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LOVE STORY ARCHETYPES by Wendy Delsol

On this day of big red hearts all the world is contemplating love. It’s an occasion, thus, to explore romantic tension in fiction. Whether as a main plot or subplot, a love story ups the reader’s emotional involvement. And while it’s comforting to think our grandparents courted without obstacles or rivals, we’d never tolerate an insipid or drama-free story line in a book. Indeed, we expect our protagonists—in the name of love—to pine and suffer before prevailing. With this in mind, it’s worth exploring a few archetypes of romantic tension.

STAR-CROSSED We owe Shakespeare and his *Romeo and Juliet* for the popularity of this construct, one in which outside forces—seemingly greater than the characters—conspire to keep them apart. Sophie Jordan’s *Firelight* with its dragon girl falls for dragon-hunter boy premise is an example. In Malinda Lo’s April 2011 release, *Huntress*, the two characters, Kaede and Taisin, are selected for a dangerous mission. The pair come to rely on each other and even fall in love, but the Kingdom requires only one of them to prevail.

STAR-ALIGNED In this archetype, fates conspire to bring together two strong-willed or seemingly mismatched individuals. Early interactions are beset by fiery personalities, a misunderstanding, or opposing views. In my own novel, *Stork*, new-to-town Katla riles traditionalist Jack with her pro-development, bulldoze the downtown stance. Early misunderstandings are forgiven as the two come to understand a shared history and recognize their unique powers and combined destinies. Jenny Moss’s *Shadow* is another example. The protagonist is Shadow, an orphan raised alongside the queen as an attempt to subvert a prophecy. When the young queen dies as predicted, Shadow flees with the aid of Sir Kenway. During this escape, she discovers both love and her true identity.  
  
 FROM RAGS TO RICHES An individual disadvantaged by class, race, or other society-imposed value proves his or her worth, talent, and/or moral fiber and wins the notice and heart of an advantaged individual. *Cinderella* and its retellings, such as Malinda Lo’s *Ash* and Gail Carson Levine’s *Ella Enchanted,* are examples. And with *Cinder*, a Spring 2012 release, Marissa Meyer promises a new spin on this story line, one in which an android Cinderella must save the planet.

PRINCESS AND THE PEON A reverse *Cinderella*, if you will. In this scenario the main character possesses a societal or monetary advantage over a potential match. In order to find love, the power-holding protagonist must reconsider his or her values. *The Princess Bride* emerges from this archetype. *The Runaway Dragon* by Kate Coombs tells the story of the feisty princess Meg who, on a quest to find her errant dragon, encounters the dashing bandit Bain.

OWN WORST ENEMY The protagonist must conquer his or her own inner conflicts before the right partner becomes clear. In *Two Moon Princess*, Carmen Ferreiro-Esteban introduces us to Andrea, a headstrong, hoping-for-knighthood princess who time travels between a medieval land and modern-day California and must choose between duty and desire. In Marissa Doyle’s *Bewitching Season* and *Betraying Season*, identical twin heroines must learn who they are and accept their magical abilities before finding love.  
  
  THREE IS NOT COMPANY *Twilight* by Stephenie Meyer—although also falling into the star-crossed category with the human falling for a vampire dilemma—is responsible for the “team” phenomenon in this category. Whether you’re Team Edward or Team Jacob, you can’t argue with the success of the series. *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins furthered popularized the love triangle as archetype with Katniss’s dilemma between revolutionary Gale and faithful Peeta. Cassandra Clare’s *Infernal Devices* has the protagonist Tessa torn between bad-boy Will and gentle Jem.   
  
So there you have it, a few ways in which writers create conflict with love stories. Does your favorite book fall into one of these categories? More importantly, knowing the constructs, what is an original angle? All good and worthwhile things to ponder on this day of big red hearts. Happy Valentine's Day and many thanks to the contributing Inkies whose works are cited above.

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