

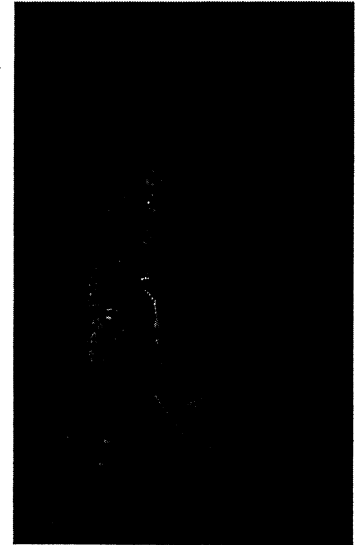
Character Archetypes in High Fantasy Literature

More than any other genre, Fantasy literature has many characteristics in common within its works, owing to the shared references of its authors throughout the years and the universal nature of its stories. The profound influence of J.R.R. Tolkien, (the 'father' of modern High Fantasy literature) is also a significant reason for the internal coherence of this literature.

Mythologists and folklorists have often noted the uncanny similarity of tales created from all over the globe. This is much the same within fantasy literature, which shares a small stock of infinitely varied and nuanced character and plot archetypes. Many theorists who study this kind of literature (beginning with folktales, to Arthurian literature, and up to the newest novels written by authors like Terry Goodkind and Robert Jordan) have noted the close similarities between fantasy's stock character types and the classical Jungian archetypes. Here is a selection:

The Hero/Heroine - After proving himself (usually by defeating a wild beast or completing a task) marries a princess, becomes king, knight, or warrior of the realm or village. A Heroine possesses unusual skills (often supernatural gifts) and takes on a special role in the kingdom or positions usually occupied by men in that society (spiritual leader, warrior, judge, etc.). He/she is often reared by foster parents, or is/becomes an outcast or outsider; or, this hero/heroine is spirited away and raised by strangers and later returns to his/her home as a stranger with new

solutions to the kingdom's problems. See Will Parry in Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy, an orphan who must journey from one world into another to help save his friends and find his father.



The Initiates - The hero or heroine, who prior to their quest, must endure some training or ceremony. The colours white (for purity and goodness) and black (for evil and death) are common symbols for these characters. For example, the 'Death Eaters' in J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series.

Parent-Child conflict - Tension often results from separation during childhood, from an external source when the individuals meet as adults, or where the mentor often has a higher place in the affections of the hero/heroine than the natural parent. Lyra Belacqua's relationship with her mother, the evil-filled Mrs. Coulter in Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy is a prime example.

Hunting group of companions - This band of loyal companions willing to face any number of perils in order to be together or achieve a common goal, the most obvious example being the cross-species 'fellowship of the ring' in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy.

Loyal retainers - Often called side-kicks, these individuals are somewhat like servants who are heroic themselves. Their duty is to protect the hero/heroine and reflect his/her nobility. See Hermione Granger and Ron Weasley in the Harry Potter series, and Samwise Gamgee of *The Lord of the Rings*.

Friendly Beast - These creatures aid or serve the hero/heroine and symbolize how nature is on the side of the hero/heroine. See Iorek Byrnison (an armored, sentient polar bear) in the *His Dark Materials* trilogy, and Buckbeak the hippogriff in the *Harry Potter* series.

The Devil Figure - this character is evil incarnate who offers worldly goods, fame or knowledge to the protagonist in exchange for possession of the soul or unbreakable fealty. See Lord Voldemort (leader of the Death Eaters and an evil, snake-like figure wielding immense power) in the *Harry Potter* series.

The Outcast - a figure who is banished from a social group for some crime (real or imagined) against society. The outcast usually wanders from place to place. See Sirius Black (an escapee from a wizard prison, wrongly accused of murder) in the *Harry Potter* series.

Creature of nightmare - A monster summoned from the darkest part of the human psyche to threaten the lives of the hero/heroine or is a perversion of the human body. See Balrog, (a giant demon made of fire which dwells in a chasm deep in the earth) which

must be overcome by the characters in the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, and the Dementors (ghoulish, skeletal creatures that feed on the soul) in the *Harry Potter* series.

Note how most of the archetypes can be covered by referencing characters from just three of the currently most popular fantasy series. These are not all the generally agreed-upon character types - there are many more which have been catalogued and described over the years. These correspondances continue far beyond the included works, covering most (if not all) works of fantasy literature. Although the Jungian or universal aspects of many of the above categories are contested by scholars, one cannot argue that the fantasy genre makes much use of them.

Example: <http://www.dansite.com/dansite/e3/>

