THE BINARITY OF INDIVIDUALITY IN SELECTED SHORT STORIES FROM OLUKOREDE YISHAU'S *VAULTS OF SECRETS*

Abayomi Awelewa
&
Oluwaseyi Oso

Abstract

This article examines individuality as a dual construct comprising societal expectations and personal volition, viewed through a psychoanalytic lens in Olukorede Yishau's *Vaults of Secrets* (2020). Influenced by Jungian psychoanalysis, especially his theories of the shadow and persona, the article explores how these characters represent and negotiate the binary structure of selfhood. This article, premised on five selected short stories reveals how these two concepts contribute to the complexity in human behaviour due to situational variables, environmental factors, and societal pressures. Central to this article is the conjecture of the fluidity and changeability of individuality, naturally based on the interaction or tension created between conscious wishes and unconscious impulses. Jung's process of individuation—or the process of integrating the shadow with the persona—provides a gateway into how characters negotiate conflicting personality attributes and balance their inner dualities. The binary construct present in Yishau's characters does not stop at mere good and evil but furthers another aspect of human nature altogether. Considering such binary constructs brings this article closer to explaining deeper psychological and societal forces at play in shaping individual identity.

Keywords: Individuality, Binarity, Shadow, Persona, Situational variables, Identity formation

Introduction

It is convincingly evident in Olukorede Yishau's *Vaults of Secrets (2020)* that the author sets before his readers, the complexity of being, and by being, is meant being an individual. In this collection of short stories, Yishau depicts how individuals shift between two distinct natures in response to societal pressures. The stories portray how society shapes the individual and how individuals struggle to adhere to societal norms while simultaneously grappling with their innate tendencies. Society, through its rigid laws and constructs of moral behaviour, prevents the individual from openly expressing socially condemned desires. However, this suppression does not lead to personal growth or the eradication of one's inner darkness. Instead, it creates a space where repression and secrecy flourish. As Ralph Waldo Emerson states in his essay, 'Self Reliance,' 'society is a joint-stock company…the virtue in most request is conformity' (Emerson 29), demanding that individuals sacrifice authenticity for acceptance.

From childhood, individuals are conditioned to conform to societal expectations, often under the guidance of parental figures who enforce religious and secular ideologies. Carl Jung's concept of the collective unconscious, which serves as a theoretical support for this article, helps in understanding this conditioning. He posits that human beings are not born as blank slates; instead, they carry instincts shaped by the collective experiences of humanity. Among these instincts is the 'shadow,' the darker, socially reprehensible aspect of the psyche. Society, in its efforts to suppress this shadow, imposes archetypes that influence how individuals perceive the world and themselves. As a result, the individual learns to hide these impulses, internalising a duality that creates a binary identity.

For instance, a child who is exposed to religious teachings, such as the descriptions of hell in Christian doctrine, learns to fear the consequences of deviating from societal norms. This fear leads to shame and the repression of natural desires, which must remain hidden from view. The child grows up, projecting a socially acceptable identity while concealing a different self that emerges when societal constraints are absent. This repression is particularly evident in characters from *Vaults of Secrets*, who lead lives dictated by social expectations but grapple with darker instincts and secrets that they cannot fully escape. One might ask: Why is parenting, as a societal mechanism, so invested in moulding individuals to conform? Perhaps it stems from an inherent understanding of the human psyche's polarity, a recognition of the in-born instincts that must be contained. Considering this, parenting becomes a form of control, preventing the individual from making the same mistakes as previous generations. It is not just an effort to protect the individual but also to ensure that the binary nature of good and evil remains hidden.

It is for this reason that Carl Jung's psychoanalytical theory becomes a necessary tool for the concern in this article. While psychoanalysis is broad, indebted to several theorists—from Freud to Jung, Lacan, and others—Carl Jung's psychoanalysis, particularly his notions of the shadow and the persona, align fittingly with the thematic concerns of this research. Jung's discourse on the unconscious is suitable for interrogating the dichotomies inherent in the human psyche, especially in relation to the binary oppositions explored in *Vaults of Secrets*.

Jungian psychoanalysis is instrumental in examining the multiplicities of human behaviour, focusing on the repressed elements of personality which emerge as the 'shadow.' Jung defines the shadow as the unconscious aspect of the personality that the conscious ego does not identify with, representing qualities the individual deems

undesirable or socially reprehensible. In this context, the shadow becomes the repository of the binary self—those suppressed facets that exist beneath the veneer of societal norms. In the ten selected stories from Yishau's collection, the characters' actions, often oscillating between moral oppositions, serve as manifestations of this shadow.

The persona, another crucial concept in Jung's psychoanalysis, refers to the socially constructed mask individuals wear to fit into societal expectations. Jung describes the persona as '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' (Jung 94). This duality between the shadow and the persona forms the theoretical underpinning for understanding how individuals in *Vaults of Secrets* negotiate their complex realities. As they dwell under societal constructs, their personas adapt to external demands, while their shadows emerge through their binary selves, usually disrupting these carefully curated facades.

The connection between the shadow and persona reflects the thematic focus of this research on the binarity of individuality. Jung's theory allows for an investigation into how characters embody conflicting traits that transcend the simplification of good versus evil. It also provides the theoretical lens through which one can understand the fluidity of identity in response to external pressures and internal drives. This binary of individuality, as discussed by Jung, represents the tension between the socially accepted self and the repressed aspects of identity, a dynamic that is central to the psychological complexity of Yishau's characters.

Also, Jung's notion of individuation—the process through which an individual integrates these conflicting elements of the psyche—seems like a pathway to understanding how characters reconcile their dualities. Individuation, as Jung theorises, is the gradual integration of the shadow with the persona, leading to a more authentic

self (Jung 88). The characters in *Vaults of Secrets* often find themselves caught between their public identities and their private desires, and it is through their struggles that the reader witnesses the unfolding of their individuating processes. This alignment between Jung's theory and the narrative dynamics of the stories allows for an in-depth analysis of how societal constraints shape the formation of identity. Before the contents of the unconscious mind are differentiated, the shadow functions as the totality of the unconscious, often appearing in dreams as figures of the same gender as the dreamer.

The shadow is mostly made up of repressed desires, uncivilised impulses, inferior moral motives, childish fantasies, and resentments—essentially all the traits one isn't proud to acknowledge. Often, these characteristics are projected onto others, making it easier to see them in others rather than in oneself.

Even though the shadow can, to some degree, be integrated into the conscious mind through self-awareness and effort, there are elements that resist moral control and remain difficult to influence. These resistances are often connected with unrecognised projections and identifying them requires an extraordinary moral achievement. While some traits of the shadow can be acknowledged as one's own, sometimes even with deep insight, the emotional cause is perceived as unquestionably stemming from the other person (Jung 16).

The persona inhibits the realisation of the shadow. The more one identifies with a positive persona, the darker the shadow becomes. Shadow and persona work in a compensatory relationship, and the conflict between them often surfaces in neurosis. The typical depression in such cases signals the need to accept that one is not entirely what they pretend or wish to be.

There is no universal method for integrating the shadow; it is a highly individualised process akin to diplomacy or statesmanship. The first step is to recognise and seriously consider the existence of the shadow. The next step is to become aware of its qualities and intentions

through careful observation of moods, fantasies, and impulses. Finally, a long period of negotiation is required.

Confronting the shadow is essential for any thorough psychological approach. This confrontation must result in some form of integration, although it may first manifest as open conflict and may remain so for an extended period. If repressed, this conflict continues within the unconscious and expresses itself in more dangerous ways. The struggle persists until both sides exhaust their resistance, with no predictable outcome except that both the ego and the shadow will be transformed. Responsibility for the shadow lies with the ego, which is why it presents a moral problem. It is one thing to recognise the shadow and what it represents, but it is another to determine which aspects can be lived out or accepted.

The initial confrontation with the shadow can lead to a stalemate, hindering moral decision-making and making convictions feel ineffective or even impossible. Everything becomes uncertain.

What is more, the presence of the collective unconscious—a reservoir of shared human experiences and archetypes—plays a role in shaping the binarity of individuality. Jung posits that the collective unconscious is composed of inherited archetypes that manifest in universal themes and patterns of behaviour, influencing the actions of individuals across time and culture (Jung 148). In this context, the characters' binary actions can be understood as both personal and archetypal, reflecting universal human struggles with identity, morality, and societal expectations.

Since theories are not used for decorative purposes but as tools for meaningful investigation, this article uses Carl Jung's psychoanalytic concepts of the shadow, the persona, and individuation to unpack the binarity of individuality in *Vaults of Secrets*. The short stories explored in this article are: 'Till We Meet to Part No More,' 'This Special Gift,' 'My Mother's Father Is My Father.'

The Conflict of Shadow and Persona in 'Till We Meet to Part No More,' 'This Special Gift,' and 'My Mother's Father Is My Father'

In Carl Jung's theory, the psyche's structure is characterised by the relationship between the shadow and the persona—the former being the sum of all repressed and socially unacceptable impulses, and the latter, a mask shaped by societal expectations. In Olukorede Yishau's *Vaults of Secrets*, this psychological tension is depicted in the short stories *'Till We Meet to Part No More,' 'This Special Gift,' and 'My Mother's Father Is My Father,'* where the protagonists struggle with the conflict between the selves they present to the world and the darker truths they keep hidden.

In the epistolary short story, 'Till We Meet to Part No More,' one is exposed to the quietly suffocating spectre of human suffering and trauma. It does so through a careful revelation of identity's fragmentation, the weighty feeling that is guilt, and the lurking shadow-self whose darkness—if unacknowledged—rises with destructive consequences. One sees lives that are affected by inner battles, caused by social and personal upheaval; and it is within this tension that Oluwakemi's tale of domestic abuse—culminating in an irrevocable act of violence—becomes a study of repressed rage and the inevitable eruption of the shadow, in a manner that is resonant with Carl Jung's discourse on the human psyche.

Jung, being aware of the delicate, protean connection between the conscious and the unconscious, postulates that the shadow is not a mere undercurrent of impulses but rather a pervasive moral dilemma. It lingers in the recesses of the mind, shaping one's actions in unpredictable ways. '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' (Jung 8). In this short story, Oluwakemi's narrative—one marked by years of

domestic imprisonment and silent endurance under her husband's cruelty—bears witness to this very concept. Her descent into violence, her eventual submission to her own dark impulses, is not a sudden outburst, but rather the inevitable consequence of the shadows that have long brewed within. The confession that spills from her lips— 'I stayed because of our children. I stayed and prayed that he would change' (Yishau 2)—is at once a confirmation of her own internalisation of societal expectations and a veiled cry for release. Nevertheless, when the moment arrives, it is not prayer or patience that saves her but the uncontainable surge of her long-repressed shadow. Her sudden, fatal act of retaliation is as much an assertion of her buried self as it is a moment of uncontrollable violence, long restrained but never fully banished.

In considering Oluwakemi's act through the lens of Jung's theory, one begins to construe the shadow not as a mere reservoir of personal darkness but as a mirror that projects the unspeakable, oftentimes invisible, cruelties inflicted by society itself. Here, her shadow is not hers alone but a shared suffering, born of societal dictates that chain women to the pillars of endurance, silence, and submission. The law, like the society it keeps in check, fails to account for the bruises hidden beneath the skin or the unseen wounds of the soul that triggers Oluwakemi's brand of reaction. Jung's observation resonates fittingly here:

> Unfortunately, there is no doubt about the fact that man is, as a whole, less good than he imagines himself or wants to be. Everyone carries a shadow, and the less it is embodied in the individual's conscious life, the blacker and denser it is. If an inferiority is conscious, one has always a chance to correct it. Also, it is constantly in contact with other interests, so that it is steadily subjected to modifications. But if it is repressed and isolated from consciousness, it never gets corrected. It is,

> moreover, liable to burst forth in a moment of unawareness. (Jung 131)

The court, indifferent to her years of abuse, casts judgment as though unaware of her suffering, and even she—standing accused—seems resigned to her fate, her own acknowledgement of her shadow's eruption remaining partial and incomplete. The verdict given by the court—unmerciful and blind to context—reflects the same societal blindness that condemned her to endure in silence, an injustice that weighs heavier on her psyche than the crime for which she stands accused.

But this trauma, this internal split, did not originate in her marriage alone. Yishau carefully threads through her story the lingering wounds of an earlier betrayal—her sale into modern-day slavery by those who should have protected her most fiercely: her parents. This betrayal, cruel and unrelenting in its severing of familial bonds, imprints upon Oluwakemi a binarity that persists throughout her life. She is, at once, a mother who strives to love and protect, and a woman who has never known true protection herself—always vulnerable, always on the edge of exploitation. In a moment of introspection and incarceration, she confesses to Elizabeth: 'No one visits me here again. Not my kids; not members of my family. Perhaps, it's because they want to have nothing to do with a killer. I do not blame them; I do not blame myself either' (Yishau 3). This detachment, this refusal to yield to societal condemnation, marks her separation from the world's expectations. In accepting her fate with neither blame nor regret, she sheds the need for absolution. The societal norms that would seek to confine her identity crumble into irrelevance, just as her shadow overtakes the fragile illusion of her former self.

Yishau uses Oluwakemi's story to question the precarious balance between the visible and the hidden, the socially acceptable and the deeply repressed. Jung's concept of the shadow proves this binarity,

in that the failure to adapt to one's shadow does not merely lead to internal discord but affects relationships and erodes one's place in society. Oluwakemi, torn between the dictates of societal endurance and the primal cry of her shadow, embodies this tragic binary. Her duality is unresolved and festering, and it explodes in a moment that cannot be undone, leaving in its wake a life damaged beyond repair. Nonetheless, in the wake of that devastation, there remains an unsettling calm, a recognition that the shadow, long denied, cannot be silenced forever.

In 'This Special Gift' the conflict of the shadow and persona becomes evident in the character of Mr Essien, whose polished, respectable persona fails as his shadow is revealed through his illicit affair with Idato, his house-help.

The moment the narrator stumbles upon this affair— 'Idato, the house-help, and Mr Essien were naked. Idato was doing reverse cowgirl' (Yishau 12)—infers not just the discovery of an illicit act, but the eruption of Mr Essien's shadow into his carefully managed public life. This is no ordinary unveiling; it is the moment when the mask of respectability slips, when the persona, with its mask of trustworthiness and decorum, crumbles beneath the weight of unbridled, suppressed desires. This confrontation between shadow and persona mirrors Jung's assertion that 'the shadow personifies everything that the subject refuses to acknowledge about himself' (Jung 8). Mr Essien's affair is an ugly betrayal of both his marital vows and his role within society, and this stands as a manifestation of his unprocessed impulses. His attempts to deflect responsibility—blaming external forces like the devil—only shows the depth of his denial, his refusal to confront the shadow within.

The mental struggle between Mr Essien's shadow and persona, reaches its pitch as he begs the narrator to preserve his secret: 'It will destroy our relationship. She has so much trust in me' (Yishau 13). This desperate plea exposes the fragility of his persona, the social mask he fears will disintegrate entirely should his wife and community come to

know the truth. In this moment, the reader is made to see the lengths to which individuals will go, not merely to preserve a semblance of dignity, but to stave off the chaotic collapse that might follow the exposure of their hidden selves. The persona, refined and presented for public consumption, is brittle and easily shattered when weighed against the inescapable presence of the shadow. It is this very fragility, this imbalance that defines Mr Essien's existence—a life built on the maintenance of outward appearances, while the inner self remains fractured and unreconciled.

The narrator, too, is implicated in this story, as a silent guardian of secrets, standing at the precipice of others' shadows without ever fully confronting his own. His so-called 'special gift' of uncovering hidden truths shows that he is not only an observer but one with a certain proximity to the shadow itself, closeness to the darkness in others that he is content to watch but never fully confront within. There is, in this, a probable irony: he moves through life encountering the concealed, the repressed, and the hidden, yet remains emotionally detached from it all, a passive vessel for the secrets of others. This detachment casts a broader societal theme, in that repression and concealment become a means of survival, not just for Mr Essien but for all who try to live in consonance with societal expectations.

Mr Essien's action brings to fore the concept of temptation as reflected in some religious or moral contexts, too. This concept is, however, crystallised differently. One can say that temptation is not, as it is conventionally understood, simply a force that allures the mind for action. To put differently, temptation is a collage of psychic elements bellied or buried inside a person and once it finds its switch or its pillar, the human being is bound to act in a controlled or uncontrolled manner. Every human being has a sexual drive, and sexual drive does not connote, here, a desire for sexual gratification; rather, a desire for an object of satisfaction and/or completion. By drive is meant, here, the vehicular movement of the bellied human nature in motion. Once

the intrinsic human nature finds its destination, either socially accepted or not, an individual is bound to make a choice, and this is perhaps when one is mostly weak.

This is what happens to Essien in this short story, and it aligns quite well with Jung's assertion. As Jung puts it: 'One does not become enlightened by imagining figures of light, but by making the darkness conscious' (Jung 265).

Mr Essien's failure to confront, let alone integrate, his shadow into his conscious life leaves him adrift in a precarious existence, one defined by secrecy, repression, and the ever-present threat of exposure. The weight of his unprocessed shadow grows with each passing moment, and in this tension, Yishau reveals the fragile artifice of social masks and the danger of allowing the shadow to fester in silence.

Similarly, in the short story, *'My Mother's Father is My Father'—where* the protagonist struggles with the trauma of incestuous parentage and hidden family secrets—Yishau helps a critical reader decipher the primordial process responsible for incest in society. This primordial process can be linked to the evolution of humanity as reflected in the Christian biblical history. One recognises immediately that the multiplicity of individuals on this planet owes its evolutionary origin to incest. How? To procreate or in God's words, to 'be fruitful and multiply' (Gen. 1.28 NKJV) siblings had to mate and parents had to mate with their own children. This was accepted or permitted at this evolutionary space and time, and there was no ground on which any contradictory law could stand. However, as humans continued to evolve and spread widely, this act became sinful, one deserving of a seat in the disdained class of nouns—incest. What this then meant was that this brand of action, now prohibited, had to be repressed by individuals from generation to generation, ultimately becoming the shadow that fascinated Jung's theorising of the concept. The story paints Carl Jung's theory of the shadow, which represents the unconscious part of the

psyche repressed due to societal norms or personal shame. The story's narrator, Williams, has a persona that society accepts, but his dreams reveal a shadow self, tied to his troubled family history.

The opening dream sequence, where Williams' grandfather takes over his body, symbolises the internalised guilt and unresolved trauma passed down through the generations. He says, 'I hear my grandfather in my body telling me to understand; telling me we are one' (Yishau 26). This moment demonstrates the shadow's emergence, where Williams' identity merges with the darker aspects of his lineage. The fact that Williams cannot control his body in the dream points to Jung's idea that the shadow operates beyond conscious control. As Jung describes, 'The shadow…is at all times an unconscious factor…closely related to the personal unconscious and its contents' (Jung 88). Williams' inability to speak in the dream foregrounds the suppression of his shadow and the shame he harbours.

Throughout the narrative, the theme of secrecy and repression aligns with the conflict between shadow and persona. Williams describes himself as 'a product of ignominy' and notes, 'No one else alive knows' about his parentage (Yishau 26). The persona he has created as a successful man hides the shameful truth about his conception. His dreams, however, expose his internal battle, as his unconscious attempts to reconcile his present life with the buried truth of his origins. This secret, 'guarded' and hidden even from himself, becomes a haunting presence, manifesting through the recurring dream of his 'father-grandfather' (Yishau 26).

Jung's concept of the persona is also evidenced in Williams' outward life, where he constructs a socially permitted identity. According to Jung, 'the persona is a complicated system of relations between individual consciousness and society, fittingly described as a mask (Jung 305). Williams wears this mask in his daily life, projecting a facade that allows him to function within societal expectations. His fear of others discovering his secret shows how he clings to the persona to

maintain a sense of normalcy. 'They think I do not know, but I do' (Yishau 27), he reflects, referring to his mother and father-grandfather, revealing how his persona is built on a shaky foundation of denial and suppressed knowledge.

The tension between the shadow and the persona intensifies when Williams recalls the day he overheard his grandmother accusing his grandfather of ruining his mother's life. The revelation that 'the product is Williams' (Yishau 28) brings the shadow into clearer focus, as Williams realises the extent of his familial dysfunction. His grandmother's words, 'You shattered it,' describe not only the destruction of his mother's life but also the affected identity that Williams must now deal with. His young mind begins to comprehend that 'there was something shameful about my being' (Yishau 29). This shame becomes the core of his shadow, an aspect of himself he cannot easily confront.

The struggle to suppress or assimilate the shadow is a key theme in Jungian psychoanalysis, and Williams' journey mirrors this struggle. His desire to bury the truth about his origin contrasts with the recurring dreams where his shadow self, represented by his father-grandfather, demands attention. Jung notes that 'to confront a person with his shadow is to show him his own light,' (Jung 93) but Williams resists this confrontation. He knows the truth, but he refuses to fully acknowledge it; instead, he allows the shadow to dominate his him.

The Binarity of Individuality in 'Lydia's World' and 'When Truth Dies'

It is needful to reiterate that Jung's theory posits that everyone possesses a conscious identity, or ego, and an unconscious component, usually referred to as the shadow, containing repressed elements of the psyche. Lydia's experience reflects this divide between the rational and the irrational. Her initial understanding of her world—one shaped by apparent familial unity—is disrupted by the latent uncertainties about

her son's parentage. Lydia's entire sense of identity as a mother faces destabilisation when her conviction in Demola's lineage is shaken by the DNA results and hospital's history of malpractice.

Demola Jnr, Lydia's only child, had been ill. When he didn't seem to be getting better after all she had done, she took him to the hospital. A battery of tests was conducted, and they included blood tests to establish his blood group and genotype. The results of the tests were puzzling to her; they showed that Demola Jnr's genotype was AS.

> It can't be. I am AA, and his father is AA. His delivery record given to us in the hospital after his birth also recorded his genotype as AA,' Lydia had told the doctor. 'It is nearly impossible to get blood tests wrong madam, but just so that you are sure we haven't made a mistake, we will rerun the tests. You may have a wrong record. I am sure you think that is impossible because this is the UK, but I can tell you that medical practitioners here are not immune to errors,' the doctor said. (Yishau 87)

Here, Jung's theory comes to mind: Lydia's confrontation with her shadow—the 'what if' of an altered family history—forces her to grapple with aspects of identity she has always assumed as intrinsic. One learns about this 'what if' as Yishau's intrusive narrator exposes her thoughts. She voices her thoughts into a void of uncertainty:

> What if Demola wasn't hers? She thought. Would she tell him? What would it mean for a boy who had known no other parent for most of his life? But then, what would the knowledge do to her? Would she love the boy? Then, she thought. What if the boy was hers? How would she go about obtaining answers from the dead? What would that news do to the family? Would her late husband's family reject her? And maybe strip her of all her husband's belongings? Would

> she become a free woman, without any attachments? And what would she do when the boy became old enough and wanted to know about his father? Would she say, my son, I am your mother, but your father is not your father? By the time we could have confirmed he had passed away from the reach of facts and left us with only uncertainties? (Yishau 91)

This psychic battle is consonant with the perspective on identity as a fluid construct, where individual selfhood is relative, adapting to societal and circumstantial pressures. Rothman contends that individuals are not bound by static qualities but shift between roles and self-conceptions as demanded by external situations. Lydia's identity as a mother teeter between two realities—either the comfort of kinship with Demola or the disorienting possibility that he might not be hers. This transition brings a realisation of her personal relativity, as her maternal devotion is tested by the suggestion that Demola might not share her bloodline, though he is undeniably part of her life's essence.

Also, Lydia's initial confrontation with the test results and subsequent revelation of Demola's background mirror Philip Zimbardo's research on how extreme psychological stress influences human behaviour and perception. Zimbardo's observations in the *Stanford Prison Experiment* suggest that under duress, individuals may experience an identity crisis, feeling trapped in distorted perceptions, emotions, and anxieties that inhibit clear reasoning. Lydia's 'nightmare' evokes similar distortions, as her sense of time, place, and even self, morphs under the burden of uncertainty. Just as Zimbardo's subjects were compelled to redefine themselves under oppressive circumstances, Lydia's maternal instinct transforms, and inflames her protective impulse while questioning her reality.

Her psychological trouble becomes apparent in her emotional dialogue with Roy, and her hyper-awareness of Demola's physical

features—each gesture, resemblance, or smile now a sign, an attempt to glean certainty. She asks Roy: 'So, if Demola is not my son, where is my son?' (Yishau 91). Zimbardo describes such behaviour as symptomatic of an 'identity entrapment,' in the sense that external factors—here, the DNA results and Chapel Hospital's dubious record—affect Lydia's autonomy, forcing her into a cycle of fear, hope, and self-reinvention. This progression reveals Lydia's transition from a passive participant in her familial life to an active seeker of truth and agency, her sense of self stretched thin under the weight of potential loss and reclamation.

In 'Lydia's World,' Lydia's identity is very relational, inseparable from her connection to her son. Yet, as the story progresses, her relational identity encounters a binarity, a doubling between 'mother' and 'stranger,' as she grapples with whether Demola is truly her son. The 'self and other' binary that Lydia experiences transcends the physical. It is one that presents identity as both constructed and fragile. With each interaction with Roy and Demola, Lydia stands between two potential realities—her son's resemblance solidifies her maternal self, but the genetic dissimilarity hints at a stranger within her home, complicating the binary of kinship.

This tension strengthens the suggestion of identity as an intersection of fluid, sometimes opposing, desires and societal expectations. Lydia's instinctual maternal bond urges her to protect Demola regardless of biological ties, but her identity as a wife and woman now demands answers from the past. This duality is reflected in her fears of familial rejection should the truth emerge; should Demola not be her child, Lydia would face the possibility of alienation and loss, relegating her to an 'outsider' in her own story. From this, the relationship between self and other manifests, as Lydia's internal dialogue stretches between acceptance and rebellion against the societal norms that tether biological certainty to parental legitimacy.

In Lydia's case, the Jungian shadow also represents the unknown aspects of her family's origin. Her quest for certainty drives

her to confront disturbing reports about Chapel Hospital, a journey that externalises her inner doubts and fears. Lydia's late-night research and her encounter with the bleak reality of maternity ward malpractice are manifestations of her shadow—an involuntary projection of suppressed anxieties, which now roam freely, manifesting as distrust, suspicion, and anger. Through this lens, her late husband's family and the hospital emerge as antagonistic forces, further fuelling the divide within her psyche between the maternal role she occupies and the latent fear of deception that lurks within.

Jung writes that 'the meeting with oneself is, at first, the meeting with one's own shadow,' (Jung 20) an unavoidable, usually unsettling recognition of what lies beneath the conscious self. For Lydia, the shadow of doubt cast over Demola's paternity pushes her into confrontation not just with the institutional negligence of Chapel Hospital, but with her own reliance on familial ties as her identity's bulwark. The maternal role becomes one that both empowers and entraps her, revealing the thin thread upon which identity is suspended when the shadow gains prominence.

For Lydia, the connection between faith in her family's integrity and the empirical, undeniable DNA evidence that casts doubt on Demola's lineage describes her psychological turmoil. Zimbardo's notion of 'empirical entrancement' comes into play here; as Lydia receives information that shatters her sense of stability, her identity is extensively complicated by the dichotomy between her lived reality and the scientific facts laid bare before her. One perceives how Lydia's initial reliance on prayer—a mechanism of faith—as a source of reassurance begins to wane as the truth becomes unavoidable and indispensable. This intersection also depicts the psychological pressure under which Lydia exists, her struggle reflective of the human propensity to cling to faith when truth seems unattainable.

However, in defiance of her gradually developing certainty, Lydia remains drawn to the comfort of the familiar—the tactile security

of holding Demola's photograph, her maternal instincts pulling her back to the sense of continuity and wholeness they represent. This juxtaposition between faith and empiricism, self and shadow, brings the concept of the 'fluid self' into sharp relief. Lydia's trust in her motherly identity does not vanish; instead, it mutates, adapting to her growing awareness that her sense of identity might rest on an illusion. Her fluid self emerges not from answers, but from her ability to move forward in the absence of them.

One can assert that Lydia's journey in 'Lydia's World' marks her transition from binary opposition to a synthesis, a transformation of the maternal self that transcends the limits imposed by biology. Lydia's evolution portrays her eventual acceptance that her identity is not defined by DNA or societal judgment but by her immovable commitment to Demola, even in the face of uncertainty. This transcendence approves of identity's mutable nature; as Lydia faces her shadow, the empirical evidence, and societal expectations, she emerges with an identity that is no longer bound by traditional definitions of motherhood or by the binary of 'real' and 'adopted.' In Lydia's world, the reality of self becomes her lasting truth, moving beyond the confines of bloodlines and genetic codes, characterising the resilient and indefinable essence of the human spirit.

In the short story 'When Truth Dies,' the thematic resonance of identity and memory runs through the protagonist's encounters with her deceased husband, Omoniyi. The text centres on the uncertainty between life and death, exposing a psychological world where existential truths oscillate between reality and illusion. The protagonist's initial confrontation with her husband, Omoniyi is destabilising. Upon sighting her supposedly dead husband, she wrestles with disbelief and the weight of her own memory.

> I step out of my Oaks Apartment flat and the harsh Houston sun almost blinds me. I rub my hand over my eyes. My vision

> becomes clearer and I see an apparition. Driving a 2019 Corolla towards the exit gate is my husband. Yes, my husband, the one who died three months ago. I clear my face again and he is still there; he is not a ghost. Back home in Nigeria, people would have thrown sand at him to confirm that he is not a ghost. In my dazed state, he drives out of the exit gate. (Yishau 77)

This conflict bears semblance to Jung's Shadow archetype, in which the individual must confront the latent aspects of their psyche—often embodied in another person or phenomenon. Jung observes that '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' (Jung 8). In this case, the protagonist's own 'shadow' seems to materialise through her husband's return, inviting a re-evaluation of both his existence and her perception of self.

By projecting her own shadow onto this figure, she bears a struggle with identity: is she grieving a husband who exists only in her memories, or reconciling with an altered image of him that now operates within the world as if autonomous from her? Zimbardo, in his *The Lucifer Effect*, speaks to how societal constructs impose roles upon individuals, affecting their actions and their sense of self. Here, Omoniyi exists as a doppelgänger, an image of societal expectations and memories that the protagonist now struggles to reconcile with a living form. As such, her binary experience oscillates between the reality of her memory and the foreign presence that her husband has become.

When Omoniyi reappears, he represents a form of the 'other,' a term discussed by existential theorists as a crucial binary in shaping self-identity. Sartre argues that the existence of the other disrupts the individual's freedom, as one's self-awareness becomes contingent on the gaze of the other (Sartre 340). Yishau, through the protagonist's incredulity, constructs a narration of the 'self' encountering the 'other' within a single individual. Omoniyi, once the object of her love and a

crucial component of her identity, reappears in a way that forces her to confront the self/other duality. Yet, this Omoniyi is not the exact other—he's a spectral double, an 'other' that is both known and unknown.

Joshua Rothman's 'Becoming You' states how 'individuality is inherently fluid, and often must accommodate the shifting boundaries of identity that society or circumstance imposes' (Rothman). The protagonist, then, is confronted not only with a literal form of her husband but with the symbolic collapse of her self-defining memories of him. These memories, once stable, are destabilised by the presence of the doppelgänger, which shows the duality of identity that has always been a core, albeit silent, feature of her psyche.

In reencountering Omoniyi, Yishau's protagonist faces the living/dead binary, another central theme in this exploration of individual identity. The dead/living duality introduces a metafictional tension: who is the true Omoniyi—the man remembered, or the doppelgänger encountered? When she observes him in Houston, alive and separate from her memory, it is like a psychological pressure that reawakens her grief. Her encounter symbolises an existential anxiety that challenges the borders between past and present, grief and acceptance. This narrative attribute, in Jungian terms, suggests that the character's psyche is undergoing an individuation crisis—a breakdown of the ego-self to integrate this 'new' husband as an unfamiliar, autonomous presence.

Her initial shock and subsequent fainting symbolise a psychological death. It is this psychological death that allows her to come to terms with her buried grief. To use Zimbardo's concept of role confusion, this doppelgänger initiates a forced recalibration of her emotional and social identity. Omoniyi's appearance in another form thus depicts the dissolution of fixed identities, supporting Rothman's view that 'individuals are constantly becoming someone other than who they are,' shaped by forces beyond their control (Rothman).

Another aspect of binarity emerges in the protagonist's interactions with her surroundings, where cultural narratives about the supernatural influence her perception. She initially rationalises the vision of her husband in culturally conventional terms: the Nigerian practice of throwing sand to confirm one's humanity. Such cultural reflexes suggest that, while her sense of self is affected by personal and existential crises, it is also shaped by collective beliefs and expectations. Yishau's prose here shows how culturally conventional practices shape the binary identities individuals deal with. The protagonist is both the rational, grieving widow and a participant in cultural practices that frame her reactions to Omoniyi's return.

In literature and psychology, identity often portrays these dualities, a theme that Yishau weaves into the protagonist's conflicted state. Her reaction symbolises a dual negotiation with both her psychological world and her cultural identity, which ascribes specific meanings to death and the supernatural. Zimbardo notes that 'the individual is defined not just by personal decisions but by the cultural weight of collective values that shape their worldview' (Zimbardo 281). Yishau depicts this through the protagonist's reliance on, and simultaneous disorientation from, her cultural memory.

In the end, the protagonist's journey in 'When Truth Dies' confronts a core paradox: the acceptance and rejection of truth. In her plea to her neighbour for contact information, her desperation shows a fragile acceptance of the ghostly form of her husband. Yet, in the same breath, she clings to her memories, rejecting any suggestion that this man might not be her Omoniyi. This tension reflects the binarity of individuality; her identity is split between acceptance of reality and the rejection of it to sustain her narrative.

In this way, Yishau questions the 'truth' of individuality: is it grounded in self-perception, memory, or the societal roles we are compelled to play?

Conclusion

Premised on the short stories analysed, one can consider individuality from the point of view of its fluidity; that is, how much the individual or a person is changeable as situation dictates. Also, it is evident that there is an ongoing dichotomy between the shadow and the persona; and this is what this article presents through the short stories explored. Yishau helps one to understand that the human behaviour, just like time, is relative. This means that there is no static behaviour, and that the individual is mutative or that individuality is typical of binarity.

Works Cited

Emerson, Ralph Waldo. *Self-Reliance*. In *Essays: First Series*, 1841. Edited by George R. Carroll, 2008. Project Gutenberg, https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/19496.

Hopwood, Ann. "Jung's Model of the Psyche." *The Society of Analytical Psychology*, https://www.thesap.org.uk/articles-on-jungian-psychology-2/carl-gustav-jung/jungs-model-psyche/. Accessed 20 Oct. 2024.

Jung, Carl. *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*. Routledge, 1980.

Jung, C.G. *Aion: Researches into the Phenomenology of the Self*. Translated by R.F.C. Hull,

Princeton University Press, 1978. The Collected Works of C.G. Jung, vol. 9, part 2.

Jung, C.G. *Psychology and Religion: West and East*. Translated by R.F.C. Hull, Princeton

University Press, 1958. The Collected Works of C.G. Jung, vol. 11.

Jung, C.G. *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology*. Translated by R.F.C. Hull, Princeton

University Press, 1953. *The Collected Works of C.G. Jung*, vol. 7.

Rothman, Joshua. *Becoming You. The New Yorker*, 2022.

Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*. Translated by Hazel E. Barnes, Washington Square Press, 1956.The Holy Bible, New King James Version. Thomas Nelson, 1982.

Zimbardo, Philip. *The Lucifer Effect: Understanding How Good People Turn Evil*. Random House, 2007.