

## Toss Out Male Tropes! Men are More than Black & White

### Part 3: Characters and Archetypes and Tropes... Oh My!

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## Conflicts

There are just **three** conflicts in storytelling. They are

1. Man vs. the World
2. Man vs. Man
3. Man vs. the Supernatural

## Plots

There are just **seven** basic plots. Some claim that Rebellion Against “The One” is a plot line. This typically concerns a hero who rebels against the all-powerful entity that controls the world until he is forced to surrender to that power. In some versions, “the One” is portrayed as benevolent, as in the story of *Job*, while in others “the One” is malevolent, as in *1984*, *Brazil*, or *The Hunger Games*.

Some claim that Mystery is a plot and define a Mystery plot as a story in which an outsider to some horrendous incident or event (such as a murder) then tries to discover the truth of what happened.

The problem I have with these additions is that they mainly fall into one of the previous seven. For example, what is being investigated in a Mystery is a story based on one of the other plots or the Rebellion against “the One” is an overcoming the Monster plot or a Rebirth plot.

I believe that either of these can fit nicely inside the traditionally recognized seven classical plots.

1. Overcoming the Monster
2. Rags to Riches
3. The Quest
4. Voyage and Return
5. Rebirth
6. Comedy
7. Tragedy

## World’s Largest Bookseller

Amazon is the largest book seller in the world. So, we can gauge what the market looks like through them. A call to Amazon in April 2019 resulted in the answer: “...more than 42 million new paperbacks written in English but the number changes daily...”

## What Makes Your Story Great?

So, with 7 basic plots, 3 basic conflicts, and tens of millions of books currently on sale, how does your once upon a time, something happened to some people and then they did this and that happened and the end stand out among the millions of books out there?

## True to Life 3D Characters

Great Characterization. What a reader is seeking when they pick up a fiction book is a character with which they can relate.

## Three-D Characters

“My last name is Poirot, like Agatha Christie's famous detective Hercule Poirot; no relation to the fictional character.”

— Ken Poirot

## Characterization is the Key

Three Dimensional Characters are the key to any great book.

Great books are character driven books.

Exact plot points and dialogue can be forgotten but great characters are memorable

## 3 Spheres of Characterization

For the next little while, we're going to talk about craft. And, this is key.

I realize this is step 1, but if you take only one thing from this class, my prayer is that you take this.

There are 3 Spheres of Characterization:

1. Physical/Material
2. Intellectual/Learn/Teach
3. Spiritual/Emotional

## The PROP character

The bellhop took our bags.

The “bellhop” is unformed and unfilled with no description and no dialogue. He or she may as well be a luggage cart.

## One Dimensional Character

The blue uniformed bellhop took our bags.

Physical Sphere

The “bellhop” is no longer uniformed, he or she is uniformed and we have a vague idea of his or her physical appearance.

## Two-Dimensional Character

The blue uniformed bellhop put on a practiced smile before he asked, “First time here, I take it?”

Physical Sphere

Intellectual Sphere

The “bellhop” is no longer one dimensional. He is uniformed and smiles. In addition, he speaks with an interrogative, so we have a vague idea of his powers of observation.

## Balanced 3-Dimensional Character

The spiritual sphere is there at the bottom intentionally because it is the foundation. It’s the building block of the other two spheres.

## The Hunger Games Metaphor

*The Hunger Games* series of books completely lacked **any** spirituality.

1. Physical/Material
2. Intellectual/Learn/Teach
3. ~~Spiritual/Emotional~~

## Mainstream Secular Romance

Mainstream Secular Romance lacks genuine emotion and spirituality and **overemphasizes** physicality.

1. **Physical/Material**
2. Intellectual/Learn/Teach
3. ~~Spiritual/Emotional~~

## Traditional Christian Romance

Traditional Christian Romance lacks genuine physicality and **overemphasizes** emotion and spirituality.

1. ~~Physical/Material~~
2. Intellectual/Learn/Teach
3. **Spiritual/Emotional**

## The Goal

Having a 3-dimensional character makes the character relatable and memorable to the reader. Note that the Spiritual sphere is the foundation of any 3-D character.

## Archetypes

Archetypes are “stock” characters. They are essentially caricatures of characters. “[T]he hero and the heroine overcome their problems not with social engineering and not with psychology, but with **core heroic virtues** and they’re always the same. It’s courage, determination, a sense of honor, integrity, and the ability to love, and that’s at the core of all our heroic archetypes.”

-Jayne Ann Krentz

## 104 Archetypes & Stock Characters

These are included as a separate spreadsheet.

## TRUTH or TROPE?

Now it’s time to play “**TRUTH or TROPE?**”

Can you recognize some of the most common and false/ misleading male tropes or determine if they represent men accurately.

## **TRUTH or TROPE?** Combine Career Criminal + Villain= **Gangsta Thug TROPE**

Black men in media are often portrayed in stereotypical roles (thugs, pimps, gangsters) which supports the American blacks as criminals label (Chochran, Dhillon, Rabow, Vega, & Yeghnazar, 2012). Moreover, an element of criminality remains a constant character trait often associated with these characters (Noakes, 2003).

**TRUTH or TROPE? Combine Career Criminal + Villain= Gangsta Thug**

**TRUTH**

This pervasive trope perpetuates long-held stereotypes that American blacks are manifestly criminogenic in and of themselves, and further fuels prejudices (Fujioka, 2005).

Martin Luther King, Jr.

Benjamin O. Davis, Jr.

Frederick Douglas

Ben Carson

Thurgood Marshall

Booker T. Washington

Muhammad Ali

Jackie Robinson

Langston Hughes

George Washington Carver

Former President Barack Obama

Heart Surgeon Daniel Hale Williams

Inventor Garret Morgan

Robert Augustus Sweeney (2x MOH recipient) along with 89 other American black recipients.

**TRUTH or TROPE? Warrior + Wildly Insane = Crazy Veteran**

**TROPE**

The vast majority of combat veterans suffer from a mental disorder called post traumatic stress disorder.

**TRUTH**

Statistics show that 6% to 8% of the general population suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder with fewer than 15% exposed to at least 1 traumatizing event. Across the entire U.S., about 8 million U.S. adults have PTSD in a given year.

Meanwhile, 87% of combat veterans are exposed to on average 3.4 traumatizing events, yet less than 13% of veterans ever show any symptoms of post-traumatic stress or a stress related metal disorder.

## What is a Trope?

Combining Archetypes to generate Tropes

A Trope is essentially a commonly accepted “dramatic truth” and can represent a character or a common theme in the narrative.

**Combine** a few **Archetypes** and you likely have some recognizable character **tropes**.

For example:      Lover (Husband) + Harlequin

Lover + Harlequin

= **Idiot Husband**

Father Figure + Harlequin

= **Idiot Dad**

“...when fathers were parenting, it was **depicted as humorously foolish in just over 50% of the relevant scenes** in the 2000s and 2010s, compared with 18% in the 1980s and 31% in the 1990s...”

Erica Scharrer, Professor of Communication, University of Massachusetts Amherst

Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media

<https://theconversation.com/why-are-sitcom-dads-still-so-inept-139737>

Mentally/Socially Disabled + Harlequin

= **Autistic Clown**

Warrior + Dumb Muscle

= **Mindless Drone**

Warrior + Psychopath

= **Sociopathic Soldier**

Warrior + Wildly Insane

= **Crazy Vet**

Prostitute + McCoy

= **Sympathetic Sinner**

Girl Next Door + Wildly Crazy

= **Crazy Ex** [Dated once, girlfriend, wife, or ex]

Prostitute + Grande Dame

= **The Gold Digger**

Warrior + Rebel

= **Renegade Cop / Criminal Cop**

## Tropes

“A **trope** is, effectively, a widely-used but importantly widely-accepted dramatic device.”

-Paul FitzSimons

Examples:

Lover (Husband) + Harlequin (Clown) = Idiot Husband

Father Figure + Harlequin (Clown) = Idiot Dad

Mentally/Socially Disabled + Harlequin (Clown) = Autistic Clown

Warrior + Dumb Muscle = Mindless Drone

Warrior + Psychopath = Sociopathic Soldier

Prostitute + McCoy = Sympathetic Sinner (aka “Hooker with a Heart of Gold)

Girl Next Door + Wildly Crazy = "Crazy" [Dated once, girlfriend, wife, or holder of an unknown and unrequited crush]

Prostitute + Grande Dame = The Gold Digger

Warrior + Rebel = Renegade Cop/Criminal Cop

## Toss Out the Tropes!

Toss out the tropes to avoid perpetuating stereotypes

### Tropes to Avoid (Male vs. Female)

With your protagonist characters, don't use phrases or characterization that perpetuates negative stereotypes about the sexes.

#### Men/Boys

Men:

- Misogyny dialogue “She'd be prettier if \_\_\_\_, All women, girls can't, chicks always, little lady, Feminazi”
- Commitment Phobic

Young men

- Oversexed, delinquent, entitled, immoral

Boys

- Dirty, mean, annoying, bullyish, dumb

## Women/Girls

### Women

- Misandry: “mansplaining, manalogue, he had a mantrum, maninterrupting, toxic masculinity, All men, boys can’t, men always, men can’t possibly understand”
- Desperate for commitment

### Young women

- Anti-male, disrespectful, selfish, promiscuous

### Girls

- Angelic, clean, sweet, smart, fair/just

## Tropes to Avoid (Asian people group)

**Yellow Peril:** an "oriental" criminal and/or political mastermind, a character originating in the xenophobic days of the late 19th century, but popular ever since.

**Yellowface:** East Asian characters are portrayed by actors of other races while wearing make-up to give them the appearance of an East Asian person, often including epicanthic folds and queue hairstyles.

**Asian Speekee Engrish:** A common stereotype (covered in dialogue)

**Interchangeable Asian Cultures:** Fortune cookies. ‘Nough said.

**Mighty Whitey, Mellow Yellow:** white male in relationship with a disadvantaged, or submissive, Asian woman.

**Asian and nerdy:** good students, come from good families and don't have any economic problems

**All Asians are Martial Arts Experts:** Seen a movie where he doesn't know kung fu?

**Asian Store Owners:** Let's meet at Arnold's after school

**Identical Looking Asians:** Queue hairstyles, peasant hats/dress, identical kimonos or other apparel

Examples of “Yellow Face” in cinema:

The 1961 film *Breakfast at Tiffany's* features Andy Rooney in “Yellow Face” portraying the bucktoothed Mr. Yunioshi speaking Pidgeon “Engrish.”

David Carradine in the TV series *Kung Fu*

Scarlett Johansen in the live action film *Ghost in the Shell*

Tilda Swinton in *Doctor Strange*.

Examples that “[Insert Color] Face” is not limited to Asian people groups:

Val Kilmer is blonde and blue-eyed with pale skin yet portrayed a Sioux Warrior in the film “Thunderheart.”

Shawn and Marlon Wayans are neither white nor chicks but played white female coeds in the film “White Chicks.”

## Tropes to Avoid (Germans)

The most common stereotype about Germans in movies since 2000 is that they are all Nazis.

Second place goes to German scientists, filed under "Herr Doctor" on TVTropes.

All Germans' supposedly actor David Hasselhoff.

All Germans operate with military precision and efficiency at all times.

## Tropes to Avoid (United Kingdom)

James Bond aside, British characters overwhelmingly seem to be a popular choice for villains.

British are all arrogant, uptight, and speak with a classic posh accent.

British are mean, especially to small animals and children (see *Oliver Twist*)

## Tropes to Avoid (Russian)

Russians are portrayed as "hard-fightin', heavy-drinkin', manly, boorish" characters.

Russians lead hard lives, often in poverty.

Most often played in films by non-Russians. In *Rocky IV*, the Swedish Dolph Lundgren started his action career as Russian boxer Ivan Drago; Arnold Schwarzenegger in *Red Heat*; and Viggo Mortensen in *Eastern Promises*

## Tropes to Avoid (Blacks)

Black men are portrayed as "Hypermasculine" as in scary/angry.

If people die in a movie, the black character is the most likely to die first.

If a film features one black character, it's likely to be the black best friend.

Black women are portrayed as loudmouthed/sassy.

"Darkest Africa" movies portray the continent as a mysterious and dangerous isolated land with only limited ties to "modern" civilization.

## Break the mold. Be original.

Tests to identify archetypes, tropes, and stereotypes.

## The Substitution Test for Sex

The simplest test for sexist remarks is to substitute the opposite sex.

(Actual quotes taken from greeting cards in a supermarket)

Not all **men** are annoying. Some are dead.

**Men** have only two faults: 1) Everything they say and 2) everything they do.

Substitute the opposite sex. Does it diminish the opposite sex?

Not all **women** are annoying. Some are dead.

**Women** have only two faults: 1) Everything they say and 2) everything they do.

## The Substitution Test for People Groups

The simplest test for prejudicial language is to imagine you are a member of an imaginary people group, such as **Smogarians**, then *substitute* that imaginary people group into any statement on a **specific** nonfictional people group.

Take this example from the Coca-Cola company's "Better Together" online training seminar.

*White people are socialized to feel they are inherently superior because they are white. White people are arrogant and defensive. Break with white solidarity. Be less white.*

Substitute the fictional **Smogarian** people for **white** people. Are the remarks prejudicial toward the **Smogarian** people group?

*Smogarians are socialized to feel they are inherently superior because they are Smogarian. Smogarians are arrogant and defensive. Break with Smogarian solidarity. Be less Smogarian.*

If you were Smogarian, would this read as offensive to you?

## The Bechdel Test

The Bechdel Test (sometimes called the Bechdel-Wallace Test) for on-screen female characters has been around since at least 1985. It is designed to determine whether or not on-screen female characters have fully realized lives apart from men.

The basis of the test is to examine a film or a TV episode and answer three questions:

1. Does it have at least two [named] women in it?
2. Do they talk to each other?
3. Do they talk about something besides a man, or men?

Any film or TV episode that can answer "yes" to all three questions passes the test.

## The DuVernay Test

In 2016, *New York Times* film critic Manohla Dargis developed the DuVernay Test, named for director Ava DuVernay (*Selma*, *A Wrinkle In Time*). The basis of the 5 question test is to answer the question:

Do on-screen minority characters have fully realized lives rather than serve as scenery for non-minority characters?

1. Does it have at least two [named] minority characters in it?
2. Do the minority characters portray harmful, simplistic, or common archetypes, tropes, or stereotypes?
3. Do the minority characters talk to each other, and about anything other than color?
4. Do only the minority characters die, or do they die first?
5. Do the minority characters pursue their own goals apart from the goals of any majority characters?

## Test your characters.

Test your characters. Identify Archetypes/Tropes

Test your HERO, HEROINE, and any other named characters

## I think I Just Tested Positive!

What do I do when I find that my story is tropish?

## The Very Best Advice

Write from the heart. Be true to your story.

I tested positive! Now what?

**It's okay. Tropes aren't always BAD!**

A Trope is sort of like a marriage.

When you do it well, and make a good marriage, there's nothing better.

When you don't do it well, and make a bad marriage, there's nothing worse.

The Very Best Advice

Write from the heart.

Be true to your story.

**Deconstruction.** Embrace the trope and RUN with it in order to encourage discussion about that trope.

For example, in *Madame Bovary*, the titular character spends all her time reading romance novels, and bases all of her actions and decisions on them the hope that it will turn her own life into the fairytales she reads. (Spoiler Alert!: there is no Happily Ever After.)

**Subversion.** Give readers the sense that a trope is playing out as expected, only to defy their predictions when the story unfolds in a different manner.

For example, in the film *Life As We Know It*, the heroine rushes to the airport to declare her love for the recently estranged co-parent of their adopted child, thus playing out the “Belated Love Epiphany” trope. She is stopped at every turn by Atlanta traffic, ticket agents, and TSA and returns home, sans love confession. When she walks into the house, he is there waiting for her.

## How do I describe minority characters without offense?

Describe minority characters without compromising the story.

### Book Cover

One way to describe the character is via the book cover.

### Point of View

Use POINT OF VIEW

Minority Character’s POV:

Rachel never liked her straight black hair that every other Korean she knew also had. She wanted to die her hair bright pink on her eighteenth birthday.

Main Character’s or Love interest's POV:

Mark looked down at their clasped fingers, admiring the contrast of his relatively light skin and her dark skin as much as he admired the warmth of her touch.

Villain's POV:

Boris despised everything about the man from his Asian features to his unshakable faith.

## What about Sensitivity Readers?

(Translated) Do I have to do my research?

### Research Readers (Sensitivity Readers)

If you are not an expert or have no personal or practical experience with your subject matter, it makes perfect sense to have someone who is read your work for flaws.

Are you an attorney, a veteran, a surgeon, or a member of a minority group?  
If so, then you probably don't need a research reader.  
If not, then you need to complete your research by having it validated.

## Set SMART GOALS with your Research Reader

**SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Timely)  
GOALS (Godly Objectives Assure Lasting Success)**

**SPECIFIC:**

Front load your selected reader with up to 3 **specific** questions.

**MEASURABLE:**

Word the questions so that responses are **measurable**. (T/F? Scale of 1 to 10)

**ACHIEVABLE:**

Ensure your reader has expertise within your areas of concerns so that you **achieve** results.

**REALISTIC:**

Keep the questions focused and **realistic**.

**TIMELY:**

Agree upon a deadline to receive responses so they are **timely**.

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God—Phil 4:6

## The Very Best Advice Remains

Write from the heart.  
Be true to your story.

## Links & Resources

Web based resources, Christian books, and Secular books that deal with the nature and character of men.

(Online)

Focus on the Family Marriage Resources [www.focusonthefamily.com/topic/marriage/](http://www.focusonthefamily.com/topic/marriage/)

God's Design for Marriage [www.focusonthefamily.com/marriage/gods-design-for-marriage/](http://www.focusonthefamily.com/marriage/gods-design-for-marriage/)

Writing Tip to Handle RACE [successfulchristianselfpublishing.com/writing-tip-to-handle-race/](http://successfulchristianselfpublishing.com/writing-tip-to-handle-race/)

(Christian Books)

*The Five Love Languages* by Gary Chapman

*Love and Respect: The Love She Most Desires; the Respect He Desperately Needs* by Dr. Emerson Eggerichs

*Romancing Your Husband* by Debra White Smith

*For Women Only* by Shaunti Feldhahn

*For Men Only* by Shaunti Feldhahn

*Love's Letters* by Shaunti Feldhahn, Gregg & Hallee Bridgeman, Scott & Leah Silverii, Juan & Ruthy Martinez, Shawn Lovejoy, Michael & Alicia Rowntree, Alicia Rowntree, Sheri Bright, Tricia Lovejoy, et al.

*Intended for Pleasure* by Ed Wheat

*Finding the Hero in Your Husband: Surrendering the Way God Intended* by Juli Slattery

*Raising Men, Not Boys* by Mike Fabarez

*His Needs, Her Needs: Building an Affair-Proof Marriage* by Willard F. Harley Jr.

*No More Headaches: Enjoying Sex & Intimacy in Marriage* by Juli Slattery

*His Brain, Her Brain: How Divinely Designed Differences Can Strengthen Your Marriage* by Barb Larimore and Walt Larimore M.D.

*Sacred Marriage: What If God Designed Marriage to Make Us Holy More Than to Make Us Happy?* by Gary Thomas

*The Excellent Wife: A Biblical Perspective* by Martha Peace

*The Exemplary Husband: A Biblical Perspective* by Stuart Scott

*Sheet Music: Uncovering the Secrets of Sexual Intimacy in Marriage* by Kevin Leman

*You Can Be the Wife of a Happy Husband* by Darien B. Cooper

*Guys are Waffles, Girls are Spaghetti* by Chad Eastham

*Men and Women: Enjoying the Difference* by Larry Crabb

*Truth About Men* by Devon Franklin

*Silent Sons: A Book for and about Men* by Robert Ackerman

*Life-Changing Verses about Men* by Carlton Lee Arnold

*Gender Roles and the People of God* by Alice Mathews

*Dare to Be a Man* by David G. Evans

*Rise of the Servant Kings: What the Bible Says About a Man* by Ken Harrison

*Stupid about Men: 10 Rules for Getting Romance Right* by Deborah Dunn

*Happy Wives Club: One Woman's Worldwide Search for the Secrets of a Great Marriage* by Fawn Weaver

*The DNA of Relationships: Discover How You Are Designed for Satisfying Relationships* by Dr. Gary Smalley, Dr. Greg Smalley, Michael Smalley

*The Christian Man: A Conversation About the 10 Issues Men Say Matter Most* by Patrick Morley

*Unspoken: What Men Won't Talk About and Why* by Johnny Hunt

*10 Lies Men Believe: The Truth About Women, Power, Sex, and God--and Why It Matters* by J. Lee Grady

(Secular Books)

*Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus* by John Gray

*Why Men Don't Listen and Women Can't Read Maps: How We're Different and What to Do About It* by Allan Pease

## Biographies and Contact Info

### **JP Robinson Biography:**

JP Robinson is a full-time author of historical and political fiction. He is also a PA-certified teacher with fifteen years of experience in marketing and education. Publishers Weekly and other industry leaders have praised his high-adrenaline novels. Bilingual in French and pursuing his master's degree in Education, JP frequently speaks at writers conferences and to church groups across the nation. He has been happily married for over fifteen years to his high school sweetheart.

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### **Gregg Bridgeman Biography:**

Gregg Bridgeman is the Editor-in-Chief at Olivia Kimbrell Press. He is husband to best-selling Christian author Hallee Bridgeman and parent to three. He continues to proudly serve in the US Armed Forces and has done so in either an active or reserve capacity for more than twenty years as an Airborne and Air Assault qualified paratrooper, earning a Bronze Star for his service. Most importantly, he was ordained in October of 2001 after surrendering his life to Christ decades earlier.

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