

# Archetypes in Literature

## Definition of Archetype:

“A universally recognizable element . . . that recurs across all literature and life (Latrobe 13). Psychologist Carl Jung called these elements a kind of “collective unconscious” of the human race, prototypes rather than something gained from experience. The word is derived from the Greek: *arche*, original, and *typos*, form or model; thus, original model (Latrobe 13).

“Archetypes are repeated patterns that recur in the literature of every age” (Sloan 48).

## Examples of Archetypes

### Characters:

#### **Hero (think of the classic hero journey & qualities of hero)**

- “The main character leaves his or her community to go on an adventure, performing deeds that bring honor to the community” (Herz and Gallo 121).

#### **Mother figure**

- **Fairy Godmother (surrogate mother)**—comforts and directs child, especially when he or she is confused and needs guidance. Represents powers that can be called on for help when it is needed. Helps young person to solve own problems (Knapp 71).
- **Earth Mother**—symbolic of fulfillment, abundance, and fertility; offers spiritual and emotional nourishment to those who she contacts; often depicted in earth colors, with large breasts and hips
- **Stepmother**—Evil, ugly, plots against protagonist

#### **The great teacher/mentor**

- Wise old men/women—protects or helps main character when he or she faces challenges. Usually has to die in order for the hero to step up to the plate

#### **The innocent**

- Child/Youth
- Inexperienced adult

**Underdog**—someone we don't expect to win

#### **Doppel-ganger (Double Identity)**

- Twins (may or may not know each other and/or be related)
- Same person with two different identities
- Split personality—the other side of an individual

**Helping animals**—friendly beast (Chewbacca)

**Scapegoat/Sacrificial Victim** — Jesus; John the Baptist

## The Sea

- Vast, alien, dangerous, chaos
- Waves may symbolize measures of time and represent eternity or infinity

## Fountain

- Stands for purification; the sprinkling of water (baptism) washes away sin. Water of fountain gives new life (Knapp 32).

## Islands

- Microcosms or small worlds unto themselves
- Represent isolation or get-a-ways

*\* Can be flood or drought (too much or not enough means the "balance of life" is upset).*

## Actions/Events:

**Journey**--"The protagonist takes a journey, usually physical but sometimes emotional, during which he or she learns something about himself or herself or finds meaning in his or her life as well as acceptance in a community" (Herz and Gallo 112).

- Linear
- Circular
- Quests
  - Quest for material wealth
  - Quest for security, as a secure place to live
  - Quest for kin
  - Quest for global good, such as when a kingdom is threatened
  - Quest for self, for self-identity or self-assurance

**Rites of initiation** - *Ceremony to "belong"*

## Parental Conflict and Relationships

- "The protagonist deals with parental conflict by rejecting or bonding with parents" (Herz and Gallo 117).

**Coming of age**—main character grows (learns) to think like an adult and put childish wishes behind

## Sleep

- Crucial for physical and/or psychological healing. During dreams, person can grow. Person can fantasize freely in sleep. A transitional and beneficial period. In dream sphere can descend to the sphere of the Great Mother. Person awakens with a greater understanding of human nature (Knapp 88).

## Sacrificial rites

## The Test or Trial

- "In the **transition** from one stage of life to another, the main character experiences a rite of passage through growth and change; he or she experiences a **transformation**" (Herz and Gallo 115).

**Enchantress/Temptress** — Jezebel for evil personified.

### **The Giant/Monster/Ogre**

**Villain** — Don John

- Antagonist
- Wolf — in fairy tales, etc.

**Trickster**—makes other characters laugh (sometimes). Provides jokes or plays tricks on people

**Evil figure** — Don John

- The Devil
- Serpent

### **Settings**

#### **Garden**

- Cultivated and carefully planned. Restricted to certain vegetation.

#### **Forest**

- Habitat of the Great Mother (Mother Nature), the lunar force. Fertility. The vegetation and animals flourish in this “green world” because of the sustaining power of the Great Mother. Symbolically the primitive levels of the feminine psyche, protective and sheltering. Those who enter often lose their direction or rational outlook and thus tap into their collective unconscious. This unregulated space is opposite of the cultivated gardens, which are carefully planned and are restricted to certain vegetation.

#### **Tree**

- Represents life and knowledge (Avatar; garden of Eden)

#### **Caves and tunnels**

- Deep down where character delves into self
- Place that character goes when “invisible” or inactive
- At the extreme may signify death

#### **Mountains and peaks**

- Highest peak is place to “see” far
- Place to gain great insight

#### **The River**

- Crossing river may symbolize new territory
- Rivers can be boundaries or borders & on the other side is something new or different
- May represent human life or time passing as we follow the river from its source to its mouth

### **Birth/Death and Rebirth**

- “Through pain and suffering the character overcomes feelings of despair, and through a process of self-realization is reborn” (Herz and Gallo 110).

### **The Fall: Expulsion from Eden**

- “The main character is expelled because of an unacceptable action on his or her part” (Herz and Gallo 111).

### **Annihilation/Absurdity/Total Oblivion**

- “In order to exist in an intolerable world, the main character accepts that life is absurd, ridiculous, and ironic” (Herz and Gallo 116).

### **Archetypal Colors**

*Color* = positive (negative)

*Black* = power (death, mourning)

*Blue* = nobility, tranquility (depression)

*Brown* = Earth, nature (confusion)

*Gray* = neutral (passionless)

*Green* = fertility, renewal, wealth (greed, envy)

*Orange* = adventure, change (forced change, disruptiveness)

*Purple* = royalty, positive personal growth (injury)

*Red* = sex, love (sacrifice, taboo, humiliation, danger)

*White* = purity, wholesomeness, rebirth (emptiness)

*Yellow* = enlightenment (cowardice, illness)

### **Archetypal Images**

*Water* = purity, cleansing, baptism

*Fire* = purging, tribulation

*Seasons* = spring is birth, winter is death

*Heavenly bodies* = moon is change, sun is power

*Circles* = completeness, wholeness, unity

*Plants* = Oak is strength, rose is beauty

*Animals* = serpent is evil, lamb is innocent, lion is strong

*Wilderness* = place of testing, place of danger

*Numbers* = 3 is a divine trinity, 7 is perfect or luck