Archetypal Symbols

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What Are Archetypes?

Archetypes are universal symbols. They have a shared similar meaning in all cultures all over the world through all times.
Archetypal Images (1)

A. Images

1. Water: the mystery of creation; birth-death-resurrection; purification and redemption; fertility and growth. According to Jung, water is also the commonest symbol for the unconscious.
   a. The sea: the mother of all life; spiritual mystery and infinity; death and rebirth; timelessness and eternity; the unconscious.
   b. Rivers: death and rebirth (baptism); the flowing of time into eternity; transitional phases of the life cycle; incarnations of deities.

2. Sun (fire and sky are closely related): creative energy; law in nature; consciousness (thinking, enlightenment, wisdom, spiritual vision); father principle (moon and earth tend to be associated with female or mother principle); passage of time and life.
   a. Rising sun: birth; creation; enlightenment.
   b. Setting sun: death.
3. Colors

a. Red: blood, sacrifice, violent passion; disorder.
b. Green: growth; sensation; hope; fertility; in negative context may be associated with death and decay.
c. Blue: usually highly positive, associated with truth, religious feeling, security, spiritual purity (the color of the Great Mother or Holy Mother).
d. Black (darkness): chaos, mystery, the unknown; death; primal wisdom; the unconscious; evil; melancholy.
e. White: highly multivalent, signifying, in its positive aspects, light, purity, innocence, and timelessness; in its negative aspects, death, terror, the supernatural, and the blinding truth of an inscrutable cosmic mystery (see, for
b. Egg (oval): the mystery of life and the forces of generation.
c. Yang-yin: a Chinese symbol (below) representing the union of the opposite forces of the yang (masculine principle, light, activity, the conscious mind) and the yin (female principle, darkness, passivity, the unconscious).
d. Ouroboros: the ancient symbol of the snake biting its own tail, signifying the eternal cycle of life, primordial unconsciousness, the unity of opposing forces (cf. yang-yin).

5. Serpent (snake, worm): symbol of energy and pure force (cf. libido); evil, corruption, sensuality; destruction; mystery; wisdom; the unconscious.

6. Numbers:
   a. Three: light; spiritual awareness and unity (cf. the Holy Trinity); the male principle.
   b. Four: associated with the circle, life cycle, four seasons; female principle, earth, nature; four elements (earth, air, fire, water).
   c. Five: signifying integration, the four limbs and the head that controls them; the four cardinal points plus the center.
   d. Seven: the most potent of all symbolic numbers—signifying the union of three and four, the completion of a cycle, perfect order.
11. Garden: paradise; innocence; unspoiled beauty (especially feminine); fertility.

12. Tree: “In its most general sense, the symbolism of the tree denotes life of the cosmos: its consistence, growth, proliferation, generative and regenerative processes. It stands for inexhaustible life, and is therefore equivalent to a symbol of immortality” (Cirlot 328; cf. the depiction of the cross of redemption as the tree of life in Christian iconography).

13. Desert: spiritual aridity; death; nihilism, hopelessness.

14. Mountain: aspiration and inspiration; meditation and spiritual elevation. “The mountain stands for the goal of the pilgrimage and ascent, hence it often has the psychological meaning of the self” (Jung, Archetypes 219n).
7. The archetypal woman (Great Mother—the mysteries of life, death, transformation); the female principle associated with the moon):

a. The Good Mother (positive aspects of the Earth Mother): associated with the life principle, birth, warmth, nourishment, protection, fertility, growth, abundance (for example, Demeter, Ceres).

b. The Terrible Mother (including the negative aspects of the Earth Mother): the witch, sorceress, siren, whore, lamia, femme fatale—associated with sensuality, sexual orgies, fear, danger, darkness, dismemberment, emasculation, death; the unconscious in its terrifying aspects.

c. The Soul Mate: the Sophia figure, Holy Mother, the princess or “beautiful lady”—incarnation of inspiration and spiritual fulfillment (cf. the Jungian anima).
With Regards,
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