

June's Persona and Shadow in the Novel *Yellowface* by Rebecca F. Kuang

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ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisa bagaimana persona dan shadow digambarkan dalam novel dan dampak yang ditimbulkan dari konflik keduanya terhadap karakter. Objek yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah novel yang berjudul *Yellowface* (2023) karya Rebecca F. Kuang. Penelitian ini menyajikan analisis dalam bentuk deskripsi dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif. Penulis menggunakan teori arketipe Carl Gustav Jung (1968) sebagai panduan dalam penelitian. Data yang dikumpulkan berupa kalimat narasi dan kutipan percakapan yang ada di dalam novel yang berkaitan dengan isu yang dibahas, yakni persona dan shadow serta dampak yang ditimbulkan dari konflik keduanya. Hasil dari penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa arketipe persona ditunjukkan melalui sikap tokoh utama saat bersosialisasi dan menunjukkan simpati untuk menjaga citra publik dan profesionalnya, sedangkan shadow tokoh utama ditunjukkan melalui perilakunya yang mencuri naskah milik temannya yang sudah meninggal dan menggunakan kebohongan untuk menutupi kebohongannya. Kemudian dampak yang ditimbulkan dari konflik persona dan shadow tokoh utama digambarkan dalam novel dengan adanya gangguan mental seperti halusinasi, insomnia, hingga kesulitan makan.

Kata kunci: Arketipe, Persona, Psikoanalisis, Shadow

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to analyze the personas and shadows depicted in the novel and their impact on the character. The object of this study is the novel *Yellowface* (2023) written by Rebecca F. Kuang. This study presents a descriptive analysis using a qualitative approach. The writer draws on Carl Gustav Jung's (1968) theory of archetypes to guide the analysis of this research. The collected data consists of narrative sentences and excerpts from conversations in the novel related to the issues discussed, namely persona and shadow, and to the impact of their conflict. The results of this study indicate that the persona archetype is shown through the main character's attitude when socializing and showing sympathy to maintain her public and professional image, while the main character's shadow is shown through her behavior of stealing a manuscript belonging to her deceased friend and using lies to cover up her lies. Then the impact caused by the conflict between the persona and shadow of the main character is depicted in the novel with mental disorders such as hallucinations, insomnia, and difficulty eating.

Keywords: Archetype, Persona, Psychoanalysis, Shadow

A. INTRODUCTION

Human personality and character are diverse and complex. When appearing in front of others, people tend to present their best selves and conceal their darker aspects. They may want to be friendly, polite, and smile to be accepted and liked by others. However, their feelings may be hurt, and they only put on a happy face to hide their

actual pain. They may also have strong ambitions that are unacceptable in society, such as selfishness, greed, or cunning.

Human character is revealed in various ways. When someone displays their personality in public, they try to show their best side while hiding their dark side. According to Stein (2019), the human character typically presented to the social world is called a persona, while the human

character or personality hidden or suppressed is called the shadow. Moreover, when these two personalities clash, it can cause mental turmoil. As Stein (2019) notes, the conflict between the persona and the shadow can be seen as a crisis of individuation. The conflict between these two personalities can arise from external or internal social pressures.

The persona and the shadow are human personalities that are important to know. According to Jung (1968), the persona is the face we show to the world, and the shadow is the face we never show. Understanding the persona and the shadow helps us to know the deepest side of our character and the dark side more deeply, although it is risky to face it alone. As Jung (1968) stated that if we can see our shadow and are willing to risk knowing it, then a small part of the problem will be solved; at least we will have brought out the personal subconscious. Knowing the persona and the shadow will make it easier to understand someone's personality and character.

Personas and shadows not only happen in real life, but can also be found in literary works, including *Yellowface* by Rebecca F. Kuang. In this novel, Kuang reveals the psychology of the main character, June Hayward, who displays a strong persona and shadow, a white writer who feels marginalized in the literary world. June steals the manuscript of Athena Liu, a successful writer of Asian descent, who died suddenly, and then publishes it under her name. June tries to be accepted in the literary world, adopting an identity that is considered "desirable" and trying to fit into the expectations and stereotypes of others.

Combining psychological and social elements, Kuang creates a colorful and engaging narrative, making *Yellowface* novel is exciting in terms of story and characterization. In order to gather proof

that personas and shadows exist in the novel, the writer used Carl Gustav Jung's archetype theory. Thus, this study is entitled "June's Persona and Shadow in the Novel *Yellowface* by Rebecca F. Kuang."

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

This study uses Carl Gustav Jung's Archetype theory (1968) to analyze the persona and shadow of the main character in the novel *Yellowface* by Rebecca F. Kuang and how they affect the main character. As claimed by Stein (2019), the human character typically presented to the social world is called a persona, while the human character or personality hidden or suppressed is called the shadow. Based on this understanding, the writer comprehends the intrinsic elements, including character, setting, theme, plot, and point of view in the novel. These elements serve as primary data to identify the depiction and effects of persona and shadow on and towards the main characters in the novel *Yellowface*.

In a novel, narrative elements help develop the story's content and can emotionally and intellectually influence the reader. According to Ramadyani (2019), a character is similar to a person in real life. A character refers to an individual (or animal) in a story. Furthermore, Malewitz (2021) said that the period and location of a tale are referred to as the setting. The setting can establish the story's mood, atmosphere, and tone. In addition, County (2004) stated that the theme is the main message, the story's moral, and the implied meaning of a work of fiction, which may be the writer's thoughts on a topic or views on human nature. Similarly, Booker (2014) claimed that plot is essentially the story we tell and how we shape the story to reveal something important about human nature. Finally, Fludernik (2009) added that point of view is

an important element in storytelling because the writer's choice can enhance or detract from the narrative. These elements help build the story and shape the structure and meaning of a work of fiction.

According to Jung (1968), the persona is a mask used to cover the face (the actor's mask) that is never shown to the world. The persona is a mask, a public character we put on to show ourselves as someone we are not. While, as stated by Jung (1968), the shadow is a vital aspect of personality, a narrow corridor, and its existence cannot be dismissed or trivialized as harmless. The shadow is a hidden and dark part of ourselves, which contains traits we do not like and do not want to admit. Moreover, when these two personalities clash, it can cause mental turmoil. As maintained by Jung (1968), the conflict between the opposing persona and shadow can be considered an individuation crisis. Because the contents of the shadow are unacceptable to the individual, the resulting conflict can be intense. The effects can include depression, mental disorders, excessive fear, and even thoughts of self-harm. Through this theoretical approach, the manifestation of the main character's persona and shadow in the novel *Yellowface* (2023) by Rebecca F. Kuang can be studied in depth.

C. METHOD

This study used a qualitative approach. As said by Yusof & Ali (2011), qualitative research does not use any statistical procedures, as if that were a quality label. This means that numbers and statistics do not limit qualitative research but focus on an in-depth understanding of the studied subject. This method emphasizes the holistic interpretation and analysis of data rather than relying on numbers to state findings. This allows researchers to explore diverse

perspectives and gain richer insights into the subject under study.

The data was taken from Rebecca F. Kuang's novel *Yellowface* (2023). The writer used narrative components in the novel to gather study-related data. The writer used several procedures to gather data for the study. According to Creswell & Creswell (2018), qualitative data analysis involves sequential steps and various levels of analysis, including preparing, reading, organizing, creating descriptions, and explaining descriptions based on data. The first step was to read the novel *Yellowface* by Rebecca F. Kuang as the data source for this study and to understand the storyline. The writer identified the components of the narrative, marked some sentences that could be problematic in the book, and organized the collected data into categories based on the subjects studied: persona and shadow. The final step was to describe the main character's persona and shadow and explain them in accordance with Carl Gustav Jung's (1968) theory.

The collected data were then analyzed using descriptive methods, supported by Carl Gustav Jung's (1968) theory of archetypes, to examine persona and shadow in the *Yellowface* (2023) novel. The findings were presented in essay form, and all data were thoroughly analyzed and interpreted to explain how the persona and the shadow, and their impact on the main character, were depicted in the novel

D. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The writer found several quotes that show persona, shadow, and their effects on the main character as follows:

1. The Persona

In the novel *Yellowface*, June Hayward is the main character. She shows her persona to cover up her shortcomings. Starting from

her crime of stealing Athena Liu's novel manuscript, her lack of social skills with publishers, and her fear that her biggest secret would be revealed.

Data 1

"Bold of you to assume I'm getting royalties at all. I don't say that out loud. If you tell Athena off for being tactless, she gets overly, exaggeratedly apologetic,..." (Kuang, 2023, p. 8)

From this quotation, we can see that June tries to show her good side. As seen in the sentence "Bold of you to assume I'm getting royalties at all," June shows a skeptical, cynical attitude toward others' assumptions about the royalties she receives. However, the sentence "I don't say that out loud" reflects an attitude and a desire not to openly show her vulnerability or dissatisfaction. This indicates that June tries to maintain her image in front of Athena and to avoid offending Athena's feelings.

Data 2

"Be happy for her, I tell myself. Just be happy for her, and let her have this night" (Kuang, 2023, p. 9)

In the story, June utters this line to herself after Athena recounts her experience meeting the producer of Tiger King. This line shows June's attempt to appear happy, even though she doesn't really want to. In the line "Just be happy for her," it shows how June suppresses her emotions for Athena's pleasure, even though there is clearly a hint of envy or sadness. June puts on a mask of happiness in front of Athena, even though she is actually jealous of her.

Based on the quotations above, June pretends to be happy in front of Athena. According to Jung (1968), the persona serves to express and hide aspects of

personality. In this case, as we know, June hides her uncomfortable side so that Athena feels okay. This pretense conceals June's other side. June presents a positive persona, yet she feels jealous and uncomfortable. This side is used by June to cover up her dark side that feels not enough, as stated in the sentence "Bold of you to assume I'm getting royalties at all." with a calm and supportive action.

Data 3

"This makes me beam. I want my editor to like me. I want her to think I'm easy to work with, that I'm not a stubborn diva, that I'm capable of making any changes she asks for." (Kuang, 2023, p. 36)

In this sentence, June is trying to please her book editor. She acts as if she's easy to work with, obedient, and not a bother. However, the previous quotation suggests that June feels belittled and dissatisfied with her situation. This is the mask she wears when interacting with her editor. She deliberately displays a friendly attitude and agrees to all of her editor's suggestions without protest to be perceived as a professional writer who is easy to work with.

Data 4

I flipped the issue open to page twelve, Athena's story, and found my own words staring back at me. ... "I like your story," I told Athena at dinner, holding her gaze, daring her to deny it. I know what you did. ... I couldn't, however, overlook the similarity between the phrases I'd used when describing my pain and the phrases Athena used in her story. ... She's stolen my story. I was convinced of it. (Kuang, 2023, p. 153)

Based on the quote above, by saying “I like your story,” June directly praises Athena’s story. However, the sentence “I know what you did” shows June’s anger towards Athena. Here, it can be seen that June is trying to show her persona, acting friendly and warm towards Athena, even though she really wants to be angry because her life story has been stolen.

Just as everyone has their own persona when interacting with others, they usually strive to please those around them. According to Jung (1968), personas are used both to hide and to reveal one’s conscious thoughts and feelings to others. Based on the quotations above, it can be seen that June demonstrates her striving to please others and her sympathy for those around her.

Data 5

“... but the tiny grandma at my shoulder insists I also try the kung pao chicken and the sesame noodles, so I let her pile helpings of those onto my plate while I try not to gag.” (Kuang, 2023, p. 90)

This is when June is having dinner with some volunteers. She doesn’t like the food provided, but June tries to accept it, even though she has to hold back her own vomit. This shows that June uses her persona to please those around her and also to maintain her image as a sociable person.

Data 6

“I clear my throat. “Good morning.” Their heads pop up. They look like startled rabbits. Skylar slams her laptop shut. I stride cheerfully to the front of the room, Starbucks in hand, trying my hardest to keep from trembling.” (Kuang, 2023, p. 182)

Based on the quotation, this is the part where June enters a classroom where her

students are gossiping about a post claiming that June stole *The Last Front*. From this quote, it can be seen that June is trying to maintain her composure, projecting a confident, cheerful persona. The phrase “Good morning,” uttered by June as she clears her throat, shows that she is covering up her vulnerability amid the gossip her students are discussing. This shows how June uses her persona to protect her image from public criticism and also to keep the feelings of those around her from being disturbed.

The character we develop through adaptation to the social environment shapes our personality, enabling us to develop a self-character that can adapt to the situation. According to Jung (1968), a persona is a mask worn by an actor who assumes a role and identity projected through a tool installed on the mask’s face. As Jung explains, this mask (persona) can cover us and make us look like someone else, as we wish. Based on the quotations above, June shows how she uses her persona to build her public image and maintain it to look good, cover up her shortcomings, use a side that is not herself, and pretend to look classy.

2. The Shadow

The shadow shown by June Hayward is in the form of her greed for fame, to the point of stealing Athena’s novel manuscript.

Data 7

“I’m tired, and I’m not having that much fun — jealousy feels worse when you’re drunk — but I’m curious to see her apartment, so I say yes” (Kuang, 2023, p. 11)

From this quotation, it can be concluded that June shows no interest in Athena’s invitation. She even feels jealous of Athena’s

living conditions. June's jealousy shows the shadow side she tries to hide. As the following sentence says, "— but I'm curious to see her apartment, so I say yes." Here, even though June felt jealous, she did not show it directly; she also felt curiosity, so she agreed to Athena's invitation.

Data 8

"I know you won't believe me, but there was never a moment when I thought to myself, I'm going to take this and make this mine." (Kuang, 2023, p. 24)

From this quote, it is clear that June feels no guilt whatsoever. She never even considered taking what was not hers. This shows June's dark side: the fact that she stole a manuscript from her friend, Athena Liu, and published it under her own name. This was certainly unacceptable in society, which is why June kept it a secret.

Data 9

"I know Daniella's email voice well enough by now to tell when she's irritated. Curt, choppy sentences. She didn't even sign off. Daniella is pissed. Good. Hot vindication coils in my gut. Candice deserves it—" (Kuang, 2023, p. 57).

From this quote, it is clear that June felt incredibly satisfied that Daniella supported her in punishing Candice. June's dark side, which delighted in seeing others suffer, was a shadow within herself that she tried to hide.

Data 10

I chuckle. I'm curled in my bed, my covers pulled up to my chin. God bless the Eden's Angel, I think. Elsewhere on the internet, Diana's rant is circulating among gleeful mobs of Junifer Song

haters, but for now, I'm happy to watch Jen and Marnie shit all over Diana's portfolio. (Kuang, 2023, p. 121)

Based on the quotation above, June shows her dark side. The sentence that says "I'm happy to watch Jen and Marnie shit all over Diana's portfolio." shows how June revels in the suffering of others. Not only happiness, but June also shows her resentment towards Diana here. This sentence also shows how June feels that victory is not only success as a writer, but also bringing down people who threaten her position. June shows her desire to insult and defeat opponents. This is a shadow that June has; instead of feeling sympathy, she actually enjoys it when Diana, who criticized her, is insulted by others.

Data 11

"Instead I have to face them head-on. I'll write about us. Well, no—a fictionalized version of us, a pseudo-autobiography in which I blur fact and fiction. I'll describe the night she died in all its heart-stopping, lurid detail." (Kuang, 2023, p. 197)

This quotation is the part when June is fed up with the comments about herself and also the terror from Athena's Instagram account. This disgust leads June to the thought that she wants to control the story of her relationship with Athena. Instead of facing it with honesty, as written in the narrative "Instead I have to face them head-on. I'll write about us. Well, no—a fictionalized version of us," June instead wants to depict and write Athena's death as fictional material and as a tool for entertainment. It is not guilt that arises, but June chooses to take advantage of the situation and consider it narrative material for the idea of the next novel. Here, June's

shadow appears as a drive to seek profit by turning guilt into power.

June's shadow is depicted as her stealing a deceased friend's manuscript and publishing it under her own name. According to Jung (1968), the shadow is a person's dark side, which we face with fear, and indicates that we are the object of unseen forces. The shadow cannot be easily eliminated or neutralized into something harmless. As Jung (1968) stated, the dark side is hidden and isolated, highly selfish, stubborn, callous, and controlling. This can be explained by June's behavior, who feels no guilt for her actions and never even feels she committed the theft.

3. The Impact

In the process of maintaining her persona and hiding her dark side, June experiences a clash between the persona she tries to project and the dark side she tries to hide. When the two collide, June has difficulty controlling herself and her thoughts. The writer finds some of the impacts that June receives in *Yellowface* (2023) by Rebecca F. Kuang.

Data 12

And then I see her. Right there, in the front row, flesh and blood, casting her own shadow, so solid and present that I can't be hallucinating.... She's slouched gracefully against her plastic pull-out chair, pushing her shiny black locks back over her shoulders. Athena. Blood thunders in my ears. I blink several times, hoping desperately she's an apparition, but every time I open my eyes she's still there, smiling expectantly at me with bright, berry-red lips. (Kuang, 2023, p. 63)

From this quote, it's clear that June is experiencing hallucinations. She subconsciously sees a figure resembling

Athena, even thinking it's Athena. The following quotation reinforces this explanation:

I'm terrified Athena will appear before me, book in hand. I keep craning my head to search for her green shawl in the line, but she seems to have vanished. Has no one else noticed? Am I the only one who's seen her? (Kuang, 2023, p. 64)

This quote confirms that June has been experiencing hallucinations. This occurs because of the conflict between her shadow side and her persona. June tries to cover up her lies, but because of this, fear haunts her and causes her to experience hallucinations.

Data 13

My heart races; my breaths are shallow. My brain buzzes so loudly that I can hardly hear my own thoughts, and I feel a tug at the base of my skull, like I'm withdrawing into and then away from my body. I can feel a panic attack oncoming—no, not oncoming, peaking; I've been low-key suffering an attack for the past hour, and I'm only now in an environment private enough to experience the full range of symptoms. My chest constricts. My vision fades to a pinprick. (Kuang, 2023, p. 64)

This is the excerpt where June returns from a book signing at a bookstore. From the above quote, it's clear that June, who previously experienced hallucinations, is now experiencing unnecessary fear. Physical symptoms such as a racing heart and shallow breathing indicate a fight-or-flight response from the nervous system. This is evidence that June is experiencing internal conflict. Her fear causes temporary panic, stress, and even trauma.

Data 14

I can't eat. I want to eat—I'm starving all the time, and I keep ordering huge, hot, greasy delivery meals of pizza or pasta bowls, but the moment I start to chew, my thoughts begin to spiral again about my impending professional implosion, and then I can't take another bite without gagging. (Kuang, 2023, p. 112)

Based on the quotation above, it can be concluded that June is experiencing mental distress that makes it difficult for her to eat. She tries to swallow her food but fails because her thoughts are constantly distracted by fear. June fears that her secret will be revealed and her career will be ruined. This indicates that June is experiencing psychological stress or excessive anxiety, which is one of the symptoms of stress or depression.

Data 15

I can't sleep. I lie awake every night until the sun comes up, feverishly refreshing various threads and accounts to see who's retweeted or responded to what, composing imaginary responses in my head, then composing imaginary rebuttals to the backlash to those responses. (Kuang, 2023, p. 112)

Based on the quotation above, June suffers from severe insomnia due to her obsessive anxiety about comments on social media. She is constantly fixated on online activities, making her constantly check threads and accounts until sunrise. June's condition continues her previous disorder of difficulty eating, indicating chronic stress that worsens her physical and mental condition. June's anxiety and panic stem from the fear of monitoring the public's reaction to the destruction of her career. As

a result, she tries to formulate responses and rebuttals to the accusations against her. This shows a form of anxiety where the mind is trapped between the person she tries to present and the shadow she tries to hide.

The impact felt by June, as explained in the quotations above, is that she, who tries to keep her shadow hidden behind her public persona, experiences conditions ranging from mild to extreme stress. According to Jung (1968), when two personalities clash, this can lead to inner turmoil. The conflicting persona and shadow collide, causing the persona to struggle to suppress the shadow. This often leads to symptoms of inner conflict. This condition is characterized by hallucinations, a refusal to eat or drink, insomnia, and excessive anxiety.

D. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study shows that in Rebecca F. Kuang's novel *Yellowface* (2023), the main character, June Hayward, has multiple personas and a shadow. Her persona is clearly visible when she socializes with others, pretending to be okay, showing sympathy, and her efforts to please others, and when June tries to maintain her image as a professional writer. Her shadow is a dark side that she tries to hide, which is stealing the manuscript of her deceased friend, Athena, a successful writer. Then, June also uses many lies to cover up her lies.

In the process of covering up her lies, the persona June projects conflicts with the shadow she seeks to hide. This causes her to experience internal conflict, leading to disorders such as mental disorders and stress, difficulty eating, and experiencing frequent hallucinations. This also makes her frequently anxious and afraid that her lies will be discovered.

In this study, the writer focuses solely on the archetypal persona, the main character's shadow, and the impact of their conflict on the main character in the novel. The writer recommends that future writers analyze other archetypes, such as the self, anima, and animus, found in *Yellowface*. Furthermore, it is highly recommended to analyze the persona and shadow in other literary works, such as films, short stories, graphic novels, and other media. However, knowledge of the theory is implicit. It requires a broader search to further develop this research by examining the issues of persona and shadow across various books, journals, and other online sources.

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