

Archetypes

Definition of Archetype:

- Archetype is a Greek word meaning “original pattern, or model.”
- 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. An example of an archetype occurs in the story of “The Flood.” Many different cultures have similar stories about the reasons for and the results of a flood.
- Guerin et al. states that archetypes are universal symbols, motifs or themes that may be found among many different cultures. They recur in the myths of people worldwide. These symbols carry the same or very similar meanings for a large portion, if not all, of mankind . . . certain symbols, such as the sky father and earth mother, light, blood, up-down, and others recur again and again in cultures so remote from one another in space and time that there is no likelihood of any historical influence and causal connection among them. (157)

- taken from: Guerin, Wilfred L., et al. "Mythological and Archetypal Approaches." *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature*. NY: Harper & Row, 1979: 157-161. Print.

Types of Archetypal Stories/Symbols:

- *Creation myths*: stories of the origins, beliefs, and people of a specific culture; scholars have found that creation myths/stories of origins are more alike than they are different across cultures.

-The God-Teacher:

* In another archetype, “The God-Teacher,” stories show the importance of a god or gods teaching man to survive on his own. “Yet it was unthinkable that the remote all-high gods would ever come into direct contact with lowly mortals to teach them what was right or wrong... The imagination had to build a bridge to connect the human world with the unapproachable divine world. An intermediary was needed, a link between heaven and earth... Myths about the god-teacher provided this divine sanction for the rituals and traditions people lived by. Such myths assured people that all their human activities stemmed from divine instruction”(Jewkes 70).

-The End of Childhood:

*This archetype focuses on stories of both loss of innocence as well as the acquisition of knowledge. “What is the meaning of “lost childhood” or “falling down”? In life, it is called “growing up.” That time when innocence somehow fades away and is replaced by experience or knowledge of the world. But in the imagination, it is the opening of a forbidden jar, the eating of a forbidden fruit, the death of a loved one, the destruction of something beautiful... it is a story or an event that is a symbol of a universal human experience. When such imaginative stories or events are so common as to be used over and over by many cultures, they are called archetypes” (Jewkes 142).

*“The fall from innocence is an archetypal event. It signifies the realization that we cannot hide from time. It is the discovery that all the potential for happiness that we feel in childhood is often not realized in adulthood” (Jewkes 142).

-The Cataracts of Heaven:

*Though you might have heard the word “cataracts” in terms of clouding one’s vision, the word cataract can also mean a great flood.

*“...there is one story pattern, or archetype, which tells [an abbreviation of] the entire imaginative story of the human race. It is the story of the “flood”—a cycle of birth, death, and rebirth (Jewkes 174).

* “The flood in literature, then, has been imagined as a destruction that enables a new creation to take place. It kills in order to cleanse. It washes away the order of earth so that a new order can be established. Perhaps people have used the image of water in this dual way because water is an element that not only is life-giving and life-threatening, but also is one that can take on different forms: it knows the dark depths of the ocean as well as the light ethereal spaces of the heavens” (Jewkes 174).

- Changes:

*“All stories and poems in this unit use the archetype of change, or metamorphosis. These stories and poems show that in the imagination people themselves can ‘become’ something else...In ‘reality’ we are subject to the changes of time, but we can imagine the changes that are not [subject to the changes of time” (Jukes 229).

- The Human Year:

*“In literature the rhythm of the seasons provides a store of opposing images that relate to emotions that swing back and forth in the human mind and heart.

*Spring, the time of planting and growth is related in the imagination to youth, hope, courtship and love.

*Summer, a time of ripening, is related to the maturing of relations, to comradeship and community, to fertility and passion.

*Fall, the time of harvest, is related to reflection and declining vigor.

*Winter, when the earth seems sterile, is related to death and emptiness” (Jewkes 302).

Archetypal 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.

Archetypal 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.

Important symbols and numbers:

-Serpent (snake, worm): symbol of energy and pure force (libido); evil, corruption, sensuality, destruction.

-Numbers:

- 3 - light, spiritual awareness, unity (the Holy Trinity); male principle.
- 4 - associated with the circle, life cycle, four seasons; female principle, earth, nature, elements.
- 7 - the most potent of all symbolic numbers signifying the union of three and four, the completion of a cycle, perfect order, perfect number; religious symbol.

Archetypal Symbols:

-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.

-The great fish: divine creation/life.