A Jungian View of J. R. R. Tolkien's The Lord of The Rings
J. R. R. Tolkien'in Yüzüklerin Efendisi'ne Jung Açısından Bir Bakış

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Abstract: A literary hermeneutic model based on the theories of Carl Gustav Jung, called archetypal interpretation or Jungian interpretation, has steadily been present on the literary scene since the 1950's and, in the second half of the 20th century, rivalled even the more prominent hermeneutic models. Even though some of Jung's ideas are now considered outdated or have been met with fierce criticism by the function of a literary work -the function is seen as mainly compensatory- whereas the meaning of a text is sculpted by the cultural and psychological myths. A prime example of a literary work abounding in archetypal content is the mythological creation of J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*. We have written extensively about the actualizations of specific archetypes in the trilogy, so for this essay, we are going to give a more general look at the trilogy through the prism of Jung's ideas on individuation and give a novel idea as to how the trilogy can be interpreted within the Jungian model of interpretation, detailing specifically Jung's concept of quaternity and its importance in Jungian theory.

Structured Abstract: Each work of literature can be approached from different perspectives and some literary works are more suitable for one kind of analysis, whereas others need a different hermeneutic method. Literary works have been analysed or criticized for centuries and different methods have been developed by critics. Some of the most popular models of interpretation, or hermeneutic methods include: cultural criticism, feminist criticism, psychoanalytic criticism, Marxist criticism, New Criticism (also known as formalism or structuralism), New Historicism, post-structuralism, and reader-response criticism, with new methods being introduced in recent decades as well - author intention, cognitive scientific, queer, to name but a few. Each of these types of criticism has its own methodology and approach; some of them focus their attention on the content and form of the literary work, some on the author, while others on the reader and the reader's experience of the literary work.

What distinguishes our hermeneutic model, known as archetypal criticism or Jungian interpretation, is the fact that the founder, renowned psychiatrist Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961), never devised a system or any sort of systematic methodology in approaching literary works, or works of art in general. In some of his writings, he does analyze different works of art as well as literary works, but he does so to exemplify his ideas on the human psyche, mainly the collective unconscious and the archetypes. In his theory, he kept revising the definition and view of the archetype through the years, and we share most of his followers' belief that no single,

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precise definition of archetypes can be made – it was of utmost importance, therefore, to him to show us examples of archetypal content and, apart from dreams, there is no better source than art (literature included).

Jung emphasized the importance of the distinction between archetype and archetypal image. Whereas archetypes are functional organizational principles of meaning transmitted through biological inheritance, archetypal images are the actual representations of the archetype, their ‘visible’ form, that takes on the coloring of the given historical moment. In other words, archetypes are unfathomable and all we are able to see or analyze, are archetypal images.

When it came to literature and works of art in general, Jung, in his essay “Psychology and Literature” made the distinction between the psychological and visionary mode. The works of the psychological type stem from the known, collective consciousness, whereas the visionary ones draw from the collective unconscious. Psychological art and literature satisfy the conventional aesthetic categories and the work is its own psychologist, its own-analyst. The visionary art, on the other hand, Jung says, is sublime, arising from timeless depths – it is glamorous, demonic and grotesque and it has the capability to burst asunder our human standards of values and aesthetic form. It is this type of art that abounds in archetypal content.

There is rarely a literary work that is more suitable for Jungian analysis than J.R.R. Tolkien’s epic fantasy trilogy, *The Lord of the Rings*. Yet, it is quite astounding how the number of such analyses amounts to barely a few. The trilogy is not just a sublime example of mythopoeia in which Tolkien created an entire mythology spanning over four ages, but an example of glossopoeia, in which he created multiple languages – some more developed than others, but two (Sindarin and Quenya) are fully developed linguistic systems with their own pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary.

The trilogy not only reflects multiple actualizations of specific archetypes – the Shadow, the Anima, the Self, but one can find examples of the other parts of Jungian theory, such as the theory of psychological types as well as his central notion of individuation. It is, therefore, only logical that one should ask the obvious question of whether Tolkien was at all familiar with the theories of Jung when he wrote the trilogy? Circumstantial evidence was to be found in several examples of Tolkien’s life and works, yet recently more specific proof was unearthed by a Tolkienian scholar. However, even if Tolkien knew of Jung and his ideas, it is impossible to try and consciously create a world which reflects his archetypes and the collective unconscious, as another author found out. The collective unconscious is an independent force that channels itself through individual authors but cannot be controlled or shaped beyond what it is trying to achieve itself.

We felt that of the two Jungian interpretations of *The Lord of the Rings* available, neither fully grasped the essence. They are both equally valid interpretations in their own right, yet we felt that the notion of the quaternity, which Jung valued greatly in the later stages of his career, contains the key to the archetypal interpretation of this trilogy.

Keywords: Literature, Carl Gustav Jung, Individuation, Archetypes, J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*.

Öz: Carl Gustav Jung’un arketipik yorumlama ya da Jung yorumları olarak adlandırılan teorilerine dayanan edebi bir yorumsal model, 1950’lerden bu yana edebiyat sahnesinde devamlı yer almakta ve 20. yüzyılın ikinci yarısında, en belirgin hermenetik modellerini bile canlandırmıştır. Her ne kadar Jung’un fikirlerinin bazıları modası geçmiş olarak kabul edilse de veya modern eleştirmenler tarafından sert eleştirilerle karşılanmış olsa da, arketipik yorumlamanın popülaritesi, neoromantisizm denilen Romantik fikirlerin canlanmasıyla bir kez daha popüler hale geldiği 21. yüzyılda pek de azalmadı. Jung’un arketipler teorisine öncelikle edebi eserlerdeki resimlere ilgi duyuyordu. Semboller ve arketipler ve bu nedenle, bir edebi eserin bir Jungian yorumu, bu arketip görüntülerini analiz eder ve arketiplerin bir edebi eserin biçimini ve işlevini tanımlamasında ısrar eder - işlev, büyük ölçüde telafi edici olarak görülür, bir metnin anlamı ise kültürel ve psikolojik mitlerin sayesinde şekillenmektedir. Arketip içeriğinde bolca yer alan edebi eserlerin ana örneği J.R.R. Tolkien’in *Yüzüklerin Efendisi*’dir. Üçlemde belirli arketiplerin hayata geçirilmesi hakkında kapsamlı bir şekilde ele alındı, bu nedenle bu araştırmanın amacı için, Jung’un bireysellik fikirleri ve dört psikolojik fonksiyonel bakış açısından yaklaşarak üçlemeye daha genel bir bakış yapacağız. Üçlemenin Jung yorumlama modeli içinde nasıl yorumlanabileceği, özellikle Jung’un kuarternite kavramını ve Jung teorisindeki önemini detaylandıran yeni bir fikir vereceğiz.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Edebiyat, Carl Gustav Jung, Bireyselleşme, Arketip, J.R.R. Tolkien, *Yüzüklerin Efendisi*.

Introduction

J.R.R. Tolkien's trilogy *The Lord of the Rings* seems to never abate in popularity¹ – over 60 years since its publication and over 15 years since its filmed versions, the world awaits yet another coming to life on the big screen of Tolkien's epic mythology, this time in the form of TV series². However popular it may be nowadays, upon publication, the trilogy received mixed reviews and literary scholars have been slow to come to appreciate the true mastery of Tolkien's mythopoeia and the extent of his genius. The trilogy is inexhaustible in its symbolism and possible hermeneutical approaches or interpretations, but this essay will look at several of its aspects from a Jungian point of view. Interestingly, several interpretations are possible even within this single hermeneutic model.

Only a few Jungian analyses have been attempted to investigate Tolkien's mythology from the point of view of archetypes - Pia Skogemann says that “a Jungian approach to *The Lord of the Rings* seems to be so obviously relevant that you would expect a Jungian to have published an analysis of it long ago...yet I found only one title using a Jungian approach” (2009:x). As the trilogy seems so obviously appropriate for Jungian analysis, two questions seem to arise spontaneously to the researcher: first of all, was Tolkien familiar with Jung's theory; and secondly, did he consciously strive to follow the development of personality in his mythology and create credible actualizations of Jung's archetypes in the story?

Timothy O'Neill, the one author Skogemann refers to in the previous quotation, points out to several clues (1979:163-164) in Tolkien's life and works that might help answer these questions. The first example is with Númenor, whose name is related to one of Jung's favorite concepts of numen³ or numinosum, which he assigned to the energy stored in the unconscious. Not only in its name, but there is a connection to Jung's theory as well, or as O'Neill says:

“Númenor was the symbol of the original dissociation of the Children of God from the will of the Valar [...] its loss, symbolically into the darkness of the unconscious, is the real beginning of Man's movement to one-sidedness...” (163)

The symbolic stature of Númenor as a powerful emotional relic of Man's past implies that both words derived from the same source for the same reason.

The second example is the name of Jung's private collection of fantasies and drawings of the mandala he calls *The Red Book*. According to O'Neill, “the parallel with the hobbits' chronicle, the *Red Book of Westmarch*, is rather startling...they are physically identical (handwritten red leather-bound manuscripts) and similar in theme” (164). Furthermore, one of the British editions of *The Lord of the Rings* is illustrated with drawings of a mandala made personally by Tolkien.

Furthermore, new evidence has surfaced in recent years. In his essay “*More Light than Shadow? Jungian Approaches to Tolkien and the Archetypal Image of the Shadow*” Thomas Honegger states:

“I had first come across concrete evidence for Tolkien's acquaintance with Jung's concept while working on the Professor's academic papers in the Bodleian in Summer 2006. Two references to Jung are to be found on a single sheet of paper among his notes for the lecture ‘*On Fairy-stories*’ (Bodleian Tolkien MS. 14, Folio 55 recto) consisting of the single name ‘*Jung*’ in a list of authors and scholars to be mentioned, and the note ‘*Jung Psych of the unconscious*’ on the same page.”

¹ The trilogy ranks fourth in the top 10 most read books in the world in the 20th century.

² Amazon bought the rights for 250 million dollars, making the series the most expensive in the history of television.

³ From the Latin *nuere*, to nod assent; it has a broader meaning of divine assent, divine will, the power of the gods accruing to a person, act or idea.

If this is not proof enough and if, on the other hand, Tolkien was not familiar with Jung's work, then his novels are even more in favor of confirming the theory of eternal images in the collective unconscious of humans. The trilogy is fascinating and has kept the attention of millions of readers for decades precisely because of its polysemy which offers a vast field of interpretations to the reader, and because of the attraction that our unconscious fantasies find in the imaginary world of Tolkien and its inhabitants. The archetypes are most commonly found in dreams, myths, fairy tales and fantasies and the world of Tolkien contains elements of all of these, establishing and maintaining a lively connection with the reader's psyche.

In Tolkien's trilogy, but also in his other works (such as *The Hobbit*, and the posthumously published *Silmarilion*), we can find examples of an entire plethora of archetypes, both personified (in individual characters) as well as transforming⁴ - to mention but a few: entering mysterious forests, magic, rituals, descent into dark and dark places, numerous mandala elements, and so on.

A Jungian analysis of the trilogy is not a straightforward task, or as Skogemann says "*once I got to work on my interpretation, suddenly nothing seemed quite so clear; the material in the trilogy is truly profound and there are many layers to work with*" (x).

In her analysis, she approaches the characters of Frodo and his three Hobbit friends – Sam, Merry, and Pippin – as the four aspects and phases of the Ego which coincide with Jung's four functions of consciousness: Sensation (Merry), Intuition (Pippin), Thinking (Frodo) and Feeling (Sam). This model of interpretation seems valid and does allow interesting insights, if one follows it through the trilogy. It, however, leaves out a very large number of the other characters who are also of importance.

Patrick Grant, on the other hand, in his essay *Tolkien: Archetype and Word*⁵ presents a view of Frodo and Aragorn as the two aspects of the Hero archetype – "*Frodo his childlikeness, Aragorn his nobility and power*", and this is another valid and interesting interpretation.

There is, also, a (in our opinion, mistaken) tendency to view the trilogy as the individuation process of Frodo – the ordinary little Hobbit who goes on a journey through his mind, to destroy evil. The above-mentioned O'Neill even goes as far as to entitle his book *The Individuated Hobbit*. However, we will show that this is not the case, as Frodo is not only not individuated, but *cannot* be individuated; if we follow Jung's theory closely.

In our opinion, there is an aspect of Jung's theory which is of great importance for the interpretation of the trilogy and it is an aspect to which Jung himself gave invaluable meaning - the *quaternity* (and multiple quaternities), as the archetypal image or representation of the Self. Examples of this are the cross or the eightfold path in Buddhism. For Jung, the quaternity "*symbolizes the possibility of becoming conscious*" (in Skogemann, 1992:189) and becoming conscious is the greatest achievement one can accomplish.

Unlike the quaternity, the trinity is disturbingly asymmetrical and incomplete⁶. Jung says:

⁴ "archetypes are divided in form and function into personifying and transforming varieties...the personifying archetypes generally take human or anthropomorphic form, and are expressed symbolically as human or humanlike figures. Transforming archetypes are nonpersonal situations and forms (quaternity, order, mandala, etc.) that have significance in psychic development." (O'Neill, 1979:33)

⁵ <http://www.crosscurrents.org/tolkien.htm>

⁶ In the context of Christian symbolism, Jung writes of the trinity and the quaternity in at least two of his books (*Psychology and Religion*, and *Aeon – Researches into the Phenomenology of the Self*). He says: "even though the central Christian symbol is the Trinity, the formula of the unconscious mind is represented by a quaternity...the Christian formula is incomplete because the dogmatic aspect of the principle of evil is missing from the Trinity...it can easily be supposed that the fourth aspect is the Devil (*Psychology and Religion*, 73-74)...but the old (medieval) philosophers symbolized the fourth aspect with the Virgin, adding the female element to the Trinity (76).

„The quaternity is an archetype of almost universal occurrence. It forms the logical basis for any whole judgement...Three is not a natural coefficient of order, but an artificial one. There are always four elements, four prime qualities, four colors, four castes, four ways of spiritual development, etc. so, too, there are four aspects of the psychological orientation...” (Jung, 1970:167)

Also, according to Aniela Jaffé:

„A quaternity or quaternion often has a 3+1 structure, in that one of the terms composing it occupies an exceptional position or has a nature unlike the others...this is the “Fourth” which, added to the other three, makes them “One”, symbolizing totality.” (Jaffé, in O'Neill, 1980: 148-149)

In Tolkien's mythology, there are multiple quaternities, starting with the Four Ages: the First Age is the age of Elves and the unconscious, whereas the consciousness of Man is primitive and dominated by the unconscious. In the Second Age, with the fall of Morgoth, Man is mature and his consciousness is expanding, but during this expansion, it loses touch with the past and its archetypal foundation, leading to the complete alienation of the conscious and the unconscious in the Third Age, during which the spiritual desolation leads to neurosis. The great battle for Middle-earth which decides the fate of the world ends with the beginning of the Fourth Age, in which a balance must be achieved between the conscious and the unconscious, otherwise the unconscious will swallow the world. This is the story we find in the trilogy. By different characters facing their personal and collective Shadows, and by accepting and integrating the Anima, their victory brings balance to the psychological forces, the psyche of Man is in equilibrium and the golden age of Man begins.

Another example of a quaternity is with the rings. The One Ring completes the quaternity with the only remaining three Elven rings (the Rings of Air-Vilya, Water-Nenya and Fire-Narya) with the One Ring signifying Earth, having been created in the cracks of earth itself, perfect, symmetrical and forged by purest gold. Even though it, in essence, has evil powers, it is quintessential as an element, because evil is present in the world since its making. Evil in the mythology of Tolkien is imperfect, embodied in the Trinity of Melkor (the Shadow of God, known in later ages as Morgoth), Sauron and Saruman.

Jung's followers, continuing his research into the yin and yang principles, have divided up into four aspects, or archetypes, the psyche of man and woman. Edward Whitmont (1912-1998) concluded that there are predominant traits in the masculine psychology and he called them Father, Son, Hero and Wise Man.⁷ If we call this the quaternity of Man, it leads us to our own model for interpreting the trilogy from a Jungian point of view.

According to Moore & Gillette (in Bogart, 2009:112) “*the son...is a man searching for relationships and his own individuality*” which, for certain, is true of Frodo in the trilogy, where his friendship with Sam is further established and, at times, pivotal to the plot, and he makes new friends along the journey. He also seeks his own individuality, mostly in the fact that he decides to leave the Shire (a thing quite uncommon for Hobbits) but also when he decides to break away from the fellowship and continue the quest by himself. The father archetype “*maintains order, manifests fertility and blessing and represents feeling calm, centered and a sense of inner authority*” (ibid.). Although this description does not fit Bilbo at first glance, let us not forget that he is a Hobbit, first and foremost, and these qualities do match the qualities of Hobbits. Frodo is in reality Bilbo's cousin, but he is, nonetheless a father figure, because he adopted him as his heir, when Frodo's parents died. The hero archetype “*fights, battles, strives...he symbolizes instinctual energy, intense experience, outpouring of life force...decisiveness, aggressiveness, training, skill, power, bravery and valor, self-control, loyalty to a cause, a people, a task or a nation...*” (ibid.). This description fits Aragorn perfectly. As does the description of the Wise Man archetype, which “*often appears as shaman,*

⁷ Edward Whitmont in Stevens, 2004: 212.

healer, or medicine man...the scholar, teacher, sage, seer, philosopher...an initiate of secret, hidden knowledge and is the wise ritual elder who guides processes of transformation, initiating others" (ibid.). Nothing could be more true of Gandalf.

Furthermore,

"the function of the hero archetype is to separate the boy from the unconscious... in order to establish an independent, individual masculine standpoint. The hero, however, is a transitional figure who needs to make way for the mature archetype of the king" (1991:56).

This is also very true for the relationship of Aragorn to Frodo, whose task is to shield him from the unconscious or evil hordes of the Nazgûl, the orcs, and Sauron himself. It is also remarkably true that in the trilogy, Aragorn is transformed from a warrior hero to a mature and wise king.

Therefore, if we do not look at the trilogy as having one or two main characters (Frodo or Aragorn), we can follow the psychological journey of the quaternity represented by Bilbo Baggins, as the personification of the Father archetype, who bestows upon his adopted Son, Frodo, the One Ring (interestingly, they are both born on the same date – September 22), and we see Aragorn as the personification of the Hero figure and Gandalf as the Wise Man figure. This quaternity is one character, one whole, and its parts or elements work together, helping each other, but they also separately face the actualizations of their own and collective Shadows and Aragorn is responsible for integrating the Anima archetype. This is why with the victory, the Age of Man begins, because this quaternity symbolizes Man, or in other words "*around the drama of these relatively few personalities has swirled the greater, turbulent, individuation of a culture, the rebirth of Middle-earth*" (O'Neill, 1980:139).

Even though the fellowship of the ring in the beginning comprises of nine members, with the death of Boromir at the start of the journey, they remain eight or a double quaternity, yet again showing and proving that this is a collective principle of individuation. All eight members of the fellowship come together once again for the final battle.

At the end of the Third Age, as we mentioned previously, the unconscious slowly starts to wake as do its dark forces, and

"some spoke in whispers of the Enemy and of the Land of Mordor...that name the Hobbits only knew in legends of the dark past, like a shadow in the background of their memories; but it was ominous and disquieting...the Dark Tower had been rebuilt...from there the power was spreading far and wide and away far east and south there were wars and growing fear." (Tolkien, I: 47)

It is interesting to note that, from the quaternity symbolizing Man, all four face the minions of the collective Shadow, or Sauron. Only three face their individual Shadows – Bilbo and Frodo have the same individual Shadow in the form of Gollum, which further reiterates (just like their same birthday), that they are two aspects of the same whole. Gandalf's personal Shadow is the Balrog, in a battle with whom he dies as Gandalf the Grey, and is resurrected as Gandalf the White, having been transformed by the depotentiation of his Shadow. Aragorn, the Hero, does not face his personal Shadow, however. Generally speaking, in critical reviews the character of Aragorn seems most neglected, with priority or emphasis being given to Frodo, but for the purposes of this essay, as well as for Jungian theory, Aragorn is of, perhaps, the greatest significance. He is bequeathed with the task of continuing the individuation process (after the depotentiation of the Shadow archetype) by integrating the Anima archetype, actualized in Arwen Undomiel, in a true hieros gamos. As the queen of Elves and Men, Arwen rules over the unconscious and the conscious, unifying the female and the male principle into a perfect and healthy whole.

This image (taken from O'Neill, 1979:151) summarizes the hieros gamos. In the center of it is the White Tree which has regained life through the efforts of Elessar (Aragorn), whose initiation and transformation are symbolized by the seven stars and seven stones, and the rayed sun, symbolic of man. The opposites are united with the hieros gamos or sacred marriage to Arwen, symbolized by the crescent moon, a feminine image. The instrument of individuation is the central mandala design built of the Ring and the coincidentia oppositorum as a quaternion, both symbolizing the complete Self.

Through the trilogy, Aragorn develops from Strider to Aragorn, son of Arathorn, to King Elessar. After his death, King Elessar, as the man who completed the process of individuation for Man, but also for himself, shows how

“a great beauty was revealed in him, so that all who after came there looked on him in wonder; for they saw that the grace of his youth, and the valor of his manhood, and the wisdom and majesty of his age were blended together. And long there he lay, an image of the Kings of Men in glory undimmed before the breaking of the world.” (III:351)

This description, just like the image previously, beautifully symbolizes and summarizes the wholeness of a successfully actualized Self.

To conclude, *The Lord of the Rings* is a tale of individuation, but it is the individuation of Man, as presented through the symbolic manifestation of the archetype of the Self through the

quaternity of the Son, Father, Hero and Wise Man, and not of any one specific character. For anyone who is familiar with Jung's theory, even when reading the trilogy for the first time, it is obviously clear with what craftsmanship and genius Tolkien managed to bring the archetypes to life, show their positive and negative qualities, and give a remarkable example of the process of individuation. As we said in the beginning, it is possible to find different models of interpretation even within Jungian theory in the trilogy and the rest of Tolkien's works are even a greater treasure cove for more archetypal content.

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