

Figurative Language • Archetypes • Symbols • Elements of Fairy Tales



Figurative Language

symbol: a visual representation of something else

motif: a reoccurring symbol in various forms which appears throughout
a selected work

metaphor: language that implies a relationship between two unlikely elements:

All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players;
They have their exits and their entrances,
And one man in his time plays many parts,
His acts being seven ages (*Shakespeare*).

Figurative Language

simile: makes comparisons of two elements, but ties them together
with additional words: *like* or *as*

The torn edges of the ancient book shone yellow *as* an autumn moon.

personification: a figure of speech giving an inanimate object or abstract idea
human characteristics for literary purposes

Death sat in the corner thoughtfully smoking his pipe, staring at the
young men and women in the pub.

anthropomorphism: interpretation of animals with humanistic personalities

Mickey Mouse

SpongeBob SquarePants

Archetypes

(see *LWP*: p. 135)

In simplest terms, these are patterns, characteristics of personality traits which appear in fiction. Northrop Frye, a Canadian literary critic, took the original Jungian concept of psychoanalysis and applied it to writing and criticism.

He believed every concept which is re-invented in literature has a mythical origin which humans, as an analytical species, carry with us in our heads.

examples:

- the hero's quest
- the good mother
- a wise old man
- the innocent virgin
- a runaway, rebellious daughter
- the evil stepmother
- a fool-comedian
- the nerdy, isolated intellectual

Archetypes

A basic image can translate to archetype, just by how an author chooses to illustrate the image.

A simple apple has multiple applications.



Archetypes

Archetypes belong to the family of elements:

- epitome:

are representatives or perfect example of a type of person

- stereotype:

*are oversimplified and exaggerated characteristics which then
are applied to groups of people*

> *race*

> *nationality*

> *religion*

> *creed*

Symbols

(LWP: p. 134-135, 136)

A symbol is an image which acts as a representation of something else.

- The Venus of Willendorf and the cave drawings in Lascaux, France are early humanity's attempt at rationalizing a world. Numerous discussions are centered on the *function* or *artistic value* early people placed on these images.
- The act of creating of symbols is basically what separates humans from other animal species.



Symbols

- To take this to another level, an American literary theorist, Kenneth Burke, in a 1964 issue of *The Hudson Review*, defines humanity as: “the symbol using, making, and mis-using animal” (“Definition of Man”). In part, the article aims to clarify what metaphoric interpretations are developed in our species.

Keep in Mind:

- By analyzing plausible symbols in a story helps examine literature as a whole and brings closer understanding of how the canon works.
- In fiction, any image within a story can be argued as an intentional **or** subconscious symbol on the part of the author.
- The theories proposed in class have been developed over a number of years and are based on numerous resources, including material left behind by the original authors.

Symbols

Finding what a specific symbol represents to an individual writer *can* be argued many ways. Your personal interpretation can be valid if backed with evidence from the story or poem itself. Likewise, some authors intentionally use an image which can carry multiple meanings.

Even the images utilized within a “basic” children’s story like L. Frank Baum’s novel, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, can carry numerous interpretations.

The yellow brick road by itself is a plot device to move Dorothy on a journey across the plot. The exact meaning of the road is open for discussion.

- search for meaning in life
- good acts gain positive rewards
- perseverance in life leads to success

Allegory

- traditionally operates as a narrative which utilizes basic symbols
- the symbols are representations of abstract concepts, which in turn, are displayed as concrete images
 - > they cannot move beyond their defined role
 - > individually these symbols can only represent one idea, one element

For example:

If a personified allegory of Literature walked into this room, she would be limited in her discussions and interactions with the class. She could only discuss literary works as a whole, not sport scores, economic conditions, weather, or any other subject. Her participation would be restricted to her basic definition.

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Below is a typical gruesome situation from the Grimm brothers' version of "Little Snow-White" where the story closes with the death of the evil step-mother.

Then the wicked woman uttered a curse, and was so wretched, so utterly wretched, that she knew not what to do. At first she would not go to the wedding at all, but she had no peace, and must go to see the young Queen. And when she went in she knew Snow-white; and she stood still with rage and fear, and could not stir. But iron slippers had already been put upon the fire, and they were brought in with tongs, and set before her. Then she was forced to put on the red-hot shoes, and dance until she dropped down dead.

Grimm, Jacob and Wilhelm. "Little Snow-White." *Household Tales*. Margaret Hunt, trans. *Surlalunefairytales.com*. October 11, 2007. Web. 01/26/11.

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- pattern number of threes: three tasks, three wishes, three journeys