The Battle of the Unconscious : A Comparative Analysis of Myth from Psychoanalytic perspectives-Freud vs. Jung

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Abstract

The realm of myths and their connection to the unconscious mind has long fascinated scholars and thinkers. While Freud believed that myths were like daydreams, serving as a canvas for the expression of unconscious desires and conflicts, Jung expanded upon Freud's ideas, delving deeper into the realms of the conscious and unconscious mind and introducing the concept of archetypes, which are prevalent in myths. The article aims to conduct a comparative exploration of Freud's and Jung's psychoanalytic perspectives on myths.

Keywords: Myth, psychoanalysis, Unconscious, dreams, *archetypes*

Introduction:

A Myth is a timeless narrative that has been passed down through generations. Myth possesses a remarkable ability to transcend the boundaries of time, culture, and understanding. Myth, as defined by the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, is "a story from ancient times, especially one that was told to explain natural events or to describe the early history of a people."

Rooted in the etymology of the word 'myth,' derived from the ancient Greek 'mythos' meaning 'utterance' or 'story,' these narratives have, since time immemorial, unfurled before us as tales of superhuman beings and divine powers. But what makes myths truly remarkable is their adaptability and their capacity to defy precise definitions. This very characteristic has rendered them resilient, and capable of assimilation and appropriation to accommodate the ever-changing needs and sensibilities of societies.

From the early thinker Euhemerus, who proposed that myths were rooted in historical facts, to the modern insights of scholars like Müller, who saw myths as a "disease of language" (Dorson 1955), each thinker has painted a distinct canvas of myth.Scottish anthropologist and folkloristJ.G. Frazer envisioned myths as explanations for natural phenomena, while Tylor believed they offered unique explanations steeped in metaphorical language, bridging the gap between the mysteries of nature and human comprehension.

Anthropologist and ethnologistMalinowski emphasized the shared social functions of myths, and French anthropologist Levi Strauss (1955) believed "myth is language." Plato even discerned between 'mythos' and 'logos' based on their claims about truth and reason.

The article aims to delve into the world of myths, guided by the insights of two popular figures in the field of psychoanalysis: Sigmund Freud and Carl Gustav Jung.

These two thinkers, each with their distinctive perspectives, have cast a profound light on the enigmatic tapestry of myths. Freud, the Austrian neurologist saw myths as the canvas for the expression of repressed ideas, while Jung, the pioneering psychologist, connected myths to archetypes, those ancient symbols that reside within the depths of the human psyche.

By delving into the perspectives of the psychoanalysts Freud and Jung, this article will unravel the layers of meaning within myths, offering a comprehensive comparative exploration that puts a spotlight on the profound influence of the unconscious mind on these timeless stories. Through this comparative analysis, the article seeks to provide fresh insights into the captivating world of myths and their profound connection to the human psyche.

Freud's Interpretation of Myth:

Austrian neurologist and founder of the Psychoanalysis school of thought Sigmund Freud argued that myths were like *daydreams*. These narratives emerge from our unconscious mind, much like how daydreams take shape from our thoughts and fantasies during the day.

Myths as Day-Dreams

Freud's comparison of myths to *daydreams*highlights the intricate relationship between myths and the inner workings of the human psyche. Moreover, myths, like *daydreams*, exhibit a conscious element. Myth-makers wield the power to shape the narrative, determine the direction of events, and select symbols that effectively encapsulate thoughts and emotions. This interplay of conscious control and unconscious influences renders myths more accessible and relatable to people.

Myths as Vague Wish Dreams of People

Freud's exploration of myths delves into the realms of repressed desires and wishes. In his work *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud introduced the concept of the *Oedipus complex*, a male child's suppressed desire for his mother and the corresponding wish to replace his father. The equivalent complex for girls is what Freud called the *Electra complex*. Freud believed that these complexes were not only detectable in dreams but also embedded within the fabric of myths. This perspective adds a profound layer to our understanding of myths, revealing their capacity to reflect deep-seated desires and conflicts.

Freud in his work *Totem and Taboo* went further, suggesting that myths were distorted *wish-dreams* of people. He proposed that the *Oedipus complex* could be seen as a memory of a real episode that occurred in what he termed the *primal horde*. During this primal era, sons, oppressed by their father, rebelled, ultimately driving him out or even killing him, and subsequently taking his wives as their own. The subsequent generation refrained from repeating these actions due to a collective sense of guilt. This historical context imbues myths with symbolic expressions of these primal events and desires. Freud's perspective underscores the notion that myths are deeply rooted in human experiences, transcending cultural history.

The Process of Dreamwork

According to Freud, myths served as a vehicle for the expression of man'srepressed and unconscious desires. Dreams, as he described in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, were the products of the unconscious, shaped through a process known as *dreamwork*. This intricate process of *dreamwork* involved mechanisms such as *condensation, displacement,* and *splitting*, facilitating the indirect communication of unconscious wishes and conflicts.

- **Condensation:** Myths just like dreams utilize the mechanism of condensation, where various elements, including themes, figures, images, and ideas, amalgamate into a single composite. This process allows myths to convey complex ideas and emotions through condensed symbolism.
- **Displacement:** In both myths and dreams, displacement is a recurring mechanism. Emotions are transferred from one idea or object to another, often rendering the representation of these emotions less threatening. For example, a dream featuring a snake may symbolize a fear of one's boss, with the emotional weight directed toward the snake, a less menacing symbol.
- **Splitting:** Freud's concept of splitting, which he stated was a defense mechanism, finds resonance in myths. Myths can portray characters, situations, or objects as either entirely good or completely bad, simplifying complex emotional conflicts. This approach enhances the accessibility and relatability of myths to their audiences.

Difference from Conscious Experience:

Myths frequently diverge from our everyday experiences, much like dreams that venture into sequences and events that defy the laws of reality. This divergence enables myths to delve into symbolic and fantastical realms, providing a platform for the exploration of profound psychological themes.

Ego, Id, and Superego

Understanding Freud's interpretation of myths necessitates an examination of his structural model of the psyche, consisting of three vital components: the *id, ego,* and *superego*.

The *id* stands as the most primal and instinctual aspect of the psyche, housing both sexual and aggressive drives. It adheres strictly to the pleasure principle, ceaselessly seeking the immediate satisfaction of desires, regardless of the potential consequences. In Freud's perspective, sexual desires held a paramount position in the dynamics of the psyche, with *libido* representing the driving force behind most unconscious motivations. The *id* and *libido* share a deep connection in Freud's theory, as the *libido* serves as the energy propelling the instinctual desires that originate within the *id*. According to Freud, *libido* plays a central role in shaping human behavior, motivations, and psychological development. This relentless pursuit of instant gratification, as evident in the *id*, finds a significant parallel in Freud's concept of the *Oedipus complex*.

The *ego* serves as the rational and conscious intermediary between the *id's* demands and the external world. Its primary objective is to strike a balance between the *id's* desires and the moral guidance of the *superego*, striving to maintain inner harmony. The *superego* embodies the moral values and ethics assimilated from society, primarily during early childhood. It functions as the internalized moral compass, actively working to suppress the *id's* unacceptable urges and guiding the ego toward socially acceptable behaviour. The dynamic interaction among the *ego, id,* and *superego* plays a pivotal role, with a harmonious balance being essential for a healthy personality.

Oedipus Complex and Electra Complex:

Myths frequently incorporate characters and situations that parallel Freud's *Oedipus* and *Electra complexes*. For instance, the story of the Oedipus Rex mirrors a son's attraction to his mother and rivalry with his father, aligning with the *Oedipus complex*. These psychosexual dynamics are recurring motifs in the realm of myths, illustrating their relevance in exploring complex human desires and conflicts.

Jung's perspective on myth

Freud and Jung's parting of ways can be traced back to two significant disagreements. Firstly, Jung's view diverged from Freud's by not confining *libido* solely to sexual energy. Instead, Jung envisioned *libido* as a broader life force, akin to a fundamental appetite, capable of fueling various creative and psychic energies beyond just sexuality. In his perspective, *libido* encompassed desires such as hunger and the innate will to survive. This contrasted sharply with Freud's assertion that sexual desire held the primary role in the human psyche.Secondly, while Jung appreciated the concept of the personal unconscious, he saw it as lacking completeness.

Personal vs. Collective Unconsciousness

Building upon Freud's foundational work, Swiss psychiatrist Carl Gustav Jung introduced a more intricate understanding of the human psyche. He divided the mind into the conscious and the unconscious. The unconscious mind functions as a repository for repressed and forgotten thoughts and memories.

Further subdividing the unconscious mind into *personal unconsciousness* and *collective unconsciousness,* Freud stated that *personal unconsciousness* was a surface or superficial layer, beneath which rested a deeper, inherited, and inborn layer called *collective unconsciousness*. This *collective unconscious*ness, as per Jung, is universal, shared among all, representing a common psychic existence. Its presence can only be identified through its contents, which are capable of consciousness.

Archetypes Unveiled

Deep within the human psyche lies a treasure trove of universal symbols, patterns, and images that shape our thoughts, behaviors, and perceptions. These fundamental elements are known as *archetypes*, a concept pioneered by Jung. *Archetypes*, as defined by the APA Dictionary of Psychology, are universal, innate models of human behaviors, personalities, and motifs that influence our actions, as evidenced in the rich tapestry of myths. Jung's theory posited that *archetypes* were archaic forms of innate human knowledge passed down from our ancestors, finding expression in myths that traverse time and culture. As per Jung, the contents of *personal unconsciousness* are referred to as feeling-toned complexes, while the contents of *collective consciousness* are called *archetypes*.

Origins of Jungian Archetypes:

The *archetypes*, according to Jung, formed the central themes around which myths revolved, conveying moral lessons to humanity. Jung argued that these *archetypes* emerged from our shared human nature and explained the striking similarities in themes and characters across myths worldwide. *Archetypes* were deeply embedded in the collective human memory and manifested in literature, art, myths, and everyday life.

Jung's Main Archetypes

Jung identified numerous *archetypes*, but four core ones hold particular significance: the Persona, the Shadow, the Anima/Animus, and the Self. These *archetypes* are inferred from religion, dreams, art, and literature, representing fundamental aspects of the human psyche.

- **The Persona:** The persona is the social mask we wear, presenting different facets of ourselves in various contexts. It acts as a shield for the ego, containing primitive urges and emotions that are deemed socially unacceptable. Over time, the persona develops as individuals learn to conform to societal expectations. As seen in myths, heroes and heroines wear personas that adapt to their roles, just as individuals do in society. The personas of

mythic characters shield them from danger and enable them to navigate complex challenges, mirroring the social masks individuals wear in their daily lives.

- **The Shadow:** The shadow represents repressed desires, instincts, and shortcomings. It forms as individuals adapt to cultural norms and repress elements considered unacceptable. The shadow often appears in dreams or visions, symbolized by dark, wild, or exotic figures. The shadow *archetype* in myths often emerges as formidable adversaries, embodying repressed desires and fears. Heroes and heroines must confront these shadowy figures, mirroring humanity's struggle to confront its own darker impulses.

- **The Anima or Animus:** The anima represents the feminine aspect within the male psyche, while the animus represents the masculine aspect within the female psyche. These *archetypes* serve as the primary source of communication with the *collective unconsciousness*. They influence gender roles and identities, contributing to a deeper understanding of the self. Mythological narratives frequently feature the anima and animus, symbolizing the journey to understand and integrate the feminine and masculine aspects of the psyche. Through myth, individuals and societies grapple with questions of gender identity, relationships, and the collective unconscious.

- **The Self:** The self represents the unified consciousness and unconsciousness of an individual. Individuation is the process by which various aspects of personality are integrated, aiming to achieve a sense of cohesive self. The self lies at the center of personality, representing completion, unification, and wholeness. Myths often explore the quest for self-discovery and integration, aligning with Jung's concept of individuation. Heroes and heroines embark on mythic journeys to find their true selves, mirroring the human desire for wholeness and self-realization.

Conclusion:

In the 'Battle of the Unconscious', the profound connection between myths and the human psyche has been unveiled. Freud's perspective portrayed myths as akin to *daydreams*, crafted by conscious minds to express unconscious desires and conflicts. These narratives bridge the gap between the conscious and unconscious realms, offering universal stories made accessible through conscious control. The mechanisms of *dreamwork – condensation, displacement,* and *splitting* – further enrich myths, making them vessels for hidden emotions and wishes. Freud's *id, ego,* and *superego* put a spotlight on the primal instincts, societal constraints, and moral struggles reflected in mythic characters. Jung, on the other hand, introduced *archetypes*, universal and innate models that bring myths to life. *Archetypes* emerge from the collective unconscious, weaving timeless themes into myths. The Persona mirrors societal masks, the Shadow challenges heroes with inner conflicts, the Anima and Animus explore gender identity, and the Self beckons us on journeys of self-discovery. In this battle, myths become mirrors reflecting our inner complexities. Freud and Jung, from different angles, revealed that myths are not just tales of Gods and heroes but also the keys to understanding our own unconscious minds.

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