplessness but never the lack of support on the part of the family. All the time, they have been regarded by her as the safest environment, able to willingly protect and to unconditionally love, accept and encourage her.

However, Melody's intense "internalization" (Pearson 1991: 76) of the feeling of guilt over her little sister's accident, that occurred due to her stubborn demand to be taken to school on the rainy day following the disastrous contest, facilitates the

manifestation of the shadow in terms of severely blaming herself for it and of obsessively repeating her wish she were normal as the other kids are.

Valencia's prompt reaction by saying that this would imply "to be mean and fake and thoughtless" (2012: 76) like them, followed by Melody's rejection of the "trophy," won by her team, that accidentally fell and broke, together with her subsequent rolling herself out of the classroom, are meant to reveal her way of facing and reacting to an unfriendly social environment.

Her conclusion, that she is not very much different from the other kids, reached by her after successfully answering most of the questions at school and after wondering and worrying as concerns what life has in store for her, is doubled by her determination to write her life story so that what she has got "stuffed" (2012: 78) inside her head could be revealed to all those concerned.

Melody seems to have returned "to Paradise as the Wise Innocent, full of trust and optimism" (Pearson 1991: 88), convinced that other children could benefit from her life story via this assumed pattern of social understanding as concerns the real significance of the existence of remarkable yet disabled children. Relying on Gilder's syntagm "personal-functional level of analysis" (2003: 108), where "personal" stands for Melody's mental profile and "functional," for the way her brain "creates" (Damasio, qtd. in Palmer 2004: 24) her mind, I will further focus on the archetype of the Orphan.

Pearson assumes that this archetype interrelates with that of the Innocent, in the sense that, once the Innocent has chosen the person or persons regarded as suitable for accomplishing his wishes, the inner Orphan, in an active and rather critical manner, will speculate which qualities should be hidden so that he/she could best promote the new social image lest he / she might be harmed. I suggest that Melody's determination to "wake up, give up illusions and face the traumatic reality" (Pearson 1991: 85), precisely due to the moral wounds provoked by various people incapable of showing the least amount of empathy towards her precarious physical condition, is a confirmation of Pearson's concerns with introspection, derived from some inner command to prove that "if we were not wounded, we would remain innocent and would never grow up" (85).

Melody's unpleasant experiences, instead of leading her to self-victimization, through constant and intense training, have helped her aspire at detaching herself from her incoherent inner structure and reveal her acceptance of being assisted to be successful in relation to other people. "Acceptance of assistance" (1991: 23) is another device belonging to Pearson and it will be employed to decode the evolution of Draper's character.

In what follows, I will shortly engage in a "both/and" (1991: 23) approach to Melody. I will observe both how the parental and communitarian opinions can become "oppressive" (Pearson 1991: 33) and show how she tries to repress those parts of her personality that are unsuitable for interrelating with the people around her, through activating the archetype of the Warrior. It encourages her to feel strong and do her best to accomplish her dreams.

It seems that Melody realizes that if she were well trained, she could "protect" (1991: 98) and defend herself against the unpleasant intrusion of the other

unsympathetic people. Pearson opines that one's successful search and discovery of one's potential is favoured by the archetype of the Warrior, that assists us in discovering ourselves, in setting the boundaries and in protecting ourselves against "outer aggressive agents" (98). Melody permanently turns to good account and relies on the potential of the inner Warrior, asserting her decision to compete for what really matters, that means for realizing the best score for her team. Her preference concerns honest solutions, for instance, that of rejecting Catherine's assistance, when directly competing, not to give the impression that she is cheating, of honestly asserting her opinions, even if that is done through precarious means, because she can only rely on technical devices and not vocalize her needs. They can be regarded as personal functional means of amplifying communication and of winning the sympathy of the readers.

It is obvious that Melody is permanently looked after by her beloved parents, interpreted by us as embodying the archetype of the Caregiver. They bind her to the school community, helping her to acquire the feeling of belonging, encouraging her to establish relations with the people around her.

Asserting themselves as "the perfect, careful, affectionate parents" (Pearson 1991: 108), they are involved in developing Melody's excellent mental endowment and her private concerns. As regards the inner Caregiver, Pearson assumes that, if it is assisted by the strong inner Warrior, it can establish those boundaries that might be regarded as reasonable, concerning one's behavior towards the family or community one belongs to. Equally important is the fact that the energy of this archetype is not only involved in setting "boundaries" (108) but also in establishing favorable interpersonal relationships, meant to help her evolve.

The setting up of 'boundaries' concerning Melody's behavior towards the people around her mainly arises from their inability to realize her mental potential, due to her serious physical disability. A good instance of showing how her emotion of anger is aroused concerns Mrs. Billups' insisting on imposing upon her the activity of recognizing and practicing the alphabet, accompanied by Melody's "bellowing" and "screaming" (2012: 81). Only her mother's arrival puts an end to the unpleasant situation, through her explanation that she regards as unbearable and cruel the permanent repetition of those letters, which Melody knows very well, and the forcing of the children into singing stupid childish songs. On the other hand, Dr Hegely's suggestion that her parents should take her to a residential hospital for children suffering from disabilities, vehemently turned down by her mother, sounds scaring for Melody, mainly due to her mother's anxiety that she might give birth to another child, suffering from cerebral palsy.

As concerns the directing of the energy of the inner Caregiver towards establishing functional interpersonal relationships, it mainly arises from Melody's determination to possess the Medi-Talker, known by everybody as being the best device meant to facilitate human intercourses. It proves to be of great help for Melody, helping her acquire the feeling of belonging to the school community, of being turned to good account by the history teacher, who encourages her to take part in prestigious competitions. It also facilitates her to establish harmonious relationships with some of her colleagues, mainly with Catherine, the one chosen to assist her at school.

Had everybody realized how eager she was to help them win the competition despite the physical disability, they should have highly appreciated her and not deprived her of the opportunity to join them in the final competition held in Washington D. C., which proved disastrous for everybody, precisely due to her being absent. Her team lost the competition and Melody, instead of experiencing her engagement with them in terms of the “archetype of generosity,” which would have happened if she had taken part in it, suffers from intense frustrations.

Melody has experienced the first level of the Caregiver when the inner tendency to “sacrifice” (1991: 245) herself for the benefit of her colleagues’ success proved a disaster. The second level of the inner Caregiver implies to learn to take care of herself so as not to be maimed and to enrich her life experience. The third level concerns the wish to contribute to the process of better integrating herself in the community she belongs to through sharing her life experience by writing a book about the way her vital mental energy has helped her surpass ordinariness and failure. Pearson also assumes that “the Caregiver is often the mother’s nurturing role and the Warrior is the father’s protecting role,” and, concludes arguing that “If your Warrior leads too strongly, you may ‘win’ at the expense of others. If your Caregiver leads over much, you may help others at your own expense” (1991: 246).

The archetype of the Seeker is the one that shows how Melody’s belief concerning her inner development, evolution and enlightenment is functional. It appears that transformation is initially controlled by the Ego’s “thinking process” (Pearson 1991: 45), whereas enlightenment is associated with one’s inner concern to become “better, more accomplished, perfect” (1991: 46).

Pearson also introduces the idea that one’s transformation is dependent on the peculiar person who is exploring and experiencing what he/she is afraid of. As concerns Melody, what she fears most are precisely the two circumstances meant to ensure her success in discovering her real logical and emotional potential. She fears to enjoy some freedom as concerns her dependence on others, obtained via the Medi-Talker, and, to courageously face the unknown when she is left all by herself to take part and find the best answer to the problems encountered during the Whiz Kids quiz competition. Melody’s determination to get involved with the quiz team can be regarded in terms of the response of her inner Seeker “to the call of the Quest: Crossing and the Threshold” (1991: 125). Pearson claims that such accomplishment requires that we should realize the fact that “the real solution is the expansion of our conscience, beyond the Ego” (1991: 125). This implies the constant search for our real identity. Pearson, quoting Hillman, also insists that “self-pity is a form of personal discovery, of self-evaluation,” suggesting that it reveals to those concerned “our own desires” (125).

Self-discovery is instrumental to Melody’s transformation from a totally dependent and misunderstood child into a person concerned with her mind, regarded by Damasio as being “private, hidden, internal” (qtd. in Palmer 2004: 124), observable only to the one that owns it. Her increased attachment to music, her predisposition to “smell freshly sliced lemons and see citrus-toned musical notes,” which used to remain hidden in her mind and to which not even her mother had any access, reveal the fact that she is

acquainted with her mental states and that her consciousness cannot be grasped through “observed and measured phenomena” (Palmer 2004: 124), but through the “first point of view of introspection” (124).

Melody’s “quest” concerns her mind, whereas “crossing” and the “threshold” refer to the fact that inner perception through introspection, no matter how incomplete it might be, should be regarded as “a major source of self-knowledge” (Gulick, qtd. in Palmer 2004: 127). Moreover, Palmer assumes that “first-person ascriptions” unveil signs of “self-deception” (127).

Approaching Melody’s mental states in terms of self-deception and, further on, in terms of self-pity and regarding them as valuable sources of “personal discovery, of self-evaluation” (Pearson 1991: 125) is an extremely profitable enterprise for me, because it will finally bring me closer to her “true and genuine identity” (1991: 129).

Self-deception can be related to her permanent perception of herself as being different from the others, only to gradually realize that her acquired knowledge regarding everything that exists around her will be never lost, but “forever tucked” (6) inside her head. Unable to walk and talk often leads her to experiencing “self-pity” (2012: 20). It is Mrs. Violet Valencia, her parents’ neighbor who manages to sense her and who is determined to assist her in discovering her “hidden superpowers, her highest potential” (20).

Melody’s highest score, achieved within the school competition, is a clear evidence of the fact that she has succeeded to surpass her physical and emotional barriers. Her subsequent rejection and betrayal by her colleagues, due to her physical disability, on the day when they all had to leave for Washington D.C. for the final stage of the contest, leads her to experiencing utter disappointment. If her previous success reveals her potential to transcend her “limited Ego” (Pearson 1991: 133), her depression signals the activation of her inner shadow for a short period of time. The archetypal shadow manifested in violent gestures and in her rolling herself out of the classroom the day after her colleagues had returned from the competition.

However, closely following Pearson’s arguments, we can grasp the way Melody attends to the ‘death’ of her old limited and disappointed self and to the birth of her new spiritual Self. It is the spiritual Self that facilitates her crossing the threshold towards a new identity, that of a child determined to write the story of her childhood, filled in with details, impressions, and commitments.

The major commitment of writing a book about the success of a disabled child to surpass her physical disability through will and conscience is possible once one’s inner shadow is “integrated and transformed” (Pearson 1991:141) so that it can enrich ourselves. Pearson associates such evolution and enlightenment with the archetype of the Destroyer.

Positively approached, the inner Destroyer is regarded as helping us to reconfigure our life by getting rid of unfavorable ways of thinking and acting. The twofold destructive and creative potential of the inner Destroyer are commented by Pearson in terms of its three levels. The first level is discussed in relation to various states of

confusion, experienced by the person who has faced losses or suffering, in our case the losses and suffering experienced by Melody after having joined the school community.

The second level of the inner Destroyer, applied upon Draper's character, illustrates her acceptance of losses and her relative lack of power, while interrelating with her colleagues. The third levels concern her potential to figuratively confront herself with her own inner Destroyer, to detach herself from those experiences and people that do not understand and support her values and to finally accomplish her aspiration of teaching them the love lesson of how one can really care for the others by self-acceptance and by interrelating with them via the aesthetic recreation of her life story.

It is the archetype of the Lover and that of the Creator that Pearson regards as facilitating our imagination and our inclination towards turning to good account our attention filled with love. If we consider the capacity of archetype of the Lover to accomplish the agreement between the Soul and the body and if we focus on the third level proposed by Pearson, we can expand upon it and reveal the fact that it is meant to enhance "self-acceptance" (Pearson 1991: 151). It is "self-acceptance" that will finally give birth to the Self, in Draper's novel to Melody's self, eager to interrelate with the selves of the other people from the community she lives in.

Following Pearson's considerations on the archetype of the Creator, we observe his underlining our "unique mission" (1991: 47) of turning to good account our creative potential to make our life meaningful, which, in Melody's case, translates itself as her determination to creatively rewrite her life story.

I have often focused on Melody and the people around her and have closely analysed how the dispersed parts of her personality have constantly developed in a harmonious way. Pearson opines that it is the archetype of the inner Ruler that is responsible for it. The inner Ruler is directly involved in consulting the Soul, instead of permanently listening to the "existential worries of the Ego" (1991: 58).

The basic condition that the inner Ruler should observe is that of being actively involved in the process of inner transformation. This requirement should be further related to the rejection of selfishness and "arrogance" (1991: 184), to constructing a credible and functional vision, to making plans and to properly fulfilling our targets.

This is precisely the strategy followed by Draper when she has conceived Melody's confrontations with life issues. The vision, the plans made by her and for her, by those concerned with her evolution, also involve a confrontation with her potential and, of course, with its limitations, due to her physical disability. Even if she is sometimes defeated, she continues to rely on her "predispositions, hopes and dreams" (Pearson 1991: 186).

Melody's attempt to heal her wounded self after the competition, from which she was excluded because her colleagues did not want to be overburdened by her inability to look after herself, can be interpreted resorting to Pearson's suggestion that the story of the wounded Fisher King is the "primary myth of the Ruler" (1991: 186).

In our opinion, "the selfish, narrow-minded and vindictive manner" (Pearson 1991: 187) of her colleagues can be related to their shadow Ruler. As concerns Melody, we can

hardly associate her with the shadow Ruler, who is assumed to possess and to manifest too little power in relation to the others and not too much power or authority.

The levels associated with the archetype of the Ruler are also useful to comment upon Melody's stages in her journey towards self-assertion. The first level, proposed by Pearson and applied upon Melody's evolution, concerns her seriously taking the responsibility of pursuing her life's targets, in the sense of identifying the best way to surpass her precarious condition and, later, to heal her wounds.

The second level, related by Pearson to the amplification of one's potential and the well-structuring of one's inner vision, can be set in relation to Melody's determination to amplify her skills, to better evaluate and structure her inner strategy to fulfill her dreams of being part of the school team and to contribute to the achieving of the best score for it. The third level, promoted by Pearson, reveals itself in the case of Melody in terms of her effort to turn to good account all the inner and outer resources while attempting to successfully contribute to the victory of her school team.

To acquire a well-balanced personality, Pearson suggests that the archetype of the Magician should be also activated. Acting like "an agent of permanent regeneration and renewal" (1991: 59), the inner Magician is able to convert "primitive emotions and thoughts" (59) into higher ones and to assist us to modify our insufficiently developed behavioral patterns so that they could become better structured.

The basic manifestation of the power of the inner Magician concerns its ethical implication in the "systematization of our inner and outer worlds" (1991: 195) to learn how we can control the changing of our consciousness by surfacing the dark side of our personality. The changing of Melody's consciousness, in the sense of its transition from a low level to an ever higher one, is Draper's basic concern. Her conscious spiritual journey can be associated with what Pearson called the "foreshadowing" of her future experiences, that usually occur in "moments of intuitive insights" (1991: 197).

Pearson claims that the genuine power of the inner Magician arises from our dependence on those people that are honestly concerned with our spiritual and physical wellness. For such people to be successful in our awakening the inner Magician, they should help us grow aware of our potential to mediate between the conscious and the unconscious so that we could benefit from their interconnectedness.

It appears that Melody's parents, Catherine, Mrs. Valencia and some of her teachers and colleagues can be regarded as having played the part of positive agents, involved in the process of her transformation from an isolated and emotionally frustrated child into a reliable and socially involved human being.

If, so far, I have focused on Melody's subjective Self, following Pearson's suggestion, I will contemplate how Melody's "objective self" (1991: 59) can be properly structured, through the archetype of the Sage, activated when we observe our feelings and thoughts but remain beyond them, without getting attached to them.

To properly respond to the "call of the inner Sage," one should seek the Truth and his/her need for "objectivity" (1991: 212). It seems that Melody's desire to find the truth despite her "confusion and doubts" (212), her need for objectifying the important stages of her cognitive development, are those instances that reveal the fact that she can

activate the inner Sage to properly celebrate her victory over existential doubts and repeated failures.

To our surprise, Pearson blames the archetype of the Fool, our inner clown for our failures, due to its being regarded as “the disconcerting shadow self, the forerunner of the emerging Self” (1991: 60). Being considered the “depository of the psychic energy” (60), the inner Fool permanently renews itself and demands that all the other archetypal structures should be turned to good account.

Melody’s activation of the inner Fool can be decoded in terms of her permanent “capacity to get up and try again” (1991: 224) and find various ways of fulfilling her wish to communicate with the other people. This is successfully accomplished via the Medi-Talker. Moreover, it has been possible through her having turned to good account the archetype of Ruler, that has helped her increase her efficiency, the archetype of the Magician, that has helped her convert the negative thoughts and feelings into positive ones, the archetype of the Sage, that has prompted her into taking the right decision and into avoiding being crushed by the unsympathetic people around her.

Melody’s inner transformation stands proof to the fact that Pearson’s theory, based on the demand that we should integrate, within the life stages, those archetypes compatible with the categories of the Ego, Soul and Self, is a valuable choice so that our life journey could become a successful experience.

Bibliography

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