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Writer Mentorship Program As a writer, understanding different character archetypes can help you create compelling and relatable characters that resonate with your readers. One such archetype is the shapeshifter, a character that often plays a critical role in stories. In this article, we’ll explore what the shapeshifter archetype is, its characteristics, and how it can be used effectively in storytelling. We’ll also examine some of the most notable examples of shapeshifters in literature and media. The shapeshifter archetype refers to a character that changes form or identity. This transformation can be physical, such as changing into an animal or mythical creature, or it can be more abstract, such as a character who changes their allegiances or morals. The shapeshifter archetype can represent many things in a story, from the fluidity of identity and the complexity of relationships to the concept of deception and transformation. Download our highly detailed infographic outlining the 20 major scenes you must have in every story. Shapeshifters can be hard to pin down as they are often portrayed as unpredictable, deceptive, and changeable. Here are some common traits of shapeshifters: Unpredictable – Shapeshifters are often difficult to predict as they can change their form or personality at any moment. Deceptive – Shapeshifters are often portrayed as deceivers, hiding their true intentions and motives behind their ever-changing form. Fluid Identity – Shapeshifters can represent the fluidity of identity, showing how a character’s identity can change and evolve over time. Moral Ambiguity – Shapeshifters can be morally ambiguous, with their allegiances and loyalties changing throughout the story. Dual Nature – Shapeshifters often have a dual nature, representing the duality of human nature and the complexity of relationships. Adaptability – Shapeshifters are adaptable and can change their form or personality to fit into any situation. The T-1000 is a shapeshifting robot that can take on the appearance of anyone it touches. It uses its shape-shifting abilities to hunt down and eliminate its targets, making it a formidable antagonist. Mystique is a shapeshifter who can change her appearance to look like anyone. She is also a complex character with a fluid identity and moral ambiguity. Nagini is the pet snake of the main antagonist, Lord Voldemort. She is also a shapeshifter who can take on a human form, making her a deceptive and dangerous character. Odo is a changeling, a shapeshifting alien species. He struggles with his dual nature as a changeling and his desire to fit in with the human crew on the space station. Ursula is a sea witch who can change her appearance and make deals with the protagonist, Ariel. She represents the shapeshifter archetype by being unpredictable and deceptive. Gollum is a shapeshifter who changes his allegiance between Frodo and Sam. He also has a dual nature, representing the struggle between good and evil within all of us. Vampires are often portrayed as shapeshifters who can transform into bats, wolves, or mist. They represent the dangers of temptation and the loss of humanity. Examples include Dracula by Bram Stoker and the vampires in the Twilight series. Grendel’s Mother is a monster who can change her appearance and is a formidable opponent for the hero, Beowulf. She represents the shapeshifter archetype by being unpredictable and hard to defeat. The Skrulls are a shape-shifting alien race that infiltrates and takes over other civilizations. They represent the dangers of deception and the difficulty in determining who is trustworthy. A group of teenagers gain the ability to shapeshift into animals after encountering an alien species called the Andalites. The characters struggle with their dual nature as humans and animals, as well as the moral implications of their actions. The shapeshifter archetype can be used in many ways in storytelling, from creating complex and unpredictable characters to exploring themes of identity and transformation. Here are some ways you can incorporate the shapeshifter archetype into your writing: Create an unpredictable antagonist – A shapeshifting villain can add suspense and tension to your story by making it difficult for the protagonist to anticipate their next move. Explore the theme of identity – Use a shapeshifting character to explore the fluidity of identity and how it can change over time. Create a complex protagonist – A shapeshifting protagonist can add depth to your story by showing the character’s struggle with their dual nature and their inner conflicts. 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By incorporating the shapeshifter archetype into your writing, you can add depth and intrigue to your characters and themes, creating stories that captivate and resonate with your readers. Whether it's copying the likeness of other beings, transforming into other physical forms, or simply altering one's physical and molecular structures - shape-shifting is surprisingly common within the world of film and television. A power not bound to just heroes nor villains, it's an ability that can be used in many different ways and with several moral motivations. This is seen the recent release of Marvel's new show, Secret Invasion, where the central narrative tracks the secret war of Skrulls - shape-shifting aliens struggling to find their place on Earth. As such, with this new mainstream focus on shape-shifting, it only seemed right to look back at some of media's most famous shape-shifters and rank them according to power. 10 The Marauders - The Harry Potter Series (2001-2011) Before there was Harry, Ron and Hermione - Hogwarts had another famed friend group known as The Marauders. Though not as fleshed out in comparison to the books, viewers got a snippet of them in Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban, when the film introduced the complicated friendship of Remus Lupin (David Thewlis), Sirius Black (Gary Oldman) and Peter Pettigrew (Timothy Spall). These three wizards made up most of the Marauders; a group of mischievous school friends, all of which had the ability to shape-shift into different creatures. Sirius and Peter were animagus beings who could willingly turn into animals - a dog and a rat. Remus, however, had no control when he shape-shifted into a ruthless werewolf. If only their story was explored more in the live-adaptations. Image via Universal Pictures As one of the classic horror-comedies of the 80s, An American Werewolf in London brings audiences back to a time when these creatures weren't stylistically romanticized a la teenage vampire drama programs. Instead, the shape-shifting is grotesque, painful and horrifying. At least, that was definitely the case for David Kessler (David Naughton), an American backpacker who's suddenly cursed as a werewolf. From the slow stretching and cracking of bones, to David's howling screams of agony, the iconic transformation scene has long made audiences squirm and recoil from their screens. Coupled with the fact that he is seen to viscously tear apart multiple victims, David's lack of control made him quite dangerous - even until his ultimate death. Image via Universal Pictures As one of the most iconic cult classics of the 80s, The Thing is often renowned for its depiction of the horrifying shape-shifting creature. In this John Carpenter classic, The Thing is revealed to be a parasitic alien that leaches and transforms into its host organism. Inhabiting bodies, copying their physical appearance and taking on their memories and mannerisms, the Thing was incredibly powerful - killing most in its path. Brought to life by masterful practical effects and mechanics, the monster was often grotesque, gory and repulsive, even when it teetered the lines of the uncanny valley. Who could forget the parasitic decapitation, stomach teeth, or even the Thing's creepy spider legs. Gross. From being the childhood friend of Professor X to the right-hand woman of Magneto, Mystique (Rebecca Romijn and then Jennifer Lawrence) may not be an omega-level mutant - but she sure is close to being one. Born with the ability to alter the formation of her cells at will, Mystique can shape-shift into anyone, mimicking both their looks and voice. Coupled with her well-rounded combat and espionage skills, this made her very powerful - and incredibly dangerous - to those who regarded her as an enemy as she often infiltrated government buildings and deceived many members of the X-Men. The one downside to Mystiques abilities, however, is that she is unable to copy another mutant's powers; she can only replicate its physical appearance. Often described as one of James Cameron's best films, Terminator 2: Judgment Day was a sequel that many believe out did its original. Not only did it introduce the newly badass-ified Sarah Connor (Linda Hamilton), but it also introduced the terrifying T-1000 (Robert Patrick), a shape-shifting robot assassin from the future whose mission was to kill the young John Connor (Edward Furlong). A more advanced Terminator, the T-1000 was fully comprised of liquid metal, allowing it to shape-shift into any form. Whether it be mimicking the appearance and voices of humans, fitting through narrow gaps, sliding through prison bars, or molding its limbs into various weapons - this Terminator was a powerful foe. Its only shape-shifting limitation was that it could only alter its density, hence the reliance on non-complex stabby weaponry. Within the show's famed first season, one of Heroes' most complex and well-developed characters was Sylar (Zachary Quinto). The main antagonist of the entire series, Sylar was introduced as the looming serial killer who sought to steal as many powers as he could. Acquiring shape-shifting from James Martin, Sylar was able to transform into anyone, so long as he came into contact with a tissue sample. Able to quickly familiarize himself with this new ability, Sylar eventually found ease in rapidly transforming. To make matters worse, he was even able to use other powers, such as telekinesis and regeneration, even when he was in a shape-shifted form. A dangerous utility of skills for a killer. Image via Marvel Skrulls have evolved across their time in the MCU. Pushed out of their home planet due to the reigning terror of Kree, Skrulls have used their shape-shifting abilities to seek refuge across various planets. Able to blend in among its populations, it was revealed that Earth itself was unknowingly hosting around a million of them. Though not inherently dangerous, their unfortunate circumstances have led Skrulls to use their abilities in deceptively dangerous ways. From infiltrating governments to replacing the identity of others, Skrulls have grown in power - not only because they can take on the appearance and memories of host they copy, but they can now also become super Skrulls; Skrulls that are genetically enhanced with superpowers. Terrifying children and adults alike, as well as raising the number of coulrophobia cases, Stephen King's horrifying creature - Pennywise (Bill Skarsgård)- has cemented itself as one of the most iconic villains in cinematic history. Though initially believed to be a simple killer clown, Pennywise is actually an ancient evil entity that consumes the fears of children. Having the ability to shape-shift into physical manifestations of whatever its victim fears most, Pennywise appeared not only as a clown, but also as a deformed woman as well as members of the Loser's Club - in an effort to trick and scare the group. What makes Pennywise even more dangerous, however, is the fact that he has several other powerful abilities. This includes casting illusions, manipulating reality, and even telekinesis. Yikes. In the animated movie that scared millions of children - and even adults - the Bedlam (Teri Hatcher) is arguably one of the most creepy villains of all time. First seen as Coraline's vibrant Other Mother, by the end of the film, it's revealed that she is actually a demonic shape-shifting being that coaxes children into another dimension as a means to take their souls. From the Bedlam's creepy Other Mother button eyes to its true form as a skeletal spider-like creature, her shape-shifting abilities is only a fraction of her power. On top of physical transformation, the Bedlam is able to manipulate the entire Other World, and can even create other forms of life such as other copies of people. Image via Walt Disney Pictures As one of Disney's best supporting characters, the Genie (Robin Williams) is arguably the most powerful being of all time as he is capable of doing anything and everything. Struck with cosmic power, he can grant wishes and has unlimited shape-shifting abilities which are not only used to seamlessly blend into the surroundings, but also for fun comedic gags - something the late Williams was great at. Whether he's mimicking a Jack Nicholson performance, singing among the local village women or warping reality and time - The Genie is practically omnipotent (other than manipulating love, life and death). His only real limitation is that he is a slave to the lamp he is contained in. Well at least that is until Aladdin (Scott Weinger) sets him free with his final wish. NEXT: 'Secret Invasion': The Main Characted, Ranked by Likability Writer Mentorship Program As a writer, understanding different character archetypes can help you create compelling and relatable characters that resonate with your readers. One such archetype is the shapeshifter, a character that often plays a critical role in stories. In this article, we’ll explore what the shapeshifter archetype is, its characteristics, and how it can be used effectively in storytelling. We’ll also examine some of the most notable examples of shapeshifters in literature and media. 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The shapeshifter archetype is a powerful tool for writers looking to create complex and unpredictable characters. From Loki to Dracula, shapeshifters have been a part of storytelling for centuries, representing the fluidity of identity and the dangers of deception. By incorporating the shapeshifter archetype into your writing, you can add depth and intrigue to your characters and themes, creating stories that captivate and resonate with your readers. Shapeshifters have appeared in mythology, literature, television and movies, and the concept of someone who is able to change his or her physical form is an intriguing one. By morphing into another person – or a creature, for that matter – you’d be able to sneak around using someone else’s identity, escape from someone looking for you in your prior form, or maybe even become a more efficient fighter. What would you do if you could shapeshift? Me? I’d probably transform into Marisa Miller and spend my time naked in front of a mirror with my legs spread. Anyway, keep reading for 10 memorable shapeshifters from film and television.* *I’m not including werewolves.   Sam Merlotte – True Blood The True Blood universe isn’t filled with just humans and vampires; there are werewolves, mind-readers, and shapeshifters, too. Sam Merlotte, the owner of Merlotte’s bar, is a shapeshifter, and he usually changes into a collie to help look after Sookie. Sam can’t change into other humans and needs a live animal as a “model” to complete his transformation. Sylar – Heroes Unlike Sam Merlotte, Sylar used his recently-acquired shapeshifting powers for personal gain. After creepily shifting back and forth between himself and his mother, Sylar became Senator Nathan Petrelli in an attempt to meet and then impersonate the President of the United States. His plan failed, though, and with his memory wiped, Sylar is currently stuck looking just like Nathan. Alexandra Mack – The Secret World of Alex Mack Alex acquired her powers from exposure to a chemical spill, and she has the ability to transform herself into a liquid puddle. Only a few people know about Alex’s powers; even her own parents are kept in the dark. Mystique – X-Men movies Mystique’s ability to shapeshift comes from her mutant power. She is normally blue-skinned and yellow-eyed, but with the ability to look like whoever she wants, Mystique is rarely found in her “normal” form. In the X-Men movies, Mystique uses her shapeshifting ability for infiltration and to aid Magneto. She even teases Wolverine a bit by transforming right before his eyes as a sexual sampler of sorts. T-1000 – Terminator 2: Judgment Day Not only can the lethal, liquid metal T-1000 take the form of any person it comes into contact with, it can change its shape to fit through otherwise impermeable barriers, can flatten itself and blend in with the floor or other surroundings, and, coolest of all, can morph its arms into blades and stabbing weapons. Merlin – The Sword in the Stone Merlin’s ability to shapeshift is magic-based, and he makes good use of it during his Wizard’s Duel with Madam Mim. Merlin and Mim transform themselves into different animals with the intention of destroying their adversary. A crab, snake, rhino, and dragon are just a few of the creatures that the two wizards turn into during their duel. This movie rules. Michael Jackson – Moonwalker No, I’m not going to make a joke about how Michael Jackson shapeshifted from a black guy to a white guy. In Moonwalker, MJ transforms himself into a really fast sports car. That likes to have sex with little boys. See? Jokes about changes in skin color: not very funny. Jokes about molesting children: always funny. It’s axiomatic. Odo – Star Trek: Deep Space Nine Odo is of the Changeling race and, as such, has the ability to alter his physical form. He can’t seem to figure out how to shapeshift into a human perfectly, and he was discovered in a gelatinous form. Odo serves as the Security Chief for Deep Space Nine. The Thing – The Thing In John Carpenter’s The Thing, “the Thing” is an alien with an ability to shapeshift. It comes upon a research station in the Antarctic and, naturally, kills the team inside. More researchers come to investigate and they, too, are attacked by the Thing. The Doctor – Doctor Who Alright, maybe he’s not a shapeshifter per se, but the time-traveling alien known as The Doctor can regenerate his body when near death. The Doctor can do this up to 12 times (for a total of 13 different forms), and each new form has its own subtle characteristics. As it has been defined as a typical example of a person, thing, object, or even animal, it presents a mental image that immediately comes to mind when finding similarities in some other thing. This imaginary comparison is often between the archetype and a living character, an object that is immediately present or a thing that is quite popular. Even some examples of such archetypes have appeared in the movies and have become popular. Some of the best archetype examples from movies are as follow.Example #1Everyman ArchetypeThese types of archetypes are often orphans, common individuals, or persons. In such cases, this type of archetype demonstrates a real picture of a person who seems similar to it. Such archetype examples are solidly virtuous, innocent, and realist. They do not pretend or show pretentions. They accept others, honor them and behave in a dignified manner, seem friendly and fair in dealings, and show understanding in relations. They continue enjoying the simple life, demonstrating all common values of loyalty, faith, and hope. Some of these examples are as follows.George Bailey in It’s a Wonderful LifeBenjamin “Ben” McKenna in The Man Who Knew Too MuchFrodo Baggins in The Lord of the RingsHuck Finn in Huckleberry FinnExample #2Innocent ArchetypeSuch archetypes are not only mystics and dreamers but are often romantic and even naïve. They demonstrate their optimism, natural goodness, and faith in God with simplicity in manners. As they are pure, showing purity of life and virtue, they often demonstrate positivism, hope, and optimism. Strong personal values drive their life toward blissfulness. They have human features of love, faith, and loyalty. Some of the innocent archetype examples are as follows.Forrest Gump in the Forrest GumpDorothy in The Wizard of OzAlice in Alice in WonderlandExample #3Hero ArchetypeHero archetype includes all types of heroes such as a soldier, tribal chief, just ruler, warrior, crusader, dragon slayer, deliverer, or even a superhero. A classical hero delivers justice to his/her people, while a just ruler, too, delivers justice. However, a superhero surmounts all types of obstacles to save his nation or tribe. Such heroes even resort to violence for a just cause. The major character traits of such heroes are wisdom, strategic thinking, courage, boldness, determination, flexibility, resilience, daredevil type of nature with the mental power to plan, advance, and retreat. Some of the best hero archetypes are as follows.William Wallace in BraveheartLuke Skywalker in Star WarsOdysseus in the Odyssey movieMaximus in GladiatorExample #4Child ArchetypeChild archetypes appear in various movies, making people identify them with other such characters around them, write about them or write characters like them. The main features of such archetypes are that a child appearing in movies could be a sagacious, truthful and happy one. He could have some physical weakness or deformity or naivety as people exploit his/her weaknesses. Some examples of such child archetypes found in movies are referred to in several documents and research as follows.Charlie in Charlie and Chocolate FactoryForrest Gump as a child in Forrest GumpAlice as a child in Alice in Wonderland movieExample #5Creator ArchetypeThe creator archetypes are not just visionary and intelligent, they are also highly curious to create something new that could prove beneficial for the public. Such types of archetypes often make sacrifices in some cases and prove highly self-centered when it comes to perfection in their talent or skill. They achieve this perfectionism at the cost of their family life and relations. Interestingly, they are often a failure case in terms of handing over their talent to their progeny.Willy Wonka in Willy Wonka & the Chocolate FactoryMozart in AmadeusChristian in Moulin RougeExample #6Caregiver ArchetypeSuch character archetypes take care of the persons in their custody. They even take risks and sacrifice their lives for this cause. They are also kindhearted, generous, and altruistic. They take care of their wards without rewards and put their own survival at stake when it comes to risks to the life of their wards. Such characters are often single-minded and highly focused. Some of the best caregiver archetype examples are as follows.The Weasleys in Harry PotterClarence Oldbody in It Is a Wonderful LifeLeight Anne Tuohy in The BlindsideExample #7Mentor ArchetypeThis type of archetype character uses logical reasoning, magic, knowledge, or learning. They often teach the people around them about how to move ahead in life. They have a commanding personality and calming presence, including the presence of mind to give ears to anyone facing problems and issues. Their consultation and pieces of advice include everything. Such characters often ignore their persona and their problems. Some of the best mentor archetypes in the movies are as follows.Jay Pritchett in Modern Family movieGandalf from Lord of the RingsQ group in James Bonds moviesExample #8Joker ArchetypeJoker archetypes are characters that cause humor in movies through different means. These means include wit, jokes, comic incidents, events, and even self-directed humor. Such archetypes also appear in tragedy as well to provide comic relief after the tension reaches its climax. When the audiences laugh, they feel relieved. Jokers usually present the sunny side of life or a distraction to cause relief from some painful event or situation. Some of the best joker archetypes in movies are as follows.Pumba in The Lion KingCaptain Jack in Pirates of the CaribbeanChandler Bing in FriendsExample #9Magician ArchetypeMagician archetypes are characters who demonstrate their knowledge of the esoteric world, use abracadabra, and seek to understand the situation, context, and history of the events to find out the solutions to the problems confronting them or their community. Sometimes, they use this knowledge against the people. Yet, they show pride and overconfidence, which mar their repute among the public. Lacking humility and excessive anger, too, contribute to their downfall. Some of the magician archetypes in movies are as follows.Ricky Jay in Deceptive PracticeGeorge Meleis in HugoEd Norton in The IllusionistExample #10Ruler ArchetypeThe ruler type of archetypes comprises tribal regions, regional leaders, country rulers, kings, emperors, chiefs, and even town rulers. They could be running companies, countries, or even educational institutions. Such archetypes are responsible persons in their own right and demonstrate the qualities and values befitting for a ruler, such as power, leadership, eloquence, and articulation to win the respect and awe of the common public. Some of the best ruler archetypes in movies are as follows.Churchill in The Darkest HourQueen Anne in The FavoriteJulius Caesar in Rome Series Learn all about the shapeshifter archetype, including definition, characteristics, examples and how it relates to the Jester archetype. What is the Shapeshifter Archetype? Just as it sounds, the shapeshifter archetype is ambiguous and can be troublesome to identify. As you might expect, just when you think you understand the shapeshifter they change into something different and surprise you with their actions. An archetypal shapeshifter finds it easy to become someone or something different from that which they currently are. They are changeable and struggle to define themselves by any one set of characteristics. Their changes can often happen unconsciously, without them really realizing that they are in fact changing. Like a chameleon, this enables them to blend into the environment in which they find themselves with little or no effort. Shapeshifter Archetype Characteristics & Traits The archetypal shapeshifter may be an individual who regularly undergoes big physical makeovers Their hair colour and style, their wardrobe, their make up and so on can all change significantly so that even those close to them may pass them by in the street and not recognise them. Similarly, the shapeshifter may change their personality and moods rapidly, making them unpredictable and difficult to live or work with. Those with whom they are close find it difficult to ever feel they truly know the shapeshifter and may feel a sense of betrayal or having been lied to as the shapeshifter constantly changes from who they thought they were into something different. Shapeshifter Archetype Examples Examples of the shapeshifter archetype in modern culture include the movie Ladyhawk, where Michelle Pfeiffer’s character lives as a hawk by day and a woman at night. In the Harry Potter books and films there are a variety of characters that, through magic, can shift their shape into another form. In culture the shapeshifter archetype is often associated with animals and changes between human and animal form. The werewolf is perhaps the most famous example of this concept in culture, whereby the human changes into a wolf-like creature. Many other examples of the archetype can be traced back through history, such as the Deer Women of Native American tribes and the half-human, half-animal gods of the ancient Egyptians (the famous Sphinx at Giza being a prime example in it’s half lion, half human form). Further Reading Further reading on the shapeshifter archetype includes: Writer Mentorship Program As a writer, understanding different character archetypes can help you create compelling and relatable characters that resonate with your readers. One such archetype is the shapeshifter, a character that often plays a critical role in stories. 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Vampires are often portrayed as shapeshifters who can transform into bats, wolves, or mist. They represent the dangers of temptation and the loss of humanity. Examples include Dracula by Bram Stoker and the vampires in the Twilight series. Grendel’s Mother is a monster who can change her appearance and is a formidable opponent for the hero, Beowulf. She represents the shapeshifter archetype by being unpredictable and hard to defeat. The Skrulls are a shape-shifting alien race that infiltrates and takes over other civilizations. They represent the dangers of deception and the difficulty in determining who is trustworthy. A group of teenagers gain the ability to shapeshift into animals after encountering an alien species called the Andalites. The characters struggle with their dual nature as humans and animals, as well as the moral implications of their actions. The shapeshifter archetype can be used in many ways in storytelling, from creating complex and unpredictable characters to exploring themes of identity and transformation. Here are some ways you can incorporate the shapeshifter archetype into your writing: Create an unpredictable antagonist – A shapeshifting villain can add suspense and tension to your story by making it difficult for the protagonist to anticipate their next move. Explore the theme of identity – Use a shapeshifting character to explore the fluidity of identity and how it can change over time. Create a complex protagonist – A shapeshifting protagonist can add depth to your story by showing the character’s struggle with their dual nature and their inner conflicts. Add an element of mystery – A shapeshifting character can add an element of mystery to your story, as the reader is never quite sure what their true motives are. Use it as a metaphor – The shapeshifter archetype can be used as a metaphor for the transformative nature of life, the fluidity of relationships, or the danger of deception. Incorporating the shapeshifter archetype into your writing can add depth and complexity to your characters and themes. By understanding the traits and examples of shapeshifters in literature and media, you can create compelling and relatable characters that resonate with your readers. The shapeshifter archetype is a powerful tool for writers looking to create complex and unpredictable characters. From Loki to Dracula, shapeshifters have been a part of storytelling for centuries, representing the fluidity of identity and the dangers of deception. By incorporating the shapeshifter archetype into your writing, you can add depth and intrigue to your characters and themes, creating stories that captivate and resonate with your readers. The shape-shifter archetype is a slippery archetype to define. One signature way to know you are in the realm of the shape-shifter is when you have a hard time figuring out who someone is. Just when you have them pegged, they surprise you and show up as someone completely different. If you have this archetype it is likely that you easily slip into the skin of other archetypes. You probably struggle to define yourself because you feel you are all of the archetypes. All you have to do is think about an archetype and you all of a sudden are it. In the shadow, the shape-shifter archetype causes unconscious shifts. Like a chameleon that changes from brown to green by simply walking off a brown branch and onto a green leaf, the shift happens without thinking. The shape-shifter’s body, her energy, shifts without her permission and without necessarily any reason behind it. The shape-shifter in the shadow has her matching, melding, merging with her environment naturally and without thought. This is not a bad thing. It just is. The shape-shifter is detrimental when she wants or needs to know herself and she can’t. It is harmful when she tries to reflect on who she is and what she wants. For the shape-shifter archetype, feelings of hopelessness creep in. She can wonder if she is anyone at all. This is not about a sense of unworthiness or powerlessness. It is about not being able to pin down who she is and, thus, making the conclusion that she is no one. The Visible Expression The shape-shifter can manifest visibly as a person who completely changes her persona and look on a continual basis. We all undergo big transformations on occasion, or “make-overs” as the TV shows call them, but the shape-shifter has upwards of five make-overs a day. This is the person that you can’t recognize from one day, or even one hour, to the next. She doesn’t have any particular style. She changes hair color often or wears her hair straight then curly then wavy. The shape-shifter may change outfits three times in a day. Her appearance is constantly shifting to match current trends. She may look taller or wider or bigger or smaller on any given occasion. Invisible Shape-Shifting Not everyone with the shape-shifter archetype changes physically. This archetype can also express invisibly. Without any shifts to outward appearances, the shape-shifter can modulate her energy field to such an extreme degree that she literally feels like a completely different person. The friend that felt warm and welcoming yesterday is cloaked, cold and unreadable today. Last week she was scholarly and well read and this week she’s childlike and naive. For those of you without the shape-shifter, being in relationship with someone who is can feel like a constant betrayal because you think they aren’t being honest. Until you are able to understand that the shape-shifter archetype is what is driving the change, not necessarily a desire to deceive you, you may take things too personally. Shape-shifters also can move between different layers of thought, reality, and consciousness. This intellectual morphing is even more confusing to by-standers. It may seem like the shape-shifter can’t make up her mind, but really she doesn’t know her own mind. She is of the mind of whatever atmosphere is around her. A truly adept shape-shifter is able to wield the power of visible and invisible shifting that results in a complete transformation into someone, or something, else. Shape-Shifter’s Association with Animals Mythology surrounding the shape-shifter archetype most often has to do with shifts between animal and human forms. There are countless stories throughout history and across all cultures of people turning into animals. In Native American tribes in the central and eastern U.S., there are myths about “Deer Women” who either shift back and forth between a woman and a doe deer or are a hybrid of the two (. In her book, Women Who Run with the Wolves, Dr. Clarissa Pinkola Estes tells the story of “Sealskin, Soulskin” from northern Inuit tribes. The main character is a selkie, a seal that can turn into a woman by shedding her seal skin. She was kidnapped by a man. He trapped her in human form by holding her sealskin captive. Dr. Estes likened the sealskin to the true, authentic “soulskin” of the woman. The woman forgot herself until she was reunited with her own skin. This is a beautiful reminder for everyone with the shape-shifter archetype that there is a skin that is the true, wild and free self. Other classic mythical examples of the shape-shifter archetype are mermaids and werewolves. In countless stories, people are cursed and turned into any type of animal imaginable. Sometimes they are able to break the curse and return to human form as with the Princess and the Frog. Relationship to the Shaman Archetype The power to shape-shift, either literally or energetically, has long been associated with the shaman archetype. Shamans go into a shamanic journey trance and morph into the form of their spirit guides. A common practice in shamanism is to shape-shift into spirit animals while in a journey trance to receive healing and guidance for oneself and for others. In many cultures, it was believed that shamans were able to literally shift into animal forms. Overlap with Other Archetypes Due to the nature of the shape-shifter and her ability to take on other forms, stories about her often overlap heavily with other archetypes such as the trickster archetype, magician archetype, god archetype, enchantress/enchanter archetype, and spy archetype. It is easy to trick someone when you appear in a different form. The ability to shape-shift does appear to be a magical ability. Gods and goddesses, being all powerful, often used their power to change forms. Many shape-shifters are able to enchant and seduce people when in disguise. And, it is especially easy to spy on others when in an inconspicuous skin. People Pleasing and the Shape-Shifter In the shadow, the shape-shifter archetype can give up who she is and what she believes in to make other people happy. She can be a classic people pleaser. She may take a form that helps her be loved and liked, and to get what she needs from others. However, the shadow shape-shifter changes form for any number of reasons, not just people pleasing. She does so to go unnoticed and be noticed, to please others and to stand up to them, and to get what she wants and to be generous. Her shape changes just for the sake of changing many times. The Shape-Shifter Today The shape-shifter archetype is alive and well in popular culture these days. There doesn’t seem to be a fantasy movie or book around that doesn’t have at least one character that posses the power to shape-shift. The examples are far to many to list here, but I’ve collected a few to give you an idea. In the movie Ladyhawk, Michelle Pfeiffer’s character is a hawk by day and woman by night while her lover, actor Rutger Hauer, is a man by day and wolf by night. In J.K. Rowlings’s Harry Potter books there are magicians that can shift into animals or that can altar their human appearances. In the Throne of Glass fiction series by Sarah Maas the form of magic that allows a person to shape-shift between different human and animal forms is considered the most dangerous of all magic. In Shana Abe’s The Smoke Thief, people are able to shift into dragons. The character Mystique in X-Men shifts between human forms. The robots in Transformers change between vehicles such as cars and planes to giant, armored robots in human form. Animals that are examples of the shape-shifter archetype are: ladybug, dragonfly, frog, and butterfly. Want to know if you have the shape-shifter archetype? Schedule an Archetypal Consulting Session and Find Out! Stacey Couch is a Spiritual Advisor who supports creative seekers learning as they go on the spiritual path. She serves beginner and life-long students of the soul. Her compassionate and collaborative approach honors the humanity and value of each person. Wisdom found in story, mysticism, and nature provide guidance and healing in her work. Through meeting with Stacey, lost souls find refuge. Connection to the Divine is realized. Belonging comes. She is the author of Gracious Wild: A Shamanic Journey with Hawks. Learn About working with Stacey The concept of the Shapeshifter archetype (What is an archetype?) has long fascinated and intrigued humanity. This mysterious and elusive archetype represents the ability to transform and adapt, embodying the essence of change. In this article, we will explore the characteristics and the role in the storytelling of the Shapeshifter archetype and delve into examples of this archetype in literature, cinema, and pop culture. SHAPESHIFTER ARCHETYPE DEFINITION The Shapeshifter archetype in storytelling is a character who is ambiguous or changeable in nature, often creating uncertainty or doubt about their true intentions or allegiances. They can shift their beliefs or loyalties, keeping both characters and audiences guessing about their true identity or motives. Shapeshifters, central to storytelling, are dynamic characters defined by adaptability and changeability. Their remarkable ability to shift form and appearance aligns seamlessly with diverse situations, underscoring their fluid and changeable nature. Resonant with a chameleon’s adaptive prowess, Shapeshifters effortlessly blend into surroundings, navigating varied environments with ease. Beyond surface-level transformations, shapeshifting holds symbolic significance, serving as a metaphor for profound shifts—be they psychological, emotional, or situational. This adds depth to their character, portraying more meaningful internal changes. The Shapeshifter’s essence thrives on ambiguity and dual nature. Motives and true identity remain shrouded, contributing to an inherent sense of mystery. This duality extends to relationships, blurring lines between friend and foe, ally and antagonist. Shapeshifters play an important role in storytelling, introducing suspense and unpredictability. Their unique ability to change form keeps both characters within the narrative and the audience on edge, constantly questioning their true motives and allegiances. The narrative landscape is transformed into a testing ground for trust, where characters must grapple with their capacity to trust the Shapeshifter. Shifting roles and appearances, the Shapeshifter subverts traditional character tropes, injecting freshness into the storytelling by challenging stereotypes and expectations. Beyond their physical metamorphosis, Shapeshifters symbolize profound change and transformation. Serving as catalysts, they propel characters to adapt to new circumstances, confront their fears, biases, and preconceptions, and undergo significant growth. Interactions with Shapeshifters propel the narrative forward, unveiling unexpected alliances, motivations, and betrayals that keep the audience engaged. One of the Shapeshifter’s narrative functions is to blur the lines between morality, challenging conventional standards of good and evil. Their ambiguous nature adds moral complexity to the story, presenting a deceptive facade that challenges perceptions and creates intrigue. In genres like fantasy or speculative fiction, Shapeshifters contribute to world-building by introducing magical or supernatural elements. They enrich the story’s setting and cultural dynamics, enhancing the overall immersive experience. Even antagonistic forces gain a humanized dimension through Shapeshifters. When not in their intimidating forms, Shapeshifters may reveal vulnerable or relatable aspects, adding depth to the conflicts within the story. The Shapeshifter archetype interacts dynamically with various other archetypes, contributing to intricate narrative relationships. Here are the relations between the Shapeshifter and key archetypes. The Hero engages in a dynamic relationship with the Shapeshifter, who serves as a constant challenge, testing the Hero’s ability to distinguish reality from illusion. This dynamic often adds layers of complexity to the Hero’s journey, introducing conflicts and obstacles. The Shapeshifter can reflect the Hero’s internal struggles, embodying aspects of the Hero’s own capacity for change or deception. The Mentor archetype provides valuable guidance to the Hero in navigating the complexities presented by the Shapeshifter. Offering insights into the nature of transformation and ambiguity, the Mentor and Shapeshifter may collaborate, combining wisdom and adaptability to influence the Hero’s growth. The Shapeshifter and the Shadow archetype may engage in an antagonistic relationship, where the Shapeshifter’s inherent ambiguity contrasts with the Shadow’s more overt malevolence. Alternatively, in certain narratives, the Shapeshifter and Shadow may collaborate to create challenges that test the Hero’s resolve. The Ally’s perception of the Shapeshifter varies, viewing them either as a supportive figure aiding the Hero’s progression or as a hindrance that needs overcoming. This dynamic significantly influences the Hero’s journey, adding layers of complexity to alliances and relationships. The Trickster archetype introduces disruption by challenging the Shapeshifter’s role, disrupting expected dynamics, and creating chaos. Role reversals may occur, with the Trickster’s unpredictable nature turning the Shapeshifter into a figure to be outsmarted. The Shapeshifter can serve as an obstacle at the narrative threshold, introducing challenges that test the Hero’s readiness. Similar to the Hero, the Threshold Guardian may see reflections of their inner struggles mirrored in the Shapeshifter, creating a connection between these archetypes. The Shapeshifter’s transformative nature can Herald impending changes or challenges in the Hero’s journey, serving as a precursor to significant plot developments. Interactions between Shapeshifters highlight their shared adaptability, creating a dynamic landscape where trust and alliances can be fleeting. Shapeshifters may either clash due to their similarities or collaborate, forming alliances based on mutual understanding. The privilege of a lifetime is being who you are. Joseph Campbell Introducing the Shapeshifter archetype in a story requires finesse to create intrigue and depth. Here are some tips. Instead of immediately unveiling the Shapeshifter’s abilities, reveal them gradually. Allow the audience to uncover this unique trait over time, building anticipation and curiosity. Use shapeshifting as a metaphor for broader transformations. Connect the character’s physical changes to internal struggles, emotional growth, or the evolving narrative. This adds layers to the character’s journey. Dive into the personal struggles of the Shapeshifter. Explore the toll that constant transformation takes on their sense of self, mental well-being, or relationships. This vulnerability humanizes the character. Keep the motives of the Shapeshifter ambiguous. Create an air of mystery around their actions and decisions, leaving room for interpretation. This ambiguity adds complexity and keeps the audience engaged. Explore the challenges and dilemmas arising from the Shapeshifter’s dual nature. This could involve internal conflicts, struggles with identity, or the tension between loyalty and betrayal. Use these dilemmas to drive the plot forward. Showcase contrasting forms that the Shapeshifter can assume. Highlight how these forms serve different purposes or convey distinct aspects of their personality. This contrast emphasizes the versatility of the archetype. Utilize the Shapeshifter’s ability to form alliances or betray characters. This unpredictability adds tension and keeps other characters—and the audience—on their toes. Explore how the Shapeshifter’s abilities impact relationships within the story. This could involve trust issues, emotional connections, or the challenges of forming genuine bonds when appearances can be deceiving. Employ foreshadowing to hint at the Shapeshifter’s presence early in the story. Drop subtle clues that something is not as it seems, creating anticipation for the eventual revelation. Infuse cultural or mythological elements into the Shapeshifter archetype. Grounding their abilities in a broader context adds depth and resonance to their character. Consider the consequences when the Shapeshifter’s abilities are discovered. This revelation should have repercussions, affecting the dynamics of the story and the relationships between characters. Strategically place the Shapeshifter in key scenes where their abilities can have the most impact. Use these moments to propel the plot, create suspense, or reveal crucial information. The Shapeshifter archetype has found its way into various storytelling mediums, captivating audiences across different forms of media. In literature, the character of Gollum from J.R.R. Tolkien’s “The Lord of the Rings” embodies the Shapeshifter archetype. Gollum’s transformation from a hobbit-like creature into a twisted and corrupted being mirrors the internal struggle between good and evil. Another iconic example is the character of Severus Snape from the Harry Potter series. Initially perceived as a villain, Snape reveals his true allegiance, showcasing the transformative nature of the Shapeshifter archetype. Lewis Carroll’s “Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland” introduces the Cheshire Cat, a whimsical creature with the ability to appear and disappear at will, leaving only its distinctive grin behind. This character embodies the unpredictable and fantastical nature often associated with shapeshifters. In film and television, the character of Tyler Durden from “Fight Club” exemplifies the Shapeshifter archetype. Tyler’s charismatic and enigmatic nature masks his true intentions, making him an intriguing and unpredictable figure. The vampire characters in the Twilight series can shapeshift into wolves, highlighting the Shapeshifter archetype’s connection to transformation and hidden abilities. The character of Sam Merlotte of “True Blood” can transform into a dog, showcasing the Shapeshifter archetype’s connection to animals and primal instincts. Shapeshifters serve as narrative catalysts, driving suspense, challenging norms, and enriching the storytelling experience. So, a good Shapeshifter is crucial for the success of the story. bibisco’s character development tools Thanks to the innovative character development tools of bibisco novel writing software, you will understand how to craft a Shapeshifter character. With this archetype, you could hit the viewer or the reader with a twist at the moment of its revelation. The Shapeshifter archetype has captivated audiences for centuries with its ability to transform, adapt, and challenge our perceptions. From ancient mythology to modern pop culture, this archetype continues to shape and enrich storytelling. By embodying duality, fluidity, and unpredictability, shapeshifting characters add depth, intrigue, and suspense to narratives. Whether they are heroes, villains, or something in between, Shapeshifters remind us of the complexities of the human experience and the ever-changing nature of our identities. The shapeshifter archetype belongs to the archetypes defined by Campbell. Additionally, explore 12 Jungian archetypes. Non medium members can read my article HERE, please consider give a tip on KO-FI if you find it enjoyable and helpful for you. Thank you!Shapeshifter Archetype. Image generated in Midjourney by Borja GarciaThese beguiling characters, who effortlessly blur the boundaries between reality and illusion, have captivated audiences from the ancient stages of mythology to the modern cinematic experience.In the shadowy corners of our collective imagination, where myths whisper ancient secrets, the shapeshifter archetype takes root, stretching its tendrils through time to emerge vibrantly in the tapestry of modern cinema. This fascinating character, capable of altering its form or essence, bridges the gap between the mystical past and the narrative complexity of today’s films.Drawing from a rich well of historical and mythological lore, shapeshifters in movies captivate audiences with their enigmatic nature, serving as a testament to humanity’s enduring fascination with transformation and the unknown. They embody the...