

Archetypes in Literature and the Pop Culture

Archetypes are at the core of mythological criticism. They are those images of people which we all recognize. **Shadow archetypes** are characters whose archetypal characteristics go beyond reason. The wicked stepmother is an example of a shadow caregiver.

1. The Innocent Embarking on a Journey

The protagonist, usually young, sets out either willingly or unwillingly, on a journey or a quest and meets frightening and terrible challenges. After proving him/herself, the protagonist receives help from divine or unexpected sources. A sacrifice is usually demanded—usually the loss of innocence that is symbolized by physical loss. Tolkien's Frodo in *The Lord of the Rings* is an archetypal Innocent Embarking on a Journey. Hawthorne's Young Goodman Brown, on the other hand, may be seen by some readers as a Shadow Innocent.

2. The Archetypal Seeker

The Archetypal Seeker is just what the name implies—a character who is seeking answers to the big questions of life or a better life or an independent life. A Shadow Seeker is one who does not know when to stop. The Shadow Seeker always thinks the pot of gold is just over the rainbow.

3. The Junex versus The Senex

This archetype simply deals with the age-old conflict between the young and the old. Junex and Senex are Latin derivatives meaning junior and senior. This conflict has often been described as the generation gap.

4. The Orphan

The archetypal Orphan is on his or her own so that he/she can get the credit for accomplishments. The Orphan may not literally be an orphan, but is removed from the comfortable presence of known supportive adults.

5. The Caregiver

This archetype provides help to the protagonist. Mary Poppins is a good example of the archetypal Caregiver. As mentioned previously, the wicked stepmother is an example of a Shadow Caregiver.

6. Sages

In contrast to The Caregiver's physical care, the Sage offers spiritual and intellectual care. The Giver in Lois Lowry's book by the same name is an archetypal Sage, providing guidance to Jonas, the young protagonist. Aslan in C.S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia* is an archetypal Sage.

7. Friends

Archetypal friends in literature and film range from *Tom Sawyer* and *Huck Finn* to *Robin Hood and His Merry Men*. The biblical characters David and Jonathan are archetypal friends. We may see *Thelma and Louise* as Shadow Friends.

8. Lovers

In terms of literature, *romances* were originally stories told in the Romance languages (Latin and Latin derived languages such as Italian, French, and Spanish). These first romances typically concerned bold knights slaying dragons, rescuing damsels in distress, or defeating the enemies of a righteous king. Often the successful knight was rewarded with the love of a beautiful maiden. Archetypal lovers include Jane Eyre and Rochester from *Jane Eyre* and Benedick and Beatrice from Shakespeare's *Much Ado about Nothing*. Shadow Lovers could include Romeo and Juliet and Catherine and Heathcliff from *Wuthering Heights*. We may even see Young Goodman Brown and Faith as Shadow Lovers after Young Goodman Brown returns from the wilderness.

9. Warriors, Heroes, and Villains or Destroyers

These archetypes are strong characters who will stand up and fight. Warriors can become Heroes or Villains and Destroyers, depending upon the side for which they choose to fight—good or evil.

10. Rulers

We may call these archetypes leaders. Aslan is an archetypal ruler. The Pied Piper who uses his power to lead the children of the village to their doom is an example of a Shadow Ruler.

11. Fools and Tricksters

The literary Fool is the archetypal ignorant character, powerless and inexperienced. Examples of the literary Fool are Sheridan's *Mrs. Malaprop*, who always mixes up her words, and Thurber's *Walter Mitty*, who fantasizes about living the heroic life. However, the biblical Fool says in his heart that there is no God (Ps. 14:1), views doing evil as a sport (Prov. 10: 23), is right in his own eyes (Prov. 12: 15), and lays open his folly (Prov. 13:16). The literary Trickster pretends to be a fool so he can get by with something. Tom Sawyer often plays the role of the archetypal Trickster.

12. Magicians

Magicians appear in stories of fantasy where authors create a make-believe world with no explanation of how the magic works. Internal consistency is all that is required. The good magician uses his or her powers for good, while the Shadow Magicians use their powers for evil. Merlin is an example of a magician while The Wicked Witch of the West is a Shadow Magician.

13. Creators

Creators transform reality by changing the way characters perceive matters, often with long-term effects on the real world. Aslan is a Creator, changing Edmund from a petty, foolish little boy to a righteous warrior. Shadow Creators are the con artists and others who exploit people's emotional needs for selfish purposes.

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