Archetypal/Mythological/Jungian Approaches to Literary Criticism

The Jungian Self

from How Does It Mean? by Lisa Schade Eckert

Carl Jung (July 1875 – 6 June 1961, Swiss psychiatrist) believed that within our subconscious mind we harbor a universal, shared consciousness that connects all human beings. This realm of consciousness is inaccessible to the conscious mind; we cannot recall the experiences that reside there because, individually, we did not experience them. They are the experiences, or ideas, that have piled up over the generations and are stored in the subconscious mind. We are only aware of the power center of the collective unconscious: the self.

According to Jung, the self, or the psyche, is the consciousness that an individual can recognize. The self includes three primary aspects: the ego, the shadow, and the anima/animus. The ego represents that small portion of the mind that we recognize as thought, maturity, and reason. In the realm of the ego, we identify who we are, what we think and believe about the world and our place in it. The shadow, much like the Freudian id, is the dark side of self, the hiding place for repressed desires, instinctive drives, and negative emotions. The anima (feminine) or animus (masculine) is the part of the self that harbors characteristics of the opposite sex; a man has an anima and a woman an animas lurking in the depths of their self. Jung argued that the goal of the individual is to achieve balance or recognition of the different aspects of self, and called this the process of individuation or self-actualization. To reach individuation, one must recognize, confront, and assimilate the ego, anima(s), and shadow into the larger realm of the self, achieving a new level of consciousness. Instead of being aware only of the ego personality, an individual becomes conscious of the vast reaches of the self. According to Jung, the individual’s desire to know the self and reach into the depths of consciousness is the basis for all storytelling as we instinctively try to understand this deeper nature through metaphor.

Jung used the term archetype from the Greek word archetypon, meaning “beginning pattern.” Inside all human beings are innate and universal patterns of behavior. We can recognize these patterns frequently in literature and myth.

The PRIMARY Archetypes of Self:

Collective Unconscious: resides deep within the unconscious mind; to recognize this is to achieve the ultimate experience (enlightenment, nirvana), to become self-actualized

Self: the psychic center or soul of man. The entire archetypal system of the unconscious, the heart of personality, and man’s ego make up the Self.

Ego: the conscious mind; who we believe we are; the “I” or “me” developed after birth.

Shadow: the opposite of the ego; the negative or the dark side that is repressed by the ego. The shadow is never shown consciously.

Persona: the image the ego projects to others; the mask or stance man develops; what one thinks society expects of him; the way one presents himself to the world; the roles we adopt in relating to others.

Anima: feminine impulses within the male subconscious; nurturing, loving, emotional, sensitive, vulnerable.

Animus: male impulses within the female subconscious; aggressive, dominating, determined, cool thinking, and sound in judgment.

Individuation: the final goal of complete self-knowledge; self-actualization. Balance among all parts of the psyche.

Transformation: changes the ego must undergo on the way to individuation
JUNGIAN (secondary) ARCHETYPES
Phillip Wedgeworth, Center for the Humanities
Derived from the work of Carl Jung

Some Character Archetypes

A. **The Hero**: Lord Raglan in *The Hero: A Study in Tradition, Myth, and Drama* contends that this archetype is so well defined that the life of the protagonist can be clearly divided into a series of well-marked adventures, which strongly suggest a ritualistic pattern. Raglan finds that traditionally the hero's mother is a virgin, the circumstances of his conception are unusual, and at birth some attempt is made to kill him. He is, however, spirited away and reared by foster parents. We know almost nothing of his childhood, but upon reaching manhood he returns to his future kingdom. After a victory over the king or a wild beast, he marries a princess, becomes king, reigns uneventfully, but later loses favor with the gods. He is then driven from the city after which he meets a mysterious death, often at the top of a hill. His body is not buried; but nevertheless, he has one or more holy sepulchers. Characters who exemplify this archetype to a greater or lesser extent are Oedipus, Theseus, Romulus, Perseus, Jason, Dionykos, Joseph, Moses, Elijah, Jesus Christ, Siegfried, Arthur, Robin Hood, and Llew Llawogyffes (Celtic).

B. **The Scapegoat**: An animal or more usually a human whose death in a public ceremony expiates some taint or sin that has been visited upon a community (e.g., Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery").

C. **The Outcast**: A figure who is banished from a social group for some crime against his fellow man. The outcast is usually destined to become a wanderer from place to place (e.g., Cain, the Wandering Jew, the Ancient Mariner).

D. **The Devil Figure**: Evil incarnate, this character offers worldly goods, fame, or knowledge to the protagonist in exchange for possession of his soul (e.g., Lucifer, Mephistopheles, Satan, the Faust legend).

E. **The Wise Old Man**: A sage concerned with meanings and ideas rather than actions and personalities of others. He is a scholar, teacher, philosopher.

F. **The Child**: The child is vulnerable, innocent, and needs the mother archetype’s protection.

G. **The Star-Crossed lovers**: A young man and woman enter an ill-fated love affair which ends tragically in the death of either or both of the lovers (e.g., Romeo and Juliet, West Side Story, Tristan and Isolde, Hero and Leander).

H. **The Sibling**: A brother or sister who works positively to support or negatively to undermine the hero.

I. **The Woman Figure**

1. **The Earth Mother**: Symbolic of fruition, abundance and fertility, this character traditionally offers spiritual and emotional nourishment to those with whom she comes in contact (e.g., Mother Nature, Mother Country, alma mater).

2. **The Temptress or Seductress**: Characterized by sensuous beauty, this woman is one to whom the protagonist is physically attracted and who ultimately brings about his downfall (e.g., Delilah, the Sirens, Cleopatra).

3. **The Platonic Ideal**: This woman is a source of inspiration and a spiritual ideal, for whom the protagonist or author has an intellectual rather than a physical attraction (e.g., Dante's Beatrice, Petrarch's Laura, most Shelleyan heroines).

4. **The Unfaithful Wife**: A woman, married to a man she sees as dull unimaginative, is physically attracted to a more virile and desirable man (e.g., Guinevere, Madame Bovary, Anna Karenina, Lady Chatterly).

**Situational Archetypes**

A. **The Quest**: This motif describes the search for someone or some talisman which, when found and brought back, will restore fertility to a wasted land, the desolation of which is mirrored by a leader's illness and disability. Jessie
L. Weston’s From Ritual to Romance traces one facet of this archetype through the quests of Gawain, Perceval, and Galahad for the Holy Grail. This situation is also used in Tennyson’s Idylls of the King, as well as in shorter poems by Morris, Browning, and Arnold. Ahab’s monomaniacal quest for the albino whale in Moby Dick is a variation.

B. The Task: To save the kingdom, to win the fair lady, to identify himself so that he may reassume his rightful position, the Hero must perform some nearly superhuman deed (e.g., Odysseus must string the bow, Arthur must pull the sword from the stone, Beowulf must slay Grendel).

C. The Initiation: This usually takes the form of an initiation into life, that is, the depiction of an adolescent coming into maturity and adulthood with all the attendant problems and responsibilities that this process involves. An awakening, awareness, or an increased perception of the world and the people in it usually forms the climax of this archetypal situation (e.g., Holden Caulfield, Huckleberry Finn, Stephen Dedalus, Eugene Gant).

D. The Journey: Usually combined with any or all of the foregoing situational archetypes, the journey is used to send the Hero in search of information or some intellectual truth. A common employment of the journey archetype is the descent into hell (e.g., Odyssey, Aeneid, Inferno, Endymion, Joyce’s Ulysses). A second use of this pattern is the depiction of a limited number of travelers on an airplane flight, sea voyage, bus ride, or walking trip for the purpose of isolating them and using them as a microcosm of society (e.g., The Canterbury Tales, Ship of Fools).

E. The Fall: This archetype describes a descent from a higher to a lower being. The experience involves spiritual defilement and/or a loss of innocence and bliss. The Fall is also usually accompanied by expulsion from a kind of paradise as penalty for disobedience and moral transgression (e.g., Paradise Lost, Billy Budd).

F. Death and Rebirth: The most common of all situational archetypes, this Motif grows out of the parallel between the cycle of nature and the cycle of life. Thus, morning and springtime represent birth, youth, or rebirth; evening and winter suggest old age or death. Anthropologists believe that fertility rites and vegetative rituals usually took place in the spring because this is the time of physical regeneration of Nature, an appropriate time to enact ritualistic statements of spiritual rebirth and resurrection.

G. Creation and Origin: Creation refers to the genesis of the earth and the life forms that exist on it. Origin stories describe how things came to be. There are often six elements in creation myths: 1. Beginning-less God who broods over the 2. Void and creates or discovers 3. Water and utters 4. Sacred Sound, or Word, over the 5. Cosmic Egg to create life with a 6. Body Part.

H. Destruction: Before destruction, evil is introduced into the world, and the culture is changed or enhanced.

Archetypal Symbols and Associations

The collective unconscious makes certain associations between the outside world and psychic experiences. These are passed from one generation to the next. Some of the more common archetypal associations are as follows:

A. Light-Darkness – Light usually suggests hope, renewal or intellectual illumination; darkness implies the unknown, ignorance, or despair (e.g., "Dover Beach").

B. Water-Desert – Because water is necessary to life and growth, it commonly appears as a birth or rebirth symbol. It is archetypally significant, anthropologists believe, that water is used in baptismal services, which solemnize spiritual birth. Similarly, the appearance of rain in a work of literature can suggest a character’s regeneration or rebirth (e.g., The Ancient Mariner). Conversely, the aridity of the desert is often associated with spiritual sterility and desiccation (e.g., The Waste Land).

C. Heaven-Hell – Man has traditionally associated parts of the universe not accessible to him with the dwelling places of the primordial forces that govern his world. The skies and mountain tops house his gods; the bowels of the earth contain the diabolic forces that inhabit his universe (e.g., Mount Olympus, the Underworld, Paradise Lost, The Divine Comedy).

D. Other: colors; geographic/geologic features--mountains, forests, gardens, rivers, etc.
The Hero's Journey

KNOWN
UNKNOWN

Call to Adventure
Supernatural Aid
Threshold Guardian(s)
Threshold (beginning of transformation)
Mentor
Helper
Challenges and Temptations
Helper

Atonement
Transformation
Revelation
 Abyss (death & rebirth)
Return

(Gift of the Goddess)
The Evolving Self
Revelation and Transformation

The Hero's Journey

"I've killed myself so many times I don't exist anymore."
Phil Connors
Groundhog Day

"To live will be a great adventure."
Peter Pan
Hook