

Archetypes in Literature

Carl Jung, the Collective Unconscious and Archetypes

In studying the human psyche, Carl Jung (1875-1961) created a theory with three parts, the third being the **collective unconscious**. You could call it your "psychic inheritance." It is the reservoir of our experiences as a species, a kind of knowledge we are all born with. And yet we can never be directly conscious of it. It influences all of our experiences and behaviors, most especially the emotional ones, but we only know about it indirectly, by looking at those influences.

There are some experiences that show the effects of the collective unconscious more clearly than others: The experiences of love at first sight, of déjà vu (the feeling that you've been here before), and the immediate recognition of certain symbols and the meanings of certain myths, could all be understood as the sudden conjunction of our outer reality and the inner reality of the collective unconscious. Grander examples are the creative experiences shared by artists and musicians all over the world and in all times, or the spiritual experiences of mystics of all religions, or the parallels in dreams, fantasies, mythologies, fairy tales, and literature.

People who had no contact with each other formed myths to explain natural phenomena such as great floods and the creation of the world as well as to answer questions as to why we die and why we are born. The fantasy images of the primitive mind are so similar for all cultures that Jung refers to them as the **collective unconscious**.

They remain part of every human unconscious mind as dreams of fantasy and fear; living, psychic forces which demand to be taken seriously. Jung believes that we can never legitimately be cut loose from our archetypal foundations or we will become suicidal.

Characteristics:

1. They are not individual, but we share them with humanity.
2. They are an inherited part of being human which connects us to past and we experience a common source.
3. They are not directly knowable, but instead express themselves in forms (situations, symbols, and characters)
4. They grow out of man's social, psychological, and biological being.
5. They are universal. From gladiators to astronauts, they are the same.
6. They cannot be explained by interaction among cultures because geography and history made it impossible.
7. They are recurrent, appearing in slightly altered in present day situations and relate them to the past in order to get the meaning in the contemporary world.

Archetype Definition(s):

1. Archetype is a Greek word meaning "original pattern, or model."
2. In literature and art, an archetype is a character, an event, a story or an image that recurs in different works, in different cultures and in different periods of time.
3. An inherited mode of thought that is defined from experience of the race and is present in unconscious minds.
4. Recurring patterns of situation, character, or symbol existing universally and instinctively in the collective unconscious.

Some Situational Archetypes:

1. **Quest** – the search for someone or some talisman (object) which when found or brought back will restore fertility to a wasted land.
2. **Task** – to save the kingdom, to win the fair lady, or to prove one's rightful position, the hero must perform some nearly superhuman deed. This also restores fertility to a wasted land.
3. **The Initiation** – usually takes the form of an initiation into adult life – RITE of passage
4. **The Journey** – a hero/heroine goes in search of truth or information necessary to restore fertility to the kingdom; usually he/she descends into a real or psychological hell to discover the blackest truths concerning his/her faults.
5. **The Fall** – a descent from a high to low state of being which involves a defilement or loss of innocence; often characters are expelled from a kind of paradise as a penalty.
6. **Death and Rebirth** – a common archetype which draws parallels between the cycle of nature and cycle of life. Morning and spring are birth, while winter and evening is death.
7. **Nature Vs. Mechanistic World** – that which is natural, or part of the natural order is good. Technology which separates people from nature, or the natural world, is bad.
8. **Battle Between Good and Evil** – A battle between two primal forces. The future or the very existence of the kingdom is often at stake. Good triumphs over evil despite great odds, but often a terrible sacrifice by the hero/heroine or by the kingdom as a whole must be made to insure victory.
9. **Unhealable Wound** – this wound is either real or psychological and cannot be healed fully. The wound often indicates a loss of innocence. The unhealable wound often aches, especially in the presence of what caused the wound, and drives the sufferer to desperate measures.
10. **The Ritual** – actual ceremonies that marks the rite of passage into another state or level of society. This rite is a signpost for a character's role in society (a princess becomes a queen, a squire becomes a knight, a seminary student becomes a priest).
11. **The Magic Weapon** – weapon symbolizes the extraordinary quality of the hero or heroine because no one else can use or wield the weapon. It is given by a mentor figure.

Some Symbolic Archetypes:

1. **Light Vs. Darkness** – light suggests hope, renewal, or intellectual illumination; darkness implies the unknown, ignorance, or despair.
2. **Water Vs. Desert** – water is a symbol of birth, rebirth, or cleansing. A desert is seen as the opposite, or a place of exile. Often the desert is represented by an absence of the expected: lack of wind or waves on the ocean, lack of rain when there is usually rain, absence of game to hunt in the wilderness, etc.
3. **Heaven Vs. Hell** – The Skies and mountain tops house the gods; the bowels of the earth of pits hide evil forces.
4. **Innate Wisdom Vs. Educated Stupidity** – Instinctive wisdom vs. book learned ignorance is emphasized. The hero/heroine cannot achieve their goal until he/she learns a hard lesson of life or becomes 'street-wise.'
5. **Haven Vs. Wilderness** – places of safety contrast against dangerous wilderness.
6. **Supernatural Intervention** – gods intervene on the side of the hero/heroine or act against the protagonist to provide obstacles in accomplishing his/her task.
7. **Fire Vs. Ice** – fire represents knowledge, light, life, rebirth; ice represents ignorance, darkness, sterility, and death.

Some Character Archetypes:

1. **Hero/Heroine** – some or all of the following criteria are present in the life of the hero or heroine:
 - a. Mother is a virgin or at least pure of heart and spirit.
 - b. An attempt is made to kill the pregnant mother or kill the child at an early age.
 - c. He/she is reared by foster parents.
 - d. (Male) after proving himself (usually defeating a wild beast) marries a princess, becomes king, knight, or warrior of the realm or village. (Female) possess unusual skills (often supernatural gifts) and takes on a special role in the kingdom or positions usually occupied by men in that society (spiritual leader, warrior, judge, etc.)
 - e. Falls from favor with the gods.
 - f. Becomes an outcast.
 - g. Upon death, body is not buried.
2. **Young one from provinces** – this hero/heroine is spirited away and raised by strangers. Later returns to his/her home as a stranger with new solutions to kingdom's problems.
3. **The Initiates** – The hero or heroine, who prior to their quest, must endure some training or ceremony. Initiates are usually innocent and wear white.
4. **Mentor pupil relationship** – Mentors serve as teachers or counselors to initiates. The mentor acts as a role model for the protagonist, and can function as father and mother figures to initiate as well. The mentor teaches by example the skills necessary to survive the quest/task/journey.
5. **Parent-Child conflict** – tension of ten results from separation during childhood, from an external source when the individuals meet as adults, or where the mentor often has a higher place in the affections of the hero/heroine than the natural parent.
6. **Hunting group of companions**– this band of loyal companions willing to face any number of perils in order to be together or achieve a common goal.
7. **Loyal retainers** – often called side-kicks, these individuals are somewhat like servants who are heroic themselves. Their duty is to protect the hero/heroine and reflect his/her nobility.
8. **Friendly Beast** – These creatures aid or serve the hero/heroine and symbolize how nature is on the side of the hero/heroine.
9. **The Devil Figure** – this character is evil incarnate who offers worldly goods, fame or knowledge to the protagonist in exchange for possession of the soul.
10. **Devil Figure with Ultimately Good Heart** – devil figure who is saved by the nobility or love of the hero.
11. **The scapegoat** – human or animal whose death in a public ceremony cleans the sin or evil that has visited upon a community. The death of the scapegoat often makes him/her more powerful than in life.
12. **The Outcast** – a figure who is banished from a social group for some crime (real or imagined) against society. The outcast usually wanders from place to place.
13. **Creature of nightmare** – a monster summoned from the darkest part of the human psyche to threaten the lives of the her/heroine other is a perversion of the human body.
14. **The woman figure** – Archetypally, male characters generally play one role at a time: the warrior, the holy man, the villain, etc. Women play very special roles in society, or they can play more than one archetypal role at a time. The following are a list of the most common female archetypes:
 - a. Earthmother – symbolic of spiritual and emotional nourishment, she is often depicted in earth colors. She is usually depicted as having large breasts and hips representing childbearing capability.
 - b. The temptress – sensuous in beauty, this woman brings about the downfall of the hero by tempting him to turn away from his goal.
 - c. The platonic ideal – this is an inspiring woman for whom the protagonist has an intellectual rather than physical attraction.
 - d. The unfaithful wife – a married woman who finds her husband dull or unattractive seeks a more virile or interesting man. Archetypally, the woman is the center of the family and is responsible for

keeping it together. While the role of the father/husband (as provider and protector) can be easily replaced, the absence of the wife/mother (as nurturer and teacher) throws a family into a different kind of chaos than the loss of the male.

- e. The Damsel in distress – The vulnerable woman must be rescued by the hero. She is often a trap by the devil figure or the temptress to ensure the unsuspecting hero.

Other Archetypes, etc.:

Archetype symbols

- *Water*: birth-death-resurrection; creation; purification and redemption; fertility and growth.
- *Sea/ocean*: the mother of all life; spiritual mystery; death and/or rebirth; timelessness and eternity.
- *Rivers*: death and rebirth (baptism); the flowing of time into eternity; transitional phases of the life cycle.
- *Sun* (fire and sky are closely related): creative energy; thinking, enlightenment, wisdom, spiritual vision.
- *Rising sun*: birth, creation, enlightenment.
- *Setting sun*: death.

Archetype colors

- **Colors:**
 - Red*: blood, sacrifice, passion; disorder.
 - Green*: growth, hope, fertility.
 - Blue*: highly positive; secure; tranquil; spiritual purity.
 - Black*: darkness, chaos, mystery, the unknown, death, wisdom, evil, melancholy.
 - White*: light, purity, innocence, timelessness; [negative: death, terror, supernatural]
 - Yellow*: enlightenment, wisdom.

Archetype examples

- *Wise old Man*: savior, redeemer, guru, representing knowledge, reflection, insight, wisdom, intuition, and morality.
- *Garden*: paradise, innocence, unspoiled beauty.
- *Tree*: denotes life of the cosmos; growth; proliferation; symbol of immortality; phallic symbol.
- *Desert*: spiritual aridity; death; hopelessness.
- *Creation*: All cultures believe the Cosmos was brought into existence by some Supernatural Being (or Beings).
- **Seasons:**
 - Spring* - rebirth; genre/comedy.
 - Summer* - life; genre/romance.
 - Fall* - death/dying; genre/tragedy.
 - Winter* - without life/death; genre/irony.

ASSIGNMENT: So you can keep this handout, on a separate sheet of paper go down the list of archetypes and give as many correlating archetypes as possible from *The Alchemist*. Do this for all of the categories (situational, symbolic, character), and as many as possible. Make sure to give the archetype name, then its manifestation in the book, and a brief explanation. This is due at the end of class and is worth 20 points.