
The Shadow and the Self: A Jungian Analysis of Hero-Villain Pairs in Jane Austen's Novels

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Email: mahima.sanadhya@gmail.com**Article Received:** 04/03/2025**Article Accepted:** 05/04/2025**Published Online:** 06/04/2025**DOI:**10.47311/IJOES.2025.7.04.185**Abstract:**

The research article presents a Jungian study of Jane Austen's novels, particularly *Pride and Prejudice*, *Mansfield Park*, and *Persuasion*. The hero-villain dynamic has been analyzed with the help of the shadow archetype by Carl Jung. The article presents that though Austen's works have always been studied from a moral and social viewpoint, they hold strong potential for psychological analysis. The hero and villain pairs are not just opposite from each other, but they have each other's repressed traits. Confronting such characteristics of their unconscious mind helps them to confront their problems and accept themselves. This study also engages in feminist and Freudian readings of Austen's works, challenging the black-and-white understanding of Austen's character and story, as it is more about the story of self-discovery.

Keywords: Shadow and the Self, psychological analysis, feminist and Freudian

Introduction

Jane Austen is a writer who truly presented the Regency era in the most entertaining manner and impacted many generations. From unforgettable heroines to charming heroes and tempting villains, Jane Austen has inspired many generations of writers. Iconic opening lines to swoon-worthy love confessions have impressed readers, breaking the shackles of time. Though most of her stories at face value seem like middle-class women struggling in the marriage market and finding love in high-class men, there is something virtuous about her characters that contrasts with the villains of her novel. While reading Jane Austen's characters with a Jungian psychoanalysis lens, there is something beyond the simpleton morality that is quite popular analysis. Characters in Austen's novels are rewarded not based on their wealth but on their virtues, while villains are punished because of their actions, which is similar to a fairytale (Duckworth 56). Heroes and villains that are presented in her novels are reflections of other's repressed traits. The male protagonist of her novels mostly struggles with pride and self-doubt, whereas her villains exude charm and recklessness, which seem like villains and heroes are two sides of a coin (Jung 87). For example, the most

loved and popular Austen novel 'Pride and Prejudice' presents Mr. Darcy is presented as a prideful hero who is restrained in showing his emotions, and in contrast, Wickham presented as a charming and deceitful individual.

Carl Jung came up with the model of the psyche to understand the human brain and what makes people who they are and came up with the answer the shadow. Shadow has been defined as the unconscious part of a person's personality, the unconscious part of the brain, which is often considered a blind spot (Jung 112). It can be habits, traits, impulses, and desires that one consciously would not accept. Carl Jung has stressed that if one has grown into his/her best self, then it is important to include the shadow aspects of personality rather than repress them. In the realm of literature, the shadow aspect is associated with the villains, which reflects the repressed thoughts and traits of the protagonist. This permits for the in-depth study and exploration of the internal conflicts that the characters go through.

Jane Austen in her works has not used villains merely as an obstacle in the love story but they present the repressed characteristics of the heroes. While facing the villain in the story the hero faces the hidden aspect of their personality that led them to solve the problems and grow personally. The research article aims at resolving protagonist growth and how such characters interact with their shadow. The Jungian reading of Jane Austen's works in this article will explore the self-awareness of Austen's heroes' identities and development.

In this article, Jane Austen's famous works, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Mansfield Park*, and *Persuasion*, are discussed while keeping the Hero Villain pairs in the center. Darcy's emotional repression and self-control are in contrast with Wickham's deceit and charm, while Edmund Bertram's idealism and morality are weighed against Henry Crawford's temptation, and lastly, Captain Wentworth's loyalty is juxtaposed with Mr. Eliot's superficiality. First, the article presented a detailed study of Jung's shadow theory and its significance in literature while analyzing novels and other works. Secondly, a detailed Hero-villain psychology and its interplay. Lastly, the Austen theme of morals and awareness is discussed among the mentioned characters.

Jung's Shadow Theory and Its Literary Application on Jane Austen's Works

There is a popular saying that no one is perfect; it is very natural for every human being to be imperfect and to have faults and weaknesses. In the language of Carl Jung, it is called our shadow self among various archetypes presented shadow archetypes, hidden traits that human beings themselves do not understand. In literature, the shadow archetype presents the dark aspect of the conscious mind of a character or a group of characters. In some literary works, we find such shadow aspects in the same character, and at other times, there is a different character that completes this role. The shadow traits are often repressed desires, weaknesses, and characteristics that humans refuse to recognize ("The Shadow Archetype"). Such traits have darker tendencies that deeply affect human lives, everyday decision-making, and relationships. These invisible emotions within human beings stay hidden but are commonly projected onto others.

In literature, these shadow aspects are presented in the story through the villain and

antagonist embodying the suppressed desires of the hero of the novel. Jane Austen presents its characters especially heroes unconsciously expressing their hidden shadow traits on the villain counterpart. For instance, Darcy rejects any social appeasement or mingling which is associated negatively by Wickham.

Another important aspect to study with the shadow is individuation, as described by Jung, as a condition where a human being associates the unconscious element of the psyche to attain a complete personality (Jung 146). In simple words, it is a self-discovery and self-realization process in which one discovers life's purpose and becomes one's truest self. According to Carl Jung, one can truly attain his/her truest self once one accepts their hidden shadow aspects rather than avoiding them or denying their existence. For example, a person may feel being assertive is rude or selfish, which results in them living their life as a pushover while resenting others, which ultimately makes them guilty of feeling this way. Thus, any potential for assertiveness and resentment makes it a shadow aspect of personality.

While one can benefit the most from the shadow it has to be separated from its negative connotation. Avoiding the shadow aspect can lead to the projection of the villain. Each Hero of Austen goes through a self-growth journey where they face their internal struggles ("The Jungian Shadow and Self-Acceptance"). In persuasion, Captain Wentworth reconciles with his pride which mirrors the detachment and manipulation of Mr Elliot.

There are existing psychoanalytic approaches to Austen's works, such as Freudian, Jungian, and feminist lenses. As per the Freudian approach to Austen's works, there are traces of repressed desires and oedipal sentiments within characters. Many scholars have discussed the courtship that is often an important part of Austen's novels as a psychological conflict towards authority and self-control (Johnson 62). In *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth's initial dislike is almost like the suppression of desire towards Darcy, suggesting Freud's concept of repression. The role of the father figures of Austen's heroines has projected their romantic interest.

The feminist criticism of Austen has always pointed out the gender roles and agency of women during the Regency era. Gilbert and Gubar, in their book *Mad Women in the Attic*, point out that Austen's heroines deal with the repression of independence, and the villains demonstrate the pressure of society on women (Gilbert and Gubar 131). In her novels, marriage is often projected as the end goal and mode of compromise. This highlights the dependence of women in the marriage market of the Regency era, as they had limited options for self-fulfillment. There is a clear difference between the financial impotence of women and men (Hardy 77). Characters like Elizabeth do not value the traditional view on marriage and demand respect and equality from society. Thus, as per the feminist interpretation, Austen's heroine struggles with society's expectations of women.

The Jungian approach to Austen's works considers individuation and archetypal criticism; her characters embody universal human emotional patterns, making her still very

relevant in modern times. The shadow archetype of Jung particularly describes the moral conflicts with deep internal problems from self-acceptance. The Jungian Lense stresses the unconscious minds of heroines, and acceptance of it leads to the defeat of the antagonist.

Jane Austen's Hero-Villain Pairs as Shadow Archetypes

Mr. Darcy's emotional repression and prideful nature

One of the most celebrated novels by Jane Austen is "Pride and Prejudice," Mr. Darcy projects pride and emotional suppression. His prime characteristics were his reserved, emotional restraint, and social awkwardness; growing up in a class-distant society, he held a rigid view of societal structures with a strong sense of propriety (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 187). He struggles with emotional expression and forming relationships beyond his family and close friends. Implying the shadow archetypes, Darcy represses his charm and vulnerability with others. It is a human tendency to be socially accepted and appreciated for who they are, but he shows no liking for compromising his values. Whilst Wickham primarily demonstrates a superficial charm, a socially appreciated quality makes him effortlessly likable. However, he uses deception to get what he wants and manipulate others to meet his ends. He demonstrates a lack of integrity, responsibility, and greed in his actions, particularly the way he deals with his relationships.

On the shadow side, Wickham has Darcy's repressed traits in a distorted manner where he acts charming without embodying any integrity; throughout the interaction between Darcy and Wickham, Darcy must confront his flaws in Wickham's actions to grow and accept himself (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 251). In pride and prejudice, Elizabeth acts as a catalyst, pushing Darcy to confront himself and acknowledge his pride and social temperament. She helped him reach the realization that having an emotional relationship is not a flaw and that detachment is rather a weakness than a strength. Darcy's reserved nature is not presented as an elite over others. Rather, it needs to be balanced; as part of his individuation process, Darcy learns to express himself more honestly, accepts his repressed traits, and becomes a more wholesome individual.

Edmund Bertram's Idealism and Henry Crawford's Moral Ambiguity

Another important work of Jane Austen is *Mansfield Park*; Edmund Bertram is an embodiment of principle, morals, values, and duty, a complete gentleman in a traditional sense. His idealist mindset is somewhat naïve for the world. His repressed quality is social confidence, accepting the grey shade of the world instead of strict idealism (Austen, *Mansfield Park* 214). Henry Crawford is a flirt and a persuasive man lacking morality; however, is not a malign person. He struggles with commitment and self-restraint. As each other's shadow, Henry shows Edmund's suppressed charm and social flexibility, and the novel revolves around whether both the gentlemen can be charismatic as well as morally strong (Austen, *Mansfield Park* 322). Throughout the novel, Edmund learns having an absolutism mindset of morality can never align with the real world; his naïve and blind admiration of Mary pushes him to confront his standard view of morality. However, he remains moral; he is limited in his capability.

Captain Wentworth's Wounds and Mr. Elliot's Manipulation

Persuasion is another popular work of Jane Austen; Captain Wentworth is presented

as a strong-willed and independent individual shaped by his profession as a naval officer. Nevertheless, behind his confidence is a man who is so hurt by Anne Elliot's rejection that he ends up building emotional barriers around him (Austen, *Persuasion* 136). In the novel, he holds on to the resentment towards Anne and is unable to forgive and move on in life. His repressed qualities are his ability to be emotionally flexible, let go, and be diplomatic in social conditions. On the other hand, Mr Elliot is manipulative and opportunistic in life and sees relationships more as alliances instead of emotional connections. The shadow aspect is Elliot, representing Wentworth's personality without any bitterness. But Elliot completely abandons any truthful emotions and sees love or loyalty as useless. Elliot's manipulations make Wentworth confront his emotional detachment issues and embrace his ambitions and vulnerability. This ultimately leads to him changing his relationship with Anne and reconnecting with her (Austen, *Persuasion* 198).

The shadow aspect between Elliot and Wentworth is important as it pushes Wentworth to confront the danger of his emotional detachment towards Anne and others. If he fails to go beyond his resentment, he will somewhat become like Elliot, a man with ambitions and no real emotional relationship in his life. Wentworth chooses to be transformed, let go of past hurt, and go for his ambition alongside his love Anne. The emotional sensitivity and sincerity portrayed by Anne help Wentworth to see the value in their relationship, let go of his bitterness, and strive towards emotional reconciliation. Thus, it can be said that the hero villains Austen wrote are not just moral opposites; there is a deep psychological connection between them. The antagonist is more of the repressed version of heroes, and by confronting such traits, the protagonist solves their internal issues and develops as a human.

Implications of the Shadow in Austen's Morally-Centered Novels

Jane Austen has long had a reputation for writing morally written novels with straightforward characters, but a deeper study of them shows the psychological complexities within them. Heroes are not naturally or inherently virtuous, but they should recognize tier-repressed traits to become whole. The villains are not necessarily bad characters but have unconscious traits of the heroes, making them go through a journey of internal struggle (Wiltshire 55). The end goal or result of Austen's novel is not to defeat the villain and emerge virtuous but rather to attain the self and transform into one's own better self.

The female protagonist has played an important role in pushing the hero to become more aware of themselves. In *Pride and Prejudice*, readers initially see Wickham as the antagonist, but his social ease pushes Darcy to confront his detachment from society and the psychological necessity of accepting more social qualities instead of denying them (Tanner 92). Elizabeth Bennet shows a mirror to Darcy and shows his prideful flaws and emotional detachment. With the help of his relationship with Elizabeth, he learns humility and the importance of engaging with society. Hence, she ultimately acted as a catalyst for Darcy to move from his stunted personality. In the same way, in *Persuasion*, Captain Wentworth's resentment stops him from attaining true happiness. Mr Elliot fails to move forward, whereas

Wentworth, by the end of the novel, manages to move forward in life. Anne Elliot possesses a quiet strength that helps Wentworth to let go of his bitterness and help him reconcile with his emotions. Anne, in the novel, represents steadiness and forces Wentworth to move beyond his resentment and wounded pride.

In *Mansfield Park*, Fanny presents moral clarity and utmost patience, contrasting Edmund's idealism, forcing him to identify his hidden charm and grow as an individual. In other words, the individuation process in Austen's novels is not private but rather helped by their counterparts to shape moral arcs. Austen repeatedly used indirect free speech in writing, making readers dive into the shifting perspectives and changing their ideas of self. Similar to Dostoevsky, the characters in Jane Austen's novel present moral issues and inner conflicts that stop them from making decisions. Jane Austen wrote about the characters that were close to her life, though her novels are not about early realism but about psychological individuation.

Conclusion

The research article highlights that villains in Jane Austen novels are not just roadblocks in the story but force heroes to look deep within them and acknowledge deep, repressed unconscious struggles. Though the novels are very focused on morality, the characters' self-awareness and psychological integration are a part of it, too. The article challenges the conventional moral understanding of Austen's work, where her works can be explored in light of psychological transformation where heroes and villains are not just present in white and black but rather in grey shades. The Freudian, feminist, and Jungian analyses of Jane Austen's works indicate the repressed traits and psychological turmoil the characters go through. The association of Austen's work with modern psychological understanding will lead to a broader discussion that not only critiques works on the basis of action but also inner conflicts.

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