

The Books I Keep Coming Back To (and Why I Do)

I'm not a fan of retreading old ground where knowledge is concerned. Once I know something, I want to use it. I don't want to just read it again.

There are a few books that get an exception to that rule. Somehow I continue to get deeper and better value from them on each successive read, but I have to let about a year pass between each reading.

Here's my current list of books that I've read/sampled and then revisited at a different stage of my life:

- **The Chronicles of Narnia**
- **Atlas Shrugged**
- **The Lord of the Rings**
- **The Bible**

There is a common thread here. All of these books use archetypal characters to tell archetypal stories.

Archetype, *n.* In literature, an archetype is a typical character, an action or a situation that seems to represent such universal patterns of human nature. An archetype, also known as universal symbol, may be a character, a theme, a symbol or even a setting. –
LiteraryDevices.net

The Narnia books are coming of age stories about young people discovering their true identities/callings as leaders, with a godlike lion character (Aslan) calling them “further up and further in” to a life of virtue.

Atlas Shrugged, despite its modernistic setting, tells of the struggle between characters which embody two opposed worldviews. It draws heavily on mythological themes (e.g. Prometheus's fire) and takes its protagonist on a journey to freedom.

The Lord of the Rings is a story of small people who get caught up in a wider world and must discover their own heroic potential. It's also the story of a wise leader's testing and return, the story of a battle between good and evil, and a the story of the passing of an old civilization and the coming of the new.

The Bible is a strange, diverse collection of books from diverse authors. They're full of evil villains and flawed heroes, good and bad leaders, and wise and foolish families.

These are the kind of books that grow deeper with time because their characters and stories represent real truths or feelings or happenings of the human experience.

As we encounter the counterparts of these archetypes in the real world, the archetypal characters in these books themselves become richer. *Narnia* becomes better as I learn how to lead rightly. *Atlas Shrugged* becomes better as I learn to live more freely and bring more of myself to my work. *The Lord of the Rings* is richer for all of the adventures and trials I've had, and the Bible becomes less strange as I get to know my own capacity for great good and great evil.

This is the holy grail of story-writing.

With books like these, there is an endless feedback loop between story and true life. The books will never cease to be a source of wisdom, approached rightly.