

# Bifurcation of Archetypes in Mykhailo Kotsiubynskyi's Novel “Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors”

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**Abstract.** This article reinterprets Mykhailo Kotsiubynskyi's “*Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors*” by moving beyond the traditional view of the novel as a Hutsul “Romeo and Juliet” tale centered on a family feud. Applying Carl Jung's theory of archetypes, the study explores how the narrative unfolds deeper psychological themes, including the Shadow, the Anima, the Wise Old Man, and the Changeling. The analysis reveals that the true essence of the novel lies in the protagonist's struggle with his darker nature, his unfulfilled redemption, and the symbolic duality of the feminine, offering a universal exploration of identity, duality, and the human psyche. The authors integrate the overlapping of paganism and Christianity in the novel with the theory of archetypes, emphasizing how these elements shape the protagonist's character and fate.

**Keywords:** archetypes, collective unconscious, bifurcation, Shadow, Anima, Changeling

## Archetipų poliarizacija Mykhailo Kotsiubynskio romane „Užmirštų protėvių šešėliai“

**Santrauka.** Šiame straipsnyje naujai interpretuojamas Mykhailo Kotsiubynskio romanas „Užmirštų protėvių šešėliai“, siekiant pakeisti tradicinį požiūrį į romaną kaip į huculų „Romeo ir Džuljetos“ istoriją, kurios centre – šeimyninė nesantaika. Taikant Carlo Jungo archetipų teoriją, nagrinėjama, kaip

pasakojime atsiskleidžia gilesnės psichologinės temos, apibūdinamos Jungo šešėlio, animos (moteriškosios sielos), išminčiaus ir pakeistinio (laumiuko) archetipais. Analizė atskleidžia, kad tikroji romano esmė glūdi protagonisto kovoje su savo tamsiąja prigimtimi, neišsipildžiusiu atpirkimu ir simboliniu moteriškojo prado dvilypumu. Autorius susitelkia į universaliąsias tapatybės, asmenybės skilimo ir žmogaus psichikos problemas. Autorės nagrinėja pagonybės ir krikščionybės elementų persiklojimą romane taikydamos archetipų teoriją, parodydamos, kaip šie elementai formuoja protagonisto charakterį ir likimą.

**Prasminiai žodžiai:** archetipai, kolektyvinė sąjmonė, poliarizacija, šešėlis, anima, pakeistinis

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## Introduction

Mykhailo Kotsiubynskyi's novel „Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors“ (1912) is frequently described as a Hutsul variation of the “Romeo and Juliet” narrative, emphasizing a family feud. However, while the enmity between the lovers' families leads to the deaths of Ivan's brother and father, it does not drive the plot's tragic development. Marichka's death occurs accidentally when she is swept away by the waters of the Cheremosh River, while Ivan, in contrast to Romeo, survives her by at least a decade and ultimately dies from wounds inflicted by his wife's lover, a sorcerer, on the story's real-world plane, before being lured into an abyss by a wood nymph impersonating Marichka on the demonic-world plane.

Despite these complexities, traditional interpretations of Kotsiubynskyi's novel and its film adaptation of 1965 – celebrated as the pinnacle of Ukrainian cinema – often frame it as a “Romeo and Juliet” tale of young Hutsul lovers ensnared by a Carpathian family blood feud (Rollberg 2009: 612). This interpretation might explain the overemphasis on the feud motif in Marco Carynnyk's translation of the novel, where the phrase *feuding families* is used in place of the original *starynia*, meaning “the elders of the family”: “They no longer grazed the sheep together and met only on Sundays and on holidays, by the church or in the forest, so that *the feuding families* would not know that their children were in love” (Kotsiubynskyi 1981: 14).

Bohdan Rubchak was the first to observe that critics have overly emphasized this minor resemblance to the „Romeo and Juliet“ model, a comparison that falters under closer examination. Rubchak also noted the connection between the sleeping ancestral voices in the novel and Jung's concept of the collective unconscious (Rubchak 1981a: 103). In particular, he singles out the legendary-mythical level of the novel, “on which the Hutsul legends of cosmogony and of the elements – especially fire and water – transcend the daily use of black magic, point to powerful universal archetypes” (Rubchak 1981a: 104).

## Archetypal model of the novel

It is also possible to surmise that the family feud in „Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors“ serves as a real-life manifestation of the deeper bifurcation present at the archetypal level of the novel. In this interpretation, the external conflict between the families could symbolize an underlying psychological and spiritual division within the character of Ivan and the mystical forces surrounding him.

From a Jungian perspective, such external conflicts often reflect internal struggles, where opposing forces within the psyche – such as the conscious and the unconscious, the Ego and the Shadow, or the Anima and the Animus – clash. The family feud, therefore, can be seen not merely as a social or cultural backdrop but as an outward projection of these inner divisions.

The bifurcation at the archetypal plane is evident in the novel’s exploration of dualities: light and dark, human and supernatural, order and chaos. A constant tension between these opposing forces marks Ivan’s life. The feud could be interpreted as a symbolic representation of Ivan’s internal conflict between his human desires and the darker, more primal forces that draw him towards the supernatural realm. His attraction to Marichka, juxtaposed with his interactions with the demonic Vanisher and his ultimate demise at the hands of the sorcerer, illustrates this profound inner division.

In this context, the family feud becomes a metaphor for the deeper, archetypal split within Ivan and, by extension, within the collective unconscious of the Hutsul community. This split is not just a personal struggle for Ivan but a reflection of the broader human condition, where individuals are subject to the tension between the conscious self and the repressed, often darker aspects of their psyche. The novel’s tragic outcome, where neither love nor the feud is resolved in a conventional sense, emphasizes the inevitability and complexity of this archetypal bifurcation.

## The bifurcation between pagan and Christian

The bifurcation starts with the religious syncretism pervading the story. The Hutsul region, where “Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors” is set, is a place where pagan beliefs and Christianity coexist, creating a rich tapestry of spiritual practices and worldviews. This syncretism is not merely a cultural backdrop but plays a significant role in the novel, reflecting the collective unconscious and the archetypes that shape the characters’ lives. The coexistence of paganism and Christianity in the novel can be seen as an external manifestation of the collective unconscious, where different archetypes and symbols from both traditions interact and shape the characters’ destinies. Carl Jung suggested that archetypes are primordial types, universal images that have existed

since the remotest times and may be transformed into conscious formulae of the rites: “Primitive tribal lore is concerned with archetypes that have been modified in a special way. They are no longer contents of the unconscious, but have already been changed into conscious formulae taught according to tradition, generally in the form of esoteric teaching” (Jung 2014: 5).

In the Hutsul world, these archetypes are expressed through a blend of Christian and pagan symbols, rituals, and practices, as Kotsiubynskyi himself keenly observed. During his second visit to the Carpathian Mountains in the summer of 1911, already bearing the idea of the future novel in mind, Kotsiubynskyi writes about the duality of the Hutsul beliefs: “The Hutsul are the most original people, with rich imagination and peculiar psyche. A profound pagan, a Hutsul spends all his life battling evil spirits that dwell in forests, mountains, and waters. He uses Christianity only to decorate his pagan cult” (Kotsiubynskyi 1973–1975: 126).

The pagan elements, such as the reverence for nature, the belief in spirits, and the rituals performed by the witch, the sorcerer, Ivan’s wife Palahna and Ivan himself represent the primal, unconscious aspects of the collective psyche. These elements coexist with Christian practices, reflecting a cultural tension between the new and the old. This tension is mirrored in Ivan’s life, where his experiences and the forces that influence him are shaped by both pagan and Christian elements. The Vanisher, the wood nymph, and other supernatural beings represent the pagan archetypes of the Hutsul collective unconscious while Christian symbols and practices attempt to impose order and morality on this wild, violent world, ultimately with no success. This is encoded in the deeply ironic (seemingly, the only irony in the story) episode: Ivan’s family is described as “devout” because “they liked to visit church, especially for parish fairs”, yet their motive for these pious trips was primarily the opportunity to repay the rival family of the Hutenuks for the blood of their kin (Kotsiubynskyi 1981: 11–12). The religious bifurcation is easily traceable in the description of Ivan’s holy supper rituals on Christmas Eve: he summoned the hostile powers against which he had guarded all his life, “necromancers, sorcerers, astrologers, wolves, bears, the tempest”, hoping that they did not accept the invitation (Kotsiubynskyi 1981: 29–30). The original image *taina vecheria* (*the Secret Supper*) from Eastern Orthodoxy fits the context perfectly, unlike its idiomatic equivalent *the Last Supper* or even Marco Carynnyk’s option *holy supper*.

It would be more appropriate to characterize the religious duality of the novel not as syncretism but as the submission of Christianity to the dark demonology of the Hutsul world, what Bohdan Rubchak in his profound analysis “The Music of the Satan and the Bedeviled World” calls “the bedevilment of Christianity in Carpathian villages” (Rubchak 1981a: 107). In his “Notes on the Text” explaining numerous Hutsul names of devil, Rubchak makes an important remark: “The world of the Hutsuls, moreover, is

ruled by the perpetual victor in that battle, who certainly is not God” (Rubchak 1981b: 46). It appears that Kotsiubynskyi himself identifies this victor in the mysterious note among his extracts from folklore and ethnographic collections intended for the novel: “The devil is the beginning of every culture” (Kotsiubynskyi 1929: 305).

The title “Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors” suggests a direct reference to the devil as the Shadow archetype. Nowhere in the story is Satan or the Devil called by its name hiding behind a plethora of euphemistic expressions – *aridnyk*, *shcheznyk*, *it*, *bisytsia*, to name just a few. As Ivan Ohiyenko (metropolitan Ilarion) observes, according to Old Ukrainian beliefs, it is dangerous to call the devil by his name, therefore he is given other names or driven away by protective phrases: *not to mention in our presence, may you vanish* etc. (Mytropolyt Ilarion: 145). Unfortunately, in the translation of the novel this superstitious fear is flattened out, as the protective phrases mention the devil: *the deuce take them all!* (Kotsiubynskyi 1981: 23), *the devil take him!* (Kotsiubynskyi 1981: 23).

## The Shadow

Jung describes the Shadow as the unconscious aspect of the personality that the conscious mind does not identify in itself. In Ivan’s story, this Shadow is not merely a part of his psyche, which “he has no wish to be”, but is also embodied in the eerie presence of the Vanisher (*shcheznyk*). The Vanisher is not just an external figure; he is a manifestation of Ivan’s internal shadow, the part of him that is drawn to the wild, the unknown, and the dark aspects of existence.

Ivan’s encounter with the Vanisher in the woods, where he is both terrified and fascinated by the mysterious figure, signifies his confrontation with his own Shadow. His later success in replicating the Vanisher’s melody on his flute and dancing with joy marks his acceptance and integration of this shadowy aspect into his being: “Thus, Ivan found in the forest what he had been looking for” (Kotsiubynskyi 1981: 11). It is symbolic that Ivan meets the Vanisher at the age of seven and after Marichka’s death he *vanishes* himself for seven years – a number often associated with transformation and cycles of life. Seven is the number of members of Ivan’s family before the murder of the father on the day when Ivan met Marichka shattered this shaky balance.

## The Changeling

Ivan embodies the archetype of the Changeling, a bifurcate creature belonging neither fully to the human nor to the supernatural world, caught between the light and the shadow. He is identified as Changeling in the opening of the novel by the Anima figure of his earthly mother. She suspects that she-devil (*bisytsia*) exchanged her child for the

human one due to the midwife's failure to perform proper rituals. From the very start, the real and demonic sides of Anima realms are brought together through manipulations of the mediator (in this respect, the motivational semantics of the translated equivalent *midwife* is even more emphasized than the original *baba*). Ivan's childhood, marked by his *ancient gaze*, his mother's curses – *Shches by! (May you vanish!)*, his vanishing into the woods and his uncanny knowledge (“*it speaking through him*”) (Kotsiubynskyi 1981: 9–10) reflects the classic traits of a changeling – an otherworldly being displaced in the human world. The novel's narrative arc follows Ivan's journey as he oscillates between his shadow nature and his desire for human connection, symbolized by Marichka.

## The Anima

Marichka embodies the positive redeeming aspect of the Anima. Her kindness and innocence make Ivan forget about darkness – his father's murder. Marichka creates beautiful songs about real life surrounding them: “No matter what her eye rested on, no matter what happened – a sheep strayed, a lad fell in love, a girl was unfaithful, a cow took sick – everything was poured into a song, as light and simple as the mountains in their primeval life” (Kotsiubynskyi 1981: 14). Her songs contrast sharply with Ivan's eerie melodies, which are imbued with the shadowy influence of the Vanisher. Marichka represents a potential for salvation, akin to the character of Janet in the Scottish legend of Tam Lin paraphrased in Robert Burns' ballad “O, I forbid You maidens A”, where the true love of a woman saves a changeling from the clutches of the fairy queen. However, unlike Tam Lin, Ivan is not saved by Marichka; her untimely death (drowning, which can be interpreted as an archetypal return to the unconscious, as “water is the commonest symbol of the unconscious” (Jung 2014: 5)) leaves Ivan unredeemed and his inner conflict unresolved.

Marichka's death marks a turning point in the novel, where Ivan's inability to fully integrate his Anima results in his further descent into the world of the unconscious. His subsequent vanishing for seven years reflects a symbolic death and rebirth, a common motif in myths and a manifestation of the collective unconscious. However, unlike the hero who emerges transformed, Ivan returns to a life of ordinary existence, unable to fully escape the shadowy forces that have shaped his life.

## The Wise Old Man

The final encounter with the sorcerer, who symbolizes the Dark Magician, and the reappearance of Marichka as a wood nymph (“the bifurcation of Marichka and anti-Marichka” (Rubchak 1981a: 113)), represent the ultimate failure of Ivan's redemp-

tion: “Ivan sensed that the hostile forces were stronger than he was, that he had fallen in battle” (Kotsiubynskyi 1981: 36). The bifurcation of Marichka in the final scene also evokes associations with the opposites of Anima archetype in the Old Ukrainian demonology – Lada (Love) and Morena (Death). Despite recognizing the Marichka’s bifurcation and his own Ego-Shadow split (“His consciousness was splitting. He sensed Marichka beside him and yet knew that Marichka was gone” (Kotsiubynskyi 1981: 37)), Ivan follows her to his death, symbolizing his complete surrender to the Shadow. The description of the abyss Ivan falls into strikingly resembles the picture of Sheol, “the land of gloom and eternal darkness” from Isaiah 5.14; comp. “he sensed the cold and malevolent breath of the abyss that had opened its insatiable maw toward him” (Kotsiubynskyi 1981: 40); “Therefore Sheol has enlarged itself and opened its mouth beyond measure” (The Holy Bible: Isaiah 5.14).

The archetype of the Shadow embodied in the novel “overshadows” the archetype of God as the Wise Old Man or the Magician, “gray-haired and barefoot”, whose functions are limited to granting the increase of the livestock on New Year’s Eve (Kotsiubynskyi 1981: 30). In the legend about *aridnyk* and God, told by Mykyta (a narration within the narration), the devil is bestowed with the power of a creator of many useful things God steals from him to give to people.

Even Yura, the sorcerer (*molfar*), embodies a much more powerful Magician archetype that blends elements of both the pagan and Christian worlds, and possesses deep knowledge but is also feared for his potential to disrupt the natural order. Yura is described as a god-like figure: in the original the verb “bohuye” (acts *as* a god) is used while the translated variant is milder – “People said that he was *like* a god” (Kotsiubynskyi 1981: 28). The sorcerer’s role as both a healer and a destroyer reflects the duality of his archetype. He is a figure of immense power, much like the deities of ancient religions who were worshipped and feared in equal measure. In the context of the collective unconscious, the sorcerer represents the dual nature of the divine – the benevolent creator and the destructive force. His god-like status in the Hutsul community and his control over natural and supernatural forces underscore his role as a mediator between the conscious and unconscious realms.

## Jungian archetypes at work

The story presented by Kotsiubynskyi is a perfect illustration of archetypal bifurcation, or of what Jung describes as “humanity split into two apparently irreconcilable halves”: “The psychological rule says that when an inner situation is not made conscious, it happens outside, as fate. That is to say, when the individual remains undivided and does not become conscious of his inner opposite, the world must perforce

act out the conflict and be torn into opposing halves” (Jung 1970: 71). In “Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors”, the Hutsul world is not just a cultural backdrop but a manifestation of these universal patterns, externalizing the unconscious conflicts and archetypes shared by all humanity. The Hutsuls, with their close connection to nature and the spirit world, live in a reality where the boundaries between the conscious and unconscious, the real and the mythic, are blurred. This setting acts as a stage where the conflicts and themes of the collective unconscious play out. Ivan’s life, marked by his interactions with these mythic figures and his eventual succumbing to the Shadow, can be seen as a dramatization of the internal conflicts that, when not made conscious, manifest externally as fate, tearing the world into opposing halves.

Given the aforementioned, the title of the novel reflects the idea preceding the text itself. It is true, to a certain extent, as three years prior to “Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors” in “Our Trip to the Holy Well”, the narrator, inspired by the Carpathians, feels the urge to compose his individual song when the sacred fire would extract from his breast the dormant ancestral voice. It is emphasized that this voice is closely linked to the locus of the primordial mountains:

“I often ponder the wisdom of those who chose to build their churches, monasteries, and chapels in the most beautiful and untamed locations. They are fully aware of their intentions. They are reaching out not only to us but to the ancestors who live within us – ancestors who for centuries performed sacred rituals in forests and groves and offered their sacrifices there”. (Kotsiubynskyi 1973-1975, 3: 11).

This may explain the initial version of the title “In the Green Mountains”, the first in the line of thirteen options. Perhaps, Kotsiubynskyi noticed the inadvertent allusion to the title of Thomas Hardy’s idyllic rustic romance “Under the Greenwood Tree” (1872) but, most probably, he decided to change the locus into the chronos, which is made manifest in his further variants – “Shadows of the Past”, “Voice of the Ages”, “Echo of the Pre-age”, “Breath of the Ages”, “Voices of the Pre-eternal”, “Legacy of the Ages”. The shift from a chronos-oriented title to the complex archetypal chronotopic one produced the variants “Gift of Forgotten Ancestors”, “Voice of the Forgotten Ancestors”, “In the Footsteps of the Ancestors”, “Power of the Forgotten Ancestors”, and eventually “Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors” which resonates deeply with Carl Jung’s concept of the collective unconscious.

Of particular interest is the three-time repetition of the variant *Voice/Voices* which alludes to “Our Trip to the Holy Well”. Kotsiubynskyi’s novel is filled with the voices of the Carpathians. Perhaps, one of the most enigmatic is the voice of the invisible axe living in the woods and heavily breathing with its weary breasts. This image is mentioned only twice in the novel (unfortunately, in Carynnyk’s translation *voice* is substituted by



*sound* (“the sound of the axe lived in the forest” (Kotsiubynskyi 1981: 28)). Rubchak suggests that the voice of the ax belongs to the plethora of preternatural phenomena collectively called *blud*, leading people astray (Rubchak 1981b: 51). However, this image acquires an absolutely different meaning when viewed through the film interpretation. The clattering voice of the invisible ax combines the beginning and the end of this cinematographic masterpiece (Hoseiko 2005: 185), which can be interpreted as the voice of the ancestors summoning Ivan’s brother Oleksa (in the beginning) and Ivan (in the end) to the world of the dead.

## The symbolic power of “Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors”

Sergiy Parajanov’s film adaptation “Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors” is widely regarded as the most heralded Ukrainian film, celebrated for its innovative cinematography, rich portrayal of Hutsul culture, and deep exploration of archetypal themes. Yet the film’s premiere at Kyiv’s Ukraine Cinema transcended its artistic significance, becoming a catalyst for political dissent. Ukrainian intellectuals, led by Ivan Dziuba, Vasyl Stus, Viacheslav Chornovil, and others used the occasion to protest against the Soviet regime’s repressive policies. In the context of the 1965 premiere and the subsequent struggle for Ukraine’s independence, the title “Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors” took on a new and positive connotation. The *shadows* now symbolized not just the burden of a forgotten past, but the enduring legacy and resilience of the Ukrainian nation. The film, and the protest it sparked, highlighted a collective memory and a ‘genetic code’ of the nation – an inherent sense of identity and resistance passed down through generations, much like the archetypes of the collective unconscious.

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