

ARCHETYPE

“Greek *archetupon*: pattern, model.

A term brought into literary criticism from the psychology of Carl Jung, who holds that behind each individual’s ‘unconscious’--the blocked-off residue of the past--lies the ‘collective unconscious’ of the human race--the blocked-off memory of our racial past, even of our prehuman experiences. This unconscious racial memory makes powerfully effective for us a group of ‘primordial images’ shaped by the repeated experience of our ancestors and expressed in myths, religion, dreams, fantasies, and literature. T. S. Eliot says, ‘The pre-logical mentality persists in civilized man, but becomes available only to or through the poet.’ The ‘primordial image’ that taps this ‘prelogical mentality’ is called the *archetype*.

The literary critic applies the term to an image, a descriptive detail, a plot pattern, or a character type that occurs frequently in literature, myth, religion, or folklore and is, therefore, believed to evoke profound emotions because it touches the unconscious memory and thus calls into play illogical but strong responses. The archetypal critic studies a work in terms of the images or patterns it has in common with other poems, plays, or novels, and thus by extension as a portion of the total human experience.”

C. Hugh Holman & William Harmon
A Handbook to Literature (6th edition)
(Macmillan 1936-92)

“The mandala of metaphors appears to be an archetype, or complex of archetypes, that operates in the culture-specific sense described by Evelyn J. Hinz and John J. Teunissen: ‘The archetype is an irruption of energy from below which manifests itself above in complexes of symbols...in art and society.’ The components of the spatial model coordinate aspects of the collective unconscious with the artist’s concrete experience. In the creative process, imagination liberates spatial archetypes from their preconscious origins, turning them into metaphors that are particularized, uniquely configured, and aesthetically specific to an individual work of literature.” (“Model of Metaphors,” 1995)

Archetypal deep thinking is pervasive throughout American literature, explicitly in examples such as Emerson’s essay “Circles,” *Walden* by Thoreau, *Moby-Dick* by Melville, and *Black Elk Speaks* edited by John Neihardt; figuratively in many works, such as “The Waste Land” by T. S. Eliot; *The Professor’s House* by Willa Cather; “A Clean, Well-Lighted Place” and *The Old Man and the Sea* by Hemingway; *The Bear* by Faulkner; *Sula* and *Song of Solomon* by Toni Morrison; and “To Hell with Dying” by Alice Walker. The concept of *archetype* makes it possible to analyze the psychological roots and universal emotional content of literature. Jungian psychology differentiates between the invisible archetype and the “archetypal image,” whereas literary criticism conflates the two.

Michael Hollister (2015)

from *Complex/Archetype/Symbol in the Psychology of C. G. Jung*
(Princeton 1959) 31-73

Jolande Jacobi

THE NATURE OF THE ARCHETYPE

It is impossible to give an exact definition of the archetype, and the best we can hope to do is suggest its general implications by “talking around” it. For the archetype represents a profound riddle surpassing our rational comprehension: “An archetypal content expresses itself, first and foremost, in metaphors”; there is some part of its meaning that always remains unknown and defies formulation....

No direct answer can be given to the questions of whence the archetype comes and whether or not it is acquired.... “Archetypes are, by definition, factors and motifs that arrange the psychic elements into certain images, characterized as archetypal, but in such a way that *they can be recognized only from the effects they*

produce... As an *a priori* conditioning factor they represent a special psychological instance of the biological pattern of behavior, which gives all things their specific qualities... “Whether this psychic structure and its elements, the archetypes, ever ‘originated’ at all is a metaphysical question and therefore unanswerable.”

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE CONCEPT IN JUNG

The term “archetype,” introduced in 1919 and today in general use, was taken by Jung from the *Corpus Hermeticum* (God is “the archetypal light”) and from Dionysius the Areopagite... Archetypal contents are a part of the psychic structure of the individual.... At first the notion of the archetype was applied by Jung primarily to psychic “motifs” that could be expressed in images. But in time it was extended to all sorts of patterns, configurations, happenings, etc., hence to dynamic processes as well as static representations. Ultimately it came to cover all psychic manifestations of a biological, psychobiological, or ideational character, provided they were more or less universal and typical.

For the sake of additional clarity, Jung drew a sharper distinction between the terms “archetype,” “primordial image,” and “dominant,” which at first he had used interchangeably.... We must always distinguish sharply between the archetype and the archetypal representation or “archetypal image.” “One must constantly bear in mind that what we mean by ‘archetype’ is in itself irrepresentable, but that it has effects which enable us to visualize it, namely, the archetypal images.”

ARCHETYPE, INSTINCT, AND BRAIN STRUCTURE

“The unconscious, as the totality of all archetypes, is the deposit of all human experience right back to its remotest beginnings... A living system of reactions and aptitudes that determine the individual’s life in invisible ways...it is also the source of the instincts, for the archetypes are simply the forms which the instincts assume.” The primordial image might suitably be described as *the instinct’s perception of itself*, or as the self-portrait of the instinct....

“There are present in every psyche forms which are unconscious but nonetheless active--living dispositions, ideas in the Platonic sense, that preform and continually influence our thoughts and feelings and actions.” “Archetypes may be considered the fundamental elements of the conscious mind, hidden in the depths of the psyche.... They are systems of readiness for action, and at the same time *images and emotions*. They are inherited with the brain structure--indeed they are its psychic aspect”.... The archetype is not only an image in its own right but also “a dynamism which makes itself felt in the numinosity and fascinating power of the archetypal image... Psychologically...the archetype as an image of instinct is a spiritual goal toward which the whole nature of man strives”....

“One must ask whether...dreams are produced not so much by the activity of the sleeping cortex, as by the unsleeping sympathetic system, and are therefore of a transcerebral nature.”

BIOLOGICAL ASPECT

“There is nothing to prevent us from assuming that certain archetypes exist even in animals, that they are grounded in the peculiarities of the living organism itself”.... Ritual behavior appears as a supra-individual order valuable for the preservation of the species”.... The supposedly free animal is not “free,” but fitted into a space-time system within which its life is enacted in rigidly determined orders....

He does not mean an “innate image” but only the “preformed potentiality” of such an image, and declares that it is “experience which fills the form with matter”.... They represent definite configurations of being and action and reaction, bearing a structural imprint in their “original pattern” but not in their individual manifestations. The term [archetype] is not meant to denote an inherited idea, but rather an inherited mode of psychic functioning, corresponding to the inborn way in which the chick emerges from the egg...

In the child from three to six months old, the social manifestation of the smile should be regarded as a response to the *Gestalt* action of the living human face, which “releases” innate archetypal reactions....

“The psyche of the newborn child is like a photographic plate that was exposed in earlier generations; when it is developed, separate fragments of the picture appear here and there, until the whole picture is before us.”

REALISTIC AND SYMBOLIC UNDERSTANDING

“The psyche has a structurally determined capacity for translating physical processes into archetypal forms or ‘images’... Man’s need to understand the world and his experience in it symbolically as well as realistically may be noted early in the lives of many children. The symbolic, imaginative view of the world is just as organic a part of the child’s life as the view transmitted by the sense organs.... It is the root of all creative activity...by the power of the initially imperceptible archetypes, working from out of the depths of the psyche and creating the realm of the spiritual.... Thus the archetype should be regarded first and foremost as the magnetic field and energy center underlying the transformation of the psychic processes into images.... The first element ‘arche’ signifies ‘beginning, origin, cause, primal source and principle’...

ARCHETYPE AND PLATONIC IDEA

A certain relationship between the archetype and Plato’s “Idea” is evident, but it is only partial, for the archetypes, as it were, “put the Platonic Ideas on an empirical basis”.... Plato’s eternal Ideas, “stored up in a supra-celestial place,” are a philosophical expression of the psychological archetypes.... “In the archetypes the psyche unceasingly supplies those figures and forms that make cognition possible. There is no important idea or view that is not grounded in primordial archetypal forms... Thus the archetypes are nothing other than typical forms of apprehension and perception, of experience and reaction, of active and passive behavior, images of life itself”....

ARCHETYPES ARE NOT INHERITED IMAGES

Archetypes are a structural condition of the psyche, which in a certain constellation (of an inward and outward nature) can bring forth certain “patterns”... This has nothing to do with the inheriting of definite images.... The “archetype as such” is an irrepresentable factor, a disposition which begins to operate in a given moment of the development of the human mind, arranging the material of consciousness into definite figures....

ARCHETYPE AND GESTALT

What is “inherited” is precisely the *Gestalt*...

HIERARCHY OF THE ARCHETYPES

Ultimately they can be reduced to the possibilities of typical and basic experience, and conceivably to the unity of the primordial opposites--such as light-dark, heaven-earth, etc....

The basic structure is laid down, but its individual spatiotemporal concretizations are imprinted by the time and environmental constellation in which they appear.... The primordial, essentially unchanging needs, the typical, eternally recurrent, basic experiences of mankind perpetuate the archetypes, and at the same time create those “magnetic tensions” within the psyche, which cause them to be manifested forever anew, in the most diverse variations and guises.... Not only do the archetypes form the “primordial pattern” for personifications of partial aspects of the psyche and hence for figures of all kinds; they can also represent the “basic principle” for abstract relationships and laws....

Like a seed the psyche bears within it the predispositions to full maturity, and realizes this predisposition in the form of archetypal processes. Thus individuation, man’s potential development into a unique personality, is also an archetypal process, contained in germ in every psyche, whether it is actualized or not....

THE COLLECTIVE UNCONSCIOUS

The collective unconscious as supra-personal matrix, as the unlimited sum of fundamental psychic conditions accumulated over millions of years, is a realm of immeasurable breadth and depth. From the

very beginning of its development it is the inner equivalent of Creation, an inner cosmos as infinite as the cosmos outside us.... The collective unconscious is not made up of individual experience; it is an inner correspondence to the world as a whole... Its contents acquire their value and position only through confrontation with consciousness....

Through the archetypes speaks the unfalsified voice of Nature... In regard to the collective unconscious, we may be...justified in representing it as over, around, under, or beside consciousness... “Sooner or later nuclear physics and the psychology of the unconscious will draw closer together as both of them, independently of one another and from opposite directions, push forward into transcendental territory, the one with the concept of the atom, the other with that of the archetype”....

He who speaks with the “primordial images” speaks “with a thousand voices; he enthalls and overpowers, while at the same time he lifts the idea he is trying to express out of the occasional and the transitory into the realm of the ever-enduring. He transmutes our personal destiny into the destiny of mankind.

ARCHETYPAL ORIGINS OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Erich Neumann

The structural elements of the collective unconscious are named by Jung “archetypes” or “primordial images.” They are the pictorial forms of the instincts, for the unconscious reveals itself to the conscious mind in images which, as in dreams and fantasies, initiate the process of conscious reaction and assimilation.... In the course of its...development, the individual ego consciousness has to pass through the same archetypal stages which determined the evolution of consciousness in the life of humanity.... Creative evolution of ego consciousness means that, through a continuous process stretching over thousands of years, the conscious system has absorbed more and more unconscious contents and progressively extended its frontiers....

In stationary cultures, or in primitive societies where the original features of human culture are still preserved, the earliest stages of man's psychology predominate to such a degree that individual and creative traits are not assimilated by the collective. Indeed, creative individuals possessed of a stronger consciousness are even branded by the collective as antisocial. The creativity of consciousness may be jeopardized by religious or political totalitarianism, for any authoritarian fixation of the canon leads to sterility of consciousness. Such fixations, however, can only be provisional. So far as Western man is concerned, the assimilative vitality of his ego consciousness is more or less assured. The progress of science and the increasingly obvious threat to humanity from unconscious forces impel his consciousness, from within and without, to continual self-analysis and expansion. The individual is the bearer of this creative activity of the mind and therefore remains the decisive factor in all future Western developments. This holds true regardless of the fact that individuals cooperate and mutually determine the spiritual democracy in which they live....

The personal, both collectively and individually, is a late product of evolution... The psychic development, or mis-development, of each individual is governed by the same primordial images which determine man's collective history.... Up to the present there has been no scientific proof of the inheritance of acquired characteristics. For this reason, analytical psychology considers the structure of the psyche to be determined by *a priori* transpersonal dominants--archetypes--which, being essential components and organs of the psyche from the beginning, mold the course of human history.... The relation of the ego to the unconscious and of the personal to the transpersonal decides the fate not only of the individual but of humanity.

Erich Neumann
The Origins and History of Consciousness
(Princeton 1970) xv-xvi, xviii-xxi, xxiv

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