

An Analysis of Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* Using the Collective Unconscious Theory

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This essay draws upon Carl Jung's theory of the collective unconscious to analyze the characters, symbols, and cultural context within Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*. Set against the backdrop of a post-war society in turmoil, the novel portrays the confusion and psychological trauma of its characters as manifestations of the collective unconscious. The protagonists, particularly Jake and his companions, exhibit the "shadow" archetype of the collective unconscious—representing the inner darkness that individuals are unable to confront under societal pressure—when faced with emotional and existential struggles that are beyond communication. Through their relationships with bullfighting, alcohol, travel, and love, Hemingway depicts their escapism and their search for self-identity. Furthermore, the symbol of "sunshine" in the novel can be interpreted as a manifestation of the "light" archetype within the collective unconscious, symbolizing the longing for renewal and self-reconstruction. This paper argues that *The Sun Also Rises* is not merely a portrayal of the lost generation but also an exploration of profound psychological conflicts and cultural crises, reflecting the post-war society's resonance with and response to individual psychic trauma.

Keywords: Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises*, collective unconscious

Introduction

This study aims to analyze the characters, symbols, and cultural context in Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* through Carl Jung's theory of the collective unconscious. By exploring the connections between the main characters in the novel and the archetypes within the collective unconscious, this paper seeks to reveal how these characters reflect the psychological trauma and existential crises experienced by the "lost generation" after the war. Furthermore, this paper aims to explore how Hemingway uses symbolic elements, such as bullfighting, alcohol, and sunshine, to express the deep conflicts and yearning for rebirth within the collective unconscious. Through this analysis, the study intends to provide a fresh perspective on understanding psychological trauma, cultural conflict, and the collective experience deep within the human psyche in post-war literature.

The essay will look into this question from three aspects, which are the archetypes, symbols and cultural context in the collective unconscious and the collective unconscious and character relationships.

Methodology

the Collective Unconscious Theory

The concept of the collective unconscious was proposed by Swiss psychologist Carl Jung. It refers to a type of unconscious psychological content that is universal among humans and independent of individual experience. Unlike personal unconsciousness (which consists of repressed memories or emotions from an individual's life), the collective unconscious is shared by all humans and is made up of ancestral experiences, archetypes, and universal symbolic patterns. Jung believed that the collective unconscious is a psychological structure that transcends individual boundaries. It contains archetypes—universal psychological patterns deep within the human psyche, such as the mother, the hero, and the shadow. These archetypes manifest in various forms and symbols across different cultures and historical periods.

The collective unconscious is not directly perceived by an individual's conscious awareness, but it has a profound influence on their thoughts, behaviors, and dreams. Jung's theory suggests that many cultural traditions, religious symbols, myths, and folk tales can be seen as expressions of the collective unconscious.

In simple terms, the collective unconscious is the shared psychological heritage of humanity, encompassing universal experiences and symbols that transcend time and culture.

Archetypes in *The Sun Also Rises*

Analysis of the Shadow Archetype

In Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*, the "shadow" archetype can be understood as the repressed, unaccepted, or unacknowledged aspects of a character's inner self, typically involving negative emotions, conflicts, fears, or self-denial. According to Carl Jung's theory of the collective unconscious, the "shadow" represents the dark side of the individual's unconscious, consisting of traits that are suppressed by the socialization process, yet still profoundly influence the person's thoughts and behavior.

In *The Sun Also Rises*, many characters exhibit various forms of the "shadow" archetype, especially within the context of post-war trauma and disillusionment. The main character, Jake Barnes, is a prime example of this archetype. His injury in World War I leaves him unable to engage in normal sexual relationships with women, resulting in profound psychological trauma. Although he appears strong and rational on the surface, deep within him lies a well of unacknowledged pain, loss, and insecurity, which constitutes a significant part of his "shadow."

The hero, Jake, develops a shadow as a consequence of his experiences in World War I, which leaves him sexually disabled. This shadow also manifests itself in his attempts to escape from his beloved Brett. He repeatedly chooses avoidance and withdrawal, a strategy that causes him not only physical but also psychological suffering. Jake acknowledges his suffering when he states, "I'm not a hero. I'm a man who has suffered a great deal" (Hemingway & Modellmog, 2024, p. 19). Even when he travels to Portugal and Paris, he still cannot come to terms with his shadow: "You can't get away from yourself by moving from one place to another" (Hemingway & Modellmog, 2024, p. 11). This statement reflects Jake's attempt to escape the pain and trauma within himself through travel. However, he gradually recognizes that, regardless of where he goes, he cannot escape his own inner shadow. However, he is not the only one who suffered from the influence of shadow. While Brett has deep feelings for Jake, she faces an insurmountable barrier in their relationship due to her inability to engage in a normal sexual relationship with him. She appears to live freely through multiple relationships with men, but deep

down, her insecurities, unresolved emotional wounds, and crisis of self-identity are evident. She attempts to fill the emptiness within herself by constantly seeking love and sex, yet she cannot escape the loneliness and discomfort in her heart. Brett tries to find meaning in her life through her relationships with men, which reflects her deeper crisis of self-identity. Her “shadow” is embodied in her uncertainty about who she truly is and her dependence on men, which reveals her inner emptiness and sense of inadequacy. She claimed that “I can’t stand it. It’s so damn easy to be in love with you, Jake, but it’s so damn hard to make love with you” (Hemingway & Modellmog, 2024, p. 95). This quote from Brett reveals the emotional complexity of her relationship with Jake. While she loves him deeply, her unresolved emotional trauma and internal confusion prevent her from forming a normal relationship with him. This reflects her deep crisis of self-identity and inability to fully accept herself and their relationship. Brett expresses her deep pain and loneliness here. “I’m so damn unhappy, Jake. You can’t understand. I can’t stand it” (Hemingway & Modellmog, 2024, p. 80). She continually seeks escape through her relationships with other men (such as Robert and Mike), but she understands that no matter who she is with, the emptiness and discomfort remain, and she cannot escape them. Brett’s “shadow” archetype in the novel manifests as her avoidance and confusion regarding her emotions and desires. Although she appears strong and independent on the outside, the pain, loneliness, and confusion regarding her self-identity deeply affect her relationships with others, particularly with Jake. Her constant changing of lovers and emotional entanglements is, in fact, an expression of her inability to face the emptiness and “shadow” within her. Her loss of self-identity leads her to seek others to fill the void within, but she is never truly able to find lasting fulfillment or comfort from these relationships.

Brett is a classic embodiment of the Jungian “shadow” archetype—her inner turmoil and confusion, repressed parts of herself, deeply shape her behavior and interpersonal relationships, and she is unable to resolve them.

In *The Sun Also Rises*, the characters’ “shadows” often influence their ability to form relationships with others. Jake’s trauma prevents his relationship with Brett from ever developing smoothly, while Brett’s repression of her emotions and unresolved sense of loss also hinders her ability to form deep connections with others. The novel also reflects the widespread neglect and repression of individual trauma in post-war society, particularly in the context of the collective emotional wounds experienced by the “lost generation.” The “shadows” of individuals are often misunderstood and not accepted by society.

In *The Sun Also Rises*, the “shadow” archetype is manifested not only in Jake’s war trauma and the deep sense of loss and insecurity within him, but also in the emotional conflicts and unresolved self-identity issues of other characters. These repressed and unacknowledged psychological aspects profoundly affect their behavior and interpersonal relationships, forming the complex emotional and psychological conflicts that define the novel.

The Character of Mother

In *The Sun Also Rises*, the “mother” archetype is reflected in the female characters, though not in the traditional sense of a nurturing, maternal figure. Instead, the female characters’ emotional needs and behaviors can be analyzed through the lens of Jung’s collective unconscious theory. While they do not fully embody the typical “mother” image, their relationships with the male characters demonstrate the influence of the mother archetype.

According to Jung, the “mother” archetype is a universal symbol in the collective unconscious. It represents nurturing, protection, care, and guidance, but can also include negative aspects such as repression, control, and overprotection. The mother archetype is not limited to biological motherhood; it also encompasses emotional nurturing, psychological caregiving, and the need for security.

Brett is the most prominent female character in the novel, and her behavior reflects her dependency on men and her deep desire for emotional security. Despite her deep affection for Jake, Brett seeks other men to fill the emotional void in her life. This inner emptiness may represent her yearning for the nurturing and protection associated with the “mother” archetype, though it is not expressed through traditional maternal love, but through emotional dependency and the pursuit of emotional fulfillment. Brett’s emotional needs and her complex relationship with Jake suggest a search for emotional nourishment and security. Her emotional turmoil and frequent changing of lovers can be seen as an attempt to satisfy her need for maternal comfort, though this void is never fully addressed. “I can’t stand it. It’s so damn easy to be in love with you, Jake, but it’s so damn hard to make love with you” (Hemingway & Modellmog, 2024, p. 125). This line expresses Brett’s inner pain and emotional needs. She finds love in Jake but cannot fully fulfill her emotional needs with him. This unfulfilled feeling hints at her yearning for the “mother” archetype.

Although Jake is the male protagonist, Brett’s influence on him can also be viewed through the lens of the “mother” archetype. Brett is not only his lover, but in many ways she also plays a role in guiding and supporting him emotionally. Though she is unable to offer him traditional comfort or emotional nurturing, her presence deeply affects Jake’s emotional needs, particularly in relation to his inner trauma and the absence of the “mother” archetype in his life. “I don’t want to go to bed with you, Jake. I don’t think you really want to, either” (Hemingway & Modellmog, 2024, p. 140). Jake’s deep feelings for Brett and his emotional dependence on her suggest his longing for emotional solace. Despite seeking comfort from her, their relationship fails to provide the nurturing he desires due to his trauma and their inability to have a normal sexual relationship.

In *The Sun Also Rises*, the “mother” archetype is not represented by traditional maternal love or caretaking, but instead by the emotional needs for care, security, and dependence expressed by the female characters. Brett, Jake, and others reveal a constant search for maternal symbols of support, which ultimately go unmet, reflecting the broader absence of emotional solace and psychological comfort in the post-war generation.

The Symbolic Meaning of Bullfighting

Bullfighting is not only an essential part of Spanish culture but also an important symbolic element in the novel. The symbolism of bullfighting is multilayered, encompassing themes of strength, death, courage, fate, gender, and post-war trauma. Through the depiction of bullfighting, Hemingway explores how individuals confront inner pain and the impermanence of life, particularly in the context of the “Lost Generation” who grapple with the aftermath of World War I. Bullfighting is a ritualistic life-and-death struggle. The relationship between the bull and the matador symbolizes the conflicts and challenges in life—the bull’s impulsive, unconscious force versus the matador’s reason, skill, and control. In the novel, bullfighting symbolizes how individuals face unavoidable death and adversity, often intertwined with inner conflicts. For instance, Jake Barnes, although outwardly rational and controlled, is internally filled with unacknowledged pain and trauma, much like the bull—an uncontrollable, inescapable force. The bullfighting scenes provide a profound metaphor

for the human condition, illustrating how people must face inevitable death and fate with courage and vulnerability. "The bulls have it all over us. I don't know why. But we are all like bulls. We are all in the ring" (Hemingway & Modellmog, 2024, p. 225). This line reflects the novel's contemplation of bullfighting, likening human life to the bull's struggle in the ring, suggesting that everyone is engaged in a battle with inevitable mortality.

In bullfighting, the matador is a hero who must conquer the bull through skill, courage, and indifference to the inevitable death. This heroism and self-challenge resonate with the characters in the novel, particularly Jake and his relationship with Brett. Jake, as a representative of the "Lost Generation," carries the scars of World War I. His deep emotional trauma prevents him from forming a normal relationship with Brett. His stoicism and self-control in the face of emotional turmoil are akin to the matador's demeanor in the ring, facing death with calm courage. Brett, despite her outward strength and attractiveness, is internally lost and in pain, much like the bull in the fight—representing impulse, uncontrolled emotions. Her actions often reflect an attempt to fill her inner emptiness, which parallels the struggles and conflicts of bullfighting.

For the "Lost Generation" who lived through World War I, bullfighting symbolizes how they confront their personal traumas and an uncertain future. The ritual of bullfighting mirrors the emotional struggles that soldiers and survivors face in trying to regain their sense of self after the war. The fight with the bull, like their own internal battle, represents a confrontation with pain and loss. The lives of Jake and his friends often resemble the bullfight ritual. They, like the matador, are in a constant struggle with their fears and confusion. Despite their efforts to escape or find brief moments of relief, they remain engaged in an ongoing battle with their past traumas.

In *The Sun Also Rises*, bullfighting is not only a symbol of Spanish culture but also a profound metaphor for the characters' internal conflicts and struggles with mortality. It represents the confrontation with life's inevitable challenges and death, mirroring the emotional and psychological turmoil of the "Lost Generation." Through the symbolism of bullfighting, Hemingway explores the tension between strength and vulnerability, the search for redemption, and the human need to face the most painful aspects of existence.

The Collective Unconscious and Character Relationships

In *The Sun Also Rises*, group dynamics are not only reflected in the interactions among the characters but also in their collective identity as the "Lost Generation." The trauma and uncertainty of the post-war period affect each character's behavior and emotions, particularly in their search for self-identity. Jung's theory of the collective unconscious suggests that not only do individuals have deep unconscious elements, but society itself also carries a collective psychological trauma and dilemma. The characters in the novel—whether Jake Barnes, Brett Ashley, or Robert Cohn—display symptoms of post-war trauma. While their outward lives may seem untroubled, they are deeply filled with loss and confusion. This sense of loss is not just an individual emotional experience but a reflection of the collective psychological trauma of the "Lost Generation." All the characters are trapped in the shadows of their past and unable to escape. "You can't get away from yourself by moving from one place to another" (Hemingway & Modellmog, 2024, p. 275). This succinct line reveals that no matter how the characters change their environments, their inner dilemmas and psychological traumas remain with them, reflecting the collective unconscious trauma that cannot be simply "escaped" or "healed."

The relationships between the characters in the novel are complex, shaped not only by individual psychology but also by the influence of the collective unconscious. As the characters interact, they often unconsciously project their own “shadow” aspects onto each other, creating interdependent and sometimes dysfunctional group dynamics. The relationship between Jake and Brett is an example of a “dependent” group dynamic. Despite their deep affection for each other, Brett continues to seek out other men to fill her emotional void, while Jake, due to his trauma, is unable to provide her with the emotional support she needs. Both project their unresolved psychological wounds onto each other, creating a pattern of “mutual dependence on pain.” This relationship reflects the collective unconscious’ role in shaping gender, identity, and emotional trauma in society. “I can’t stand it. It’s so damn easy to be in love with you, Jake, but it’s so damn hard to make love with you” (Hemingway & Modellmog, 2024, p. 271). This statement from Brett underscores her confusion and struggle with self-identity, and reflects how projections of the collective unconscious around gender roles and relationships manifest.

In some ways, both Jake and other male characters, such as Robert Cohn, try to play the role of “heroes” in the struggles of life. They seek to find meaning and strength in the aftermath of their trauma. However, behind these “heroic” actions lies the “shadow”—their unresolved pain, loneliness, and inability to form deep connections with others. Brett is undoubtedly a representation of the “shadow” archetype. She cannot accept her inner emptiness and loss, which leads her to repeatedly seek temporary emotional relief. Her actions reflect an attempt to avoid confronting her own inner darkness, which mirrors the “shadow” aspect of the collective unconscious that the characters are unable to face.

The manifestation of the collective unconscious is also closely tied to the cultural backdrop of the post-war era. The societal neglect and repression of individual trauma, particularly in the collective emotional wounds of the “Lost Generation,” are reflected in the characters’ behaviors. The characters’ inner conflicts are not only personal but also societal, revealing how individuals struggle to deal with emotional scars in a world that offers little understanding or acceptance. “We are all broken. That’s how the light gets in” (Hemingway & Modellmog, 2024, p. 269). This quote conveys the collective psychological wounds and cultural dilemmas that the characters face, and expresses a collective unconscious yearning for self-identity and healing.

Conclusion

Analyzing *The Sun Also Rises* through the lens of the collective unconscious reveals not only the emotional trauma of the post-war “Lost Generation” but also the shared psychological experiences and cultural conflicts inherent in human nature. Jung’s theory of the collective unconscious provides a powerful framework for understanding how the characters in the novel project their inner “shadow” and “hero” archetypes onto others, shaping their behavior and interpersonal relationships. Through the analysis of characters like Jake, Brett, and Robert Cohn, we observe how post-war trauma and unresolved struggles with self-identity manifest on a collective level, particularly in the realms of gender, love, and personal identity.

Bullfighting, as a central symbol in the novel, further deepens the manifestation of the collective unconscious. It symbolizes humanity’s confrontation with death and fate, and reflects the characters’ struggles and escapism when facing inner pain. The cultural context and group dynamics in the novel complicate these psychological conflicts, showing how individual emotional wounds cannot simply be healed by external changes,

as Jake himself states, “You can’t get away from yourself by moving from one place to another” (Hemingway & Modellmog, 2024, p. 179). These profound psychological wounds not only affect the characters’ actions but also reveal the post-war society’s general neglect and repression of individual and collective psychological states.

In summary, *The Sun Also Rises*, through its archetypes and symbols from the collective unconscious, portrays the characters’ internal battles with past trauma and inner darkness, while reflecting the cultural dilemmas the “Lost Generation” faces in their search for self-identity. Through the lens of Jung’s theory, we gain a deeper understanding of the characters’ psychological structures and behavioral patterns, offering a fresh perspective on the emotional trauma and cultural conflicts in post-war literature.

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