

Jung's Collective Unconscious and Individuation Theory in Paulo Coelho's *The Zahir*

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Abstract: *The paper intends to study Mikhail's character in The Zahir written by Paulo Coelho in the light of Carl Jung's Collective Unconscious theory. The Jungian unconscious is positive and has the possibility of finding value in human life. The human collective unconscious consists of instincts and archetypes, and universal symbols such as the Great Mother, the Wise Old Man, the Shadow, the Tower, Water, and the Tree of Life. The concept of individuation by Jung helps Mikhail to develop an individual personality. The psychoanalytical study of Mikhail's character depicts his importance in the novel besides being a minor character. He is also the anchor for Coelho's use of adventure, quest, and transformation of the hero, supernatural power, occult rituals, destiny, and the interpretations of dreams in the Jungian terms. It also approves that Paulo Coelho is the ambassador of psychological literature.*

Keywords: Carl Jung, Individuation, Psychoanalytical Study, Psychological Literature, Unconscious Theory

Introduction

Psychoanalytic criticism is a form of literary criticism that uses some of the techniques of psychoanalysis in interpreting literature. Psychoanalytical literary critics focus on interpreting texts to find the unconscious feelings or motives of either the author or those of the characters in literary works. Jung's collective unconscious in the early 20th century raised interest in studying dreams, mythology, and religion. The collective unconscious is a universal version of the personal unconscious, holding mental patterns, or memory traces, which are shared with other members of the human species (Jung, 1928). The aspects of this theory include instincts and archetypes. Jung defined instincts as natural, unlearned impulses present at birth that inspire psychological motivation. These ancestral memories, which Jung called archetypes, are represented by universal themes in various cultures, as expressed through literature, art, and dreams. Jung postulated four main archetypes or symbols inherited from the past generation. First, the persona is a 'mask' we wear in society reflecting cultural norms that are appropriate or impressive. Second, the shadow archetype embodies the dark side of the unconscious with destructive tendencies as well as culturally unacceptable instincts. The anima/animus is symbolic of gender identities and roles, with each sex expressing traits of the opposite sex. The final archetype is the self, which involves the struggle for an integrated sense of identity and satisfaction through purpose and accomplishment. Jung believed that archetypes are present in every culture as part of the collective experience.

In "The Significance of Constitution and Heredity in Psychology" (November 1929), Jung wrote: As modern humans go through their process of individuation, moving out of the collective unconscious into mature selves, they establish a persona—which can be understood simply as that small portion of the collective psyche that they embody, perform, and identify with.

Jung's concept of individuation is a process of psychological differentiation, having the development of the individual personality for its goal. Jung describes individuation as "the process of psychological development in which the innate individual qualities are carried out. In other words, it is the process by which a person becomes the specific, unique being that he actually is", (Jung, 2013, p. 99). Jung suggested that people naturally move towards their integrity- they exist in a constant state of formation. For individuation, the interaction of consciousness and the unconscious state is very important.

According to Jung, The Self represents the integrated fully developed person, qualified by mature wisdom, generosity, and total consciousness. The self is represented by geometric forms, such as the mandala, square, circle, or by great persons such as Buddha, Christ, or by united pairs, such as father/son, or king/queen. The most controversial archetype is the God image, which is not the divine being as such but the image of God within the depths of the Self and from which the ego can respond to the divine being. Creating the self occurs through a process known as individuation, in which the various aspects of one's personality are integrated. Within this complex structure of the individual, the main goal is to integrate these elements by a process called "individuation," or becoming an undivided fully conscious Self. This process is also called "self-realization". Jung believed that disharmony between the unconscious and the conscious mind could lead to psychological problems. Bringing these conflicts into awareness and accommodating them in conscious awareness was an important part of the individuation process. For Jung, this process usually occurs in two stages: youth and middle age. In Youth, one develops the personality's extroverted side through well one's education, work, marriage, etc. In middle age, one develops the introverted side of the personality by means of uniting the opposites within the psyche through reflection, dream analysis, spiritual exercises, therapy, etc. Such opposites that are to be united are the outer and the inner, sensation and intuition, thinking and feeling, perceiving and judging. In addition, one is also called to differentiate and integrate the very structures of one's full Self: the conscious and unconscious, the rational and irrational, the feminine and masculine, matter and spirit. The overall movement of the later part of life is called the transcendent function, which brings all these structures of the Self into full individuation and integration on a higher level.

Paulo Coelho is an author of internationally bestselling novels. His works are augmented with multidimensional scope encircling the disciplines of History, Geography, Mythology, Philosophy, Theology, and Psychology. The novels of Paulo Coelho are rich in psychological content as the writer describes adventures, quests, vivid transformation of the characters, supernatural powers, occult rituals, destiny, and the interpretations of dreams. This study applies the descriptive qualitative method in analyzing data, which means that the data will be described and explained in words without numbers. Psychoanalysis of Mikhail's character in the novel, *The Zahir is* with the objective of finding the concept of collective unconsciousness. The study will also focus on the importance of the voice or visions in developing the narrative and the process of individuation.

The Zahir (Coelho, 2005) is a novel about a successful novelist obsessed with finding his wife, who has disappeared from his life leaving him bereft of meaning. The unnamed narrator of this story is a wildly successful novelist and celebrity who lives in Paris with his wife Esther, a war correspondent. Through *The Zahir* Coelho presents the philosophical and spiritual chronicle of a man's quest for self-discovery. The novel centres on the narrator's search for his missing wife, Esther, a journalist, and a war correspondent. She has helped him in pursuing his dream of becoming a writer. Frustrated and shocked, the narrator is unable to figure out the reason for his wife's disappearance. During the book launch and signing event, the narrator encounters Mikhail, one of Esther's closest friends with whom he suspects she has been romantically involved. With the help of Mikhail, he learns that she has left in search of peace and happiness as she had trouble living with the narrator. Learning about his *Zahir*, the narrator embarked on a spiritual and physical journey to recover his wife; this, in turn, resulted in his transformation. Mikhail plays a very significant role in the novel as his character considerably influences the plot development. Coelho uses Mikhail's 'visions' as a means of communicating the real message of the narrative. In Paris, Mikhail is a moderator and attends weekly philanthropic meetings in a local restaurant. He can attract people through his enchanted speeches. By narrating his history to other people in Paris, he manages to create his own community and becomes their spiritual leader. He continues his mission of spreading love and healing souls by holding sessions in restaurants as well as meeting homeless people living on the streets. Mikhail, a schizophrenic epileptic, tells the narrator about "The Voice" which guides him. When the narrator attempts to convince Mikhail to reveal Esther's location, he warns that "The

Voice” will permit him to convey it at the right time as the timing for their meeting is not appropriate now. As the narrator departs to find Esther the next morning, he meets with an accident, which he takes as an affirmation of Mikhail’s warning. While waiting for the appropriate time, the narrator is made to realize his mistakes by analyzing the reasons behind Esther’s disappearance. Moreover, the narrator understood that to find Esther, he must find himself first. Mikhail acts as a buffer helping the narrator in the process of self-realization. To attain self-realization, a person must establish the contents of his unconscious state into the conscious state. The unconscious and the conscious are opposites and at the same time complementary.

Methodology

The study is based on a qualitative method of research. The primary source of the research paper is the novel, *The Zahir*, and the secondary source comprises library resources and internet resources.

Analysis and Findings

The Zahir presents a very articulate example of the collective unconscious in Mikhail’s vision of the small girl. Mikhail’s real name was Oleg, but he chose to name himself Mikhail after he decided to be reborn as a ‘warrior of light’. He was the chosen one, on the mission to spread the message of love. When Mikhail was seven years old, he had to walk for an hour to reach his school. One afternoon while going to his school he felt a strong wind blowing and saw lights surrounding him after which, he lost his consciousness. Upon regaining consciousness, he saw a white little girl wearing a white dress, floating in the air, and smiling at him. Mikhail narrates the incident to his mother, but his mother is terrified and considers it a hallucination. After a week he again sees the white little girl floating in the air as they smile at each other but this time he tries to speak to her, but she doesn’t respond. Mikhail questions his classmates about the little girl but is threatened to be expelled from the school if he ever spoke about his ‘visions’. Mikhail continues to see that white little girl for a whole month. During such visions, he would sometimes faint and sometimes not. When his mother got suspicious and confronted him, he told her the truth, but she didn’t scold him and instead got ready to accompany him the following day. The next morning when they reached that place his mother told him to ask the little girl about his dead father. The little girl spoke without moving her lips. She informed him that his father was fine, asked him to remind his mother about the heater, and ordered his mother to tie a scrap of fabric and a prayer around a small tree growing there. Mikhail’s mother told her friend and thus others came to know about it, they secretly started tying scraps of fabric and were informed about their dead relatives. Mikhail sometimes fainted or sometimes felt the warm wind blowing and saw the bubbles of light around him. After some days the tree was cut down by the police and Mikhail was expelled from the school for provoking rebellion and encouraging superstition. The little girl reappeared when Mikhail started weeping after he saw the scattered fabrics and the axed tree. She told him that the destruction was a part of the plan as she would accompany him for the rest of his life to direct him on what to do.

The recurrence of the female child’s image as it enters Mikhail’s body often referred to as the voice in the narrative is divine energy and the epileptic effect that renders Mikhail unconscious, driving Mikhail back to the primitive stage. The image of the little girl that is visible to and communicates with Mikhail only, is almost the woman that Mikhail fantasizes about – a dream-like object, not an earthly girl but a supernatural being surrounded by a halo and floating in the air. The girl, the Immaculate Conception or ‘the voice’ plays a vital role throughout the narrative as it leads the story. The divine energy decides the right moment for the author to know about his missing wife, “...but the voice tells me that is not the moment, that no one should interrupt her encounter with the energy of love. I respect the voice, the voice protects us, protects me, you, Esther.” (Coelho, 146). The voice encouraged Mikhail to go to the book signing ceremony.

The Zahir makes use of the apparition of the Virgin Mary to Mikhail. With such a vision, he is guided towards fulfilling his mission to spread love with Esther's help. The role of the Virgin Mary in the novel strengthens the theme of recognition of the feminine face of God, the Virgin Mary being the primary deity in the novel. Jung unlike Freud considered religion responsible for developing psychic personality, conscious and unconscious. He considered God to be a reality from the deepest part of the collective unconscious. It is evident that when Jung was twelve years old, he was entranced by the sight in 'radiant sunshine' of the roof of Basle cathedral glittering, and at the thought of God sitting above it, 'far away in the blue sky on a golden throne and...'. For two days, Jung could not complete his thought through terror. Then, he wrote:

I gathered all my courage, as though I were about to leap forthwith into hell-fire and let the thought come. I saw before me the cathedral, the blue sky. God sits on His golden throne, high above the world - and from under the throne an enormous turd falls upon the sparkling new roof, shatters it, and breaks the walls of the cathedral asunder. (pg. 39; Jung 1961)

This experience made Jung realize that he lived, not 'in the Christian myth' but by '[his] personal myth ... I understood that the self is the principle and archetype of orientation and meaning' (Jung, MDR, Ch. 6). This involved the internalization of his father's external God – or at least the realization that since God and the self are both unknowable, they could be the same, and one a projection of the other – more often, he refers to God as being a projection of the self (Jung, Ans. To Job).

And it is again the voice that tells Mikhail that before he is twenty-two, a woman from far away will come and carry him off to see the world, to fulfill a mission "She also tells me that I have a mission to fulfil, and that mission is to spread the true energy of love throughout the world" (Coelho 195, 2005). Expelled from the school, Mikhail works as a shepherd but the rumour that he is cursed becomes the reason for his dismissal. Mikhail wanders the steppes with hunters as they believe his presence and magical powers help them find foxes. He spends his time at the museum of the poet reading and listening to people recite his verses. The voice also communicates to the director of the museum through Mikhail that he is likely to receive an important post. The voice tells him about the next drought, the time of animals falling sick, and the time of arrival of the traders. The voice is both the source and medium to establish a communion between the mystic world and the world of the human psyche. And the epileptic fits are the symptoms of Mikhail's connection with the Power. Mikhail is seen as a patient of epilepsy which he pretends to believe for his mother. Mikhail and his mother move to Almaty, a city to earn a living. Like any fifteen-year-old boy, he has normal adolescence, but his friends become curious about his fits, so he invents stories of being possessed by 'higher powers'. On further investigations by friends, he declares himself to be a member of 'secret societies' which became fashionable and people having such powers were considered valuable gurus.

At the age of twenty, Mikhail meets Esther, who was looking for an interpreter willing to go with her into the interior of Kazakhstan. Mikhail did not want to miss this golden opportunity as a way out at the same time was surprised as the 'voice' had told him that one day a woman would come and take him far away. Esther employed Mikhail as an interpreter to help her communicate with the nomads and shamans of the Tengri tradition. She arranged a visa for him in the French embassy as an interpreter of the Kazakh language. Initially falling in love with Esther, Mikhail realizes that she is married and loves her husband but with time, something important has been lost. She wanted to escape from the depression that would follow her disintegrating marriage. She was completely lost and searching for something. The 'voice' asked Mikhail to bless Esther with a ritual and prayer. After meeting her, Mikhail understood his mission—"she was the one who brought me here, a poor 21-year-old with no future, an aberration in the eyes of the people in my village, or else a madman or some sort of, who had made a pact with the devil, and, in the eyes of the people in the city, a mere peasant looking for work." (Coelho, 143)

Conclusion

The 'voice' in the novel guides Mikhail about when and how to see Esther, besides making other predictions that always come true. During the journey, the narrator is made to pass through the realization as he allows his consciousness to coincide with the memories of his ex-wives and also with his girlfriend, Marie. The realization helps him to locate the space for Esther and he finds that she has become the *Zahir* (a myth) which in the Jungian psychoanalytic context exists in the deep mazes of the hero's psyche that is consciousness, representing the collective unconscious of man's destiny in Jungian terms. Thus, the journey of the narrator, Esther and Mikhail in *The Zahir* becomes not only the journey of the characters but also of the entire human race in the quest for love. The integration of the ego (consciousness) with the personal and collective self helps to attain the self-called as individualization.

The Zahir is an example of the contemporary state of human relationships and represents an artistical assimilation of Jung's psychology. Coelho has fused the psychology of the unconscious with individual and collective experience. Coelho has adopted Jung's theory of collective unconsciousness and the process of individualization in the novel and depicted the importance of Mikhail in helping the narrator and his wife to attain the same.

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