Literary Archetypes

Understanding the use of symbolism in writing
Questions to ask ...

What symbols are present in the literature?
What do they appear to represent?
What message does the author want communicated through their use?
What is an archetype?

- term used to describe **universal** symbols
- evoke deep/often unconscious responses in a reader
- symbolically embody basic human experiences,
- apply to ANY *time* and *place*
- 3 basic types in literature:
  - Situational, character, & symbolic
What are **ARCHETYPES**?

All cultures around the world use archetypes to build stories. (term coined by Carl Jung).
Recognizing Archetypes
Types of Archetypes

1 – Situational *
   - Ex – The Task, Quest, Initiation, Loss of Innocence

2 – Character
   - Ex – Helper, Scapegoat, Friendly Beast

3 – Symbolic
   - Ex – colors, shapes, water, numbers

* There are more situational archetypes.
Common Symbolic Archetypes

- Water
- Sun
- Colors
- Shapes
- Numbers
...a symbol of life, cleansing, and rebirth—represents the mystery of creation

Examples:

**Sea**—spiritual mystery and infinity; timelessness and eternity

**River**—death / rebirth (baptism), flowing of time into eternity, transitional phases of the life cycle
Sun

 Represents energy, creativity, thinking, enlightenment, wisdom, spiritual vision, the passing of time, and life

Examples:
Rising Sun — Birth and Creation, life, beginnings

Setting Sun — Death, endings, completion of a cycle
**COLORS**

- **White**—purity, innocence, death, terror, supernatural, blinding truth
- **Red**—love, sacrifice, hate, evil, anger, violent passion, sin, blood, disorder
- **Green**—birth / death, fertility, luck, hope, jealousy, decay, greed
- **Blue**—sadness, spiritual purity, truth, religious feelings of security
- **Black**—power, doom, death, darkness, mystery, primal wisdom, unconscious evil
SHAPES

- **Circle** (Sphere) — wholeness, unity
- **Egg** (Oval) — the mystery of life and the forces of regeneration
- **Triangle** (connections) Holy Trinity, the Chinese Triad, love triangles
Animals

- *Snake* (serpent, worm)—
  evil, corruption, sensuality, destruction, wisdom, temptation

- *Dark-colored bird* (raven, hawk)—
  death, hate, corruption

- *Light-colored bird* (dove)—
  peace, love, life

- *Pheonix, cathpillar*—
  transformation, change
Numbers

- **Three** (3) — represents unity, spiritual awareness, light, connections/relationships
- **Four** (4) — cycle of life, (earth, water, fire, air) nature
- **Seven** (7) — unity between 3 and 4, completion and perfect order
- **Twelve** (12) — Tribes of Israel, the Zodiac
- **Forty** (40) — Times of “trial” and seclusion (privacy)

http://www.dartmouth.edu/~matc/math5.geometry/unit4/unit4.html
Temptress, mother figures (earth mother, stepmother, fairy godmother), villain, hero, the mentor, the underdog, the ‘innocent’ one, the sacrificial redeemer.
Symbols are everywhere...
Look around to see what symbols are in your world.
...The End