



## Restoration of Archetypal Memory in Elchin's Novel Mahmud and Maryam

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**Abstract.** *This article examines the artistic reconstruction of archetypal memory in Elchin Afandiyev's novel Mahmud and Maryam within a psychoanalytic and mythopoetic framework. Drawing on Carl Gustav Jung's theory of archetypes and the collective unconscious, Mircea Eliade's concept of sacred-profane dichotomy and mythological time, and Joseph Campbell's monomyth theory, the study analyzes how archetypal structures — particularly the mother, hero, wise old man, and cosmic symbolism — are represented and transformed within the novel's poetic system. The research employs close textual analysis supplemented by intertextual and comparative perspectives, tracing the novel's engagement with the Azerbaijani epic tradition of Kitabi-Dede Gorgud and the classical Eastern literary motifs of Nizami's Layla and Majnun. The findings demonstrate that the novel does not merely reproduce traditional archetypes but actively reinterprets them through historical, cultural, and social dimensions specific to sixteenth-century Azerbaijan. The character system functions as a symbolic model of collective memory: Maryam embodies the mother archetype as a figure of sacred origin and regeneration; Mahmud instantiates the hero archetype through his progression from idealistic innocence toward spiritual trial and maturity; and Havalı Ibrahim fulfills the function of the wise old man as a mediator between visible and metaphysical knowledge. The mythopoetic construction of time and space — particularly the city of Ganja as a symbolic locus of collective memory — reinforces the cyclical rather than linear temporality characteristic of mythological narrative. The article argues that Mahmud and Maryam constitutes a complex artistic model in which archetypal memory is reconstructed through the synthesis of mythological, historical, and literary traditions, offering a significant contribution to the study of mythopoetic thinking and collective identity in modern Azerbaijani prose.*

**Keywords:** *archetypal memory, Elchin Afandiyev, Mahmud and Maryam, Jungian archetypes, mythopoetic analysis, collective unconscious, Azerbaijani literature, comparative literature*

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## 1. Introduction

The issue of the artistic reconstruction of mythopoetic thinking and collective memory in Azerbaijani literature is among the most compelling problems of contemporary literary scholarship. Many works written in the genre of the historical novel not only depict the social and political landscape of a specific period but also transfer the archaic layers of national memory, mythological patterns of thinking, and mechanisms of collective identity into the artistic plane (Eliade, 1963; Seyidov, 1983). In this respect, *Mahmud and Maryam* by Elchin Afandiyev attracts particular scholarly attention as one of the most significant works reflecting the artistic reconstruction of archetypal memory in Azerbaijani prose. The novel, set against the background of events in early sixteenth-century Azerbaijan during the Safavid period, interweaves political power, religious conflict, individual destiny, and the motif of love within a richly layered structure in which historical realism and mythopoetic symbolism are inseparably fused.

Yet the novel's significance extends beyond its historical and social dimensions. Behind the surface narrative of political intrigue and tragic love lie the archetypal structures of collective memory: configurations of meaning that Carl Gustav Jung identified as the universal contents of the collective unconscious, recurring across myths, religious representations, and literary creativity throughout human history (Jung, 1969). Elchin Afandiyev's novel activates and reinterprets these configurations, transforming the particular historical circumstances of sixteenth-century Azerbaijan into a symbolic model of enduring human experiences — love, spiritual trial, the encounter with fate, the sacred in the natural world — that resonate far beyond their immediate historical occasion.

Existing scholarship on Elchin Afandiyev's work has primarily approached the novel from historical, thematic, and biographical perspectives (Yusifli, 2010; Kazımov, 2009). While these contributions have established the novel's place within the Azerbaijani literary canon and clarified its relationship to documented historical events, they have not systematically engaged with the psychoanalytic and mythopoetic dimensions of the work — the layer of archetypal symbolism that gives the novel its particular density and universality. The present article addresses this gap by applying the theoretical frameworks of Jungian depth psychology and Eliadean mythology to a close reading of the novel's character system, temporal and spatial construction, and intertextual connections. The study aims to demonstrate that *Mahmud and Maryam* is not merely a historical love story but a complex artistic model in which archetypal memory is reconstructed through the synthesis of mythological, historical, and literary traditions.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation of this analysis rests on three intersecting traditions. The first and most central is Carl Gustav Jung's analytic psychology, particularly his theory of archetypes and the collective unconscious. Jung proposed that beneath the personal unconscious lies a deeper layer of the psyche — the collective unconscious — that is shared across individuals and cultures and



contains universal psychic images or patterns, which he termed archetypes. These archetypes — including the mother, the hero, the wise old man, the shadow, and the self — are not specific to any culture but manifest across the full range of human mythological, religious, and literary production, always adapting their surface form to the specific cultural context while retaining their underlying structural and semantic consistency (Jung, 1969).

The second theoretical tradition is Mircea Eliade's philosophy of religion and mythology. Eliade's central contribution to the interpretation of mythological thinking is his account of the sacred-profane dichotomy and his theory of mythological time — what he calls *in illo tempore*, the primordial time of origins to which myth and ritual provide renewed access. For Eliade, archaic human existence is characterized by the repetition of archetypal models established in this sacred time: historical acts acquire meaning and validity only insofar as they consciously or unconsciously re-enact primordial patterns (Eliade, 1959). This framework is directly applicable to the narrative structure of Mahmud and Maryam, where the events of sixteenth-century history are simultaneously historical particulars and re-enactments of archetypal patterns embedded in the deeper memory of the culture (Eliade, 1963).

The third tradition is Joseph Campbell's comparative mythology and his theory of the monomyth — the universal structure of the hero's journey that underlies the mythological narratives of diverse cultures. Campbell's hero's journey proceeds through a tripartite sequence of separation, initiation, and return: the hero departs from the ordinary world, undergoes trials in an extraordinary realm, and returns transformed with knowledge or gifts for the community (Campbell, 2004). This pattern provides the structural template against which Mahmud's narrative arc can be interpreted and through which his particular historical and personal circumstances are linked to the universal archetype of heroic self-realization. Together, these three theoretical frameworks constitute a comprehensive interpretive apparatus for analyzing the reconstruction of archetypal memory in Elchin's novel.

### 3. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative interpretive methodology combining close textual analysis with comparative intertextual investigation. The primary method is close reading — the detailed examination of selected episodes, character representations, and symbolic motifs in the novel that reflect key archetypal patterns and mythological structures. Each element identified through close reading is analyzed in relation to the Jungian and Eliadean theoretical frameworks outlined above, with particular attention to the symbolic functions of characters, the mythopoetic construction of time and space, and the cosmic symbolism embedded in descriptions of natural phenomena. A comparative perspective supplements the close reading by situating the novel within its intertextual context: the Azerbaijani epic tradition of Kitabi-Dede Gorgud, the classical Eastern literary tradition represented by Nizami's Layla and Majnun, and the universal love archetypes of world literature including the Romeo and Juliet motif. This comparative dimension enables the study to



trace the specific intertextual pathways through which Elchin activates and transforms collective memory in the novel.

#### 4. Mythopoetic Structure: Time, Space, and Collective Memory

The poetic structure of Mahmud and Maryam is built upon the synthesis of historical reality and mythopoetic models of thinking. Events in the work unfold not only on political and social levels but across archetypal and mythological layers simultaneously. Although the plot is presented against the background of significant events in sixteenth-century Azerbaijani history, the ideological structure of the work is fundamentally based on the artistic interpretation of collective memory and mythological archetypes. The opening scene of the novel establishes this mythopoetic register from the outset through the representation of the minstrel's execution — an episode that simultaneously depicts a historically specific act of political violence and enacts the mythological model of cosmic harmony disrupted:

*"Saz suddenly began to speak on its own and played the most sorrowful melody in the world... the sky neighed, and a torrential rain began"* (Elchin, 2004, p. 144).

The parallel presentation of natural phenomena with human destiny in this episode is a defining characteristic of the mythological worldview as analyzed by Eliade (1959): natural events are not merely atmospheric background but symbolic participants in the human drama, reflecting the disruption of the cosmic order that acts of injustice bring about. This cosmic responsiveness of nature to human events — what Eliade terms the sympathy between the macrocosm and the microcosm in archaic thought — recurs throughout the novel as a consistent structural device linking individual fate to universal archetypal patterns.

The construction of time in the novel departs deliberately from the linear, progressive temporality of realist historical fiction. Elchin frequently refers to what Eliade (1959) characterizes as mythological time — a cyclical, repetitive temporality in which present events are understood as re-enactments of primordial patterns rather than unique, unrepeatable historical moments. This temporal structure is particularly evident in the novel's treatment of love and sacrifice as recurring archetypal events that transcend their specific sixteenth-century context. Similarly, the city of Ganja functions not merely as a geographical setting but as a symbolic locus of collective memory — a spatial container of accumulated historical time and communal experience:

*"Ganja was asleep... the artisans, merchants, and court people of the city, struggling in the heat, had finally fallen asleep"* (Elchin, 2004, p. 145).

In this description, the collective rhythm of urban life — with its simultaneous exhaustion and latent vitality — functions as a symbolic carrier of historical time and collective memory. Ganja is presented not as a static backdrop but as a living repository of the cultural and spiritual traditions that the novel's events will both draw on and transform.



## 5. Archetypal Characters: The System of Collective Memory

### 5.1 *The Mother Archetype: Maryam*

The most complex and multilayered archetypal structure in the novel is the mother archetype as embodied in the character of Maryam. Jung identified the mother archetype as one of the most powerful contents of the collective unconscious, encompassing not only biological maternity but the symbolic dimensions of origin, nourishment, spiritual purity, and regenerative power (Jung, 1969). In *Mahmud and Maryam*, the character of Maryam carries all of these dimensions simultaneously, functioning as both an individual character within the historical narrative and as a symbolic embodiment of archetypal motherhood in its cosmic sense.

The choice of name is semiotically deliberate. Maryam, the Azerbaijani form of Mary, carries resonances of the most sacred maternal figure in the Abrahamic traditions — a figure whose defining characteristics are precisely those that Jung associates with the positive pole of the mother archetype: purity, protective power, and the capacity for miraculous regeneration. The novel makes this symbolic dimension explicit through the episode of the withered date tree:

*"In the middle of the desert stood a single dry date tree... suddenly, green leaves sprouted from its withered branches"* (Elchin, 2004, p. 169).

This image crystallizes the regenerative aspect of the mother archetype with extraordinary precision. The withered tree — symbolizing spiritual desolation, the exhaustion of life, the apparent triumph of death — is revived through Maryam's presence or proximity, enacting the archetypal maternal function of restoring life where it has been extinguished. As Eliade (1963) demonstrates, the motif of the miraculous tree is one of the most universal symbols of the axis mundi — the cosmic center that connects the terrestrial with the divine — and its association with a female sacred figure is consistent across mythological traditions from the Near East to pre-Islamic Central Asia. In placing Maryam at the center of this episode, Elchin situates his character within this global mythological tradition while grounding it specifically in the Azerbaijani and broader Islamic cultural context.

### 5.2 *The Hero Archetype: Mahmud*

The character of Mahmud instantiates the hero archetype in its classical form as theorized by both Jung and Campbell. The hero archetype, as Jung analyzed it, represents the development of the individual ego in its struggle toward self-realization, involving a confrontation with the collective unconscious through its various projections — shadow, anima, wise old man — that ultimately results in psychological integration and spiritual maturity. Campbell's account of the monomyth specifies the structural stages of this journey: the call to adventure, the crossing of the threshold, the road of trials, the supreme ordeal, and the return or transformation (Campbell, 2004).



Mahmud's trajectory in the novel follows this archetypal pattern with considerable fidelity. The novel introduces him at the threshold of his hero's journey — the moment of pure idealism before experience:

*"Mahmud was sixteen, yet he was so pure that he believed the world should be exactly like this"* (Elchin, 2004, p. 147).

This initial presentation corresponds precisely to what Campbell terms the 'ordinary world' of the hero — the state of innocence and undifferentiated potential that precedes the call to adventure. Mahmud's love for Maryam constitutes this call: it draws him across the threshold into a world where his idealism is tested against the full weight of historical, religious, and social reality. The religious and social obstacles that structure the novel's conflict — the division between Muslim and Christian, the power of the Safavid state, the condemnation of their love by the structures of authority — function as the archetypal 'road of trials' through which Mahmud's heroic character is formed and tested. His ultimate fate, whatever form it takes in the novel's conclusion, constitutes the 'supreme ordeal' that transforms him from an idealistic youth into a figure of collective moral significance.

### ***5.3 The Wise Old Man Archetype: Havalı Ibrahim***

The character of Havalı Ibrahim embodies the wise old man archetype — what Jung also termed the senex or the spirit archetype — whose function in both mythological narrative and psychoanalytic theory is to serve as a guide, mediator, and revealer of hidden truths at critical junctures in the hero's journey (Jung, 1969). The wise old man archetype represents the capacity of the collective unconscious to make its wisdom available to the conscious ego at moments of maximum need and maximum receptivity, typically through a figure who appears to operate at the boundary between ordinary and extraordinary reality.

Havalı Ibrahim's characterization in the novel consistently emphasizes this liminal, boundary-crossing quality. His sudden states of revelation, his responsiveness to voices and presences from the invisible world, and his ecstatic physical episodes mark him as a figure who mediates between the visible and metaphysical dimensions of reality:

*"Havalı Ibrahim suddenly widened his eyes, hearing voices from the unseen... then he would fall to the ground, writhing"* (Elchin, 2004, p. 149).

These episodes recall the classical features of the shaman or spiritual mediator in Turkic and Azerbaijani pre-Islamic tradition — figures whose capacity to enter altered states of consciousness gave them access to knowledge unavailable to ordinary perception (Seyidov, 1983). Elchin's deployment of this figure thus operates simultaneously at two levels: at the universal level of the Jungian wise old man archetype, and at the culturally specific level of the Azerbaijani folkloric and shamanic tradition, grounding the universal in the particular and demonstrating precisely the



kind of archetypal reinterpretation through cultural specificity that characterizes the novel's mythopoetic method throughout.

## 6. Intertextual Dimensions: Epic Tradition and Classical Literature

The restoration of archetypal memory in Mahmud and Maryam is realized not only through the direct deployment of Jungian archetypes but through a sustained intertextual engagement with the literary traditions that carry and transmit collective memory across generations. Two intertextual fields are particularly central: the Azerbaijani epic tradition represented by Kitabi-Dede Gorgud, and the classical Eastern literary tradition represented by Nizami's Layla and Majnun.

The resonances between Mahmud and Maryam and Kitabi-Dede Gorgud operate primarily at the level of the hero archetype and its relationship to collective ideals. The character of Deli Domrul in the epic tradition — a hero whose defiance of fate and struggle against supernatural forces expresses the individual's assertion of value against cosmic indifference — provides a cultural template that Mahmud's character both inherits and transforms. Where Deli Domrul's heroism is expressed through physical confrontation and martial valor, Mahmud's heroism is expressed through emotional fidelity and moral commitment in the face of social and religious prohibition — a transposition that reflects the transformation of collective values from a warrior-tribal society to a more complex, urban, and spiritually stratified historical context (Kazımov, 2009). The epic dimension of Mahmud's character — his embodiment of collective ideals rather than merely personal desires — is thus not simply an individual authorial choice but a deliberate activation of the archetypal heroic model encoded in the Azerbaijani epic tradition.

The intertextual relationship with Nizami's Layla and Majnun operates differently, engaging not with the hero archetype but with the love archetype in its transcendent, spiritualized form. In classical Eastern poetry, love is not merely a biographical or emotional phenomenon but a metaphysical orientation — a form of the soul's movement toward the divine, figured through the experience of longing for an unattainable beloved. Mahmud's love for Maryam inherits this metaphysical dimension: it is, at one level, a particular historical and biographical experience, but at another level a symbolic expression of the soul's orientation toward the sacred, the beautiful, and the transcendent. However, as the analysis has shown, Elchin does not simply reproduce the classical Eastern love archetype but critically transforms it by situating it within concrete historical and social constraints — the religious division between Muslim and Christian, the political violence of the Safavid state — that the idealized transcendence of the classical love narrative suppressed or sublimated. This transformation constitutes one of the novel's most significant literary achievements: the appropriation of a canonical archetypal structure and its reinvestment with historical and social specificity.

## 7. Discussion

The foregoing analysis demonstrates that the mythological, psychoanalytic, and intertextual dimensions of Mahmud and Maryam are not independent or parallel features of the novel but



components of a unified and coherent artistic strategy whose ultimate aim is the reconstruction of archetypal memory — the activation, in the individual reader's consciousness, of the deep structural patterns of collective experience that Azerbaijani culture has accumulated and transmitted across generations. Elchin's method is neither purely traditionalist nor purely modernist: he neither reproduces the archetypal structures of the epic and mystical tradition unchanged, nor abandons them in favor of an exclusively realist historical narrative. Instead, he subjects these structures to a process of critical reinterpretation through which their universal significance is preserved and made newly accessible while their historical specificity is simultaneously acknowledged and respected.

This interpretive strategy has important implications for the broader question of the relationship between literature, collective memory, and cultural identity. Halbwachs (1992), in his foundational analysis of collective memory, argues that communities maintain their identity through the active, ongoing reconstruction of the past in forms that are meaningful to the present — a process in which literature, art, and ritual play irreplaceable roles. Elchin's novel exemplifies this process with particular clarity: by reconstructing the archetypal structures of Azerbaijani collective memory through the artistic medium of the historical novel, it makes that memory available to contemporary readers in a form that is both recognizably rooted in tradition and freshly relevant to present experience. The fact that the novel has achieved canonical status in Azerbaijani literature — and has attracted sustained scholarly and popular attention over two decades — is itself evidence of the success of this reconstructive project.

Propp's (1968) morphological analysis of the folktale, while focused on a different literary form, provides additional analytical support for the structural approach adopted in this article. Propp's demonstration that a limited set of narrative functions underlies the surface diversity of folktale plots is analogous to the Jungian argument that a limited set of archetypes underlies the surface diversity of mythological and literary characters. Both frameworks suggest that the power of narrative to engage collective memory derives precisely from its mobilization of these underlying structural patterns — and both are consistent with the interpretation of Mahmud and Maryam offered here.

## 8. Conclusion

This psychoanalytic and mythopoetic analysis of Elchin Afandiyev's Mahmud and Maryam has demonstrated that the novel constitutes one of the most significant examples in Azerbaijani prose of the artistic reconstruction of collective memory and archetypal thinking. The ideological and aesthetic structure of the work is built not only on the realistic depiction of historical events but on mythological motifs and a system of archetypal images that give the historical narrative its deeper, universally resonant significance.

The analysis has identified and theorized four principal archetypal structures operative in the novel: the mother archetype embodied in the character of Maryam, through whose association with



sacred regeneration and the axis mundi the novel activates the most fundamental human experience of origin and renewal; the hero archetype instantiated in the character of Mahmud, whose journey from idealistic innocence through historical trial follows the universal monomythic pattern while grounding it in specifically Azerbaijani historical and cultural conditions; the wise old man archetype fulfilled by the character of Havalı Ibrahim, who mediates between the visible and invisible worlds in the tradition of the Azerbaijani shamanic healer; and the cosmic symbolism through which nature participates in human destiny as a manifestation of the deeper cosmic order whose disruption and restoration the novel enacts. Through these archetypes, Elchin transforms traditional themes of love, power, fate, and moral choice into artistic expressions of collective memory whose significance extends far beyond the particular historical circumstances of sixteenth-century Azerbaijan.

The intertextual dimensions of the novel — its engagement with the Azerbaijani epic tradition and with the classical Eastern love narrative — further enrich and complicate this archetypal structure by demonstrating that Elchin's reconstruction of collective memory is simultaneously individual, national, and universal: rooted in the specific traditions of Azerbaijani literary culture while opening onto the universal archetypal patterns that those traditions share with the mythological and literary heritage of humanity. Future research might productively extend this analysis to Elchin's other novels and dramatic works, examining whether the reconstructive strategy identified in Mahmud and Maryam constitutes a consistent characteristic of his literary method, and situating this method within the broader context of the recovery of national cultural memory in post-Soviet Azerbaijani literature.

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