Do You Choose Him or Does He Choose You?
- Analyzing Character Archetypes in Otome Games

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Abstract. The relationship between fiction and humanity is long-established and can create strong affective bonds. This connection can also be seen in digital games, especially otome games. In this sense, this research was developed in order to obtain a richer understanding of players' bonds with character tropes from otome games through the archetypal typology developed by Margareth Mark and Carol Pearson, and was able to identify that the analyzed tropes are connected to at least one of the archetypes defined by the authors. This study's findings can contribute to the understanding of parasocial relationships between fictional characters and humans, and, additionally, aid game developers in creating more intricate characters infused with the power of archetypes.
Keywords— otome games, parasocial relationships, archetypes, collective unconscious

1. Introduction

The relationship between fiction and humanity is long-established. Humans used to carve clay tablets to share stories and today one can experience an interactive narrative through a screen with video games. However, human development hasn't changed the fact that people still get emotional with fictional characters as if they were real. In Victorian England, people took the streets to protest about Sherlock Holmes' death [Armstrong 2016]; and similarly, there are people today who rent a giant digital billboard in China to wish happy birthday to their favorite game character [Feng 2018].

It is believed that such occurrences are due to the strong bonds created between a person and a fictional other, which can range from identification to the creation of parasocial relationships (PSR), relationships with a media persona that resemble real ones, even having the same effects of providing social support and triggering distress if broken up [Dibble et al. 2015].

These relationships also happen in otome games, a category of games originated from Japan that are developed and marketed towards women where the player can choose one of the male characters to develop a romantic relationship with. Otome games, which had their debut in 1994 with the game Angelique, introduced a type of entertainment that helps women escape the social pressure of their gender and seek solace in a safe space dotted with fantasy, where they can experiment with and enact various female identities and female fantasies [Kim 2009]. The genre has its limitations and stereotypes but also

space to grow. Love and Producer, a Chinese otome game, for example, generated roughly 20 million yuan (3.1 million US dollars) in revenues on its peak day within the first month of its release in 2017 [Liang 2020], which demonstrates how promising the market is.

These games have their own popular character tropes – common or overused themes or devices –, that are so cherished that they continually repeat in old and new games alike. And players don't seem to get tired of them: they choose to romance characters with their favorite tropes in different otome games and still create PSRs with them. These relationships are so strong that some games have specific cafes and merchandise, and even live shows with the voice actors. It is considered that this intense connection may, among several possibilities, is due to the unconscious appeal of the characters and their connection with the collective unconscious, a repository of all human experience shared since the dawn of humanity. This unconscious is occupied with archetypes, structures that can appear as images and symbols in dreams and culture [Shamdasani 2011].

The symbolic potential of archetypes was used by Margaret Mark and Carol Pearson, based on an adaptation of the theory of psychiatrist Carl Gustav Jung, to create a typology, with which they showed how successful brands strengthen their image and meaning in the eyes of the public by associating themselves with archetypes, creating strong bonds with their customers. Based on this study, this research aimed to use the archetype typology created by Mark and Pearson [Mark and Pearson 2001] to analyze popular otome character tropes, aiming to explore the connection between archetypes and the tropes' popularity, and to comprehend players' preference for certain tropes. The motivation for this research considered that this understanding may aid game developers in strategically creating more meaningful characters with the help of archetypes and, additionally, it may help players have a better understanding of their character preferences and the psychological connotations such preference entails.

2. Related Work

Research regarding otome games is sparse but highly valuable. A study found that otome games have implications for interpersonal relationships and well-being, and may cultivate idealized romantic beliefs [Song and Fox 2016], showing how PSRs can deeply affect one's life. However, research involving otome games does not elaborate on the PSRs created between players and characters or the nature of this relationship. PSRs, on the other hand, have been studied extensively in the past. It has been discovered that these relationships can offer the same benefits of a real relationship, and even advantages, due to the lack of reciprocal interaction between relationship partners. The absent interaction means reduced risk of rejection, creating a safer context in which to form relationships [Horton and Wohl 1956]. However, these studies do not associate these strong PSRs with Jung's theory of the collective unconscious and archetypal patterns.

Regarding the use of Mark and Pearson's typology [Mark and Pearson 2001], a study by Taguchi and Miyake [Taguchi and Miyake 2019] utilized the method to analyze characters from the game *Say Bye to the Villains*. The research developed an expansion with new character cards based on the twelve archetypes, supporting Mark and Pearson's argument that when correctly recognized, the archetypes can help individuals find deeper meaning in their lives and offer them comfort. Nevertheless, this study does not delve into the PSRs created between players and characters, and its analysis is limited to one game.

3. Method

In order to gain a richer understanding of the players' strong affective ties with otome game character tropes, this research utilized the archetypal typology developed by Mark and Pearson[Mark and Pearson 2001], adapted by Paula, Araújo e Silva [Paula et al.], to analyze eleven popular otome game tropes, selected from blogs and online discussions related to otome games.

This typology posed as an interesting strategy for the analysis of otome games considering Mark and Pearson created an instrument that enables the practical application, even if adapted, of Jung's theory (since the latter did not prefix and characterize archetypes at this level of detail), focusing on the development of the theoretical basis surrounding the archetype's concept. Another important characteristic is that the brands analyzed by the authors exploit the "strength of archetypes" to retain their audience, a strategy that otome games can use to financially stimulate the consumer market loyal to this entertainment type, whether by selling products linked to the characters or other business strategies.

3.1. Mark and Person Archetypes

Mark and Pearson [Mark and Pearson 2001] characterize the twelve archetypal types identified in their studies, describing the characteristics of each type. The authors identified these profiles in company brands, associating their characteristics with consumer loyalty. This description comprises the archetype's desires, goals, fears, and gifts, which are distributed across different levels, with Level Three being the deepest and most infused with meaning, and the Shadow being the negative temptation of each type.

In a synthetic way, the description of the archetypal profiles is presented below:

a) **The Innocent**: The Innocent's core desire is to experience paradise and their goal is to be happy. They fear doing something wrong or bad that will provoke punishment and their gifts are faith and optimism. The Innocent is also hopeful and yearns for a "happy ending", but can get into a state of denial.

b) **The Explorer**: The Explorer's core desire is to have freedom to find out who you are through exploring the world, and their goal is to experience a better, more fulfilling life. They fear getting trapped and conforming, and their gifts are autonomy, ambition, and the ability to be true to one's own soul. The Explorer also desires to escape from routine and boredom, thus avoiding developing ties with people and things.

c) **The Sage**: The Sage's core desire is to discover the truth and their goal is to use intelligence and analysis to understand the world. They fear ignorance and being misled, and their gifts are wisdom and intelligence. The Sage is attracted to intelligent people and those who stimulate knowledge, but they can often be disconnected from reality.

d) **The Hero**: The Hero's core desire is to prove one's worth through courageous and difficult actions, and their goal is to exert mastery in a way that improves the world. They fear weakness and vulnerability, and their gifts are competence and courage. The Hero wishes to be as strong and powerful as one is capable of being, usually to defend someone or a noble cause. However, they may become ruthless and overly competitive.

e) **The Outlaw**: The Outlaw's core desire is to seek revenge or revolution and their goal is to destroy what is not working, either for the Outlaw or society. They fear

being powerless and trivialized, and their gifts are outrageousness and radical freedom. They have deeper values, different from conventional ones, and desire to be stronger to achieve their goals, which may lead to criminal or evil behavior if their shadow is active.

f) **The Magician**: The Magician's core desire is to have knowledge of the fundamental laws of how the world or universe works. Their goal is to make dreams come true and they fear negative and unanticipated consequences. The Magician's gift is finding win-win outcomes and they value vision and innovation.

g) **The Everyman**: The Everyman's core desire is to connect with others and their goal is to belong. They fear standing out or acting superior and being exiled or rejected as a result, which might make them endure abuse to be a part of a group. The Everyman are hard workers and their gift is realism and lack of pretense.

h) **The Lover**: The Lover's core desire is to attain intimacy, a deeper connection, and their goal is to be in a relationship with the people, work, and experiences they love. They fear being alone, unloved, unwanted, and feel unworthy of love. The Lover's gifts are passion, appreciation, and commitment. They make others feel special and want to feel the same, but their shadow may induce promiscuity and obsession.

i) **The Jester**: The Jester's core desire is to live in the moment with full enjoyment and their goal is to have a great time and lighten up the world. Their gift is bringing joy and they fear boredom or being boring, which may prompt irresponsibility.

j) **The Caregiver**: The Caregiver's core desire is to protect people from harm and their goal is to help others. They fear selfishness and ingratitude, and their gift is compassion and generosity. The Caregiver might put others before themselves, but also manipulate, entrap who they're trying to protect.

k) **The Creator**: The Creator's core desire is to create something of enduring value and their goal is to give form to a vision. They fear having a mediocre vision or execution and their gifts are creativity and imagination. The Creator is often a perfectionist and values authenticity and innovation, but might overly dramatize their life.

l) **The Ruler**: The Ruler's core desire is to control and their goal is to create a secure and successful family, company, or community. They fear chaos and being overthrown, and their gifts are responsibility and leadership. The Ruler can also be bossy and authoritarian, and, due to their shadow, have tyrannical or manipulative behaviors.

3.2. Analysis

The eleven otome character tropes selected for the development of this research are some of the most popular ones present in otome games. This analysis sought to characterize the trope, present two characters from different otome games that correspond to this profile and, later, associate the trope with one of the twelve archetypal profiles of the typology developed by Mark and Pearson[Mark and Pearson 2001].

i) **Tsundere**: These characters tend to be hostile towards the heroine at first, but as the story progresses, they slowly warm up to her and become more affectionate. Jiwoo, from the otome game *Dandelion*, openly shows this trope: at first, he is rude and snobby but as the story progresses, the player finds out he actually cares for her and only had trouble showing his feelings. Using aggressiveness in order to hide their desire to have

a more profound connection is one of the Lover's characteristics. At some point in the story, Jiwoo avoids the heroine because he's afraid she doesn't like him, thus showing the fear of the Lover of being unwanted and abandoned.

Tsunderes use verbal abuse to hide the Lover within them, usually out of fear of not being worthy of love or being abandoned. This wall they build around themselves might be due to past trauma, an example being Sasakuza from *Collar x Malice*, whose mother died to save him. The trauma is usually revealed only when the heroine is able to free the Lover inside the Tsundere, which is the case with Sasakuza. When he trusts the heroine and lets the Lover take over, he realizes how her love and care made him grow and deal with his trauma.

Players attracted to the Tsundere trope might want to feel special and adored. They may want to be that unique person that will finally bring the Lover within the Tsundere forward and make this hot and cold character blush and stammer, thus fulfilling the players' need of feeling special.

ii) **Yandere**: The yandere is someone that is literally "lovesick". Once they meet the heroine, they become highly obsessive, desiring to have her love and devotion all for themselves. In some cases, the Yandere might have been harboring those feelings for a long time, like Kuroyuki from *Nightshade*, whose obsession had grown over the years. The obsession is a characteristic of the shadow of the Lover, along with jealousy, which is also a trait of the Yandere, since they will do anything to keep the heroine with them.

Yanderes also have the urge to care for and protect who they love, much like the Caregiver. However, the Caregiver's shadow transforms this feeling into manipulation and martyrdom. At first, the Yandere shows a loving and caring exterior, but when the heroine sees the shadow, it is too late. Toma from *Amnesia* lies about being the heroine's boyfriend after she lost her memory and keeps her in his house to take care of her, but when the heroine finally sees through his lies, Toma puts her in a cage "for her own protection". Similarly, Kuroyuki creates an elaborate lie to make the heroine believe she has been disowned and only has him in the world. He wants her to be with him forever and is violent towards anyone who tries to get in the way.

Players who like the Yandere trope might want to feel special and adored, but like the Lover and the Caregiver they are afraid of abandonment and ingratitude. The Yandere extinguishes that fear with their twisted love and obsession, promising to love the player with all their being, even if a few heads have to roll in the process.

iii) **Kuudere**: These characters seem cold and aloof at first, and don't show their emotions to the heroine. They're usually highly intelligent and prefer to be rational rather than let emotions cloud their judgment. These characteristics are seen in the Sage, who seeks knowledge and information, but who tends to isolate themselves from reality.

Saito Hajime from *Hakuoki* is an example of the Kuudere trope. In the story, when the heroine pretends to be a man in 19th century Japan, Saito is the first to find out her secret. Like the Sage, he's observant and wise, and has confidence in his skills. However, he keeps his emotions to himself, and it takes time for the heroine to gain his trust and make him open up to her rather than only focus on his craft and duty. Kent from *Amnesia* is another example. He has an intellectual mindset and analyzes relationships rationally as if they were simply another subject to be studied. Much like the Sage, he's attracted to

intelligent people and those who stimulate knowledge.

Players interested in the Kuudere trope might want to seek the truth and gain knowledge. They may also be attracted to intelligent people who stimulate them. Since the Kuudere is often shrouded in mystery, the players might also want to "study" him and slowly find out who he really is until they see the truth behind the Kuudere's cool mask.

iv) **Dandere**: The Dandere is a quiet and anti-social character, but their reserved behavior is often due to shyness. They usually treat the heroine with kindness at first, even if they're distant, and take a long time to warm up to her. This behavior can be seen in Senri from *Norn9*, who rarely leaves his room due to his fear of people and how they perceive him. He places heavy importance on being accepted, like the Everyman, whose basic desire is to connect with others. Senri, like the Everyman, also fears standing out and being cast out due to that.

At the beginning of their story, Danderes often feel alone and abandoned, like Nageki from *Hatoful Boyfriend*, who spends most of his time in the library and nobody, apart from the heroine, seems to notice him. However, as the story progresses, the heroine is able to gradually make him open up to her and be less shy, thus giving Nageki a feeling of connection with another person, which is the core desire of the Everyman, and with that, she also brings him peace.

Players who are attracted to the Dandere trope yearn to connect with someone and want the Dandere to do the same. The Everyman likes the simplicity of things, and the Dandere can provide a calm and simple love after the player manages to get past their shyness and reach their loving personality.

v) **Oresama**: Oresamas can be very charismatic and charming, but their arrogance, usually due to extreme wealth, intelligence, or talent, overshadows those aspects of their personality. They're snobbish and will spend the remainder of the game trying to control and dominate the heroine.

This behavior can be seen in Li Zeyan from *Love and Producer*, who is the CEO of a financial group. He tries to dictate the heroine's life, often saying he knows what is best for her. Like the Ruler, Li Zeyan takes control to avoid chaos and provide safety. However, he forgets to consider the heroine's desires, like an authoritarian ruler that enforces his own wishes. Similarly, Ayato, one of the vampires from the game *Diabolik Lovers*, is known for being arrogant and similar to the shadow of the Ruler, he manipulates the heroine and has tyrannical behaviors. Even when he redeems himself in one of the game endings, he still makes the heroine swear an oath that she will stay with him forever, thus showing his ever-present Ruler necessity to be in control.

Players attracted to the Oresama trope might want more control and order in their lives. They might have the need for security and predictability, things that the Oresama can provide them with, since they will make sure to have control over the situation and lead the way, even if the heroine wants it or not.

vi) **Genki**: The Genki is often a redhead and has a boisterous and playful personality, which can be rather annoying at times, but he always treats the heroine with kindness. Beneath his upbeat personality, the Genki tends to hide deep traumas and dark pasts, which he will reveal to the heroine as they grow closer. However, that rarely affects

his cheerful attitude as they would much rather look on the bright side of life.

An example is Impey from *Code: Realize*. He's upbeat and innocent, and, despite having a traumatic past, Impey doesn't have resentments, always remaining optimistic about life. This world view is similar to the Innocent, who dreams of a perfect future and a happy ending. The Innocent also values purity and kindness, traits shown by Impey when he disapproves of killing his enemies, even when they attack him. However, the Genki also has characteristics of the Everyman when they treat everyone with kindness and integrity. Otoya from *Uta no Prince-sama*, goes out of his way to help the heroine at the start of the game, even if he doesn't know who she is, and always treats her with kindness. The Everyman's realism often clashes with the Innocent's naivety and the Genki can be serious when needed, but he much prefers having a smile on his face.

Players drawn to the Genki might be attracted to positive and hopeful ideas, and wish for a more common and simple connection with others, capable of providing a kind and safe relationship.

vii) **Childhood Friend**: The Childhood Friend is a character that grew up alongside the heroine. He usually has a very close relationship with her and acts as an older brother, always looking after the heroine and protecting her. The Childhood Friend often has unrequited feelings for the heroine and will try to prove he is worthy of her love.

Hino from *7'scarlet* spends a great part of the game wondering if he's worthy of the heroine's love and gets upset when he thinks he might not be good enough for her. Like the Hero, he's competitive and wants to be stronger to be able to protect the one he loves, and he's even called a 'knight in shining armor' by another character due to his desire to protect the heroine. Another example is Hiroya from *Period: Cube - Shackles of Amadeus*, who is also overprotective when it comes to the heroine. When Hiroya and the heroine are forced to play a dangerous game, he's always talking about getting stronger to protect her. His goal is to be the number one in the heroine's life.

Players interested in the Childhood Friend trope might want someone that has set values and convictions, and that will do anything to protect what they believe and achieve what they want. Since the Childhood Friend has the Hero's necessity to protect those in need, players attracted to this trope might desire to be protected and cared for, which the Childhood Friend will be able to provide, even at the cost of his own safety.

viii) **Shota/Younger Man**: The Shota is younger than the heroine and often has a childish personality. He is generally very excitable and cheerful, and is friendly towards the heroine from the start. Their romance is often "purer" than that of his older male counterparts, and the heroine's love for him may resemble a mother's love for her child.

However, the Shota will usually go through a transformation during the game. Yeonho from *Nameless*, a delicate doll turned human, starts off as innocent and dependable on the heroine, but as the story progresses, he becomes more mature and sure of himself. At the end of the game, the heroine points out how Yeonho became a man, a transformation that can be seen as the transition from the Innocent to the Hero. The Shota goes from someone that needs protection to someone who can protect others, especially the one he loves. Similarly, Scarlet from *Ozmafia!!*, a boy with feminine features who despises being seen as weak, wants to grow taller and be respected by everyone, which is similar to the Hero's core desire to prove their worth. At the beginning of the game,

Scarlet is averse to violence, but at the end, he's ready to fight for what he believes.

Players who like the Shota trope might may want a purer and innocent relationship with someone that has strong values, which the Shota can provide with his combined characteristics of the Innocent and the Hero.

ix) **Mature/Older Man**: The Mature Man is often much older than the heroine. He acts like a supportive and caring father figure, giving advice in tough situations and teaching her the ways of the world. His feelings are kind and sincere, however, since the heroine is surrounded by younger guys, the Older Man gets self-conscious, thinking she won't be attracted to him.

Shirabe from *Sweet Fuse: At Your Side* confesses to the heroine that she is important to him and his daughter, but then dejectedly says he is too old for her. When the heroine says it doesn't matter, he acts surprised and doesn't believe her for a moment. Like the Everyman, he is learning to connect, which is the Everyman's core desire. The Everyman is also a hard worker and realist, and those characteristics can be seen in the Older Man as well. Rindo Kaoru from *Café Enchanté* is a middle-aged man who takes his job very seriously and keeps his problems to himself, a common trait in Mature characters. Through the story, Rindo learns to see the heroine not as a child who needs protection, but someone he can count on and share his burdens with, thus fulfilling the Everyman need for connection and belonging.

Players attracted to the Older Man trope might want a more realistic and ordinary romance, without the immaturity and games that might come from a relationship with younger men. The Everyman isn't fond of dishonesty, so the Older Man will provide a truthful relationship. He's a hardworking man that can support the heroine, giving her life the Everyman's "common touch" that he exudes.

x) **The Bad Boy/Villain**: Bad boy/Villain is usually the delinquent or antagonist of the story. He tends to have strict ideals and beliefs and will do anything at his disposal to achieve his goals. He is aggressive, ruthless, and will often resort to violence. However, he almost always has a hidden side, a "magnetic pull" that leaves the heroine intrigued to know more about him. She often finds out that, despite his many flaws, the Bad Boy has some powerful redeeming qualities.

The Villain goes against the status quo and tries to destroy the current social structure. Zero from *Collar x Malice*, the leader of a terrorist cult, wants to create a happier world where people wouldn't suffer. He wants a revolution, to create a new society, which is the core desire and goal of the Outlaw. Similarly, Kazama Chikage, the main antagonist of *Hakuoki*, is a ruthless demon that sees humans as greedy creatures who only fight for money and fame. He has an extreme sense of responsibility and loyalty to his clan, and like the Outlaw, he feels powerless and enraged at humanity, who forced the demons to live in isolation. Even if at the end of his story his view of humans changes a little, he still refuses to conform to other people's standards, being loyal to his own views. Like other Villain stories, the heroine becomes a source of strength for the Villain, spurring him to be more powerful, which is one of the Outlaw's objectives.

Players drawn to Bad Boy or Villain characters may wish to destroy or get rid of something in their lives and might also want a shocking relationship that doesn't follow the usual standards. Another charming point of the Villain can be that after they fall in

love, his destructive behavior will be geared towards what he is fighting against but not at the heroine. She is the only one who will see that side of him and be the receiver of his love, while his passion burns the world around them.

xi)**The Playboy**: The Playboy is suave, charismatic, and handsome, often leaving a trail of broken hearts behind him as he goes. He is known for being pushy and not taking the heroine's feelings into consideration. Despite his Don Juan ways, once his heart has been successfully won over, the Playboy is devoted beyond compare.

The Playboy never stays with one woman for long. He's a free spirit that can't be restrained. Goemon from *Nightshade* is a thief that never stays in one place for long and has that same attitude towards the women he involves himself with. This adventurer spirit is seen in the Explorer, who wants freedom and to be true to one's soul. Like the Explorer, the Playboy wants to experiment new things, running away from the boredom of routine and being careful to not be tied to something or someone. Additionally, the Playboy also has the shadow of the Lover active in him, making him promiscuous and resistant to let the Lover be active in different levels in his life. However, that changes when he spends time with the heroine. In Goemon's story, as he and the heroine travel together, he begins to see her as someone special and, at the end of the game, wants a future by her side. The same happens with Yuri from *Nameless*, who is a doll created to be the perfect man to all women. When he gets transformed into a real man, he still believes that is his purpose and thus flirts with women indiscriminately, but never gives it too much thought. Like other Playboys, Yuri is the combination of the individuality of the Explorer and the shadow of the Lover. In their stories, Playboys learn how to love sincerely and finally accept the Lover in them, making it more active than the Explorer.

Players who are attracted to the Playboy trope may admire the freedom of the Playboy and the excitement his character brings, but at the same time they may want an intimate connection, and they can achieve that by being the one to make the Playboy transition from the individualistic Explorer to the enamored Lover, making the Player become the only one in the Playboy's mind.

4. Discussion

Out of the eleven tropes studied, all of them had at least one dominant archetype active in them, showing that popular otome game tropes are indeed connected to the collective unconscious and archetypes and thus, have characteristics that are ancient, universal, and that upon discovered, can bring a feeling of connection to people. Although the way to tell stories has changed and developed, these popular otome game tropes still carry the ancestry of the old stories in them, even if they are masked by a more modern exterior.

It is important to notice that not all of the twelve archetypes Mark and Pearson coined appeared in the studied otome game tropes and some even repeated in distinct tropes. Regarding the archetypes that did not appear in the results, namely the Creator, the Sage, and the Joker, they might be active in otome tropes that were not part of this study's scope. Additionally, if such archetypes are not preeminent in otome game characters, this can be a great opportunity for game developers to harness the power of the archetypes and the collective unconscious to create profound characters capable of motivating players to create stronger and more meaningful PSRs with them. The same can be done with the existing popular tropes by exploring the other levels of the archetype they embody.

The limitations of this study center on the lack of otome game players' input in whether the hypotheses presented in each character trope's analysis regarding the players' reasons for preferring that trope are correct. Until research involving players as one of the subjects is carried out, the hypotheses created in this study will remain as possibilities.

5. Conclusion

This research's findings contribute to a better understanding of the PSRs between fictional characters and humans and the reason for their intensity. The analysis can also be beneficial to game developers who wish to create more complex characters which harness the archetypes' powers to potentialize the PSRs that occur in games. Furthermore, this study provides useful information to aid players in perceiving the connection between their love for a character and their internal necessities and desires, thus providing them with a new perspective about themselves.

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