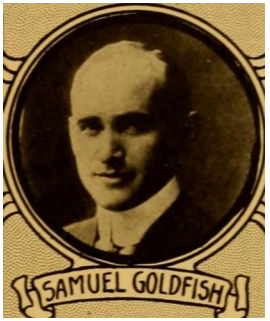
First of all, this isn't about making Art.

It's not about Film as Art.

If that's what you're after, *discard this book immediately*. Put it down and walk away. There is nothing here for you.

This short book is about a concept of what makes popular works successful, and that's it. There is zero interest here in Film, or any other medium or format, as any kind of personal expression or messaging. I refer to the quote credited to Samuel Goldwyn:

"Pictures are made to entertain; if you want to send a message, call Western Union."



I extend that sentiment, or lack of it, to self-expression: if you want to express yourself, go ahead; but don't expect the personal outpouring of your soul to be successful. The idea here is a result of an extensive study of what I've come to call Picture Stories: stories told primarily, or solely, with pictures. The idea is

applicable to other forms of popular work, but the main concept was developed from studying successful Picture Stories.

I anticipate some criticism of this book from creative types (see above disclaimer) who will assume it's a work of personal bitterness: that I am upset because I wasn't personally successful, and came up with a crazy, wild idea that justifies why my own material wasn't successful, when really it's because my own stuff just isn't very good and nobody wants to buy it. This is a fair criticism. I get it. Also, somewhat factual, except in my case, I developed a wide range of material, only to discover that work I didn't like, and took no personal pride in, throwaway junk, is what people liked the most. My personal disappointment wasn't that nobody liked what I was doing, but they liked the wrong stuff. The more I hated doing it, the more people loved it. For a creative type, the only thing worse than being a failure, is being a success for work you despise, or only did for the money, or as a thoughtless lark.

Also, if I'm so smart and know how to make successful movies, why don't I do it myself, and become a bazillionaire?

The quick and simple answer to that very legitimate question, is that I hate working with people. I don't hate people, really, and routinely work productively in my day-to-day workplace in cooperative teamwork with others and enjoy it immensely, finding good teamwork deeply rewarding; but man, I just hate working with other people in creative situations. In the case of film-making, I also despise begging for money; which is what, 99.999% of the work of making movies. I viscerally resent sharing my own creative process, and

hate doing it; and I find asking people for money unacceptably demeaning and would rather make my living in some other way, and self-finance.

In short, I'm an eccentric, impossible crank.

The Concept

This is the idea, and it's really simple: when one crafts a work intended for mass attendance and success, what you're doing is making and presenting a kind of National Personification.

That's it.

A popular culture icon, like Dirty Harry or Batman, is the same thing as a National Personification, like Uncle Sam. Sherlock Holmes is the same thing as John Bull. You're presenting an image to a mass audience and hoping at least a part of the audience embraces it as their chosen National Personification. The goal of a work isn't to tell a compelling story, or showcase fine acting, but to get at least some of the potential audience to latch onto the image and make it their Personification.

That's the whole concept.

This idea is originally drawn from Comic Books. In the early 1980s I was making storyboards for my own independent movies, and after realizing I hated the actual process of making movies, I decided to polish up my storyboards and present them as a kind of printed movie. If the point of making a movie is achieve a result, to present a series of images in the form of a story, to accomplish a creative vision, what difference did it make if the pictures were on film or paper?

Here I ran into being declared Comics.

So, figuring the two forms weren't really different things, I explored the Comics situation; and found almost the entirety of the business was built around a rigid structure of superheroes. People consuming Comics were obsessed with superheroes, to the point the fan-base, the paying audience, truly believed that's what Comics were for. I presented certain creative works, pictures on pages arranged in such a way as to tell a story, and was told they weren't Comics; partly because of form, but primarily because my work didn't feature costumed superheroes.

So, I was being told by Film people my work was Comics, while simultaneously being told by Comics people they most definitely were not.

In looking into how a simple matter of pictures on a page became such a constricted venue, it looked like certain moral panics had truncated the Comics business in the early 1950s, resulting in a decades-long suppression of creativity: it looked like, due to legal and societal pressures, pictures on a page had been declared Comics, for small children, and had been compressed into a ghetto. This also revealed that subject material of Comics was carefully controlled, and deviations from the norms could and did result in extreme legal

consequences. It seemed pictures on a page had been declared Comics, for small children, were tightly controlled as to subject material, and the entire process was artificial: the end result of a temporary political, cultural, and moral panic.

In dealing with Comics people, I grew to despise superheroes. Not that there's anything wrong with them, but the overwhelming crush of expectation, disfiguring a creative outlet, was intolerable. The crushing of Comics in the 1950s had resulted in a vicious cycle: people who loved Comics more for the subject material, superheroes, developed creative skills, entered the business, then made what they loved: it was a closed loop, fans making material for other fans. Not only had this distorted the perceptions inside the fan-base, it had resulted in a distorted perception from outside the fan-base.

It was like the old question to a farmer:

"Why are all the barns red?"

"Because the paint is so cheap."

And, on asking the paint supplier why the paint is so cheap, they respond:

"Because we sell lots of it!"

If anyone asks why I didn't just go do something else, I respond, Why should I? It was a legitimate issue, it should be explored. There was absolutely no reason whatsoever why mere pictures on a page should be so criminally limited.

The thing about superhero Comics, too, was not only were the central characters so limited, the so-called supporting characters were as well: there was a rigid pattern, a set, of characters that seemed to never change in any significant way: the superhero had some wise sage-type guiding them, had some wild or cartoonish

sidekick, and had a long-suffering or alienated girlfriend or female figure that was treated as threatening, burdensome, or utterly peripheral. Then, this set of characters would be usually set against a supervillain, with exactly the same set of characters, just Evil instead of Good: mirror images of each other in perpetual conflict. There weren't any stories as such, little character development, not even firm beginnings and endings, just endless, repetitive fights between these opposing things. And these superhero Comics often ran for years, decades, and hundreds, sometimes thousands, of magazine issues.

It was also obvious this ghetto-ization of Comics was mostly USA-specific: European and Asian countries had embraced Comics as a fully-fledged Art Form, and by no means tried to limit what could be done with them; and featured a wide range of subject material far beyond that of the USA.

So, I embarked on a project of documenting historical Picture Stories, really for two reasons: one, to prove the USA was needlessly harming a creative form, and two, to provide a potential defense if some legal entity objected to subject material outside of the usual expected in USA Comics. I figured there had to be some. There's nothing new under the Sun, so if I was doing it, it was a good bet someone else had too.

There was very simple criteria: pictures arranged in such a way as to tell a story. The pictures had to be explicit, and there had to be more than one of them; they had to contain a coherent narrative in separate images and possess the basics: a beginning, a middle, and an end. That's all.

The search was easy: they're everywhere, all over the place. They've been around forever, probably since someone could first draw in the dirt with a stick.

Except there was a serious problem: I had expected to find a wide range of subject material and creative diversity. I did not.

Everything I found looked like superhero Comics. I'm not joking, not kidding. Literally everything I could locate looked exactly like a superhero Comic, including that fixed set of characters. Super-men with some special power or gift doing super-things, that's the entire history of Picture Stories. I went in believing I would discredit the idea that Comics were for superheroes; instead I proved that's exactly what Picture Stories are for.

The findings produced the idea that audiences, like Comics fandom, weren't really looking for story or character progression, but for a very specific character set; and expect to see it. If they don't see it, they won't reward it. The work won't attract them.

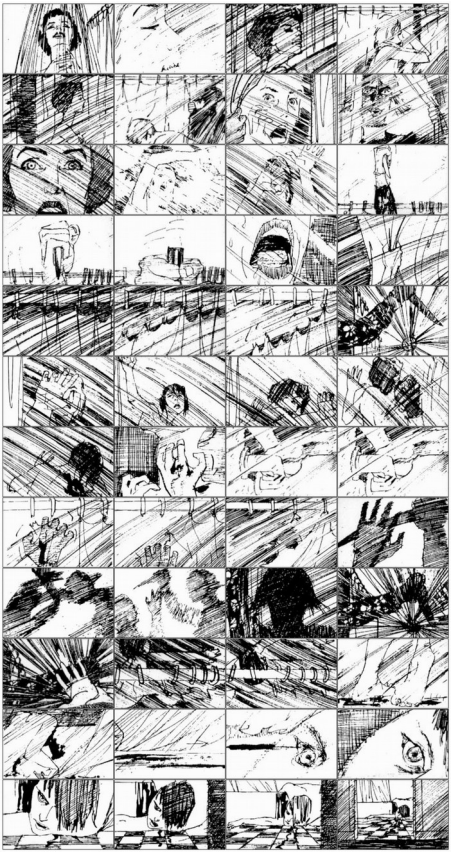
Obviously, drawn figures in Picture Stories aren't actors, like in plays; so the attraction of Picture Stories clearly had nothing to do with Drama as it's usually known. There was no real story as such, just endless repetition of these opposing figures; so none of the usual interpretations of why people go to, say, plays and movies, could possibly apply.

People were there for these character images. They were, they are, the Main Event.

This then led to the serious question of, if these images don't work the way they're supposed to, what are they? They're not acting, they're not literature really, and often, in the Picture Stories, so-called narratives drawn from historical written materials didn't feature the

same things as the written books did. They just didn't make any sense. They're huge, everywhere, through all cultures, and in all human history; and they're all the same.

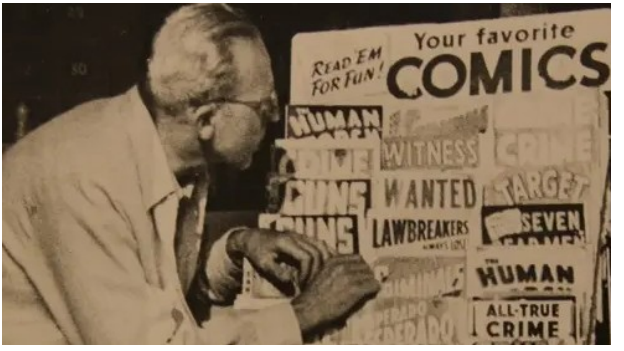
After the initial shock of having proved my entire premise hopelessly wrong, I recovered enough to reexamine some of the amassed material, and saw the cover of a Comic Book from 1941; and that changed everything.



Storyboards for PSYCHO.

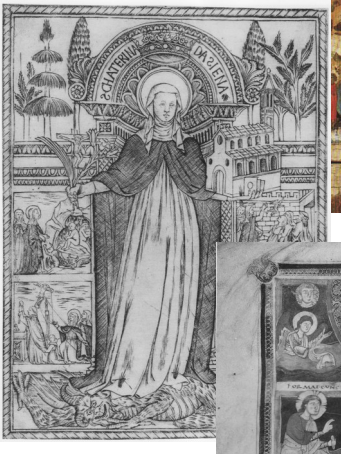
ALIEN ‘Movie Novel’, 1979

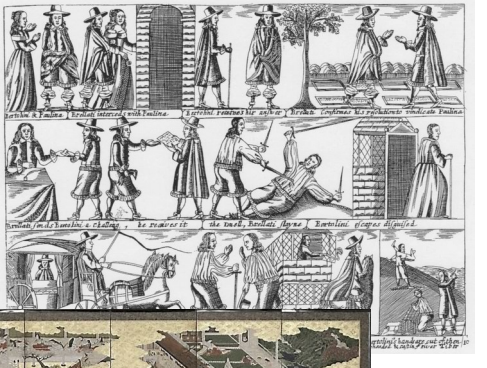
It didn’t have to be like this!

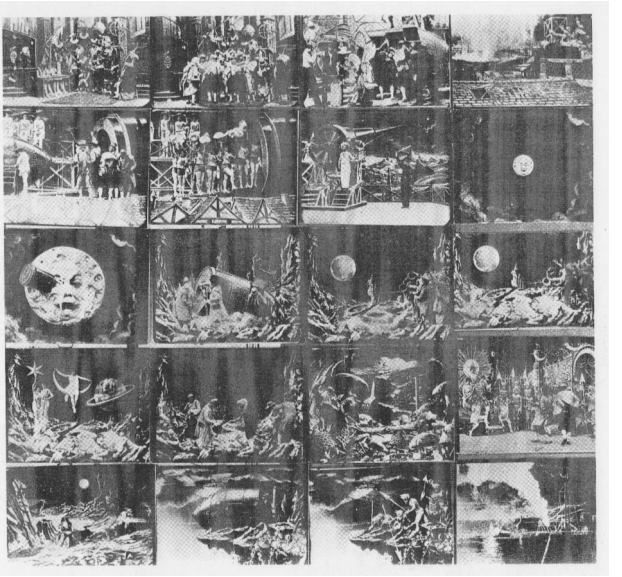


There was a huge Moral Panic in 1950s USA, which led to printed-image Stories being relegated to material suitable for little kids. Interestingly, despite a modern insistence this Panic was brought on by religious, anti-Communist Right Wingers, actually it was touched off by well-meaning Progressives all concerned about The Children!

As it turns out, Stories told in pictures have been around since, well, *ever*.







Movies, Comics, whatever, are just a modern version of something that's *always* been around. People have *always* made them.

...except, they all looked like Superman.

...bringing us back to *this guy*.

How could Uncle Sam be used as a Comic Book superhero? He's a National Personification. 'I Want You' and all that. How could he even be used, or allowed to be used, in that way? There have been Comics featuring, say, Jesus Christ, for ages, but those were respectful and regarded as illustrated versions of The Holy Bible, for educational purposes; this wasn't that at all. It was the equivalent of making a Comic featuring a leotard-clad Jesus Christ punching it out with The Joker. Jesus and his Bad-Ass Disciples take on Doc Oc and his Octopii! Next ish! Excelsior!

The only possible explanation was that Uncle Sam and superheroes were, are, in the same family: the same thing. Uncle Sam is a visual representation of a group of people: the United States; then, a work of entertainment, featuring these superheroes, like Daredevil, was, is, doing the same thing.

So, when making a work of entertainment, while you can self-express, and that's nice, what the actual mechanism is doing is crafting one of these central images, distributing it to a mass audience, a Group, and hoping they relate to it enough to make it, elect it, as a kind of National Personification, a Personification of a Group.

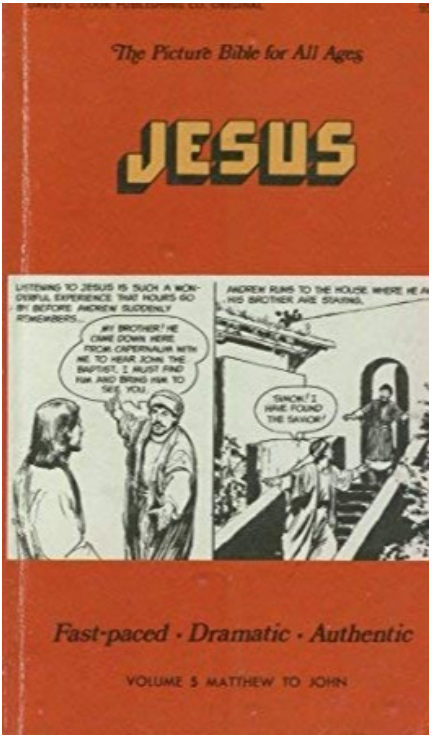
This idea explained a lot: why terrible movies could make mountains of money, while amazing works of Art could be ignored and discarded: people weren't looking for intellectual stimulation, or education, or even a story as such: they were looking for one of these iconic figures to elevate into a Group Personification. Actually, it didn't explain a lot, it explained everything.

Also, historically, those supporting characters were ever-present as well: a superhero always had a sidekick or posse, a long-suffering female, a wise older guy

telling them what to do, etc. and fought against a mirror image of themselves and that set of characters. ‘Character’ is probably a poor word to use, they’re more ‘figures’.

Sherlock Holmes has his Dr. Watson; Batman has his Robin; The Lone Ranger has his Tonto; Robin Hood has his Little John; and on and on and on. And it’s hopelessly consistent: in examining about 5,000 years of popular entertainment, these figure patterns remained constant with the permanence of The Sphinx.

After my initial shock (which was severe!), I realized, very slowly, that I was looking at 5,000 years not just of some vague pattern of human expression, but of *5,000 years of unbroken success*; an absolutely proven track record of How to Make Successful Movies.

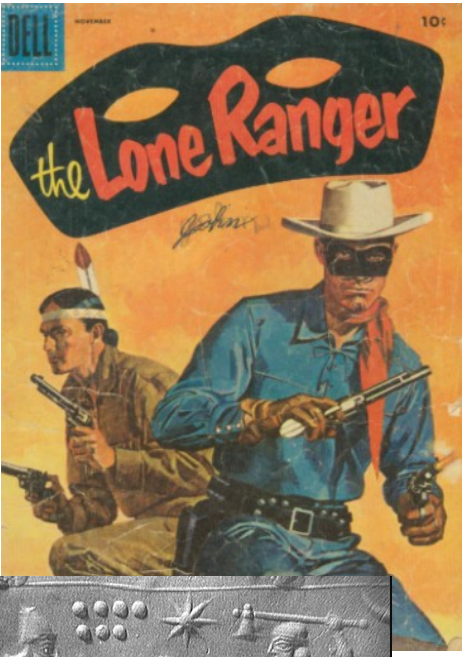


Approved for educational purposes


TRAIN THEM!
EXCITE THEM!
ARM THEM!
...THEN TURN THEM LOOSE ON THE NAZIS!
METRO GOLDWYN MAYER presents A KENNETH HYMAN PRODUCTION
The Dirty Dozen
MARVIN BORGNINE BRONSON BROWN CASSAVETES JAECKEL
KENNEDY LOPEZ MEEKER RYAN SAVALAS WALKER WEBBER
METROCOLOR

The Dozens.

Noted thespians.



5,000 years of this.

The research said audiences were looking for a very specific pattern of figures: it's not just one figure. The superhero doesn't act alone, but has a very specific set of supporting figures that define what he is; and those figures have to be there for audiences to know what they're seeing. It's not just a single thing, it's a set of things that make up a whole. And that superhero has to be set against a mirror image with that exact same set as well.

Use these sets, it's like counting cards at blackjack: you might not win every hand, but over time you will beat the house. It's like a cheat code.

To see the set, one has to look at *only* the most successful works: this is why the historical study was so important: over time, thousands of years, only the most successful remained: anything else had long been eliminated and left behind. In modernity, there is a huge, new library of works that create a massive wall of noise that makes it very difficult to determine what is or isn't truly successful; the pattern, the set, is an average of successful works, not some single work.

It's also important to see that the successful result isn't a factor of the creator of the work: the creator isn't, the only function a creator provides is to present those images to an audience, and it's a useful approach to view the mass audience as the true author of the work. Anybody can make an image and/or an image set and get it in front of an audience, but only the audience can select what will be actually, truly successful.

It's like the quote attributed to Yogi Berra: "Well, if people don't want to come to the ball park, nobody can stop them."

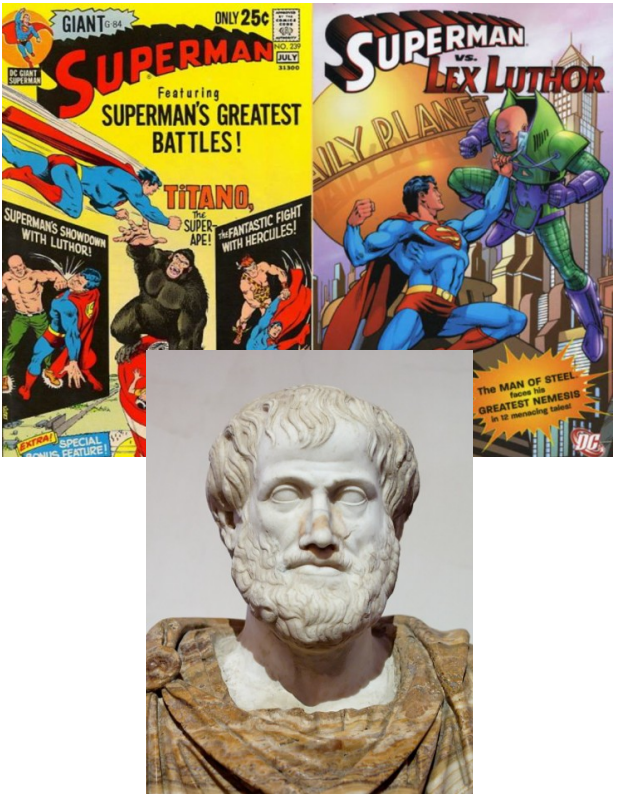
Here it's worthwhile pointing out that many, if not most, influential Films, like oh, anything by Sergei

Eisenstein, were extremely influential, but only technically and only on other filmmakers, not audiences. They didn't make any money. Even in Stalin's USSR, which had the power to force people to see certain movies, it proved impractical: even if people were compelled to see certain movies, it proved impossible to make them genuinely like any particular work. An actual, honest examination of what was truly popular in even totalitarian systems will reveal audiences flocked to the usual fare: action movies, romances, musicals, comedies. The official, High-Art Message Movies were most often box-office bombs. Such Films as Art weren't successful and are to be discarded as irrelevant.

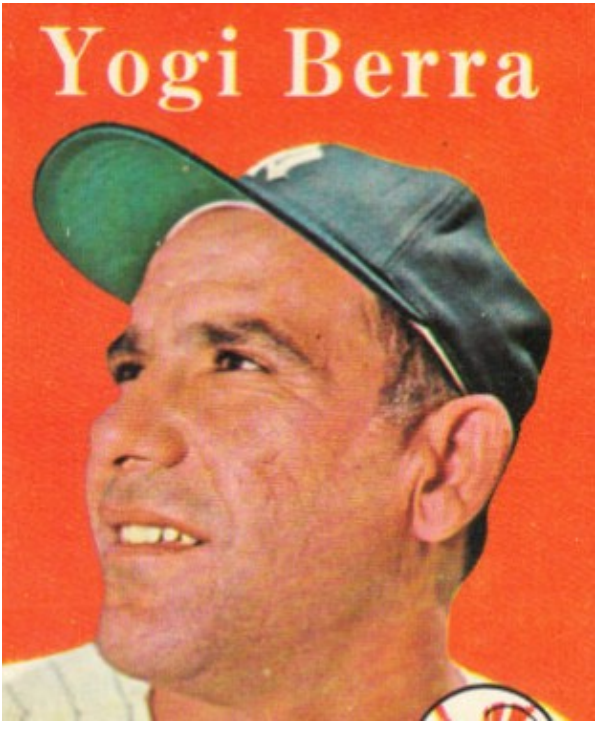
Certain social strata, the 'educated classes', will attend Art Products, but mostly from social in-group pressure and a sense of embarrassment so as not to seem uncultured. These very specifically targeted products are rarely, if ever, truly successful, and tend to be heavily or completely subsidized by those allegedly educated classes. Such Art Products distort the human entertainment record in that while large amounts of money are often involved, large numbers of people typically are not.

Meshes Of The Afternoon is quite popular and successful… in Film Schools, but has absolutely no relevance whatsoever to any mass audience success.

The historical record indicates real, mass human audiences want to see their preferred pattern set of figures and will ignore anything else no matter what.



First you make a superhero, then you make a supervillain. Story? What are you, some kind of *intellectual*?! GTFO.



This guy gets it.

Irrelevant junk.

Masterpiece!

There did turn out to be another pattern.

While superheroes are far and away the Big Boy On The Block, there is another pattern that was a bit confusing until it determined to be actually separate.

A Romantic pattern was also present, in which a Hero of some sort rescues a female figure from some dark threat: think, a Knight rescuing a Princess from a Dragon.

This pattern creates confusion in making the role and definition of The Hero somewhat unclear: in the case of the superhero, the female figure is sidelined, irrelevant, or sometimes not present at all. In the case of the hero thing, the female rescue is the entire point.

They are different, and most often appear in separate works entirely. The functions of the figures in the sets are different. It took a while to figure out what the differences were, but they are separate and are always separate.

Basically, there are two prominent figure sets; one revolves around the superhero, the other revolves around a hero. They can be termed in various ways, but a useful one is Superhero and Hero, or maybe Romantic? But they are quite different and the two patterns are separate, different, and in crafting works hoping for popular success, they have to be kept distinct and separate. You can do one or the other, but not both, with one important exception.

Why these two patterns exist, and exist apart from each other, isn't the purpose of this book. They exist and that's enough. It's a fact the most successful, over time, is the superhero pattern set, but the hero pattern set can also be quite successful; but there is a distinction between the role of a female figure in a superhero set and the hero set.

Actually, the most successful works feature both simultaneously: one figure plays superhero, while another plays hero.

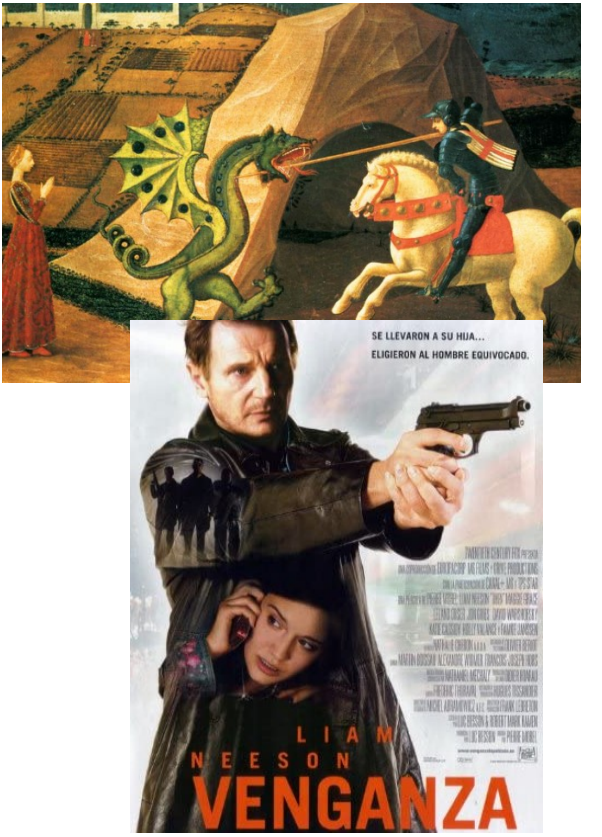
Probably the most successful of this dual-type is *Star Wars*, in which one figure is heroic (Luke Skywalker), pursues the rescue of Princess Leia from a dark threat (Darth Vader), and one figure (Han Solo), with his sidekick (Chewbacca), and with troubled relations with a female figure (Princess Leia), battles against a supervillain (Darth Vader) and his sidekicks (Stormtroopers). In the case of *Star Wars* the figure sets are intertwined, but are there. If a creator can work both pattern sets into a work, they can effect a kind of double whammy in which both sets are evident, and can double their potential success with some truly spectacular results.

A careful study of Buddy Movies and TV shows will reveal this same duality: one figure is superheroic, the other is heroic, and one will take on The Supervillain while the other pursues the rescue of a female figure.

So there are two.

And, they are distinct and separate.

Again, 'Why?' Well, that's not the point here, the point is, they're there. Anybody can speculate about it but it won't change the fact they exist and are quite separate.



Hero rescues damsel in distress.

One does one thing, the other one does that other thing.

Note the difference between the two posters.
Luke does that one thing, Han Solo does that other thing.
A *case study* in how to do it.

In using the pattern sets, it's fairly simple: say, you want to make a Western. Ask yourself, well, what place in the figure set does the main character occupy? Because that will define everything else. Setting is rather irrelevant, and the alleged story is also a side issue.

First thing, is the main character, if male, a superhero or a hero? What's he doing? Is he like The Lone Ranger and fighting a super-villain? If so, he needs a sidekick, which needs to be uncontrolled, animalistic, or wild. Female figures have to be sidelined, left behind, threatening to the purpose, irrelevant, or dead; and there needs to be some older, wise figure in the background guiding the superhero's purpose.

If heroic, it's a simple matter of rescuing a female figure from a dark threat, with the assistance of a wise guidance figure. Think, a cowboy rescuing a sweetheart from wild Indians.

If you want both, have two main characters, one superheroic, one heroic.

That's it.

If you think this is absurd, offensive, watch *Last Of The Mohicans*, 1992, and say this is wrong.

In the case of character emphasis, there is nothing to stop the main character from being any one of the figures in the set: the sets remain, it's simply a rotation, a change of Point-Of-View, POV. The superhero set can be viewed from the perspective of the sidekick or the female, or even from the guidance figure.

The heroic set, if viewed from the female POV, is usually considered a Romance, and instead of a seeming rescue from a dark threat, the female figure ('main character') is compelled to select between one of two male figures, with the assistance of a wise guidance figure. The rescue takes on the aspect of a choice, and

the ‘drama’ stems from which of the male figures is ‘good’ and which one is ‘bad’. It’s the same pattern set, just a POV rotational shift.

Watch *Titanic* and say this is incorrect.

Interestingly, horror movies are almost exclusively the heroic/Romance pattern: but rather with the POV rotation to the dark figure. It’s a seeming oddity that a large audience for even the most wildly offensive, sexist slasher movies are female, but makes sense seeing them as a POV rotation of the heroic/Romantic pattern.

Comedies will be seen to have these same patterns, just played for laughs. *Dumb And Dumber*, 1994, will be seen to have this pattern, with one figure identified early on, with his dogs, identified as a superheroic figure, the other on a mission to rescue a female figure.

Tragedies result from a failure of a happy ending: the hero fails to rescue the female figure, the superhero fails (nobly!) against the super-villain. *Romeo and Juliet*; *Gladiator*. Most slasher movies with their Final Girl trope are the heroic/romantic pattern as tragedy, with the hero often dying in the rescue attempt.

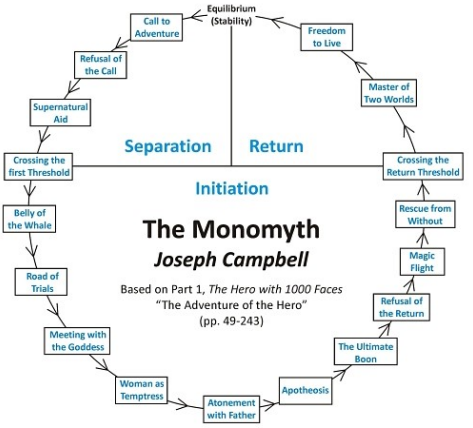
It can’t be stressed enough when throwing movie titles out that only the most successful works, and those with proven longevity, can be applied: some single cult movie a specific individual likes is totally irrelevant.

Jaws, 1975, is an interesting example of a dual-type work: the famous movie poster is pure heroic: female under threat by a dark figure, with Martin Brody as hero; but with the introduction of Quint and Matt Hooper, there are both pattern sets in the movie; the shark is both a threat against a female and a kind of metaphysical super-villain. The more lasting aspect of the work has been the heroic/Romantic/horror, but in fact both are present.

A pattern set can be seen from the Guidance Figure POV easily: such TV shows as *Matlock* can be seen this way.

This concept, of popular entertainments as kinds of National/Group Personifications, discards any and all usual interpretations of what entertainments do. Tropes, stereotypes, story cliches, settings, even the idea of what constitutes a story, are relegated to the trash can.

Medieval Drama, Detective Show, Biker Flick, Slasher Movie, Rom-Com, whatever, the setting or supposed genre or *mise-en-scene* doesn't matter at all.



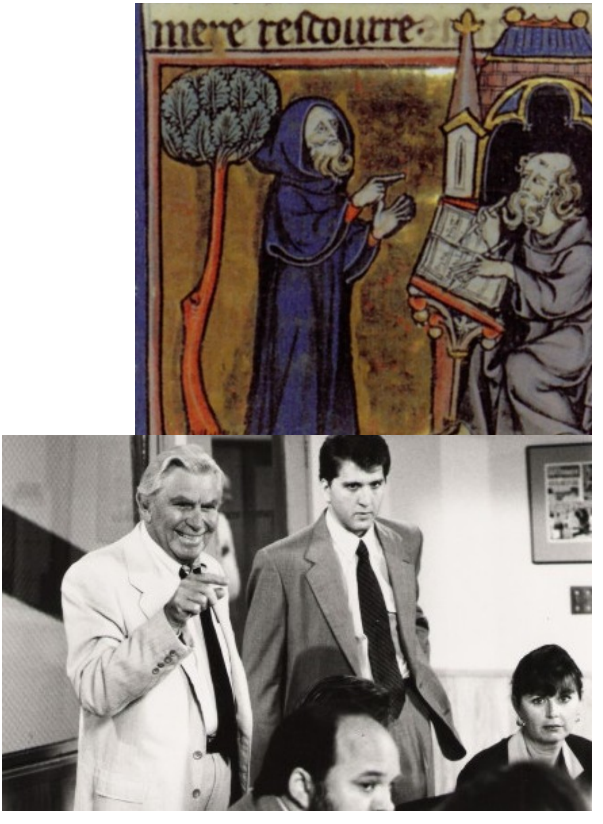
Nah.

An heroic rescue simply takes the form of a choice.

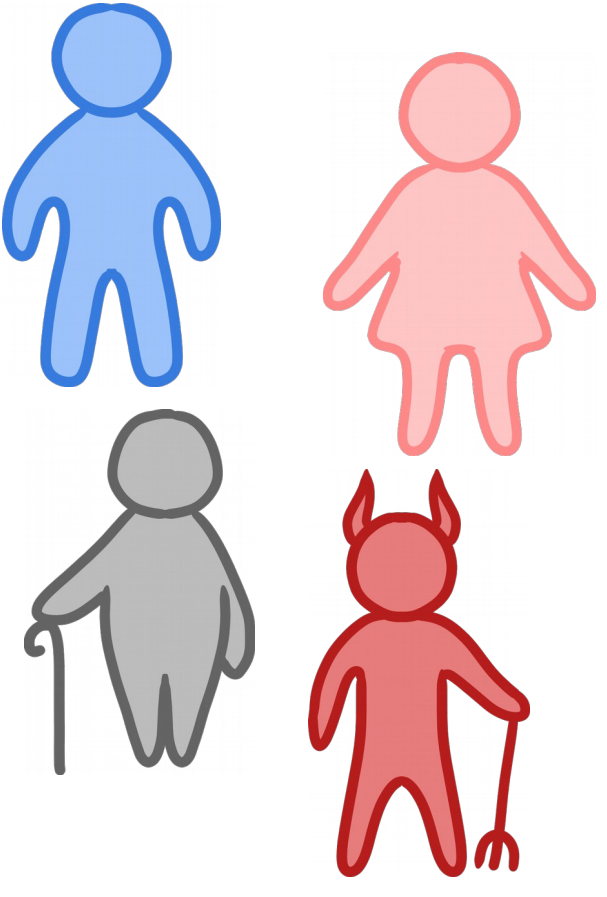
This thing made *how much* money?
Spoiler alert: the boat sinks.

They’re just reconfigured dragons.

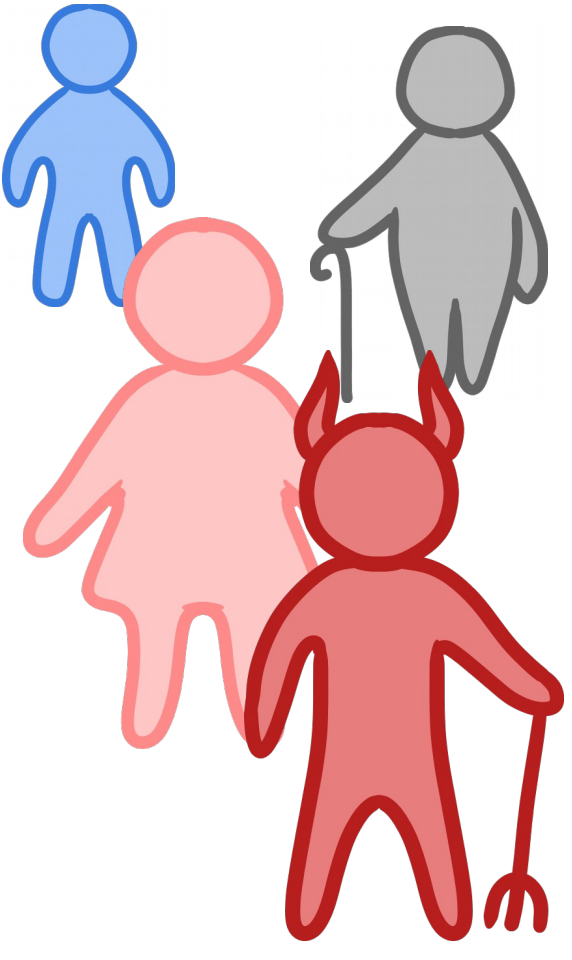
Princess and the dragon. Simple as that.



From Merlin to Matlock, it’s all the same.



My daughter made these for the book, they’re pretty cool. Components of a set.



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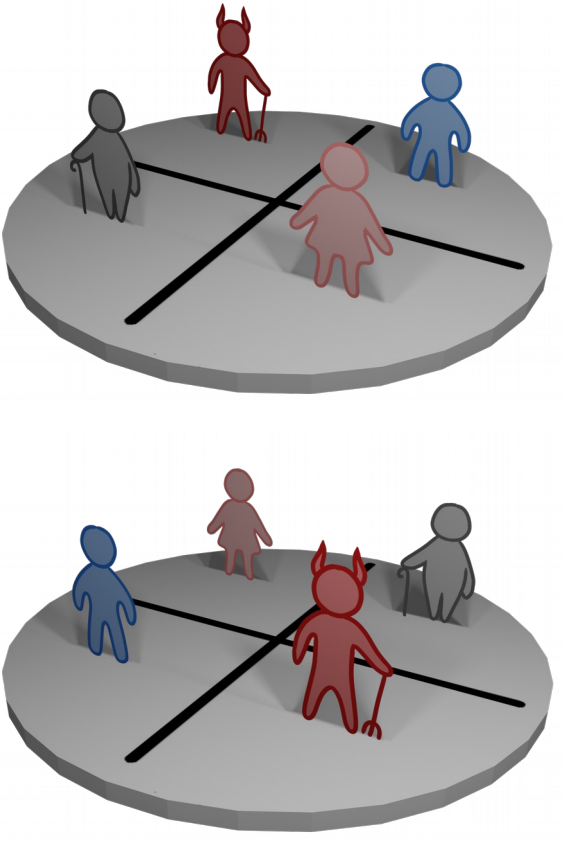
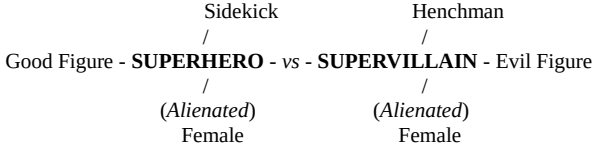


I prefer the idea of a sort-of lazy susan, rotating the POV.

Figure Patterns In Diagrams:

A)



B)

Wise Figure - **HERO** - *vs* - Threat - (to rescue) Female

Or, arranged vertically:

Figure Patterns In Diagrams:

A)

Good Figure
/
Sidekick - **SUPERHERO** - (Alienated) Female
/
vs
/
Henchman - **SUPERVILLAIN** - (Alienated) Female
/
Evil Figure

B)

Wise Figure
/
HERO
/
vs
/
Threat
/
(to rescue)
Female

A final observation, which is only peripherally relevant, is to point out one more discovery, which involves asking Why? These images exist and Why? They act the way they do.

National/Group Personifications occur not in just one image, but in multiples: Nations don't have a single

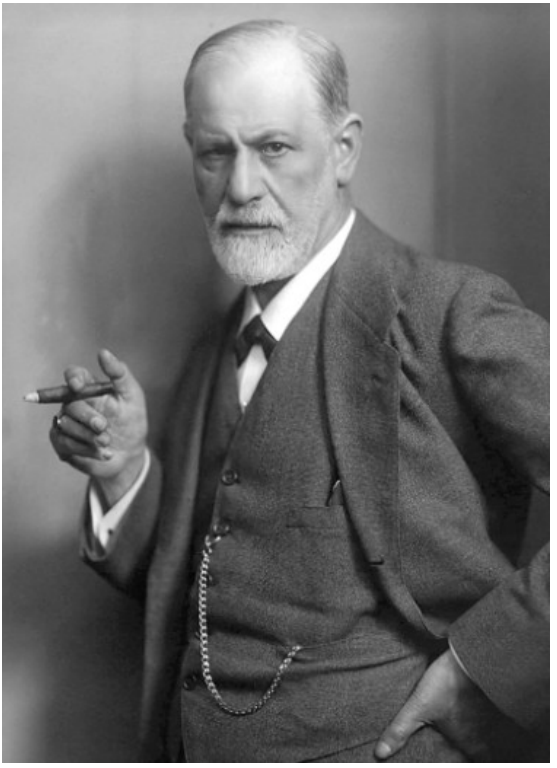
image they use to represent themselves but a set, just like in entertainments.

The United States doesn't have just Uncle Sam. The United States has Uncle Sam, Columbia, The Eagle, and an implied figure of God. Nations, Groups, Tribes, select not one single image but a set, and consistently use that set to express their identity. Why this is, isn't the point of this short book.

This work is intended to observe a set of consistent figure patterns in historical human entertainment, and that's all. Those observations can be used to craft successful works of entertainment, and that's as far as this work goes. There's no philosophy here, no metaphysical speculation, no Freudian or Jungian or Campbell-esque erudite analysis, it's just making an observation, making observations, and pointing out the potential of using them to, essentially, beat casinos at blackjack.

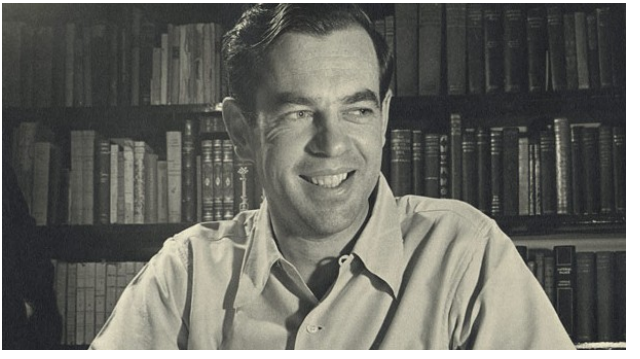
...and that's all.

National Personification Sets.

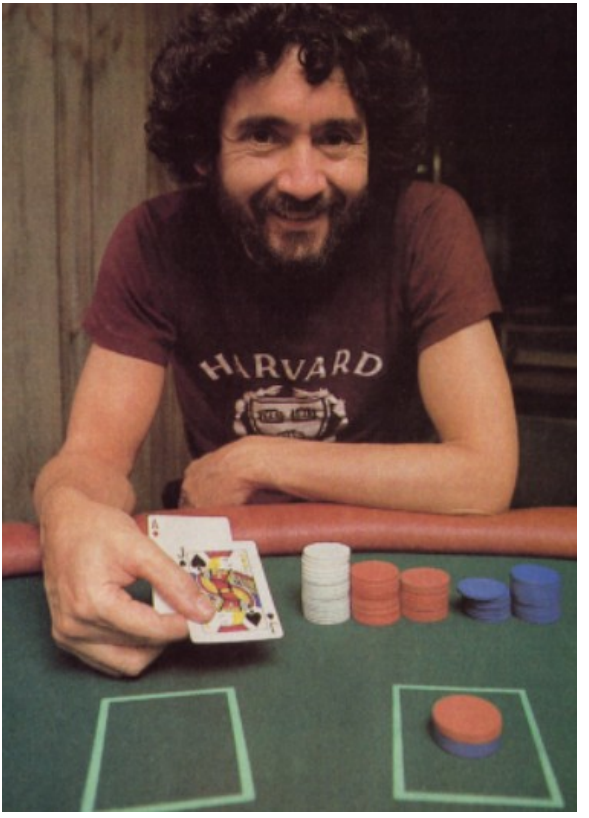


Buddy, it’s a cigar.

Dude, you think too much.



Personal growth?
Bro, get ahold of yourself.



Let’s count some cards and make some *money*!