

Character: Defined

What Exactly is a Character?
Are you a Character?

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**A Gathering of Writers
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Acknowledgements

- Amelie O. Rorty

- Editor of The Identities of Persons
- Last article in the book, which is the proceedings of a philosophy conference

- Various books on the Enneagram

- M. H. Abrams

- A Glossary of Literary Terms

- Years of study of the history of the development of the world's religions

- Years of practice with the Tarot and many books on the Tarot

Planned Agenda: Part 1

A brief history / exploration of “personhood”

- Hero, Protagonist, Figure, Character, Person, Individual, Soul, Presence
 - First three(+) are most strongly related to “your place in society”
- Some/ Many of these categories overlap

Planned Agenda: Part 2

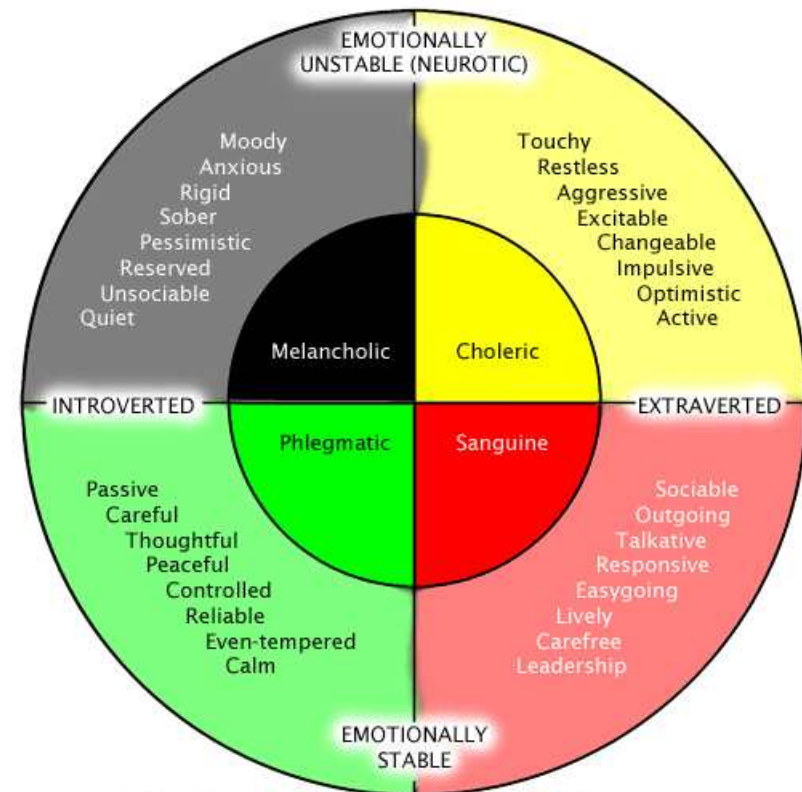
- Using the Tarot as an exploration tool for character development in writing
- The Tarot (Astrology), Enneagram, myths, provide “premade packages” of characteristics

Let's Get Started!

With an example of a way to group characteristics

<https://katerinamichouli.wordpress.com/the-four-temperament-types-of-hippocrates-wikipedia/>

- The Four Temperaments or Four Humours can be traced back reliably to Ancient Greek medicine and philosophy, notably in the work of Hippocrates (c.460-377/359BC – the ‘Father of Medicine’) and in Plato’s (428-348BC) ideas about character and personality. In Greek medicine around 2,500 years ago it was believed that in order to maintain health, people needed an even balance of the four body fluids: blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile. These four body fluids were linked (in daft ways by modern standards) to certain organs and illnesses and also represented the Four Temperaments or Four Humours (of personality) as they later became known.” (Montgomery, 2002 in ODportal, s.d.).

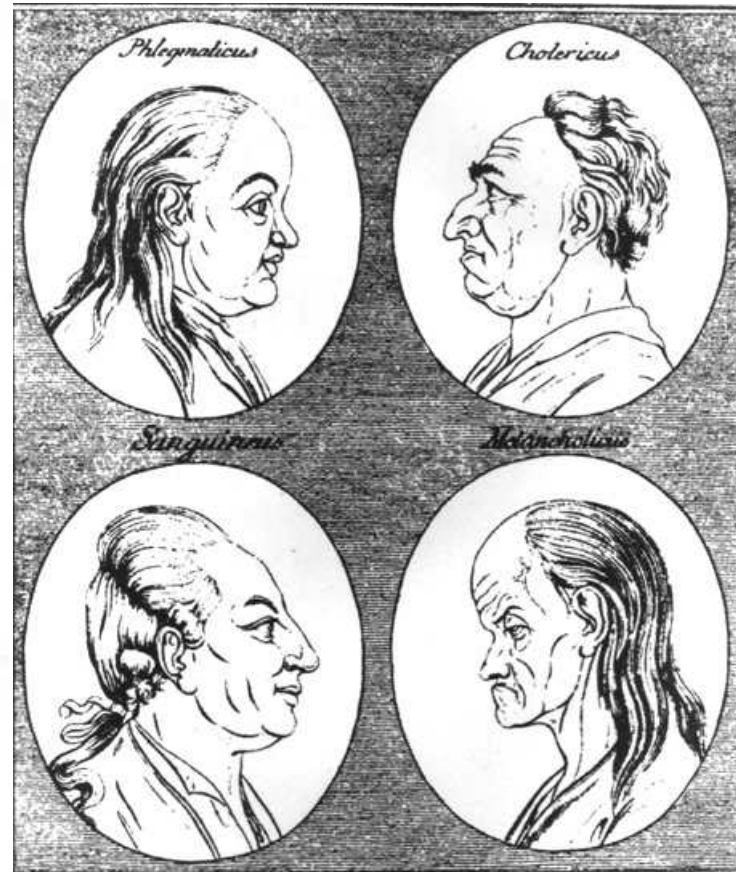


Eysenck, H.J and Eysenck, M.W. *Personality and Individual Differences*. Plenum Publishing, 1958.

From Wikipedia

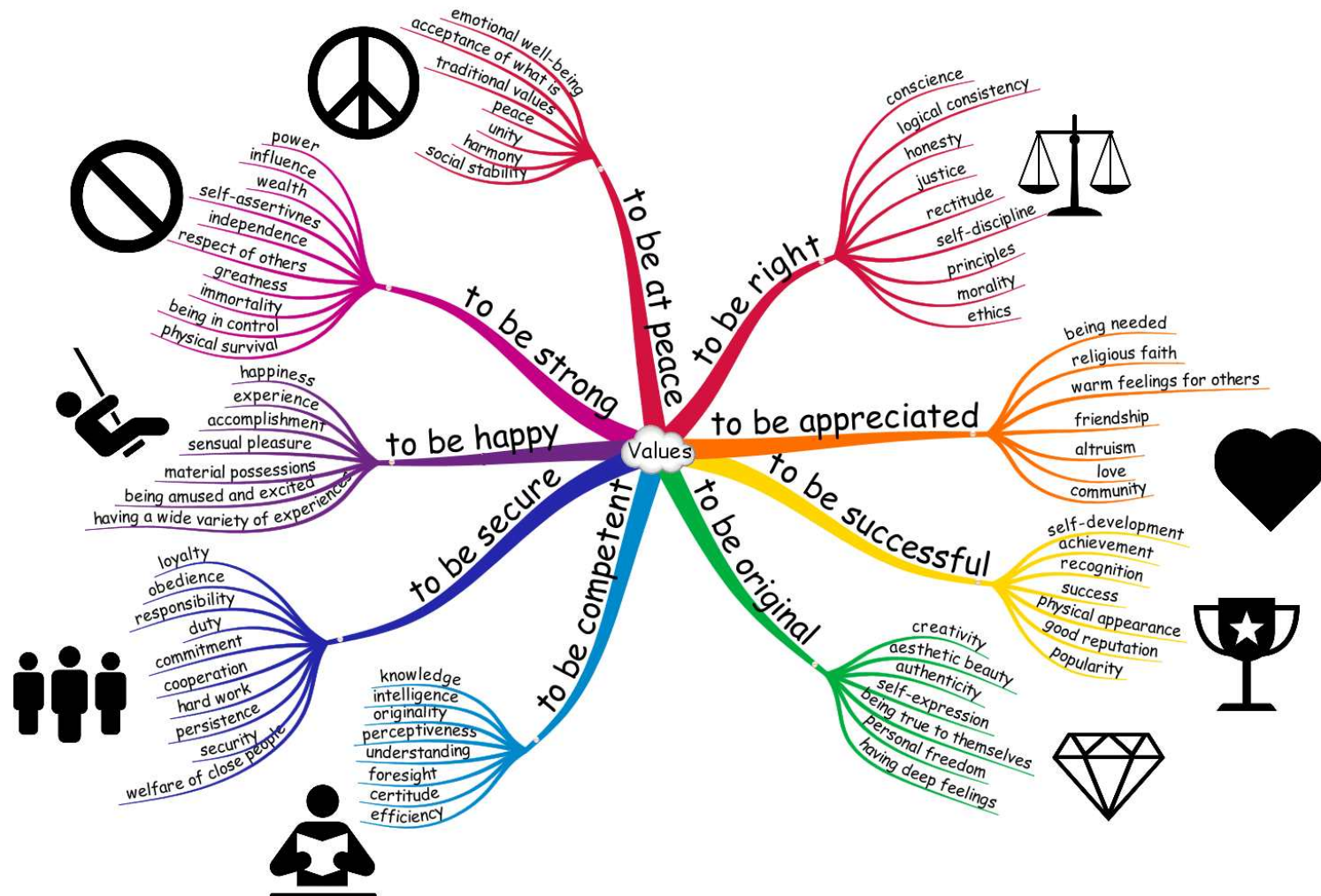
image of woodcut from Physiognomische Fragmente zur Beförderung der Menschenkenntnis und Menschenliebe (1775-1778) by Johann Kaspar Lavater. Phlegmatic and choleric (above), sanguine and melancholic (below)

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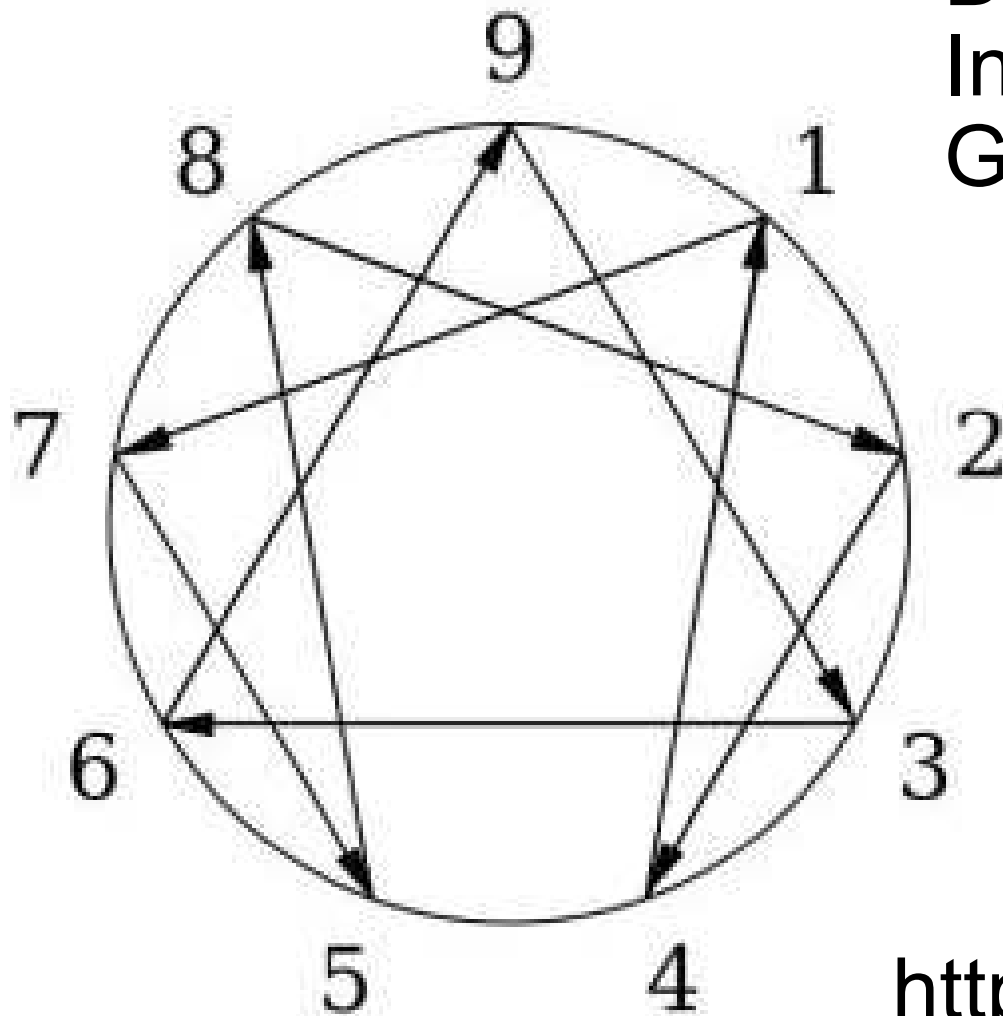


Another Character Typing System

- The Enneagram presents a personality typing SYSTEM that predicts potential courses of a life based on original traits
 - In two situations
 - The person becoming more mature, and integrating their traits, as they go through life, **due to good choices they make**
 - The person “disintegrating” as they go through life, **due to poor choices they make**
 - The Enneagram shows the typical “critical moments” for each of the nine types of personality.



<http://aetherforce.com/what-personality-type-are-you-introduction-to-the-enneagram>



Direction of
Integration or
Growth

[https://enneagram
integration.com/](https://enneagramintegration.com/)

Astrology is a Character Typing System

Now, Some Characters

What makes a character?
Their characteristics or traits!

Sir Walter Elliot in Persuasion

<https://www.theguardian.com/culture/gallery/2013/jan/05/jane-austen-10-best-characters>

Example of a type character from a historical time...

Fathers often come off badly in Austen's novels. Sir Walter Elliot, father of Anne, the heroine of *Persuasion*, is a selfish, heartless man, absorbed by himself and his title. He's almost a **caricature** of the dim-witted upper classes. He is vain to the point of absurdity. His house is lined with mirrors. Obsessed by keeping up appearances, he will only be seen in public with attractive or well-born people. He dislikes sailors because of their orange tan and supposed lack of breeding. He's so vain he probably thinks this feature's about him

Photo reference at above website-
from BBC



Examples of Characters

- “The Artful Dodger” from Oliver Twist- is a pickpocket, so called for his skill and cunning in that respect; leader of the gang of child criminals



Artful Dodger

Dickens' Description

- The Artful, meantime, who was of a rather **saturnine disposition***, and seldom gave way to merriment when it interfered with business, rifled Oliver's pockets with steady assiduity.
- He was a snub-nosed, flat-browed, common-faced boy enough; and as dirty a juvenile as one would wish to see; but he had about him all the airs and manners of a man. He was short of his age: with rather bow-legs, and little, sharp, ugly eyes. His hat was stuck on the top of his head so lightly, that it threatened to fall off every moment--and would have done so, very often, if the wearer had not had a knack of every now and then giving his head a sudden twitch, which brought it back to its old place again. He wore a man's coat, which reached nearly to his heels. He had turned the cuffs back, half-way up his arm, to get his hands out of the sleeves: apparently with the ultimate view of thrusting them into the pockets of his corduroy trousers; for there he kept them. He was, altogether, as roystering and swaggering a young gentleman as ever stood four feet six, or something less, in the bluchers.
- ***sluggish in temperament; gloomy; taciturn: serious and unfriendly: gloomy, dark, moody or mysterious: gloomy, mean, scowling. Not exactly the life of the party**

What is a hero?

Before we had the idea of a character (person defined by their traits), we had heroes

- In the earliest ancient (especially Greek) Western literature, there was a vast divide between humans and gods.
- Heroes bridged that gap, by virtue of being “half divine, half human”
- Heroes had fixed story lines.
- The hero achieved what he achieved by virtue of his parents “station.”

What is a hero?

- Plain, normal humans were limited in what they could do by societal belief.
 - There was no “nature or nurture.”
 - There was only nature as far as the humans of that time understood.
- They could never become heroes

Baby Hercules Killing Snakes



What is a hero?

- Eventually, the heroes' stories started to depict the seeds of an inner life

- People started to rebel against the idea of strict dualistic separation of divine and human

- The heroes started to show gumption in the face of fate
- The way we tell our stories influences how we live

Oedipus with the Sphinx



What is a hero?

- Writers started to show that even in the face of fate, "story subjects" retain some choice of attitude if not action.
- The great "classical tragedies" of ancient Greece explored this.
 - Filled in the bare outlines of the myths to tell a new story
 - We are still doing something similar today with both Greek and Biblical, now Indian (both kinds), Chinese, and other indigenous people's myths (Parabola)
 - We're always rewriting our stories

Hero or Character?

- This led to the idea of characters
- The idea of characters first opens us to the possibilities of free will
- Zarathushtra was probably the original known and named proponent of free will
 - His dates are extremely controversial
 - Life consistent with Bronze Age, as was Abraham
- Many myths have their origins long before this time.

Zarathushtra



What is a hero?

- Zarathushtra did not tell stories or give specific laws. He told people to think for themselves.
 - But people still turned him into a hero, as they did with the possibly contemporary or somewhat later Buddha
 - and much later Jesus.

Free Will as the Origin of Character?

- Abraham did not preach in this way, but we see him struggling with choice.
 - God gave him horrific orders in an attempt to get him to disobey. Shows how hard it was to disobey. Comes from how we (must) raise our kids.

Chagall



Free Will as the Origin of Character?

- Adam and Eve were set up to fail, but we are told they “disobeyed.”
- Disobedience is the foundation for free will.
- Hindu Ramayana shows a related idea
 - The detrimental outcome of obedience (maybe 4th Century BC)



Origin of Character

- Classical Greece say 0 - 1200 years after Abraham / Zoroaster.
- Classical Greeks start to struggle in their dramatic art to depict the emergence of free will versus everything happening by fate.
- But the idea of Free Will is very difficult for humanity to understand

Antigone
Choosing to
disobey the king



Free Will as the Origin of Character?

- A character must act in character.
- A “character’s character” is expressed in their WORDS and ACTIONS (not thoughts)
- According to Abrams, Flaubert and Henry James were the origin of the show v tell controversy in creative writing.
 - Abrams says both have their uses.

Character as Origin of Person

- In using the “tell” mode of describing a character, the author may comment on the “thoughts” of the character.
- This brings us to a “person.”
- “A unified center of choice and action, the unit of legal and theological responsibility ...Individuals are seen as primary agents...”
 - Rorty

Character as Origin of Person

- “Persons” are only possible when society has abandoned the idea of family or clan responsibility
- Roman law did not treat women, slaves as persons.
 - A big part of the idea of fate is that the generations following the sinner had to pay for the sinner. Kids were property of the father.
 - Father was presumed to have control of offspring
- Judaism LIMITED the curse of the ancestor to 4 generations. Greeks and Turks are still fighting the Trojan War.

Character as Origin of Person

- The Israelite prophets started saying that each person would bear the burden of his own sins.
 - Zoroaster is here in the background
- Christianity made each human a person, so they could be judged.
- This created a need for each person to have appropriate moral education.

Character as Origin of Person

- Personhood, and the free will that sustains it, is the origin of the strong distinction between outer and inner life.
- “Selves” came later. Selves “own things.”
- “Individuals” came yet later. “Some things we own are inherently part of us.”
 - Inalienable rights
- Only in modern times are we working to make the legal system reflect the philosophical ideas of personhood.
 - 5000 years on...

Am I a Person?

- The law says we are.
- Law is distinct from tradition.
- Law had to distinguish itself from tradition.
- Law was based on the sword
 - Justice has to have a sword to enforce her judgement
 - King originally was the judge as well
 - Balance pan was a later symbol of justice
 - Original single purpose of law was to sustain order in society
 - Idea of restricting the powerful came later

Am I a Person?

- You don't have to be a human to be a person
- A single human may comprise multiple persons.
- The Christian idea of Judgement based on free will / choice has to assume that the individual is a person.

What is a Protagonist?

Between Heroes and Characters

- Between Heroes and Characters, we encounter story lines of humans whose actions revealed “divine DNA.”
- The story line starts by portraying them as humans, moves to REVEAL them as special: Previously hidden heroes.
- You can become a protagonist.
- You can’t “become” a hero. You are born a hero, or you’re not.

What is a Protagonist?

Between Heroes and Characters

- From a different culture, we have the story of Sargon, who was “drawn from the water” and raised by a poor person, but later became emperor.
- His story was worth telling. It had to be told, and somehow he had to be shown as having some “divine DNA.”

What is a Protagonist?

- Moses story is different. He was clearly shown to be of the people.
- His sister was clearly shown to have her wits.
- He is neither a hero nor a protagonist.
 - Power to the people
 - Moses' name not mentioned by Jews at Passover Seder
 - Moses was a human.
 - Moses achieved great things through God's help and action.
 - This is a new way.
 - Shows the idea of personal relationship with God

What is a Protagonist?

- Zoroaster and “Judaism” are clearly struggling to break humans out of the fate driven outlook on life
- The free-will processing individual later more clearly becomes the foundation for Christianity
 - Yet Jesus is turned into a hero

What is a Protagonist?

- Some people just can't understand a story without a hero.
- Turning a human into a hero of this type "lets us off the hook" of responsibility.
- Stories of God "giving the gifts of civilization" rather than glorifying our own (human's) inventiveness.

What is a Protagonist?

- If you were a radical revolutionary in prehistoric times, you and your tribe didn't want it known.
- Change makers kept a low profile.
- Probably the inventive people did not even see themselves as inventive as they were in the “collective consciousness.”
 - They FELT like the ideas came directly from the powerful spiritual beings in charge.
 - And isn't this where ideas come from?

Character Defined

- Rorty says “Characters are their individual powers and dispositions.”
 - Characters are what they can say and do in their society
- We’re going beyond the common use of the word which refers to a fictional person appearing in a book or film.

Character Defined

- As “characters” are the units of language (letters and phonemes), characteristics of humans together create their “character.”
- The characteristics that make up the character may be random or may be influenced by older stories, already gathered into premade clusters.

Examples of Characters

- Modern literary fiction that explores a changing society probably has well rounded characters (Jane Austin is an example given in several sources)
- Detective novels (and other "genre fiction") may have flatter characters, and still have a strong fan base.

○

What is a Character?

- Characters don't change. They go from event to event as a result of the (foreseen and foreseeable) results of the previous event. They are always "in character."
 - The same group of traits may result in positive outcomes in one situation and negative in another.
 - Characters are not "at fault" for their failings. There's no "core entity" to "be at fault."
 - Characters are nothing but the collection of their traits.
 - Heroes can't be successfully imitated by humans.
 - Most humans would not want to have to achieve what the heroes had to do.

What is a Figure?

“Characters, writ large” (Rorty)

- A type of character (Jesus, Adam, Mary or Martha, Peter or Paul) who is intended to inspire imitation

- Is Pollyanna a figure?

Remember Pollyanna and the "Glad Game"? The "Glad Game" is where you find something to be glad about in every situation.



What is a Figure?

“Characters, writ large” (Rorty)

- The figures are usually idealized to make a few features very strong, and thus memorable
- Originally, fate was thought to determine which figure you were to imitate

What is a Figure?

- This change from predestination to choice is what leads to the idea of a “person.”
- In my life, I have found myself “being” various “figures,” having become aware of portions of my life reflecting an old story.
 - I have called this “dancing with the archetypes.”
- This concludes the introduction to Heroes, Protagonists, Characters, Figures, Persons, Individuals, and Selves.
 - “We are all the heroes of our own lives.” (Campbell)

QUIZ!

HAHA

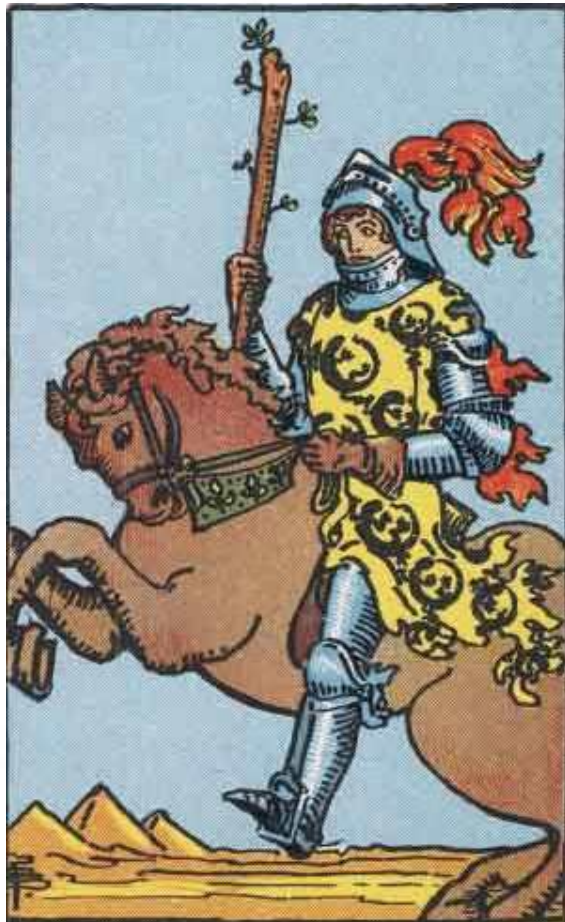
- Listen to stories...
- Is Puss in Boots a character? A figure? A hero? If so, what kind? What do each of these attributions tell us about the storyteller's objective(s)?
- Is Cinderella a character? A figure? A hero? If so, what kind? What do each of these attributions tell us about the storyteller's objective(s)?

Tarot's Basic Character Types

■ Basic personality types and family roles: Found in the Court Cards

- These are the Page, Knight, Queen, King cards of the four "Suits" (or Princess, Prince, Queen and King in Gender Balanced decks)
- Suits are associated with astrological signs
 - Wands (Clubs)-Fire - Aries, Leo, Sagitarius
 - Cups (Hearts)-Water - Cancer, Scorpio, Pisces
 - Swords (Spades)- Air -Gemini, Libra, Aquarius (not a mistake)
 - Pentacles or Coins (Diamonds)-Earth - Taurus, Virgo, Capricorn





KNIGHT of WANDS.



PAGE of WANDS.

What are the Elements Represented in the Tarot?

■ Basic personality types and societal roles: Found in the Court Cards

- Wands (Clubs)-Fire - Aries, Leo, Sagitarius
 - People active in the wider business world (merchants, entrepreneurs)
- Cups (Hearts)-Water - Cancer, Scorpio, Pisces
 - People active at home (care takers, parents, nurses, helping professions)
- Swords (Spades)- Air -Gemini, Libra, Aquarius
 - Intellectuals, Lawyers, Legislative Government, Soldiers?
- Pentacles or Coins (Diamonds)-Earth - Taurus, Virgo, Capricorn
 - Farmers, Laborers, Bankers, Jewelers

What are the Elements Represented in the Tarot?

- Basic personality types and family roles:
Found in the Court Cards
 - Predestination is probably a significant factor for the prohibition against Tarot by the “new” Western religions, so bent on holding people responsible for their actions.
 - Some Tarot books have the “element” or suit, determined by eye, hair and skin color. This gets back to the idea of character having appearance and temperament being two sides of a single coin.
 - Modern Tarot readers emphasize use as a meditation tool, not a prediction.

What are the Elements Represented in the Tarot?

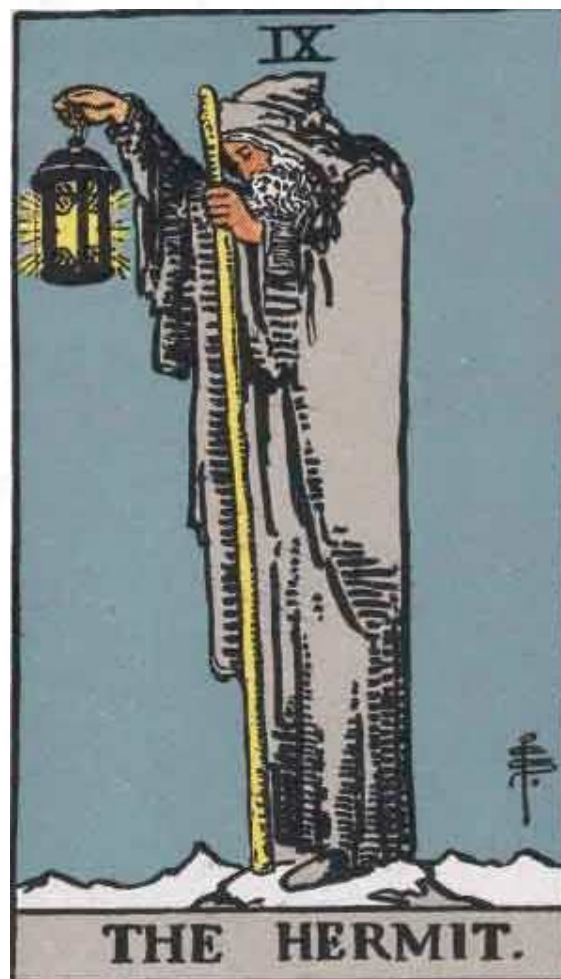
- It was right to question appearance = character
- How easy is it really to tell, for example, if someone is honest by how they look?
 - My uncle with buck teeth never LOOKS serious.
- Scientific studies have shown that we do judge people's characters by their appearances.













Additional Acknowledgements: Karen Bota and MMWG

Thanks!

Let's write!