

Literature As A Projection Of The Psyche

The collective unconscious, which Carl Jung defines as the “deeper layer of the psyche,” acts as an inborn network of information within our unconsciousness and possesses “contents and modes of behavior that are more or less the same everywhere and in all individuals” (Jung). These contents refer to the motifs or archetypes whose existence prevails in nature, but they only become activated once projected, perceived, and reasoned. However, once the reasoning is convicted, their meanings become subjective to the understanding of the individual’s consciousness. In their projection, the “class of ideas that people at first find strange soon come to be possessed and used as familiar conceptions” (Jung). Applying Jung’s collective unconscious noumena to literature, allows us to see the web through which the archetypes link. As the motifs in the texts overlap, literature becomes a branch of interconnecting works that tell one story. Moreover, this story, being the same as the one that Jung argues, is the story of humankind. If literature serves as a projection of the human psyche, it is also a network that prevails in a deeper layer of humankind’s unconsciousness.

Around the globe, humans have actively decided to distinguish specific works as part of the literary canon. This agreement refers to the works considered of enormous cultural value, making them gradually fall into the deeper layer of the human psyche and prevail as part of the inherited collective unconscious. When the individual looks for knowledge and wisdom, they refer to their reasoning of the world. As Jung argues, seeking knowledge becomes a fulfilling journey when our intellects still lack spiritual contentment. Literature, as part of the liberal arts, has emerged to fulfill that seeking of understanding while enhancing the reality that the individual knows, as “in the end we dig up the wisdom of all ages and peoples, only to find that

everything most dear and precious to us has already been said in the most superb language” (Jung).

Jung presents the ideas of meaning and life as two different archetypes that sometimes link. He defines the archetype of life as “a surrender of our own powers, not artificially willed but forced upon us by nature” (Jung). The archetype of meaning is subjective to “the forms we use for assigning meaning,” which are “historical categories that reach back into the mists of time” (Jung). He argues that while the archetype of life is imposed by nature, the archetype of meaning is challenged by the side from which we may approach the subject as “we find ourselves confronted with the history of language, with images and motifs that lead straight back to the primitive wonder-world” (Jung). These archetypes can be recognized in all literature throughout time as “literature grows out of other literature” (Foster 24).

When we consume stories in any form, there are specific dynamics, plots, and desires that we can recognize and understand unconsciously. One can easily recognize the tragic spirit of William Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* in songs, movies, books, sayings, or even in real life. Jane Austen’s strong female characters as Elizabeth Bennet from *Pride and Prejudice*, and the idea of one’s pride being a limitation to make a proper judgment, manifested in the same novel, are key messages that we hear echoes of in other works and in our daily life affairs. The extraordinary desire to change one’s reality portrayed by Gatsby in F. Scott Fitzgerald’s most famous novel, *The Great Gatsby*, is a shared sentiment that all individuals have experienced at least once in their lives. The collective unconscious recognizes these stories and their themes while nurturing and influencing other works as they become literary archetypes.

In *Romeo and Juliet*, Shakespeare creates a conflict between families and loyalties that leave the young lovers to make difficult choices. Shakespeare appeals to the archetype of life by

presenting echoes of the 8th-century narrative poem *Metamorphoses* by Ovid. In this extensive Roman poem, the reader sees the conflict of the families opposing the union of the lovers Pyramus and Thisbe. Moreover, their downfall as their ill-fated end presents Pyramus, who, believing that a lioness had devoured Thisbe, stabs himself; Thisbe sees what happened and kills herself. Moreover, *Metamorphoses* echoes one of the first stories to be written down, the Indian epic *Mahabharata*. Written in the 9th-century BC, the epic has the themes of family divisions, the force of fate, the eternal nature of reality, and moral discussion between right and wrong.

Shakespeare's innovation and uniqueness in his adaptation of this story into live action correlates with the archetype of meaning as he gives the youths a voice from the prologue of the play "A pair of star-crossed lovers take their life, / Whose misadventured piteous overthrows / Doth with their death bury their parents' strife" (Shakespeare 45). In giving Romeo and Juliet cosmic importance by titling them "star-crossed lovers," Shakespeare makes the misdoing of humans worthy of tragedy, as until his time, tragedy was only accustomed to heroes and gods. Today we come to acknowledge Romeo and Juliet as the tragic lovers stereotype.

In *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen discusses the personal struggle to judge correctly when the ego's limitations affect the perception. As Austen gives life to the society of the Regency period that focuses on marriage, fashion, witty conversation, and manners, she showcases the flaws of being human as the archetype of life. In Austen's work, we can see the philosophy of personal development as the force that drives the novels. Austen presents the reality of her society as people in England began talking about women's rights. The emphasis in the beliefs, manners, and structures of social classes fostered by the rising genre in Romanticism, the novel of manners, dominated by women, as well as the desire of understanding humankind promoted by the Enlightenment Age, were central themes for Austen's works. Moreover, the discussion of

character development goes back to the first ever written work *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, a Mesopotamian epic that explores the themes of human nature, morality, and essentially the personal development from tyrant to hero. A version of the latter can be observed in both Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy as they develop their characters by learning how mistaken they were in their judgments of each other. Through them, Austen shows how little we know about each other, and even questions how little we know about ourselves as Elizabeth observes after reading Mr. Darcy's final letter, "But vanity, not love, has been my folly. (...) Till this moment, I never knew myself" (Austen 205).

In a time when there were increasing discussions about rights and responsibilities, *Pride and Prejudice* deconstructs our idea of love, referring to the archetype of meaning. From the opening line, Austen echoes this conversation and applies it to the understanding of marriage as she writes, "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife" (Austen 3). Nevertheless, Austen gives a hint of the mistakenness of such assumption in the following line, "However little known the feelings or views of such a man may be on his first entering a neighbourhood, this truth is so well fixed in the minds of the surrounding families, that he is considered the rightful property of some one or other of their daughters" (Austen 3). Throughout the novel, Austen deconstructs our idea of love. She presents it as we know it and slowly rips it apart only to give us a new meaning, as she shows that improving and educating oneself and each other is what love should be instead of the patriarchal ideas enforced by society.

In *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald embodies the "universal sentiment of youth: the belief that one can become anything" (Ward viii). In Gatsby's ambition to escape reality, Fitzgerald uses the archetype of life, which is strongly recognized by the readers as "The American

Dream.” However, this is not the first time that a story that deals with the doom of oneself has been recorded. Going back in time, one realizes that Gatsby’s story correlates with the novels of the picaresque genre originated in Spain in 1554. Moreover, Gatsby’s ultimate undoing connects with the “atmosphere of the inevitable” that Sophocles presented in his story *Oedipus The King* in 429 BC.

While *The Great Gatsby* takes the reader into the fantasy of the idealized roaring twenties, it shows the hollowness of the materiality that the people of the era worshiped. The reader is able to recognize Fitzgerald’s disheartened tone and to see their melancholy reflected in Gatsby’s failed dream through the archetype of meaning. One can see themselves in Gatsby’s earnestness, ambition, and desperation. Although the readers may associate Gatsby’s dream and emotions to their youth, Gatsby remains in that state of illusion and never grows out of it. That allows the reader to connect on a deeper level with the story, as they would be able to find a refuge in Gatsby in their younger days and a comfort in the melancholy of those years when they are older. Furthermore, as a voice of The Lost Generation, Fitzgerald embodied the wandering and disoriented spirit of The Great War survivors’ generation through Gatsby’s ambition. The reader sees this from the beginning of the novel when Nick remembers his friend, “No—Gatsby turned out alright at the end; it is what preyed on Gatsby, what foul dust floated in the wake of his dreams that temporarily closed out my interest in the abortive sorrows and short-winded elations of men” (Fitzgerald 2).

According to Jung, while the archetype is “essentially an unconscious content that is altered by becoming conscious,” the collective unconscious is the group of all archetypes that “rests upon a deeper layer [of the psyche], which does not derive from personal experience and is not a personal acquisition but is inborn” (Jung). Jung calls this deeper layer “collective” because

he argues that this part of the unconscious is “not individual but universal” since it has contents that are “more or less the same everywhere and in all individuals” (Jung). Since Jung explains that “a well-known expression of the archetype is myth,” it can be understood that the discussed world-acclaimed works live in that deeper layer of the psyche called the collective unconscious.

Although these stories follow a unique plot, in their essence, there are shared forces and desires that unconsciously activate our identification with the narratives. One of these themes is The Self. While living in our unconscious, Romeo, Juliet, Elizabeth, Mr. Darcy, Gatsby, and Nick embody the complexity of breathing and living individuals. Regardless of how we may interpret them and empathize with them, which will be a matter of the consciousness, we can recognize them as characters figuring out their plots and acting out of the only thing they can rely on, human instinct. Over the course of Shakespeare's play, one sees a young romantic Romeo and a naïve Juliet mature and become two young adults capable of taking their lives for their lover. In Austen's novel, both Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy are blinded by their pride and prejudices of the other, which makes the individual's limited perception the main theme of the story. In *The Great Gatsby*, we see Gatsby's dream ultimately become his downfall as he “paid a high price for living too long with a single dream” (Fitzgerald 161).

Another theme is Connection, which can be seen in the characters' interactions. This theme can be subdivided into love, friendship, hate, and many other types of connection, but some kind of relationship is always present in the development of these characters. The essence of *Romeo and Juliet* is the connection of the young lovers and the rivalry of the families. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy need each other to develop their characters and all the other secondary characters connected to them who are part of their wrong judgment of each other. In *The Great Gatsby* is the intense connection between the characters that moves the

story. James Gatz's obsession with both Daisy and society makes him become Gatsby, which leads us to the third theme: Reinvention.

In all these stories, the authors present a thesis and antithesis, which provokes a conscious reaction to the narratives, but is the possibility of changing what we unconsciously recognize as the theme of Reinvention in the first place. These themes of the collective unconscious are acquired from inborn knowledge and not personal experience. In *Romeo and Juliet*, Shakespeare presents the human experience of making mistakes out of love, but uses these as the tool to return harmony to Verona as stated by the Chorus in the prologue of the play, "The fearful passage of their death-marked love / And the continuance of their parents' rage, / Which, but their children's end, naught could remove" (Shakespeare 45). In *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen presents the radical idea that happiness should be privileged over security. We see this in Elizabeth's nature when she declines Mr. Darcy's marriage proposal; she answers him, "In such cases as this, it is, I believe, the established mode to express a sense of obligation for the sentiments avowed, however unequally they may be returned. (...) But I cannot" (Austen 187). Having a woman of poor social status like Elizabeth reject a master of a great state like Mr. Darcy merely because of her poor opinion of his character, Austen sets love as an independent force above society and, therefore, gives a new meaning to marriage. This same use of reinventing reality is present in *The Great Gatsby* as Fitzgerald takes the so precious American dream that his nation prides itself on and destroys it. Through Gatsby's parties, he shows the hollowed soul of the aristocracy, as Nick observes, "Sometimes they came and went without having met Gatsby at all, came for the party with a simplicity of heart that was its own ticket of admission" (Fitzgerald 41). Fitzgerald achieves a social critique that questions the desires and ambitions of a whole nation, or even of the social order of the whole world.

Narratives have come a long way. From creating language to enable communication, oral storytelling to convey lessons and beliefs, cave paintings for the preservation of knowledge, writing for the trade of information, and ultimately the birth of literature to fulfill the seeking of understanding. Stories have influenced, portrayed, and created a comfortable, sometimes uncomfortable, place to discuss our nature as beings. Stories are always subject to our interpretations of them, and by this, they have a life of their own. However, in the core of their existence, where no readers' consciousness has perceived them, their universal messages live. To see their soul is almost impossible because we detect it with our unconscious, but as we look back on history, we realize that literature grows out of literature. Stories speak to us because we relate to them. And world-acclaimed works such as William Shakespeare's *Romeo & Juliet*, Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, and F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* prevail through the centuries because they embody the shared human sentiment of being alive.

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