

A GLOSSARY OF COMMON LITERARY ARCHETYPES

My Notes:

Carl Jung first applied the term archetype to literature. He recognized that there were universal patterns in all stories and mythologies regardless of culture or historical period and hypothesized that part of the human mind contained a collective unconscious shared by all members of the human species, a sort of universal, primal memory. Joseph Campbell took Jung's ideas and applied them to world mythologies. In *A Hero with a Thousand Faces*, among other works, he refined the concept of hero and the hero's journey. Recognizing archetypal patterns in literature brings patterns we all unconsciously respond to in similar ways to a conscious level.

The term **archetype** can be applied to a/an:

- image
- theme
- symbol
- idea
- character
- plot pattern

Archetypes can be expressed in

- Myths
- Dreams
- Literature
- Religions
- Fantasies
- Folklore

According to Christopher Vogler, an author and former consultant for large film companies, archetypes are not always fixed. Character archetypes, for instance, can evolve and shift through a story to achieve certain purposes.

HEROIC ARCHETYPES

1. **Hero as warrior (Odysseus):** A near god-like hero faces physical challenges and external enemies
2. **Hero as lover (Prince Charming):** A pure love motivate hero to complete his quest
3. **Hero as Scapegoat (Jesus):** Hero suffers for the sake of others
4. **Transcendent Hero:** The hero of tragedy whose fatal flaw brings about his downfall, but not without achieving some kind of transforming realization or wisdom (Greek and Shakespearean tragedies—Oedipus, Hamlet, Macbeth, etc.)
5. **Romantic/Gothic Hero:** Hero/lover with a decidedly dark side (Mr. Rochester in *Jane Eyre*)
6. **Proto-Feminist Hero:** Female heroes (*The Awakening* by Kate Chopin)
7. **Apocalyptic Hero:** Hero who faces the possible destruction of society
8. **Anti-Hero:** A non-hero, given the vocation of failure, frequently humorous (Homer Simpson)
9. **Defiant Anti-hero:** Opposer of society's definition of heroism/goodness. (*Heart of Darkness*)
10. **Unbalanced Hero:** The Protagonist who has (or must pretend to have) mental or emotional deficiencies (*Hamlet, One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*)
11. **The Other—the Denied Hero:** The protagonist whose status or essential otherness makes heroism possible (*Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison, *The Joy Luck Club* by Amy Tan)
12. **The Superheroic:** Exaggerates the normal proportions of humanity; frequently has divine or supernatural origins. In some sense, the superhero is one apart, someone who does not quite belong, but who is nonetheless needed by society. (Mythological heroes, Superman)

THE HERO'S JOURNEY

My Notes:

The Hero's Journey is a pattern of narrative identified by the American scholar Joseph Campbell that appears in drama, storytelling, myth, religious ritual, and psychological development. It describes the typical adventure of the archetype known as The Hero, the person who goes out and achieves great deeds on behalf of the group, tribe, or civilization.

Its stages are:

1. **THE ORDINARY WORLD.** The hero, uneasy, uncomfortable or unaware, is introduced sympathetically so the audience can identify with the situation or dilemma. The hero is shown against a background of environment, heredity, and personal history. Some kind of polarity in the hero's life is pulling in different directions and causing stress.
2. **THE CALL TO ADVENTURE.** Something shakes up the situation, either from external pressures or from something rising up from deep within, so the hero must face the beginnings of change.
3. **REFUSAL OF THE CALL.** The hero feels the fear of the unknown and tries to turn away from the adventure, however briefly. Alternately, another character may express the uncertainty and danger ahead.
4. **MEETING WITH THE MENTOR.** The hero comes across a seasoned traveler of the worlds who gives him or her training, equipment, or advice that will help on the journey. Or the hero reaches within to a source of courage and wisdom.
5. **CROSSING THE THRESHOLD.** At the end of Act One, the hero commits to leaving the Ordinary World and entering a new region or condition with unfamiliar rules and values.
6. **TESTS, ALLIES AND ENEMIES.** The hero is tested and sorts out allegiances in the Special World.
7. **APPROACH.** The hero and newfound allies prepare for the major challenge in the Special world.
8. **THE ORDEAL.** Near the middle of the story, the hero enters a central space in the Special World and confronts death or faces his or her greatest fear. Out of the moment of death comes a new life.
9. **THE REWARD.** The hero takes possession of the treasure won by facing death. There may be celebration, but there is also danger of losing the treasure again.
10. **THE ROAD BACK.** About three-fourths of the way through the story, the hero is driven to complete the adventure, leaving the Special World to be sure the treasure is brought home. Often a chase scene signals the urgency and danger of the mission.
11. **THE RESURRECTION.** At the climax, the hero is severely tested once more on the threshold of home. He or she is purified by a last sacrifice, another moment of death and rebirth, but on a higher and more complete level. By the hero's action, the polarities that were in conflict at the beginning are finally resolved.
12. **RETURN WITH THE ELIXIR.** The hero returns home or continues the journey, bearing some element of the treasure that has the power to transform the world as the hero has been transformed.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE HERO'S JOURNEY

- The hero is naïve and inexperienced
- The hero meets monsters or monstrous men
- The hero has a strange, wise being as a mentor
- The hero yearns for the beautiful lady who is sometimes his guide or inspiration
- The hero must go on a journey, learn a lesson, change in some way, and return home
- The hero often crosses a body of water or travels on a bridge.
- The hero is born and raised in a rural setting away from cities
- The origin of the hero is mysterious or the hero loses his/her parents at a young age, being raised by animals or a wise guardian
- The hero returns to the land of his/her birth in disguise or as an unknown
- The hero is special, one of a kind. He/she might represent a whole nation or culture
- The hero struggles for something valuable and important
- The hero has help from divine or supernatural forces
- The hero has a guide or guides
- The hero goes through a rite of passage or initiation, an event that marks a change from an immature to a more mature understanding of the world
- The hero undergoes some type of ritual or ceremony after his/her initiation
- The hero has a loyal band of companions
- The hero makes a stirring speech to his/her companions
- The hero engages in tests or contests of strength (physical and/or mental) and shows pride in his/her excellence
- The hero suffers an unhealable wound, sometimes an emotional or spiritual wound from which the hero never completely recovers.

TYPES OF ARCHETYPAL HERO'S JOURNEYS

1. The quest for identity
2. The epic journey to find the promised land/to found the good city
3. The quest for vengeance
4. The warrior's journey to save his people
5. The search for love (to rescue the princess/damsel in distress)
6. The journey in search of knowledge
7. The tragic quest: penance or self-denial
8. The fool's errand
9. The quest to rid the land of danger
10. The grail quest (the quest for human perfection)

SITUATIONAL ARCHETYPES

1. **The Quest** – This motif describes the search for someone or some talisman which, when found and brought back, will restore fertility to a wasted land, the desolation of which is mirrored by a leader's illness and disability.

2. **The Task** – This refers to a possibly superhuman feat that must be accomplished in order to fulfill the ultimate goal.

3. **The Journey** – The journey sends the hero in search for some truth of information necessary to restore fertility, justice, and/or harmony to the kingdom. The journey includes the series of trials and tribulations the hero faces along the way. Usually the hero descends into a real or psychological hell and is forced to discover the blackest truths,

quite often concerning his faults. Once the hero is at this lowest level, he must accept personal responsibility to return to the world of the living.

4. **The Threshold**—Gateway to a new world (literal or figurative) in which the hero must enter to change or grow

5. **The Initiation** – This situation refers to a moment, usually psychological, in which an individual comes into maturity. He or she gains a new awareness into the nature of circumstances and problems and understands his or her responsibility for trying to resolve the dilemma. Typically, a hero receives a calling, a message or signal that he or she must make sacrifices and become responsible for getting involved in the problem. Often a hero will deny and question the calling and ultimately, in the initiation, will accept responsibility.

6. **The Ritual** – Not to be confused with the initiation, the ritual refers to an organized ceremony that involves honored members of a given community and an Initiate. This situation officially brings the young man or woman into the realm of the community's adult world.

7. **The Fall** – Not to be confused with the awareness in the initiation, this archetype describes a descent in action from a higher to a lower state of being, an experience which might involve defilement, moral imperfection, and/or loss of innocence. This fall is often accompanied by expulsion from a kind of paradise as penalty for disobedience and/or moral transgression.

8. **Death and Rebirth** – The most common of all situational archetypes, this motif grows out of the parallel between the cycle of nature and the cycle of life. It refers to those situations in which someone or something, concrete and/or metaphysical dies, yet is accompanied by some sign of birth or rebirth.

9. **Nature vs. Mechanistic World** – Expressed in its simplest form, this refers to situations which suggest that nature is good whereas the forces of technology are bad.

10. **Battle Between Good and Evil** – These situations pit obvious forces, which represent good and evil against one another. Typically, good ultimately triumphs over evil despite great odds.

11. **The Unhealable Wound** – This wound, physical or psychological, cannot be healed fully. This would also indicate a loss of innocence or purity. Often the wounds' pain drives the sufferer to desperate measures of madness.

12. **The Magic Weapon** – Sometimes connected with the task, this refers to a skilled individual hero's ability to use a piece of technology in order to combat evil, continue a journey, or to prove his or her identity as a chosen individual.

13. **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. Sometimes the conflict is resolved in atonement.

14. **Innate Wisdom vs. Educated Stupidity** – Some characters exhibit wisdom and understanding intuitively as opposed to those supposedly in charge.

SYMBOLIC ARCHETYPES

1. **Light vs. Darkness** – Light usually suggests hope, renewal, OR intellectual illumination; darkness implies the unknown, ignorance, or despair.
2. **Water vs. Desert** – Because water is necessary to life and growth, it commonly appears as a birth or rebirth symbol. Water is used in baptism services, which solemnizes spiritual births. Similarly, the appearance of rain in a work of literature can suggest a character's spiritual birth.
3. **Heaven vs. Hell** – Humanity has traditionally associated parts of the universe not accessible to it with the dwelling places of the primordial forces that govern its world. The skies and mountaintops house its gods; the bowels of the earth contain the diabolic forces that inhabit its universe.
4. **Haven vs. Wilderness** – Places of safety contrast sharply against the dangerous wilderness. Heroes are often sheltered for a time to regain health and resources.
5. **Supernatural Intervention** – The gods intervene on the side of the hero or sometimes against him.
6. **Fire vs. Ice** – Fire represents knowledge, light, life, and rebirth while ice like desert represents ignorance, darkness, sterility, and death.
7. **Underworld**—A place of death or metaphorically an encounter with the dark side of the self. Entering an underworld is a form of facing fear of death.
8. **The Crossroads**—A place or time of decision when a realization is made and change or penance results.
9. **Fog**—uncertainty
10. **The Maze**—a puzzling dilemma or great uncertainty, search for the dangerous monster inside of oneself, or a journey into the heart of darkness.
11. **The Castle**—a strong place of safety which holds treasure or princess, may be enchanted or bewitched.
12. **Tower**—a strong place of evil, represents the isolation of self
13. **The Whirlpool**—symbolizes the destructive power of nature or fate.
14. **Colors**
 - a. Black (darkness) – chaos, mystery, the unknown, before existence, death, the unconscious, evil
 - b. Red – blood, sacrifice; violent passion, disorder, sunrise, birth, fire, emotion, wounds, death, sentiment, mother, Mars, anger, excitement, heat, physical stimulation
 - c. Green – hope, growth, envy, Earth, fertility, sensation, vegetation, death, water, nature, sympathy, adaptability, growth, Jupiter and Venus, envy
 - d. White (light) – purity, peace, innocence, goodness, Spirit, morality, creative force, the direction East, spiritual thought
 - e. Orange – fire, pride, ambition, egoism, Venus
 - f. Blue – clear sky, the day, the sea, height, depth, heaven, religious feeling, devotion, innocence, truth, spirituality, Jupiter, physical soothing and cooling

- g. Violet – water, nostalgia, memory, advanced spirituality, Neptune
- h. Gold – Majesty, sun, wealth, corn (life dependency), truth
- i. Silver – Moon, wealth

15. Numbers

- a. Three – the Trinity (Father, Son, Holy Ghost); Mind, Body, Spirit, Birth, Life, Death
- b. Four – Mankind (four limbs), four elements, four seasons, circle of life, earth
- c. Six – devil, evil
- d. Seven – Divinity (3) + Mankind (4) = relationship between man and God, seven deadly sins, seven days of week, seven days to create the world, seven stages of civilization, seven colors of the rainbow, seven gifts of Holy Spirit.

16. Shapes

- a. Oval – woman, passivity
- b. Triangle – communication, between heaven and earth, fire, the number 3, trinity, aspiration, movement upward, return to origins, sight, light
- c. Square – pluralism, earth, firmness, stability, construction, material solidity, the number four
- d. Rectangle – the most rational, most secure
- e. Cross – the Tree of life, axis of the world, struggle, martyrdom, orientation in space
- f. Circle – Heaven, intellect, thought, sun, the number two, unity, perfection, eternity, oneness, celestial realm, hearing, sound
- g. Spiral – the evolution of the universe, orbit, growth, deepening, cosmic motion, relationship between unity and multiplicity, macrocosm, breath, spirit, water

17. Nature

- a. Air – activity, creativity, breath, light, freedom (liberty), movement
- b. Ascent – height, transcendence, inward journey, increasing intensity
- c. Center – thought, unity, timelessness, spacelessness, paradise, creator, infinity
- d. Descent – unconscious, potentialities of being, animal nature
- e. Duality – Yin-Yang, opposites, complements, positive-negative, male-female, life-death
- f. Earth – passive, feminine, receptive, solid
- g. Fire – the ability to transform, love, life, health, control, sun, God, passion, spiritual energy, regeneration
- h. Lake – mystery, depth, unconscious
- i. Crescent moon – change, transition
- j. Mountain – height, mass, loftiness, center of the world, ambition, goals
- k. Valley – depression, low-points, evil, unknown
- l. Sun – Hero, son of Heaven, knowledge, the Divine eye, fire, life force, creative-guiding force, brightness, splendor,
- m. active awakening, healing, resurrection, ultimate wholeness
- n. Water – passive, feminine
- o. Rivers/Streams – life force, life cycle
- p. Stars – guidance
- q. Wind – Holy Spirit, life, messenger
- r. Ice/Snow – coldness, barrenness
- s. Clouds/Mist – mystery, sacred
- t. Rain – life giver
- u. Steam – transformation to the Holy Spirit
- v. Cave – feminine
- w. Lightning – intuition, inspiration
- x. Tree – where we learn, tree of life, tree of knowledge
- y. Forest – evil, lost, fear

18. Objects

- a. Feathers – lightness, speed
- b. Shadow – our dark side, evil, devil
- c. Masks – concealment
- d. Boats/Rafts – safe passage
- e. Bridge – change, transformation
- f. Right hand – rectitude, correctness
- g. Left hand – deviousness
- h. Feet – stability, freedom
- i. Skeleton – mortality
- j. Heart – love, emotions
- k. Hourglass – the passage of time

CHARACTER ARCHETYPES

1. **The Hero** – In its simplest form, this character is the one ultimately who may fulfill a necessary task and who will restore fertility, harmony, and/or justice to a community. The hero character is the one who typically experiences an initiation, who goes the community's ritual (s), et cetera. Often he or she will embody characteristics of: young person from the provinces, initiate, innate wisdom, pupil, and son.
2. **Christ Figure**—an individual who sacrifices her/himself for the greater good.
3. **Young Person from the Provinces** – This hero is taken away as an infant or youth and raised by strangers. He or she later returns home as a stranger and able to recognize new problems and new solutions.
4. **The Initiates** – These are young heroes who, prior to the quest, must endure some training and ritual. They are usually innocent at this stage.
5. **Mentors** – These individuals serve as teachers or counselors to the initiates. Sometimes they work as role models and often serve as father or mother figure. They teach by example the skills necessary to survive the journey and quest.
6. **Mentor - Pupil Relationship**—In this relationship, the Mentor teaches the Hero/pupil the necessary skills for surviving the quest.
7. **The Threshold Guardian**—Tests the hero's courage and worthiness to begin the journey
8. **The Shadow**—A worthy opponent with whom the hero must struggle in a fight to the end. Must be destroyed or neutralized. Psychologically can represent the darker side of the hero's own psyche.
9. **Hunting Group of Companions** – These loyal companions are willing to face any number of perils in order to be together.
10. **Loyal Retainers** – These individuals are like the noble sidekicks to the hero. Their duty is to protect the hero. Often the retainer reflects the hero's nobility.
11. **Friendly Beast** –These animals assist the hero and reflect that nature is on the hero's side.

12. **The Devil Figure** – This character represents evil incarnate. He or she may offer worldly goods, fame, or knowledge to the protagonist in exchange for possession of the soul or integrity. This figure's main aim is to oppose the hero in his or her quest.
13. **The Evil Figure with the Ultimately Good Heart** – This redeemable devil figure (or servant to the devil figure) is saved by the hero's nobility or good heart.
14. **The Scapegoat** – An animal or more usually a human whose death, often in a public ceremony, excuses some taint or sin that has been visited upon the community. This death often makes them a more powerful force to the hero.
15. **The Outcast** – This figure is banished from a community for some crime (real or imagined). The outcast is usually destined to become a wanderer.
16. **The Earth Mother** – This character is 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.
17. **The Temptress** – Characterized by sensuous beauty, she is one whose physical attraction may bring about the hero's downfall.
18. **White Goddess**—Good, beautiful maiden, usually blond, may make an ideal marriage partner; often has religious or intellectual overtones.
19. **The Platonic Ideal** – This source of inspiration often is a physical and spiritual ideal for whom the hero has an intellectual rather than physical attraction.
20. **The Unfaithful Wife** – This woman, married to a man she sees as dull or distant, is attracted to a more virile or interesting man.
21. **The Damsel in Distress** – This vulnerable woman must be rescued by the hero. She also may be used as a trap, by an evil figure, to ensnare the hero.
22. **The Star-Crossed Lovers** – These two characters are engaged in a love affair that is fated to end in tragedy for one or both due to the disapproval of society, friends, family, or the gods.
23. **The Creature of Nightmare** – This monster, physical or abstract, is summoned from the deepest, darkest parts of the human psyche to threaten the lives of the hero/heroine. Often it is a perversion or desecration of the human body.

RECOGNIZING PATTERNS

The following list of patterns comes from the book *How to Read Literature Like a Professor* by Thomas C. Foster who teaches at the University of Michigan.

- ❖ Trips tend to become quests to discover self.
- ❖ Meals together tend to be acts of communion/community or isolation.
- ❖ Ghosts, vampires, monsters, and nasty people and sometimes simply the antagonists are not about supernatural brew-ha-ha; they tend to depict some sort of exploitation.
- ❖ There's only one story. Look for allusions and archetypes.
- ❖ Weather matters.
- ❖ Violence can be both literal and figurative.
- ❖ Symbols can be objects, images, events, and actions.

- ❖ Sometimes a story is meant to change us, the readers, and through us change society.
- ❖ Keep an eye out for Christ-figures.
- ❖ Flying tends to represent freedom. What do you think falling represents?
- ❖ Getting dunked or just sprinkled in something wet tends to be a baptism.
- ❖ Geography tends to be a metaphor for the psyche.
- ❖ Seasons tend to be traditional symbols.
- ❖ Disabilities, Scars, and Deformities show character and theme.
- ❖ Heart disease tends to represent problems with character and society.
- ❖ So do illness and disease.
- ❖ Read with your imagination.
- ❖ Irony trumps everything!
- ❖ Remember the difference between public and private symbols.

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- <https://www.hccfl.edu/media/724354/archetypesforliteraryanalysis.pdf>