**Archetypes in Fantasy Writing  
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***Foreword by Will*** *Archetypes are an important part of the human experience and subsequently they have become a very important part of literature, music, art and film. In this essay Marilyn gives us a wonderful overview of the concept of archetypes and some great examples of the major types. For more insight and literature from her be sure to visit her website.*

Archetypes infuse fantasy writing, as well as all other genres, with life and meaning. Many famous fantasy stories include them. Carl Gustav Jung, a psychoanalyst who learned from Sigmund Freud and then branched off to form his own theories, claimed that all human beings share a “collective unconscious”, a kind of inherited pool of psychological experiences that influence us without our consciously being aware of them. Within the collective unconscious are important “archetypes” that have risen out of our common human experience.

One such archetype is “mother”. All human beings have mothers and the “mother” archetype affects us emotionally. Furthermore, “mother” can be subdivided into “good mother” and “bad mother”. According to analytical psychology, very young children are unable to integrate images of their mothers behaving in ways that feel “good” (e.g. feeding them and taking care of them) with images of their mothers that feel “bad” (e.g. punishing or abusing them). According to analytical psychology, all human beings retain unconscious memories of their childhood perceptions.

Many successful works of literature include a “mother” archetype, and many include images of both “good mother” and “bad mother”. In Lord of the Rings, Galadriel appears as a warm, loving, wise mother. In The Wizard of Oz, Glinda is the Good Witch, presented in stark contrast to her nemesis The Wicked Witch of the West. Archetypal theory applied to literature and film tells us that these characters stir up unconscious feelings in the reader or viewer, deepening the emotional experience of the fictional stories.

Two other important archetypes are “father” and “wise old man”. In Lord of the Rings, Elrond is a loving father figure. Gandalf is a wise old man and guide, while Saruman is a dark and evil old man. Bilbo Baggins is an eccentric father figure, sometimes good, sometimes taken over by evil when in possession of the Ring.

In the Harry Potter novels, J.K. Rowling presents a vast array of different types of parents, parent figures, and wise old men and women- -some good, some evil, some in between.

The “child” is another important archetype. All adult human beings know what it was like to be a child, and childhood carries many memories. The “child” archetype can be represented by either children or childlike characters. In Lord of the Rings, all the hobbits are childlike characters in many ways, especially when they act like children.

Cormac McCarthy’s novel The Road won the 2007 Pulitzer Prize for Literature and was selected by Oprah Winfrey for her Book Club. This is a powerful novel presenting two main characters who are never given names: a father and his son traveling through post-apocalyptic country. The tenderness of the father toward his son and the love between these two strongly archetypal characters delivers a powerful message, placed against the terrible backdrop of the setting and the violent actions of some fellow travelers on the road.

“Family” is another Jungian archetype, one that plays out in many different ways in fictional stories. Broken families form the core of many characters’ quests for wholeness, as in the Harry Potter series. All human beings know what it means to belong to a family and to be the descendant of particular ancestors. Intricate family trees often fill important roles in epic fantasy. In the Harry Potter series, J.K. Rowling explored in great detail how family histories affected particular characters. In fact, the Black Family Tree is shown in great detail in both the “Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix” book and movie. J.K. Rowling developed many different ways in which individual characters reacted to painful family histories, with Voldemort and Harry Potter at two opposite extremes of the good vs. evil continuum.

Another important archetype is the “hero”. Literature and movies have given us many famous heroes, the archetype with which most people easily identify as they read the story or watch the movie. Some heroes that come easily to mind are: Luke Skywalker in Star Wars, Harry Potter in the Harry Potter series, and all the comic book superheroes.

The “maiden” is a female archetype representing purity and innocence, often rescued in traditional literature by the “hero”. Arwen Evenstar in Lord of the Rings, Princess Leia in Star Wars, and Cinderella in the fairy tale are examples of the “maiden” archetype.

The “animal” archetype is frequently an important element in fantasy stories. Gandalf’s horse in Lord of the Rings is one example. In the Harry Potter series, Voldemort’s snake, the students’ animals, and all the animals cared for by Hagrid fulfill our human connection to animals.

The “shadow” archetype represents the dark, animal side of human nature. The pure “shadow” archetype is considered neither “good” nor “evil”, but definitely animalistic in nature. These abound in fantasy literature in the form of snakes, vampires, and werewolves to name just a few.

The “persona” represents the public image that humans show to each other, sometimes represented as the mask. Often developed to hide the deeper parts of ourselves, the “persona” is somewhat removed from the collective unconscious.

In using archetypes in fantasy writing, it’s important that they arise naturally out of the story itself, not simply be dropped into it. When a writer finds him- or herself deeply involved with the story they’re writing, to the point where the words and ideas seem to be arising from the unconscious almost as though arriving through mist, archetypes will often be a part of the unfolding story.

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| Archetype | Description/Characteristics | Example |
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