

# Symbolism in english literature assignment

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Archetypal figures present in Chaucer's "The Miller's Tale" By Jose Luis Guerrero Cervantes According to Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung, an archetype is a symbolic formula that begins to work wherever there are no conscious ideas present. They are innate universal psychic dispositions that form the substrate from which the basic themes of human life emerge[1]. The archetype is experienced in projections, powerful affect images, symbols, moods, and behavior patterns such as rituals, ceremonials and love. Jung[2] compared the archetype, the pre-formed tendency to create images, to a dry river bed.

Rain gives form and direction to the flow, we name the river, but it is never a thing located in any place, it is a form but never the same, it is always changing but it is still a river. Following this analogy, the archetype would be the dry river bed that motivates and modifies our conscious understanding of ourselves and the world (the water of the river) from which emotions, attitudes and ideas arise. It is possible to track the use of archetypes in universal literature, according to Joseph Campbell[3], from the origins of human civilization.

Archetypes help Chaucer to his main purpose when writing The Canterbury Tales: to reflect on the personal concerns and solutions of the evolving medieval society of his time. Characters with strong archetypal features has an automatically and unconsciously effect in the reader's mind, allowing his mind to recognize experiences, emotions, and typical patterns of behavior, establishing a "dialog" or "unconscious link" between the reader and the text. The purpose of the present essay will be to identify such archetypal characters and situations and their impact in the reader's psyche. [4]

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It is possible to recognize in Nicholas' behavior elements that match with the archetype of the "Trickster". In mythology, and in the study of folklore and religion, a trickster is a god, goddess, spirit, man, woman, or anthropomorphic animal that plays tricks or, otherwise, disobeys normal rules and conventional behavior[5]. In modern literature, the classical figure of the trickster survives as a character not necessarily supernatural or divine, but as a clever, mischievous man or creature, who tries to survive the dangers and challenges of the world using trickery and deceit as defense.

For example, many typical fairy tales present kings who want to find the best man for his daughter by setting a trial to obtain the hand of his daughter.

Brave knights are not able to overcome the trial until a poor and simple peasant comes. Armed only with his wits and cleverness, instead of fighting, he evades or fools the obstacles between him and the desired object. This way, the most unlikely candidate passes the trials and receives the reward.

One example of this character in English Literature is Shakespeare's Bassanio in *The Merchant of Venice* who, in order to marry Portia, must pass a trial set by Portia's father.

In this case, Nicholas is described similarly to this archetype: This lad was known as Nicholas the Gallant, And making love in secret was his talent, For he was very close and sly, and took Advantage of his meek and girlish look[6]. Nicholas is characterized as somebody whose main attributes are not physical strength or economic power, but cleverness in managing the weak points of people for his own benefit (expressed in the words "talent", "sly", "took advantage") hidden under a humble figure (expressed in the word "meek").

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Here it is possible to identify the breaking of conventional behavior that it is proper of the classical tradition when it is said that Nicholas makes love “ in secret”. In addition, in order to gain Alison, he must figure out a trick, otherwise, both might die if caught together. Alison’s behavior, on the other hand, shows characteristics that matches with the “ Anima” archetype developed at the level of “ Eve”. The Anima and Animus, in Carl Jung’s school of analytical psychology, are the unconscious or true inner self of an individual, as opposed to the outer aspect of personality.

In the unconscious part of men’s mind, it finds expression in a feminine inner personality. Anima, in contrast, is in the unconscious of women and it is expressed as a masculine inner personality. It can be identified as the totality of the unconscious feminine psychological qualities that a male possesses; or the masculine ones possessed by the female. The positive anima qualities of a man are tenderness, patience, consideration, kindness and compassion; then the negative anima qualities of a man are vanity, moodiness, bitchiness, and easily hurt feelings[7].

Jung believed anima development has four distinct levels, which he named Eve, Helen, Mary, and Sophia. Eve level is named for the Genesis account of Adam and Eve. It deals with the emergence of a male’s object of desire, yet simultaneously generalizes all females as evil and powerless. This means that when an object of desires arises, the archetype shows an opposite behavior from that she had shown previously[8]. In the preliminary description of Alison, Chaucer describes Alison (with ecstasy and accuracy) this way: She was a fair young wife, her body as slender

As any weasel's, and as soft and tender; She used to wear a girdle of striped silk; Her apron was as white as morning milk Over her loins, all gusseted and pleated. White was her smock; embroidery repeated Its pattern on the collar, front and back, Inside and out; it was of silk, and black. The tapes and ribbons of her milky mutch Were made to march her collar to a touch; She wore a broad silk fillet, rather high, And certainly she had a lecherous eye. And she had plucked her eyebrows into bows, Slenderly arched they were, and black as sloes; And a more truly blissful sight to see

She as than blossom on a cherry-tree, [...] Her mouth was sweet as mead or honey ??? say A hoard of apples lying in the hay. Skittish she was, and jolly as a colt, Tall as a mast and upright as a bolt Out of bow. [...] She was a daisy, O a lollypop For any nobleman to take to bed Or some good man of yeoman stock to wed. [9] Everything in her is lovely. Chaucer centers his attention on the physical description and little is said about her character. However, the adjectives " skittish", " jolly", " tall" and " upright" describe her as someone irreproachable in any sense.

After she falls in love with Alison, all the marvelous image of Alison disappears when she decides to play a cruel joke to Absalon: Absalon started wiping his mounth dry. Dark was the night as pitch, as black as coal, And at the window out she put her hole, And Absalon, so fortune framed the farce, Put up his mouth and kissed her naked arse Most savorously before he knew of this. [10] As it can be observed, Alison's attitude changes dramatically after meeting Nicholas (the object of desire).

This desire unleashes those feelings that are the negative counterpart of the male "Animus". "Eve" development of "Anima" helps to generalize all women as evil, and Alison attitude towards Absalon reinforces this belief. John represents the archetypal of "The Child" in the developed degree of "The abandoned". In Jungian psychology, it refers to an instinctual pattern of thought or symbolic imagery derived from the past collective experience (Jung referred to this as "the collective unconscious"), and present in the individual unconscious.

We were all children at one time and we can remember the freedom of being a child, the unconditional love we received from our parents, the spontaneous laughter, how we innocently accepted things as they were and let our imaginations run wild. All those experiences left a mark in the unconscious and arise under certain conditions. In this case, the condition is the fear of losing Alison what makes this feeling to arise[11]. The Abandoned (Orphaned) Child archetype can easily be seen in characters like Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz or Oliver in Oliver Twist.

The fear of losing a caretaker and the feeling of vulnerability makes the character to proceed in a blind, precipitously way. Jealous he was and kept her in the cage, For he was old and she was wild and young; He thought himself quite likely to be stung. It is possible to notice here that John's fear for losing Alison makes him to keep her out of the sight of the rest, "in the cage". Nicholas takes advantage of this fear and uses it to deceive him in a childish way. 'This world' he said, 'in just about an hour, Shall all be drowned, it's such a hideous shower,

And all mankind, with total loss of life'. The carpenter exclaimed, ' Alas, my wife! My little Alison! Is she to drown? ' And in his grief he very near fell down. As it was explained before, innocence is a mark of our childhood, and here innocence is incarnated by John. Absalon represents the archetype of the " Shadow". In Jungian psychology, the shadow or " shadow aspect" is a part of the unconscious mind consisting of repressed weaknesses, shortcomings, and instincts. It is a link to the most primitive animal instincts, which are superseded during early childhood by the conscious mind.

According to Jung, the shadow, in being instinctive and irrational, is prone to project: turning a personal inferiority into a perceived moral deficiency in someone else. It is the link to the most primitive animal instincts that are superseded during early childhood by the conscious mind, like the survival instinct. Absalon plans his vengeance for the cruel joke played on him and reacts in a even more violent way than his aggressors: Said Absalon, all set to make a launch, ' Speak, pretty bird, I know not where thou art! ' This Nicholas at once let fly a fart As loud as if it were a thunder-clap.

He was near blinded by the blast, poor chap, But his iron was ready; with a thump He mote him in the middle of the rump. This way, Absalon fulfills his vengeance by recalling his most instinctive, irrational feelings. In the situations present in the tale it is also possible to identify two archetypal situations: " The Task" and " The love Triangle". " The Task" is that situation in which a character is required to perform a task that will restore balance. It is commonly found n literature in the situations like to save a kingdom, to win the fair lady, the identification of the hero so he may reassume his rightful position, etc[12].

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Examples of this archetypal situation in English literature are when Arthur pulls Excalibur from the stone or when Beowulf slays Grendel. In this case, the task set for Nicholas is to consume his union with Alison using his cleverness to deceive his husband who has her “ in a cage”. The reader is not told about the plan, so the reader and the fooled characters go hand-in-hand in the discovery and the development of the plan, holding the attention of the reader. The “ love triangle” works in a similar way than “ The task”, however the task appeals to the “ logos” of the reader, while the “ love triangle” appeals to the “ ethos”.

In addition, “ the love triangle” works as the counterpart of the “ Required Love”, which is used to enhance the nobler feelings of human nature: sacrifice, loyalty, friendship, fidelity, etc. The “ love triangle” enhances rivalry, fight, deceit, infidelity, etc[13]. It is possible to observe how the love triangle made Nicholas to figure out an ingenious trick to have sex with the John’s wife (infidelity), the showing of the darkest side of pure Alison, the wrath of easygoing Absalon, and the showing of the dumbest side of John.

It is possible to conclude, after all this analysis that “ The Miller’s Tale”, as the whole Canterbury Tales, explores the nature of human being life and behavior of the people of his time, making the reader to do an introspective view of his own life. The characters of “ The Miller’s tale” are very likely to common people, functioning as a mirror in which society can see itself. The empathy that Chaucer is able to establish between the characters, their situations and the readers is possible because he appeals to those universal characteristics that human beings seem to share beyond race, distance, culture and time.

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These pre-figured behavior, or archetype, causes an unconscious reaction on the reader, putting them in the same, Jung would say, “ psychogenetic frequency”. Therefore, it possible to explain why the Canterbury Tales is a universal piece of work: because it will never lose validity. It appeals to values and characteristics that do not seem to change in time, since it is possible to identify them in the universal literature of all times.

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