Mythological/Archetypal Approach Applied to Romeo and Juliet

**Group Members:**

1. __________________________
2. __________________________
3. __________________________
4. __________________________
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7. __________________________
8. __________________________

**Process**

1. Read through the objectives, Notes, Essential Questions, and Points of Study
2. Your main group will be divided into two smaller groups: Group A and Group B. Each group will complete a portion of Activity 1.
3. The groups will be rearranged to share responses from Activity 1.
4. In your new groups, you will respond to a new set of questions.
5. You will return to your Groups A and B and complete a portion of Activity 2.
6. The groups will be rearranged to share responses from Activity 2.
7. The group will meet as a whole to work together on a group presentation of the Mythological/Archetypal Approach Applied to Romeo and Juliet for the class.
8. Each member of the group will complete a written essay.
**Objectives: Students will be able to**

- Examine Romeo as archetypal hero and/or outcast
- Examine Juliet as an archetypal hero and/or outcast
- Recognize celestial bodies, the garden, and Romeo and Juliet’s suicide as mythological archetypes
- Examine Romeo and Juliet’s redemptive sacrifice for the advancement of unity among the citizens of Verona

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**Notes on the Mythological/Archetypal Approach**

Mythological, archetypal, and psychological criticism are all very closely interrelated. This is because Freud formulated many theories around the idea of the social archetype, and his pupil, Carl Jung, expanded and refined Freud’s theories into a more cross-cultural philosophy.

Critics who read texts with the mythological/archetypal approach are looking for symbols. Jung said that an archetype is “a figure...that repeats itself in the course of history wherever creative fantasy is fully manifested” (“The Problem of Types in Poetry” 1923). He believed that human beings were born innately knowing certain archetypes. The evidence of this, Jung claimed, lies in the fact that some myths are repeated throughout history in cultures and eras that could not possibly have had any contact with one another. Many stories in Greek and Roman mythology have counterparts in Chinese and Celtic mythology (long before the Greek and Roman Empires spread to Asia and northern Europe). Most of the myths and symbols represent ideas that human beings could not otherwise explain (the origins of life, what happens after death, etc.). Every culture has a creation story, a life after death belief, and a reason for human failings, and these stories—when studied comparatively—are far more similar than different.

When reading a work looking for archetypes or myths, critics look for very general recurring themes, characters, and situations. In modern times, the same types of archetypes are used in film, which is why it has been so easy for filmmakers to take a work like Jane Austen’s Emma and adapt it into the typical Hollywood film Clueless. By drawing on those feelings, thoughts, concerns, and issues that have been a part of the human condition in every generation, modern authors allow readers to know the characters in a work with little or no explanation. Imagine how cluttered stories would be if the author had to give every detail about every single minor character that entered the work!

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**Essential Questions for a Mythological/Archetypal Reading**

1. Examine all of the characters—major and minor—and their situations. What archetypes seem to be present?
2. How do any of the characters change over time? What events or people make them change?
3. What is suggesting in the setting (time of day, season of year, location—garden, body of water, etc.) that might suggest an archetypal reading?
4. What types of symbols are used? What do they represent?
5. How are the symbols in this work different in any way from the traditional use of that symbol? What is significant about this difference?
6. What myths are at work in different parts of this work? What features of the story are reminiscent of other stories you know?
**Three main points of study:**

1. **Archetypal characters**—
   - The **HERO**: a figure, larger than life, whose search for self-identity and/or self-fulfillment results in his own destruction (often accompanied by the destruction of the general society around him). In this aftermath of the death of the hero, however, is progress toward some ideal. While this applies to modern superheroes such as Superman (Clark Kent searching for the balance between his super self and his mortal self), it also applies to the Christian faith’s Jesus Christ (a mortal man who comes to terms with his destiny as the Messiah) and thousands of other literary and religious figures throughout history.
   - The **SCAPEGOAT**: an innocent character on whom a situation is blamed—or who assumes the blame for a situation—and is punished in place of the truly guilty party, thus removing from the culprit and society.
   - The **LONER or OUTCAST**: a character who is separated from (or separates him or herself from) society due to a physical impairment or an emotional or psychological realization that makes this character different. Jesus goes into the desert to discern his destiny; Buddha leaves society to come to terms with his philosophy. Victor Frankenstein travels to remote locales to avoid people when he realizes that he has created a monster. Often the Hero is an outcast at some point in his or her story.
   - The **TEMPTRESS**: the female who possesses what the male desires and uses his desire as a means to his ultimate destruction. Examples are Eve, Juliet, Lady Macbeth.
   - The **EARTH MOTHER/GODDESS**: Mother Nature, Mother Earth, the nurturing, life-giving aspect of femininity.
   - The **SPIRIT or INTELLECT**: the often-unidentified feminine inspiration for works of art and literature. Examples would be Dante’s Beatrice, Shakespeare’s Dark Lady, etc.

2. **Archetypal images**—
   - **COLORS**: red as blood, anger, passion, violence; gold as greatness, value, wealth; green as fertility, luxury, growth; blue (the color of the sky) as God-life holiness, peace, serenity; white as purity; etc.
   - **NUMBERS**: three for the Christian trinity; four for the four seasons, the four ancient elements (earth, water, fire, air); twelve for the months of the solar year, etc.
   - **WATER**: the source of life and sustenance; cleansing or purification; baptism.
   - **GARDENS**: natural abundance; easy, beautiful life; new birth, hope; Eden, the original Paradise from which humankind was expelled.
   - **GEOMETRIC SHAPES**: a triangle for the trinity; a circle for perfection and eternity, wholeness, union.
   - **CELESTIAL BODIES**: the sun (masculine) is both the giver and the destroyer of life; the moon (feminine) marks the passage of time and controls the course of human events. Seedtime, harvest, etc., are all determined more by the phases of the moon than the phases of the sun.
   - **YIN AND YANG**: any scheme that suggests that each of a pair of opposites partakes of the other’s nature, complements the other, and essentially completes the other; without it the world would erupt into chaos.

3. **Archetypal situations**—
   - The **QUEST**: the hero’s endeavor to establish his or her identity or fulfill his or her destiny
   - The **RENEWAL OF LIFE**: death and rebirth, resurrection as seen in the cycle of the seasons, the phases of the day, sleeping and waking. Examples are “Sleeping Beauty,” “The Secret Garden,” etc.
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- **INITIATION**: coming of age, rites of passage. Some examples would be the first hunt, weddings, teenage angst films.
- **THE FALL**: any event that marks a loss of innocence, a devolution from a paradisiacal life and viewpoint to a tainted one.
- **REDEMPTIVE SACRIFICE**: any voluntary loss, especially a loss of life, that results in another’s gaining or regaining a desired state.
## Activity One: Examining Romeo and Juliet as Archetypal Heroes

**Group A: Romeo**

Answer the following questions in their entirety with your group members. Record your responses neatly.

1. Does Romeo stand apart from his social equals (Mercutio, Benvolio) in the text? If yes, how?
   
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   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
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2. Given Romeo’s passion for Rosaline when we first meet him followed by his sudden and deep love for Juliet, what can be inferred about Romeo’s need *not* to be isolated or alienated?
   
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3. How does Romeo’s quest for love mirror his quest for self-identity or self-fulfillment?
   
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4. What can be inferred from Romeo’s apparent willingness to help heal the feud between the Capulet and Montague families?
   
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5. How significant is Romeo’s exile from Verona?
   
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6. What progress does Romeo’s death bring to the society in which he lives?
   
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7. How does society reflect on Romeo’s life and death?
   
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## Group B: Juliet

**Answer the following questions in their entirety with your group members. Record your responses neatly.**

1. What differentiates Juliet’s character from other female characters in the play? Specifically, what sets Juliet apart from her social equal, Rosaline?

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   __________________________________________________________

2. Is Juliet focused on finding an idealized, reciprocated love relationship? Why or why not?

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3. To what extent does Juliet’s quest for love mirror her quest for self-identity or self-fulfillment?

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4. What can be inferred from Juliet’s apparent willingness to help heal the feud between the Capulet and Montague families?

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5. What progress does her death bring to the society in which she lives?

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6. How does society reflect on Juliet’s life and death?

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Jigsaw
Step One: discuss your analysis of Romeo or Juliet depending on which character your group was assigned to.

Step Two: record your discussion of the following questions.

1. To what extent are Romeo’s and Juliet’s deaths foreshadowed throughout the play? Does this foreshadowing lend a sense of inevitability to the final scene?

2. What can be inferred from the fact that Romeo and Juliet’s relationship culminates in the lovers’ deaths and the fact that the society of Verona is changed as a result?

3. What elements in the play turn Romeo and Juliet into outcasts? Why is it necessary for the two lovers to become outcasts in order to become mythological hero figures?

4. Seen from this archetypal view, what is this play about?
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#### Romeo and Juliet Archetypal Group A Worksheet

In the spaces below, cite the Act and Scene in which your character’s words and/or actions fulfill one of the following criteria of the archetypal hero. (Note: find and cite as much evidence as you can. Do not merely cite the first one or two instances.) Briefly describe each action or quote the character’s line. If a particular criterion is not met after a thorough search of the text, write “not met” in the space.

**Character name:** ____________________________________

#### The Hero

1. **A figure, larger than life**
   
2. **Whose search for self-identity and/or self-fulfillment**
   
3. **Results in his (or her) own destruction**
   
4. **(often accompanied by the destruction of the general society around him or her).**
   
5. **In the aftermath of the death of the hero, however, is progress toward some ideal.**

#### The Loner or Outcast

1. **A character who is separated from (or separates him or herself from) society**
   
2. **Due to a physical impairment or an emotional or psychological realization**
   
3. **That makes this character different**
   
4. **Often the hero is an outcast at some point in his or her story**
**Romeo and Juliet Archetypal Group B Worksheet**

1. Directions: in your group complete the worksheet, considering especially the following:
   a. The Chorus’ warning about the fate of “star-cross’d lovers” in the PROLOGUE.
   b. Romeo’s premonition that “some consequence” is “yet hanging in the stars” in Act 1, Scene 4.
   c. Romeo’s claim that “Juliet is the sun” in Act 2, Scene II.
   d. Romeo’s killing of Tybalt and his action’s consequences in Act 3, Scene I.
   e. Romeo’s heroic endeavor to “o’erperch these walls” in order to enter the Capulet garden in Act 2, Scene II.
   f. The meeting between Romeo and Juliet taking place during a “love-performing night” in the Capulet garden in Act 3, Scene II.
   g. Romeo’s and Juliet’s death in Act 5, Scene III.

In the spaces below, cite the Act and scene in which the following places or situations play a role in the action of the play. (Note: if a particular archetypal meaning is not found, they do not all need to apply in order for an archetypal reading to be valid, write “not found” in the space.) Briefly describe each instance, examining what the place or situation contributes to the plot or meaning of the play, and how, looked at from the archetypal viewpoint, the meaning of the play changes.

**Gardens**

1. Natural abundance

2. Easy, beautiful life

3. New birth, hope

4. Eden, the original Paradise from which humankind was expelled

**Celestial Bodies**

5. The sun (masculine) is both the giver and destroyer of life

6. The moon (feminine) marks the passage of time and controls the course of human events

**The Fall**

7. Any event that marks the loss of innocence, a devolution from a paradisiacal life and viewpoint to a tainted one
**Group Presentation**

Directions: answer the following questions in your group. After you have discussed them in length, collaborate on a presentation in which you introduce the mythological/archetypal approach to analyzing Romeo and Juliet, and present your findings to the questions below to the rest of the class. Each member of your group is required to present some portion of the discussion. Consider in what ways you can make the information visually attractive on a poster.

1. Summarize the mythological/archetypal approach to analyzing Romeo and Juliet.
2. To what extent does the relationship between Romeo and Juliet exemplify an idealized romantic bond between two lovers?
3. What characteristics in Romeo lead to his fall and eventual death as the hero?
4. How do the desires, fears, and hopes expressed by Romeo and Juliet represent the desires, fears, and hopes experienced by every human being?
5. Is the story of Romeo and Juliet a universal reference point or merely a story of love between unique individuals?

**Writing Assignments**

Directions: choose one of the following essay prompts to respond to with a well-written, fully developed five paragraph essay that introduces your topic in the introduction, presents and thesis, and develops the thesis using relevant evidence cited from the text.

1. Analyze Romeo’s and Juliet’s roles in the play as their hero’s quest. Consider their quests’ goals and ultimate outcome(s). Be sure to support all your assertions with specific references from the text.
2. Compare and contrast Romeo and Juliet with other “classic” love stories (books, stories, movies) that perpetuate the images of idealized love. Consider whether or not the lovers in other stories also have to sacrifice their love and lives in order to better the world around them. Books or movies to consider might include King Kong, Casablanca, A Streetcar Named Desire, Wuthering Heights, Pride and Prejudice, The Hunchback of Notre Dame, etc.
3. In Act I, Scene 3, Romeo exclaims “I fear, too early, for my mind misgives some consequences yet hanging in the stars shall bitterly begin in this fearful date.” Discuss the extent to which fate and the stars contribute to or detract from the impact of Romeo and Juliet as heroes.
4. After Romeo’s and Juliet’s deaths, Montague states, “I will [raise] her statue in pure gold, that whiles Verona by that name is known, there shall no figure at such rate be set as that of true and faithful Juliet.” Capulet responds by promising that “As rich shall Romeo’s by his lady’s lie, poor sacrifices for our enmity!” Write an essay in which you discuss the almost-mythological level that Romeo and Juliet has attained.