Archetypes in Literature

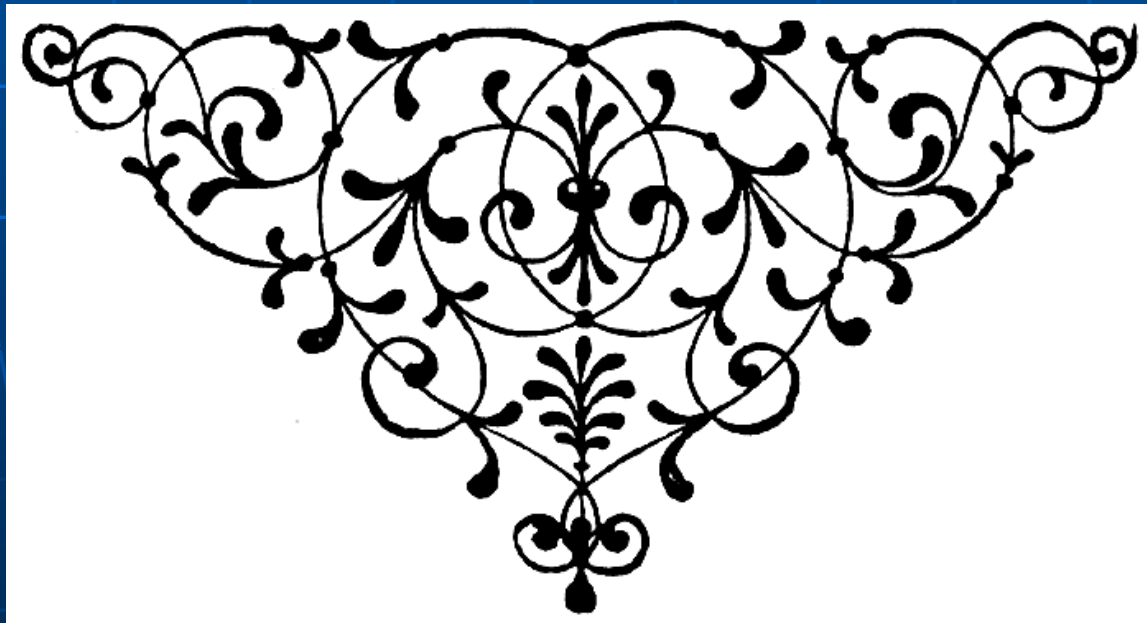rld Literature

Definition of Archetype

- A recurrent narrative design, pattern of action, character type, themes or image which is identifiable in a wide variety of works of literature.

- An archetype is the first real example or prototype of something (as the Model T is the prototype of the modern automobile). In this sense an archetype can be considered the ideal model, the supreme the perfect image of something 111-112, 114).

Definition of Motif

- An event, device reference or formula which occurs frequently in works of literature.

Floral

Motif

So what's the difference?

- The differences are minimal. Often the words are used interchangeably.

- An archetype is described as a recurring symbol, theme, character, or setting in multiple works. It's something that's appeared in literature so often that it's very recognizable. For example, an archetypical theme is "love conquers all." Where have we *not* seen that before? An archetypical plot structure is the infamous love triangle.

  A motif, though, is a recurring contrast, structure, or literary device that comes back in different forms. In *Lord of the Flies*, the beasties are symbols which are used as motifs which represents fear, but it comes in different forms.

Examples of Archetypes

- **Characters**
  - Hero (think of the classic hero journey & qualities of hero)
    - "The main character leaves his or her community to go on an adventure, performing deeds that bring honor to the community" (Herz and Gallo 121).
    - The courageous figure, the one who's always running in and saving the day.
      - D'artagnan from *Three Musketeers*
      - John Wayne in most of his movies
      - Hercules

Mother Figure

- **Fairy Godmother (surrogate mother)** – comforts and directs child, especially when he or she is confused and needs guidance. Represents powers that can be called on for help when it is needed. Helps young person to solve own problems (Knapp 71).

- **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

- **Stepmother**

Examples

- Fairy tales characters such as the stepmother in Cinderella, fairy godmothers, Mother Goose, Little Red Riding Hood, Briar Rose, Pocahontas
- Mythology: Persephone, Demeter, Hercate, Gorgon, Medusa
- Literature: Gladriel from Lord of the Rings, Glinda from the Wizard of Oz, Dante's Beatrice, Faulkner's Light in August, Woolf's To the Lighthouse
- Movies: the Dad in Mr. Mom, the mother in Flowers in the Attic, Ripley with Newt in Aliens

The Great Teacher/Mentor

- Wise old men/women – protects or helps main character when he or she faces challenges.
- 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.
- Examples
  - Obi Wan Kenobi
  - Rafiki
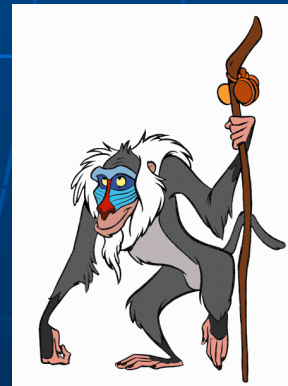
The Innocent

- Child/Youth
- Inexperienced adult
- The innocent, fearing abandonment, seeks safety.
- Their greatest strength is their trust and optimism that endears them to others and so gain help and support on their quest.
- Their main danger is that they may be blind to their obvious weaknesses or deny them. They also may become dependent on others to fulfill their heroic task.
- Frodo – *Lord of the Rings*
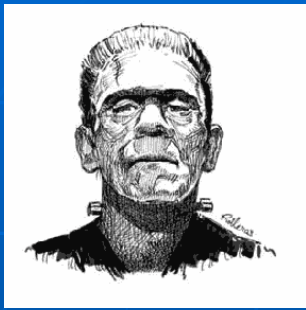
Double

- ■ Doppelganger
- ■ It is the double or mirroring or split personality or good/evil
- ■ It is the duplicate of an individual or part of a divided individual
- ■ Versions of the doppelganger are found in dreams, myths, rituals of primitive people, folklore and literature and other art forms
- ■ Can have many names including the Other, the alter ego, the second self
- ■ Examples
  - • Frankenstein
  - • Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde

The Sacrificial Redeemer

- "The protagonist is willing to die for his or her beliefs; the main character maintains a strong sense of morality" (Herz and Gallo 123).
- Embodiment of divine power and being sent on a mission to save humanity.
  - Jesus Christ
  - Erin Brockovich

Scapegoat/Sacrificial Victim

■ The one who gets blamed for everything, regardless of whether he or she is at fault.

- Snowball from George Orwell's *Animal Farm*
- Hassan

Enchantress/Temptress

- Characterized by sensuous beauty, this woman is one to whom the protagonist is physically attracted and who ultimately brings about his downfall. May appear as a witch or vampire .
  - The Sirens in Mythology
  - Mystique from *X-Men*
  - Elektra King from James Bond *The World is Not Enough*
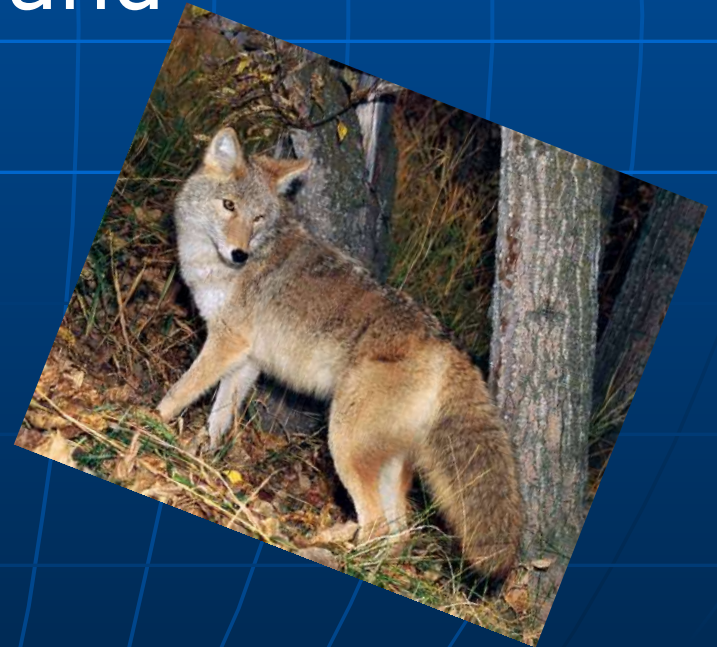
Villain

- Wolf
- Antagonist
- Bad Guy
- Examples:
  - Cruella DeVille

Trickster

- A **trickster** is a god, goddess, spirit, man, woman, or anthropomorphic animal who plays tricks or otherwise disobeys normal rules and conventional behavior.
  - Loki
  - Coyote

Evil Figure

- The Devil or Serpent
- 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.
  - Voldemort

Settings

- Garden
  - Cultivated and carefully planned. Restricted to certain vegetation

Forest

- Habitat of the Great Mother (Mother Nature), the lunar force. Fertility. The vegetation and animals flourish in this "green world" because of the sustaining power of the Great Mother. Symbolically the primitive levels of the feminine psyche, protective and sheltering.

- Those who enter often lose their direction or rational outlook and thus tap into their collective unconscious. This unregulated space is opposite of the cultivated gardens, which are carefully planned and are restricted to certain vegetation.

Tree

- Represents life and knowledge

Caves and Tunnels

- Deep down where character delves into self
- Place that character goes when "invisible" or inactive
- At the extreme may signify death

Mountains and Peaks

- Highest peak is place to "see" far
- Place to gain great insight

The River

- Crossing river may symbolize new territory
- Rivers can be boundaries or borders and on the other side is something new or different
- May represent human life or time passing as we follow the river from its sourt to its mouth

The Sea

■Vast, alien, dangerous, chaos
■Waves may symbolize measures of time and represent eternity or infinity

GREENPEACE

Fountain

- Stands for purification; the sprinkling of water (baptism) washes away sin. Water of fountain gives new life (Knapp 32).

Islands

- Microcosms or small worlds unto themselves
- Represent isolation or get-a-ways

Actions/Events

- **Journey** – "The protagonist takes a journey, usually physical but sometimes emotional, during which he or she learns something about himself or herself or finds meaning in his or her life as well as acceptance in a community" (Herz and Gallo 112).
  - Linear
  - Circular
  - Quests
    - Quest for material wealth
    - Quest for security, as a secure place to live
    - Quest for kin
    - Quest for global good, such as when a kingdom is threatened
    - Quest for self, for self-identity or self-assurance

Rites of Initiation

- This is the process by which a character is brought into another sphere of influence, usually into adulthood.

Parental Conflict and Relationships

- "The protagonist deals with parental conflict by rejecting or bonding with parents" (Herz and Gallo 117).

Coming of age

Sleep

- Crucial for physical and/or psychological healing. During dreams, person can grow. Person can fantasize freely in sleep. A transitional and beneficial period. In dream sphere can descend to the sphere of the Great Mother. Person awakens with a greater understanding of human nature (Knapp 88).

Sacrificial Rites

The Test or Trial

- "In the transition from one stage of life to another, the main character experiences a rite of ppassage through growth and change; he or she experiences a transformation" (Herz and Gallo 115).

Birth/Death and Rebirth

- "Through pain and suffering the character overcomes feelings of despair, and through a process of self-realization is reborn" (Herz and Gallo 110).

The Fall: Expulsion from Eden

- "the main character is expelled because of an unacceptable action on his or her part" (Herz and Gallo 111).

Annihilation/Absurdity/Total Oblivion

- "In order to exist in an intolerable world, the main character accepts that life is absurd, ridiculous, and ironic" (Herz and Gallo 116).

Works Cited

Brunel, Pierre. *Companion to Literary Myths, Heroes and Archetypes.* New York: Routledge, 1992.

Franz, Marie-Louise von. *Archetypal Patterns in Fairy Tales*. Toronto: Inner City, 1997.

Herz, Sarah K., and Donald R. Gallo. *From Hinton to Hamlet: Building Bridges Between Young Adult Literature and the Classics.* 2nd ed. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2005.