

Rejecting the Shadow: The Psychological Conflict of the Complex
Persona in Don Paterson's *The Ferryman's Arms*

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Abstract:

The complexity of the human psyche has been the focus of literature and psychology for many decades. The complicated situation modern man faces is a direct consequence of the constant pressure imposed by societal standards. People might feel obligated to present a perfect image of themselves while they brutally suppress their feelings and desires. These scenes could cause a severe conflict between the polished persona the individual presents and the unconscious aspect of the psyche, usually known as the shadow. Accordingly, this paper examines how the complex persona in Paterson's poem *The Ferryman's Arms* confronts the shadow. It illustrates the disastrous repercussions of denying the shadow, which leaves the modern man in a constant state of anxiety and apprehension. Furthermore, the current paper adopts Jungian psychology, specifically focusing on the persona and the shadow, to highlight the reality of being in a state of rejection, where people frequently find themselves trapped in a vicious circle of conflicts and agony.

Keywords: Complexes, complex persona ,Don Paterson,, shadow, *The Ferryman's Arms*

1. Introduction

Investigating the complex persona is becoming increasingly important in contemporary times in view of the challenges that individuals face in a rapidly changing society. Within this context, it seems that the conflict between the persona and the shadow is getting worse, which makes the comprehension of this dynamic more relevant than ever before. The social environments are considered a platform that is accessible to all, where people are able to present a polished image of themselves, promoting the perjured nature of their perfect persona. Whereas the shadow remains concealed, accumulating and waiting for the perfect moment to pounce and destroy everything. This makes the modern man suffer terribly from enormous amounts of inner conflict, gaining vast fields of extensive research and study.

The duty of the author often requires enormous effort to seek solutions and address complicated issues faced by the modern man (Muhammed, 2014, p. 21). Accordingly, Don Paterson expertly tackles the complexities of the human condition, revealing the harsh truths surrounding modern individuals. Paterson is a prominent Scottish poet, who was born in Dundee in 1963. He is the only poet who won the T.S. Eliot Prize twice. Besides, his work has received other accolades including the Whitbread work Prize, the Geoffrey Faber Memorial Prize, the Costa Poetry Award, and three Forward Prizes (Doyle, 2024). Paterson's first collection entitled *Nil Nil* (1993) is most frequently asked deep questions regarding the nature of human existence. In *Nil Nil*, Paterson takes readers to an expedition to the human psyche through contemplation that exposes clearly the interaction between the persona and the shadow. Through the persona, the speakers in Paterson's poetry express their feelings and challenges that they faced as they tried to understand the world that surrounded them. At the same time, the shadow manifests the doubts and the negative emotions that often restrict the individuals. These dynamics make the readers ponder the way in which they deal with uncertainty and the gloomy aspects of their unconscious. Obviously, these poems include inner dialogues showing how the persona and the shadow engage and react. Moreover, these dialogues are developing rapidly, becoming either a source of strengths or weaknesses.

It should be stressed that the individuation is an important step towards reconciling the persona and the shadow. In Jungian psychology, the individuation process means transforming from a fragmented component to a unique whole (Jeffrey, 2019). Notably, the result of the confrontation could differ from one person to another. For some individuals, the confrontation process might succeed. While for others, it might fail, leaving the individuals living in perpetual circles of fear and agony. Consequently, this research focuses on how the speaker in Paterson's poem "The Ferryman's Arms" would face the results of facing his shadow and the negative consequences of rejecting it. I reached out to James Hollis, a modern Jungian analyst and author, through email to discuss the complex relationship that exists between the persona and the shadow. He states that the complexity of the human psyche reflects the inner struggle that arises between the different aspects of the psyche. In this context, the complex persona could be interpreted through the lens of the complex (Naser, 2024).

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 The Complex Theory

Jung adopted the term complex psychology to establish his theories. Though Jung's preferences, the term of complex psychology is scarcely employed for describing his thoughts. The most often used umbrella term for Jungian theory and application is analytical psychology. Conversely, complex psychology offers a psychological viewpoint in which the complex is seen as the basic framework of the psyche, essential for grasp of most internal human activities (Harkey, 2022). Importantly, Jung termed his field as complex psychology right after his separation with Freud in 1912 until other concepts, such as archetypes, were added (Naser, 2024).

2.2 Archetypes and Their Psychological Functions

Jungian archetypes mean the universal images and patterns that heavily influence ones conduct and personality traits (Copley, 2024). Among numerous archetypes Jung developed were the mother, God, the child, power, death, and the wise old man. Some archetypes affect the psyche more broadly than others do. The most common archetypes include the persona, the anima, the animus, and the shadow (Schultz & Schultz, 2009, p. 110). It should be noted that the archetypes appear on two leaves, the personal level through the complex and the collective level through the traits of whole societies (Luton, 2011). Accordingly, the current paper focuses on the persona level, particularly emphasizing the tension between persona and the shadow to tackle the dilemma of the complex persona through this lens.

According to Jung (2014), the complex is a “feeling-toned complex”, which is loaded with emotions and thoughts. It contradicts the individual's usual approach in life, as it vigorously controls their behavior and choices at any moment. The complexes have full autonomy, which means while the individuals suppress their complexes with tremendous effort, they cannot easily be buried away. Rather, the complexes likely reappeared to the surface with full brutality whenever the opportunity arose (96).

As stated by Schultz and Schultz (2009), Jung's theory of personality could provide a clear analysis of the complex persona. The persona is the word used to describe a mask an actor wears to portray numerous roles or personalities to the audience. In Jungian psychology, the persona archetype functions as a public image that the individuals use to represent themselves as different from their true nature. It includes a range of social aspirations and ideals that they espoused and expressed publicly. It should be noted that the persona is not merely a mask that the people wear; it is a kind of a stimulating dialogue between societal expectations and their needs. However, the over-reliance on the persona could lead to ignoring the other aspects of the psyche. On the other hand, the shadow represents the hidden aspect of the psyche, which includes fears, doubts, and shortcomings. The shadow represents the rebel force against the persona, as it expresses the aspect that does not align with the perfect image that the modern man seeks to present (p.110-112).

Consequently, the complexes arise through the complicated relationship between the persona and the shadow. They are considered the psychological burden that the individuals carry, which frequently control their emotional responses and actions. When the polished persona faces a challenge or experiences social pressures, these complexes stirring under the surface. Accordingly, applying Jungian psychology on Paterson's poetry would explore the psychological conflicts of human existence. Moreover, it enables readers to gain profound visions regarding the nature of the complex persona, which result from the sharp contrast between adhering to societal standards and the authentic self-expression.

3. The Psychological Conflict of the Complex Persona in The Ferryman's Arms

In “The Ferryman's Arms”, the opening poem of Paterson's first collection, *Nil Nil*, the readers acknowledge a thorough exploration of the paradox, which operates as a vital mechanism to understand the interaction between the daily experiences and the profound reality. Wilkinson states that the poem emphasizes the importance of events and daily details, referring to the fact that it has the ability to enhance the perceptual shifts that could occur after recognizing these concerns. Furthermore, these daily experiences could be usual, but upon closer examinations, they expose layers of deep meaning that transcend their external appearance. Wilkinson assures that in *Nil Nil*, Paterson maintains a firm commitment to the established daily life pattern. Accordingly, Paterson's “The Ferryman's Arms” states that after the speaker ponders his situation, he is ready now to daily life, with clear acknowledgement of his condition (Wilkinson, 2021, p.16).

Wilkinson claims that “The Ferryman's Arms” is a thought-provoking analysis of the psychological pain that modern individuals often encounter in their quest towards alignment with society. Paterson employs the estrangement technique regarding the ordinary scenes of daily life, which creates feeling disjointed and disconnected from the surroundings. This pushes individuals to reconsider their perspectives and their ordinary comprehensions about the world. Through presenting the familiar scenarios in a confusing light, Paterson promotes readers to a deeper interrogation of the previous perceptions that passed and remained unrealized (p.17-16). Consequently, the poem takes place in an ordinary setting. However, the billiard game and the deserted bar go beyond their apparent relevance. They reflect profound issues such as the psychological and the existential crises of the modern man; therefore, the inner dilemma of the speaker and the tension between the persona- shadow tensions become tangible:

About to sit down with my half-pint of Guinness
I was magnetized by a remote phosphorescence
and drawn, like a moth, to the darkened back room
where a pool-table hummed to itself in the corner.

With ten minutes to kill and the whole place deserted. (Nil, p. 1)

Clearly, the poem catches the complexity of life through vivid images and the intricate symbolism. Initially, the speaker's reflection on sitting with his “half-pint of Guinness,” indicates seeking for belonging and consolation. It symbolizes the modern man's effort to find comfort amidst the chaos of urban life. He was allured through a “remote phosphorescence” just like a moth into a dimmed deserted

bar. That signals a desire to live distant from the expectations and demands of modern society. Then, the speaker takes part in a pool game, which one could consider as a microcosm of more significant life challenges. Thus, his engagement in the game mirrors his latent dread and fear. The speaker's acknowledgement of his terrible circumstance grows increasingly obvious when he states, "With ten minutes to kill." These allusions raise great consciousness of the kind of death that the speaker suffers. It is important to note that the concept of death is skillfully employed not as a literal end, but as a psychological metaphor reflecting the speaker's inner conflict and the price of following society's expectations. Within this domain, the idea of dying appears as an analogy for the psychological death that the speaker faces in exchange for his acceptance of a new life, leaving behind his inner conflicts. In an email correspondence with Dr. Hollis, I discussed the idea of the psychological death and its effects. He observed that the poem's meaning is quite ambiguous, permitting various interpretations, and one acceptable interpretation is the one I have presented. He then claimed that dealing with psychological death is more difficult than managing other forms of death (Naser, 2025). As the events of the poem move forward, the speaker's persona starts to break apart, exposing the complexity natural of his existence:

When I set down the cue-ball inside the parched D
it clacked on the slate; the nap was so threadbare
I could screw back the globe, given somewhere to stand.
as physics itself becomes something negotiable. (Nil, p.1)

When the speaker puts the ball into its proper place, this victory seems shallow, hiding streams of inner conflicts and anxiety. Evidently, this success becomes a symbol of triumphs that the society glorifies. Nevertheless, the victory comes with its cost, which is abandoning the real Self. It must be emphasized that civilized society prevents individuals from connecting with their genuine nature, making their psyche sick and distorted (Sulaiman, 2015, p. 656). As a result, the detrimental psychological effects might disturb the individual's emotional and behavioral performance (Naseef, 2020, p. 37). The constant pursuit for acceptance in the modern world often leads individuals to replace their psychological stability with the shell of success. Although the speaker plays the role of winner superficially, he struggles internally with agonizing feelings of isolation and discontent. It also be emphasized that the images of the parched D and the threadbare nap operate as metaphors for the fatigue of modern life and slippery toward an inevitable disaster that accompanies the passage of time. Additionally, the speaker's desire to return the globe to its natural state and make physics itself a matter

open for discussion and adjustment reflects his desire to control his situation. Nonetheless, his aspirations are ultimately unsuccessful due to societal norms, which resulted in a sense of helplessness. At that moment, the speaker portrays the fleeting nature of accomplishments as “a rash of small miracles,” often overwhelmed by uncertainty and loss of interest following fulfilled great goals.

The boat chugged up to the little stone jetty
without breaking the skin of the water, stretching,
as black as my stout, from somewhere unspeakable
to here, where the foaming lip mussitates endlessly,
trying, with a nutter’s persistence, to read
and re-read the shoreline. I got aboard early,
remembering the ferry would leave on the hour
even for only my losing opponent;
but I left him there, stuck in his tent of light, sullenly
knocking the balls in, for practice, for next time. (Nil, p.1)

The arrival of the ferry provides a heavy symbolism for death. The speaker's decision to board the figurative ferry indicates his departure from authenticity. It means that he leaves and ignores the reality of his existence, moving into a world that is controlled by societal standards and expectations. When the speaker starts playing the game at the beginning of the poem, he decides to put “a coin in the tongue,” an obvious allusion to Charon. In Greek mythology, Charon is the ferryman who transports the deceased's souls across the river of Hades to the judgement. The Greeks put a coin in the mouth of the corpse because they thought they required it in order to repay Charon for his services (Cartwright, 2021). Within this context, the setting reflects the speaker's profound understanding of inevitable death. In a modern society that is full of violence and cruelty, people frequently live in a condition of survival (Hussein, 2023, p. 35). Moreover, the societal beliefs and norms have significantly influenced the way modern individuals create their personas (Ibraheem & Fejer, 2023, p. 153). In such an environment, the interaction between societal norms and individuals’ expressions often creates a complicated scene where the real desires are often neglected. Therefore, the idea of psychological death appears here as a crucial concept in understanding the consequences of this dynamic. Unlike natural death, psychological death refers to the gradual erosion of the spirit, because of adhering to societal norms at the expense of the individual's aspirations.

Prominently, the description of the water “as black as my stout” evokes the depth of the unconscious, representing the parts of the psyche that remain unresolved. The darkest aspects of the psyche indicate the speaker’s shadow, which he refers to as his “losing opponent”. The speaker is not able to name the place that he goes to, which indicates the enigmatic nature for what often lies beneath. Furthermore, the “foaming lip mussitates endlessly/ trying, with a nutter’s persistence, to read/ and re-read the shoreline” (Nil, p.1), point to the speaker's inner struggle to understand his current situation. Significantly, many individuals face enormous difficulty to cope with overwhelming experiences or situations over which they have no control, which could ultimately lead to fears that are accompanied by a sense of despair and misery (Japer, 2020, p. 3). As a consequence, the speaker decides to leave his “losing opponent” behind, ignoring the aspects of the psyche that demand recognition. The speaker's opponent remains “stuck in his tent of light”, indicating his refusal to his shadow, whereas the tent of light represents the polished persona that conceals the shadow. Therefore, the symbolism of the ferry as a transition to psychological death operates in amplifying that conflict. While the speaker moves physically towards the ferry, he walks symbolically towards a hollow existence that lacks genuineness.

It needs to be underlined that examining the paradox and contradiction in Paterson's poem reveals a great psychological involvement over the fundamental challenge that modern individuals seek to comprehend. Therefore, the speaker's abandonment of his “losing opponent” behind works as an irony that readers should be made to stop and look for the real loser. Whereas the speaker sees his opponent as a loser, the fact is that the speaker himself is the defeated. The speaker's refusal to accept his shadow makes him surrender to life that is empty from growth and development. Besides, that the existential idea of as he is trapped in a vicious cycle of stress, is more stressed when the speaker hits “the balls in, for practice, for next time”. This showcases the speaker continuity in living the game of life, ignoring the process of confronting the sinister aspects of the psyche. It also raises questions about the future of modern society, as many individuals face similar conflicts to harmonize between their perfect persona and their shadow.

According to Wilkinson (2021), the emphasis that Paterson's poetry destabilizes the idea of the unified sense of self becomes clearer when readers consider the philosophical context that is provided by W. B. Yeats. Yeats says that individuals make their quarrel with others as rhetoric and their fights with themselves as poetry. This indicates that the individuals' battles with their reality and themselves could produce poetic dialogue that reflects deeper facts about our existence. For instance, the speakers in Paterson's poetry could ponder their feelings and thoughts, leading them to realize that their persona is not coherent. Rather, it is multifaceted and complex (16). In *Toy Fights*, Paterson (2023) stresses the importance of developing a lucid sense of self in such a chaotic world. He says that it is quite distressing to witness the self's collapse and to comprehend that there is no longer a central core to cling to. This lack of a "center" promotes a sense of alienation from the circumstance itself. Thus, this shows how occurrences or profound existential crises could cause a disconnection from one's genuine essence. Therefore, it creates a scenario whereby individuals feel only observers of their suffering (185). In this vein, the speaker in "The Ferryman's Arms" has a fragmented persona that ultimately leads to construct a complex persona. The poem operates as a touching exploration of the dreadful consequences of ignoring the shadow, culminating in a profound feeling of separation from the genuine Self.

It is important to remember that one's sense of self, or what refer to as the persona, might be significantly influenced by the events that are taking place in the individuals' immediate environment. Hence, the sense of self is quite different from the Self (Hollis). In her article entitled "Intro to Jung: What is the Self," Amanda Butler (2020) illustrates this diverse further by stating that the Self with the capital S indicates the whole system of the conscious and unconscious operations of the human psyche. She adds that Jung regards this form of energy represented in the individuals' capacity to change, develop and grow. Whereas, the sense of self represents the persona itself, which means the public image that one introduces to the world.

Importantly, the individuation process is considered as a vital means to release the Self from the terrible layers of the persona and the powerful effect of the shadow (Jung, 1992, p. 240).). It could be seen as a perfect path in which the individual walks through in order to reach the authentic Self and solve the dilemma of their complex persona. Moreover, this mission requires enormous courage to comprehend and face the dark dimensions of the psyche, the merit that the speaker in Paterson's "The Ferryman's Arms" fails to have. The gloomy setting suggests an emptiness that is in contrast to the

speaker's shiny persona is surrounded by sentiments that are incredibly bothersome and frustrating.

Notably, the speaker's difficulties coping with his shadow are testified to by the poem's imagery. He embodies a complex persona that intricately weaves together the rational aspect and the unconscious turmoil, which makes the task of investigating the psychological conflict the central theme. The speaker in the poem is obviously in a fatal conflict between the persona and the shadow, bringing his complexes that are stored in the shadow side to the surface. In “Mini-personalities: Why Carl Jung believed your “complexes” lead their own inner lives,” Stephen Johnson (2023) asserts that the concept of the complexes basically mean a range of feelings, thoughts, and memories that have a shared emotional experience. It develops as a knot in the psyche, frequently eludes awareness, and functions in the sphere of consciousness as an alien entity. The state in which drastically affects the individuals’ actions and behavior. Importantly, the effect, intensity, and weight of the devastating experience are typically determined by a tragic incident (Japer, 2022, p.117).

As states before, these complexes are kept hidden in the shadows since they allow people to store feelings that they usually ignore such as concerns, uncertainties, and unmet needs. Whenever they go through a perplexing experience similar in its severity to the one before, the complex manifests itself instantly, bringing back the dormant pain and suffering from deep within. Brilliantly, Paterson's poetry highlights an awareness that these psychological complexes are deeply rooted in the psyche. Despite the social enlightenment and development, there is still unwillingness to investigate and deal with the darkest aspects of the human psyche. Thus, the speaker in Paterson's poem presents himself as being deeply engaged in a conflict between the persona and the shadow, an inner battle that is sparked by the alienation and the melancholy of the modern world.

4. Conclusion

The modern individuals live in a complicated world that is full of inner struggles and a psychological fragmentation. With increasing the psychological burdens that result from sustaining the public image, many questions stand out more clearly about how that pressure could affect the individual's psyche. This status poses a major psychological challenge that requires profound contemplation about the nature of the opposing aspects of the human psyche, practically the persona and the shadow. Thus, the importance of literature genres, including poetry, comes to genuinely reflect these concerns, as it provides a space to express this inner tension. Poetry continues to be regarded as an efficient means for exploring conflicts, where it has made a great contribution to the development of cultural consciousness (Naser, 2018, p. 146). Consequently, Paterson's "The Ferryman's Arms" centers on a close study of the conflict between the daily experiences and the complexities beyond the mere depiction of the divisions of many cases of life. As an extrapolation of reality, the poem offers a thorough investigation of the dilemma that individuals face in modern society. Besides, it underscores the negative repercussions associated with ignoring the shadow, potentially resulting in a psychological death. In the relevant context, utilizing Jungian psychology on Paterson's poems offers an insightful means to grasp the foundations of the psychological struggles contemporary man experiences. It underlines that neglecting the shadow and the inner conflict could have serious effects on the psychological and emotional levels, hence absorbing the people in an endless loop that involves pain and agony.

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رفض الظل: الصراع النفسي للشخصية المعقدة في قصيدة "سلاح العَبَّار" لدون باترسون

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المستخلص

لقد كانت تعقيدات النفس البشرية محور اهتمام مجالات الأدب وعلم النفس لعقود عدة. إن الوضع المعقد الذي يعيشه الإنسان الحديث ناجم بشكل مباشر عن الضغوط المستمرة التي تفرضها عليه المعايير الاجتماعية. إن تقديم الناس صورة مثالية عن أنفسهم قد يشعروهم بالضغط، بينما يكبحون بوحشية مشاعرهم ورغباتهم. قد تؤدي مثل هذه الحالات إلى تناقض حاد بين القناع البراق الذي يظهره الناس للعالم والجزء اللاوعي من ذواتهم، الذي يُعرف عادةً بالظل. بناء على ما سبق ذكره، فإن هذه الورقة البحثية تتناول كيفية مواجهة الشخصية المعقدة لظلالها في قصيدة باترسون بعنوان "سلاح العَبَّار". كما تبرز تلك الورقة الآثار الوخيمة الناجمة عن إنكار الظل، الذي يوقع الإنسان الحديث في حالة دائمة من القلق والاضطراب. وفوق ذلك، تتناول هذه الورقة علم النفس اليونغي، مع التركيز بشكل خاص على مفهوم "القناع" و "الظل" من أجل تسليط الضوء على واقع حالات الرفض التي يجد فيها الناس أنفسهم عالقين فيها، مما يفضي بهم إلى دائرة مفرغة من الصراعات وآلام.

الكلمات المفتاحية: العقد، دون باترسون، الشخصية المعقدة، الظل، سلاح العَبَّار