

# ARCHETYPE

**ARCHETYPE:** A recurring plot pattern, image, descriptive detail, or character that expresses itself in stories, dreams, or religions.

Occurring in literature in the form of recurrent plot patterns, images, or character types, archetypes stir profound emotions in the reader because they awaken images stored in the collective unconscious, and thereby produce feelings or emotions over which the reader initially has little control. Carl Gustav Jung argued that the human psyche consists of three parts: the conscious, the personal unconscious, and the collective unconscious. The conscious or waking state is directly affected by the unconscious. In turn, the unconscious is divided into the personal unconscious and the collective unconscious.

**Collective Unconscious:** The part of the mind that contains the cumulative knowledge, experiences, and images of the human race. This knowledge evidences itself as "primordial images" in humankind's religions, myths, dreams, and literature and can be tapped by writers through the use of archetypes.

**Personal Unconscious:** The part of the mind that exists below the surface of the conscious, and contains elements of all those private affairs that occur daily in each of our lives. The personal unconscious is therefore peculiar to one individual and not shared with any other.

**Archetypal Criticism:** Archetypal criticism is an approach to literary analysis that applies the theories of Carl Jung to literary analysis. An archetypal critic studies images or patterns of repeated human experiences (archetypes) found within a specific text and common to other works of art. According to Jung, people from all over the world respond to certain myths or stories in the same way not because everyone knows and appreciates the same story, but because lying deep in our collective unconscious are the racial memories of humanity's past. These memories exist in the form of archetypes.

## ARCHETYPAL SITUATIONS

**Nature vs Mechanistic World:** implies that Nature is good while technology and society are often evil.

**The Battle between Good and Evil:** Mankind shows eternal optimism in the continual portrayal of good triumphing over evil despite great odds.

**The Unhealable Wound:** physical or psychological. Also indicates a loss of innocence. The wound always aches and often drive the sufferer to desperate measures. (e.g. Harry Potter's scar on his forehead).

**The Initiation:** The adolescent comes into his maturity with new awareness and problems along with new hope for the community. This usually takes the form of an initiation into adult life.

**The Fall:** A descent from a higher to a lower state of being involving a defilement and/or loss of innocence and bliss.

**Death and Rebirth:** The cycle of nature and the cycle of life parallel each other. Morning and springtime represent birth, youth, or rebirth while evening and winter suggest old age or death.

**The Ritual:** The actual ceremonies the initiate experiences that will mark his rite of passage into another state. The importance of ritual rites cannot be over stressed as they provide clear sign posts for a character's role in society as well as our own position in this world. (e.g. weddings, baptisms)

**The Task:** usually a performance of some superhuman deed that identifies the hero so that he may reassume his rightful position. A good example of this is Arthur pulling Excalibur from the stone.

# ARCHETYPAL SYMBOLS

## The Garden

Usually a place of refuge or a temporary haven.

## Light vs Darkness

Light usually suggests hope, renewal, or intellectual illumination; darkness implies the unknown, ignorance, or despair.

## Water

Because water is necessary to life and growth, it commonly appears as a birth or rebirth symbol. Water is used in baptismal services, which solemnizes spiritual births. Similarly, the appearance of rain in a work can suggest a character's spiritual rebirth.

## Mountains

Wisdom, solitude

## Wilderness or Forest

Retreat, Haven, Mystery, Evil

## The Desert

Sterility, Death

## The City

Civilization or Decadent Metropolis (Emerald City or Gotham)

## Fire

knowledge, light, life, rebirth

## Ice

ignorance, darkness, sterility, death

# ARCHETYPAL CHARACTERS

**The Hero:** Traditionally the hero's mother is a virgin, the circumstances of this conception are unusual, and at birth some attempt is made to kill him. He is however, spirited away and reared by foster parents. We know almost nothing about his childhood, but upon reaching manhood he returns to his future kingdom. After a victory over the king or a wild beast, he marries a princess, becomes king, reigns uneventfully, but later loses favor with the gods. He is then driven from the city after which he meets a mysterious death, often at the top of a hill.

**The Young Man from the Provinces:** This hero is spirited away as a young man and raised by strangers. He later returns to his home and heritage where he is a stranger who can see new problems and new solutions.

**The Initiates:** These are young heroes or heroines who, before their quest, must endure some training and ceremony. They are usually innocent and often wear white.

**Mentors:** These individuals serve as teachers or counselors to the initiates. Sometimes they work as role models and often serve as a father or mother figure.

**Father-Son Conflict:** Tension often results from separation during childhood or from an external source when the individuals meet as men and where the mentor often has a higher place in the affections of the hero than the natural parent.

**Hunting Group of Companions:** Loyal companions willing to face any number of perils in order to be together.

**Loyal Retainers:** These individuals usually serve as a sidekick for the hero. Their duty is to protect the hero and reflect the nobility of the hero. (e.g. Flounder and Sebastian in Disney's The Little Mermaid)

**Gentle Giant:** This character is usually of large physical size but lacks intelligence.

**Devil Figure:** This character offers worldly goods, fame, or knowledge to the protagonist in exchange for possession of the soul. Usually this character demonstrates many of the same characteristics as the outcast and creature of nightmare archetypes. Frequently dark and gloomy imagery is associated with this character. (e.g. Ursula from Disney's The Little Mermaid)

**Evil Figure with the Ultimately Good Heart:** A redeemable devil figure saved by the nobility or love of the hero. (e.g. Scrooge, the Grinch)

**The Scapegoat:** An animal or more usually a human whose death in a public ceremony expiates some taint or sin that has been visited upon a community. Their death often makes them a more powerful force in the society than when they lived.

**The Outcast:** A figure who is banished from a social group for some crime (real or imagined) against his fellow man. The outcast is usually destined to become a wanderer from place to place.

**The Creature of Nightmare:** A monster usually summoned from the deepest, darkest part of the human psyche to threaten the lives of the hero/heroine. Often it is a perversion or desecration of the human body.

**The Earthmother:** symbolic of fruition, abundance, and fertility, this character traditionally offers spiritual and emotional nourishment to those with whom she comes in contact. Often depicted in earth colors and has large breasts and hips symbolic of her childbearing capabilities.

**The Temptress:** Characterized by sensuous beauty, this woman is one to whom the protagonist is physically attracted and who ultimately brings about his downfall.

**The Platonic Ideal:** This woman is a source of inspiration and a spiritual ideal, for whom the protagonist or author has an intellectual rather than a physical attraction.

**The Unfaithful Wife:** A woman married to a man she sees as dull or distant and is attracted to more virile or interesting men.

**The Damsel in Distress:** The vulnerable woman who must be rescued by the hero. She is often used as a trap to ensnare the unsuspecting hero.

# THE HERO'S ADVENTURE

In his book *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*, Joseph Campbell defines the hero's adventure in the following way: "A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man (30)."

## PART ONE: DEPARTURE

- Call to adventure
- Threshold of adventure

## PART TWO: INITIATION

- The road of trials
- Supreme Ordeal
- Reward

## PART THREE: RETURN

- Flight
- Crossing of threshold
- Sharing of boon

## DEPARTURE

**The call to adventure:** The hero recognizes that someone from whom something has been taken, or feels there is something lacking in the normal experiences available or permitted to the members of his society. Often the hero has reluctance to accept the adventure.

### **The threshold of adventure:**

- Protective figure: usually an old man who provides the adventurer with amulets against the dragon forces he is about to pass.
  - Threshold guardian: A dangerous power that the hero must face with courage and competence in order to enter the "belly of the beast/whale".
  - The hero enters "the mouth of the beast" by defeating the guardian and entering (battle, offering, charm) or is slain and descends through death (dismemberment, crucifixion). The hero is no longer visible to the members of his society that have been left behind.
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## INITIATION

**The road of trials:** The hero journeys through a world of unfamiliar forces, which threaten him (tests) or give him magical aid (helpers).

**The supreme ordeal:** The hero undergoes a supreme ordeal represented by one of the following:

- sacred marriage (hero's sexual union with the goddess mother of the world)
- father atonement (recognition by the father-creator)
- apotheosis (hero's own divinization)
- elixir theft (theft of the boon he came to gain)

**Reward:** The boon is given to the hero (sacred marriage, father atonement, apotheosis) or he steals it (bride-theft, fire-theft).

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## RETURN

**Flight:** If the powers have blessed the hero, he now sets forth under their protection (emissary)

If the hero is not blessed, he flees and is pursued (transformation flight, obstacle flight)

**Crossing of threshold:** At the return threshold the transcendental powers must remain behind.

**Sharing of boon:** The boon that he brings restores the world (elixir).

The belly of the whale: "The idea that the passage of the magical threshold is a transit into a sphere of rebirth is symbolized in the worldwide womb image of the belly of the whale. The hero, instead of conquering or conciliating the power of the threshold, is swallowed into the unknown, and would appear to have died." This is similar to the metamorphosis one experiences when one enters a temple and sheds his secular character in order to be able to experience the spiritual god within. "That is why the approaches and entrances to temples are flanked and defended by colossal gargoyles: dragons, lions, devil-slayers... These are the threshold guardians to ward away all incapable of encountering the higher silences within." (Campbell, 91-93)

