



**UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA**

**FATHER-SON CONFLICT FROM MYTHOLOGICAL AND  
ARCHETYPAL PERSPECTIVES IN ROSTAM AND SOHRAB AND  
OEDIPUS REX**

**MOHSEN SOLHDOOST**

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PERSPECTIVES IN ROSTAM AND SOHRAB AND OEDIPUS REX**

**BY**

**MOHSEN SOLHDOOST**

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, in  
Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts**

**October 2010**



**Dedicated to:**

**My beloved parents**



Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts

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By

**MOHSEN SOLHDOOST**

**October 2010**

**Chairman: Associate Professor Rosli Bin Talif, PhD**

**Faculty: Modern Languages and Communication**

The purpose of this study is to examine the cross-cultural conception of father-son relationship / conflict through analysis of heroic features, unconscious motives, and conscious actions of two fathers and two sons as the heroes of the stories with different mindsets in the main chapter of *Shahnameh*, “Rostam and Sohrab,” and Oedipus Rex. This study is to further analyze the distinguishing characters of archetypes as primordial images which, despite being prototypal, may have different representations in different myths of different nations. Further on, this study aims to compare and contrast both similarities and differences in demonstration of same archetypes transcending time and place in two distant cultural settings.

The methodology used to undertake this research consists of Freud’s theory of psychoanalysis, Jung’s theory of archetypes, as well as the anthropological standpoints



of Frazer and Frye. An interdisciplinary approach has been actually applied as the conceptual theory to conduct this study.

As the result of this study, we see how the same archetypes are presented differently in two different socio-cultural settings. As discussed, it is shown how a hero is respected in the Persian and Greek society. Highlighting the father-son relationship in the two cultures, we see how the two societies react differently to the father-son conflict. And finally we realize that the same archetypes are likely to be demonstrated differently in different places and time-settings.



Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia  
sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Master Sastera

**KONFLIK AYAH – ANAK LELAKI DARI SUDUT PERSPEKTIF  
MITOLOGIKAL DAN ARKETIPAL DI ROSTAM DAN  
SOHRAB DAN OEDIPUS REX**

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**Oktober 2010**

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Tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk meneliti konsepsi silang budaya hubungan / konflik antara ayah- anak lelaki melalui analisis ciri-ciri wira, tujuan tersembunyi dan aksi-aksi jelas antara dua orang ayah dan dua orang anak lelaki sebagai hero dalam cerita beserta set minda yang berbeza dalam bab utama *Shahnameh*, *Rostam* dan *Sohrab* serta *Oedipus Rex*. Seterusnya kajian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis karekter yang membezakan arketip sebagai imej primordial, walau pun bersifat prototipal, mungkin mempunyai representasi mitos yang berbeza dari negara yang berbeza. Kajian ini juga bertujuan untuk memperlihatkan persamaan dan perbezaan apabila mendemonstrasikan arketip yang sama yang menjangkau masa dan tempat bagi dua latar budaya yang berbeza.

Metodologi yang digunakan dalam kajian ini ialah Teori Psikoanalisis Freud , Teori arketip Jung di samping menggunakan sudut pandangan Frazer dan Frye. Pendekatan

antara disiplin telah diaplikasikan sebagai teori konseptual dalam menjalankan kajian ini.

Hasil kajian mendapati arketip yang sama telah dikemukakan secara berbeza dari dua latar sosio-budaya yang berbeza. Seperti yang telah dibincangkan, kajian ini menunjukkan bagaimana seseorang hero digambarkan dalam masyarakat Parsi dan Greek. Dengan memperlihatkan hubungan ayah-anak lelaki dalam dua budaya, dapatlah diketahui bagaimana perbezaan reaksi antara dua masyarakat terhadap konflik ayah-anak lelaki. Kesimpulannya, kajian ini memperlihatkan bahawa arketip yang sama mungkin didemonstrasikan secara yang berbeza pada tempat dan latar yang berbeza.



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I certify that an Examination Committee has met on October 6, 2010 to conduct the final examination of Mohsen Solhdoost on his Master of Arts thesis entitled “Father-Son Conflict from Mythological and Archetypal Perspectives” in accordance with Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (Higher Degree) Act 1980 and Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (Higher Degree) Regulations 1981. The Committee recommends that the student be awarded the degree of Master of Arts.

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## **DECLARATION**

I declare that the thesis is my work except for quotations and citations, which have been duly acknowledged. I also declare that it has not been previously, and is not currently, submitted for any other degree at Universiti Putra Malaysia or at any other institution.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

As long as Iran is known as the country of ancient civilization, and always is remembered for its rich history and culture, many literary critics have directly or inadvertently admitted that Iranian Literature has been a stronghold for a large number of literary theories and critical concepts. According to Zabihollah Safa in his *Epic Narration in Iran*:

Those nations who have lived for long in a region and have faced bad or good incidents, achieved victories, or failed wars, will have stories of their warriors, heroes, and intruders to their territory, which are indeed memories serving as a basis for creation of their nationhood. And it's for this reason that when they get together, some stories which represent their grandeur and awesome history are made, narrated, and developed from one generation to another in so far as a powerful poet with very strong patriotic feelings composes an unforgettable and immutable epic (2008, 5).

A major landmark in Persian literature which has been extolled for its pure Persian wording is *The Epic of Kings (Shahname)*. This Persian national epic is a poem of some 60,000 rhyming couplets that was composed by Abolqasem Mansour Ferdowsi over a period of several decades, [35 years] in the late tenth and early eleventh centuries. Inspired by sincere love for his country and its prolific culture, Ferdowsi has actually pioneered in the composition of a pure Persian literary work and has held the line on his using merely Persian diction throughout his work to the possible extent. The author's groundbreaking of great literary merit gives a detailed account of four dynasties in Persian history of which, the first two are mythical and the latter part goes just for real in a historical context (Shoar & Anvari, 2000, 10).



In this masterpiece, just like all its other narrations throughout the book, there is a chapter on the almost archetypal fear of succession and the eternal fascination of father-son conflict. It is the refusal of the elderly to be superseded by the young (Mahjoob). This pattern and its similar traits, where all fathers and sons are individuals developing their own man based on life experiences of different kinds, hold true in the Greek cycle where they are best represented by the myth of Oedipus written by Sophocles. *Oedipus Rex*, considered by many, the greatest of the classic Greek Tragedies, is indeed Sophocles' finest play and a work of extraordinary power and resonance. Aristotle considered it a masterpiece of dramatic construction and refers to it frequently in the *Poetics* (1996). These two great literary works of outstanding construction, *The Epic of Kings & Oedipus Rex* portray some major Jungian archetypes, father-son conflict in particular, through key characters within the work and, therefore as Jung mentions in his *The Archetypes and The Collective Unconscious* (1968), the theory of Archetypes equips the literary critics and the readers of myth to examine such works minutely part by part and then figure out how the same motifs and patterns are differently demonstrated in different cultural settings.

However, analysis and examination of some archetypes in given cultural contexts, here one ornamented by oriental characteristics and the other embellished by occidental attributes, will help us gain an appreciation of different kinds and/or aspects of representation of archetypes.



## **Background of study**

When Joseph Campbell wrote his book, *The Masks of God: Primitive Mythology* (1959), where he observes some animal patterns of behavior, a thought-provoking question followed: “Whence, this abrupt seizer by an image to which there is no counterpart in the chicken’s world? Living gulls and ducks, herons and pigeons, leave it cold; but the work of art strikes some very deep chord!” (31).

Campbell’s analogous statement so as to identify the relationship between literature and the deep nature of human beings was a rudimentary conscious understanding of the collective unconscious. Similar pronouncements were made by other literary critics such as; Mark Schorer, Alan W. Watts, George Whalley, and Allen Tate in furtherance of the approach, and then Carl Gustav Jung (26 July 1875 – 6 June 1961), a Swiss Psychiatrist, and an influential thinker and the founder of Analytical Psychology, became the most well-known pioneer in the field of exploring and developing the concept of Archetypes and Symbols in mythology. Jung’s appreciation of the Unconscious realms and consideration of the process of Individuation necessary for a person to become whole, led into the introduction of the Character Archetype of Father-Son Conflict (Guerin, Labor, Morgan, Willingham, 1993, 154).

This archetypal pattern had been detected by Jung’s predecessor, Sigmund Freud, in *Oedipus Rex* and was named Oedipal Complex. In spite of the existing connection



between Freud's Psychological approach and Jung's Mythological criticism, the former was merely experimental and diagnostic which is closely related to biological science, whereas the latter tends to be more speculative and philosophic which is closely related to religion, anthropology, and cultural history, which all in all; makes it more applicable for a comparative study of myths of different societies (Guerin, Labor, Morgan, Willingham 154).

Sigmund Freud's analysis of *Oedipus Rex* was an effort to scrutinize Oedipus' relationship with his father. According to Freud in *The Ego and the Id*:

The boy deals with his father by identifying himself with him. For a time these two relationships [the child's devotion to this mother and identification with his father] proceed side by side, until the boy's sexual wishes in regard to his mother become more intense and his father is perceived as an obstacle to them; from this the Oedipus Complex originates (1962, 21).

Oedipus' attempt to get rid of his father either for sexual reasons or thirst for power was later on considered by Jung as a universal phenomenon and an intrinsic developmental stage of individuals' growth in their pursuit of becoming whole (*The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* 60).

*The Epic of Kings*, a long epic consisting of Persian myths, is most praised for its chapter on Rostam & Sohrab, a father and son who engage in a bloody conflict without knowing their blood relation (Mahjoob). Examination of this myth brings us to the fact that it shares some themes and motifs of unconscious desire for bestial



incest and/ or competitive power, however; differs in some aspects of father-son relationship.

### **Statement of the problem**

Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* has been observed through the standpoint of Mythological and Archetypal approach with a lot of attention by literary critics. This coalition of myth and literature has been a well-trying exemplar for verification of the theory of Archetypes and mythological approach to literature, although, all archetypal motifs and patterns portrayed in *Oedipus Rex* have been said to be following a well-known mythic narrative existing long before Sophocles has immortalized them as tragic drama and therefore they became legendary in literary critics' memory. Corollary to the popularity of its familiar archetypal characters, there has been much effort, though not enough, taken to analyze the synthetic prototypal themes and characters in this mythical work (Rank, 1914, 65).

Myth critics have discovered some corresponding universals in other literary works which, despite being the product of the workshop of an unaffiliated writer, could be undoubtedly traced back to Greek literary features existing long before their composition (Guerin, Labor, Morgan, Willingham 157).



The relationship between the elemental components of the old Greek work, Oedipus, and other worldwide myths just like Persian Rostam is too much likely to intrigue an undeniable interest amongst literary critics.

Just like mythological approaches which have been used to find some commonalities between Oedipus and other mythic heroes, Jung's theory of Archetypes, though modern in its formation, have verified some certain universals and primal patterns in Oedipus which can be appropriately applied to any other myth (Guerin, Labor, Morgan, Willingham 157). Through a more thorough examination of Persian literature, one could say that Sophocles' ideas look more than too much identical, parallel or even correlated with those of Ferdowsi in molding his masterpiece. This said, it can be fairly contended that all human beings are bound or interconnected by dense memory webs, or put it the other way; as Jung has figured out; we all share some prototypal features in our collective unconscious even though we might not have any cultural affinities or geographical proximities (78).

This premier father-son relation has been picked up by literary critics in many other masterpieces such as Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. According to Francis Fergusson in comparing Oedipus with Hamlet:

In both plays a royal sufferer is associated with pollution, in its very sources, of an entire social order. Both plays open with an invocation for the well-being of the endangered body politic. In both, the destiny of the individual and of society are closely intertwined; and in both the suffering of the royal victim seems to be necessary before purgation and renewal can be achieved (1992, 118).



Such catholicity, as mentioned before, becomes very much evident in the works of diverse literatures throughout the world as we proceed with other literary works in the course of time and thus any single initiative is only disclosing one more aspect of such cosmopolitan role models. With this end in view, the Orient, and the rich Persian literature in particular, seems to be highly qualified and noteworthy for such literary explorations.

According to the definition of myths as hereditary self-explanatory stories which have been revealing the mysteries of gods and goddesses providing rationales for social customs in addition to establishing dos, don'ts, rituals, and forms in ceremonies, it could be wisely said that a nation with a well-established historical background as that of Persia could be best opted for any mythological studies.

In this regard, a great epic poem called *The Epic of Kings (Shahnameh)* composed by Ferdowsi is going to be examined and compared with Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* to measure the sameness and uniformity of recurrent primordial images across the world. However, through focusing more on characters and their relations with each other and less on the plot, this study is going to examine closely the internal and individual conflicts in which fathers confront their own sons with consideration of their cultural values.

Needless to say, Persian literature has been accorded much respect by the Greeks for its far-reaching influence over Greek society and consequently Greek literature as



even some Persian elite who were familiar with Greek rhetoric have written their literary works in Greek (Zarrinkoub, 1977, p. 1956). The play, *The Persians* written by the ancient Greek playwright, Aeschylus, in 472 BC is in no small way a testimony to this claim. Mathew Arnold's *Rostam & Sohrab* also testifies to the uniqueness of Persian literature. Furthermore, the occurrence of the name Persia in the *Book of Ezekiel* and Cyrus, a famous Iranian king, in the Book of Isaiah, and many other examples of Persian literary and cultural avant-garde should all substantiate this notion (Malcolm, 1815, 533).

Although this great reservoir of literature has been neglected unfairly after the conquest of Arabs, many Nationalists on one hand and some Orientalists on the other have remained faithful to *The Epic of Kings* as the only pure Persian piece of work whose language and diction has remained intact even after the Arabization or Islamicization of ancient Iranian culture (Safa 25).

As said before, both literary works have been considered valuable so as to reveal some primordial thematic structures and thereby confirm the theory of archetypes originating in mythology. To this effect, and as far as the universality of archetypes demands, further supporting evidence can only be provided through a comparative study of different texts wherein similarities and differences of Father-Son Conflict can be singled out. This research is going to fulfill this ambition through a comparative analysis of Ferdowsi's *Rostam & Sohrab*, and Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, as both of these literary discourses can truly serve as an important medium for

clarifying mnemonic contentions on the presentation of same archetypes in different cultural settings. By the end of this work, we are also afforded the opportunity to gain a meticulous understanding of the relationship between sons and fathers existing in Persian and Greek cultural contexts at given times.

### **Scope and limitation of the study**

This study, though credited for its universality in terms of targeting the texts, is purposely narrowed in scope to only two literary texts for a qualitatively comprehensive comparison. *The Epic of Kings*, an enormous poetic opus, written in the 10<sup>th</sup> century by Abolqasem Mansour Ferdowsi, known as the Homer of Iran, is one of the major texts of this study. Ferdowsi's *The Epic of Kings*, completed in 1010 AD, contains almost sixty thousand rhyming couplets written in ancient Pahlavi diction which has been the formal language of Iran before the invasion of Arabs and the consequent loss of national independence. The author has been inspired by oral and literary sources for recounting such a historical account of the 50 kings of Persia who successively rule Iran. While the title of the book makes it a chronicle of the kings of Persia, it focuses on the story of a hero called Rostam. Rostam is too much like Hercules of the Greek cycle of stories for us not to regard the book as an epic.

According to David Elton Gay:

The Epic of Kings is a telling of Persian history through the history of Persia's kings, from the first kings through to the last king before the Islamic conquest of Persia. Because so much pre-Islamic mythological and heroic tradition is preserved in the epic, it is an invaluable resource for studying early Persian mythological, historical, and heroic traditions. But, in addition to its importance for the study of pre-Islamic traditions, because Ferdowsi's epic was so thoroughly accepted by the Persians that it has influenced virtually all later Persian literary, folk epic, and romance traditions, it is an

essential source for understanding later Persian tradition as well (*The Oral Background of Persian Epics: Storytelling and Poetry/Sunset of Empire: Stories from the Shahnameh of Ferdowsi*. Vol. 3 2006).

As David Elton Gay has pointed out, *The Epic of Kings* is a valuable source to explore the traditions and values of Persia as one of the most historic nations in the East, an endeavor which has never been undertaken in comparison with the literary work, *Oedipus Rex*, from the west which has been the basis of a literary criticism for some decades.

Many literary critics believe that *The Epic of Kings* is the greatest Persian piece of Literature, and Mohammadali Forooghi in *Forooghi's Articles* mentions that the only reason not to consider *The Epic of Kings* as the loftiest summit of the world literature is that one might be unfairly considered incompetent to understand the literature of other nations (1973, 37).

What makes *The Epic of Kings* irreplaceable by other similar texts originally written in English such as Mathew Arnold's *Rostam and Sohrab*, is that the latter literature has been composed under the influence of western traditions and mode of thinking, and thus lacks all those essential literary attributes coming specifically from the Persian socio-cultural settings. Therefore, *The Epic of Kings* which is carefully translated in English merits more than any other similar English text which is just inspired by Ferdowsi's story of "Rostam and Sohrab" for such comparative discussions. In much the same way, *Oedipus Rex* which is a translated text has been

for long a major source of conducting English literary analyses. Being unparalleled in recounting the primordial image of father-son conflict and Oedipal Complex, *Oedipus Rex* has been taught and analyzed in English Literature for long as Stanley Appelbaum has stated in his notes (*Oedipus Rex 2*).

Ferdowsi, writing about the history of Iran in his book, begins with the first ruler of the world Qayomars (gayo is earth and mars is man) and ends with the pre-Islamic kings of the Sassanian dynasty (224-651 AD) and its last king Yazdgard who was defeated by the Arabs. According to Laina Farhat-Holzman: “In short, a study of the *The Epic of Kings* gives us a literary excuse for exploring how culture moves across time and space, becoming part of the global common heritage” (*The Shahnameh of Ferdowsi: An Icon to National Identity* 2001).

With consideration of such comments on the significance of *The Epic of Kings* as a purely Oriental literary masterpiece, the choice of this text, which is accurately translated in English, for a mythological and archetypal study, proves justifiable.

The other book under the examination is *Oedipus Rex* created by Sophocles, who is inevitably considered as one of the three greatest Greek writers. He has been the author of 123 plays out of which, only seven are existing in their entirety. The most important play, by all means, is the *Oedipus Rex*. As far as this literary work, translated in English, has been conducive to the introduction of Psychoanalytical literary criticism, this text, though not originally written in English, is definitely



worth doing analytical research. Moreover, similar myths which are originally written in English, even if existed, have never taken the place of *Oedipus Rex* in literary discourse analysis. Oedipus, the protagonist of the story, rules over Thebes, a city founded by Cadmus. Oedipus, in the course of events, realizes that he has unknowingly killed his father and married his mother, a prophecy-come-true already presaged by the Delphic oracle. Based on Stanley Appelbaum's note: "*Oedipus Rex* is famous for its smooth and suspenseful plotting, its cosmic ironies and the philosophical questions it raises about the limits of man's power and ambitions" (*Oedipus Rex* 1).

Finally, it should be noted that considering the objectives of this study which are related to the psychoanalytical and socio-cultural settings of the two societies, the English translation of these two texts which have been used in literary discourse analyses are selected to conduct this study.

It should be taken into consideration that in order to conduct this study, all citations and references are based on the English translation of *The Epic of Kings* (*Shahnameh*) by Helen Zimmern.



## Conceptual theory

To have full compliance and acquiescence between the conceptual theory and the selected texts in terms of practicality to run this study, Mythological and Archetypal approach can stipulate the most accommodated compatibility and greatest functionality. According to Joseph Campbell:

For it is with the relationship of literary art to “some very deep chord” in human nature that mythological criticism deals. The myth critic is concerned to seek out those mysterious elements that inform certain literary works, and that elicit, with almost uncanny force, dramatic and universal human reactions. He wishes to discover how it is that certain works of literature, usually those that have become, or promise to become, “classics,” image a kind of reality to which readers give perennial response (*The Masks of God: Primitive Mythology* 33).

As stated above, it was Campbell’s analogy through which he identified the relationship between literature and the deep nature of human beings, nonetheless, produced the basic principles of Mythological criticism. Following Campbell’s initiative, other literary figures such as; Mark Schorer, Alan W. Watts, George Whalley, and Allen Tate contributed to the theory of archetypes and confirmed that all myths are communal and collective by nature (Guerin, Labor, Morgan, Willingham 156).

Completing remarks in this regard were added by Sigmund Freud’s sometime protégé, Carl Gustav Jung, a Swiss Psychiatrist, and an influential thinker and the founder of Analytical Psychology. As noted briefly in the previous sections, Jung believed that the basic themes of human life emerge from some universal images and

