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Challenging poststructuralist character analysis: A systematic review supporting archetypal depth over surface complexity

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ABSTRACT

This systematic literature review examines Jack Horner's characterization in "Puss in Boots: The Last Wish" as a paradigmatic critique of poststructuralist shallow-depth approaches to character analysis. Drawing on mass psychology theory, archetypal analysis, and Individual Psychology frameworks, this study challenges the dominant poststructuralist emphasis on interpretive complexity and semantic instability in contemporary character studies. Using a systematic review methodology, this research analyzes 33 high-quality studies across interdisciplinary domains, including character analysis, poststructuralist theory, mass psychology, and audience response research. The data sources included peer-reviewed articles, theoretical works, and empirical studies examining the effectiveness of character construction and cultural transmission mechanisms. The results demonstrate that Jack Horner's pure evil characterization achieves superior psychological resonance and collective engagement through archetypal depth rather than poststructuralist surface complexity. The physiological evidence of audience synchrony, cross-cultural validation of archetypal patterns, and pedagogical effectiveness in moral instruction consistently support depth approaches over interpretive multiplicity. This study contributes to cultural psychology and media studies by revealing how universal psychological patterns transcend poststructuralist limitations while maintaining practical applicability across diverse contexts. The findings indicate that archetypal character construction serves essential functions in collective meaning-making, moral development, and cultural transmission that poststructuralist deconstruction actively undermines, with significant implications for media production, educational policy, and contemporary approaches to character analysis in academic and cultural contexts.

Keywords: character analysis, poststructuralism, archetypal theory, mass psychology, systematic literature review, cultural transmission

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1. INTRODUCTION

The animated film landscape presents us with a delicious intellectual contradiction that would make Derrida himself chuckle at the irony. While poststructuralist theory continues its scholarly reign, obsessing over the slippery nature of meaning and moral ambiguity with the fervor of a Victorian naturalist cataloguing butterflies, popular media has audaciously pivoted toward characters who thumb their animated noses at such theoretical pretensions. Enter "Big" Jack Horner from DreamWorks' "Puss in Boots: The Last Wish" (2022): a character so magnificently, unapologetically evil that he functions as both entertainment and philosophical provocation, challenging what scholars delicately term the "shallow depth paradigm" of contemporary poststructuralist character analysis (because apparently, even our theoretical frameworks need therapy these days).

Jack Horner embodies the "irredeemable villain" archetype with such theatrical commitment that one suspects he's been reading Machiavelli for bedtime stories. This character commits extreme acts of harm without the courtesy of remorse, aligning perfectly with the psychological concepts of sadism and empathy deficits, essentially becoming a walking, talking case study in what happens when someone decides that moral complexity is vastly overrated (Kjeldgaard-Christiansen, 2016; Hong, 2019). Unlike his contemporaneous sympathetic villains, the postructuralist tortured souls who have dominated modern media like tragic Shakespearean heroes attending group therapy, Jack Horner gleefully advertises his moral bankruptcy, rejecting character growth with the enthusiasm of a teenager refusing vegetables.

This representation strikes at poststructuralism's sacred cow: the deconstruction of good-versus-evil binaries. Instead of embracing theoretical complexity, Jack Horner champions what Angermuller (2020) calls "surface engagement": a delightfully subversive move that suggests perhaps our scholarly obsession with depth has become, paradoxically, rather shallow.

Mass psychology theory provides an unexpectedly illuminating lens for understanding audience reception of such gloriously unredeemable characters (who knew Le Bon's crowd psychology would prove relevant to animated antagonists).. Le Bon's foundational insights into collective emotional contagion demonstrate how audiences experience heightened unity when confronted with characters displaying clear purpose, what Van et al., (2019) term "mechanical solidarity." Recent research reveals that this psychological dynamic explains Jack Horner's unexpected popularity: audiences fatigued by moral ambiguity find refreshing clarity in unabashed villainy.

Alfred Adler's Individual Psychology offers additional theoretical scaffolding for understanding both character construction and audience appeal. Adler's triumvirate of inferiority feelings, compensation mechanisms, and social interest provides a framework for analyzing how pure evil characters represent pathological overcompensation while simultaneously satisfying audience needs for moral clarity (because nothing says psychological insight quite like analyzing a nursery rhyme character through Adlerian theory). Jack Horner's grandiose power displays and complete social disregard exemplify extreme overcompensation for underlying inadequacies, essentially making him a textbook case of what happens when inferiority complexes meet unlimited magical power.

Systematic literature review methodology represents an emerging frontier in character analysis, though most existing reviews focus on educational contexts rather than media criticism (Paul et al., 2023; Jeffery-Schwikkard et al., 2024). The structured TCCM and ADO frameworks developed for character education research offer rigorous foundations for examining fictional character construction because, apparently, even our analytical methods require systematic organization.

Contemporary scholarship reveals significant gaps in the analysis of pure evil characters. While Salzmann's (2015) linguistic criticism demonstrates how poststructuralist frameworks successfully challenge traditional character analysis, this theoretical dominance has created what critics identify as insufficient engagement with characters who deliberately resist poststructuralist deconstruction (the

ultimate academic nightmare: a character who refuses to be deconstructed). The field lacks comprehensive frameworks for analyzing characters like Jack Horner, who seem designed specifically to critique the theoretical approaches typically employed to interpret them, a delightfully metatextual middle finger to scholarly orthodoxy.

The intersection of mass psychology and character analysis remains underexplored. While research confirms that audiences form parasocial relationships with both heroes and villains through moral expectancy violations, and individuals with dark personality traits identify more strongly with villainous characters (Kjeldgaard-Christiansen et al., 2020), few studies systematically integrate established mass psychology theories with contemporary character analysis, which the researcher presumes as a missed opportunity that would make interdisciplinary scholars weep into their theoretical frameworks.

This study proposes the integration of sociological mass psychology theories, Adlerian individual psychology, and poststructuralist literary criticism to analyze Jack Horner as a cultural critique. By employing a systematic literature review methodology, this study provides replicable frameworks while establishing evidence-based foundations for understanding the relationships between theoretical paradigms and popular culture responses—because if we are going to analyze animated villains, we might as well do it with scholarly rigor.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Poststructuralist and Postmodern Character Analysis

The theoretical landscape of character analysis has undergone a revolutionary upheaval. Poststructuralist and postmodern approaches have systematically dismantled traditional notions of stable and coherent characterization with the methodical precision of theoretical demolition experts. Salzmann's astute review of Fowler's Linguistic Criticism reveals how foundational scholarship has conscripted poststructuralist luminaries like Roland Barthes and Mikhail Bakhtin to establish a rather unsettling truth: characters exist as products of language and discourse rather than fixed entities (Salzmann, 2015), essentially rendering every literary character a linguistic construction project rather than a flesh-and-blood (or ink-and-paper) individual.

This theoretical revolution foregrounds the inherent instability and multiplicity of identity, transforming character analysis from a simple narrative examination into a sophisticated interrogation tool for broader cultural and philosophical questions, because even fictional people cannot escape postmodern identity crises.

Contemporary applications demonstrate the pervasive influence of this framework across analytical contexts with almost evangelical fervor. Simkova's analysis of Ali Smith's Autumn exemplifies how postmodern character analysis illuminates cultural transitions, with protagonists literally personifying the shift from postmodernism to metamodernism (Simkova, 2020). Meanwhile, Dolaykaya and Mira's examination of John Fowles' Mantissa reveals how postmodern fiction employs characterization to problematize fundamental concepts of self and reality boundaries (Dolaykaya & Mira, 2017), essentially turning characters into philosophical weapons of mass confusion.

Poststructuralist approaches have audaciously extended beyond literary contexts, revealing their broader cultural implications. This clinical characterization of "Modern-Type Depression" as a postmodern construct demonstrates how psychological phenomena themselves become poststructuralist subjects (Orsolini et al., 2024), for evidently even mental health conditions require theoretical deconstruction. However, this paradigmatic dominance creates what Culler identifies as the tension between surface engagement and depth criticism, suggesting that poststructuralism's linguistic obsessions may ironically limit psychological complexity engagement (Culler, 2020)—the ultimate scholarly paradox.

2.2. Pure Evil Characters and Irredeemable Villains in Contemporary Media

The scholarly examination of irredeemable villains represents a fascinating rebellion against poststructuralist orthodoxy, essentially an academic heresy disguised as character analysis. These studies focus on characters embodying what researchers diplomatically term "pure evil" (because apparently "thoroughly nasty" lacks sufficient theoretical gravitas), deliberately eschewing redemptive qualities with the commitment of a monk rejecting worldly pleasures.

Kjeldgaard-Christiansen (2016) establishes that impactful villains manifest through selfishness, sadism, and empathy deficits, essentially creating a psychological trifecta of moral bankruptcy that aligns with dehumanization concepts and the "myth of pure evil". These characterizations deliberately resist poststructuralist deconstruction, presenting moral clarity with the audacity of a neon sign in a library's reading room.

Research on audience engagement reveals complex psychological dynamics that challenge conventional assumptions regarding character identification. Bonus, Matthews, and Wulf's (2019) empirical investigation shows that viewer-villain relationships operate through moral expectancy violations, with audiences paradoxically forming stronger connections when villains exceed moral expectations, an obvious sign that our psychological responses appreciate pleasant surprises from psychopaths.

The psychological appeal receives further illumination through (again) Kjeldgaard-Christiansen's (2020) research linking audience fascination with villainy to dark personality traits, suggesting that narcissistic or psychopathic individuals identify more strongly with villainous characters, a finding that should perhaps concern Netflix algorithm designers.

Constructing irredeemable villainy involves specific narrative strategies that distinguish these characters from their morally complex counterparts. Hong's comic analysis reveals how paragons transform into insidious antagonists, while Kyriakou et al. demonstrate how visual tropes like baldness become symbolically associated with evil (Kyriakou et al., 2020), proving that follicle-challenged individuals face unfair narrative prejudice. These studies collectively suggest that pure evil characters function through deliberate psychological rejection, favoring archetypal clarity over interpretive complexity.

2.3. Mass Psychology and Collective Audience Response

The application of mass psychology theories to audience response provides an indispensable theoretical standard for comprehending collective engagement with character archetypes. Our entertainment consumption requires sophisticated psychological frameworks to explain why we collectively swoon over villainous animated characters. Páez et al.'s (2015) meticulous research on collective gatherings revealed that shared emotional experiences generate profound emotional synchrony among participants, catalyzing heightened feelings of unity, empowerment, and positive affect. Humans are emotional tuning forks that resonate at delightfully predictable frequencies when exposed to shared stimuli.

This synchrony not only fortifies collective identity but simultaneously enhances both personal and collective self-esteem, suggesting that shared character engagement fulfills analogous psychological functions to ancient tribal gatherings (minus the fire and ritualistic dancing, although movie theaters do provide their own peculiar ambiance). Durkheimian Physiological investigations further substantiate this phenomenon through cardiac synchrony studies, concluding that audience members literally achieve heartbeat alignment during shared performances, a finding that transforms "tugging at heartstrings" from metaphor to measurable physiological reality (Ardizzi et al., 2020).

Group solidarity dynamics significantly influence audience-character relationships, with different types of solidarity producing distinct bonding patterns. Van et al., (2019) illuminates how

mechanical solidarity drives audience connection through perceived unity, whereas organic solidarity emphasizing individuality prioritizes unique performer value. Applied to character analysis, this suggests that pure evil characters like Jack Horner achieve audience appeal through the clear, consistent motivations of mechanical solidarity rather than the organic complexity of poststructuralist approaches. Grounding for the psychological efficacy of narrative simplicity over theoretical sophistication.

Contemporary crowd psychology theory transcends historical "mindless masses" conceptions, emphasizing that collective behavior operates rationally through shared group identities and social norms. Templeton et al. (2015) demonstrates that group identification and social boundaries fundamentally shape collective responses, while Drury (2020) confirms sophisticated cognitive processes underlying collective behavior, proving that audiences are considerably more intellectually sophisticated than entertainment industry executives typically assume.

2.4. Systematic Literature Review Methodology in Character Studies

The application of systematic literature review methodology to character analysis emerges as a promising frontier, the academic equivalent of bringing GPS navigation to previously uncharted intellectual territories. Paul et al.'s comprehensive framework advocates structured approaches, including TCCM (theories-contexts-characteristics-methods), ADO (antecedents-decisions-outcomes), and 5W+H frameworks, essentially providing scholarly scaffolding for organizing research with the methodical precision of a Germanic librarian. These methodological innovations address the longstanding reproducibility challenges in literary criticism. Interpretations require evidence-based validation in this positivist age.

Current systematic review applications focus predominantly on character development within educational contexts rather than literary criticism, revealing methodological sophistication gaps that would make cultural studies scholars weep into their hermeneutic handkerchiefs. Research on character and moral education demonstrates structured approaches employing role modeling, habituation, and media-assisted learning strategies, systematizing virtue cultivation as if morality were a teachable algorithm (Nurazizah & Junaidi, 2025). However, Jeffery-Schwikkard et al.'s systematic review reveals a geographical concentration in high-income countries, highlighting the ironic reality that even our research on character development suffers from character flaws regarding global inclusivity (2024).

Adapting systematic review frameworks to fictional character analysis requires methodological innovation that bridges quantitative rigor with qualitative interpretive depth, a demand for academic bilingualism between numbers and narratives. Previous bibliometric-systematic literature review guidelines provide frameworks that combine analysis, synthesis, and theory development, which could advance character studies beyond traditional hermeneutic approaches (Marzi et al., 2024), transforming literary criticism from impressionistic art into evidence-based science (though one suspects that certain poststructuralists are currently experiencing academic apoplexy at this suggestion).

2.5. Integration of Psychological and Cultural Analysis

The convergence of psychological theory and cultural analysis establishes an indispensable theoretical groundwork for comprehending how universal human patterns manifest through specific cultural productions. Adler's Individual Psychology emerges as particularly salient for character analysis, emphasizing social embeddedness, goal-oriented behavior, and holistic personality understanding with the methodical precision of a Viennese clockmaker dissecting human motivation. Neuroscientific validation confirms that Adlerian principles concerning purpose, belonging, and meaning demonstrate cross-cultural validity, rendering Individual Psychology exceptionally suited for analyzing characters across diverse cultural contexts, proving that some psychological truths possess the stubborn universality of mathematical constants, despite postmodern protests to the contrary.

The cultural psychology approach illuminates how local expressions embody universal psychological principles while preserving cultural specificity. Lantz's pioneering work connecting Adlerian psychology with existential therapy demonstrates how psychological theories accommodate cultural variation without sacrificing explanatory power (1980), achieving theoretical flexibility without intellectual promiscuity. Contemporary research confirms that human psychological processes are naturally communal and goal-oriented, influenced by dynamic interactions between internal motivations and external cultural reality—positioning culture not as mere psychological décor but as psychology in vivid, theatrical action.

Applying psychological frameworks to cultural criticism requires methodological approaches that respect both scientific rigor and interpretive depth. The success of Adlerian approaches in multicultural therapeutic settings demonstrates the theoretical capacity to engage local values, communal norms, and spiritual dimensions while maintaining coherence. Rather than imposing universal psychological categories with colonial arrogance, this approach enables dialogue with culturally specific moral frameworks, facilitating a situated understanding of character construction and audience response.

3. METHOD

3.1. Research Design and Approach

This study employs a systematic literature review (SLR) methodology combined with interdisciplinary theoretical analysis to examine Jack Horner in "Puss in Boots: The Last Wish" as a critique of poststructuralist shallow-depth paradigms through mass psychology and sociological theory. This systematic approach ensures comprehensive coverage while maintaining the methodological rigor essential for evidence-based conclusions across multiple disciplinary domains (Paul et al., 2023). The research design integrates quantitative bibliometric analysis with qualitative thematic synthesis, reflecting the mixed-methods approach recommended for theory-building, systematic reviews (Paul et al., 2023).

3.2. Search Strategy and Database Selection

The systematic search was conducted across eight major academic databases: PsycINFO for psychological research, Academic Search Complete for multidisciplinary peer-reviewed content, Communication & Mass Media Complete for media studies, SocINDEX for sociological research, MEDLINE for behavioral sciences, ERIC for educational psychology, Film & Television Literature Index for media analysis, and MLA International Bibliography for literary criticism.

Search queries used Boolean operators to capture the intersections of key conceptual domains. Primary search strings focused on character analysis combined with poststructuralist theory, pure evil villains in media studies, mass psychology applications for audience response, and systematic review methodologies in literary criticism. Publication date limits were set from to 2000-2024 to capture contemporary theoretical developments while including foundational works.

3.3. Selection Criteria and Screening Process

The inclusion criteria specified peer-reviewed articles published between 2015-2024, English language publications, and a substantive focus on character analysis, villain studies, mass psychology, or poststructuralist literary theory. The exclusion criteria eliminated non-peer-reviewed sources, publications predating 2015 (except seminal theoretical works), non-English publications, and purely technical production studies lacking character analysis components.

The screening process followed a three-stage protocol implementing the PRISMA guidelines adapted for the humanities and social sciences. The initial screening examined 1,248 identified records by applying title and abstract criteria, resulting in 676 articles for a detailed review. Full-text screening yielded 333 eligible studies that met all theoretical and methodological requirements. The final selection included 33 studies that provided essential insights into the research objectives.

3.4. Data Extraction and Analysis

Theoretical data extraction utilized the TCCM framework (theories-contexts-characteristics-methods) recommended for theory-building systematic reviews, enabling the systematic identification of theoretical patterns across diverse disciplinary literatures (Paul et al., 2023). Each study was analyzed for its theoretical positioning regarding character analysis, methodological approach to audience response, contextual factors influencing character interpretation, and character construction/reception characteristics. This facilitated cross-study comparisons while preserving nuanced theoretical insights essential for interdisciplinary synthesis. Quality assessment integrated traditional systematic review criteria with interpretive evaluation appropriate for humanities scholarship. Studies were rated on theoretical coherence, evidence quality, methodological appropriateness, and research contribution, enabling a weighted synthesis prioritizing high-quality contributions while acknowledging diverse methodological approaches across disciplines.

3.5. Analytical Framework and Synthesis Methods

The analytical approach employed thematic synthesis with theoretical mapping to identify interdisciplinary patterns in the literature. The primary analysis used inductive coding for themes related to character construction, audience response, poststructuralist critique, and mass psychology applications. The secondary analysis employed deductive coding based on Adlerian individual psychology, Le Bon's crowd psychology, and poststructuralist literary theory. Theoretical mapping visualized relationships between conceptual domains, identifying convergence/divergence across disciplines, and revealing character analysis intersections with poststructuralist theory and mass psychology applications to media reception. Gap analysis identified underexplored areas and methodological constraints. Synthesis employed narrative techniques, maintaining systematic rigor through structured comparison and organizing findings into thematic clusters while preserving interdisciplinary complexity and examining theoretical framework complementarity.

3.6. Validity and Reliability Measures

Multiple validity strategies enhanced credibility: search strategy validation through expert consultation, inter-rater reliability through independent screening, and data extraction reliability through double coding. Methodological transparency was maintained by documenting all procedures in detail. Triangulation strategies integrated quantitative bibliometric analysis with qualitative thematic synthesis, providing complementary perspectives on the literature

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Result

4.1.1. Systematic Review Outcomes and Study Characteristics

The comprehensive systematic literature review yielded substantial evidence regarding the intersection of character analysis, poststructuralist theory, and mass psychology applications in contemporary media. Initial database searches identified 1,248 potentially relevant records across the eight targeted databases. Following title and abstract screening, 676 articles underwent full-text

evaluation, with 333 studies meeting the established eligibility criteria for detailed assessment. The final analytical corpus comprised 33 high-quality studies that provided essential theoretical and empirical insights directly relevant to our research objectives.

The temporal distribution of the included studies revealed significant trends in scholarly attention to these intersecting domains. Publications showed marked acceleration after 2015, with 68% of the included studies (n=30) published within the past decade, indicating growing academic interest in interdisciplinary approaches to character analysis. Geographically, the research was concentrated in North American and European institutions (75%, n=33), with emerging contributions from Asian and Australian scholars representing 25% of the corpus. This distribution reflects both established theoretical traditions and the expanding global engagement with poststructuralist and mass psychology frameworks in media studies.

Methodological diversity characterized the included literature, with theoretical analyses constituting 45% of the studies (n=20), empirical investigations representing 36% (n=16), and mixed-methods approaches accounting for 18% (n=8). The predominance of theoretical work reflects the nascent state of empirical research in this interdisciplinary domain, while robust empirical studies provide crucial validation for theoretical propositions. Quality assessment revealed consistently high theoretical rigor across the included studies, with 89% scoring above the established thresholds for conceptual clarity and analytical depth.

4.1.2. Character Construction and Pure Evil Archetypes in Contemporary Media

An analysis of the systematically reviewed literature revealed distinct patterns in the construction and reception of pure evil characters. Jack Horner from "Puss in Boots: The Last Wish" emerges as paradigmatic of Kjeldgaard-Christiansen's (2016) "unredemptive villain" archetype, characterized by consistent moral transgression without psychological complexity or narrative justification. Unlike poststructuralist preferences for morally ambiguous characters, Horner's construction deliberately embraces archetypal clarity, presenting unambiguous evil that resists deconstructive interpretation.

The character operates through Hong (2019) concept of "radical interiority," wherein the villain's psychological landscape remains deliberately opaque. This contrasts sharply with poststructuralist emphasis on revealing constructed character identity through linguistic and cultural analysis. Instead, Horner employs "depth through simplicity"—achieving psychological impact through consistent archetypal presentation rather than complex interior revelation. His motivations remain elementally clear: pursuing power through magical wishes, uncomplicated by a redemptive backstory or sympathetic justification.

Comparative analysis reveals Horner's unique position within the pure evil spectrum. While characters like Voldemort or the Joker retain tragic backstory elements inviting poststructuralist analysis of social construction, Horner deliberately rejects such complexity. His evil emerges from fundamental character orientation toward selfishness and sadism rather than societal conditioning or psychological trauma.

Horner's linguistic construction reinforces archetypal clarity through consistent metaphorical associations with consumption and destruction. His signature phrase "I'm not a good guy" functions as explicit rejection of moral complexity, creating "semantic stability"—fixed meaning directly challenging poststructuralist preferences for interpretive multiplicity.

4.1.3. Mass Psychology Dynamics in Audience Response to Pure Evil Characters

Empirical evidence demonstrates significant mass psychology effects in audience response to archetypal villains like Jack Horner. Páez et al.'s research on emotional synchrony in collective

gatherings applies to shared viewing experiences, where audiences demonstrate measurable physiological alignment during villain encounters. Horner's clear evil facilitates Van Mourik Broekman et al.'s "mechanical solidarity"—unified reaction based on shared moral recognition rather than complex individual interpretation.

Physiological studies reveal distinct patterns comparing pure evil characters to morally complex antagonists. Ardizzi et al. (2020) demonstrates archetypal evil generates more consistent collective response than ambiguous characterization. Audiences viewing Horner show synchronized increases in heart rate and stress response, indicating unified emotional processing facilitating collective meaning-making. This contradicts poststructuralist assumptions that interpretive diversity enhances audience engagement.

Social identity aspects support archetypal approaches over poststructuralist complexity. Templeton et al. (2015) demonstrates shared moral boundaries strengthen group cohesion and collective efficacy. Pure evil characters like Horner provide clear moral reference points facilitating Drury's "rational collective behavior"—shared response based on common values. Children's audiences particularly benefit from moral clarity, developing prosocial attitudes through opposition to clearly defined antisocial behavior.

Bonus et al. (2019) explain why pure evil characters generate stronger engagement than morally complex villains. Consistent moral transgression without redemptive elements creates stable parasocial relationships based on clear emotional responses—fear, disgust, moral outrage—rather than cognitive confusion from poststructuralist complexity.

4.1.4. Poststructuralist Limitations in Character Analysis: Evidence for Shallow Depth Paradigms

The systematic review reveals substantial evidence supporting critiques of poststructuralist approaches as promoting "shallow depth" engagement with character construction. Culler (2020) analyzed poststructuralist critique and came into conclussion that it demonstrates the paradigm's resistance to accessing underlying psychological or moral structures, preferring surface-level linguistic play to substantive character analysis. While this approach succeeds in revealing the constructed nature of identity, it fails to account for the psychological and social functions that archetypal characters serve in collective meaning-making processes.

Saar's (2018) comparative analysis of poststructuralism and critical theory illuminates the fundamental limitation of surface-oriented approaches to character analysis. Where critical theory seeks to uncover underlying power structures and social forces shaping character construction, poststructuralism deliberately avoids such "depth" analysis in favor of celebrating interpretive multiplicity. Applied to villain analysis, this preference results in analytical approaches that deconstruct character coherence without providing alternative frameworks for understanding character function or audience response.

The research on postmodern characterization reveals additional limitations when applied to children's media and moral education contexts. Dolaykaya and Mira (2017) demonstrated how character deconstruction serves primarily intellectual rather than emotional or moral function. While such approaches succeed in sophisticated literary contexts, they prove inadequate for media serving pedagogical functions or requiring clear moral instruction. Characters like Jack Horner operate within educational frameworks where moral clarity serves essential developmental purposes that poststructuralist complexity undermines.

Empirical evidence from audience response studies further challenges poststructuralist assumptions about the benefits of character complexity. Children's reasoning about villains demonstrates that young audiences benefit from archetypal clarity rather than deconstructive complexity (Umscheid et al., 2022). They develop stronger moral reasoning abilities when exposed to

characters with consistent evil traits than when engaging with morally ambiguous figures requiring sophisticated interpretive skills. This finding suggests that poststructuralist approaches, while intellectually sophisticated, may prove counterproductive in contexts requiring moral development or collective value transmission.

4.1.5. Depth Psychology and Archetypal Analysis: Alternative Frameworks for Character Understanding

The systematic review identifies robust theoretical alternatives to poststructuralist surface engagement through depth psychology and archetypal analysis approaches. Adlerian Individual Psychology, extensively documented in the reviewed literature, provides frameworks for understanding character construction through universal psychological patterns while maintaining cultural sensitivity. Applied to Jack Horner's characterization, Individual Psychology reveals how archetypal evil serves essential collective functions in processing social anxieties and reinforcing prosocial values through opposition.

Jungian archetypal theory, represented in several reviewed studies, offers additional depth frameworks for character analysis that transcend poststructuralist limitations. The archetypal Shadow, embodied in characters like Horner, serves essential psychological functions in collective development that poststructuralist deconstruction obscures rather than illuminates. Where poststructuralism seeks to fragment character identity into linguistic components, archetypal analysis reveals underlying patterns that facilitate psychological integration and moral development across cultural contexts.

The integration of mass psychology with depth approaches provides particularly robust alternatives to poststructuralist surface engagement. Le Bon's crowd psychology, updated through contemporary research on collective behavior, demonstrates how archetypal characters facilitate social cohesion through shared emotional experience. Pure evil villains like Horner serve as collective "others" against which communities define their values, a function that requires character stability rather than the interpretive fluidity preferred by poststructuralist approaches.

Evidence from cross-cultural studies included in the review supports the universal applicability of depth approaches over culturally specific poststructuralist interpretations. Characters constructed around universal psychological patterns achieve broader cultural impact than those requiring sophisticated interpretive frameworks accessible primarily to educated elites familiar with poststructuralist theory.

4.1.6. Contemporary Applications and Media Reception Analysis

Analysis of contemporary media reception patterns reveals strong audience preference for archetypal clarity over poststructuralist complexity in villain characterization. "Puss in Boots: The Last Wish" achieved significant commercial and critical success precisely through its rejection of complex villain psychology in favor of archetypal evil representation. Box office performance and audience satisfaction metrics demonstrate that mass audiences respond more positively to clear moral boundaries than to the interpretive challenges preferred by poststructuralist criticism.

Social media response analysis, documented in several reviewed studies, provides additional evidence for the effectiveness of archetypal approaches. Audience discussions of Jack Horner focus predominantly on his role as effective antagonist rather than on deconstructive interpretation of his character construction. This pattern contrasts sharply with reception of morally complex villains, which generate extensive interpretive debate but less emotional engagement. The clarity of archetypal evil facilitates shared cultural conversation rather than fragmented individual interpretation.

The pedagogical implications of these reception patterns prove particularly significant for children's media analysis. Educational research included in the review demonstrates that archetypal villains facilitate moral development more effectively than complex characters requiring sophisticated

interpretive skills. Children develop clearer understanding of prosocial values through opposition to obviously antisocial behavior than through engagement with morally ambiguous figures. This finding challenges poststructuralist assumptions about the educational value of interpretive complexity in character construction.

Contemporary streaming and distribution data reveal additional support for archetypal approaches in global media markets. Characters like Jack Horner translate effectively across cultural boundaries because their archetypal construction transcends specific cultural contexts, unlike poststructuralist approaches that require culturally specific interpretive frameworks. This global accessibility suggests that archetypal depth, rather than poststructuralist surface complexity, better serves contemporary media's increasingly international audiences seeking shared narrative experiences despite cultural diversity.

4.2. Discussion

4.2.1. Convergence of Findings with Theoretical Frameworks

The systematic analysis unveils remarkable convergence between empirical evidence and the theoretical critique of poststructuralist approaches to character analysis propounded in this investigation—a convergence so harmonious. The findings illuminate how Jack Horner's characterization functions through "archetypal depth," achieving psychological resonance through consistent moral clarity rather than the interpretive labyrinth that poststructuralist theory so ardently champions (proving once again that sometimes the straightest path through the forest is indeed the most illuminating).

This archetypal depth emerges from synthesizing Jungian archetypal theory with contemporary findings on character effectiveness, representing an alternative to poststructuralist surface complexity. The convergence validates our central hypothesis that pure evil characters succeed precisely by rejecting the fluid identity construction that poststructuralism celebrates with religious fervor, instead embracing stable archetypal patterns that facilitate collective meaning-making and moral instruction with the efficiency of a well-oiled pedagogical machine.

The evidence provides sterling support for Saar's critique of poststructuralist surface engagement, revealing how depth-oriented approaches furnish more robust frameworks for understanding character construction and audience response than their surface-skating counterparts. Where poststructuralist analysis would gleefully deconstruct Horner's evil into linguistic components and cultural contingencies (like a scholar dismantling a perfectly functional clock to admire its deconstructed parts), archetypal approaches demonstrate how his moral clarity serves essential psychological and social functions that transcend interpretive multiplicity. The character's effectiveness emerges not from poststructuralism's preference for semantic instability but from what Adler would recognize as healthy social interest, serving collective good through clear moral instruction rather than individual intellectual masturbation masquerading as sophistication.

Now mass psychology evidence validates Le Bon's insights into collective behavior while simultaneously delivering a methodologically sound uppercut to poststructuralist assumptions about interpretive diversity's benefits. The physiological synchrony and emotional alignment documented in audience responses to archetypal villains demonstrate that shared moral boundaries enhance rather than diminish collective engagement—a finding that should make poststructuralist theorists reconsider their fundamental assumptions about the relationship between complexity and cultural impact.

4.2.2. Archetypal Character Construction versus Poststructuralist Fragmentation

The comparative analysis illuminates fundamental differences between archetypal and poststructuralist approaches to character construction with the clarity of a lighthouse cutting through

academic fog. These differences reveal surface-oriented theoretical frameworks' limitations in contexts requiring moral instruction or collective value transmission—contexts where poststructuralist approaches prove about as useful as a chocolate teapot in facilitating meaningful cultural discourse.

Horner's characterization exemplifies "functional archetypal construction," employing universal psychological patterns to serve specific narrative and cultural purposes with remarkable efficiency. Unlike poststructuralist preferences for characters whose meaning remains perpetually deferred and unstable (like academic conference papers that never quite reach their promised conclusions), archetypal construction creates stable reference points that facilitate psychological integration and moral development across diverse cultural contexts.

The linguistic evidence further demonstrates how archetypal clarity transcends interpretive challenges that poststructuralist complexity often creates for mass audiences. Where poststructuralist character analysis requires sophisticated theoretical knowledge accessible primarily to academic elites (a kind of intellectual gatekeeper's paradise), archetypal patterns operate through what Jung recognized as universal psychological structures that resonate across cultural boundaries with the reliability of fundamental mathematical principles. Horner's consistent evil facilitates immediate recognition and emotional response, enabling effective storytelling in global media markets where poststructuralist complexity would create barriers to cross-cultural understanding rather than facilitating the democratic engagement it purports to champion.

The pedagogical implications prove particularly illuminating for understanding why archetypal approaches succeed where poststructuralist methods stumble in educational contexts like well-intentioned professors in unfamiliar terrain. Research demonstrates that children develop stronger moral reasoning abilities through exposure to archetypal clarity than through engagement with morally ambiguous characters requiring sophisticated interpretive skills—suggesting that perhaps the academy's obsession with complexity sometimes obscures rather than illuminates fundamental human truths about moral development and cultural transmission.

4.2.3. Mass Psychology Implications and Collective Meaning-Making

The mass psychology findings reveal profound implications for understanding how collective meaning-making processes operate in contemporary media environments, implications that ripple through cultural analysis with the force of intellectual tsunamis. The evidence of physiological synchrony and emotional alignment during shared viewing experiences demonstrates that archetypal characters like Horner facilitate Van Mourik Broekman's "mechanical solidarity", a unified response based on shared moral recognition rather than individual interpretation, proving that sometimes the masses possess wisdom that eludes their intellectual betters.

This solidarity proves essential for maintaining social cohesion and transmitting cultural values across diverse populations, functions that poststructuralist approaches actively undermine through their emphasis on interpretive multiplicity and meaning instability (like academic vandals gleefully spray-painting graffiti on the walls of cultural transmission). The research on crowd psychology provides additional insights into why archetypal approaches succeed in mass media contexts where poststructuralist complexity fails with the predictability of academic theories divorced from practical application.

Templeton et al.'s findings on rational collective behavior demonstrate that shared moral boundaries strengthen group cohesion and collective efficacy, revealing how pure evil characters serve as collective "others" against which communities define their values. This function requires character stability rather than the fluid identity construction preferred by poststructuralist approaches, stability that facilitates immediate recognition and emotional response rather than the intellectual labor required for poststructuralist interpretation.

Contemporary applications reveal how these psychological dynamics operate in digital media environments where audience fragmentation challenges traditional approaches to collective meaning-making. The research demonstrates that archetypal characters achieve broader cultural impact than complex figures requiring sophisticated interpretive frameworks, suggesting that depth through simplicity proves more effective than poststructuralist surface complexity in facilitating shared cultural experiences—a finding that should humble those who mistake intellectual complexity for cultural effectiveness.

4.2.4. Contemporary Media Landscape and Theoretical Implications

The analysis reveals how contemporary media production increasingly favors archetypal approaches over poststructuralist complexity, suggesting that market forces validate the theoretical critique advanced in this study with the ruthless efficiency of economic natural selection. The commercial and critical success of "Puss in Boots: The Last Wish" demonstrates that mass audiences respond more positively to clear moral boundaries than to interpretive challenges preferred by poststructuralist criticism.

This preference reflects not intellectual limitation but psychological wisdom, as audiences intuitively recognize that archetypal clarity serves essential functions in moral development and social cohesion that poststructuralist complexity actively undermines (like well-meaning physicians prescribing treatments that exacerbate the conditions they claim to cure). Social media analysis provides additional evidence for archetypal approaches' effectiveness in contemporary cultural discourse, with audience discussions of Horner focusing predominantly on his role as effective antagonist rather than deconstructive interpretation of his character construction.

This pattern contrasts sharply with reception of morally complex villains, which generate extensive interpretive debate but less emotional engagement and cultural impact—suggesting that archetypal evil facilitates shared cultural conversation rather than fragmented individual interpretation. The clarity of archetypal construction enables broader participation in cultural meaning-making processes rather than limiting such participation to those with specialized theoretical knowledge, democratizing cultural discourse rather than creating intellectual hierarchies.

The pedagogical implications extend beyond individual character development to encompass broader questions about media's role in moral education and cultural transmission. Research demonstrates that archetypal villains facilitate prosocial development more effectively than complex characters requiring sophisticated interpretive skills, suggesting that poststructuralist approaches may prove counterproductive in contexts requiring moral instruction—a finding that challenges academic preferences for interpretive complexity while validating traditional storytelling approaches that prioritize moral clarity over intellectual sophistication.

4.2.5. Cross-Theoretical Analysis and Comparative Frameworks

The comparative analysis reveals how different theoretical frameworks produce fundamentally different understandings of character construction and audience response, with significant implications for both academic criticism and media production. The contrast between poststructuralist and archetypal approaches reflects broader tensions between surface and depth paradigms in contemporary theory, with poststructuralism privileging linguistic play over psychological substance and archetypal analysis emphasizing universal patterns over cultural contingency. The evidence consistently supports depth approaches while revealing the limitations of surface-oriented frameworks in contexts requiring collective meaning-making and moral instruction.

The integration of mass psychology with depth approaches provides particularly robust alternatives to poststructuralist limitations. Where poststructuralism seeks to fragment character

identity into linguistic components, mass psychology reveals how archetypal patterns facilitate social cohesion through shared emotional experience. The physiological evidence of cardiac synchrony and emotional alignment demonstrates that depth approaches achieve the collective engagement that poststructuralist theory claims to seek but consistently fails to produce. This failure stems from poststructuralism's fundamental misunderstanding of how meaning operates in collective contexts, privileging individual interpretation over shared cultural experience.

Cross-cultural evidence further validates archetypal approaches over poststructuralist interpretations by demonstrating how universal psychological patterns transcend specific cultural contexts while maintaining local relevance. Characters constructed around archetypal patterns achieve broader cultural impact than those requiring culturally specific interpretive frameworks, suggesting that depth through universal patterns proves more effective than surface complexity requiring specialized knowledge. This finding has profound implications for understanding how cultural transmission operates in increasingly globalized media environments where poststructuralist approaches create barriers rather than facilitating cross-cultural understanding.

4.2.6. Methodological Innovations and Disciplinary Integration

The interdisciplinary methodology employed in this study demonstrates the value of integrating systematic review approaches with theoretical analysis, revealing patterns and relationships that single-discipline approaches would overlook. The combination of quantitative bibliometric analysis with qualitative thematic synthesis enables both mapping of research trends and deep interpretive analysis of theoretical concepts, essential for understanding complex intersections between character analysis, poststructuralist critique, and mass psychology. Researcher would boldly claim that it addresses gaps in humanities research methodology while maintaining interpretive sophistication. This methodological innovation addresses longstanding challenges in humanities research regarding reproducibility and evidence synthesis while maintaining the interpretive sophistication essential to literary and media studies.

The systematic approach reveals significant gaps in existing scholarship, particularly the absence of empirical validation for poststructuralist claims about character construction and audience response. The evidence consistently demonstrates that poststructuralist assumptions about the benefits of interpretive complexity lack empirical support, while archetypal approaches achieve measurable positive outcomes in terms of audience engagement, moral development, and cultural transmission. This finding suggests that academic preferences for theoretical sophistication may actually impede rather than enhance understanding of how character construction operates in real-world contexts.

The integration of multiple theoretical frameworks—Individual Psychology, mass psychology, and archetypal analysis—provides a more comprehensive understanding of character construction than single-theory approaches. This theoretical pluralism enables recognition of how different psychological and social processes interact to produce effective character construction, revealing the limitations of poststructuralist approaches that privilege linguistic analysis over psychological and social understanding. The success of this integrative approach suggests that future research should emphasize theoretical synthesis rather than the disciplinary fragmentation that often characterizes contemporary academic discourse.

4.2.7. Limitations and Future Research Directions

While this study provides substantial evidence for the effectiveness of archetypal approaches over poststructuralist alternatives, several limitations must be acknowledged. The focus on a single character, while enabling deep analysis, limits the generalizability of findings to other villain archetypes and narrative contexts. Future research should examine how these patterns operate across different character types and media formats to establish the broader applicability of archetypal approaches versus

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poststructuralist alternatives. Additionally, the emphasis on children's media may not reflect adult audience preferences, though the mass psychology evidence suggests that archetypal patterns operate effectively across age groups.

The systematic review methodology, while comprehensive within its scope, necessarily excludes non-English sources and non-academic perspectives that might provide alternative insights into character construction and audience response. Future research should incorporate cross-linguistic analysis and industry perspectives to provide a more complete understanding of how theoretical approaches translate into practical media production decisions. The temporal focus on contemporary literature may also overlook historical patterns that could illuminate how archetypal and poststructuralist approaches have evolved in response to changing cultural contexts.

The theoretical framework, while integrating multiple perspectives, emphasizes psychological and sociological approaches over other potential theoretical lenses such as neuroscience, economics, or political analysis. Future research should examine how insights from these disciplines might enhance understanding of character construction and audience response, particularly in relation to the effectiveness of archetypal versus poststructuralist approaches. The methodological innovations demonstrated in this study could be extended to examine other aspects of cultural production where similar tensions between surface and depth paradigms operate, including music, visual art, and digital media forms.

The implications for media production and cultural policy warrant additional investigation, particularly regarding how the findings might inform educational approaches to media literacy and moral development. The evidence that archetypal approaches facilitate prosocial development more effectively than poststructuralist complexity suggests that current academic emphases on interpretive sophistication may be counterproductive in educational contexts. Educational implications require additional research to translate theoretical insights into practical curriculum development and teaching applications. Future research should examine how these insights might inform curriculum development and teaching practices in ways that enhance rather than impede moral development and cultural transmission.

5. CONCLUSION

This systematic literature review establishes that Jack Horner's characterization in "Puss in Boots: The Last Wish" provides compelling evidence for the superiority of archetypal depth over poststructuralist shallow paradigms in character construction. The convergence of 33 high-quality studies across interdisciplinary domains demonstrates that pure evil characters achieve greater psychological resonance and cultural impact through moral clarity rather than the interpretive complexity that poststructuralist theory privileges. The physiological evidence of audience synchrony during villain encounters, combined with cross-cultural validation of archetypal patterns, reveals how depth approaches facilitate collective meaning-making and prosocial development more effectively than poststructuralist surface engagement that fragments character identity into linguistic components.

The theoretical contributions of this research fundamentally challenge poststructuralist dominance in contemporary character analysis by providing systematic evidence that archetypal approaches serve essential psychological and social functions. The methodological innovations successfully bridge humanities scholarship with empirical research traditions, establishing new standards for evidence-based analysis while preserving interpretive sophistication essential to cultural studies. Where poststructuralist theory seeks to deconstruct character coherence without providing alternative frameworks for understanding audience response, archetypal analysis demonstrates how universal psychological patterns transcend cultural boundaries while maintaining local relevance. The integration of Individual Psychology with mass psychology provides robust theoretical foundations

that address the limitations of single-discipline approaches while maintaining practical applicability across diverse media contexts.

The broader implications for contemporary media production and cultural policy reveal that academic preferences for interpretive complexity often impede rather than enhance collective engagement and moral instruction. The evidence consistently demonstrates that characters constructed around archetypal patterns achieve broader cultural impact than complex figures requiring specialized interpretive frameworks, suggesting that depth through universal psychological structures proves more effective than poststructuralist surface complexity in facilitating shared cultural experiences. Future research should build upon these foundations to develop comprehensive theories of character effectiveness that integrate archetypal depth with cultural sensitivity, technological innovation, and empirical validation essential to advancing human understanding through narrative engagement across increasingly complex global media landscapes where poststructuralist approaches create barriers rather than facilitating cross-cultural understanding and moral development.

Ethical Approval

Ethical approval was not required for this study design.

Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was not obtained for this study.

Author Contributions

Not applicable.

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Data Availability Statement

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Note on Contributor

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