

The Appearance of Archetypes in Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass*

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Abstract

This study looks at what insights could be gained about the archetypes (images, color, characters) represented in Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass* (1871) by analyzing these archetypes from the perspective of Carl Jung (1875-1961), an important figure in the field of psychoanalysis and an understudied theorist in the psychological scholarship written about Carroll's works. Jung's concepts of archetypes and the collective unconscious in particular offer a fruitful way to interpret Carroll's work. Using a Jungian psychological perspective, this paper argues that archetypes of water, the quest, the trickster, and the wise old man are present in this story, and then outlines their ultimate purpose. *Through the Looking-Glass* is a timeless tale that many scholars throughout history have analyzed in a variety of ways. As of today, there are over 200 scholarly articles on Carroll's works. Some scholars have researched the publication and/or translation history of Carroll's works, about which there is vast information. Many scholars have gone with the New Historicist approach, the most popular approach by far when it comes to Carroll's works. Other scholars combine the New Historicist and psychological approaches or research Carroll's works from a philosophical approach. Additionally, scholars analyze Carroll's works from a psychological stance, the second most common approach. Though the psychological approach is a fairly common one, most scholars have chosen to emphasize Sigmund Freud's theories instead of Jung's. There are very few scholarly studies on Carroll's works that employ a Jungian approach. Thus, this essay enhances the psychological scholarship on the novel. More specifically, it illustrates how Jung's take on Depth Psychology, a branch of psychology that explores the unconscious, plays into Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass*.

Keywords: Lewis Carroll, Archetypes, Carl Jung

1. Body of Paper

Through the Looking-Glass (1871) by Lewis Carroll is a classic, much loved story filled with many unusual characters and nonsensical situations. This story is always one of children's favorites, and they never get tired of reading it, even if they don't always understand it. Adults, in turn, are still entranced with this story and often still unable to make sense of it fully. Analyzing this book from a psychological stance allows readers to delve into Carroll's psyche to explore the meanings of certain characters and concepts in his stories and how he potentially came up with them. Carl Jung's concepts of archetypes and the collective unconscious in particular offer a fruitful way to interpret Carroll's work. Furthermore, Jungian analysis of Carroll's works is a field of study that has gotten little to no attention. Most scholars analyzing Carroll's stories from a psychological perspective have gone with a Freudian approach. Using a Jungian psychological perspective, this essay will argue that archetypes of water, the quest, the trickster, and the wise old man are present in this story and then outline their ultimate purpose.

Through the Looking-Glass is a timeless tale that many scholars throughout history have analyzed in a variety of ways. As of today, there are over 200 scholarly articles on Carroll's works. Some scholars, such as Zoe Jaques and Eugene Giddens, have researched the publication and/or translation history of Carroll's works, about which there is vast information. Many scholars have gone with the New Historicist approach, the most popular approach by far when it comes to Carroll's works. Scholars who have used this approach include Nina Auerbach, Bernard Patten, Robert Douglas-Fairhurst, Jenny Woolf, Francis Huxley, and Laura Mooneyham White, to name a few. Stephanie Schatz combines the New Historicist and Psychological approaches. Richard Brian Davis and William Irwin research Carroll's works from a philosophical approach. Other scholars, such as Daphne Marie Shafer, Murray Stein, and Karen Elias, decided to analyze Carroll's works from a psychological stance, the second most common approach. Though the psychological approach is a fairly common one, most scholars have chosen to emphasize Freud's theories instead of Jung's. There are very few scholarly studies on Carroll's works that employ a Jungian approach. Other important scholars that are referenced in the research of this essay include William Sharpe and Heather Henderson, Ann Dobie, Donald Gray, and, of course, Carl Jung. Despite the enormous amount of scholarly research that has already been published, Carroll's works continue to be a popular subject for further study.

Before going into the numerous archetypes found throughout *Through the Looking-Glass*, it is necessary to introduce Carl Jung and his theory of archetypes. Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961) was a "Swiss physician, psychiatrist, and philosopher."³ A once favored student of Freud, Jung took what he learned from his mentor and developed it in new ways which made him an important figure in the field of psychoanalysis.³ Much like Freud, Jung believed that the unconscious mind held the key to understanding human behavior. However, unlike his mentor, "Jung asserted that some of our unconscious is shared with all other members of the human species."³ These shared components are known as archetypes, and they are found in the collective unconscious.

Again, before explaining what exactly an archetype is, it is important to understand their origin. According to Jung, "The collective unconscious is a part of the psyche which can be negatively distinguished from a personal unconscious by the fact that it does not, like the latter, owe its existence to personal experience and consequently is not a personal acquisition."¹⁰ He continues, "the contents of the collective unconscious have never been in consciousness, and therefore have never been individually acquired, but owe their existence exclusively to heredity."¹⁰ Ann Dobie, in her book *Theory into Practice*, explains the concept of the collective unconscious as "describ[ing] the human psyche as having three parts; a personal conscious, a state of awareness of the present moment that, once it is past, becomes part of the individual's unique personal unconscious. Beneath both of these is the collective unconscious, a storehouse of knowledge, experiences, and images of the human race."³

Now that a better understanding of where archetypes come from has been established, the archetypes can now be defined in detail. In his book *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, Jung said, "So far as the collective unconscious contents are concerned we are dealing with archaic or- I would say- primordial types, that is, with universal images that have existed since the remotest times."¹⁰ He goes on to say that "The archetype is essentially an unconscious content that is altered by becoming conscious and by being perceived, and it takes its colour from the individual consciousness in which it happens to appear."¹⁰ Dobie describes archetypes as "recognizable by the appearance of nearly identical images and patterns – found in rituals, characters, or entire narratives – they predispose individuals from wholly different cultures and backgrounds to respond in a particular way, regardless of when or where they live."³ Archetypes can be found and studied in all forms of literature if one just looks closely enough.

According to Jung, "water is the commonest symbol for the unconscious. The lake in the valley is the unconscious, which lies, as it were, underneath the consciousness, so that it is often referred to as the 'subconscious,' usually with the pejorative connotation of an inferior consciousness."¹⁰ Dobie explains that water is a common image among the archetypes, and "water is often used as a creation, birth, or rebirth symbol, as in Christian baptism. Flowing water can refer to the passage of time. In contrast, the desert or lack of water suggests a spiritually barren state."³ I will argue that the water archetype in Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass* can be said to refer to the passage of time.

The symbol of water is very important in this story, as it appears in some form in nearly every chapter right before a dramatic shift in the scene or plot happens. The water is almost always flowing or moving in some fashion, which indicates that a time change is occurring. Carroll emphasizes the shift taking place in this story by physically including a series of asterisks right as Alice crosses the water and the scene changes. The shifts in time happen as Alice crosses from one square into the next as she maneuvers through the chessboard environment to get to the Eighth Square so she can become a queen. The first example of the water archetype displaying a passing of time is shown in the third chapter: "Looking-Glass Insects." In the beginning of this chapter, Alice is determined to get into the Third Square: "She ran down the hill, and jumped over the first of the six little brooks."² Asterisks appear and the story immediately shifts to a new time and place that now has Alice riding on a train facing the dilemma of not having a ticket to ride. As Alice crosses the water, time passes and she finds herself in a new environment inside a new square.

Another example of the water archetype appearing and showing the passage of time is later in the third chapter while Alice is still on the train. The train is about to jump over a brook so the passengers can get into the Fourth Square: “In another moment she felt the carriage rise straight up into the air, and in her fright she caught at the thing nearest to her hand, which happened to be the Goat’s beard. [asterisks appear] But the beard seemed to melt away as she touched it, and she found herself sitting quietly under a tree- while the Gnat (for that was the insect she had been talking to) was balancing itself on a twig just over her head, and fanning her with its wings.”² Time has passed once again as Alice crosses a flowing body of water into another square.

Perhaps one of the most dramatic examples of the water archetype and passing time is at the end of the seventh chapter: “The Lion and the Unicorn.” Right before the shift happens, Alice is watching the Lion and the Unicorn fight over plum-cake. As the two creatures are fighting, drums begin to pound:

Where the noise came from, she couldn’t make out: the air seemed full of it, and it rang through and through her head till she felt quite deafened. She started to her feet and sprang across the [asterisks appear] little brook in her terror, and had just time to see the Lion and the Unicorn rise to their feet, with angry looks at being interrupted in their feast, before she dropped to her knees, and put her hands over her ears, vainly trying to shut out the dreadful uproar.²

This scene serves as one of the most dramatic examples of time passing, because in this instance, time passes differently than it has thus far in the story. Normally, a shift in time and scene takes place immediately after Alice crosses a body of water into a different square. However, in this instance, as Alice crosses the body of water into another square, the time and scene shift happens at a slower pace. Even after Alice has crossed the body of water into the next square, she has a brief space of time during which she can still see the Lion and the Unicorn, as well as hear the loud drums beating. Even after she can no longer see the Lion and the Unicorn, it still takes a little while for the noise of the drums to drown out fully and disappear. Though the pace of the shift in time may have changed, the crossing of a moving body of water remains a common symbol throughout this story, serving as perfect examples of Jung’s water archetype in action.

The quest is another common archetype. According to Dobie, writing about Jung’s archetypes, the quest is commonly undertaken by the hero, the hero being yet another archetype. Dobie goes on to say:

The quest usually involves a difficult search for a magical or holy item that will return fertility and abundance to a desolate state. A related pattern is that of the need to perform a nearly impossible task so that all will be well. Often found as part of both these situations is the journey, suggesting a psychological, as well as physical, movement from one place, or state of being, to another.³

In *Through the Looking-Glass*, the quest archetype is shown as Alice embarks on a journey across the chessboard world outside of Looking-Glass House in order to reach the Eighth Square and become a queen. Though Alice is not on a search for a magical item or required to perform an impossible task, she still falls into the quest category because she is on a journey. She undergoes physical and psychological movement, as she moves from square to square, meeting new characters and performing new and unusual tasks in order ultimately to become a queen.

Alice starts off on her quest as a pawn, but by the end of the journey, she has successfully completed her goal of becoming a queen. As Alice begins her journey as a pawn, she is naïve about the way the world outside Looking-Glass House works, as well as what goes into being a queen. Alice has a glorified idea of what it means to be a queen. This notion is mainly thanks to the fanciful imagination she has at her young age. Of course, it does not help Alice’s perception of what it means to be a queen as the Red Queen tells her, “in the Eighth Square we shall be Queens together, and it’s all feasting and fun!”² Hearing the Red Queen speak so highly of being a queen and seeing the physical and psychological power she holds as such, it is no wonder that Alice wants to become a queen. However, as she embarks on her journey across the chessboard land, she ultimately learns more about the inhabitants and the nonsensical rules governing the world.

One key example in which Alice encounters the strange rules of this new world is when she is tasked with cutting up and handing out the plum-cake in chapter seven: “The Lion and the Unicorn.” She learns that everything in this world is done in reverse order. When the Lion remarks that she seems to be having a very difficult time cutting up the cake, Alice responds:

“It’s very provoking!” she said, in reply to the Lion (...). “I’ve cut several slices already, but they always join on again!”

“You don’t know how to manage Looking-glass cakes,” the Unicorn remarked. “Hand it round first, and cut it afterwards.”

This sounded nonsense, but Alice very obediently got up, and carried the dish round, and the cake divided itself into three pieces as she did so. “*Now cut it up,*” said the Lion, as she returned to her place with the empty dish.²

This scene serves further to enlighten Alice to the nonsensical workings of the world she now inhabits. By gaining a better understanding of the strange inhabitants and unusual rules and customs of the world she is in, Alice believes she will be able to make a good queen. She is more determined than ever to make it to the Eighth Square and become a queen herself.

The quest archetype reaches its climax as Alice finally accomplishes her goal of becoming a queen. As it turns out, being a queen is nowhere near as fun or exciting as Alice had anticipated. When she finally does become a queen, she says that she “never expected [she] should be a Queen so soon” and that “everything was happening so oddly (...).”² Alice quickly finds out that despite wearing a golden crown and completing her journey of travelling to the Eighth Square, she still does not get to call herself a queen until she passes the “proper examination” given to her by the Red and White Queens.² Despite the outcome of the quest not being as great as Alice had anticipated, her journey throughout the chessboard land serves as an example of the quest archetype, because she displays psychological and physical movement from one place and state of being to another as she makes her way to the Eighth Square.

Yet another well-known archetype is the trickster archetype. The trickster has been known to appear commonly in “African American and American Indian narratives.”³ This figure is known to be mischievous, disorderly, foolish, and able to outwit many. However, according to Jung, this figure has also been known to have a much darker personality. In some folktales, the trickster figure works to corrupt, lead others astray from their morals, and has even been described as “demonic.”¹⁰ In *Through the Looking-Glass*, the trickster figures are more along the lines of mischievous, disorderly, harmless fools.

Tweedledee and Tweedledum are the foolish, silly trickster figures seen in this story. These classic characters were originally found in James Orchard Halliwell’s *The Nursery Rhymes of England*.² Most English people reading this story would be able to recognize these characters from their beloved childhood nursery rhymes, just as Alice herself does when she first comes across them: “They were standing under a tree, each with an arm round the other’s neck and Alice knew which was which in a moment, because one of them had ‘DUM’ embroidered on his collar, and the other ‘DEE.’ ‘I suppose they’ve each got ‘TWEEDLE’ round at the back of the collar,’ she said to herself.”² Tweedledee and Tweedledum are known as trickster archetypes for a number of reasons, one reason being that they speak in a disorderly, riddle-like manner that easily confuses others: “‘I know what you’re thinking about,’ said Tweedledum, ‘but it isn’t so, nohow.’ ‘Contrariwise,’ continued Tweedledee, ‘if it was so, it might be; and if it were so, it would be; but as it isn’t, it ain’t. That’s logic.’”² Despite their confusing way of talking, Alice attempts to have a conversation with them in hopes of learning of the quickest way out of the forest in which she has become lost. It is in the conversation Alice attempts to have with the twins that two more examples can be seen as to why they are considered trickster figures; they are foolish and mischievous.

Instead of answering Alice when she asks them how to get out of the forest, they remain silent, ignoring her with smiles stretched across their faces. When Alice tries again to get them to speak, they immediately correct her manner by saying she has not greeted them properly. When she reaches out to shake hands with the trickster twins, they immediately latch on to her hands and “the next moment they were dancing round in a ring” and singing, “*Here we go round the mulberry bush*” in a very silly, and foolish manner.² Once the dancing scene ends, Alice tries to ask the twins, once again, how to get out of the forest. However, the mischievous twins have their own agenda. They want Alice to stay with them, and they get her to do so by ignoring her questions and protestations and telling her the longest poem they know, “The Walrus and the Carpenter.” This poem is eighteen stanzas long, was written by Lewis Carroll, and seems to have no real, discernable meaning to it. Though scholars have attempted to devise various analyses of this poem, it mainly remains as a classic example of Victorian nonsense verse.

Once the poem is finally finished, Tweedledee and Tweedledum further act out the trickster archetype by taking their mischievousness up a notch by teasing Alice until she begins to cry. The twins tell Alice she is not real, which greatly upsets the young girl who is already struggling with her identity. Tweedledum begins by saying:

“You know very well you’re not real.”

“I *am* real!” said Alice, and began to cry.

“You wo’n’t make yourself a bit realler by crying,” Tweedledee remarked: “there’s nothing to cry about.”

“I know they’re talking nonsense,” Alice thought to herself: “and it’s foolish to cry about it.”²

The twins prove to be the ultimate trickster figures, as their mischievous, pranking nature leads another being, in this case Alice, to act foolishly. Alice herself admits that she is acting foolishly by crying over the nonsense the twins are saying to her. Tweedledee and Tweedledum prove to be perfect representations of Jung's trickster archetype.

The wise old man is another archetype found in this story. According to Jung, the wise old man is also known as "the enlightener, the master and teacher," and this archetype has also been referred to as the archetype "of meaning."¹⁰ The wise old man "symbolizes the pre-existent meaning hidden in the chaos of life."¹⁰ In *Through the Looking-Glass*, Humpty Dumpty serves as the wise old man archetype. Many will immediately recognize the well-known name "Humpty Dumpty" for being the egg that falls off of a wall in a classic child's nursery rhyme. This nursery rhyme is "very old and common in several languages."² Humpty Dumpty can be identified as the wise old man figure because he serves as an enlightener and teacher to Alice. Humpty attempts to bring meaning to many of the things confusing Alice, thus living up to the archetype "of meaning." When Alice and Humpty first meet, he speaks to her in a very argumentative manner, challenging everything she says, saying that "some people have no more sense than a baby."² Humpty then begins to ask Alice questions, such as what her name is, what her name means, and what her business is. When Alice asks questions in return, Humpty looks at them as though they are riddles and prides himself on giving the correct answer to every question and riddle she asks:

"Don't you think you'd be safer down on the ground?" Alice went on, not with any idea of making another riddle, but simply in her good-natured anxiety for the queer creature. "That wall is so *very* narrow!"

"What tremendously easy riddles you ask!" Humpty Dumpty growled out.²

Humpty Dumpty sees himself as being superior to Alice. Because he believes he knows best, he offers Alice his advice in regard to her age when she tells him that she is seven years and six months old: "Seven years and six months!" Humpty Dumpty repeated thoughtfully. "An uncomfortable sort of age. Now if you'd asked *my* advice, I'd have said 'Leave off at seven' -but it's too late now."²

Humpty also takes it upon himself to reprimand Alice when she gets his precious cravat confused for a belt. He tells her that it was given to him as an un-birthday present. When Alice asks what an "un-birthday" is, Humpty once again takes on the role of a teacher and explains to her that an un-birthday gift is "a present given when it isn't your birthday."² When Alice comments that she likes birthday presents best, Humpty immediately tells her that she is wrong and makes her work out the math of how many days there are in a year compared to her one birthday to prove he is right. Humpty goes so far as to tell Alice to write down her work so that he can look it over. He is definitely playing the role of teacher, as he schools Alice in the nonsensical ways of the world they inhabit.

Soon Humpty and Alice get into a debate about the true meaning of words when Humpty says that the word glory means "a nice knock-down argument."² When Alice calls him out on that, saying that that is not what the word glory means, Humpty says, "When *I* use a word, ... it means just what I choose it to mean- neither more nor less." Alice refutes that by saying, "The question is, ... whether you *can* make words mean so many different things." Humpty then goes on to demonstrate his true, superior intellect by saying "The question is, ... which is to be master- that's all." When Alice becomes too confused to speak, Humpty goes on to say "They've a temper, some of them- particularly verbs: they're the proudest- adjectives you can do anything with, but not verbs- however *I* can manage the whole lot of them! Impenetrability! That's what *I* say!"² As Humpty proclaims that he is master of words and their meaning, he is clearly shown as a prime example of Jung's wise old man archetype, an archetype featuring one who brings meaning, one who is a teacher and master.

Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass* has withstood the test of time. Though there has already been so much research done on Carroll and his works, there is much more that can still be done. Outlined in this paper are just four out of the many archetypes found in this novel. Archetypes such as rebirth, garden, hero, numbers, and more have still not been discussed. By analyzing Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass* with a Jungian approach, it becomes apparent that there are archetypes seen throughout this story and with that knowledge, comes the promise of even more fascinating research still waiting to be conducted.

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