



Persona And Shadow Archetypes Of Achilles In “The Song Of Achilles”

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Abstract

This study investigates Achilles' psychological depth in Madeline Miller's “The Song of Achilles”, focusing on the role of the Persona and Shadow archetypes in his internal conflict and tragic fate. Using Carl Jung's archetype theory, this study aimed to see how Achilles' Persona is shaped by societal expectations and his mother's desire for him to attain god-like status. In contrast, his Shadow contains his suppressed fears, vulnerability, and emotional attachments, particularly his strong feelings for Patroclus. The conflict between these two opposing forces causes Achilles' emotional isolation and destructive behavior, particularly after Patroclus' death. This conflict, which stems from his failure to adjust to his Persona and Shadow, eventually leads to his downfall. This study emphasizes the importance of archetypal theory in understanding Achilles' character development.

Keywords: *Jungian Archetypes, Persona, Shadow, The Song of Achilles.*

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INTRODUCTION

Literature is a powerful medium that expresses human experiences, emotions, and societal values through writing. It includes a wide range of genres, with fiction, poetry, drama, and essays. According to Wellek & Warren (1956), literature functions as a social institution that uses language to express “life”, which is basically a social reality. They also argue that literature goes beyond social representation, as it serves as a tool to imitate the natural and subjective world of individuals. Literature is not just a means of artistic expression, but also a source of criticism and analysis. As works of literature deals with complicated themes, they become more open to criticism, which allows for a deeper understanding. This process is widely known as literary criticism.

Li (2018) states that literary criticism involves researching, analyzing, and evaluating certain writers or works. With the above definition, it can be said that literary criticism is a method of interpreting a writer’s work using various theoretical frameworks. By doing so, it can reveal levels of meaning that may not be immediately apparent. There are different ways to critique a piece of literature, all depending on the lens through which the text is approached. Each of the frameworks offers unique insights to the themes, characters, and social contexts of a work.

One such framework is Jungian literary criticism, which uses Carl Jung’s psychological theories to analyze and examine the characters through the lens of archetypes. Jung described the collective unconscious as a reservoir of shared experiences and memories that form our perspective of the world, from which archetypes emerge from the collective unconscious as fundamental, universal patterns of thought and behavior (Qalbi, 2024). These archetypes which are deeply ingrained in the psyche act as symbolic representations of the core aspects of human experience. Leigh (2011) further elaborates that the term “archetype” refers to the shared

unconscious characteristics of the human mind that reside deep within the psyche. The archetypes theory is considered as one of the important components of Jung's extensive and detailed research (Fatihah & Mustofa, 2022). Archetypes provide insights into how universal symbols influence behavior, psychology, and story structures. Understanding these patterns is important for interpreting the psychological depth of characters in literature, as they mirror universal struggles, desires, and transformations.

Archetypal criticism offers a perspective that enables the comprehension of literature in terms of cultural patterns and universal symbols. It is usually perceived as a fusion of historical criticism and structural criticism (Alvina & Saragih, 2023). This approach seeks to identify repeating symbols, themes, and character types that are true across cultures and time periods, reflecting fundamental human experiences. These archetypal patterns often manifest in many forms, such as persona, anima and animus, shadow, and self (Diana et al., 2022). While each of these archetypes plays an important role in shaping character development and narrative structure, this study will focus specifically on the persona and shadow, as they are crucial to understanding the character of Achilles from "The Song of Achilles" by Madeline Miller.

According to Hardanto et al. (2019), persona is a part of the unconscious mind that is shaped and accepted by society, which acts as a mask that conceals our true identity. Our authentic self, however, resides within the shadow. They further elaborate that shadow archetype holds our true personality, often causing feelings of insecurity and fear of exposure, as it tends to conflict with societal norms. Diana et al. (2022) states that the shadow archetype represents instinctive traits like greed, jealousy, and other bad instinct of humans, which is often considered immoral as it conflicts with the persona, making it a subpersonality that the persona rejects and hides.

Madeline Miller, an American novelist, published her book *The Song of Achilles* in 2011. It is a retelling of the Trojan War from Patroclus' point of view, set during the Greek Heroic Age. With a focus on their romantic relationship, the book chronicles Patroclus' journey with Achilles from their first meeting to their exploits during the Trojan War. The story starts with Patroclus's childhood and his transfer to Phthia after a terrible accident. There, he becomes friends with Achilles, who is the son of King Peleus and the sea goddess Thetis. The friendship between them grows into a deep love as they get older. The story follows their journey from Phthia to the Trojan War, where Achilles' dream of being a brave fighter comes true.

Previous studies have been conducted prior to the current study. The first study was conducted by Stefanus et al. (2020). They focus on the persona, shadow, and anima archetypes in the characters of Toom from *Beautiful Boxer* and Kevin and Marcus from *White Chicks*. The previous study uses a qualitative research method to explore how the archetypes manifest in the characters. The findings show that Toom's persona is used to fit into society's expectations of masculinity, while his Shadow represents his suppressed desire to become a woman. In contrast, Kevin and Marcus' persona serves as a tool for their undercover roles, and their anima emerges due to their transformation into women. While the previous study explores the external expressions of archetypes in societal roles, the current study examines how these archetypes help shape a single character, Achilles', internal conflict and contribute to his tragic fate.

The second study was from Athalia (2024), which investigates the manifestation of Jung's archetypes in the characters of *Persona 4*, focusing on the persona, shadow, and self archetypes. The research applies a qualitative approach using "close playing" (replaying the game) to analyse how the characters develop and integrate their shadows through their journey of self-discovery. Findings show that each character's shadow represents repressed fears or

desires, and integrating these shadows helps them discover their true selves. Unlike the previous study that explores multiple characters and includes the self archetype and the collective unconscious, the current study narrows the scope down into only the persona and shadow archetypes to examine their specific roles in Achilles' development.

Based on the theoretical framework of Jungian archetypes, this research seeks to explore the psychological complexity of the character Achilles in "The Song of Achilles". The study will address the following research questions: (1) How are the archetypes depicted on Achilles in "The Song of Achilles"?; (2) How do the persona and shadow archetypes contribute to Achilles' character development in "The Song of Achilles"?. By exploring how Achilles projects his Persona to meet societal standards of heroism while suppressing his Shadow, this study will show that his failure to reconcile these two elements of himself leads to his tragic collapse.

METHOD

The current study will be implemented using a qualitative research method. This kind of research involves gathering, sorting, analyzing, and drawing conclusions from data without generalizing. According to Creswell (2009), "qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem". Close-reading technique will be applied to analyze the novel. Carl Jung's archetypal theory will be used as the theoretical framework for this study. The data source for this study are taken from the novel entitled "The Song of Achilles" written by Madeline Miller. The data collection is done by reading the novel thoroughly and dialogues and interactions that may depict how the character embody the archetypes are collected. Then, the analysis was conducted, and compared to the persona and shadow archetypes from the archetypal theory proposed by Carl Jung.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Archetypes Depicted on Achilles

Persona Archetype

The persona acts as a mask which hides a person's true character to be accepted by the society. In the case of Achilles, his persona is closely associated with the image of a hero, which is a figure of extraordinary power and invulnerability. This can be seen from the quote below.

"He is a weapon, a killer. Do not forget it. You can use a spear as a walking stick, but that will not change its nature."

(Miller, 2012)

Achilles' Persona is strongly related to the idea of a hero, as evidenced by his legendary combat skills, status as the son of a goddess, and near-mythical talents. His Persona, as a powerful and unstoppable physical force, portrays the idealized image of a Greek hero, someone destined for glory not only through moral deeds but also because of impressive physical abilities. The phrase implies that, despite his best efforts to change or disguise his character, Achilles cannot escape the persona of being a "weapon" and a "killer" since they are inseparable to his identity. This persona of a superhuman warrior is highly impacted by society expectations, rather than being purely self-chosen. His physical strength becomes more than just a personal trait, as it has become the very identity that he presents to the world. The society around him sees him donning this mask of this persona, raising him to the status of a near-divine being whose worth is determined by his ability to fight and win.

Achilles' Persona as a hero is not a choice, but rather a mask imposed on him by the expectations of his mother, Thetis, as noted below when Patroclus remarks,

"She wants you to be a god," I told him.

"I know." His face twisted with embarrassment, and in spite of itself my heart lightened. It was such a boyish response. And so human. Parents, everywhere.

(Miller, 2012)

Achilles' character is defined by his heroic exterior, which is a purposefully constructed image that complies to socially acceptable standards of heroism, rather than merely reflecting his natural attributes. Achilles does not choose to wear this mask of power and invincibility; rather, it is placed on him by his ancestry, divine legacy, and the prophecy that surrounds him. The pressure to fulfill the role of the destined hero is clear as he considers his mother's wishes, demonstrated as Patroclus said the lines of "she wants you to be a god", which Achilles responded by saying that he knows as his face twisted with embarrassment. The moment reveals that Achilles' heroic persona is not entirely his own making, rather than a burden placed on him by his mother, Thetis, whose hopes for him is to achieve a god-like status.

Shadow Archetype

The shadow archetype represents the repressed, hidden aspects of an individual's personality, often mirroring qualities that are in direct conflict with the persona they present to the world. In Achilles' case, his shadow is tied to his fear of mortality, vulnerability, and his emotions that he tries to conceal due to his heroic persona. This can be seen in the following quote:

"Do you want to be a god?"

His eyes were dark in the half-light. I could not make out the gold flecks in the green.

"I don't know," he said at last. "I don't know what it means, or how it happens." He looked down at his hands, clasping his knees. "I don't want to leave here. When would it happen anyway? Soon?"

I was at a loss. I knew nothing of how gods were made. I was mortal, only.

(Miller, 2012)

The moment above reflects Achilles' conflict and vulnerability, which offers a peek into the emotional turmoil that lies beneath his heroic persona. The question from Patroclus, "do you want to be a god?" forces Achilles to confront the reality of his mortality, something that he has avoided due to his identity as a nearly invincible warrior. He responded that he did not know, followed by his strings of hesitation and uncertainty, which shows his deep sense of doubt and fear. He is uncertain about not only becoming a god, but also what would it mean for him as a mortal to go beyond the limit of a mortal being. Achilles' previous emotional weakness and uncertainty are replaced to a more destructive force following Patroclus' death, when the grief and rage contained by his Persona emerge in the form of his wrath and aggressiveness.

Achilles makes a sound like choking. "There are no bargains between lions and men. I will kill you and eat you raw." His spearpoint flies in a dark whirlwind, bright as the evening-star, to catch the hollow at Hector's throat.

(Miller, 2012)

The moment above depicts Achilles' overwhelming rage in the aftermath of Patroclus' death, which makes a dramatic shift in character, revealing the darker side of him that had been suppressed by the mask he dons as his persona. The phrase of "no bargains between lions and men" suggest that to him, there is no negotiation or mercy when it comes to

avenging Patroclus, his closest companion that was killed by Hector. The brutal imagery as he said "I will kill you and eat you raw" expresses his fury, devoid of the honor and restraint that heroes are expected to have. The quote above signifies Achilles' road to vengeance, as his grief transforms into a more darker aspect of his shadow, overshadowing the heroic persona and the more human aspects of his character.

Achilles' Character Development

The Persona and Shadow archetypes are important to understanding Achilles' internal battle. His Persona, influenced by societal expectations and his warrior rank, portrays him as an unstoppable hero. This exterior image of Achilles is constantly at odds with his Shadow, which reflects his more weak and human side. The conflict between these two archetypes sparks an internal battle in Achilles, who is forced to connect his heroic character with the emotional obstacles that appear from his human limitations. This conflict not only defines his behaviors and relationships, but it further adds to the tragic nature of his character.

Achilles' persona is influenced by the expectations put on him as a hero, which include strength, invulnerability, and honour. This image is not something Achilles chooses, as it is imposed on him by those around him, particularly his mother, Thetis. As a goddess, Thetis wants her son to attain god-like status, believing that immortality will shield him from the restrictions and grief of mortal life. The warrior culture also plays an important part, as strength and military success are the ultimate measurements of a person's worth, confirming Achilles' romanticized image of a hero. This Persona determines Achilles' actions and interactions with others. He is continuously driven to demonstrate his strength and dominance in battle, following society's noble standards. However, the need to project an image of invincibility causes him to repress his inner self. Achilles separates himself from his more human side by wearing a mask of power and stoicism, giving little chance to express his genuine emotions. This internal tension between the image he displays and the person he genuinely is becomes crucial to his character's development, which eventually leads to the terrible outcomes of his journey.

Achilles' Persona and Shadow are constantly at odds, with his Persona as a hero concealing his true vulnerabilities and emotions. His Shadow is made up of his deep fear of death, his emotional attachment to Patroclus, and the aspects of himself that he tries to suppress in order to live up to his heroic image. When confronted with the prospect of becoming a god, Achilles' ambiguity reveals his struggle with the reality of his human limitations and fear of death. This internal conflict gets worse by his feelings for Patroclus, which contradict the emotional distance required by his Persona as a warrior. Achilles is expected to be disciplined and devoted to glory, but his strong feelings for Patroclus make him more human and vulnerable. After Patroclus' death, his grief and rage bubble to the surface, manifesting in his brutal vengeance on Hector. His violent actions demonstrate how his suppressed emotions, like fear, grief, and a need for connection, eventually explode. This drives him toward more destructive behavior motivated by the Shadow he has long attempted to suppress.

His Persona, influenced by society's expectations of him as a hero, drives him to seek glory and vengeance, particularly after Patroclus' death. This image of strength and invincibility compels him to cover up his emotions, such as the grief and fear he feels after losing Patroclus. But his Shadow, the part of him that harbors these hidden emotions, eventually arises, particularly when he pursues Hector in a fit of rage. Achilles never fully reconciles his Persona as the ideal hero with his human side, resulting in his death. His struggle to reconcile these two sides of himself leaves him emotionally torn, and while he briefly

confronts his emotions, it does not change the fact that he dies with this conflict unresolved within him.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the Persona and Shadow archetypes reveal Achilles' deep internal conflict, which shapes his character in "The Song of Achilles". His Persona, shaped by societal expectations and his mother's desires, drives him to project an image of strength and invincibility, while his Shadow, which represents his hidden vulnerabilities and emotional depth, is suppressed. This conflict between his public image and private fears contributes to his emotional isolation and impulsive behavior, particularly after Patroclus' death. Finally, Achilles' inability to reconcile these two aspects of his identity contributes to his tragic fate, emphasizing the complex nature of his character and the harm that comes of failing to reconcile the Persona and Shadow.

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