

DOI 10.26886/2520-7474.4(74)2026.4

UDC 159.964.26+ 159.9(091)

**JUNGIAN ARCHETYPES AND THEIR REPRESENTATION IN THE
MAJOR ARCANA OF THE TAROT: A PSYCHOLOGICAL AND
SYMBOLIC ANALYSIS**

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The relationship between analytical psychology and the symbolic system of the Tarot has attracted considerable interest among psychologists, historians of religion, cultural theorists, and practitioners of depth psychology. Although Carl Gustav Jung did not develop a systematic psychological theory of Tarot and did not establish a canonical correspondence between the Major Arcana and his archetypal model, his concepts of the archetype, the collective unconscious, individuation, the Self, the Shadow, the Persona, and psychological transformation provide a particularly productive framework for interpreting Tarot imagery. The Major Arcana, consisting of twenty-two symbolic figures and situations, can be approached as a visual and narrative system representing recurrent patterns of human experience: the emergence of consciousness, confrontation with unconscious material, psychological conflict, transformation, integration, and the development of a more comprehensive sense of self. The present article examines the Major Arcana from the perspective of Jungian analytical psychology. It proposes that Tarot images may be interpreted as symbolic representations of archetypal patterns rather than as literal descriptions of supernatural forces or objective predictions of future events. Particular attention is given to the Fool as an image of undifferentiated psychic

potential, the Magician as a representation of agency and conscious intentionality, the High Priestess as an image of the unconscious and intuitive knowledge, the Empress and Emperor as complementary maternal and paternal principles, the Hierophant as an embodiment of tradition and collective symbolic order, and the Lovers as an image of psychic opposition and integration. The Hermit, Wheel of Fortune, Hanged Man, Death, Devil, Tower, Star, Moon, Sun, Judgment, and World are examined as successive symbolic configurations of withdrawal, destabilization, surrender, transformation, confrontation with the Shadow, dissolution of psychic structures, renewal, encounter with the unconscious, emergence of consciousness, psychological rebirth, and integration.

The article argues that the strongest psychological value of the Tarot does not depend upon its predictive claims. Rather, its images can function as projective and amplificatory symbols that facilitate reflection on unconscious processes. At the same time, the proposed correspondence between Tarot and Jungian psychology must be regarded as a modern interpretive construction rather than as a historically established doctrine of Jung. A critical approach therefore requires distinguishing between the historical development of Tarot, Jung's original psychological concepts, and subsequent attempts to integrate these traditions.

Keywords: Carl Gustav Jung, analytical psychology, archetypes, collective unconscious, Tarot, Major Arcana, individuation, Shadow, Self, symbolism, depth psychology, projection.

Human beings have always created symbolic systems through which experiences that are difficult to express in ordinary language can be represented, communicated, and psychologically explored. Myths, fairy tales, religious narratives, dreams, rituals, works of art, and divinatory traditions frequently employ recurring images of birth, death, transformation,

conflict, initiation, descent, sacrifice, wisdom, love, and renewal. Such images appear across cultures and historical periods, although their particular meanings vary according to cultural context.

One of the most influential psychological approaches to recurrent symbolic patterns was developed by the Swiss psychiatrist Carl Gustav Jung. Jung's analytical psychology proposed that the human psyche cannot be reduced to conscious mental processes. Beneath and beyond individual consciousness exists a deeper dimension of psychic life, which Jung termed the collective unconscious. Its contents are expressed through archetypal patterns that emerge in dreams, myths, religious symbols, fantasies, literature, and other forms of cultural production.

The Tarot presents an especially interesting case for psychological interpretation because its Major Arcana consist of a sequence of highly condensed symbolic images. A figure encounters authority, knowledge, love, isolation, fortune, crisis, death, temptation, destruction, hope, illumination, and completion. When viewed as a symbolic narrative, the sequence can be interpreted as a representation of psychological development.

It is important, however, to establish a methodological distinction at the outset. Jung did not create the Tarot, nor did he formulate a definitive system in which the twenty-two Major Arcana correspond to twenty-two Jungian archetypes. Tarot cards originated within European card culture during the fifteenth century, while the occult and esoteric interpretations associated with the Major Arcana developed considerably later. Consequently, claims that Tarot cards are intrinsically or historically "Jungian" would be misleading.

Nevertheless, the absence of a historical identity between Jungian psychology and Tarot does not prevent their meaningful theoretical dialogue. Jung's theory offers a language for interpreting symbolic images as expressions of psychological processes. Conversely, the Tarot can serve as a rich cultural corpus through which concepts such as archetypal polarity,

projection, Shadow, anima and animus, transformation, and individuation can be explored.

The purpose of this article is therefore not to demonstrate that Tarot is a hidden form of Jungian psychology. Rather, it is to investigate how the symbolic structures of the Major Arcana can be interpreted through Jungian concepts and to evaluate the psychological usefulness and limitations of such an approach.

The central hypothesis is that the Major Arcana may be understood as a symbolic map of psychological transformation. Individual cards can represent specific archetypal configurations, while the sequence as a whole may be interpreted as a narrative of movement from psychological potential and relative unconsciousness toward increasing differentiation, confrontation with unconscious material, and integration.

Literature Review

The psychological interpretation of Jungian archetypes and their representation in the “Major Arcana of the Tarot” is based primarily on the theoretical framework of analytical psychology developed by Carl Gustav Jung. Jung conceptualized archetypes as fundamental patterns of the collective unconscious that manifest through myths, dreams, religious imagery, fantasies, and symbolic representations [5]. His theory of the collective unconscious provides an important psychological basis for interpreting Tarot images not merely as divinatory symbols but as representations of recurring psychic structures and processes. Jung’s later discussions of symbolism and the role of images in psychological development further emphasize the capacity of symbolic material to express unconscious contents and facilitate their integration into consciousness [6]. His “Two Essays on Analytical Psychology” also establishes the relationship between conscious and unconscious processes and the development of

personality, which is particularly relevant to interpreting the Major Arcana as stages or aspects of psychological transformation [7].

Jung's studies of psychological types and symbolic processes provide additional theoretical foundations for this approach. In "Psychological Types", Jung examines different modes of psychological orientation and consciousness, demonstrating how contrasting psychic functions contribute to individual development [9]. His "Psychology and Alchemy" is especially significant for Tarot analysis because it explores symbolic transformation as a representation of psychological change. The alchemical process, interpreted by Jung as a symbolic expression of individuation, offers a useful framework for understanding the Major Arcana as a sequence of images associated with transformation, confrontation with the unconscious, and the achievement of greater psychological integration [8].

The historical and intellectual development of Jung's analytical psychology is examined by Shamdasani, who places Jung's ideas within the broader history of modern psychology and demonstrates the importance of symbolic, mythological, and comparative approaches in the formation of his theoretical system [12]. This historical perspective is useful for distinguishing Jung's original psychological concepts from later applications of archetypal theory to Tarot.

The concept of the archetypal journey is further developed in the works of Joseph Campbell and Jean Shinoda Bolen. Campbell's comparative study of mythology identifies the recurring structure of the hero's journey, including separation, initiation, transformation, and return [3]. This model has become particularly relevant to interpretations of the Major Arcana, whose sequence can be understood symbolically as a movement from an initial state of potential and unconsciousness toward knowledge, integration, and completion. Bolen's analysis of goddess archetypes applies Jungian principles to female psychological patterns and provides an additional

perspective for interpreting Tarot figures associated with femininity, such as the High Priestess, Empress, and other feminine symbolic forms [2].

Roberto Assagioli's psychosynthesis provides a complementary psychological perspective on personal transformation and the development of will. His emphasis on conscious self-development and the integration of different aspects of the personality can be productively compared with Jung's concept of individuation and with the transformational progression represented by the Major Arcana [1]. Although Assagioli's theoretical system differs from Jungian analytical psychology, it offers a broader framework for considering Tarot symbolism as a potential representation of inner psychological development.

Several authors have addressed the Tarot directly from historical, symbolic, and psychological perspectives. Douglas examines the origins, meanings, and uses of Tarot cards and provides an important foundation for understanding the symbolic vocabulary of the Tarot tradition [4]. Waite's "The Pictorial Key to the Tarot" is particularly important for the interpretation of the imagery associated with the Rider–Waite–Smith tradition, which remains one of the most influential visual systems for contemporary readings of the Major Arcana [13]. These sources make it possible to connect specific visual motifs with established Tarot symbolism while distinguishing traditional meanings from later psychological interpretations.

Nichols explicitly approaches Tarot through a Jungian framework, interpreting the cards as stages of an archetypal psychological journey from darkness toward greater consciousness [10]. Her work is particularly relevant to the present study because it directly connects individual Tarot images with Jungian concepts such as the unconscious, archetypal patterns, psychological transformation, and individuation. Pollack similarly interprets the seventy-eight Tarot cards as a system of images that can facilitate self-

awareness and psychological reflection, emphasizing the developmental and introspective potential of Tarot symbolism [11].

Taken together, these sources provide three complementary foundations for the present research: Jungian analytical psychology and archetypal theory [5; 6; 7; 8; 9], comparative and developmental approaches to archetypal transformation [1; 2; 3], and historical, symbolic, and psychological interpretations of Tarot [4; 10; 11; 13]. The combination of these perspectives makes it possible to examine the Major Arcana as a symbolic system in which recurring archetypal motifs — such as the Self, Shadow, Anima and Animus, Wise Old Man / Woman, Hero, Mother, and Trickster — can be interpreted in relation to psychological development and individuation. At the same time, Shamdasani's historical analysis encourages a careful distinction between Jung's original theoretical concepts and subsequent Jungian interpretations of Tarot [12]. Thus, the selected literature establishes an interdisciplinary basis for analyzing the Major Arcana not as evidence of supernatural prediction, but as a culturally developed symbolic language capable of representing fundamental psychological themes and processes.

Archetypal Images and Cultural Symbolism

Jung's model of the psyche differs substantially from theories that identify psychological life primarily with conscious cognition. For Jung, consciousness represents only one dimension of psychic reality [5, p. 53]. The ego occupies the center of conscious awareness, but it is not identical with the total psyche. The unconscious consists of both personal and collective dimensions. The personal unconscious contains forgotten, repressed, or subliminal experiences associated with the individual's biography. The collective unconscious, by contrast, refers to a deeper layer of psychic organization containing inherited predispositions for experiencing and organizing certain fundamental human situations.

Jung described archetypes as structural tendencies or organizing patterns that become visible through symbolic images [5, p. 73]. An archetype should not be confused with a fixed picture. The image that appears in consciousness is an archetypal representation, while the archetype itself is better understood as an underlying pattern of psychic organization.

This distinction is crucial when interpreting Tarot. The Emperor, for example, should not simply be declared “the archetype of the Father” as though a single image possessed one permanent meaning. Instead, the Emperor can activate a constellation of meanings associated with authority, order, boundaries, law, paternal function, political power, discipline, and the potential dangers of rigidity [4, p. 34].

Archetypal patterns are expressed through culture. A maternal principle may appear as a mother goddess, a fertile earth, a queen, a protective animal, or a nurturing human figure. Similarly, the heroic principle may appear as a warrior, traveler, knight, divine child, or individual confronting a monster. Therefore, archetypal psychology does not imply that all cultures use identical symbols. Rather, it suggests that recurrent human psychological problems can generate symbolically comparable forms.

The Tarot is particularly suitable for this kind of investigation because each card combines several layers of representation: human figures, social roles, animals, celestial bodies, landscapes, objects, gestures, colors, numbers, and spatial relationships. The symbolic density of the cards allows different psychological interpretations to coexist.

One of Jung’s most influential concepts is the Shadow. It refers broadly to psychological aspects of the personality that the conscious ego fails to recognize or accept. The Shadow may contain socially unacceptable impulses, aggression, envy, dependency, sexuality, vulnerability, ambition, or other qualities that contradict a person's conscious self-image [12, p. 107].

It may also contain positive capacities that have been neglected or rejected. The Shadow is not equivalent to evil. It is a dimension of the psyche that remains insufficiently integrated into conscious identity.

Several Major Arcana can be interpreted through this concept, particularly the Devil, Moon, Tower, and Death. Yet the Shadow may potentially appear in any card because archetypal symbolism is context-dependent. Even apparently positive archetypes can acquire a shadow form. The Emperor can become authoritarian; the Hierophant can become dogmatic; the Hermit can become isolated; the Lovers can become dependent; and the Magician can become manipulative.

The Persona is the psychological “mask” through which an individual relates to society. It is necessary for social adaptation, but psychological difficulties can arise when the individual becomes excessively identified with a social role.

The Tarot contains numerous images of social identity: rulers, priests, merchants, lovers, hermits, judges, and travelers. These figures can be understood as symbolic representations of different modes of social and psychological identity. The tension between Persona and deeper psychic reality becomes especially relevant when a socially successful identity no longer corresponds to the individual's psychological development [11, p. 76].

Jung originally conceptualized anima and animus as unconscious contrasexual dimensions of the psyche. His formulation reflected the gender assumptions of his historical context and has subsequently been subjected to considerable criticism and revision. For contemporary psychological interpretation, these concepts can be approached more flexibly as symbolic representations of psychological qualities traditionally culturally associated with femininity and masculinity, including receptivity and agency, relationality and autonomy, intuition and rationality. Such a reinterpretation avoids treating gendered psychological characteristics as biologically fixed. Within

the Tarot, the High Priestess, Empress, Emperor, Magician, Lovers, and Moon offer particularly rich material for examining psychological polarity and the integration of apparently opposite qualities [10, p. 128].

The concept of individuation is central to Jung's mature psychology. Individuation refers to the development of a more differentiated and integrated personality. It is not equivalent to individualism in the ordinary social sense. Rather, it involves the gradual recognition that the conscious ego is only one part of the psyche and the development of a relationship with previously unconscious aspects of personality.

From this perspective, psychological development involves neither the elimination of the unconscious nor the domination of the psyche by the ego. It involves dialogue between conscious and unconscious processes. The Tarot's Major Arcana can be interpreted as a symbolic narrative of precisely such a process. The sequence begins with the Fool, a figure associated with openness, uncertainty, potential, and departure. It culminates in the World, an image traditionally associated with completion, integration, and wholeness.

The conventional numbering of the Major Arcana provides a particularly suggestive narrative structure: 0 — The Fool; I — The Magician; II — The High Priestess; III — The Empress; IV — The Emperor; V — The Hierophant; VI — The Lovers; VII — The Chariot; VIII — Strength; IX — The Hermit; X — Wheel of Fortune; XI — Justice; XII — The Hanged Man; XIII — Death; XIV — Temperance; XV — The Devil; XVI — The Tower; XVII — The Star; XVIII — The Moon; XIX — The Sun; XX — Judgment; XXI — The World.

The sequence should not be treated as an objectively established psychological development model. Nevertheless, as a symbolic narrative it can be read as a progression from undifferentiated possibility toward increasingly complex forms of psychological consciousness.

The Fool: Undifferentiated Potential and the Beginning of the Journey

The Fool occupies a unique position in the Major Arcana. Traditionally numbered zero, the card stands outside the ordinary sequence while simultaneously functioning as its beginning and, in some systems, its completion. From a Jungian perspective, the Fool can be associated with the archetypal motif of the Divine Child, the Wanderer, or the Trickster. The image often represents innocence, spontaneity, openness, risk, and freedom from established structures.

Psychologically, the Fool may represent a condition in which the ego has not yet established a stable relationship with the world. This condition can be creative but also dangerous. Consciousness has not yet accumulated sufficient experience to anticipate consequences. The Fool therefore embodies an important psychological paradox: what appears to be naïveté may contain enormous developmental potential, while what appears to be certainty may conceal psychological rigidity [10, p. 45].

The Fool's journey begins when the individual leaves the familiar structure of identity. In Jungian terms, psychological development frequently requires a temporary destabilization of established assumptions. The person must become capable of encountering experiences that cannot be fully assimilated into the existing conscious worldview. Thus, the Fool can symbolize the beginning of individuation: not completion, but willingness to enter an unknown psychological territory.

The Magician: Ego Agency and the Capacity to Act

The Magician represents conscious agency, skill, communication, intentionality, and the transformation of potential into action. His traditional symbolism frequently includes objects representing the four suits, suggesting access to multiple dimensions of human experience. From a Jungian perspective, the Magician can be understood as a representation of the

developing ego's ability to differentiate and manipulate elements of experience consciously [10, p. 227]. If the Fool represents potential without established direction, the Magician represents directed psychic energy. Yet the Magician also contains a Shadow dimension. Agency can become manipulation; intelligence can become deception; creativity can become narcissism. The psychological task is therefore not merely to acquire power but to establish an ethical relationship with it. The Magician can consequently be viewed as an archetypal image of psychological efficacy: the recognition that the individual possesses resources capable of transforming experience.

The High Priestess: The Unconscious, Intuition, and Hidden Knowledge

The High Priestess occupies a fundamentally different psychological position from the Magician. Whereas the Magician emphasizes conscious action, the High Priestess emphasizes receptivity, silence, intuition, mystery, and hidden knowledge. She can be interpreted as an archetypal image of the unconscious psyche. The veil behind or around her suggests a boundary between what consciousness can immediately perceive and what remains concealed.

From a Jungian perspective, unconscious processes cannot be reduced to irrational noise [7, p. 123]. Dreams, fantasies, spontaneous images, emotional reactions, and symbolic productions may contain information about psychological conflicts and developmental possibilities. The High Priestess therefore represents a mode of knowing that does not operate through conscious rational control. Her Shadow form, however, may involve excessive secrecy, passivity, emotional withdrawal, or the idealization of intuition as infallible knowledge.

Psychologically mature engagement with the High Priestess requires neither blind rationalism nor blind intuition. It requires the capacity to allow unconscious material to emerge while maintaining reflective consciousness.

The Empress: The Maternal Principle, Nature, and Psychic Generativity

The Empress is traditionally associated with fertility, nature, abundance, sensuality, creativity, and motherhood [2, p. 47]. In Jungian terms, she can be interpreted through the Great Mother archetype. The maternal archetype has both positive and negative aspects. Its positive dimensions include nourishment, protection, generativity, emotional containment, and connection with life. Its negative dimensions may include engulfment, excessive dependency, possessiveness, and resistance to psychological separation.

The Empress can therefore represent not only biological motherhood but the broader psychological capacity to generate, nurture, and sustain. Creative activity may be understood as one of the psychological manifestations of this archetypal pattern. The artist, writer, researcher, or parent gives form to something that previously existed only as potential. At the same time, individuation requires differentiation from the maternal field. The nurturing principle becomes psychologically problematic when it prevents autonomy.

The Emperor: Authority, Structure, and the Paternal Principle

The Emperor represents order, structure, authority, boundaries, law, stability, and social organization. Within a Jungian framework, he may be interpreted as a symbolic representation of the paternal archetypal function. His psychological role is to establish boundaries, distinguish self from other, and transform undifferentiated potential into organized reality.

The Emperor complements the Empress. If the Empress symbolizes generation and containment, the Emperor symbolizes differentiation and structure [4, p. 17]. However, excessive identification with the Emperor produces rigidity. Authority may become authoritarianism, order may become repression, and stability may become fear of change [3, p. 354]. The psychological challenge is therefore to integrate structure without becoming imprisoned by it.

The Hierophant: Tradition, Collective Meaning, and the Cultural Psyche

The Hierophant represents institutionalized knowledge, tradition, ritual, teaching, religious authority, and collective values. Jung's psychology emphasized the importance of symbolic and religious structures in psychic life [6, p. 134]. Humans require systems of meaning through which existential experiences can be interpreted.

The Hierophant can therefore represent the collective symbolic order into which an individual is born. Family traditions, religion, education, moral conventions, and cultural narratives provide psychological structure. At the same time, individuation requires differentiation from collective expectations. The person must eventually ask whether inherited values genuinely correspond to their developing psychological reality. The Shadow of the Hierophant is dogmatism. A symbolic system that once provided meaning can become oppressive when it is treated as absolute and immune to psychological examination.

The Lovers: Relationship, Choice, and the Integration of Opposites

The Lovers are frequently reduced to the theme of romantic love. From a Jungian perspective, however, their symbolism is considerably broader. The card may represent encounter with the Other, attraction, psychological polarity, choice, and the confrontation between incompatible values. Jungian psychology places considerable emphasis on opposites. Conscious and

unconscious, rational and irrational, autonomy and relationship, individuality and belonging are not necessarily problems to be eliminated. They constitute tensions through which psychological development occurs. The Lovers therefore symbolize the necessity of choosing. Psychological maturation requires that the individual recognize conflicting desires and values rather than remaining in an undifferentiated state [13, p. 86]. The card may also be interpreted in relation to projection. Romantic attraction can involve projecting unconscious qualities onto another person. The beloved becomes the carrier of psychological contents that actually belong partly to the subject's own psyche. The withdrawal of projection does not destroy love; ideally, it transforms it into a more conscious relationship.

The Chariot: Ego Consolidation and Direction

The Chariot represents movement, determination, control, victory, and purposeful direction. Following the relational and psychological tensions represented by the Lovers, the Chariot can symbolize a more consolidated ego capable of choosing a direction. From the standpoint of individuation, however, conscious control has limitations. The charioteer must coordinate opposing forces. The image therefore suggests not simply domination but the integration of competing drives. The Shadow of the Chariot is compulsive control: the belief that every psychological problem can be solved through willpower. Jungian psychology would caution against excessive identification with the conscious ego [8, p. 281]. The psyche contains autonomous processes that cannot always be controlled directly.

Strength: The Conscious Relationship with Instinct

Strength traditionally depicts a human figure interacting peacefully with a lion. This image offers an especially powerful Jungian metaphor. The lion can represent instinctual energy, aggression, sexuality, vitality, and the non-rational dimensions of the psyche [10, p. 164]. The human figure does not necessarily destroy or suppress the animal. Instead, the relationship is one

of containment and integration. This corresponds closely to the Jungian idea that psychological development does not require eliminating instinct. Consciousness must establish a constructive relationship with instinctual energy.

The Shadow of Strength appears when the individual mistakes repression for self-control. Suppressed instinct does not disappear; it may return through projection, compulsive behavior, dreams, or emotional eruptions. Strength therefore represents a mature form of psychic power: not domination, but conscious integration.

The Hermit: Withdrawal, Reflection, and Inner Knowledge

The Hermit represents solitude, contemplation, wisdom, and withdrawal from ordinary social activity. Jung's own life and writings emphasize the psychological importance of withdrawal from collective consciousness [12, p. 143]. Individuation requires moments in which the individual encounters their own psychic reality without relying entirely on social validation. The Hermit can therefore symbolize the movement from external authority toward inner authority.

His lantern represents a limited but meaningful light: consciousness illuminates only a small portion of the psychological landscape at any given moment. The Hermit's Shadow is isolation. Solitude can facilitate psychological development, but excessive withdrawal may become avoidance of relationship and reality.

Wheel of Fortune: Psychic Change and the Limits of Ego Control

The Wheel of Fortune introduces the theme of cyclical change. Human beings experience success and failure, gain and loss, emergence and decline. From a Jungian perspective, the Wheel may symbolize the autonomous dynamics of the psyche. The ego does not determine all psychological events. Unconscious processes, interpersonal relationships, historical circumstances, and collective forces continually influence the

individual's life. The Wheel can therefore challenge narcissistic fantasies of total control [9, p. 172]. Psychological maturity requires recognition that the ego participates in life but does not govern the totality of psychic reality.

Justice: Moral Consciousness and Psychological Responsibility

Justice represents equilibrium, discernment, consequence, and ethical judgment. In Jungian psychology, individuation is not a license for unrestricted self-expression [7, p. 136]. Greater psychological consciousness entails greater responsibility for one's actions. Justice may be interpreted as the encounter between personal desire and objective consequence. The individual must recognize both the subjective meaning of an action and its impact upon others. The card also raises the question of psychic balance. Opposing elements cannot always be reduced to a simplistic choice between "good" and "bad". Mature consciousness often requires tolerating ambiguity and accepting responsibility for contradictory aspects of oneself.

The Hanged Man: Surrender and the Transformation of Perspective

The Hanged Man represents suspension, reversal, surrender, sacrifice, and the abandonment of conventional perspective. From a Jungian standpoint, this card may symbolize a crucial stage of psychological transformation: the conscious ego encounters a situation that cannot be solved through its existing methods. The individual must temporarily surrender control. Such surrender should not be confused with passivity. Psychologically, it may represent the capacity to tolerate uncertainty and allow unconscious material to reorganize conscious understanding [1, p. 85]. The inverted position of the Hanged Man is particularly significant. What appears "wrong" from one perspective may reveal a new meaning when the frame of reference changes.

Death: Psychological Transformation and the End of an Identity

Death is one of the most psychologically significant Major Arcana because its symbolic meaning extends far beyond biological death. Within

Jungian interpretation, Death can represent the dissolution of an obsolete psychological structure. An identity, relationship pattern, belief system, or defensive mechanism may need to end so that psychological development can continue. Individuation frequently requires symbolic deaths. A person cannot become psychologically different while preserving every previous identification unchanged. The Shadow of Death is resistance to transformation. The ego frequently attempts to maintain familiar structures even when they have become dysfunctional [7, p. 203]. Death therefore represents not annihilation but transition: something must cease for something else to emerge.

Temperance: Psychic Integration and the Union of Opposites

Temperance depicts the mixing of substances between vessels and traditionally symbolizes balance, moderation, healing, and integration. This imagery corresponds particularly well to Jung's emphasis on the union of opposites. Psychological integration does not mean that all differences disappear. Rather, contradictory tendencies can enter into a new relationship. Conscious and unconscious processes may interact; rationality can coexist with intuition; autonomy can coexist with attachment; strength can coexist with vulnerability. Temperance thus represents one of the central principles of individuation: psychological wholeness is not uniformity but differentiated integration.

The Devil: The Shadow, Compulsion, and Psychological Bondage

The Devil is perhaps the Major Arcanum most directly associated with Jung's concept of the Shadow. The card traditionally represents temptation, attachment, materiality, sexuality, instinct, compulsion, and bondage. Its imagery often emphasizes chains or forms of captivity. From a Jungian perspective, psychological bondage frequently results from unconscious identification. A person may believe that a particular desire, fear, or social

role defines them completely. The Devil represents the moment when unconscious forces acquire disproportionate power over consciousness.

Importantly, Jungian psychology does not equate instinct with evil [9, p. 246]. Sexuality, aggression, ambition, pleasure, and material desire are components of human psychology. The problem arises when they are denied, projected, or allowed to dominate behavior without conscious reflection. The Devil therefore invites Shadow integration rather than moralistic rejection.

The Tower: Collapse of the False Structure

The Tower depicts sudden destruction, lightning, falling structures, and dramatic disruption. Psychologically, it can represent the collapse of an ego structure that has become incompatible with reality. A person may maintain a coherent identity through beliefs, defenses, relationships, or social roles. When contradictory evidence becomes impossible to ignore, the structure may collapse. From a Jungian perspective, such experiences can be profoundly destabilizing but potentially transformative. The Tower is therefore not simply a symbol of catastrophe. It represents the destructive dimension of psychological truth. What is false or excessively rigid may need to collapse. The experience is painful precisely because the ego experiences the loss of its familiar organization as a threat to identity.

The Star: Hope, Renewal, and the Emergence of Meaning

After the destruction of the Tower comes the Star. The Star traditionally symbolizes hope, inspiration, renewal, authenticity, and spiritual orientation. In psychological terms, the Star may represent the emergence of a new organizing image after the collapse of previous structures. Jung emphasized the importance of symbolic images in psychological transformation [8, p. 138]. When an old worldview becomes inadequate, the psyche may generate new images that provide orientation. The Star therefore represents

the psychological capacity to imagine a future that is not merely a repetition of the past.

The Moon: The Unconscious, Projection, and Ambiguity

The Moon is among the most psychologically complex Major Arcana. It is associated with dreams, uncertainty, fear, illusion, instinct, projection, and the ambiguous territory between consciousness and unconsciousness. This makes it particularly compatible with Jungian approaches to dreams and symbolic material. The Moon does not simply mean deception. It represents a state in which perception is influenced by unconscious material. Fear may distort reality; projection may cause the individual to experience internal qualities as external threats. The psychological task is not to eliminate ambiguity immediately. It is to remain sufficiently conscious while entering an uncertain psychological territory. The Moon thus represents the necessity of developing a relationship with unconscious material without confusing symbolic experience with objective external fact.

The Sun: Consciousness, Vitality, and Psychological Illumination

The Sun represents clarity, vitality, joy, visibility, and conscious awareness [11, p. 212]. In Jungian symbolism, light frequently provides a metaphor for consciousness. The Sun can therefore represent the emergence of psychological material into awareness. Yet the Sun should not be interpreted as a permanent state in which all unconscious processes have disappeared. Jung's psychology does not propose that consciousness can illuminate the entire psyche. Rather, the Sun represents a relative increase in clarity: the individual can recognize aspects of experience that were previously obscure. Its positive imagery also suggests the integration of vitality and spontaneity. Psychological maturity is not synonymous with seriousness or suppression; it includes the capacity for play, pleasure, creativity, and authentic expression.

Judgment: Psychological Rebirth and the Call of the Self

Judgment represents awakening, calling, resurrection, recognition, and a decisive transition. From a Jungian perspective, it can be associated with a major stage of individuation in which the individual responds to a deeper organizing principle of the psyche. Jung distinguished the ego from the Self [5, p. 335]. The ego is the center of conscious awareness, whereas the Self represents the totality and organizing wholeness of the psyche. Judgment may therefore symbolize an encounter with a deeper sense of identity that cannot be reduced to social roles or previous ego definitions. The image of resurrection is psychologically significant because transformation often requires the emergence of a new relationship between past and present. The past is not erased; it is integrated and reinterpreted.

The World: Wholeness and the Symbolism of the Self

The World is traditionally the final card of the Major Arcana and represents completion, integration, fulfillment, and wholeness. This makes it particularly suitable for comparison with Jung's concept of the Self. The Self is not merely the ego perfected. It refers to the totality of conscious and unconscious psychic life. Consequently, the World should not be understood as a state in which conflict disappears permanently. Psychological wholeness involves the capacity to contain opposites [7, p. 186]. The figure within the circular wreath can be interpreted as an image of integrated psychic life: movement and stability, individuality and participation, conscious and unconscious dimensions are held within a larger pattern. The World therefore represents not the end of psychological development but a temporary experience of integration. The circular structure also allows the sequence to begin again with the Fool.

The Major Arcana as a Narrative of Individuation

When the Major Arcana are considered collectively, a broad psychological narrative becomes visible. The Fool begins as potential. The Magician develops agency. The High Priestess introduces the unconscious.

The Empress and Emperor establish complementary principles of generation and structure. The Hierophant represents collective meaning, while the Lovers introduce relationship, polarity, and choice [13, p. 67]. The Chariot consolidates direction. Strength establishes a conscious relationship with instinct. The Hermit turns inward. The Wheel of Fortune confronts the ego with forces beyond its control. Justice introduces responsibility, while the Hanged Man disrupts habitual perspective. Death marks symbolic transformation. Temperance attempts integration. The Devil confronts unconscious attachment and Shadow material. The Tower destroys rigid structures. The Star introduces renewed orientation. The Moon returns consciousness to ambiguity and the unconscious, followed by the clarifying symbolism of the Sun. Judgment represents awakening to a deeper psychological identity, and the World symbolizes integration. This sequence resembles the broad structure of individuation: differentiation, encounter with unconscious material, confrontation with opposites, destabilization of previous identity, integration, and movement toward greater psychic wholeness. However, this interpretation should not be mistaken for a literal psychological algorithm. Human development is rarely linear. Individuals move backward and forward between psychological states, revisit unresolved conflicts, and experience multiple transformations throughout life. The Major Arcana can therefore be better understood as a symbolic spiral than as a straight developmental ladder.

Archetypal Polarity in the Major Arcana

One of the most important principles of Jungian psychology is the relationship between opposites. The Tarot repeatedly constructs symbolic polarities:

- Fool / World: beginning and completion;
- Magician / High Priestess: action and receptivity;
- Empress / Emperor: generation and structure;

- Hierophant / Lovers: collective values and personal choice;
- Chariot / Hermit: outward movement and inward reflection;
- Strength / Devil: conscious integration of instinct and unconscious bondage;
- Death / Sun: symbolic ending and renewed consciousness;
- Tower / Star: destruction and reconstruction;
- Moon / Sun: ambiguity and clarity.

These polarities suggest that psychological development does not consist in choosing one side permanently. The conscious personality becomes more complex when it can hold opposing psychological truths simultaneously. For example, autonomy without relationship may become isolation, whereas relationship without autonomy may become dependency. Rationality without intuition may become rigidity, while intuition without critical reflection may become projection. Jungian individuation therefore requires a psychological capacity that can be described as “holding the tension of opposites” [5, p. 34]. The Tarot provides an exceptionally accessible visual language for this principle.

Projection and the Psychological Use of Tarot

One of the most significant connections between Tarot and analytical psychology concerns projection. Jung understood projection as a process through which unconscious psychological contents are experienced as belonging to another person or to the external world. Symbolic images can become objects of projection because they are sufficiently ambiguous to activate personal associations. For example, an individual looking at the Devil may perceive sexuality, fear, repression, temptation, power, or liberation depending on their psychological history. The card does not contain one psychologically universal message. Rather, it functions as a symbolic stimulus [12, p. 92].

This principle provides a possible explanation for why Tarot readings may feel personally meaningful even without assuming supernatural prediction. The individual's associations, expectations, emotional reactions, and memories contribute to the interpretation. The Tarot card can function as a mirror — not because it objectively reflects future events, but because symbolic ambiguity permits the individual to encounter aspects of their own psychological world. This does not mean that every subjective interpretation is psychologically valid. Projection can distort perception as easily as it can facilitate insight. A responsible psychological approach therefore requires reflection on the interpreter's assumptions.

Jung developed the method of amplification to explore symbolic material by connecting a particular image with mythological, religious, cultural, and historical parallels. The Tarot lends itself naturally to such an approach.

A card can be examined on several levels:

1. Descriptive level: What is visibly represented?
2. Personal level: What associations does the image evoke in the individual?
3. Cultural level: What historical meanings are attached to the symbols?
4. Archetypal level: What recurrent psychological pattern might the image activate?
5. Developmental level: What psychological conflict or transition could the image represent?

This multilayered approach prevents the reduction of Tarot symbolism to rigid definitions. For instance, the Hermit may historically evoke religious asceticism and wisdom. Personally, it may evoke loneliness or freedom. Archetypally, it may activate the Wise Old Man motif. Developmentally, it may represent a period of withdrawal required for psychological differentiation. All of these meanings can coexist.

A central place in Jungian analytical psychology occupies the concept of the Self [5, p. 48]. Jung's conception of the Self is broader than the ordinary notion of self-esteem or personal identity. It refers to the organizing totality of the psyche and to the possibility of psychological wholeness. Several Tarot images can be interpreted as manifestations of this principle. The World is the most obvious example because of its symbolism of completion and circularity. Judgment may represent the call toward a deeper identity, while the Sun represents increasing consciousness. Nevertheless, the Self should not be equated with any single card.

If the Self represents psychic totality, then the entire Major Arcana can be interpreted as a symbolic field through which different aspects of psychic life become visible. The Self is therefore not simply the destination of the Fool's journey [12, p. 67]. It is also implicitly present throughout the journey.

The phrase "Fool's Journey" is commonly used in modern Tarot discourse to describe the progression through the Major Arcana. From a Jungian perspective, the journey can be understood as a symbolic representation of the development of consciousness. At the beginning, the individual encounters external structures: authority, tradition, family, relationship, social identity. Later, the journey turns toward inner experience: solitude, uncertainty, surrender, transformation, Shadow confrontation, and the unconscious. The final stages involve renewed consciousness and integration. This narrative corresponds to a general psychological movement: potential → differentiation → social adaptation → conflict → withdrawal → destabilization → confrontation with the unconscious → transformation → integration. The model is useful precisely because it does not portray psychological growth as uninterrupted progress. Crisis is included as an essential component of development.

A serious academic interpretation must acknowledge significant limitations. First, Tarot is historically older than Jung's analytical psychology

but younger than many of the myths and symbolic traditions sometimes associated with it. The modern occult interpretation of the Major Arcana emerged through complex 19th- and 20th-century esoteric traditions.

Second, there is no canonical Jungian system assigning each Tarot card a specific archetype. Any detailed correspondence between the twenty-two Major Arcana and Jungian concepts is therefore interpretive.

Third, the concept of archetypes itself has been criticized for ambiguity. Some scholars have questioned whether archetypes should be understood as inherited psychic structures, culturally transmitted patterns, cognitive predispositions, or metaphorical descriptions of recurring human experiences.

Fourth, symbolic interpretation is inherently susceptible to confirmation bias. Once an interpreter expects to find a particular archetype, almost any sufficiently ambiguous image may appear to confirm the hypothesis.

Fifth, psychological meaning cannot be separated entirely from culture and personal history. The same Tarot image may evoke very different psychological associations in different individuals.

For these reasons, Tarot should not be presented as a scientifically validated diagnostic instrument. The psychological interpretation of Tarot must be distinguished from empirical psychological assessment. Contemporary clinical psychology relies upon methods designed to evaluate reliability, validity, predictive accuracy, and clinical utility. Tarot does not possess comparable empirical status as a diagnostic or prognostic instrument. Nevertheless, symbolic practices may have psychological value without functioning as scientific tests.

Narrative therapy, expressive arts, dream work, guided imagery, and other therapeutic approaches demonstrate that symbolic representation can contribute to self-reflection and meaning-making. A Tarot image may similarly serve as a prompt for narrative exploration.

For example, asking an individual what the Tower represents in their current life may encourage examination of beliefs, structures, and identities that have become unstable. Asking what the Hermit means to them may facilitate reflection on solitude, boundaries, and inner authority.

The psychological mechanism in such cases need not be supernatural. It may involve projection, metaphorical thinking, autobiographical memory, emotional activation, narrative reconstruction, and perspective-taking. The therapeutic usefulness of a symbolic practice should therefore be evaluated separately from its metaphysical claims.

It is tempting to describe the Major Arcana through fixed statements such as “the Emperor means authority” or “the Devil means temptation”. A Jungian approach suggests a more dynamic interpretation [12, p. 27]. Authority can be conscious or unconscious. The Emperor can represent healthy structure or authoritarian domination. The High Priestess can represent intuitive wisdom or avoidant secrecy. The Hermit can represent mature solitude or defensive isolation. The Lovers can represent authentic relationship or projection. The Devil can represent destructive compulsion or the rediscovery of rejected instinctual energy. The Tower can represent traumatic collapse or liberation from a false identity. Thus, archetypal images should be interpreted in terms of psychological relationships rather than dictionaries of fixed meanings. The same archetypal pattern can have both constructive and destructive manifestations [11, p. 214].

One of the greatest psychological strengths of the Tarot is ambiguity. Scientific concepts strive toward precise operational definitions. Symbolic images function differently. Their meanings are open enough to allow associations but structured enough to provide psychological orientation. This ambiguity creates a productive tension between recognition and uncertainty. A person may recognize themselves in an image while simultaneously discovering something unexpected about their own interpretation. The Moon

is particularly illustrative. Its ambiguity may provoke fear, imagination, curiosity, projection, or intuition. The card does not resolve the uncertainty; it creates a symbolic space in which uncertainty can be examined. From a depth-psychological perspective, this can be valuable because unconscious processes frequently become visible first through ambiguous images rather than explicit propositions.

The comparison between Jungian archetypes and the Major Arcana demonstrates a substantial interpretive compatibility, but compatibility should not be confused with historical identity or empirical validation.

The Tarot's symbolic richness allows many Jungian concepts to be represented metaphorically. The Shadow finds particularly clear expression in the Devil and Moon, while the process of psychological transformation can be explored through Death and Tower. The Self is especially compatible with the World, and individuation provides a framework for interpreting the entire sequence.

Nevertheless, no one-to-one correspondence can be established. This is partly because archetypes are not equivalent to characters. The same archetypal pattern may appear in multiple cards, while a single card may activate several archetypal patterns simultaneously. The Emperor, for instance, can represent the paternal principle, authority, order, Persona, collective structure, or the ego's need for control. Which dimension becomes psychologically significant depends on the individual and the context. Similarly, the Fool can embody the Divine Child, Trickster, Wanderer, or potentiality. The psychological meaning is not contained entirely within the image itself. This interpretive openness is not necessarily a weakness. It is precisely what allows symbolic material to function as a medium of psychological exploration. However, it does mean that Tarot interpretation should be presented as hermeneutic rather than diagnostic.

The study of Tarot through Jungian psychology may contribute to a broader understanding of symbolic consciousness.

First, it demonstrates the persistence of archetypal narrative structures in contemporary culture.

Second, it provides a case study of how individuals construct personal meaning from culturally transmitted images.

Third, it illustrates the psychological significance of ambiguity. Human beings frequently need symbolic forms that can contain contradictory meanings without resolving them prematurely.

Fourth, Tarot offers an accessible example of the distinction between projection and objective reality. A card may reveal something about the interpreter's psyche precisely because the interpreter participates in constructing its meaning.

Finally, the Tarot may be considered a cultural artifact through which the tension between rational modernity and symbolic imagination becomes visible.

Rather than asking whether Tarot is “scientifically true” in a predictive sense, psychological scholarship can ask what people psychologically do with Tarot, why its images remain compelling, and how symbolic interpretation influences self-narratives.

Conclusion

The Major Arcana of the Tarot and Jungian analytical psychology belong to different historical and intellectual traditions. Tarot emerged within European card culture and later became associated with various occult and esoteric systems. Jung, by contrast, developed a psychological theory concerned with consciousness, the unconscious, archetypal patterns, symbolic experience, and individuation.

Nevertheless, the two systems can be placed into a productive interpretive dialogue. The Major Arcana can be read as a symbolic narrative

of psychological development. The Fool represents the beginning of an uncertain journey; the Magician, conscious agency; the High Priestess, the encounter with the unconscious; the Empress and Emperor, complementary generative and structuring principles; the Hierophant, collective tradition; the Lovers, relationship and psychological polarity; the Chariot, direction; Strength, integration of instinct; the Hermit, inner reflection; the Wheel of Fortune, the limits of ego control; Justice, responsibility; the Hanged Man, surrender of habitual perspective; Death, transformation; Temperance, integration; the Devil, Shadow and attachment; the Tower, collapse of rigid structures; the Star, renewal; the Moon, unconscious ambiguity; the Sun, illumination; Judgment, awakening; and the World, symbolic wholeness.

The most significant correspondence is therefore not between individual cards and isolated archetypes, but between the structure of the Tarot journey and the psychological logic of individuation. From this perspective, the Tarot does not need to be understood as a supernatural mechanism in order to possess psychological significance. Its images can function as symbolic containers for projection, imagination, emotional recognition, narrative reconstruction, and reflection on unconscious processes.

The value of a Jungian interpretation of Tarot lies precisely in its ability to transform the question from “What will happen to me?” into “What is happening within me, and what might this image reveal about the way I understand myself?” Such an approach also preserves the distinction between symbolic interpretation and scientific evidence. Tarot should not be regarded as an empirically validated diagnostic or predictive method. Its potential psychological relevance lies instead in its function as a symbolic language.

Ultimately, the Major Arcana may be understood as a gallery of psychological possibilities. Their figures do not necessarily predict external events; they dramatize inner situations. Their narratives remind us that

development involves not only gaining knowledge and control but also encountering uncertainty, recognizing disowned aspects of ourselves, relinquishing obsolete identities, integrating opposites, and discovering forms of meaning that are larger than the conscious ego. In this sense, the journey of the Tarot can be interpreted as an image of a fundamental psychological movement: from unconscious potential toward greater consciousness, from fragmentation toward integration, and from identification with a limited ego toward a more complex relationship with the totality of psychic life. The Fool and the World may therefore be understood as two points on the same symbolic circle. The journey begins with openness to the unknown and culminates in an experience of greater wholeness — but wholeness itself contains the possibility of a new beginning. Psychological development is not a final state. It is an ongoing process of becoming.

Further research could focus on a more detailed comparative analysis of individual Major Arcana cards and specific Jungian archetypes, as well as on their relationship to the process of individuation. Future studies could also investigate how psychological interpretations of Tarot symbolism vary across different cultural contexts and contemporary approaches to analytical psychology.

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Citation: Elena Andriyenko (2026). JUNGIAN ARCHETYPES AND THEIR REPRESENTATION IN THE MAJOR ARCANA OF THE TAROT: A PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SYMBOLIC ANALYSIS. Frankfurt. TK Meganom LLC. Paradigm of knowledge. 4(74). doi: 10.26886/2520-7474.4(74)2026.4

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