

The Idol and the Shadow: A Psychoanalytic Study of Identity in K-Pop: Demon Hunters (2025) Animated Film

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*"For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed;
neither hid, that shall not be known."*

Luke 12 : 2 (KJV)

ABSTRACT

This study purposefully shows how popular, family-friendly animation contributes to the issue of mental health by examining the Sony Picture animated film K-Pop: Demon Hunters (2025). It analyzes the psychological conflict between public identity performance and the repressed self, using Carl Jung's theory of Analytical Psychology (1959). Using a qualitative approach focused on narratives, dialogues, and song lyrics to investigate how internal psyche conflicts are brought to life through cinematic techniques, the findings show: **1)** Rumi's physical changes, specifically her glowing purple skin patterns and loss of voice, act as physical signs of an unintegrated shadow and industry enforced trauma; **2)** The film taps into the collective unconscious to make Korean shamanism globally relatable through universal archetypes, while subverting Celine's "*Mentor*" role into an agent of toxic conformity; **3)** The psychological recovery and artistic freedom are achieved through the process of Individuation, requiring the active integration of the suppressed shadow rather than its erasure. This study concludes that the film provides a critique of forced perfectionism and identity fragmentation. This research significantly builds a clear framework for understanding deep messages about mental health inside popular, family-friendly animation, challenging viewers to question the intense social pressures of today's societal expectations. Finally, it is hoped that future research will apply this psychoanalytic lens to other non-music global media genres, such as streaming series or graphic novels.

Keyword: *Carl Jung, Psychoanalysis, Idol Culture, K-Pop, Shadow, Persona*

INTRODUCTION

Literature and films serve as more than mere entertainment; they are a conceptual testing ground in which the abstract is transformed into lived reality and the human experience is analysed. The fairytale narrative is essential for unveiling inner conflicts unconsciously process questions of identity and self-repression. In the world of animated films, cultural representation is the reproduction, distribution and invention of distinct cultural elements, values and social ideologies through visual artistry and fairytale narrative. By literalising abstract ideas through symbols like

demons, patterns, or magical barriers, one expresses internal psychological issues like rejections, inner conflict, or change; establishing an instant emotional connection that conventional text-based literature typically conveys more indirectly (Praveen, 2022).

With the understanding that both literature and films have a purpose, animated films have a uniquely powerful yet often overlooked position in the literary canon. Often categorised as family or kid-friendly entertainment, they are written off as simply a diversion; however, cartoon films, which are essential sources of entertainment for kids, also have educational components, and their innocent display often carries subtle messages that contain various negatives (Gökçearsan, 2010). Since animated films are regarded as innocent, the ideological meanings within them are often ignored, allowing the young audiences to absorb the meaning uncritically. Because animated films use vivid colour and composition, emotional expression, and a distorted, staged handling of image to influence children's behaviour in a laid-back setting, watching them can be seen as a social learning process. *“Children who are exposed to gender stereotypes in the media may develop and propagate these beliefs; as a result, the themes presented in films aimed at younger audiences need to be carefully considered.”* (Raju et al., 2023). The understanding of children of norms of society and moral values can also be greatly impacted by the social setting shown in animated cartoons (Bandura, as cited in Malaysia Journal of Invention and Innovation, 2024). Animated films are a rich and relevant subject of literary and psychoanalytic research because of the gap between perception and reality, between what viewers believe they are and what they actually transmit. In this case, K-Pop: Demon Hunters (2025), a PG-rated animated musical fantasy on Netflix with a large global viewership, operates inside this powerful zone and so requires careful analysis using Carl Jung's (1959) theory of archetypes and the collective unconscious.

The main issue of the film reflects the high pressure of Idol Culture found in both the South Korean entertainment industry and the global music market. The K-pop industry is well known for its demanding preparation process, where individuals are required to complete years of extensive training in dance, vocals, and public presentation before making their debut. This training system may produce amazing performers, but also forces them to embrace social conformity where they are required to follow strict rules to specifically fit the 'perfect' image. This pressure serves to train individuals to act the same and never stand out as an individual is much more intense than what we usually see with celebrities in the Western countries. The film critiques this by viewing Korean tradition through a Western lens, specifically reimagining ancient Korean Shamanism (Muism). In traditional Korean culture, the mudang held a deeply respected spiritual role, using performances such as dance and songs to drive away harmful spirits and safeguarding those around them. The film,

however, adapts this practice into a Western style of superhero narrative where hunting demons must remain a dark, hidden secret. This choice serves as a Western critique of how modern commercial industries might exploit beautiful cultural traditions and turn them into high pressure performances. Ultimately, the narrative suggests that when individuals are forced to maintain perfection, the aspects of their true identity that break these rigid regulations have to go somewhere else. In the film, these suppressed shadows transform to demons, but in reality they manifest as mental health issues.

K-Pop: Demon Hunters, produced by Sony Picture Animation and directed by Maggie Kang and Chris Appelhans, is a PG-rated animated musical fantasy released globally on June 20, 2025 on Netflix. The screenplay was written by Danya Jimenez and Hanna McMechan, and the film centers on three main characters of the fictional idol group HUNTRIX. The character Rumi was voiced by Arden cho, Mira voiced by May Hong, and Zoey voiced by Ji-young Yoo. This film was categorized as an action adventure musical, which successfully creates tension through the demon hunting battles and catchy soundtracks that allows them to win the Golden Globe for Best Motion Picture Animated and the Critics' Choice film Award for Best Animated Feature in 2026. Furthermore, its song called Golden made history by winning a Grammy Award for Best Song Written for Visual media. The film broke records as the most watched original film in Netflix history. The film also successfully led to a sing along theatrical release in late 2025. Additionally, behind the colorful animation and highly successful songs, this film also contains critical and hidden messages that criticize the social pressure of K-pop industries and the struggle to protect an individual's mental health while performing a "perfect" mask in public. The story follows the renowned K-pop girl group that lives a double life of superstars and demon hunters. The main conflict focuses on the lead character, Rumi, who is half demon and has been taught to hide and be ashamed of her entire life. This internal struggle, expressed through the purple patterns that erupt on her skin and the eventual loss of her singing voice, connects the fantasy of demon hunting to the real life struggle of young people who feel pressured to conceal their true identities in order to fit into society.

To analyse the psychological conflict at the heart of *K-Pop: Demon Hunters*, this study applies the analytical psychology of Carl Jung, particularly his concepts of the persona, the shadow, the collective unconscious, the archetypes, and the individuation process as outlined in *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* (1959). In this study, the persona is understood as the institutionally enforced “Golden” image that the members of HUNTRIX are required to perform at all times. This image is wholesome, polished, and entirely free from contradiction, having been shaped not only by personal choice but also by the collective expectations of the K-Pop industry and its audiences. As Jung (1966, p. 192) described, the persona functions as the social mask or public

face that an individual presents to conform to societal norms and expectations. While necessary for social adaptation, the persona can become problematic when it grows overly rigid or inflated, concealing the individual's authentic personality and creating a barrier to genuine self-discovery. Correspondingly, the shadow is operationalised as everything the system requires its performers to suppress. In Rumi's case, this is most literally embodied in her half-demon nature and the purple patterns that surface on her skin whenever her repressed identity asserts itself. Jung viewed the shadow as the dark hidden aspect of the personality; encompassing repressed desires, impulses, negative traits, and aspects of the self that the conscious ego refuses to acknowledge. Importantly, Jung (1959) emphasized that the shadow is not inherently destructive; rather, it contains vital energy and potential. The source of psychological crisis, therefore, lies not in the shadow's existence but in its enforced concealment and denial. Rumi's sudden loss of her singing voice, the very instrument of her public persona can be read as the symptomatic consequence of psychic split, a breakdown that occurs when maintaining the persona becomes unsustainable (Jung, 1964).

The ways people analyze literature using psychology changed a lot when it moved from Sigmund Freud's ideas to Carl Jung's. Freud believed that stories mostly reflected an author's painful past or hidden desires. Jung, on the other hand, believed that stories tap into the "*collective unconscious*," a deep part of the human mind that all people share, filled with universal symbols and themes (Jung, 1959/1969). As Knapp (1984) explains, this approach expands our understanding of literature because it connects individual stories to shared human experiences rather than individual mental illness (p. 2). Because of this, a story can deeply move readers from different cultures and time periods, since it speaks to psychological truths that all humans share — even if the author never planned it that way (Rowland, 1999).

Through this lens, a character's struggles are seen as battles between different parts of their own mind. Stories often show the tension between the *persona*; the social mask we wear to fit in and the *shadow*, which represents the darker, hidden parts of ourselves that we keep out of sight (Walker, 2002). This inner conflict is also shaped by the *anima* (feminine qualities in men) or *animus* (masculine qualities in women) inner forces that push characters toward either emotional balance or a breakdown (Rowland, 1999).

In the end, Jungian criticism sees a story's plot as a journey toward becoming a complete, balanced person by working through inner conflicts, a process called *individuation* (Jung, 1959/1969). Literature serves as a kind of healing tool for both the writer and society by bringing buried feelings and thoughts to the surface (Knapp, 1984). When a story ends with a hero resolving a conflict or making peace with an enemy, it symbolizes the conscious mind finally finding harmony

with the deeper, hidden parts of itself (Walker, 2002). By focusing on future emotional growth rather than past trauma, Jungian theory shows how literature serves as a universal map for human transformation.

Beyond the individual psyche, Jung (1959) introduced the concept of the collective unconscious, a universal layer of the human mind shared across cultures and generations, which contains inherited symbols and patterns of behavior known as archetypes. Jung (1959, p. 5) defines archetypes as “the necessary and indispensable components of every healthy psyche,” functioning as universal templates that shape how individuals and cultures construct meaning. In the context of this film, the collective unconscious is operationalised through the reimagining of ancient Korean Shamanism into a modern K-pop narrative. This allows a specifically Korean cultural tradition to resonate with a global audience by tapping into universal archetypal roles such as the Mentor, the Hero, and the Healer.

In the story’s potential answer to this battle, (Jung 1966, p. 173) describes the individuation process as the psyche’s journey toward wholeness, for the integration of conscious and unconscious elements (Jung, 1959). Jung (1966, p. 173) defines individuation as “becoming an ‘individual,’ and... implies becoming one’s own self,” which he describes as ‘coming to selfhood’ or ‘self realization.’ Rumi and the members of her band, the HUNTRIX, embody individuation by engaging in their demon-hunting quests, as archetypal confrontations with the shadow.

While recent scholarship on K-pop media has explored gender representation and cultural meaning in the context of the global Korean Wave, significant gaps remain regarding how these representations operate across varying formal instantiations. Such is the case in *The Awakening of Female Consciousness: Study on K-Pop Girl Groups’ Music Videos* by Ruojia Zhang (2023), who uses semiotic analysis to analyze three K-pop girl-group music videos and how representations of feminist ideas and female consciousness are simulated through visual symbols and narratives. The current girl group study has more explicit communications of empowerment and resistance in the intersection of surroundings patriarchal culture according to the study. As one example, body and gender: post feminism and representation of girl groups in k-pop music videos by Jiayi chen also scrutinizes gender portrayal in k-pop, but it analyzes lyrics and aesthetics of several generations of girl groups through a post feminist lens. Despite the more visible feminist dialogue around female empowerment narratives, Chen finds that gender stereotypes and aspects of industry exploitation still inform the way in which female idols are presented onscreen

Although both articles are useful in research on gender representation in k-pop media, they vary in their theoretical focus and approach to the research. Zhang (2023) uses semiotic analysis of

the visual image, choosing symbolic meaning in few music videos to understand feminist messages. On the contrary, Chen (2024) uses the postfeminist theoretical approach and textual analysis to lyrics and visuals of a few generations of idols, underlining the effect of wider industry construction in forming female images. In spite of these methodological variations, both works come to certain common conclusions that k-pop girl groups gradually represent the phenomena of empowerment at the same time reproducing some of the gender stereotypes of the entertainment industry system. The two articles, however, majorly concentrate on music videos and idol performance in the music industry leaving other spheres of k-pop inspired media relatively undiscovered.

Now compared to a previous psychoanalytic literary criticism studies such the “Jungian analysis of Cruella (2026), which that they mainly focuses on dual identity, shadow self and psychological transformations within western cinema, this study will expand the discussion with our context which is K-pop-inspired animated media and entertainment culture. In the Cruella studies it emphasizes individual psychological conflict and symbolic transformations, present research examines how identity repression, public persona, mental health pressure and social expectation are shaped by idol culture and having global media industries. With the previous jungian film it studies generally focused on western narratives and live-actions cinema, while our studies is to explore animated musical fantasy as transnational storytelling that combines K-pop symbolism, fantasy elements and psychological representations.ans so Therefore, this research contributes a border interdisciplinary perspective by connecting jungian theory which is psychoanalytic literary criticism with K-pop cultural studies, animated narrative media and contemporary discussions of identity performance and emotional repression.

The film captures a fundamental critique of identity performance under systems of social norms, particularly the high pressure aesthetic and behavioural standards of the K-pop industry, through the protagonist Rumi's journey of suppression, collapse, and eventually self acceptance. This concept serves as the base for this study's four main goals to analyze how the demons, purple patterns, and Rumi's loss of voice are portrayed expressions of the shadow; to investigate how the antagonistic forces of the film represent the consequences of a fully unintegrated shadow; and to investigate how the film's conclusion reflects the Jungian individuation process as the path to psychological wholeness through a conscious recognition of the suppressed self. This study is significant on several levels. By extending Jungian psychoanalytic analysis beyond music videos and live idol performances into K-pop-inspired animated media, it fills an academic gap in the literature. Understanding that family rated films convey crucial themes about identity, acceptance, and self-worth, it provides educators and general readers with a critical framework for engaging more

with popular animated entertainment. In broad terms, this study presents *K-Pop: Demon Hunters* as a text that directly addresses the mental health issues of a generation brought up under societal expectations. Therefore, this study argues that *K-Pop: Demon Hunters* (2025) functions as a psychologically layered animated text that externalizes Jung's concept of the persona, shadow, and individuation through fantasy narrative enforcing 'Golden' image suppresses the shadow until the ego collapses, how universal archetypes embedded in the collective unconscious resonate globally through Korean Shamanic tradition, and how true psychological recovery is only possible through the conscious integration of the suppressed self rather than destruction.

Binary Opposition

Persona	Shadow
Refers to the 'Golden' identity of the K-pop idol that serves as a shield between the individual's true self and the public's expectations. It represents the 'ideal' version of the person. The Persona is considered superior in the eyes of the industry because it is the most profitable and marketable representation that fits society's expectations. However, over-identifying with this mask may cause a loss of the true self. " <i>The persona is a complicated system of relations between individual consciousness and society... a kind of mask, designed on the one hand to make a definite impression upon others, and, on the other, to conceal the true nature of the individual.</i> " (Jung, 1966, p. 192).	Refers to the 'Demon Hunter' side of the characters, containing the repressed, chaotic, and horrific elements of their mentality that the 'Golden' persona cannot acknowledge. In the film, the demons and patterns are physical representations of this shadow. This side is seen as inferior by characters like Celine because it represents a threat to their social status. However, suppressing the shadow just makes it more dangerous. Additionally, true power comes from accepting these parts of the self rather than trying to eliminate them. " <i>The shadow is a moral problem that challenges the whole ego-personality, for no one can become conscious of the shadow without considerable moral effort. To become conscious of it involves recognising the dark aspects of the personality as present and real.</i> " (Jung, 1951, p. 8).

METHOD

This research used a qualitative approach in a psychoanalytical literary criticism framework, namely based on the analytical psychology of Carl Gustav Jung: *Persona* and the *Shadow* from the book, "*The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*" (1959). Jung's framework was selected because it offers the best theoretical tools for analysing the main issues of the movie, such as identity performance, psychological repression, and the integration of the self, using the ideas of the Persona, the Shadow, the Collective Unconscious, and the Individuation process. By using this theory, this research will uncover the psychological aspects of *K-Pop: Demon Hunters* (2025) by examining how the film's fantasy narrative conveys internal psychic conflicts through its visual motifs, character

arcs, and symbolic imagery. The 2025 Netflix animated movie is the only subject of this study; no other K-pop media or related materials are used. Furthermore, the study concentrates on the psychological experiences of the characters about identity suppression, fracture and integration and is confined to Jungian analytical psychology.

The data of this study were presented in visual-audio form, which means that closely analyzing the film was essential to the research. The film was carefully and frequently watched in order to gather the data, and each character's psychological growth as it was portrayed throughout the story was examined. In addition to dialogue, song lyrics, the background sound and musical score were also analyzed as data because the emotional flavor or meaning of the sound often conveys a meaning that is beyond what the words are conveying such as: identity performance, self-acceptance and emotional repression. Furthermore, the visual elements such as cinematography, colour palette, lighting, and symbolic imagery such as the purple demon patterns and the transition to iridescent rainbow lighting in the film's climax were collected and analysed to enhance the data; it is essential to examine the hidden messages that illustrators and directors frequently include into their moving visuals.

DISCUSSION

1. The Collapse of the Ego Between the Persona and the Shadow When Perfection Breaks

In the film K-Pop: Demon Hunter (2025), the golden idol image of the group HUNTRIX occurs not as a personal choice, but it is enforced as a standard of perfection. Jung (1966) defines the persona as *"a complicated system of relations between individual consciousness and society... a kind of mask, designed on the one hand to make a definite impression upon others, and, on the other, to conceal the true nature of the individual."* This is what demands Rumi to perform as the perfect standard that conceals everything that does not fit the industry or even the societal expectations. Later then, Jung (1969) identifies this kind of mask as *"a secondary reality, a figure which is meant to appear as if it were the individual, but which is in fact only a mask."* Rumi's core struggle is shown from wearing this mask for so long that she has begun to mistake the performance and her real self identity. Jung (1966) warns that *"identification with one's office or title is very attractive... but the damage to the soul is great"* (p. 143), and this damage is exactly what the film highlights through Rumi's journey. The golden image is therefore not a choice made by Rumi, but a standard enforced by an industry that views any difference from perfection as failure. This pressure does not only shape Rumi's public behavior, but eventually transforms her understanding of self.

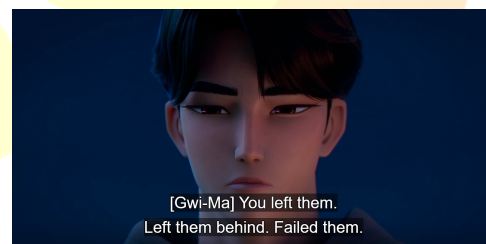
What the persona suppresses, does not disappear but accumulates. Jung (1938) writes that *"everyone carries a shadow, and the less it is embodied in the individual's conscious life, the blacker and denser it is"* (p. 131). This accumulation is shown physically through the purple and magenta patterns that appear on Rumi's skin whenever she experiences emotional stress. The film does not treat these patterns as an anomaly, but rather presents them as trauma responses that characters as Jinu has experienced, and Rumi who has been taught to view with self disgust believing that hiding these flaws is the only way to be loved. According to Praveen (2022), animation's ability to interpret



a metaphor by portraying the psychological as the physical creates an instant emotional connection (p. 45). The patterns serve as the movie's most direct interpretation of internal psychological issues into visible, physical form. The cinematography reinforces this through an angle that forces

the audience to experience Rumi's moment of shame, making her fear of discovery feel deep and personal, while the high contrast between the dark environment and the vibrant glowing patterns marks the shadow as something unavoidable. Jung (1959) identifies the shadow as *"that hidden repressed, for the most part inferior and guilt-laden personality whose ultimate ramifications reach back into the realm of our animal ancestors."* The patterns on Rumi's skin are not curses, but rather a public expression of shame that the idol industry implanted in her, which is becoming more violent since she has been taught to conceal it is the only way to survive.

The narrative is extended through Jinu, who is depicted being tortured by the voice of the demon king, Gwi-Ma, as he relives the memory of abandoning his human family for 'a beautiful voice.' The scene uses melancholic blue lighting and soft edged K-drama inspired aesthetics to capture a mood of deep misery, while the chibi animation



system ensures that Jinu's vulnerability is fully conveyed to the audience despite his role as a villain. Gwi-Ma controls his servants without using physical chains, choosing instead to trap them by constantly reminding of their guilt and past regrets. This illustrates how the shadow, when denied left unacknowledged, becomes a tool of total psychological control. This is precisely what Jung (1953) warns of *"if it has been suppressed and guiltily ignored, it is as dangerous as an unchained beast"* (p. 103). Jinu acts as a shadow reflection of Rumi, meaning his struggle of shame directly felt relatable to her own inner battle. This connection proves that the demons troubling both characters are not outside enemies, but are physical reflections of the exact same hidden identities the music

industry forced them to. Gökçearsan (2010) notes that animated films often present *"innocent display of cartoons which gave many subtle messages"* that younger viewers take in without analyzing them critically. This scene effectively demonstrated that idea by hiding a very deep psychological lesson about shame and control inside a story that audiences watch merely for entertainment.

The shadow's most significant breakthrough is shown through a scene when Rumi raises her ritual staff against a demon, but then hesitates mid battle. The dialogue *"Are you a prisoner too? Is*



Gwi-Ma making you do this?" shows the first time Rumi breaks away from her corporate brainwashing. Instead of blindly following the industry's rule that demons are just evil monsters, she begins to realize they are trapped by the same pressure she is in. The close up shot of Rumi's

face captures her vulnerability in this scene, while the cold blue glow of her ritual staff, the tools she uses to perform her duty, becomes the thing that spotlights her 'enemy.' Rather than revealing a monster, this light exposes that the demon is actually a helpless prisoner. Through this, her own weapon of her perfect idol mask is used to break down the corporate brainwash. This exact moment matches Jung's (1969) idea that *"recognizing the dark aspects of the personality as present and real."* Therefore, this hesitation is not a weakness in Rumi's character. Instead, it is the first genuine act of a psyche that has spent its entire life performing someone else's idea of perfection. It is a compulsory awakening that demonstrates her conscious mind or the ego can no longer force the two halves of her identity to stay apart.

Everything falls apart in a scene where Mira and Zoey confront Rumi about her patterns, saying *"How do you have patterns?" "These were supposed to be gone,"* says Rumi, which immediately frames the shadow not as something to be understood but as something that has failed to be erased, reflecting how the industry has brainwashed everyone in order to maintain perfection. Rumi responded while stuttering *"No, I have a plan to erase them. Jinu was supposed to— I— He was—"* cuts off mid sentence. This broken way of speaking physically acts out of her conscious mind or the ego, which has simply run out of ways to hold itself together. The breakdown intensifies with *"No. No! No! I was using him to fix all this!"* which strips away any kind of mask, exposing the desperation hidden beneath the perfect golden idol image she worked so hard to protect. Lastly, her final desperate cry *"To fix me! So we could all do our duty!"* clearly shows the devastating



psychological effects she has gone through forcing herself to play through a masked role her entire life. Therefore, the loss of her singing voice that occurs is a direct psychosomatic consequence of an ego that has been pushed beyond its limit. According to Jung (1964), *"psychological symptoms are not just 'malfunctions' but are the soul's way of trying to tell us something,"* and Rumi's silence communicates precisely what her conscious mind has spent her entire life refusing to acknowledge that the golden persona and the repressed shadow cannot continue to coexist without destroying each other. As Jung (1951) writes, *"that which we do not bring to consciousness appears in our lives as fate,"* and for Rumi, the refusal to accept her half demon heritage does not protect her, but rather silences her.

2. Bridging Shamanism and Modern Idol Culture Through the Collective Unconscious

In the opening narration of the film, the audience is introduced to the historical lineage of the demon hunters through a flashback performance of the Sunlight Sisters. These three women, who are



Rumi's predecessors, perform as a unified trio to establish the historical foundation of their spiritual lineage. The subtitle explicitly states, *".. a new trio of Hunters is chosen to fulfill our ultimate duty."* This scene illustrates how the ancient tradition of the mudang (shaman) has been reimagined within the cultural

framework of modern idols, suggesting that the concept of K-pop is linked to the collective mission of the ancestors. Rather than allowing the girls to have their own identities, their roles are instead constructed around devotion to a transpersonal goal that is considered "irreproachable" or "perfect" Within the Jungian framework, this ancestral heritage represents the transmission of archetypal tasks across generations. As Jung explained, *"The collective unconscious... does not, like the personal unconscious, owe its existence to personal experience and consequently is not a personal acquisition"* (Jung, 1959, p. 56). This passage suggests that Rumi's responsibilities as both a hunter and an idol are not merely personal choices, but inherited roles shaped by the collective unconscious passed down through generations. The historical "Golden" standard of the idol group acts as a powerful archetype of the "Warrior" or "Healer" that transcends time, compelling the modern group, HUNTRIX, to conform to pre-existing psychological molds. By framing the mudang through these universal archetypes, the film transforms a deeply Korean tradition into something audiences anywhere can feel without needing to study it. Because the collective unconscious belongs to everyone, a viewer with no knowledge of shamanism can still sense the weight of Rumi's duty, the pull toward healing, the cost of fighting darkness; because these are struggles that live in all of us.

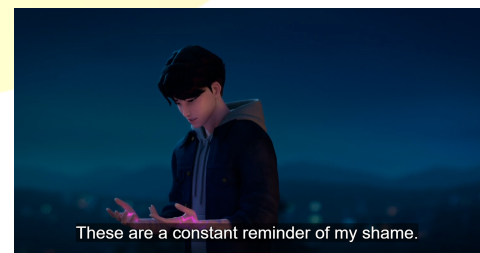
The scene uses symmetrical, stage-centered framing to convey a sense of order and perfection. The warm, golden-hued lighting and vintage styling (inspired by the 1950s Kim Sisters) act as semiotic tools to ground the narrative in a "polished" past, establishing the Persona that the modern group, HUNTRIX, feels pressured to emulate.

As Rumi struggles with her internal dual identity, the film depicts a pivotal confrontation in which Celine enforces the entertainment industry's repressive demands. As a stern authority figure, Celine directly targets Rumi's inner imperfections; her secret half-demon heritage, framing them as flaws that must be completely eradicated. Celine coldly states, *"Nothing can change until your patterns are gone."* This scene marks an emotional turning point that illustrates the brutal pressure the industry places on idols to maintain a perfect public image. Celine embodies the classic "Mentor" archetype, a figure sent to guide the protagonist. However, the film subverts this role by transforming her into an agent of toxic conformity, who argues that survival requires the total destruction of one's true self. As Jung explains, *"Archetypes are the 'patterns of instinctual behavior'... They are the necessary and indispensable components of every healthy psyche."* (Jung, 1959, p. 5) This supports the use of universal character roles in the film, such as Celine serving as the "Mentor" archetype guiding the "Hero" group. Nevertheless, by forcing Rumi to erase her internal "patterns", which actually represent her true healthy instinctual behavior and her true dark side, Celine ends up destroying Rumi's soul rather than healing it. In this scene, Celine is positioned in a wide, high-key lighting shot against a backdrop of a clear, bright Seoul skyline. This bright, "public" environment reinforces the "Golden" Persona she is demanding Rumi maintain. The large glass windows behind her symbolize the "Honmoon" barrier—a clear but rigid separation between the acceptable human world and the hidden demonic one.



3. Beyond the Mask: Individuation and the Authentic Self

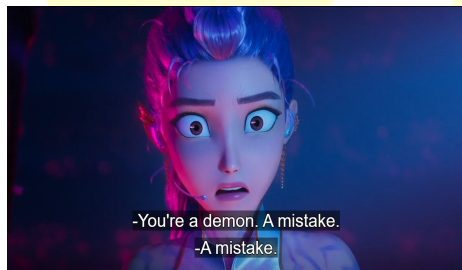
K-pop: Demon Hunters disrupt the traditional "Hero's Journey". In conventional storytelling situations, the monstrous antagonist is typically destroyed and overcome by the hero to achieve ultimate success. In Jungian psychology, however, suppressing or destroying the Shadow is recognized as both an unattainable goal and a direct catalyst for psychic fracture. In the competitive atmosphere of the K-Pop industry, forcing performers to cast aside their personal insecurities and trauma to project a perfect image only worsen this internal rift.



Therefore, true success and the final restoration of Rumi's singing voice become possible only through the process of Individuation. Jung defines this psychological milestone as a process of "*becoming one's own self*" and achieving true "*self-realization*" (Jung, 1966, p.173). This milestone requires the conscious unification of the "Demon" (the Shadow) and the "Idol" (the Persona) into a single, cohesive entity.

This developmental process of becoming whole begins with an uncomfortable and often necessary 'wake-up call' to the hidden components of the self, as captured when Jinu appears in the story as a "Shadow Reflection" or a mirror for Rumi's soul. The cinematography highlights his vulnerability; he is isolated in the frame from the backdrop of a city, which is far away and blurred, emphasizing his role as a solitary object of the masses. The only element that brings light to his face is the glow from his magenta hands, which visually suggests that his inner world is entirely consumed by the burning shame and guilt of his past actions. When Jinu recognizes these marks as a reminder of his shame, he takes the vital first step toward individuation. As Jung notes, becoming conscious of the unconscious "*involves recognizing the dark aspects of the personality as present and real*" (Jung, 1969). By ceasing to hide and accepting his dark side, Jinu establishes a shared vulnerability that enables both characters to close the gap between their corporate personas and find the freedom to breathe.

If a character is unwilling or unable to deal with them in the conscious mind, this psychological conflict is bound to manifest itself as a conscious problem. In one scene of Rumi's darkest hour, her secret is revealed, her conscious Ego collapses and she is left utterly vulnerable.



The shot is based on the shallow depth of field setting the intention to blur the figures on either side of the screen. The lighting is a dramatic switch to a sinister magenta and purple hue, which the makers call a "symbolic indicator for demonic corruption and misery". This visual crisis perfectly illustrates Jung's famous maxim "*that which we do not bring to consciousness appears in our lives as fate*" (Jung, 1951). Her half-demon essence is suppressed, but it erupts uncontrollably as an external danger, breaking her career. An overwhelming sense of failure and internalized shame overtakes Rumi, causing her to lose her voice and to beg Celine to kill her.

The resolution of the film establishes that true psychological recovery requires active integration rather than suppression or erasure. Jung asserts that "*psychological symptoms are not just malfunctions but are the soul's way of trying to tell us something*" (Jung, 1964). Rumi's loss of voice is not a permanent injury, but a psychological reaction designed by her soul to force her to stop the

fake performance of her corporate mask and face her true identity. During the climactic performance of the song "What It Sounds Like," the characters achieve this confrontation by transitioning away from destructive concealment. The visual presentation also changes radically from the traumatic, threatening magenta to the harmonious colors of an iridescent rainbow. By allowing their jagged edges to meet the light, the members of HUNTRIX demonstrate that the Shadow contains vital energy. It does not destroy their idol status to embrace their demonic heritage; it makes them greater to do so. Ultimately, this transformation suggests that an authentic Self can only be realized when individuals accept their entire history, using their hidden wounds to achieve true artistic and psychological freedom.



CONCLUSION

This Study analyzes the psychological conflict and identity repression that is portrayed in K-pop: Demon Hunters (2025) through Carl Jung's analytical psychology, particularly the concepts of persona, shadow, collective unconscious, archetypes and individuation. The findings also reveal that the film presents the 'Golden' idol image of HUNTRIX as a socially applied persona that pressures individuals to suppress their true identities in order to maintain perfection. Within Rumi's half-demon identity, the glowing purple patterns on her skin, and the loss of her voice for her singing performance, the film visualizes the psychological consequences of emotional repression and internalized shame. And additionally, the relationship between Rumi dan Jinu demonstrates Jung's concept of the theory shadow, showing how hidden fears and insecurities become psychologically destructive when denied or concealed. Ultimately, the film suggests that true healing and self-realization can only be achieved through acceptance.

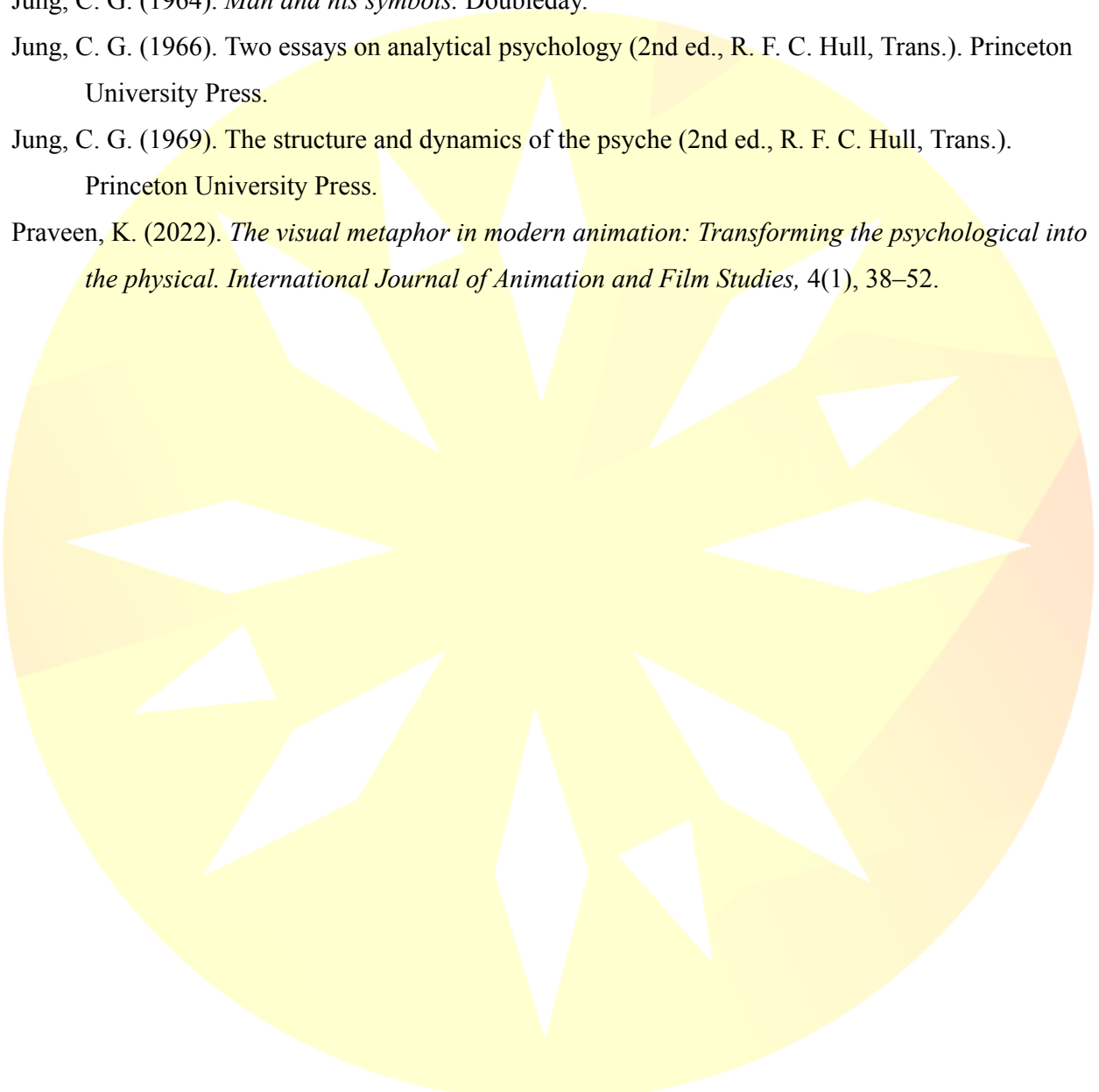
This research also addresses three major gaps or aspects in previous studies. First, the media format gap, where earlier studies primarily focused on K-pop music video, lyrics and idol performance which discuss K-pop inspired animated narratives. K-pop: Demon Hunters also demonstrates how animations and fantasy telling communicate psychological struggles and social criticism from beyond traditional music video formats. In the Second hand the theoretical gap, this discusses the previous research commonly used which is semiotic or postfeminist approaches, where this study applies Jungian psychoanalytic theory to analyze identity repression, mental health pressure, and emotional conflict in K-pop-inspired media. And last the third, The cultural and narrative representation gap, because this study explores how Korean shamanistic symbolism through K-pop and universal archetypes are combined into a transnational narrative that attracts

global audiences. And that being said the research contributes to broader discussion on identity performance, globalization and emotional repression in the contemporary entertainment industry.

The consequences of this study highlight the importance of mental health awareness, emotional honesty and self acceptance with the environments that demand constant perfection and public performance. Ethically, the film teaches us that suppressing one true identity for social approval may ultimately lead to emotional suffering and emotional fragmentation, while accepting personal flaws and vulnerabilities becomes the foundation of genuine healing and individuality. Moreover, this research is significant because it also builds a framework for understanding how family-friendly animated films can communicate complex psychological and social reviews through symbolic storytelling. By combining Jungian psychoanalytic criticism with K-pop cultural studies and animations analysis, And this studies demonstrates how popular media could reflect the emotional struggles experienced by many young people in modern society. And finally, future researchers and encouraged to apply similar psychological approaches to other forms of nonmusic global media such as streaming series, graphic novels, virtual idols culture and interactive digital narratives so in order to further explore about representations of identity, trauma, gender expectations and emotional repression across transnational entertainment systems.

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