



## **HWA CHONG INSTITUTION (HIGH SCHOOL SECTION)**

### **HUMANITIES RESEARCH PAPER 2018**

---

Topic: The Lighter Shade of Black: A Jungian Approach on the Romanticisation of Villainy in  
*House of Cards* (2013-)

Slant: Literature

Total Word Count (excluding appendixes, footnotes & references): 5388 words

Student's (official) Name: Ng Jun Rui

Class: 4H1

Name of Teacher-Mentor: Ms Liew Pei Li

**Declaration**

I declare that this assignment is my own work and does not involve plagiarism or collusion. The sources of other people's work have been appropriately referenced, failing which I am willing to accept the necessary disciplinary action(s) to be taken against me.

Student's Signature : Ng Jun Rui

Date of Submission: 16/8/2018

**Table of Contents:**

1. Introduction
2. Literature Review
3. Methodology
4. Discussion, Interpretation and Analysis
5. Conclusion
6. Bibliography

## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

#### **1.1 General Background**

In his writing entitled *A Love-Hate Relationship: Television's Anti-Hero Archetype Reflects Society*, Cooper Packard points out that “of the past 15 Emmy winners for Best Actor in a Drama Series, 13 were anti-heroes” (Packard, 2014), highlighting the increasing proliferation of anti-heroes in contemporary American television today. This trend is similarly observed in *Rise of the Anti-Hero* (2013), where Jonathan Michael describes the anti-hero as a “common character archetype for the antagonist that has been around since the comedies and tragedies of Greek theater” (Michael, 2013), but has been increasingly prominent in American television. In light of the increasing usage of the “anti-hero” trope to romanticise villains in popular media, this paper then situates itself in the zeitgeist of contemporary television, as it aims to analyse the factors which enable villainous characters to feature eminently in American television today.

#### **1.2 Rationale:**

In a contemporary context where anti-heroism proves able to “lure in large audiences” (A. Amato, 2016, p. 1), it is relevant to examine how villainous protagonists are presented by showmakers and the processes utilised to romanticise them. *House of Cards* (2013-) is well suited for this purpose as it does not dichotomise notions of morality; there are abundant displays of the Underwoods engaging in immoral activity, but the trope of the anti-hero gives leeway for subtle demonstrations of their vulnerability. This paper seeks to identify this duality within the

Underwoods' behaviours which resonates with viewers as "realistic and enticing" (A. Amato, 2016, p.1). This analysis is then enriched by the Jungian lens which lends a comprehensive framework to understand the mutabilities of human behaviour depending on influences from the psyche, both conscious and unconscious.

### **1.3 Research Questions:**

1. Can the Underwoods be seen as traditional "anti-heroes"?
2. How does the conflict between the ego and the unconscious as espoused by Jung shape the Underwoods as anti-heroes?
3. What does Fincher's romanticisation of the Underwoods convey about the nature of villainy?

### **1.4 Thesis Statement**

Fincher romanticises the Underwoods in *House of Cards* (2013-) by portraying them as "anti-heroes" who, while possessing traits traditionally associated with villainy, exhibit oft-repressed vulnerabilities and desires within their Personal Unconscious which humanise them.

### **1.5 Scope of Research / Delimitation(s):**

This paper will analyse the portrayal of the Underwoods in the opening season of *House of Cards* (2013-). In addition to critical acclaim it has received from multiple critics, the eminence of *House of Cards'* opening season (2013) in popular culture is evidenced by it being the first nominated series for original online web television for the 65th Primetime Emmy Awards. The

series is a key work when analysing the romanticisation of villainy due to its conflicting presentation of the Underwoods as blatantly immoral figures who simultaneously possess vulnerabilities and sentimental sides. The first season is particularly important in this regard as it devotes significant portions of time to characterisation; where other series often attempt to portray a gradual transition into depravity or provide contextual necessity for its villains' immoral acts, the Underwoods exhibited an intrinsic desire to choose a life of depravity rather than being coerced into this decision. The tension between their inherent immorality and their sentimentality provides much ground for exploration.

### **1.6 Significance of Research:**

It is observed from the popularity of *House of Cards* (2013-) that society possesses an “inclination towards power worship and “ignoring abuses” when assessing politicians, choosing to celebrate them based on their political effectiveness” (Friedersdorf, 2014), instead of their moral codes. By utilising the Jungian lens to analyse how villainy is presented in *House of Cards* (2013-), we gain insights pertaining to the conflict between villains’ conscious choices and their repressed sentimentalities, desires, and self-perceived weaknesses. This positions it as a suitable theory in analysing the emotional dilemmas and complexes which anti-heroes often are portrayed to possess, thus the usage of Jungian criticism value adds to the discourse surrounding the romanticisation of villainy.

## **1.7 Limitations**

A potential limitation of utilising the Jungian model is that it assumes that the shadow, or “dark sides” (Diamond, 2012) of one’s existence are unconscious to one’s mind due to the ego’s refusal to admit its imperfections, resulting in under-engagement with this region of the psyche. However, people in reality could be completely cognizant of their flaws, but consciously choose to accept and embrace them, which works against the assumption that the repression of the shadow is necessarily subconscious.

Jungian theory addresses this seeming contradiction with the concept of individuation. Editor Joseph Campbell writes in *The Portable Jung* (Campbell, 1976) that “Jung’s concept is that the aim of one’s life, psychologically speaking, should be not to suppress or repress, but to come to know one’s other side, and so both to enjoy and to control the whole range of one’s capacities”, describing the process of individuation. Hence, it is only a natural process to arrive at the acceptance of one’s shadow, and the conscious acceptance of one’s “dark side” is not a contradiction to the Jungian theory of the shadow.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review**

#### **2.1 Jungian Model of the Psyche**

The Jungian school posits that the psyche “is comprised of a three-tiered structure, each tier being an extension of the previous structure. The Self, the collective and personal unconscious, and the ego-consciousness are underscored as a vital construct constituting the dynamic functioning of the human psyche” (S. Rohleder, 2011, p. 10). This paper explores the tensions within the Self, unconscious and ego-consciousness as they shape the conflict between the central characters’ thirst for power and the repressions of their pasts and desires.

##### **2.1.1 The Ego and the Self**

Jung saw the ego as “the organiser of our thoughts and intuitions, feelings, and sensations, and has access to memories which are not repressed.” (Hopwood, 2015, p.1), representing our conscious state of mind. On the other hand, the Self unifies both the conscious and unconscious parts of the psyche and ultimately seeks numinous goals of individual completion “through a compensatory regulation of opposite energies” (S. Rohleder, 2011, p. 10), which is the concept of “individuation” as explicated in Chapter 1.7.

##### **2.1.2 The Personal Unconscious**

The Jungian school understands the personal unconscious as “part of the mind existing outside of an individual's awareness, a region of energies that house a vast assortment of abilities, and

operates without the individual's guidance or supervision.” (quoted in S. Rohleder, 2011, p. 23). This aligns with Jung’s own understanding of the psyche as “unique to the individual...formed from repressed wishes and impulses, subliminal perceptions, and forgotten experiences.” (Snowden 2010, p. 31). These contents could have become unconscious either because they had lost their intensity over time, never had “sufficient intensity to reach consciousness” (*ibid*, 58), or had been deliberately repressed, the latter being a natural response to traumatic memories and material which threatens the ego.

### **2.1.3 The Shadow Archetype, Persona and Projections**

A key component of the unconscious formed by such material is the Shadow. Snowden writes that “the shadow is an unconscious part of the personality that contains weaknesses and other aspects of personality that a person cannot admit to having” (*ibid*). It opposes the norms and values which the ego attempts to uphold, and is often perceived to be a manifestation of traits we consider undesirable and uncivilised. In his work *Aion, CW 9 Part II* (1951), Jung argues that “to become conscious of the shadow involves recognizing the dark aspects of the personality as present and real” (Jung, 1951), denoting that true integration of the personality arrives only upon healthy interaction with and understanding the shadow.

In order to hide the undesirable parts of the shadow, the ego creates a mask in order to glorify one’s appealing traits, known as the persona. In his work entitled *Psychological Types, CW 6* (1921), Jung writes that “The persona is . . . a functional complex that comes into existence for reasons of adaptation or personal convenience” (Jung, 1921) in order to function within social norms and protect the vulnerable ego.

In contrast to the function of an healthy ego as characterised in Chapter 2.1.1, an over-inflated ego will project its shadow externally. In his work *Normality in Analytical Psychology*, Steve Myers argues that “projections are not inherently a bad thing because they can be vital to maintaining psychic equilibrium in the person or society who is projecting”. (Myers, 2013). However, he offers an illustration where projection becomes detrimental - “if we take a one-sided, conscious view of ourselves as wholly good, then the psyche compensates by finding willing carriers of our projections” (Myers, 2013). In other words, a situation where the ego emphasises excessively upon a singular conception of itself and denies all other traits is the point in which projection becomes detrimental. This projection can also take place in groups, forming a “collective shadow” whereby there are common feelings of hatred against another entity.

## **2.2. The Traits and Appeal of Anti-Heroes**

There is a common understanding that anti-heroes are presented as “willing to cross lines, or cause physical harm to another person, in order to achieve a desired goal” (Amato, 2016, p.2) and “often make morally questionable choices, fall prey to human temptations, and usually challenge the boundaries of authority within society” (*ibid*, p.1). The seeming immorality of such anti-heroes is echoed by P. David Marshall in his writing entitled *Seriality and Persona* (2014), where he writes that there is a “connection of the audience to an anti-hero: a *personnage* that was not filled with virtue but moved with Machiavellian acuity towards his objective of ultimate power” (Marshall, 2014). Jason M. Stewart, while echoing Marshall’s sentiments in that “upon first impression, anti-heroes often seem untrustworthy, criminal, and perhaps unlikable”, posits that “as their stories strategically unfold audience members learn the reasons behind their

ethically questionable ways and usually begin to root for the character" (quoted in A. Amato, 2016, p.2). Elif Ince, in her thesis, makes a broader comment of the nature of anti-heroes, claiming that they "often reflects society's confusion and ambivalence about morality" (Ince, 2013).

There are several theories pertaining to how anti-heroes are being romanticised. The first is that showmakers aim to portray anti-heroes as sympathetic characters despite their immorality. Jack Langley argues that immorality, to begin with, is not uniform across anti-heroes - "some will experience regret or are forced into positions where they have to break the rules, others will murder and debauch without any remorse at all" (Langley, 2012). He notes, however, that "characters must become more than violent avengers, and have intricately woven inner conflicts with which the viewer can sympathise." Jessica Page Morell forwards a similar definition of the anti-hero as "someone who disturbs the reader with his weaknesses yet is sympathetically portrayed and who magnifies the frailties of humanity." (quoted in Ince, 2013 p.6). In other words, the anti-hero is someone who operates within morally grey areas, but yet has redeemable aspects brought on by these very ambiguities.

The second is the belief that because "audience members may feel trapped or limited by society in regards to what they can do in order to solve their own problems, these characters offer an escape and a chance for audiences to fantasize about acts they cannot commit" (A. Amato, 2016, p.5). Packard further comments that "there's a type of release in watching [anti-heroes], a vicarious thrill of people doing illicit things that we aren't allowed to do because of our repressive society" (quoted in A. Amato, 2016, p.5). While Ince would not go as far as to brand society as "repressive", she does concede the cultural factors which have led to the rise of the

anti-hero. In her thesis, she references skeptics of the traditional heroic story arc such as Hourihan, who casts doubt upon “the “myth of progress” as represented by the linear, unswerving structure of hero’s journey” as “yet another meta-narrative just like Christianity and Marxism; and just like them, the history of the twentieth century has made it difficult to sustain belief in it.” (quoted in Ince, 2013, p.7) In synthesis of this discourse, it is then a plausible conclusion that showmakers are crafting anti-heroes which are “disillusioned by any myth of progress” (Ince, 2013). In other words, the anti-heroes’ depravity is presented to be more tolerable due to societal factors, and that they are not likely to repent or demonstrate remorse as long as their environment remains constant.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Research Methodology**

This chapter will elucidate how the aforementioned theories will be applied throughout the research process. Concepts of the Ego, Shadow and Projections will be used as bases for understanding the conscious and unconscious behaviours of the Underwoods. The analysis will be structured through common means of romanticising anti-heroes - framing them as victims of circumstance, humanising them through vulnerabilities, and celebrating their appeal through ruthlessness - to explore how far the Underwoods align with this archetype.

This paper will focus on the tension between the Ego's need for stability, and the emergence of the Shadow in the Underwoods. Juxtapositions will be made between scenes where the Underwoods behave ruthlessly at work for political expediency, and more emotionally intimate scenes where they privately entertain their repressed emotions and instincts. Such scenes include Frank Underwood's reunion with an ex-classmate whom he once was romantically involved with, and Claire Underwood's reaction to an old lady who chides her for being disrespectful, both of which reveal vulnerabilities within their Shadows.

The means through which the Underwoods deal with the emergence of their Shadows will be analysed as well. Claire opts to repress her Shadow - as seen by her return to Frank after a brief affair with Adam Galloway, despite it bringing her happiness. Scenes demonstrating Claire's constant willingness to place herself as secondary to Frank also highlights how she masks her insecurities in the relationship to keep their marriage going. On the other hand, Frank chooses to

project his Shadows onto “external carriers” (Myers, 2013), as seen by his externalisation of the blame after being betrayed in the pilot.

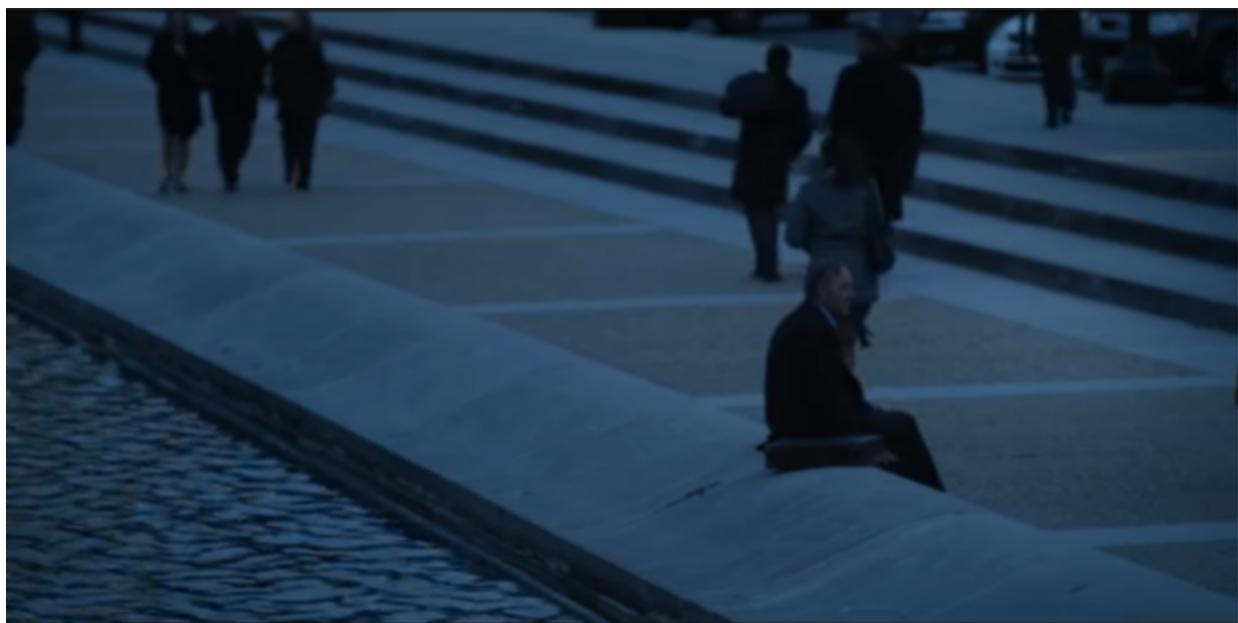
By examining the various means through which the Underwoods are being portrayed throughout nine key scenes in the opening season which exemplifies the tension between the Ego and the Unconscious, this paper will examine how the Underwoods blur the duality between “villain” and “protagonist”, thus arriving at a textured understanding of the characters.

## Chapter 4

### Discussion, Interpretation and Analysis

#### 4.1 The Underwoods as Victims of Circumstance

The argument that the Underwoods are romanticised as victims of circumstance is not unfounded. Chapter 2.2 has discussed the tendency of showmakers to provide justification for the depravity of anti-heroes in order to induce greater moral tolerance, a technique observed in the opening sequences of *House of Cards* (2013-). However, I posit that the sympathy generated by this is very much mitigated by Fincher through his prior characterisation of Frank as blatantly immoral and is not the main means of romanticisation.



*Fig. 1. Frank Underwood, visibly downcast and demoralised after being blindsided by the President*

After the President reneges on his promise to nominate Frank Underwood as Secretary of State, Underwood is portrayed to be visibly distraught. Frank sits alone beside a water body near the

White House as a blue overlay is employed by Fincher to evoke a sense of despondency. The wide-angle shot emphasises this isolation as the people around him march on, immune to his personal affliction. From a Jungian perspective, the scene is a manifestation of Frank's ego attempting to retain stability as he tries to downplay the grief from the betrayal to capacitate the ego. Viewers are instinctually able to understand this alienation due to the notion of betrayal being a common one in the personal unconsciousness of many, and thus find themselves sympathising with Frank.

However, the prior characterisation of Frank dispels the notion that he is indeed a victim of circumstance forced onto a path of immorality. Before being betrayed by President Walker, Frank speaks of him in a revelatory direct address, "Do I like him? No. Do I believe in him? That's beside the point." This reduces the sympathy evoked for Frank considering that Frank expresses little qualms in constructing Personas when politically expedient.

Within the same sequence as documented in Fig. 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3, Frank celebrates in a monologue that he had "backed the right man", as the camera swivels to personnel in the Administration whom Frank then condescends upon, before he declares smugly, "Welcome to Washington". From a Jungian perspective, this scene symptomises the dangers of an over-inflated ego fixated on a singular conception of oneself and projects all flaws onto others, dismissing the potentiality of weakness. From the panning of the camera around Frank, Frank is presented as the fulcrum of the party where people literally revolve around him, reflective of Frank's own hubris.



*Fig. 2.1, 2.2 & 2.3* Frank smugly introduces each person he sees use for to advance his career during the President's tenure

Thus, while the argument that Frank is a victim of circumstance does hold weight, his duplicity and arrogance were present right from the get go, thus the sympathy evoked from his “fall from grace” in the opening sequence is very much mitigated. In other words, while we can appreciate the reasons behind Frank’s agony, we are capable of recognising that he was not hurt solely by his circumstances - his hubris was his fatal flaw.

## 4.2 The Humanisation of the Underwoods

### 4.2.1 The Vulnerability of the Ego

When Frank recounts how the betrayal was broken to him, “Walker wasn’t even there. That’s what really gets me. He doesn’t even have the courage to look me in the eye”, Frank refuses to admit that his anger stems from the betrayal itself, instead attributing it to the President’s cowardice to face him. When told off by Claire, “I told you not to trust that woman”, with reference to Walker’s Chief of Staff, Frank further asserts that he “[doesn’t] trust her. [He doesn’t] trust anyone.” In both dialogues, Frank refuses to admit that it was his misplaced judgment which caused his downfall. Frank projects negative experiences and consequences of his poor decision-making on external carriers such as Walker to protect his vulnerable ego. Here, Frank is presented as a character with weaknesses and irrationalities, hence humanising him to viewers as someone who similarly experiences grief, loss and requires time to restore psychic equilibrium. This aligns with previous discourse surrounding anti-heroes as Frank experiences times of insecurity and unease, ephemerally embodying the “frailties of humanity” (Ince, 2013).



*Fig. 3. Claire interrupts Frank when he attempts to explain himself, asserting her presence in the relationship*

Claire similarly demonstrates vulnerabilities within her ego. When Frank returns home after the betrayal, Claire declares, “Nine hours. You don’t not call me – not when it’s this big...It’s that we do things together. When you don’t involve me, we’re in a free fall.” Claire’s ego is wounded by her belief that Frank does not perceive her as an equal in the “partnership”, which exemplifies the power asymmetry in the marriage. She attempts to alter this unequal dynamic by forcing a confrontation with Frank. In the opening season, this is a rare moment where Claire engages with such repressed desires within her Shadow, as she more frequently opts to suppress such facets of her psyche.

#### **4.2.2 Engagement with the Shadow**

Claire’s Shadow, in particular, is portrayed as a fleeting but powerful distraction which threatens the stability of the Ego. I posit that Claire could be seen as a foil to Frank in terms of engagement with the Shadow to juxtapose Claire’s humanity against Frank’s ruthlessness. As the storehouse of repressed desires, impulses and memories, the Shadow manifests spontaneously in ways which Claire’s ego cannot rationalise.

An instance which symbolises the Shadow’s disruption to Claire’s ego is her encounter with an old lady while jogging at a cemetery, where the old lady abruptly shouts, “What are you doing? You shouldn’t be running here. It’s disgraceful.” Claire, while momentarily shaken, runs on. From a Jungian perspective, this episode mirrors the intrusion of the Shadow - the act of jogging is one which represents familiarity for Claire; Claire adopts it as a routine in her daily life, symbolising the ego. However, the old lady is an anomaly to daily life which disrupts Claire’s stability and forces Claire to reflect over her disrespect and ruthlessness.



*Fig. 4. Claire is berated by an old woman for disrespecting the dead by running at the cemetery*

However, Claire's instinctive nonchalance eventually morphs into heightened receptiveness to the situations unfolding around her, a sign of healthy engagement with the Shadow. She later has a leisurely walk at the cemetery, where she sees a young couple having sex, displaying a similarly flagrant disrespect for the dead. However, Claire gives a small smile and she observes from a distance, atypical of her aloof demeanor. While Claire's disrespect is borne out of a lack of concern for suffering, the couple's disrespect is portrayed as an act of spontaneity and reckless abandon in displaying affection, desires which emerge from Claire's unconscious Shadow.



*Fig 5.1. & 5.2. As Claire smiles to the couple making love in the distance, the tulips she planted are placed in the light*

This sequence is interspersed with scenes of the family bodyguard setting up tulips in the middle of the Underwoods' dining table with a kitchen light shining on it. Claire had planted the tulips the year before for reasons she herself could not articulate, as she herself remarked that it was the "only day in [her] life" that she gardened, and that she was embarrassed of it. By presenting Claire's reaction to the young couple immediately before the tulips, a physical manifestation of her spontaneity, are placed under the light, viewers associate the tulips with Claire's yearning for affection. As such, her wry smile could be interpreted both as envy towards the couple and a sardonic mockery at her own inability to readily find such affection. This inner affliction which

Claire momentarily engages with reveals that she is ultimately vulnerable and susceptible to emotional experiences. Thus, through the tension brought about by her reaction to the couple making love, Claire is portrayed to possess “intricately woven inner conflicts” (Langley, 2012) with which viewers are able to connect with, thus lending her sympathy as an anti-hero.

#### **4.2.3 The Suppression of the Shadow**

However, Fincher is ultimately pessimistic towards integration with the Shadow, and is emphatic in portraying individuation as unattainable due to the Underwoods’ political decisions, demonstrating the Shadow’s continuous repression by the Underwoods. This repression is carried out by the creation of Personas which ensure that the vulnerable ego is protected. While Frank and Claire both construct Personas for political expediency, a more interesting study would be into the Personas they construct in front of themselves and to each other.

Claire is often forced into a position where repression on her part is necessary more so than Frank. When Frank apologises to Claire for not meeting her expectations, Claire refuses his apology and declares, “my husband doesn’t apologize, even to me.” Claire enforces the subservience she is trapped in by celebrating Frank’s blitheness towards herself, entrenching the perception that she does not need respect, in order to stroke Frank’s ego. However, when Claire intends to share with Frank about the old lady who confronted her during the jog, Frank does not listen to her because he has to handle a crisis, and she is forced to brush the episode off as no big deal. From a Jungian perspective, Claire’s repeated construction of Personas to mask her need for emotional validation and the loss of outlets for engagement with her Shadow unbalances her

psychic equilibrium. These sequences foreground Claire's subsequent affair with Adam as an act of seeking liberation from her repression.



*Fig. 6. Claire has a brief affair with Adam, but eventually returns to Frank after re-evaluating her priorities*

However, the short-lived affair is framed as unattainable due to Claire's ego's desire for stability. When Claire calls Adam up, Claire is initially glad to be hearing his voice, but by the end of the phone call, she confesses, "I need to use you", marking a return to her utilitarian Ego. A double entendre is used here - she literally requires Adam to donate several photographs for a gala, but she also uses Adam to cope with Frank's constant devaluation of herself in their marriage. This sequence is a microcosm of Claire and Adam's arc within the series - while Claire briefly engages with her Shadow, her Ego is unable to reconcile irrational yearnings with her political career, and she always opts for a return for what is conscious and stable.

Frank, despite being the sole character who breaks the fourth wall via direct address, never uses it to convey his inner vulnerabilities to the viewers; the emergence of his Shadow is far less

frequent and pronounced than Claire's. I posit that this is due Frank's ego having been inflated to the extent whereby he singularly fixates on absolute ruthlessness to achieve his ends; he has normalised a state of hypervigilance against any potential danger to his Ego such that he disregards all social standards of morality to protect it.

However, it is reductive to argue that Frank lacks any semblance of sentimentality. When Frank returns to his military college, he reminiscences upon old days with an ex-classmate, Tim Corbet, whom it is implied he had a gay relationship with. He is quick to draw the distinction between love and attraction, for when he is asked by Tim if "anyone ever calls [him] Francis", he quickly declares that "only Claire does". From a Jungian lens, the act of Frank entering the darkness of the old Sentinel library through a small window could be a physical representation of engagement with the Shadow - the part of his life containing details which would jeopardise his political career. The childishness of the four men in cracking inane jokes and making a ruckus with glee invokes the "child" archetype, a symbol in Jungian psychology for innocence and salvation. However, this return to innocence is proved to be short-lived; the next day, light illuminates the soon-to-be-renovated library, an extended metaphor for the inevitable return and omnipotence of the Ego.



*Fig. 7.1 & 7.2. The light progressively brightens as the sequence unfolds, highlighting both the taboo nature of their relationship and the eventual return of the Ego*

As Frank leaves the campus, he bids farewell to Tim and the camera immediately pans to Claire, who informs her that their bodyguard is waiting. Frank's discardment of a Sentinel pamphlet as he discusses the next move with his Chief of Staff physically represents how quickly Frank is able to detach himself from his Shadow and return to his Ego. Immediately after bidding goodbye, Frank returns to the control of his Ego and ventures back into his plans for ascension, re-adopting “*a personnage* that [is] not filled with virtue but moved with Machiavellian acuity towards his objective of ultimate power” (Marshall, 2014). Thus, Fincher reminds us that Frank’s moment of weakness has not made him detract from larger ambitions, hence exemplifying the choice of pragmatism over ethicality often made by anti-heroes.

### 4.3 The Appeal of Ruthless Winners

The final means through which the Underwoods are romanticised is through portraying them as “ruthless winners” (Friedersdorf, 2012), who demonstrate little compunction in achieving their ends. I posit that this is the logical conclusion of the Shadows’ repression - due to the denial of vulnerabilities, sentimentality and guilt, Fincher frames the Underwoods as ruthless but successful, heavyweights.

The series opens with Frank strangling his neighbours’ dog with his bare hands, declaring, “I have no patience for useless things. Moments like this require someone who will act, who will do the unpleasant thing, the necessary thing.” As the dog’s whimpers fades to silence, Frank looks straight into the viewers’ eyes, saying, “there...no more pain.” This scene is both emblematic of how Frank deals with his opponents, and how he suppresses his Shadow in order for his Ego to function at maximal efficiency. The decision to not physically show the dog reveals the nature in which Frank views his Shadow - unworthy of attention and vulnerable.



*Fig. 8. Frank kills a dog with his bare hands while in direct address with audience*

This foregrounding of Frank's gumption is echoed throughout the series, particularly when Frank recounts his transition from poverty to affluence. Frank describes his home state as a place of "bibles, barbecues and broken backs." The use of plosives emphasizes a sense of violence in his tone; he speaks of it with embitterment. The symbols themselves which emerge from Frank's Unconscious feeds into existing caricatures of the deep South - religious, clamorous and poverty-stricken. Instead of rejecting his roots of poverty, Frank declares to a lobbyist, "I'm a white trash cracker from a white trash town that no one would even bother to piss on. But here's the difference – I've made something of myself. I have the keys to the Capitol." Frank juxtaposes "white trash town" with "Capitol", and "no one would even bother to piss on" with "respect", to highlight his growth in social status and stature. It is evident that Frank's Ego is heavily predicated upon the notion of overcoming difficulty and rising from adversity, causing viewers to further buy into the narrative of Frank's ascension to success.



*Fig. 9.1 & 9.2. Claire quickly gets over her initial remorse and speaks to her remaining staff of the firings*

Claire similarly proves herself as someone willing to make tough decisions when she fires half her staff, including her longtime office manager, to reduce operating costs, declaring, “You’re going to have to leave us today, too, Evelyn...I’m sorry, I truly am,” to which Evelyn responds with, “No you don’t, you don’t give a fuck.” Claire seems momentarily shaken by the brusqueness of the expletive, but she almost immediately stridently marches down the empty hallways of her office and delivers a speech to motivate her remaining staff. This instinctual repression of guilt starkly contrasts Claire’s earlier engagement with the Shadow following her encounter with the old lady, marking a return to her pragmatic nature. From a Jungian perspective, Claire’s now empty office is a visual representation of her psyche. The office is themed grey, and staff workers are preoccupied with their own activities. This parallels Claire’s

fierce discipline in compartmentalising the various facets of her psyche, as the emptiness emphasises her emotional void. Her striding across the office corridor as she motivates her staff could be seen as a physical manifestation of her Ego attempting to establish control over her Psyche in a display of strength, evoking a sense of admiration within viewers towards her as we experience “a vicarious thrill of people doing illicit things that we aren't allowed to do because of our repressive society” (quoted in A. Amato, 2016, p.5) despite her blatant ruthlessness.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Conclusion**

Synthesising the above discussion, Fincher's romanticisation of the Underwoods as anti-heroes can be distilled into three main mechanisms - framing the Underwoods as victims of circumstance, humanising the Underwoods through exhibiting their vulnerabilities, and evoking admiration for the Underwoods due to their ruthlessness. Not all means are applicable to both Frank and Claire; in fact, the two serve as foils to each other when their varying degrees of engagement with the Shadow are juxtaposed.

While the season opens with Frank being blindsided by the President, prior foregrounding of his inherent depravity and hubris heavily reduce sympathy for him as a victim of circumstance. The second and third mechanisms prove more pertinent to how he is romanticised. The Jungian lens becomes crucial in analysing the second mode of romanticisation, where the conflict between the ego and the unconscious aspects of the Underwoods render them as vulnerable and human characters who are not wholly immoral or infallible. The suppression of the Shadow marking the return of the Ego, in particular, reminds viewers that the ascent to power is a difficult one which involves sacrifices.

However, for the fact that the Underwoods choose to undertake such immoral activities despite the enormous cost enhances their appeal - viewers are drawn to their capacity to disregard social norms in their self-interested pursuit of power. In such instances, the suppression of the Shadow could also serve the dual purpose of evoking admiration for the Underwoods as they prioritise

the pragmatic goals of the Ego with gumption. The cinematography of the sequences and the tone of speech accentuates a sense of certainty that the Underwoods' project.

In essence, Fincher argues that there is no monolithically evil entity - in American television today, villains are becoming more complex as they simultaneously demonstrate blatant depravity and repressed vulnerabilities. While the Underwoods do not strictly adhere to all three modes of romanticisation, their characterisation abides by the recent paradigm shift away from presenting wholly evil characters to conflicted characters whose moral codes are ambiguous. Even if their immorality were to be blatant, the presence of neutralising factors such as their inner vulnerabilities and awe-inspiring efficiency is similarly able to generate appeal, positioning the Underwoods as the beloved "power couple" of D.C.

## Section 6

### Bibliography and References

Amato, Sara A., "Female Anti-Heroes in Contemporary Literature, Film, and Television" (2016). *Masters Theses*. 2481. Retrieved March 4, 2018, from  
<http://thekeep.eiu.edu/theses/2481>

Diamond, S. A. (1996). Anger, madness, and the daimonic: The psychological genesis of violence, evil, and creativity. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Friedersdorf, C. (2014, February 20). Feminism, Depravity, and Power in House of Cards. Retrieved February 25, 2018, from  
<https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2014/02/feminism-depravity-and-power-in-em-house-of-cards-em/283960/>

Haybron, D. M. (1999). Evil Characters. *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 36(2), 131-148. Retrieved May 12, 2018, from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20009959>

Jonathan, M. (2013, April 26). <Https://relevantmagazine.com/culture/tv/rise-anti-hero>. *Relevant Magazine*. Retrieved February 20, 2018, from  
<Https://relevantmagazine.com/culture/tv/rise-anti-hero>

Jung, C. G., Read, H. E., Fordham, M. S., & Adler, G. (1953). *The collected works of C. G. Jung*. New York: Pantheon Books.

Jung, C. G. (1976). *Psychological types: A revision*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Jung, C. G., & Campbell, J. (1988). *The portable Jung*. New York: Penguin Books.

Jung, C. G. (2014). *Collected Works of C.G. Jung, Volume 9 (Part 2): Aion: Researches Into the Phenomenology of the Self*. Princeton University Press.

Langley, J. (2012, September 13). Adherence and Alienation – The Position of the Hero and Anti-hero in Mainstream American cinema. Retrieved June 13, 2018, from  
<Https://filmshards.wordpress.com/tag/anti-hero/>

Marshall, P. D. (2014). Seriality and Persona. *M/C Journal - A Journal of Media and*

*Culture*, 17(3). Retrieved January 17, 2018, from  
<http://journal.media-culture.org.au/index.php/mcjournal/index>

Meyer, M. D. (2003). Utilizing mythic criticism in contemporary narrative culture: Examining the “present-absence” of shadow archetypes in spider-man. *Communication Quarterly*, 51(4), 518-529. doi:10.1080/01463370309370171

Morrell, J. P. (2008). *Bullies, bastards & bitches: How to write the bad guys off fiction*. Cincinnati, OH: Writer's Digest Books

Myers, S. (2013). Normality in Analytical Psychology. *Behavioral Sciences*, 3(4), 647-661. doi:10.3390/bs3040647

Pauker, L. (2014, December 14). Frank Underwood, The Perfect Character For The Virtual World. Retrieved April 02, 2018, from  
<https://thoughtcatalog.com/lance-pauker/2014/12/frank-underwood-the-perfect-character-for-the-virtual-world/>

Rohleder, D. S. (2013). The Shadow As Hero in American Culture: A Jungian Analysis of the Villain Archetype Transformed. *Dissertation Abstracts International: Section B: The Sciences and Engineering* (1411061189;2013 -99180183)

Snowden, R. (2018). *Jung - The Key Ideas: From Analytical Psychology and Dreams to the Collective Unconscious and More*. Hodder & Stoughton.

Tokgöz, Y. (2016, June). The Rise of The Anti-Hero: Pushing Network Boundaries in The Contemporary U.S. Television. Retrieved March 3, 2018, from  
[http://www.academia.edu/28815501/The\\_Rise\\_of\\_The\\_Anti-Hero\\_Pushing\\_Network\\_Boundaries\\_in\\_The\\_Contemporary\\_U.S.\\_Television](http://www.academia.edu/28815501/The_Rise_of_The_Anti-Hero_Pushing_Network_Boundaries_in_The_Contemporary_U.S._Television)

Ince, E. (2013). The Subversive Anti-Hero Trend In Postmodern Television: How Subversive Are They, Really? Retrieved June 19, 2018, from  
<http://acikerisim.bahcesehir.edu.tr:8080/xmlui/bitstream/handle/123456789/129/H.DEN%20Z%20G%DCRCAN.pdf?sequence=1>

