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## 25. The Archetypal Approach

(1930s–1940s)

- \* Archetypal Criticism marks the transition from New Criticism to Structuralism.
- \* He was the founding father of Archetypal criticism.
- \* Herman Northrop Frye was born in 1912 in Quebec, Canada.
- \* He was graduated from the University of Toronto.
- \* He eventually obtained his master's degree from Oxford.
- \* He taught English at the University of Toronto.
- \* Frye's Books:
  - *Fearful Symmetry (1947) (A Study of William Blake)*
  - *Anatomy of Criticism (1957)*
  - *Fables of Identity: Studies in Poetic Mythology (1963)*
  - *The Well-Tempered Critic (1963)*
  - *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature (1982)*
- \* Frye died in 1991.
- \* His 'Anatomy of Criticism' is a touch stone in Archetypal criticism.
- \* Among the prominent practitioners of various modes of **archetypal criticism**, in addition to Maud Bodkin, were G. Wilson Knight, Robert Graves, Philip Wheelwright, Richard Chase, Leslie Fiedler, and Joseph Campbell.

### Frye and Myth:

- \* For Frye '**Literature imitates total dream of man**'.
- \* Frye classifies the Literary Universe in to four categories and he calls them **mythoi**- corresponding to the four natural seasons.
- \* That is, plot forms, or organizing structural principles, correspondent to the four seasons in the cycle of the natural world, are incorporated in **the four major genres** of:
  - i) **Comedy (spring),**
  - ii) **Romance (summer),**
  - iii) **Tragedy (autumn), and**
  - iv) **Satire (winter).**

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- \* The central myth of literature is **the quest myth**.
- \* Frye has been himself called **a poetic myth-maker** and not a scientist.
- \* Myth gives significance to ritual.
- \* Acted part of myth is ritual.
- \* Spoken part of ritual is myth.
- \* For him, Literature is a **‘reservoir of potential values’**.
- \* Literature is a total order of words.
- \* Frye discusses the quest myth which comes from ritual of **‘Messiah myth’** (Grail myth).
- \* He, then, quotes from James Frazer’s *‘The Golden Bough’*.

**Apollonian and Dionysian:**

- \* Nietzsche in his book *‘The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music’* (1872) discusses the history of the tragic form and introduces an intellectual dichotomy between the Dionysian and the Apollonian.
- \* Nietzsche also argues that the tragedy of Ancient Greece was the highest form of art due to its mixture of both Apollonian and Dionysian elements into one seamless whole.
- \* Later, in her book titled *‘Patterns of Culture’* (1934) Ruth Benedict analyses two cultures namely **Apollonian Culture (Disciplined culture)** and **Dionysian Culture (undisciplined culture)**.
- \* She describes how, in ancient Greece, the worshipers of Apollo emphasized order and calm in their celebrations.
- \* In contrast, the worshipers of Dionysus, the god of wine, emphasized wildness.

**Archetype:**

- \* The term denotes **recurrent narrative designs, patterns of action, character types, themes, and images which are identifiable in a wide variety of works of literature, as well as in myths, dreams, and even social rituals**.
- \* These recurrent items are the result of universal patterns in the human psyche whose effective embodiment in literary work evokes a profound response from the attentive readers because he or she shares the psychic expressed the author.
- \* The death/rebirth theme was often said to be the archetype of archetypes.
- \* Carl Jung’s wrote the book *‘Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious’*(1934-1955)

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- \* He applied the term “archetype” to what he called “**primordial images,**” the “psychic residue” of repeated patterns of experience in our very ancient ancestors which, he maintained, survive in the “collective unconscious” of the human race and are expressed in myths, religion, dreams, and private fantasies, as well as in works of literature
- \* Carl Jung was a Swiss psychiatrist and psychoanalyst.
- \* The Contents of the ‘collective unconscious’ are the archetypes.

### Myth:

- \* A story or a complex of story elements or a perspective-an activity of the mind that synthesises received knowledge.
- \* Myths are the reflections of a **profound reality.**
- \* In Greek ‘Mythos’ signified any story or plot, true or invented.
- \* A myth is one story in a mythology- a system of hereditary stories of ancient origin which were believed to be true by a particular cultural group.
- \* Most myths are related to social rituals (ceremonies)
- \* But anthropologists disagree as to whether rituals generated myths or myths generated rituals.
- \* Myth – If protagonist is a supernatural being in a traditional story / hereditary story.
- \* Legend – If protagonist is a human being in a traditional story.
- \* Folk tale – Supernatural being who are not gods, the story is not a part of systematic mythology.

### Origin of Archetypal criticism:

(Social anthropology – To Psychoanalysis – To Literature criticism (Through Maud Bodkin) – To Frye developed)

- ❖ James G. Frazer’s ‘*The Golden Bough*’ in twelve volumes first published in 1890.
  - He was a Professor of Anthropology at Cambridge University.
  - He identified elemental patterns of myth and ritual that recur in the legends and ceremonial of diverse and far-flung cultures and religions.
  - He provided a complete survey of myth, rituals and religious practices.
  - It is called “encyclopaedia of the mythologies of the world.”

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- ❖ Carl Jung’s ‘*Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*’(1934-1955)
  - Collective unconscious, archetype, primordial images.
  
- ❖ Miss Maud Bodkin’s ‘*Archetypal Patterns in Poetry: Psychological Studies of Imagination.*’ (1934)
  - It is generally taken to be a major work in applying the theories of Carl Jung to literature.
  - It was a trailblazer in every sense.
  - Archetypal literary criticism was given impetus by Maud Bodkin.
  
- ❖ Northrop Frye’s ‘*Anatomy of Criticism*’ (1957), is a remarkable and influential book.
  - In this remarkable and influential book, Northrop Frye developed the archetypal approach—which he combined with the typological interpretation of the Bible and the conception of the imagination in the writings of the poet and painter William Blake.

### ***The Archetypes of Literature (1951)***

#### **Introduction:**

- Frye’s ‘*The Archetypes of Literature*’ was first published in 1951.
- It was then incorporated into his ‘*Anatomy of Criticism*’ (1957).
- Later it was included into his ‘*Fables of Identity: Studies in Poetic Mythology*’ (1963)
- In the essay “The Archetypes of Literature,” Frye critically evaluates literature within the framework of rituals and myths.
- The essay is divided into three parts.
  - The first elaborates the concept of archetypal criticism.
  - The second discusses the inductive method of textual analysis.
  - The third, the deductive method of analysis.

#### **Part 1: Archetypal Criticism:**

- Just as there are several ways to interpret literature, there are different approaches to literature and one among them is the archetypal approach.

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- The term archetype denotes an original idea or a pattern of something of which others are copies.
- The archetypal approach interprets a text on the basis of myths and rituals unique to a race, nation, indigenous or social group.
- Texts are studied, meanings are deciphered and messages are conveyed in the backdrop of myths and rituals.
- The impetus to the genesis and development of archetypal approach is the social anthropologist James Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, which studies magic, religion and myths of different races.
- Carl Jung, in his notion of "collective consciousness" states that a civilized man preserves the ideas, concepts and values of life cherished by his forefathers, and these ideas are manifested in the myths and rituals of the society or race.
- Writers and poets have employed myths in their works and critics analyze texts to unearth traces of "mythological patterns."
- Critical analysis of this kind of a text is called archetypal criticism.
- An example could be T.S. Eliot's "The Waste Land" that abounds in mythical patterns. In the present essay, Northrop Frye expounds an analysis of "mythical patterns", which writers have used.

### **The Two Types of Criticism and the Humanities:**

- Similar to science, literary criticism is a systematized and organized body of knowledge and just as science dissects nature to analyze it, literary criticism analyses and interprets literature.
- Unlike literature, literary criticism and its theories and techniques can be taught.
- Literature is to be understood and relished and literary criticism can be creative.
- **Literary criticism is of two types:**
  - **The significant and meaningful criticism, and**
  - **The meaningless criticism.**
- In contrast to meaningful criticism, a meaningless criticism would provide only background information of a work rather than develop a systematic structure of knowledge about a work of literature and hence distract the reader from literature.



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- Literature, interpolated by history and philosophy provide a pattern to comprehend literature.
- Philosophy and literature are the two major instruments to interpret literature and archetypal criticism partakes of both these branches of study.

**Formalistic and Historical Criticisms:**

- Several types of criticism remain commentaries on texts; however, certain other types of criticism focus entirely on the text without considering the extraneous factors.
- Such formalistic or structural criticism would help the readers to comprehend the text within a limited scope.
- The reader would understand the content and pattern of the text, but he may fail to apprehend the way the pattern evolved because of insufficient background information, which is provided by historical criticism.
- While structural criticism involves grasping the pattern of a text and historical criticism includes realizing the social backdrop of the text.
- A synthesis of structural and historical criticisms would prove beneficial to the reader and this is where archetypal criticism stands to gain.

**Science and Literary Criticism:**

- Science explores nature in all its dimensions.
- Physics examines matter and the natural forces that operate in the universe.
- The birth of physics is from “natural philosophy” and of sociology from “moral philosophy”.
- Physics and astronomy gained acceptance as branches of science during the Renaissance.
- Chemistry achieved the status of science in the eighteenth century, and Biology in the nineteenth century.
- The social sciences were introduced only in the twentieth century.
- Literary criticism, in contemporary times, is systematic in approach and analysis and hence could be considered a science.
- Within this framework, says Frye a work of literature may be critically or scientifically gauged. Structural criticism and historical criticism are discussed elaborately in the remaining parts of the essay.

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- Prosody is scientific in structure; so is phonetics; so is philology.
- In the centrifugal movement, one finds that literature is the central division of the “humanities”, flanked on one side by history and on the other by philosophy.
- *“Criticism, as a science, is totally intelligible; literature, as the subject of a science, is so far as we know an inexhaustible source of new critical discoveries.”*

### Part-II:

#### Inductive Method of Analysis: (Centripetal)

- Frye states that structural criticism would help the reader to understand a text and he decides to proceed inductively, that is analyze a text from the particular truths in a work, he would deduce general truths.
- Othello, in Shakespeare’s Othello, inflicts pain on himself due to jealousy, which leads to the general truth that jealousy is a destructive sentiment.
- This is inductive analysis under structural criticism. Frye elaborates this in detail in this section of the essay.
- It is important to maintain an objective stance while writing a text and an author cannot express his personal emotions or make comments that would interfere with the work.
- A critic looks out to see whether an author maintains objectivity. This is a type of psychological approach, where the author’s personal symbols, images and myths are incorporated in his works and the reader is able to identify them.
- The author at times may be aware of the myths, symbols and the other features he has used extensively in his works and the critic undertakes the effort to discover them.
- The inductive method of analysis can be explained with the help of the grave digger scene in Hamlet.
- In the foreground, the intricate verbal structure is evident from the puns of the first clown.
- It could be inferred that the literary anthropologist, in search of the source of the play *Hamlet* from the pre-Shakespeare play to Saxo and from Saxo to the nature myths is actually drawing closer to the archetypal form recreated by Shakespeare.
- *“For the archetype, we need a literary anthropologist.”*
- *The search for archetypes is a kind of literary anthropology.*

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**Historical Criticism and Inductive Analysis:**

- The critic who conducts historical criticism interprets a text as the outcome of the social and cultural demands of a society in a particular period of time.
- The work is seen as the product of the cultural and social fabric of the society.
- Both the structural and the historical criticisms are crucial for archetypal criticism but either of them independently fails to explain a work completely.
- A historical critic discovers common symbols and images used by different writers in their works, and concludes that there could be a common resource from which the writers have derived their symbols, images and myths.
- Mr Auden's brilliant essay '*The Enchanted Flood*' shows, an important symbol 'sea', an archetypal symbol of literature.
- The sea appears to be one of the most common symbols to be used by writers over the ages and therefore it could be considered an archetypal symbol.
- Apart from symbols, images and myths, even genres are archetypal in nature as illustrated by the genre of drama that originates from Greek religion.
- The historical inductive method explains not only the symbols, images and myths but also genres.

**Jung and the Collective Unconscious:**

- Symbols, images, rituals and myths, which originate from primitive myths, rituals, folklore and cultures are employed by writers in works, and the primitive factors lie buried in the "collective unconscious" which may otherwise be called "racial memory" of the people, says Jung.
- The writer, being a part of a race expresses myths, rituals, symbols and images that lie in his "unconscious" mind.
- Archetypal criticism uncovers such covert aspects in a text and under the reductive method of analysis, a critic progresses from the particular truth to the general one.
- A particular symbol or myth employed by the writer, proceeds to determine a general truth.
- This way, works of art are created over the years and literature is the gradual outcome of such endeavors.

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**Features of Archetypal Criticism:**

- A comprehensive term, archetypal criticism is the process of systematic organization of facts to interpret a text that is preceded by conscious effort by different categories of people at every stage.
- Those involved in the task are the editor to “clean up” the text; a rhetorician to analyse the narrative pace; a philologist to examine diction and significance of words; and a literary social historian to inquire into the evolution of myths and rituals.
- Archetypal criticism ensures the efforts of all these concerned faculties to analyze of a text hence archetypal criticism is of immense significance.
- When an archetypal study of Shakespeare’s Hamlet is made, the anthropologist traces the source of the drama to the legend of a Hamlet described by Saxo Grammaticus, a thirteenth century Danish historian in Danes, ‘*Gesta Danorum*’.
- Apart from this discovery, the source of the drama is also tracked down to nature myths, which were popular during the Norman Conquest.
- The role of the anthropologist is thus just threadbare where the analysis of the origins of Hamlet under archetypal criticism is concerned.

**Part – III:****Deductive Method of Analysis:**

- Under the deductive method of analysis, the critic proceeds to ascertain the meaning of a work from the general truth to the particular one.
- Literature could be compared to music and painting because just like music that carries rhythm as one of its principal characteristics, of music and painting, pattern, literature employs images, forms and words as realizations of rhythm and pattern.
- While rhythm in music is temporal and pattern in painting is spatial, in literature both rhythm and pattern are recurrences of both the temporal as well as the spatial dimensions.
- In literature, rhythm is equated to the narrative and the narrative presents events and episodes as a sequence to hasten action.
- Pattern, in literature is the verbal structure that conveys a meaning.
- To produce the desired artistic effect, a work of literature should comprise of rhythm, the narrative and pattern, besides the meaning.

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**Expression of Rhythm:**

- Nature maintains a natural cycle of rhythmic patterns that is evident as seasons namely summer spring, autumn and winter.
- All the species in nature maintain a rhythmic pattern that is evident in the periods of mating and this could be called a ritual.
- Rituals are not performed casually or at all times of the year but after certain intervals or gaps.
- Hence these cyclic patterns denote reproduction that is also a part of the cycles of the ecosystem.
- Activities like planting crops and harvesting them involve offering sacrifices to appease deities, which denote the facets of fertility and consummation of life.
- Man performs rituals voluntarily and they carry signification.
- Works of literature have their origin in such rituals and the critic discovers and explains them.

**Pattern in a Work:**

- Both pattern and rhythm are the major intrinsic aspects of a work.
- It has been mentioned earlier that pattern in literature refers to recurrent images, forms and words.
- Patterns originate from the writer's "epiphanic moments", which means that moments of inspiration govern the work or ideas of his work and he looks into the heart of things.
- Whatever is perceived by the writer is delivered as proverbs, riddles, commandments and etiological folktales, which carry the element of narrative and contribute to the writer's output.
- Myths may be used either deliberately or unconsciously as forms of perception and the critic exposes the inherent archetypes and myths and expounds the patterns in the work.

**Myth in Four Phases:**

- The narrative of a myth often centers on a figure that may be a God, a quasi-divine figure, a superhuman or a legendary character, and James Fraser and Carl Jung opine that they are pivotal to the narrative. Frye classifies myths into four categories:

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**1. Dawn, spring and birth phase.**

- These are myths related to the birth of a hero, his revival and resurrection, the defeat of the dark forces and death.
- The father and the mother, who are categorized as subordinate, are introduced in the myth.
- These myths are the archetypes of romance and ecstatic poetry.

**2. Zenith, summer and marriage or the triumphant phase.**

- These are myths of apotheosis, which is the act of being raised to the rank of God, the almighty, and includes sacred marriage and entry into Paradise.
- The subordinate characters in these myths are the companion and the bride.
- They represent the archetypes of comedy, pastoral and idyll.

**3. Sunset, autumn and death phase.**

- These myths signify the fall of a hero, a dying God, violent death, sacrifice and the hero's isolation.
- The subordinate characters are the traitor and the siren.
- Such myths are the archetypes of tragedy and elegy.

**4. Darkness, winter and desolation phase.**

- These are myths dealing with the triumph of the destructive powers.
- The myths of floods, the return of chaos and the defeat of the hero and Gotterdammerung myths are examples of this phase.
- The ogre and the witch are the subordinate characters.
- These myths are the archetypes of satire. For example, the conclusion of '*The Dunciad*'

**Myth-The Quest:**

- The myth of the quest is derived from the four types of myth and Frye explains the significance of this myth in the essay.
- The figure of the questing hero, who goes in search of truth, occurs in all religions.
- The quest for the Holy Grail in T.S. Eliot's "The Waste Land" is a famous example.

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- The critic would have to closely examine the scriptures to locate and interpret these texts.
- From the analysis of the archetypes of myths, a critic can embark on the study of genres and move further down to elucidate the text in terms of myth.
- This is referred to as the deductive method of analysis, wherein the critic moves from the general truth, which is the myth to the elucidation of the particular truth that explains the actual reason behind the character's behaviour in a text.
- In this way, a critic can analyze the formulation of a drama, a lyric or an epic from myths.
- Frye adds that many genres in every literature have evolved from the quest-myth.
- It is the duty of the critic to analyze myths and establish the integral meaning or essential message of a work.

### **Similarities between Literary Criticism and Religion:**

- A literary critic considers God an archetype of a man who is pictured as a hero in a work.
- Paradise Lost or The Bible has God as the central character and the critic considers God a human character.
- Literary criticism and religion share certain affinities.
- Criticism as well as religion is unique in that while criticism deals with probability or assumption, religion associates with what appears to be and not the actuality of things.
- Literary criticism and science are centered on what is conceivable.
- Hence, scientific actuality is replaced by what is conceived.
- This means that a certain epiphany is at work, which is a revelation of God or truth.
- The epiphany is a profound insight that originates from the subconscious, just as dreams do.
- Waking and dreaming are two antithetical factors that also cause epiphany.
- During the day man develops fear and frustration, and at night his libido, the strong force of life, awakens and he attempts at resolving the crisis.
- It is the antithesis, which resolves the problems and misunderstandings of man and makes him perceive truth both in religion and literary criticism.

### **The Comic and the Tragic Visions of Myth:**

- Both art and religion are similar in that they aim for perfection.

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- Perfection in art can be achieved through dreams or imagination and in religion, through visualization.
- The analyses of perfection in literary criticism by the critic are through an examination of the comic and tragic visions of life in a work.
- The central pattern of the comic vision and the tragic vision in a myth is explained as:
  - 1) In the comic vision of life in a myth, the “human” world is presented as a community, or a hero is portrayed as a representative of the desires of the reader. Symposium, communion, order, friendship, and love archetypes of images are the archetypes. Marriage or consummation belongs to the comic vision of life. In the tragic vision of life, in the “human” world, there is tyranny or anarchy, or an individual or an isolated man, or a leader with his back to his followers or a bullying giant of romance, or a deserted or betrayed hero. In addition to these, the presence of a harlot or a witch or other varieties of Jung’s “terrible mother” is visible.
  - 2) In the comic vision of life in a myth, the “animal” world is presented as a community of domesticated animals, usually a flock of sheep, or a lamb, or one of the gentler birds like a dove. The archetypes of images are pastoral images. In the tragic vision of life, in the “animal” world there are beasts, birds of prey, wolves, vultures, serpents, dragons and so on.
  - 3) In the comic vision of life, in the “vegetable” world of a myth, there is a garden, a grove or park, or a tree of life, or a rose or lotus. The examples of the archetypes of Arcadian images are Marvell’s green world and Shakespeare’s forest comedies. In the tragic vision of life, in the “vegetable” world of a myth, there is a sinister forest like the one in Milton’s Camus or at the opening of Dante’s Inferno, or a heath or wilderness, or a tree of death.
  - 4) In the comic vision of life, in the “mineral” world of a myth, there is a city, or one building or temple, or one stone, normally a glowing precious stone. These are presented as luminous or fiery. The example of the archetype of image is a “starlit dome.” In the tragic vision of life, the “mineral” world of a myth is seen in terms of deserts, rocks and ruins, or of geometrical images like the cross.
  - 5) In the comic vision of life, in the “unformed” world of a myth, there is a river, traditionally fourfold, which influenced the Renaissance image of the temperate body with its four humours. In the tragic vision of life, this world usually becomes the sea, as the narrative myth of dissolution is so often a flood myth. The combination of the sea and beast images gives us the Leviathan and similar water-borne monsters.



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- ◆ The above discussion is followed by Frye’s observation of W.B. Yeats’ “Sailing to Byzantium” as the perfect example of the comic vision, which is represented by the city, the tree, the bird, the community of sages, the geometrical gyre and the detachment from the cycles of birth and death in the poem. It is either a tragic or a comic vision of life, which determines the interpretation of a symbol or myth.

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