



45 Master Characters: Mythic Models for Creating Original Characters

Victoria Lynn Schmidt

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This volume explores the most common male and female archetypes, provides instructions for using them to create original characters and gives examples of how other authors have brought such archetypes to life in novels, films and television.

45 Master Characters: Mythic Models for Creating Original Characters Details

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From Reader Review 45 Master Characters: Mythic Models for Creating Original Characters for online ebook

Dani Ger says

The master character models (including the new 46th downloadable character -which link has changed), the supporting character models, and the feminine and masculine journeys are very helpful for crafting a story.

KareyLyn says

Great books are what they are, largely due to strong character archetypes. This book is a phenomenal classroom in your lap for learning all about archetypes and what kinds of character archetypes they need to be put with in order for the main character to grow.

Betty says

There is no book on the planet that does a better job of revealing the characteristics of archetypes so well. In my opinion, almost anyone reading this book is likely to exclaim at least a couple dozen times, "Oh yeah, I get it!" Schmidt, a former screenwriter, know her people and personalities and has a talent for coming up with the perfect set of mythic or modern characters to help the reader understand and relate. I especially liked the chapter entitled "How to Use the Archetypes" that explains the motivation of the characters by asking the questions: What does your character care about? What motivates her? What does she fear? and "How do other characters view her? At the end of that chapter you are even given optional exercises to help you explore ways to create you own character.

In addition, I love the illustrations. Visual example of the archetypes are sprinkled throughout the book. Those examples are often reproductions of famous book illustrations or photos from plays or films.

Kayla says

Without a doubt, Victoria Schmidt's revised edition of "45 Master Characters" is the best character reference guide I own. Not only does the book go into depth about the different archetypes like it promises, the book also gives you access to an additional 46th character you can download off of the Writer's Digest website, and it also has a chapter on creating plots. The book is divided as follows:

Part I: Getting Started

Part II: Creating Female Heroes and Villains

Part III: Creating Male Heroes and Villains

Part IV: Creating Supporting Characters

Part V: Creating Feminine and Masculine Journeys

There is also an index and appendix at the back of the book, the latter being quite useful if the reader/writer decides to follow Schmidt's advice on plot arcs.

The first part, Getting Started, is a short part, but also quite useful. Besides the author providing a clear distinction between archetypes and stereotypes, Schmidt also has a handy little character questionnaire. Normally, I'm not too keen when I have to answer questions like, "what is your character's favourite colour and why?" but the questions in the questionnaire are designed to help the aspiring writer see archetypal patterns in the character, which will help him/her define what their characters' dominant archetype is. She also has a list of motivating factors.

The next two parts of the book are real gems. They are PACKED with information on potential backstories for each archetype, character flaws, fears, motivations, how other characters might perceive this character (both positive and negative views), and more. I also love how the author made a "good side" of the archetype and an antagonistical side. For example, with the goddess Demeter, her good side is The Nurturer but her villainous side is the Over-Controlling Mother. On the topic of Demeter and other gods and goddesses, I especially love how the author decided to base the archetypes on mythic models. This makes it extremely easy to visualise what the characters may be like, and also makes remembering the various archetypes easier than they would be without a mythic base. At the end of each chapter, Schmidt provides a list of literary, historical, TV and movie examples for the archetype just described. I find it especially interesting how even though there are so many characters based on the same archetype, there are still many different characters that can spring from that foundation. For example, I never would've guessed that both Captain Kirk (Star Trek) and Jerry Springer (Seinfeld) were both based on Zeus' archetype. These two sections of the book are super helpful when it comes to laying down the basic foundations of one's character(s).

Part IV, Creating Supporting Characters, is just as helpful as Part II and III. The author not only goes on to explain the main archetypes for friends and rivals, but also talks about symbolism. Personally, I'm not the type of writer who actively seeks out placing symbolic characters throughout my manuscript, but I will find this section useful when asked to do a novel study for a class or when asked to write a short piece of literary prose.

The last part of the book is badly mislabelled, being called The Feminine and Masculine Journeys. When I first got to this part, I was very confused, wondering if there was a difference in the journeys male and female protagonists must go on. There might be a slight difference, but when the author started going deeper into her explanation, I realised she was talking about something else. This part could also be renamed to Plot Driven vs Character Driven Stories, Literary vs Commercial Fiction, and several other names. The fact that she labelled these fiction styles as Feminine and Masculine Journeys might not bother some people, but even if it does, don't let that stop you from thinking this is a good book. However, in terms of content for this particular part, I found nothing that especially stood out to me. Every piece of information I was reading I could easily find in another book on plot, such as James Scott Bell's "Plot and Structure" and Larry Brook's "Story Engineering." The advice on structure was very formulaic, but at the same time, I agree with pretty much everything she noted. Nonetheless, I would still find the last section of the book a lot more helpful if I were writing a movie script.

So if the book is this amazing, you might be wondering why I only gave it four stars. The answer is the feminism. To be honest, I found that the character archetypes being separated into male and female categories unnecessary and annoying. While flipping through the pages in the book store, I felt it was okay that Aphrodite and Artemis acted the way they did, but when I got to Athena, I was also annoyed. Being the only female archetype who is a business women, part of her motivating factors involved "wanting to fit in with the boy's club." Um...what? Knowing a couple female professionals in private industry, I can definitely say that they did not become business women because they wanted to "prove they [were] equal to men," but because they love what they do. The feminism and sexism doesn't stop at these three goddesses. (There is a useful review [here](#) explaining the feminism and sexism towards both genders in the book:

<http://www.amazon.com/review/R3GE5QBE...>) As a result, whenever I refer to this book, I'll most likely be looking at the male section for the bulk of my characters, regardless of gender. Obviously, these archetypes will also just be a basic foundation.

Overall, I definitely got my \$17.06 money's worth from this book. I read it from cover to cover in about a day and discovered a WEALTH of information. It's sitting on my desk along with my other character references (Writer's Guide to Character Traits and Nancy Kress' Dynamic Characters), but this will be the one I'll refer back to most often.

The verdict? Buy this book. It will sharpen your characters into three-dimensional ones and do wonders for your plot. Just be warned about the stuff I mentioned.

James says

Illustrates character archetypes, based almost entirely on Graeco-Roman gods, and how they act and interact with other characters and sidekicks. Also a masculine and feminine hero's journey is defined and examples are given on how to use them in your work. The author recognizes the patriarchal aspects of many of the stereotypes.

Should you use these in your writing? You probably are without knowing it. Food for thought, discussions and discourse. Used copies are quite cheap.

Shannon Kostyal says

This is another reference type book I've gone through a few times. It can be a bit overwhelming in the layout, but it's still pretty useful for fine-tuning character concepts. I have a few other books on character types, and between these references and incorporating and RPG character roll-up/level up approach, I think I've found a pretty decent method for getting to know my characters even before they've fully lived their story in book form.

Darusha Wehm says

I've never cared for the eurocentric "hero's journey" and this book relies entirely on those archetypal characters and story arcs. It claims to be a feminist update, with separate female characters and both feminine and masculine journeys. The author does state briefly in the introduction that those journeys could be undertaken by either men or women, and there is a single "gender-bending" example of each. I just found the reliance on stereotypical (not archetypal) gender traits entirely unappealing.

I'll freely admit that I'm probably throwing out the baby with the bathwater here, but I just got too annoyed with the basic concept to take what is valuable out of it. C'est la vie.

Marie Garwood says

Honestly, I loved this book. I'm rating it 5 stars not necessarily because it is some kind of modern classic, but more so because it is a new staple of my craft book library.

If you enjoy the Myers-Briggs personality test and thinking in terms of different personalities when creating characters for your stories, **you will love this book.**

I gained a lot to think about in terms of my own characters from all the different perspectives this book discusses. The strength of this book is the amount of information and examples it provides! If there was a character type I didn't understand as well, I typically understood it much better after referencing some of the examples of that character type in other media.

I didn't enjoy reading about the masculine and feminine journeys as much, but those portions of the book were still helpful as well.

If you need some help fleshing out your characters, **pick up this book!** You'll at least walk away with some new ideas if not the answers you're looking for.

Abby says

Having very little experience with archetypes, this book was full of new concepts for me. The archetypes were thoroughly explained with great lists of potential flaws and virtues, as well as references to Greek gods that made each one memorable. I also enjoyed the section on the hero and the heroine journeys. Thank you for a great reference, Victoria Lynn Schmidt! I would love to see an in-depth version of this book, with even more detail and examples.

Tez says

In 2008 or earlier, I learned that character arcs were troublesome for me. In 2009, I requested titles of craft books that might help me, and Victoria Lynn Schmidt's [45 Master Characters](#) is a gem. It explains the difference between stereotypes (cardboard cut-outs) and archetypes (realistic characters), going into detail about the traits and flaws of each of the 45 archetypes, as well as examples. However, I don't read classics, I watch only a few movies a year (if that), and my TV tastes are mostly animated comedies, so the examples here didn't really connect.

It all sounds straight-forward, until I realised that my character has traits of *two* archetypes, which may double my work. And the sections on feminine and masculine journeys...there is a gender-bending example for each, but basically it seems to say that the more action-packed stories are masculine, and the more reactional ones are feminine. So while overall [45 Master Characters](#) may seem like a feminist text, it still seems to pigeon-hole the so-called fairer sex.

Still, I've dog-eared many pages of this library copy, and have just ordered my own to keep.

Olivia says

I found this interesting and a very creatively fruitful read, mostly because I wanted to argue with author on every page. While it's true that archetypes are powerful and useful tools, I think writing directly from the well of euro centric archetypes is a path so well traveled it is now paved and lined with truck stops and tourist traps that we've all heard of, visited, eaten the sandwiches of questionable provenance and bought the t-shirt.

However, I will say that I found the hero's journey structure (helpfully divided into feminine journey and masculine journey, with some marginal mention of genderbending, *sigh) an interesting jumping off point for structural purposes.

Mostly it was useful to me because it roused my contrarian tendencies and made me angry. :-) So, really, I kind of loved it.

Ryan says

I'd been meaning to *45 Master Characters* for quite some time. I've owned it for a number of years, but my current drive to push my story ideas beyond my thoughts and into words (still slow going) inspired me to finally read it cover to cover. The book largely explores character archetypes, which it defines as the foundation that characters stand upon; a blueprint for the writer to build from that preserves their creative spark. The idea of discovering my characters within this book's frameworks always seemed like a great way to understand them even more, as well as maybe point out contradictions that I hadn't noticed to correct flaws in design.

The book divides archetypes by sex, starting with female. Each has eight different archetypes, headed by a classical deity that embodies the core ideas of that archetype, which is then split into heroic and villainous interpretations. For example, the archetype represented by the goddess Demeter is The Nurturer or the Overcontrolling Mother. Each represents two sides of the same coin. Each chapter is respectably thorough in exploring its archetype, and follow a familiar framework each time that makes it easier to refer back to if need be. Later chapters go on to cover the importance of supporting characters, the different roles they can fill, and finally the feminine journey and masculine journeys are laid out in detail. There are handy worksheets in the Appendix as well that one could use to plot out their own stories within these frameworks.

Something important to remember, which I struggled to keep in mind myself, is that what this book lays out is not word of law. I found this to be especially important to keep in mind the archetype chapters. These archetypes as laid out are ultimately supposed to be foundations only, so while Schmidt does get rather specific when detailing them as characters I made sure to see them not as requirements but as fine-tuned examples. I had a subconscious desire to be told what to do, which is contrary to the point. Much of the legwork for building up a character is still left up to the reader. For example, during my reading I realized that while a lot of well-known warrior women characters fall under the archetype of the Amazon, that does not mean other female characters are not allowed to be athletic or combative. To think this way would be to rely too much on what the book says at face value. An archetype speaks more about an underlining attitude the character has, not necessarily what they can or can't do.

Furthermore, the values and fears listed are not checklists that must all be met, but a pool the reader can pull from or play with. Don't feel as if you must make sure your character must tow these lines either. Schmidt does a rather good job of repeatedly emphasizing that a story is meant to challenge and/or change the core aspects of these characters over its course. As a small criticism, however, I do feel she could have done a better job emphasizing that the archetypes are much more flexible than her examples may be making them sound. I won't fault her for expecting critical thinking from her readers, but at the same time they are coming to this book for instruction and reference, so it might have helped to show how varied interpretations could be. There are a few cases where she cements a certain concept as inherent to an archetype, and while I don't disagree that it's important, I'm more curious to know how a writer might redefine it.

Another shortcoming I found was how dated some of the references could be when bringing up examples of an archetype "in action." While there were plenty of obvious ones like Luke Skywalker or Wonder Woman, as well as other characters from popular series or films, I did find that a number of others I had to take the author's word on. As for the use of Ancient Greek deities (as well as Isis and Osiris) to represent the archetypes themselves I found her usage of them to be nearly perfect. When looking into what others thought of the book I found some people complaining that they were too Eurocentric. While that is the case, I won't fault the book for it simply because the Greek gods have been such a fixation in Western thought for over a century that for the intended audience they (for the most part) easily evoke what their respective archetype is meant to be, in a way that Mesopotamian or even Norse pantheons could not.

Though perhaps not as useful to writers looking to break certain molds or think far outside the box, I found *45 Master Characters* to be a fantastic writing reference book that got me thinking more deeply about my own characters and story in ways that I hadn't before. Where things were not clear for me, I really have been able to more firmly cement ideas, see where they need to begin, as well as what works, what doesn't, and why. I found the book's particular focus on female characters and the feminine journey especially valuable, particularly its lesson that a journey being "feminine" or "masculine" does not limit it to one sex only. While not the only reference guide out there, and certainly not a required rule book, it is nonetheless a valuable resource for those looking for more guidance. There is also a revised edition of this book (which is not the one reviewed here) that may address some of the shortcomings I brought up.

Review originally posted on my blog [here](#).

Hesper says

Useful for tween fanfic writers, I suppose, or people who like silly formulas, but that's insulting to both of those groups.

Look: she only marginally grasps the mythological figures she uses as archetypes, has obviously not read all the books from which her character examples are drawn, and operates on a gender-binary, heteronormative definition of humanity that will only hinder character authenticity.

Just avoid it. No half-baked taxonomy will make anyone a better writer.

Jennifer Newell says

If you want a good book on archetypes to help you with your writing, I wouldn't necessarily recommend this book (see instead *The Complete Writer's Guide to Heroes & Heroines* by Tami Cowden, Caro LaFever and Sue Viders). For me, the descriptions of the archetypes were the weakest aspect of this book, which is why I had to knock off a couple of stars on my rating. Where this book really shines is in its descriptions of the Feminine and Masculine Journeys. The author's breakdown of the different stages and how they are unique depending on the specific story journey of the character was fabulous. Every writer should read this section after mastering the Hero's Journey as explained by Christopher Vogler (another must have book for writers).

I'm keeping this book close while I'm writing my current book and would highly recommend it to other writers. Just because the archetype descriptions didn't work for me doesn't mean that others won't find them useful and essential for creating their characters.

James says

A lot of good stuff, but it could have been much better done. I anticipated a plug-and-crank formulaic writing cookbook, and this book is better than that; the author does give extensive and concrete advice about structure and character development, but in ways that encourage the reader to be original in applying that advice rather than settle for easy cliches. I also appreciated her extensive use of examples from well-known myths, books, films, and TV shows, and her having provided some worksheets in an appendix to help the reader organize his/her own development of characters and stories.

The reason I can't give this five stars is that the writing and editing are just too sloppy - especially in a book about writing! The book is laced with grating grammatical errors and clumsiness, and there are too many homonym-mixup mistakes, e.g. using "shoot" for "chute." I am a professional author, albeit of nonfiction, and I would never have let a draft manuscript in this rough a condition out of my hands and into those of an editor, let alone a final proof. And where was that editor? Ms. Schmidt deserved better, because she clearly put a great deal of thought into this, if not enough attention to detail. Her editor(s) failed her.

I still recommend this for aspiring fiction writers, but one of its lessons has to be an unintended one, the result of hurrying through ideas without going back and polishing them.
