The Importance of Psychological Realism in Children's Literature: A Psychoanalytical Study of Harry Potter

Lashynna Duncan Marbaniang
PhD Scholar
Department of English
North-Eastern Hill University
Shillong - 793022
Meghalaya
India

Abstract:
The paper addresses the importance of psychological realism in analyzing children's literature by utilizing Carl Jung's archetypal theory to study the character of Harry Potter from the *Harry Potter* (1997-2007) series. The paper aims to illustrate how realistic portrayals of challenges and tribulations reflected through the struggles of a character are necessary. By specifically focusing on the shadow archetype propounded by Jung, the study aims to depict how it creates a realistic and relatable character for the reader.

Index Terms – **Psychological realism, psychoanalytical criticism, Carl Jung, archetypal theory, shadow archetype, *Harry Potter*, children's literature**

Psychological realism emerged as a branch of the field of realism in literature where individuals' thoughts, feelings, motives, and general psychological growth are examined. This approach offers insights into the characters' interior lives. The goal here is to be able to create characters with realistic features that encourage relatability for the readers. Literature employs psychoanalysis as a tool for creativity, while literary criticism serves as a tool for analysis. These two disciplines have evolved a coexisting relationship under the umbrella of psychoanalysis. "Psychoanalysis explores the complexities of the human soul, long a major preoccupation of literature" ("Literature and Psychoanalysis"). Psychoanalytic critique allows a deeper knowledge of the literary work by exploring the hidden and undiscovered. A thorough investigation offers a greater understanding in the context of the era in which the work is produced. "Psychoanalysis has a great importance in contemporary understandings of reading, meaning and relation of literature to culture" (Hossain 2). Psychoanalysis, a branch of psychology, places a strong focus on unearthing the workings of the conscious and unconscious mind. It started the development of psychotherapy with Sigmund Freud in the early 1890s with the intention of raising awareness of the unconscious and its functions. This Austrian neurologist who founded psychoanalysis paved the road for understanding a person's psychology by highlighting the significance of the unconscious and what it reveals.

The archetypal theory propounded by Carl Gustav Jung, a Swiss psychiatrist and psychologist, is a theory which lays emphasis on the "collective unconscious." Jung established analytical psychology and shifted the focus of psychoanalysis to emphasize how certain repeating patterns in human behaviour are represented in the unconscious and ultimately passed down through generations. Jung promoted the idea that everyone had a "collective unconscious" which is depicted in societal elements including cultural characteristics, behaviours, beliefs, and customs. These repeated patterns and symbols are what Jung classifies as archetypes; he thus propounded the archetypal theory based on these findings. He thought that these traits, which are present in every civilization, were handed down unconsciously from one generation to the next. Jung classifies the psyche into three parts: the ego, the collective unconscious, and the personal unconscious. Jung's ego belongs to the conscious part of the psyche, while the personal unconscious is the layer above the collective unconscious which contains the suppressed memories, while the collective unconscious is the repository of inherited universal knowledge. The collective unconscious encompasses archetypes which Jung explains is a term that is "apposite and helpful because it tells us that so far as the collective unconscious contents are concerned we are dealing with archaic or – I would say – primordial types, that is, universal images that have existed since the remotest times" (Jung 1969 229). "Archetypes actively seek their actualization in the personality and the behaviour of the individual, as the life cycle unfolds in the context of the environment" (Stevens 50).

Jung proposed several archetypes but the main ones are the persona, the shadow, the anima and the self. This paper will be discussing the shadow archetype in relation to the character of Harry Potter from the *Harry Potter* (1997-2007) series and how the incorporation of the shadow enables a portrayal of a realistic and relatable character. The development of a well-rounded character is crucial in children's literature for this enables it to shape the mind and view of the reader (child and adult alike). Relatability is the keyword when it comes to literature, and the development of a wholesome and relatable character is what a reader looks for. Such characters can assist in the development of the reader's psyche; therefore having psychologically realistic characters is crucial. The aspect of the shadow has been chosen specifically due to its realistic depiction of the struggles faced by the protagonist in the Harry Potter series. The character of Harry Potter is a complex one in that he faces challenges which provoke the shadow within him. The paper aims to illustrate the darker side of his challenges which eventually lead to a positive outcome – conveying a necessary message of resilience for readers of all ages. Jung explains in *Aion: Researches into the Phenomenology of the Self*

"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 recognizing the dark aspects of the personality as present and real. This act is the essential condition for any kind of self-knowledge, as a rule, meets with considerable resistance" (Jung 1959 8). The shadow contains the "disowned subpersonality" that emerges through various triggers emerging in various ways such as dreams (Stevens 64). It surfaces as the dark side of the personality thus creating a "moral complex" as termed by Jung. "The moral complex forms based on an archetypal imperative and maintain the values of the culture into which we happen to be born" (Stevens 66).

Harry Potter is an orphaned boy who witnesses emotional abuse and neglect as an underaged child at the hands of his maternal family, the Dursleys. This naturally impacts his outlook towards the world, and although it apparently does not surface as a young child, it emerges as he transitions into adolescence. We witness a traumatized Harry at the conclusion of *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (2000), where he witnesses the murder of his fellow Triwizard Tournament champion, Cedric Diggory, at the hand of Lord Voldemort (the archetype of the enemy), the dark wizard who murdered his parents. All of these traumatic events remained suppressed in his unconscious as a child and can be seen surfaces only through Harry's scar – the mark of his past as well as his destiny. His scar is a constant indicator of Voldemort's presence and plays the role of a warning sign of any imminent danger. It also is the source of the connection to his shadow especially as it amplifies after Voldemort's return to full form in *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*. Voldemort taking complete form truly ignites the shadow in Harry and it begins his challenges which take form internally (in the form of his subconscious connection with Voldemort as well as his own psychological dilemmas) as well as externally which takes the form of an external threat through Voldemort.

The true impact of his trauma is witnessed in *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (2003) where his subconscious fear of neglect resurfaces when he is isolated from those close to him, triggering a negative reaction. Here, we witness the insistence of Harry's unconscious to make its presence felt, especially as he battles isolation. As dreams turn into nightmares, Harry finds himself in a bitter subconscious state threatened by the resurfacing of Voldemort together with all that he feels he has lost. Recurring nightmares of Cedric's murder haunt Harry, further aggravating the shadow within; the nightmares may be described as a case of post-traumatic stress disorder. He repeatedly finds his nightmares leading him through dark long corridors and constantly arriving at "dead ends and locked doors" (Rowling 2003 14). As Harry's erratic shadow amplifies, so does his subconscious connection to Voldemort, which provides him insight into Voldemort's present. Following several emotional outbursts towards his friends after being left isolated. Harry finds feelings of bitterness lingering and festering – this is the shadow unkempt and chaotic. Its presence is filled with erraticism which up to this point has been left unchecked by Harry.

Jung explains how arriving at a position of self-introspection incurs recognition of the presence of the uncontrolled shadow - a difficult emotional and mental transition. For Harry, this transition begins when he has a recurring nightmare which turns awfully realistic; this involves Harry becoming a snake attacking a man whom we discover to be Mr. Weasley. Harry admitted to experiencing it all from "the snake's point of view" where he finally admits to Albus Dumbledore, the great wizard and headmaster of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, that "I was the snake" (Rowling 2003 414). This admission is crucial because it initiates his awareness of the overpowering shadow within. As Harry recognizes that Dumbledore blatantly ignores his moment of honesty and vulnerability, Harry feels "a hatred so powerful he felt, for that instant, he would like nothing better than to strike – to bite – to sink his fangs into the man before him" (Rowling 2003 414, 419). The shame following the incident leaves Harry once again with a feeling of isolation and angst which triggers a series of questions.

"How had he become a snake? Perhaps he was an Animagus … no, he couldn't be, he would know … yes, thought Harry, that would fit, he *would* turn into a snake of course … and when he's possessing me, then we both transform … that still doesn't explain how I got to London and back to my bed in the space about five minutes … but then Voldemort's about the most powerful wizard in the world, apart from Dumbledore, it's probably no problem at all to him to transport people like that. And then, with a terrible stab of panic, he thought, *but this is insane – if Voldemort's possessing me, I'm giving him a clear view into the Headquarters of the Order of the Phoenix right now!*" (Rowling 2003 436).

Jung explains that "coming to terms with the unconscious involves a process with its own distinctive labour and technique" (Jung 1928 83). Harry begins his insight and introspection following these events. He first begins his investigation on the possibility of him being possessed, and a feeling of "being unclean" emerges (Rowling 2003 439). But this feeling is quickly rectified by Ginny Weasley, the daughter of Mr. Weasley and Harry's friend, who had previously been controlled by Voldemort in *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (1998), who assures him that he is not being possessed. This source of encouragement allowed Harry to shift towards a positive approach towards controlling his shadow, which is actually linked to Voldemort. It begins with Harry "recognizing the dark aspects of the personality as present and real" which in this scenario involves Harry accepting the subconscious connection with Voldemort (Jung 1959 8). It also involves him accepting that there is a positive force within him that will enable him to control his shadow. It encourages him to open up once again towards his best friends Ronald Weasley and Hermione Granger who assist him – furthering his control of the

shadow. The final moment which tests Harry's ability to control the shadow, which in his case is identified with Voldemort, is in *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix,* at the Ministry of Magic where Harry finds himself vis-à-vis with Voldemort. Harry is faced with the ultimate challenge to resist being possessed by Voldemort.

"Harry's scar burst open… it was pain beyond imagining… he was locked in the coils of a creature with red eyes, so tightly bound that Harry did not know where his body ended and the creature's began: they were fused together, bound by pain, and there was no escape – And when the creature spoke, it used Harry's mouth, so that in his agony he felt his jaw move … *Kill me now, Dumbledore …'* Blinded and dying, every part of him screaming for release, Harry felt the creature use him again … *'If death is nothing, Dumbledore, kill the boy …'* Let the pain stop, thought Harry … let him kill us … end it, Dumbledore … death is nothing compared to this … And I'll see Sirius again … And as Harry's heart filled with emotion, the creature's coils loosened, the pain was gone" (Rowling 2003 719-720).

This is significant because it heralds Harry's successful triumph over the shadow where he can control the unconscious through the process of self-introspection and understanding of his shadow. Harry is able to consciously perceive and control the unconscious link between him and Voldemort as a result of the last stage involving taming of the shadow. In *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (2007), Harry uses this newly acquired power to preserve the subconscious connection with Voldemort without him realising it. In the latter stages of his search for Horcruxes, Harry manages to enter Voldemort's thoughts without his realising it.

The final control and recognition of the shadow enables Harry to proceed with his quest as one well-equipped to defeat Voldemort. Through the archetype of the shadow, we are able to witness a realistic illustration of the psychological struggle Harry faces, which impacted him sociologically as well. It illustrates the impact that psychological issues have on the social, which is seen when Harry withdraws himself even from his closest friends. Harry is a character of realistic proportions with struggles and challenges, something many readers can relate to. The message of resilience is embedded within him as he self-introspects and reflects on how he can take control of the situation. The relationships he has with his friends who are a symbol of support and loyalty convey the message of the importance of communication and sharing. Harry's isolation and his determination to overcome his situation, with the help of his loved ones, represent the necessary message of hope in times of tribulation. The character of Harry Potter is well-rounded, which gives readers a palpable relatability on several fronts.

The focus of this paper is to illustrate how the presentation of the central character enables a realistic portrayal of trials and tribulations as well as resilience. Through his character, readers are able to understand that there is a light at the end of the tunnel. Jungian archetypal theory can furnish an in-depth reading and detailed analysis of the character of Harry Potter, here in the context of the shadow. This analysis further conveys that such aspects as discussed here can play an important and crucial role in the understanding and interpretation of children's literature. These demonstrate the importance of resilience in times of struggle - a necessary component in children's literature which provides readers with a message of hope.

References:

Primary Sources

1. Rowling, J. K. *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. Bloomsbury, 1997.

2. Rowling, J. K. *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*. Bloomsbury, 1998.

3. Rowling, J. K. *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*. Bloomsbury, 1999.

4. Rowling, J. K. *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*. Bloomsbury, 2000.

5. Rowling, J. K. *Harry Potter and Order of the Phoenix*. Bloomsbury, 2003.

6. Rowling, J. K. *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*. Bloomsbury, 2005.

7. Rowling, J. K. *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*. Bloomsbury, 2000.

8. Rowling, J. K. *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*. Bloomsbury, 2007.

Secondary Sources

9. *Carl Jung's Method of Self-Development – The Path of Individuation*. 19 May 2021,
    https://academyofideas.com/2021/05/carl-jung-self-development-path-of-individuation/. Accessed 21 July 2021.

10. Hossain, Mahroof. *Psychoanalytic Theory Used in English Literature: A Descriptive
    Study*. 2017, pg. 2-7.

11. Jung, Carl. G. and Gerhard Adler. *Collected Worlds of C. G. Jung: Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious.* Volume 9 (Part
    1).
    Princeton University Press. 1969.

12. Jung, C. G. *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung : Aion*. *Internet Archive*,
    http://archive.org/details/collectedworksof92cgju. Accessed 11 December 2022.

13. Jung, C. G. *Two Essays On Analytical Psychology*. 1928. *Internet Archive*,
    http://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.218694. Accessed 7 December 2022.

14. *Literature and Psychoanalysis | Encyclopedia.Com*.
    https://www.encyclopedia.com/psychology/dictionaries-thesauruses-pictures-and-press-releases/literature-and-
    psychoanalysis. Accessed 15 December 2022.

15. Stevens, Anthony. *Jung: A Very Short Introduction.* Kindle ed. Oxford University Press. 2001.