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Abandonment and Resilience: The Jungian Orphan Archetype in Adam Johnson's *The Orphan Master's Son*

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Abstract

The Jungian archetype of the orphan is a potent representing of themes of loss, resilience, and self-discovery. According to Carl Jung's idea of archetypes, the orphan negotiates a world that is either indifferent or hostile while seeking affiliation and self-actualization, therefore reflecting both vulnerability and possible change. This paper aims at examining the orphan characters depicted in *The Orphan Master's Son* by Adam Johnson. It tries to explore how orphan characters convey the existential solitude, trauma, and systematic neglect, thereby reflecting more general concerns on displacement, identity, and survival in the contemporary society. It tries to portray how the orphans are depicted as helpless victims of destiny, modern stories usually place them as active agents who question repressive systems, rebuild their fractured identities, and create unusual kinds of kinship.

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It endeavors to present how the orphan archetype is a vital literary device expressing the changing dynamics of selfhood, belonging, and resilience.

Key Words: Orphan archetype, Jungian archetypes, identity, Psychological growth, Resilience, *The Orphan Master's Son*

الهجر والصمود: نموذج اليتيم اليونغي في رواية ابن سيد الأيتام

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كلية التربية للبنات / جامعة تكريت

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المستخلص

يُمثل النموذج الأصلي لليتيم عند يونغ تمثيلاً قوياً لمواضيع الفقدان، والصمود، واكتشاف الذات. ووفقاً لمفهوم كارل يونغ للنماذج الأصلية، يخوض اليتيم عالماً إما لامبالياً أو عدائياً، ساعياً إلى الانتماء وتحقيق الذات، مما يعكس الضعف والتغيير المحتمل. تهدف هذه الورقة إلى دراسة شخصيات الأيتام التي صوّرها آدم جونسون في رواية "ابن سيد الأيتام". وتحاول استكشاف كيفية تعامل هذه الشخصيات مع العزلة الوجودية، والصدمة، والإهمال المنهجي، مما يعكس مخاوف أكثر عمومية حول النزوح، والهوية، والبقاء في المجتمع المعاصر. يُصوّر الأيتام كضحايا عاجزين أمام القدر، وعادةً ما تصورهم القصص الحديثة كفاعلين يُشكّكون في الأنظمة القمعية، ويُعيدون بناء هوياتهم المُشرذمة، ويُنشئون أنواعاً غير مألوفة من القرابة. من منظور التحليل النفسي اليونغي، يستكشف هذه البحث كيفية تعامل هذه الشخصيات مع الصدمة الداخلية، وانطلاق مسارات تحويلية نحو التفرد. يسعى الكتاب إلى توضيح كيف يُعدّ نموذج اليتيم أداة أدبية حيوية تُعبّر عن الديناميكيات المتغيرة للذات والانتماء والمرونة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: نموذج اليتيم، النماذج اليونغية، الهوية، النمو النفسي، المرونة، ابن سيد اليتيم.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Jungian Orphan Archetype in Adam Johnson's *The Orphan Master's Son*

The architect of Jungian psychology, as Carl Jung states, is referred to as analytical psychology. Freud's psychoanalysis is unique from this approach, by emphasizing on the collective unconscious, archetypes, and individuation. In this regard, individualization

refers to the process of human growth that takes place via the integration of many different aspects of the self. These concepts include the collective unconscious, archetypes, individuation, and the therapeutic techniques that are founded on Jung's scientific work.

Additionally, these principles encompass the collective unconscious. There is a potential that the notion of the collective unconscious might be the most distinctive and forward-thinking aspect of Jungian psychology. There is a community layer of the unconscious that is shared by all human beings, according to Jung's conception of the phenomenon. It is positioned beyond the personal unconscious, which is made up of memories and experiences that are unique to an individual. This is located beyond the personal unconscious. The basic pictures and concepts that are referred to as archetypes are those that are found frequently across different cultures and time periods. Because of this, they are the fundamental components of our collective consciousness. Jung held the belief that the collective unconscious was a more fundamental and all-encompassing component of the human psyche (Jung, 1969, p. 42).

On the other hand, Freud was more concerned with the personal unconscious, which was generally filled with memories that were repressed. Freud's focus was on the unconscious inside the individual. Jung held the view that the collective unconscious includes the mental residue that has been retained during the course of human development. He also believed that the collective unconscious is genetic and fundamental. The stories, experiences, and patterns that characterize every culture and cut beyond its borders to bring people together are the components that make up this. Many of the motifs, such as the role of the mother or the route of the hero, are found in stories, fairy tales, and religious traditions that span a wide variety of countries. The supremacy of these concepts was explained by this thesis, which gave a reason for them. Jung asserts that the archetypes that are a component of the collective unconscious are the foundation upon which the symbolic depiction of human experience is built (1969, p.45). Within the collective unconscious, archetypes make up a significant portion of the construct.

Archetypes are notions shared by all individuals, thus it is possible to use archetypes as models or templates in order to get a deeper understanding of the human lived experience. One may discover those individuals in a variety of locations, including things like dreams, mythology, literature, and art, among other places. Archetypes such as the Hero, the Shadow, the Anima and Animus, and the Wise Old Man are among the types of characters that are encountered almost as often as other types of characters. These numbers are symbols of fundamental aspects of the human mind that are present in every individual, regardless of the society from which they originate (Jung, 1959, p.22). The Hero archetype, which represents the individual, serves as an illustration of this journey towards self-discovery and progress. It may be found in a wide range of cultural narratives, stories in which the protagonist goes through difficulty and challenges and ultimately emerges more changed as a result of their experiences. On the other hand, the Shadow archetype is a representation of the darker and more repressed aspects of the self, which a person has to confront in order to achieve a state of wholeness (Jung, 1959, p. 35). Both the Anima and the Animus are symbolic representations of the feminine and

masculine aspects that are present inside a person, regardless of the gender of the individual. It is necessary to introduce these opposing features in order to achieve psychological balance, and they symbolize the need of being introduced.

Archetypes are enormous psychological forces that have the capacity to influence human behavioral patterns and experiences. Archetypes are also known as archetypes. It is possible for individuals to improve their self-awareness and personal growth if they recognize and grasp the impact that these archetypes have on them. Additionally, archetypes play a crucial role in the process of individuation, which in Jungian psychology is regarded to be a fundamental term (Jung, 1959,p. 88).

This study explores the Jungian archetype of the orphan from several perspectives, shedding light on its relevance to modern literature. The study sheds light on literary criticism and psychological theory by investigating the ways in which this archetype appears, is interpreted, and is experienced in contemporary novel. This study gives a thorough investigation of the orphan archetype. Our knowledge of how modern literature uses and reimagines the orphan figure is expanded by this study's identification of recurrent motifs, narrative structures, and symbolic meanings linked with this archetype. Understanding the impact of archetypal patterns on narrative is enhanced and literary works are better appreciated as a result. This study adds to our knowledge of the orphan archetype's reflective and informative power by bringing Jungian psychology theories to bear on modern literature.

The study aims to analyze how the Jungian orphan archetype is reimagined in *The Orphan Master's Son* by Adam Johnson, with a emphasis on themes of abandonment, resilience, psychological trauma, and identity reconstruction in the context of authoritarianism and sociopolitical displacement. To achieve those aims, the objectives are going to :

- 1- To analyze the literary representation of the orphan archetype in *The Orphan Master's Son* through a Jungian psychoanalytic lens.
- 2- To explore how the protagonist's emotional and psychological experiences—such as loss, alienation, and resilience—reflect the inner life of the Jungian orphan.
- 3- To examine the narrative and symbolic functions of the orphan archetype as a metaphor for identity reconstruction, rebellion, and psychological growth.

The study raises many questions:

1. How is the orphan archetype represented in contemporary novel, and what recurring themes and motifs emerge in these representations in *The Orphan Master's Son* by Adam Johnson?
2. In what ways do the psychological and emotional experiences of orphan characters in contemporary literature reflect broader human concerns about identity, belonging, and resilience?
3. How do sociocultural factors, such as race, class, gender, and historical context, influence the portrayal of the orphan archetype in contemporary novel in *The Orphan Master's Son* by Adam Johnson?

The study will analyze *The Orphan Master's Son* by Adam Johnson from various cultural and geographical backgrounds. This novel has been chosen based on their notable representation of the orphan archetype. The selected novel for analysis may be influenced by availability, accessibility, and personal preferences. This could result in a selection bias that may not fully represent the diversity of contemporary literature or the range of interpretations of the orphan archetype. The analysis will be grounded in Jungian psychological theory, specifically focusing on the concept of archetypes and their role in literature. The study will apply Jungian concepts to interpret the portrayal of the orphan archetype and its symbolic meanings. The study will involve a detailed examination of narrative structures, themes, and character development related to the orphan archetype. It will explore how these elements contribute to the overall message and emotional impact of the novel.

The methodology used for this study on the Jungian archetype of the orphan in *The Orphan Master's Son* by Adam Johnson incorporating a multi-faceted approach, integrating literary analysis, psychological theory, and social criticism. This investigation makes use of a qualitative research approach in order to investigate the portrayal of the orphan archetype as well as the relevance of this archetype. This methodology makes it possible to conduct a comprehensive examination of literary works and to use Jungian psychology theory in order to understand the results of the investigation. For the purpose of providing background and providing support for the analysis, scholarly articles, critical essays, and theoretical works on Jungian psychology and literary archetypes will be evaluated.

1.2. Adam Johnson's *The Orphan Master's Son*: Identity Control and Psychological Disintegration

This novel explores themes of identity, loss, and resilience under the weight of an authoritarian state. Central to this narrative is the Jungian archetype of the orphan—a figure symbolizing abandonment, self-reinvention, and the struggle for individuation. The protagonist, Jun Do, experiences forced identity shifts, state control, and profound loss, which align with the psychological journey of the orphan archetype. Through the lens of Jungian psychology, it examines how abandonment and resilience shape Jun Do's path, reflecting both individual transformation and a critique of state-imposed erasure of identity.

Carl Gustav Jung proposed that archetypes are universal symbols residing in the collective unconscious, shaping human experience across cultures. The orphan archetype encapsulates the themes of displacement and self-formation. Orphans, lacking parental guidance, must construct an identity from fragmented experiences. This archetype appears in mythology, literature, and psychological development as a metaphor for individuation—the process of integrating disparate elements of the self into a coherent identity (Jung, 1969, p. 45). The orphan's journey is characterized by suffering but also by resilience. The Jungian orphan is not merely a victim of circumstance; rather, the archetype signifies transformation, as abandonment forces the individual to seek wholeness. This process mirrors the psychological trials of Jung's individuation theory, wherein the self must confront its shadow and integrate suppressed elements to achieve completeness (Jung, 1959, p. 88).

Jun Do's life epitomizes the orphan archetype. Raised in a state orphanage and later repurposed by the North Korean government into various roles—soldier, kidnapper, prisoner, and imposter—his identity is continuously erased and rewritten. His early experiences of abandonment and lack of familial stability force him into a survivalist mindset, shaping his journey toward self-awareness. His upbringing in an institution, rather than a traditional family, severs him from foundational identity markers. The state replaces familial bonds, dictating who he is and who he must become. This external manipulation mirrors Jung's concept of the shadow—the unconscious force that an individual must confront to achieve psychological wholeness (Jung, 1961, p. 173). However, Jun Do's struggle is not just against his inner demons but against a system that actively suppresses individuation.

In Jungian terms, the labyrinth is a recurring symbol of the subconscious mind, representing the internal struggle between authenticity and imposed roles. Jun Do's journey through the novel reflects this motif—his identity is rewritten, and his personal history is erased, much like a labyrinth where each turn distorts reality. The state systematically constructs false narratives, forcing individuals to abandon their true selves in favor of a state-approved existence (Leigh, 2015). The protagonist's forced assumption of Commander Ga's identity exemplifies this erasure. In Jungian psychology, the mirror symbolizes self-reflection and confrontation with the true self. However, when Jun Do looks into reflective surfaces, he sees not himself, but the identity imposed upon him: "He studied his reflection, but it was not his own. The face staring back at him belonged to another man, a man he was meant to become." (Johnson, 2012, p. 45). This moment encapsulates the orphan's crisis—an identity fragmented by external forces, disconnected from a personal narrative. The struggle to reclaim selfhood, despite imposed roles, is central to the Jungian path of individuation.

Jung's concept of the shadow—the repressed and often darker aspects of the psyche—plays a crucial role in Jun Do's development. His experiences of violence, coercion, and moral conflict reveal his shadow self, which he must confront to attain individuation. The state forces him into roles that demand brutality, yet glimpses of his humanity persist. His interactions with Sun Moon, a woman symbolic of an unattainable ideal, reflect his internal conflict between imposed duty and personal longing. The shadow emerges most vividly in moments where Jun Do is both victim and perpetrator. As a kidnapper, he enacts the state's violence but also understands the suffering he inflicts. This duality mirrors Jung's assertion that the shadow must be integrated rather than denied: "He had been many men, worn many faces, spoken many names. But in the end, he knew, there was only one truth—his own." (Johnson, 2012, p. 72). This realization marks a turning point where Jun Do begins to reclaim his narrative, challenging the state's omnipotence over his identity.

The orphan's journey in literature often leads to self-reclamation, and Jun Do's transformation aligns with this pattern. In Jungian terms, individuation is the process of integrating suppressed aspects of the psyche to form a unified self. Though the novel does not offer a conventional triumph, Jun Do's ultimate resistance signifies a form of individuation. He asserts agency in small acts of defiance—choosing not to conform entirely to the roles imposed upon him, seeking moments of authentic connection despite the state's interference. His final assertion of selfhood, even in the face of probable death, represents the orphan's resilience. He embodies Jung's belief that psychological

wholeness is achieved not through conformity but through the painful process of integrating the fragmented self (Jung, 1969, p. 180). Unlike conventional depictions, which often include the resolution of orphanhood by reintegration into a structured family or social order, modern literature delivers explorations of this archetype that are more complicated, ambiguous, and sometimes unresolved. The narrative of the orphan typically overlaps with themes of trauma, institutional injustice, and displacement, which positions the character as a symbol that is both significant to the individual and to the political system (St.Hilaire, 2018). The quest for belonging that the orphan makes in a society that is indifferent or even hostile is a reflection of modern fears around globalization, migration, and identities that have been broken apart. In addition, these tales provide a challenge to the traditional concepts of kinship by demonstrating how alternative communities and chosen families may function as places of healing and empowerment. Through the use of Jungian psychoanalysis in conjunction with trauma studies, this study has shed light on the manner in which orphan protagonists demonstrate the battle for individuation. Individualization refers to the process of uniting fragmented pieces of one's self in order to reach psychological wholeness. In many cases, these narratives function as allegories for contemporary existential conundrums, illuminating the conflict that exists between seclusion and the pursuit of self-actualization. Contemporary orphans redefine survival, agency, and the human ability for reinvention by the tenacity they have shown throughout their lives.

2. CONCLUSION

The Jungian archetype of the orphan is a powerful and profoundly resonant character in modern literature. It symbolizes not just the psychological challenges of individuals but also the larger socio-cultural catastrophes that are occurring in the world. According to the findings of this study, contemporary tales often recast the orphan as a dynamic actor who navigates existential ambiguity, social isolation, and the search for identity. This is in contrast to the traditional portrayal of the orphan as a simple victim of loss. As a trip that exemplifies the common human experience of estrangement and self-discovery, the orphan's journey highlights the inherent need for connection, resilience, and change.

In *The Orphan Master's Son* by Adam Johnson explores the orphan archetype through the harrowing journey of Jun Do, whose identity is continuously erased and rewritten by the oppressive North Korean regime. Stripped of familial ties and subjected to state control, he embodies the existential struggle for authenticity in a world that dictates his fate. Through his shifting roles—prisoner, soldier, spy, and imposter—Jun Do undergoes a painful yet profound transformation, mirroring the Jungian process of individuation. His final assertion of selfhood, despite immense suffering, underscores the resilience of the human spirit against systemic dehumanization. Johnson's novel thus presents the orphan's journey as not merely personal but as a broader reflection on identity, memory, and resistance within a repressive society.

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