

Common Archetypes and Symbols in Literature

SITUATION 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 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.

5.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.

6.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.

7.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.

8.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.

9. 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.

10. 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.

11. 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.

12. 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.

13. 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. 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, the note C, anger, excitement, heat, physical stimulation
- c. **Green** – hope, growth, envy, Earth, fertility, sensation, vegetation, death, water, nature, sympathy, adaptability, growth, Jupiter and Venus, the note G, envy
- d. **White** (light) – purity, peace, innocence, goodness, Spirit, morality, creative force, the direction East, spiritual thought
- e. **Orange** – fire, pride, ambition, egoism, Venus, the note D
- f. **Blue** – clear sky, the day, the sea, height, depth, heaven, religious feeling, devotion, innocence, truth, spirituality, Jupiter, the note F, physical soothing and cooling
- g. **Violet** – water, nostalgia, memory, advanced spirituality, Neptune, the note B
- h. **Gold** – Majesty, sun, wealth, corn (life dependency), truth
- i. **Silver** – Moon, wealth

8. Numbers:

- a. **Three** – the Trinity (Father, Son, Holy Ghost); Mind, Body, Spirit, Birth, Life, Death
- b. **Four** – Mankind (four limbs), four elements, four seasons
- c. **Six** – devil, evil d. **Seven** – Divinity (3) + Mankind (4) = relationship between man and God,
- d. **Seven** – 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.

9. 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

10. 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, active awakening, healing, resurrection, ultimate wholeness
- m. **Water** – passive, feminine
- n. **Rivers/Streams** – life force, life cycle
- o. **Stars** – guidance
- p. **Wind** – Holy Spirit, life, messenger
- q. **Ice/Snow** – coldness, barrenness
- r. **Clouds/Mist** – mystery, sacred
- s. **Rain** – life giver
- t. **Steam** – transformation to the Holy Spirit
- u. **Cave** – feminine
- v. **Lightning** – intuition, inspiration
- w. **Tree** – where we learn, tree of life, tree of knowledge
- x. **Forest** – evil, lost, fear

11. 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.