

# ADVANCED PLACEMENT WORLD LITERATURE

## NORTHROP FRYE'S THEORY OF ARCHETYPES

### Summer: Romance

#### Introduction

Tales from this mythos are marked by extraordinarily persistent nostalgia, and a search for some kind of imaginative golden age in time or space. These stories typically have virtuous heroes and beautiful heroines who represent ideals and villains that threaten their ascendancy.

#### Plot

The common plot is a basic quest sequence:

- Struggle: perilous journey and minor adventures
- Ritual death: crucial struggle, usually a battle in which either the hero or his foe, or both, must die
- Recognition: the exaltation of the hero

Often the hero will disappear after the ritual death and will reappear for the final stage.

More specifically the tale begins with a land that is ruled by a helpless old king being laid to waste by a dragon. Young people are offered up until the king's daughter is to be sacrificed; then the hero arrives, kills the dragon, marries the king's daughter, and ascends to throne.

#### Characters

In romance the reader's values are bound up with hero who unequivocally represents what is supposed to be right and virtuous. If the tale rises to the level of myth, the hero will show signs of divinity and the enemy will have demonic qualities.

##### Hero from upper world

spring, dawn, order, fertility,  
vigor, youth



Battle in our world



##### Enemy from lower world

winter, darkness, confusion,  
sterility, moribund life, old age

#### Eiron

- hero: an unequivocally right and virtuous character
- old wise man: often a magician who effects action
- sybilline: often the lady for whose sake or at whose bidding the quest is performed

#### Alazon

- enemy: in religious tales this character may take the form of a horrible monster that represents different ideas of Satan; in a secular story, the enemy may be guarding a hoard of gold, which may represent power and wisdom

#### Bomolochoi

- spirits of nature (shy nymph, elusive half-wild creatures, wild man): elude moral antithesis because they are partly of the moral neutrality of the world or partly of the world of mystery that is never seen; these characters intensify and focus the romantic mood

*Many characters that are on the virtuous side in romance have a counterpart: the hero's helper is balanced by the traitor; the heroine, by siren or beautiful witch; and the dragon, by helpful animals. Not all of these characters or even complete pairs of characters need to appear in every tale.*

## **Traits**

Dialectic structure resists subtlety and complexity: characters are either for or against the quest: those who assist are gallant or pure; those who obstruct are villainous or cowardly.

Jung (dream terms): quest-romance is search of libido or desire of self-fulfillment that will deliver it from the anxieties of reality; antagonists are sinister figures, giants, ogres, witches and magicians of parental origin

Frazer (ritual terms): quest-romance signifies fertility (food and drink, bread and wine, body and blood, union of male and female) over wasteland

## **Phases of Romance**

1. Complete innocence: These stories often relate to the birth of the hero, an event which is commonly associated with a flood or water imagery; it is common to have a hero locked in a chest, symbolizing that fertility and youth is the real wealth
2. Youthful innocence of inexperience: This phase usually presents a pastoral world, a generally pleasant wooded landscape with glades, shaded valleys, and murmuring brooks; the story tends to center on a youthful hero, still overshadowed by parents and surrounded by youthful companions
3. Completion of an ideal: This is the typical quest where the hero sets out on an adventure to destroy the monster and evil and return goodness and fertility to the land
4. Happy society resists change: The hero's society, which is innocent, is assaulted by an enemy, which is experience, but it withstands and survives the assault; this is often seen in a moral allegory or morality play; it may be a society or the individual that needs to be defended
5. Reflective or idyllic view: Here experience and adventure is contemplated, a similar world as that in the second phase is present, but with a knowledge of experience that did not previously exist
6. Society ceases to exist beyond contemplation: These are tales often told in quotation marks by one individual to a small group; there is a coziness to this type of tale as it is free from confrontation and has a relaxed and entertaining tone