Ch. 6

SYMBOLISM,
ALLEGORY,
And
FANTASY
Some Questions to Ponder

- Do you believe dreams are important?
- Do we have a soul?
- Who are your heroes?
- What is sin?
- What is myth?
- Do we need myth?
- Why are symbols important?
- Are there universal symbols?
- What is the difference between conscious and unconscious?
- Is instinct important?
- Does our culture need mythology?
- Do you believe in magic? Does it even exist?
SYMBOLISM

- SYMBOL: an object that stands for itself and a greater idea; it creates a direct, meaningful link between...

  a specific object, scene, character, or action
  (AND)

  abstract ideas, values, persons or ways of life.

(A SIGN is different because it is an object that is taken literally, while a SYMBOL can be taken both literally and figuratively)
A symbol can have a variety of meanings:

1. **PERSONAL**: a meaning uniquely associated with our experiences
2. **CONTEXTUAL**: a private meaning created by an author
3. **CULTURAL**: a meaning uniquely influenced by our current culture

*(ex: dogs represent **faithfulness** in China, but **IMPURITY** in Indian/South Asian cultures)*
4. UNIVERSAL: a meaning that is given to a thing by most people and cultures (ex: lions suggest deity, power and courage in many cultures)

NOTE: these may be hard to discern because in order to discover these, you have to put aside your own personal and cultural lenses
On INTERPRETATION:

A piece of writing will always mean more than a writer intended because of personal associations. You may not understand all of the contextual symbols an author uses, but might get meaning out of something the author never planned.

We can derive meaning from the symbol itself, but can also make inferences based on how a universal symbol is exhibited or used.

(ex: Universally, water represents life and purity, so how we might interpret the use of a **Polluted River** in a story?)
ALLEGORY...

...a complete and self-contained narrative that can also be applied to a parallel set of external situations which may be political, moral, religious or philosophical.

In other words, it tells a real story and a symbolic story simultaneously.

Like symbols, allegories can be personal, contextual, cultural and universal.
WHAT’S IT LOOK LIKE??

You may recognize the...

...PARABLE: a short allegorical story designed to illustrate or teach some truth, religious principle, or moral lesson.

OR other familiar stories like...

- The Pilgrim’s Progress, John Bunyan
- Alice in Wonderland, Lewis Carroll
- The Lord of the Rings trilogy, Tolkien
- The NARNIA series, C.S. Lewis
- The Divine Comedy, Dante

AND very soon in your future...

- The Lord of the Flies, William Golding
Fantasy...

... a type of fiction that ideologically and aesthetically subordinates reality to imagination by depicting a world of marvels that is contrasted to everyday reality and to accepted views of what is credible.

Fantasy literature evolved together with realistic literature and used realistic and other literary means of depicting ideas, passions, and events.
Fantasy's habit of taking real-life situations and characters and introducing them into a world where unexpected (and unexplainable) things happen has resonated with readers since the earliest days.

The very first recorded literary works in history were fantasy: the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, Homer's *Odyssey*, *The Book of a Thousand Nights and a Night* (which featured the first appearances of Sinbad and Aladdin) and countless others were the prototypes upon which modern literature was formed.

Many of the most enduring works of popular and literary fiction fall squarely within the realm of fantasy, such as Sir Thomas Mallory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*, Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book* and Sir Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe*. 
Many times when we think of fantasy, we think of trite stories of dragons, wizards, and maybe some machine-gunned armies on distant planets. But throughout the world, fantasy has been used subversively as political commentary or more broadly to reveal often-overlooked aspects of human nature. Unlike other works of fiction, the fantastic aspect of fantasy novels can separate readers even more from reality, allowing them to understand in a different and perhaps deeper way, the themes of the works.
Magical Realism – fantastical and magical events are woven into mundane and ordinary situations, creating memorable effects unavailable to either realism or fantasy alone.
SYMBOLISM, ALLEGORY, and FANTASY are MODES that expand meaning.

Can you identify any use of these “modes” in the literature you’ve read so far this year?
HOW MANY SYMBOLS CAN YOU ASSOCIATE WITH **UNIVERSAL**, **ABSTRACT** IDEAS OR VALUES??

HINT: Don’t limit yourselves to objects, think also about shapes and colors or just *parts* of a picture.
FROM SYMBOLS TO SYMBOLISM

(SYMBOLISM is simply the use of symbols in art or literature.)

“I DREAMT A DREAM...”

Dreams are often full of strange events and objects that can be symbolic in nature. In fact, there is tons of literature out there that interprets dreams by putting universal meanings to these unexplainable things.

Your assignment is to Part 1 - recall a dream you have had and write a short narrative describing your dream. Part 2 – Identify (highlight) as many objects/symbols you can recall from your dream. Keep in mind that dreams do not interpret themselves; they are mysterious and abstract. Your job is to narrate the dream in all its weirdness; however, it needs to start with a chronological sequence of events that can include your symbols along the way. It should be at least a half-page long, and no longer than a page. When we’re done, let’s see if we can’t interpret each other’s strange nighttime visions...