



WWJMRD 2017; 3(8): 185-187
www.wwjmr.com
International Journal
Peer Reviewed Journal
Refereed Journal
Indexed Journal
UGC Approved Journal
Impact Factor MJIF: 4.25
e-ISSN: 2454-6615

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Strangling the Journey of the Soul: The Anima in Tunku Halim's "Strangling the Soul"

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Abstract

In Jungian psychology, the soul refers to the anima or animus. Often, individuals are not able to address this unconscious element properly, resulting in the failure of individuation—the process whereby the state of psychological maturation is achieved through the integration of the conscious and the unconscious mind. The dynamics of these mental components can be traced in the short story "Strangling the Soul" by a Malaysian author, Tunku Halim. The story narrates the experience of a couple dealing with repressed soul image, leading to the murder of the wife. This study investigates the protagonist's anima which affected his soul journey towards individuation. In order to achieve this, the protagonist is analyzed through Jungian archetypal concepts like the anima and shadow. The analysis reveals that the characters struggled with addressing his soul complexes which leads to failure of individuation.

Keywords: Anima, Archetype, English literature, Individuation, Jungian, Shadow

Introduction

Carl Jung described the soul as "a feminine character in the man and a masculine character in a woman" (Jung 1982: 301). In Jungian psychology, the soul is known as the anima (in men) and animus (in women). The anima or animus is the unconscious element that lies the deepest in the unconscious mind. The inability to tap into this element inhibits individuals' journey towards individuation, which is the process of psychological maturation. In Tunku Halim's short story, "Strangling the Soul", this is an issue that the protagonist, Jam, battled with. He struggled with the projection of his anima onto a woman he would later discovered to be a less-than-ideal wife. His inability to come to term with this issue disrupted his soul's journey towards individuation.

Anima or animus has been observed in several literary works. Its' presence in works of fictions are in line with Jung's description of archetypes, in which anima or animus is a part of—they are collective ideas shared universally by all human in their unconscious mind, and are often projected into fairytales, myths and artistic representation (Jung 1970: 449). Becker (2002) studied Théophile Gautier's short story, "Le Chevalier double" which portrays the relationship between anima, shadow and individuation through its characters and plot. Oluf as the protagonist represents common individuals with psychological baggage, and in order for him to achieve his goal, he had to battle his evil doppelganger (shadow) that gave him access to his lover (anima). Doppelganger traditionally symbolizes impending doom. In psychoanalytical reading, the double represents

...a primary narcissistic wish to preserve one's own ego. However, when the ego has seemingly progressed beyond that 'primitive' stage of thought, it actually perceives the double as alien and horrific or as a harbinger of one's death. (Peterson 2001: 54)

This double may then be subsumed into the unconscious, appearing in various guises "often as a mirror image of the protagonist, or at other times as a shadowy figure who haunts the tracks of the main character" (Becker 2002: 5). In "Le Chevalier double", after dealing with both his doppelganger or shadow, and anima, he was cured of his curse—this symbolized individuation. Connolly (2002) in his analysis of Nikolai Gogol's short story "Vii" discussed the idea that men who are afraid to acknowledge their anima and rely heavily on their

masculinity often faced deleterious consequences. In fact, a lopsided reliance on either the masculinity or the femininity alone is psychologically unhealthy as demonstrated in a study of William Faulker's short story "A Rose for Emily" (Hsu & Wang 2014). The protagonist of this story is a woman who was driven by her animus that resulted in her descent into madness, thus failing her soul journey.

Similar to previous studies, this research aims to analyze Jam's anima, the protagonist in Tunku Halim's "Strangling the Soul." The methodology of this study is qualitative text analysis with the utilization of the concepts of anima and shadow by Carl Jung.

Conceptual Framework

Carl Jung's concept of the psyche maintains that the human mind consists of the conscious and the unconscious realm, which are further divided into several elements with distinctive roles. The unconscious mind consists of shadow and anima/animus. Shadow is a collection of repressed unwanted thoughts and traits (Jung 1961: 399) and anima/animus, also known as the soul image refers to the personification of the opposite gender traits of the individuals (1961: 391).

The anima/animus deals with the femininity in men and masculinity in woman. Jung called this aspect the human soul and Von Franz explained that it can influence individuals' behavior and the choice of their marriage partner (1964: 180). A man can project his anima onto a woman which resulted in the sense of familiarity towards the woman, recognizing her as the one for him. However, when men are unable to come to term with the anima either through repression or over-identification, they become anima-possessed. Emma Jung explained that anima-possession occurs when excess energy in the unconscious supercharges the anima causing the individuals involved to become possessed by the anima (1957: 6). Anima-possessed men turn into inferior women, characterized by moodiness and uncontrolled disposition (Jung 1982: 295) and have a tendency to produce "waspish, poisonous, effeminate remarks" (Von Franz 1964: 179). Jung further described that the possession is often carried out through the shadow (Jung 1971: 30) because as with any other rejected elements, rejected anima traits are relegated into the shadow.

The shadow refers to the inferior, animalistic personality (Jung 1959: 233-234). They are rejected traits and thoughts repressed into the unconscious. The more the shadow is repressed, the powerful it becomes (Jung 1969: 76). With enough stress, it can flood into the conscious mind, causing havoc on the individuals' psyche.

The assimilation of the soul is crucial for individuation. When in equilibrium with the conscious mind, the anima and shadow elements will facilitate the process of psychological maturation known as individuation whereby the individuated individuals become "separate, indivisible unity or 'whole'" (Jung 1966: 275). Achieving this state requires tremendous mental efforts and the process is akin to a journey whereby individuals are made to face their repressed unconscious elements and integrate them with their conscious mind.

Jam' Journey of the Soul

Jam is introduced to the reader as an individual with questionable mental condition. His introduction in the short story involves an encounter with his doppelganger

strangling a woman he would later recognized as his future wife, Dinah. This episode, along with other seemingly supernatural encounters he would later experience can be interpreted as a byproduct of a troubled psyche whereby his unconscious mind is actively attacking his conscious mind. His outburst can be attributed to his inability to come to term with his soul image—his anima. Jam had an idealistic view of a perfect woman and initially, Dinah appeared to be a perfect projection of his anima. Von Franz mentioned that anima "can be projected so that they appear to the man to be the qualities of some particular woman" (1964: 180). For Jam, Dinah embodied his soul image—a person that complements his personality. This is in agreement with Von Franz's notion that the man who projected his anima onto a woman feels intimate familiarity with the woman and he becomes helplessly and madly in love with her (1964:180). This projection is symbolically portrayed in the story during the initial supernatural vision in the bathroom whereby Jam saw himself strangling Dinah. It can be suggested that the woman he strangled in his vision is a blank canvas woman—it is not any woman in particular. However, when he met Dinah on the next day, he projected her image onto the woman in his vision, thus recognizing Dinah as the woman he strangled. Furthermore, he was drawn to Dinah even though he tried to distance himself from her initially. He recognized the danger of becoming too close to Dinah but was unable to resist her pull because he had projected his soul image on her.

Meanwhile, Dinah slowly opened up her personality towards Jam as their relationship progressed. By the time they were married, Jam knew that Dinah was a smoker and that she did not know how to cook. This does not match up to his ideal of the perfect woman. His discontent was subtle and gradual, slowly causing disturbance of energy in his anima. This disturbance caused Jam to become anima-possessed whereby he began to show characteristics of a hysterical woman. He experienced sudden mood swing causing Dinah to question his health, signaling that it is not normal for Jam to suddenly become gloomy (Tunku Halim 2016: 306). Rejected anima components are repressed into the shadow and as Carl Jung had described, anima-possessed individuals are being possessed through their shadow (1971: 30).

Jam's shadow manifested itself in the form of his doppelganger which has been similarly observed in Gautier's "Le Chevalier double" (Becker 2002). Jam's doppelganger takes on the same characteristics as the protagonist in Gautier's short story whereby they appear as a mirror image of the character. During the night of the incident with the doppelganger, Jam witnessed his own figure murdering a woman. This signifies that Jam had developed a splinter personality as a result of the ejection of his undesirable traits. This 'other' personality is repressed into the unconscious as a shadow because his ego perceived it as a threat. It manifested as the "other" Jam, capable of conducting a murderous act.

During the incident, Jam appeared to be more disturbed by the fact that it was he who did the killing instead of the action of killing itself. This is shown in the excerpt

He could not believe what he had seen. A man had killed a woman. But that was not all. That was not any man, that man was...was...*Ya Allah!*

Jam had seen his own face staring at him! (Tunku Halim 2016: 289)

There are instances in which Jam promptly thought of the murder, only to have his conscious mind brushing it off as inappropriate, as shown when he thought “Dinah, her sparkling voice, her warm intelligent eyes, his hands around her neck...No!” (2016: 296). Moreover, there are instances whereby it appears that Jam thought of murder in a matter-of-fact manner, for example, “*Must keep away, he told himself. The image must be a warning of some kind. I don't want to end up killing her*” (2016: 297). These examples show the way Jam perceives murder; that is, he is capable of doing the act and he might not be too affected if he were to do it. His ego is the only block that had prevented him from doing the act thus far.

His murderous desire was finally realized when his ego was in its most fragile state. His festering shadow ruptured into his conscious mind, directly communicating with him.

It's you not her. You're the one your mind tricking seeing things smelling things not there see a doctor a psychiatrist anybody just get out or you'll do her harm don't you see your mind playing tricks get help help help...

Lower was more to the point, simply repeating the same words over and over like a clock ticking the seconds over.

her kill her kill her kill her kill her kill her kill her kill her kill her (2016: 307-308).

This excerpt shows the battle between Jam's ego and shadow, who had been “upon him all night like worms devouring his brain” (2016: 308) with the shadow finally winning with its clock-like *kill her* playing repeatedly in Jam's mind. His doppelganger, the symbols of impending doom, indeed brought doom not only to Jam's sanity, but also to his family.

Him being anima-possessed is the culmination of his inability to properly assimilate his anima, repressing the unwanted elements into his shadow. As a result, his psychic energy was supercharged, his shadow erupted and he fell into psychosis.

Conclusions

It can be concluded that Jam failed individuation because of his refusal to assimilate his soul. The conflict in his soul stems from the unconscious ideal that a wife should be a “perfect woman.” Him initially projecting his anima onto Dinah shows that he wanted Dinah to become that perfect woman. However, once he realized that Dinah is not this ideal figure, he became anima-possessed and his shadow took control of him. This finding concurs with the characters studied by Connolly (2002), and Hsu and Wang (2014) whereby if the characters lean excessively on either their masculinity or femininity, as well as repressing the opposite traits, they are strangling the journey of their soul towards individuation.

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