

An analysis of archetypes in literatures essay

[Art & Culture](#), [Symbolism](#)



Archetypes are one of the main components of every literary piece.

Understanding the function of archetypes and their contributions to literature is important in order to fully understand and analyze a piece of literature.

Tracing the origin of archetypes will lead us to the discovery of its connection with one of the pillars of psychology: the Jungian Analysis.

The term archetype comes from the junction of words “ arch,” which means chief or principal and the Latin word “ typus,” which translates to the English words images and impression (Archetypal Criticism 1). The etymology of the word archetype suggests its superior role on literatures and other things where it can be applied. As reiterated many times at the beginning of this paper, archetypes are common elements of literary pieces but its function does not solely serve literature only.

Archetypes are also a fundamental concept of one of the major branches of psychology that deals with the analysis of an individual’s personality: The Jungian Analysis. Jungian analysis was pioneered by one of the important figures of psychology, Swedish psychiatrist Carl Jung (Ablongman 289). Carl Jung, the closest friend of the famous psychologist Sigmund Freud, led the establishment of Jungian analysis, whose bases are closely anchored to Freud’s famous psychoanalytic theory (Ablongman 289). Jung’s personality theory was formally called as analytical theory and, like psychoanalysis, it largely believed in the ability of the human’s unconscious mind to affect his or her conscious behavior (Ablongman 289). But unlike Freud’s theory of each person’s unique unconscious traits—which he called personal unconscious, Jung believed that each person’s unconscious has striking resemblances with the unconscious of other people—a concept he called as

collective unconscious (Ablongman 289). Jung's perspective of the unconscious reflects his strong regards for the contributions of culture and other ancestral factors in shaping an individual's personality (Ablongman 289). Jung's theory states that the unconscious is a storehouse of concealed memory which was passed unto an individual from his or her ancestral past (Ablongman 289). Furthermore, Jung sees human mind as the result of man's evolutionary development (Ablongman 289). Jung also states that the components comprising the collective unconscious are universal and their quality can be best described as mythical and overarching (Ablongman 289). Specifically, the components of Jung's collective unconscious are called archetypes (Ablongman 289). Jung's archetypes of the mind include (1) the self, (2) the persona, (3) the anima, (4) the animus, and (5) the shadow (Ablongman 289). As Jung explained, each of the archetypes of the human's unconscious mind presents unique characteristics that affect the way an individual presents himself or herself and the way he or she interacts with others. The self is the archetype that presents an individual's entire identity and his or her integration with his or her personality (Ablongman 289). The persona is the archetype that represents the mask that an individual put unto his or her personality in order to ensure his or her compliance with the standards of the society he or she moves in (Ablongman 289). The anima on the other hand represents the innate feminine side of men while the animus, its counterpart, represents the masculine side of women (Ablongman 289). The last archetype, the shadow, is theorized to represent an individual's unconscious inclination to become cruel (Ablongman 289).

Carl Jung's use of archetypes for the sake of explaining and exploring the

human psychology established the importance of archetypes in the field of science. But archetypes do not only serve the purpose of explaining the science of human's unconscious mind. Archetypes are also fundamental parts of literature. As explained by one source, literary archetypes serve the purpose of adding depth and significance to most of the literatures that made their way well into our understanding and imagination (Archetypes). Like Carl Jung's explanation of psychological archetypes, literary archetypes represent patterns or symbolisms that play crucial roles in conveying the message of literary pieces (Archetypal Criticism 1). Archetypes in literature may be symbols, images, characters, or plot structures (Archetypal Criticism 1). But in general, literary archetypes may be divided into two categories: the characters and the situations or symbols (Archetypes).

The most common archetypes in literature are the characters. Archetypal characters often represent major elements in a literary piece around which the whole story revolves. Some of the most common types of character archetypes are the hero, the outcast, the scapegoat, the lovers, and the shrew (Archetypes). The hero, as the name implies, represent the protagonist of the story (Archetypes). The hero of literature is often pictured as the most courageous character who also acts as the savior of other characters of the story (Archetypes). An example of an archetypal hero in literature is Alexandre Dumas' Dartagnon from the literary piece "The Three Musketeers" (Archetypes). The outcast on the other hand, as the name implies, is the character that is casted out from the society or has chosen to leave the society voluntarily (Archetypes). An example of archetypal outcast in literature is the character Simon from William Golding's work "The Lord of

the Flies” (Archetypes). The scapegoat is the character that gets blamed for everything regardless if he or she was actually the one who did or not (Archetypes). Scapegoat archetypes in literature often suffer from sacrificial consequences due to the faults that are blamed on them (Archetypal Criticism 14). Snowball from George Orwell’s highly acclaimed literary artwork *Animal Farm* is an example of scapegoat archetype (Archetypes). Tyrion Lannister from George R. R. Martin’s famous epic series *A Song of Fire and Ice* can also be considered a scapegoat archetype. Archetypal lovers are another common type of character in literatures. Lovers as archetypes are often faced with fateful conflicts that intervene with their romantic affair like in the case of Shakespeare’s famous couple Romeo and Juliet which is also one of the best known types of lover archetypes in literature (Archetypes). The last of common character archetypes given above is the shrew. The shrew is often nagging and irritating wife that abuses her husband verbally (Archetypes). An excellent example of the archetype shrew is Zeena from the literary piece *Ethan Frome* written by the famous author Edith Wharton (Archetypes). Aside from the shrew, female archetypes are also common in literature and they often take the figure of the good mother, the terrible mother, or the soul mate (Archetypal Criticism 15). Situational and symbolic archetypes are also a common feature of literary pieces. Situational archetypes may include Biblical plots (Archetypal Criticism 4). Situational archetypes include the quest, the death-rebirth, the initiation, the journey, tragedy, comedy, crime and punishment, the temptation, and the suffering or sacrifice of the scapegoat (Archetypal Criticism 4-5). Situational archetypes are significant events that enhance the

importance of a character's existence in the story. Aside from situational archetypes, symbolic archetypes are also common features of literature. Symbolic archetypes usually include objects and natural phenomena that may serve some significance to the characters of the story. Water, fire, whirlpool and fog are some common occurrences in nature that signal deep meanings in literatures (Archetypes; Archetypal Criticism 17).

Archetypes are important parts of literature and myths that help in explaining the world and life (Myths & Archetypes). Archetypes help in disclosing some of the symbols whose meanings are universal but would not be discovered if not for their association in literatures and other myths. Archetypes are also the indicator of mankind's unifying trait of looking for the meaning of almost everything in the surrounding environment. The reiteration of some important and common archetypes in literatures among diverse cultures is one of the finest evidence of the importance of archetype in bridging the gap of one culture to another (Myths & Archetypes).

Works Cited

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