

## SYMBOL

A *symbol* is an image with meanings beyond the literal. *Simile*: Her eyes are *like* stars. *Metaphor*: Her eyes *are* stars. *Symbol*: As the rocket lifted off, she had stars in her eyes. The *symbol* of stars makes *symbols* also of the rocket, the crew, the journey and the goal, creating an *allegory*. A *simile* is explicit and rational (left brain), usually introduced by the words *like* or *as*; a *metaphor* can be either explicit or implicit and is transrational (right brain); whereas a *symbol* is implicit, even subliminal, is multiple in meanings and is felt beyond words. *Symbolism* is the psychologically unifying language of the unconscious, articulated in dreams and art. Analysis reduces *symbols* to *metaphors* or *signs*--to conceptual aspects, such as "stars represent the transcendent"--in order to explain them to the rational mind.

The Puritans impose a reductive *sign* on Hester Prynne. Over the years her good works reverse the meaning of the A in the public mind from Adulteress to Able. Meanwhile, Hawthorne analyzes the A as a *sign* that becomes a *symbol*, forming a complex allegory. For example, as a mirror of Hester's soul, Pearl both reflects her mother's sin and represents her potential salvation. She is complex, a *symbol* personifying opposite ideas--both Evil and Good. If Pearl was merely a *sign*, she would be reduced to one idea, merely an embodiment of Evil. Likewise in "The Minister's Black Veil" the veil is a *sign* expressing the Calvinist doctrine of total depravity imposed by the minister upon himself, with some evil effects dramatized in an allegory of *symbols*. One of Hawthorne's major projects is to replace reductive thinking in *signs* like the Puritans with thinking in *symbols* that express complexity.

Authentic *symbols* arise naturally. They are most effective when organic as distinct from artificial or merely cultural, with exceptions in some cases where the *symbol* is given enough context, such as the billboard for Dr. T. J. Eckleberg in *The Great Gatsby*, which picks up resonance from its ash heap setting in the tradition of Eliot's "The Waste Land." A natural symbol means what it is by nature, not as contrived by an author--such as Poe in some instances. For another example, fastidious critics accuse Frank Norris of contriving some of his symbols in *McTeague*. An effective natural symbol is "The Egg" by Sherwood Anderson because it literally represents the possibility of a new life, therefore promise and hope--and by extension in context, the American Dream.

## ARCHETYPAL SETTINGS

*Symbols* are usually rooted in one of the primary *archetypal spaces*: City/Garden/Wilderness/Sky. Of all American writers, Hawthorne and Dickinson are the most consistent and obvious in using these spaces. Works of European literature are usually urbane and set mostly in the *City*, whereas major works of American literature are more often located in *Wilderness*: Catskill mountains (Irving), forests (Brown, Cooper, Hawthorne, Faulkner), woods (Thoreau, Frost, Stegner) prairie (Cooper, Crane, Cather, Stegner, Erdrich), Antarctica (Poe, Pynchon), Africa (H. Crane, Bellow, Morrison) pond (Thoreau, Annie Dillard), lake (Cooper, Marilynne Robinson), ocean (Poe, Melville, Whitman, Chopin, Stevens, O'Neill, Steinbeck, Hemingway, Jeffers), river (Twain, James Dickey, Ken Kesey), grave (Poe, Dickinson, Wilder), wasteland (Eliot, Fitzgerald, West, T. Williams, O'Connor, DeLillo, McCarthy), desert (Norris, Bowles, McCarthy). The difference in primary *symbolism* between Europe and America is evidence of (1) more natural space and wilderness in America; (2) more freedom to move, especially to the West; (3) individualism and greater opportunity to individuate through the psychological Wilderness; (4) more philosophical and spiritual interest in Nature. See "Model of Metaphors."

## FOCAL SYMBOLS

Often in American literature a *focal symbol* is an animal, usually wild: hornets, wasps (Crèvecoeur), bees (Crèvecoeur, Cooper), mosquitoes (Faulkner), ants (Thoreau, Crane), spider (Edwards, Dickinson, Robert Lowell), snake (Winthrop, Hawthorne, Dickinson, Twain, Faulkner, Steinbeck), fly (Hawthorne, Dickinson, Shapiro), locusts (Nathaniel West), mouse (Steinbeck, Alan Dugan), skunk (R. Lowell), gophers (Stegner), groundhog (Eberhart), lemmings (Larry Leonard), iguana (Tennessee Williams), pigs (Twain, O'Connor), goat (Barth), turkey (Franklin), butterfly (Hawthorne, Dickinson), waterfowl (Bryant), raven (Poe, David Duncan), owl (Thoreau, Thurber), thrush (Whitman), eagle (Melville), robin (Dickinson), dove

(James, McMurtry), heron (Jewett), parrot, mockingbird (Chopin), pigeon (Chopin, Stevens, Irving, Updike), canary (Norris), cockatoo (Stevens), blackbird (Stevens), swallow (Stevens, Eliot), nightingales (Eliot), chickens (W.C. Williams), lark (Cather, Welty), peacock (O'Connor), Jewbird (Malamud), teal, spectator bird (Stegner), cuckoo (Kesey), crow (James Welch), loon (Thoreau), dog (Dickinson, London, Faulkner), horses (Black Elk, Crane, Anderson, Faulkner, Hemingway, Steinbeck, Stegner, McCarthy), deer (Cooper, Black Elk, William Stafford), beast in the jungle (James), monkey (Kingston), ape (Poe, O'Neill), gorilla (O'Connor), bison (Cooper), wolf (London), elk (Black Elk), bear (Faulkner, Ellison, Irving, Erdrich), bull (Hemingway, Wright Morris), water buffalo (Hemingway, Tim O'Brien), elephants (Hemingway), lion (Hemingway, Stegner, Bellow), chambered nautilus (Holmes), shark, squid, whale (Melville), octopus (Norris, Bellow), crab (Eliot), fish (Bishop), marlin (Hemingway), trout (Hemingway, Faulkner, Brautigan, David Duncan), wildcat (Bierce, Morrison), black cat (Poe), cat in the rain (Hemingway), cat on a hot tin roof (T. Williams).

American fictions commonly emerge from a *focal symbol* such as those above and others including: maypole, black veil, birthmark, poisonous garden, scarlet letter, marble faun, leaves of grass, lilacs, ship, steamboat, open boat, ferry, raft, bridge, red badge of courage, golden bowl, egg, birches, woods on a snowy evening, snow man, enormous room, enormous radio, clean well-lighted place, crucible, glass menagerie, Main Street, Camino Real, the road, flowering judas, native son, invisible man, mask, tar baby, rocket, wise blood, love medicine, Dylar. The *focal symbol* is often a house or hotel or other domicile, especially when set in a town or City: house of Usher, Old Manse, house of seven gables, Uncle Tom's cabin, house of little women, house of mirth, professor's house, soldier's home, blue hotel, pigeon house, Sutpen's plantation mansion, Hotel New Hampshire. Some are the pastoral "good place" (often ironic): Merry Mount, the American farm, Sleepy Hollow, Catskills, Lake Otsego, Walden Pond, Blithedale, Hannibal, Mississippi River, Jackson's Island, Deephaven, Yellow Sky, Grand Isle, Spoon River, Our Town, Winesburg, Zenith, East Egg, Big Two-Hearted River, Burguete, Blue Mesa, the rez, the Hamlet, Boston, Concord, Brooklyn, Harlem, Eloë, Paris, Oregon, California, Haight Ashbury, Woodstock, Prankster bus, South Pacific, Typee Valley, Tahiti, Gilead.

#### MYTHIC FIGURES

Often the *focal symbol* is a representative character type and *personification* of ideas that make it larger than life--*mythic*: Anne Hutchinson, Ben Franklin, the American Farmer, Ichabod Crane, Rip Van Winkle, Natty Bumppo, Uncas, Chingachgook, Black Elk, Crazy Horse, Arthur Gordon Pym, Ligeia, Young Goodman Brown, Hester, the confidence man, Benito Cereno, Pierre, Billy Budd, Uncle Tom, Tom Sawyer, Huck Finn, Connecticut Yankee, the man that corrupted Hadleyburg, the mysterious stranger, Daisy Miller, the American, Silas Lapham, Sister Carrie, McTeague, Martin Eden, Antonia, Alexandra, Prufrock, Babbitt, the Great Gatsby, Dr. Eckleberg, Tom Joad, Dilsey, Benjy, Willy Loman, Hazel Motes, Henderson the Rain King.

#### MANDALAS

In a few cases the *focal symbol* is literally at the center of a novel, rounding it into a *mandala*, such as the matador *bull-fighting* in *The Sun Also Rises*, Mesa Verde in *The Professor's House* and the dying mother Addie Bundren in *As I Lay Dying*. Other fictions that are circular in structure as expressed by the movement of the action and spiral upward in transcendence include *Moby-Dick*, *Walden* and *The Old Man and the Sea*.

#### ICONS

*Icons* are *symbols* that attain fixed meanings through repetition, most common in religious symbolism, such as the crucifix. They appear in the art of a culture with widespread agreement about values and common understanding of prevailing *symbolism*. In American literary history *iconic* art is most common in the Puritan and the Victorian periods, most particularly in Irving, who used *icons* such as the wife and the home to maintain rapport with his mainly female reading audience, and in Hawthorne, who did so for the same reason and also to define his subtle allegories with commonly understood reference points, including: sunshine, shadows, rose, weeds, veil, mirror, iron, prison, watch, main street, railroad, hearth, church, fountain, angel, devil and serpent. Two representative Victorian examples of *iconic* art are "The Wife" by Irving and "A White Heron" by Jewett. The danger of using *icons* is that they may become too static, they

generate stock responses and through time they may lose their fixed meanings. The opposite of *iconic* style is the late 20th-century Postmodernist style of *iconoclasm*--which has attacked, mocked and destroyed traditional beliefs and *icons*.

Michael Hollister (2015)

## HANDBOOK DEFINITIONS

“For the Hindu philosopher Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *symbolism* is ‘the art of thinking in images,’ an art now lost to civilized Man, notably in the last three hundred years, perhaps in consequence of the ‘catastrophic theories of Descartes’... Coomaraswamy, then, shares the views of Fromm and Bayley, explicit in the titles of their respective works: *The Forgotten Language* and *The Lost Language of Symbolism*. However, this loss--as anthropology and psychoanalysis have shown--is limited to consciousness and not to the ‘unconscious,’ which, to compensate, is perhaps now overloaded with *symbolic* material....

Diel considers the *symbol* to be ‘a precise and crystallized means of expression,’ corresponding in essence to the inner life...in opposition to the external world... In this, he agrees with Goethe, who asserted: ‘In the *symbol*, the particular represents the general, *not* as a dream, *not* as a shadow, but as a living and momentary revelation of the inscrutable’.... This language of images and emotions is based...upon a precise and crystallized means of expression, revealing transcendent truths, external to Man (cosmic order) as well as within him.”

J. E. Cirlot

*A Dictionary of Symbols*

(Philosophical Library 1962) xxix-xxx

“*Symbol*: Greek *sumbolon*, token, watchword, from *sumballein*, to agree, literally, cast together. In *Dictionary of Art Terms*, R. G. Haggart, defining this term, says: ‘It is a recognizable equivalent or type of some person, object, or abstract idea by means of features associated in the popular mind with that person, object, or abstract idea. Thus in medieval art the saints are identified by the signs of their martyrdom; for example, the wheel of St. Catherine. It is also the expression of abstract ideas in terms of pattern, colour, line; the conveyance of abstract or spiritual ideas by means of natural objects. Symbols may be of many kinds: hieroglyphics, initials, emblems, allegories, fables and (as in some modern art) enigmas. Some *symbols* closely approximate to an idea or person and are easily recognized; others can be understood only by following some out-of-the-way association of ideas.’. [This definition equates very different concepts, including *symbol* and *sign* and *allegory*!]

A. F. Scott

*Current Literary Terms*

(Macmillan/St. Martin’s 1965)

“A *symbol* is something that is itself and also stands for something else; as...a flag is a piece of colored cloth that stands for a country. All language is *symbolic* in this sense, and many of the objects that we use in daily life are also. In a literary sense, a *symbol* combines a literal and sensuous quality with an abstract or suggestive aspect. It is advisable to distinguish *symbol* from *image*, *allegory* and *metaphor*.... A *symbol* is an *image* that evokes objective, concrete reality and prompts that reality to suggest another level of meaning....

A *metaphor* evokes an object in order to illustrate an idea or demonstrate a quality, whereas a *symbol* embodies the idea or the quality. As W. M. Urban said, ‘The *metaphor* becomes a *symbol* when by means of it we embody an ideal content not otherwise expressible.’ Literary *symbols* are of two broad types: one includes those embodying universal suggestions of meaning, as flowing water suggests time and eternity, a voyage suggests life. [archetypal symbols] Such *symbols* are used widely (and sometimes unconsciously) in literature. The other type of *symbol* acquires its suggestiveness not from qualities inherent in itself but from the way in which it is used in a given work. Thus, in *Moby-Dick* the voyage, the land, the ocean are objects pregnant with meanings that seem almost independent of Melville’s use of them in his story; on the other hand, the white whale is invested with meaning--and differing meanings for different crew members--through the handling of materials in the novel.... Similarly, in Hemingway’s *A Farewell to Arms*, rain...is

converted into a *symbol* of death... The meaning of practically any general *symbol* is thus partly a function of its environment.”

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

## ANALYSIS OF THE SYMBOL

“Erich Fromm reports that under hypnosis persons having no knowledge of the interpretation of dreams were perfectly able to understand and interpret the *symbolism* of their dreams, but that on waking they showed no understanding of them at all and for the most part declared their dreams to be sheer nonsense. [*The Forgotten Language*, p.19]....

Animals have signals and *signs*, but no *symbols*. Compared with the animal, man lives...in a new dimension of reality, namely, that of *symbolism*. In addition to the world of physical reality he has a world of *symbolic* reality, and he must give it expression if he wishes to rise from the animal world of instinctual drives to the creative being that he shares with the gods. All creation and even the smallest of its parts can become a *symbol*, an *image* conveying meaning. The psyche as a mirror and expression of the outward and inward world creates *symbols* and transmits them from soul to soul... When consciously observed and guided, the individuation process represents a dialectical interaction between the contents of the unconscious and of consciousness; *symbols* provide the necessary bridges...

The word *symbol* (*symbolon*), derived from the Greek verb *symbollo*, has long been the object of the most diverse definitions and interpretations. But all these definitions and interpretations are agreed that *symbols* present an objective, visible meaning behind which an invisible, profounder meaning is hidden.... The *symbol* awakens intimations, speech can only explain.... The *symbol* strikes its roots in the most secret depths of the soul, language skims over the surface of the understanding like a soft breeze... Only the *symbol* can combine the most disparate elements into a unitary impression... Words make the infinite finite, *symbols* carry the mind beyond the finite world of becoming, into the realm of infinite being. They awaken intimations; they are tokens of the ineffable, and like it they are inexhaustible.... For the artist...*symbols* are not material to be exploited for his own psychic development; rather, they are the occasion and substance of his process of artistic creation and make him the guide, the authentic spokesman of the unexpressed but eternally and profoundly vital forces in the souls of mankind....

‘In a sense, the *symbol* can make even the divine visible.... With irresistible power it draws the beholder to itself, and with the force of necessity, like the world spirit itself, it seizes upon our soul. In it moves the exuberant source of ideas; and what reason, aided by the understanding, strives to attain by a succession of inferences, it achieves through *symbolism* all at once’.... And Goethe: ‘*Symbolism* transforms the phenomenon into idea and the idea into *image*.’ ‘Whether a thing is a *symbol* or not depends chiefly upon the attitude of the observing consciousness.’ [Carl Jung, *Psychological Types*, 603] It depends on whether a man is able and in a position to regard a given object, a tree, for example, not merely in its concrete manifestations as such, but also as an expression, a token for something unknown. Hence it is perfectly possible that for one man the same fact or object represents a *symbol* and for another only a *sign*....

*Symbols* can...‘degenerate’ into *signs*, but...according to the context in which they stand or the attitude of the individual, *signs* can also be taken as *symbols*. ‘Insofar as a *symbol* is a living thing,’ writes Jung, ‘it is an expression for something that cannot be characterized in any other or better way. The *symbol* is alive only so long as it is pregnant with meaning. But once its meaning has been born out of it, once that expression is found which formulates the thing sought, expected, or divined better than the hitherto accepted *symbol*, then the *symbol* is dead...and it becomes a conventional *sign*’.... [Jung, *Psychological Types*, 602] Reflections about the *symbolic* character of a formulated faith have proved, in many historical religions, to be the first and decisive signs of their disintegration. The more conventional a man’s mind and the more he holds to the letter, the more he will be barred from the *symbol* and the less able he will be to experience its meaning; he will cling to the *sign* alone and add his bit of confusion to the definition of the *symbol*.”

Jolande Jacobi

*Complex/Archetype/Symbol*  
(Princeton 1959) 88, 94, 115, 123, 82, 77-8, 84-5

“*Symbol* is distinguished from *metaphor* by its greater stability and permanence... A *symbol*, in general, is a relatively stable and repeatable element of perceptual experience, standing for some larger meaning or set of meanings which cannot be given, or not fully given, in perceptual experience itself.... It is necessary to mention the stable and repeatable character of a *symbol*; for when an *image* is employed as *metaphor* only once, in a unique flash of insight, it cannot accurately be said to function *symbolically*. It acquires a *symbolic* nature when, with whatever modifications, it undergoes or is considered capable of undergoing recurrence....Two *metaphors* from Donne’s Sermons, ‘No man is an island’ and ‘For whom the bell tolls,’ have become *symbols* in our time by reason of the wide currency that Ernest Hemingway has given them....

*Symbols* having a literary background and a consequent potentiality of allusive reference may be described as having ancestral vitality... A *symbol* may complete its work as the presiding *image* of a particular poem; it may be repeated and developed by a certain poet as having special importance and significance for him personally; it may develop literary life (‘ancestral vitality’) by being passed from poet to poet, being mingled and stirred to new life in fresh poetic contexts; it may have significance for an entire cultural group or an entire body of religious believers; and finally it may be *archetypal*, in the sense of tending to have a fairly similar significance for all or a large portion of mankind, independently of borrowings and historical influences.”

Philip Wheelwright  
*Metaphor and Reality*  
(Indiana U 1962; Midland 1968) 92-3, 98-9

#### ARCHETYPAL SYMBOL

“What really matters in a *metaphor* is the psychic depth at which the things of the world, whether actual or fancied, are transmuted by the cool heat of the imagination... [Archetypal symbols] carry the same or very similar meanings for a large portion, if not all, of mankind. It is a discoverable fact that certain *symbols*, such as the sky father and earth mother, light, blood, up-down, the axis of a wheel, and others, recur again and again in cultures so remote from one another in space and time that there is no likelihood of any historical influence and causal connection among them. Why should such unconnected repetitions occur? The reasons are in many cases not at all puzzling.

Despite the great diversity among human societies and their ways of thinking and responding, there are certain natural similarities too, both in men's physical and in their basic psychical make-up. Physically all men are subject to the law of gravitation, for which reason *up* is normally a more difficult direction in which to go than *down*; and this makes it natural enough that the idea of going up should associate itself with the idea of achievement, and that various images connoting loftiness or ascent should associate themselves with the idea of excellence, and often of regality and command. Hence everyone finds it natural to speak of ‘striving upwards,’ and not of ‘striving downwards.’ A king rules ‘over’ his subjects, not ‘under’ them. We speak of surmounting our difficulties, and we triumph ‘over,’ not ‘under’ temptation. Various images that are empirically associated with the idea of *up*, such as a flying bird, an arrow shot into the air, a star, a mountain, a stone pillar, a growing tree, a lofty tower, come to mean (whatever the other meanings that may have got attached to one or another of them) something to be reached for, a hope of attainment, hence in some sense the Good. *Down*, in one of its two main types of context, connotes the opposite idea. We ‘fall’ into bad habits or into bankruptcy, we do not climb into them....

Of all *archetypal symbols* there is probably none more widespread and more immediately understandable than *light*, as symbolizing certain mental and spiritual qualities. Even in our current everyday vocabulary pertaining to mental phenomena there are many words and phrases that are products of earlier light metaphors: *elucidate*, *illuminate*, *clarify*...*bright*, etc. On the whole these words have ceased to function as active metaphors and have lost all tensive character, becoming mere trade-words; it may be, however, that a more explicit phrase such as ‘throw light on’ still retains some metaphoric life for those who employ it consciously.

The earliest known instance of the *light* symbol is found at Sippar in ancient Mesopotamia, toward the end of the third millennium B.C. On the fertile plain between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers there flourished, some forty to forty-five centuries ago, the oldest school of which there is any record. Young men who wished to learn would congregate from all over Mesopotamia, and perhaps from outlying regions too. Excavations have shown that they sat on rude stone benches without backs; and from what is known of that early culture it may be presumed that their studies consisted mainly of the art of cuneiform writing, medicine which included magic, astronomy which was inseparable from astrology, and the mythological and theogonic lore pertaining to their complex and often ambiguous pantheon. Shortly before the Second World War an Oxford archeological expedition discovered a buried stone on which the antique characters could still be deciphered, and which was judged to have served as the lintel to the main doorway of the school. The words which would thus have greeted the student as he approached the entrance to the building were these: *'May he who sits in the places of learning shine like the sun!'*

There are particularly three characteristics of *light* that tend to suggest by analogy certain important qualities of mind and spirit, for which the analogy of *light* would therefore have come to mind as a symbol. First and most evidently, *light* produces visibility, it shows forth clear outlines which in darkness vanish. By a natural and easy metaphoric step we can pass from this observable action of *light* in the physical world clarifying spatial boundaries and shapes to the action of the mind bringing the boundaries and shapes of ideas into intellectual configuration. Consequently *light* readily becomes a sign of mental configuration--which is to say, of mind in its most distinctive form.

In mythopoeic ages, however, *light* is not a visual entity exclusively. Modern household appliances have so successfully enabled us to separate *light* and *heat*, that we are prone to forget how naturally in ancient times the two phenomena went together and hence how natural it was to think of them as two aspects of a single entity comprising them both as manifestations of itself. Even on a cold winter's day the sun could be felt in one's marrow. Consequently, in those contexts where *light* served as a symbol of intellectual clarity it tended to carry certain metaphoric connotations of *fire* as well. An important connotation in the history of symbolism is that which derives from the warming power of *fire*. As *fire*, glowing with light, warms the body, so intellectual *light* not only instructs but also stimulates the mind and spirit....

[“The anthropologist Roger W. Westcott offers the intriguing hypothesis that consciousness is internal bioluminescence, a concept which may prompt investigation of the possibility that enlightenment is a physical and measurable event in the brain. In *The Divine Animal* Westcott proposes that endocranial bioluminescence, ‘a literal form of *light* generated in, by, and for the brain,’ may be the stuff of pure consciousness. ‘Awareness itself may consist of the internal generation and reception of perceptible radiation--in a word, of *light*.’ John White, ed., Introduction, *The Highest State of Consciousness* (Doubleday/Anchor 1972) xiv-xv]

Perhaps the most philosophically mature of the great archetypal symbols is the *Circle*, together with its most frequent imagistic concretion the *Wheel*. From earliest recorded times the *circle* has been widely recognized as the most perfect of figures, both because of its simple formal perfection and for the reason stated in Heraclitus' aphorism, ‘In the *circle* the beginning and the end are the same.’ When the *circle* is concretized as a *wheel*, two additional properties come in: the *wheel* has spokes, and it rotates. The spokes of the *wheel* are taken as iconically symbolic of the sun's rays; both the spokes and the rays being symbolic of the creative influences going out to all things in the universe from a central life-giving source. In its rotation a *wheel* has the property that when its axis is at rest the movement of its spokes and rim is perfectly regular--a property which readily becomes symbolic of the human truth that to find the quiet center of one's own soul is to produce a more tranquil ordering of one's experiences and activities.

Like many another archetypal symbol the *Wheel* is potentially ambivalent. It may have either a positive or a negative significance, and occasionally both. Negatively the *Wheel* can symbolize in the West the hazardous play of fortune, and in the East the persistent cycle of deaths and rebirths from which release is sought. Yoga, to the Hindu, is the patient disciplined exercise of action and non-action whereby an individual may prepare himself for such release. On the positive side, in addition to the symbolic import mentioned in the foregoing paragraph, the *Wheel* is in Hindu tradition connected with Dharma, or divine law. Buddhist iconography makes much of ‘the *Wheel* of the Law,’ and there is a widespread legend that

Buddha, when he gave his first sermon after his initiatory vision under the bo tree (the so-called Deer Park Sermon), set it revolving. In traditional Chinese Buddhist ritual a chariot *wheel* is often fastened to a post and turned to the right, which is supposed to reflect the sun in its orbit and to symbolize the path of universal Tao. In Tibet the idea of the perfection and sincerity of universal law can be symbolized by so simple a gesture as joining the thumb with the middle finger. The Tibetan prayer *wheel* had originally the same meaning, and perhaps still retains it for informed worshipers, despite the crude magical uses to which it has later been put....

When a straightforward thinker sets out to free himself from symbolic and metaphorical thinking, what he actually means to do is limit himself to those symbols and rigidified metaphors which have become habitual stereotypes in everyday life. The issue is not between symbolic and non-symbolic thinking, but between limiting one's thought and sensitivities to the plain meanings denoted by conventional symbols and learning to think with a more tensive alertness.... Tensive symbols may perhaps offer hints about the nature of things which straightforward techniques must either ignore or distort. If reality is largely fluid and half-paradoxical, steel nets are not the best instruments for taking samples of it."

Philip *Wheel*-wright  
*Metaphor and Reality*  
(Indiana U 1962; Midland 1968) 111-12, 116-18, 125-28

Michael Hollister (2015)