

THE NOVEL DILEMMA

WRITING LONGER EROTIC FICTION

SHORT INTRO

- Madeleine Morris aka Remittance Girl
- MA in Writing, PhD in Creative Writing
- Published Works
 - Short stories: (about 30) in various anthologies (between 2000 – 10,000 words)
 - Novellas: The Waiting Room, The Splinter, Gaijin, Veiled Girl With Lute
 - Novel: Beautiful Losers.
- Web work: huge library of flash fiction, short stories, and series online at www.remittancegirl.com

A LOOK BACK AT EROTIC FICTION

- The earliest erotic writings were poetry: Sappho, Song of Songs, Shakespeare's erotic sonnets, Wilmot's obscene verses, etc.
- Plays
 - The Satyr Plays, along with tragedies and comedies, were dramatic works performed as part of the Ancient Greek festival of Dionysus, which seem to have been both erotic, obscene and religious.
- Most longer works of eroticism have historically been collections of erotic vignettes, perhaps woven together by setting, characters or theme.
 - *The Satyricon* by Petronius Arbiter
 - *The Decameron* by Giovanni Boccaccio
 - *120 Days of Sodom* by Sade
 - Carter's *The Bloody Chamber*

FIRST, A DISTINCTION

- There have been many novels with intense erotic elements and we could debate whether these novels might be considered erotic fiction.
- Is Sade's *Philosophy in the Bedroom* a journey through sadomasochistic delights or a religio-political treatise?
- Is *Lady Chatterley's Lover* an erotic novel, or a novel about gender and class that uses eroticism to bring the conflicts to light?
- Is *Lolita* a celebration of pedophilia, or a portrait of a man who pursues his desires to the destruction of himself and those around him?
- Is *Crash* an erotic homage to the death drive, or a critique of modernity and our fascination for machines and celebrity?
- Is *Fifty Shades of Grey* a novel about the pleasures of BDSM or a romance that uses kink to inject silly amounts of conflict?

Maybe they are all both. Maybe it doesn't matter. But it's worth interrogating your own intentions and the ideas you have to see where your planned work sits along this spectrum.

THE CHALLENGE OF WRITING LONG

- What makes writing long, continuous erotic narratives such a challenge?
 - The nature of erotic feelings
 - Readers' reactions
 - The normal cycle of arousal and release
 - Cultural & legal prohibitions
 - Illicit publication
 - Much erotic reading material was historically produced in small quantities and passed around from hand to hand – sometimes with the stains still fresh!
 - Amazon and even Smashwords have restrictions on what they will allow to be sold on their platforms, driving people back to more obscure repositories on the net where posting longer works is difficult and inconvenient to read.

THE ANATOMY OF LONGER EROTIC WORKS

Let's examine the structure of some really famous erotic works by looking at the way the story is organized or signposted

- *The Story of O* is a fictional biography which follows the erotic, emotional and romantic journey of O, signposted by a number of different lovers. If we had to break up the novel into big chunks, you could title the different sections by the name of the lover she is with in that part of the story.
- *Fifty Shades of Grey* has a very typical romance structure: Girl meets boy, girl falls in love with boy, boy fucks up, girl fucks up, they make up, and get married.
- Anne Rice's *Sleeping Beauty Trilogy* (is actually a quartet now) follows the sexual adventures of Beauty. Each of these new erotic adventures could easily be a short story, with Beauty and the setting as the unifying elements to bind the works together into a novel-like form. It echoes the collected erotic vignettes of Sade and some Victorian confessional works.
- JG Ballard's *Crash* was never considered an erotic novel by him, but it is read as one by many readers. The unifying theme is a set of characters who travel through a landscape of erotic obsession with modernity, cars, celebrity, and injury to the body.

PLOT DRIVEN OR CHARACTER DRIVEN? PORN OR EROTICA?

- Medieval, Enlightenment and many modern erotic works focus on the details of the erotic interludes: the desires of the characters don't give you much insight into their personalities, but simply provide a premise by which the sexual acts can be pursued. The eroticism of the text lies in the descriptions of arousing acts, not the inner lives of the people who do them.
- Erotic Romance sits in between. The real story is the progression of the love relationship between the characters. The erotic aspects of the story can be there to a) drive the initial attraction which begins as sexual, b) bond the characters physically, and/or c) act as the site in which conflict can occur, but the ultimate aim of a romance is love.
- Erotica tends to focus not on the sexual acts, but the feelings and changes in the character brought about through a journey of erotic self-awareness developed through those sexual experiences.
- So... what's your character arc?

EROTIC CHARACTER ARCS

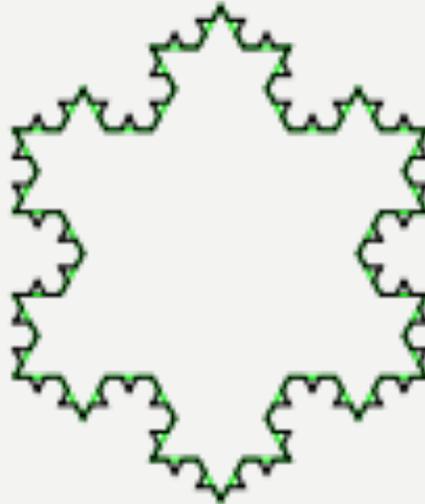
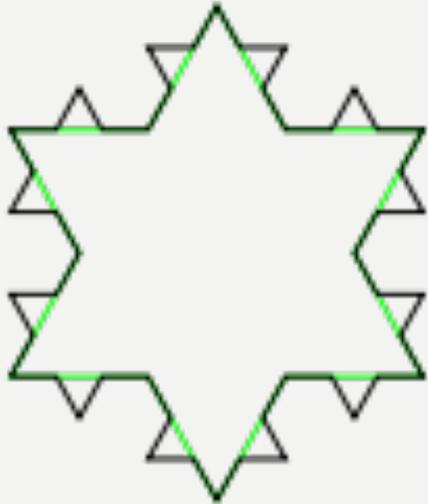
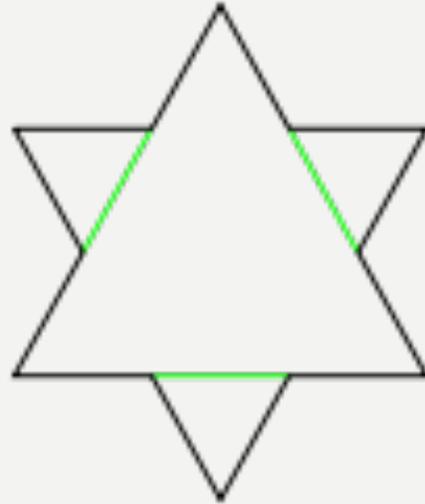
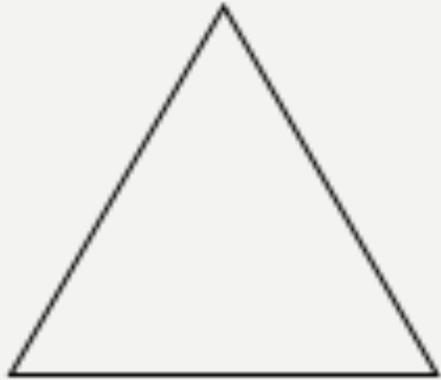
- As humans, we seem to have a need to make meaning out of our erotic experiences. Erotic fiction tends to have a strong psychological focus where erotic experience is employed as a lens through which to understand the whole person better.
- Plot-driven erotic narratives might be more effective as pornography (i.e. it's an effective sex aid to assist in bringing the reader to orgasm). There is no expectation or requirement for the characters to be changed by their experiences.
- In a character driven erotic narrative, the main characters evolve as they are changed by the erotic experiences they have. Character-driven erotic narratives tend to immerse the reader in a fictional universe suffused with erotic meaning, and encourage erotic self-reflection.
- One of the worst flaws of badly written erotica is that the main character doesn't evolve, so the reader is not invited to grow erotically with the character and the plot doesn't contain enough explicitly detailed sex acts to function as a sex aid, either.
- Personally, I think the best erotic fiction contains very strong erotic character arcs. The character encounters both external and internal conflicts and is fundamentally altered by his or her experiences.
- This also offers a viable story-arc that can be sustained for long enough to merit a novel-length work.

THINKING ABOUT STRUCTURE: LENGTH VS GIRTH

- Long works require a structure. It can be loose and hazy, you can alter it as you write, but if you have no sense of where you want to end up, you can waste a lot of time.
- As you've seen, an erotic novel doesn't need to have a standard story structure, it can be a group of shorter pieces held together by themes (fairy tales and female protagonists), setting (1001 Arabian Nights, The Decameron), a collection of confessions or erotic adventures from a single character, or even one place or precipitating event that brings a group of characters, each with their own stories, together at the end.
- If you have a collection of short stories all featuring one character, you might consider reworking them into a novel by stringing the stories together as adventures.
- If you often revisit a theme in a number of stories, you might consider reworking them and adding a story that will pull them together.
- If you have a set of stories all set in the same place, you might consider reworking the pieces after seeing the setting as a character itself, which acts as a catalyst for these stories to occur.

THE PSEUDO SNOWFLAKE METHOD (NO, NOT THE CONFESSION OF A LIBERAL)

- The snowflake method is a way to build a small story into a novel by adding complexity and detail to a simple central premise and elaborating.
- You can lengthen the story by
 - writing a longer beginning, building a set up and thickening up the character by giving them a complex history before the events in the short story occur that inform and foreshadow the characters decisions, feelings and behaviour.
 - continuing where the short story leaves off, weaving the fallout and complications that happen in consequence of the events in the story.
- You can thicken the story by
 - adding detailed accounts of people and events the short story glosses over,
 - writing the stories of ancillary characters, or adding characters who have stories of their own, which you can tell.
 - Triangulating – telling the same story from multiple viewpoints
- If you're interested in learning more about the standard 'snowflake' method, there's a very good, detailed description of it here: <https://www.advancedfictionwriting.com/articles/snowflake-method/>



THE SNOWFLAKE METHOD

- Start with a single sentence on what the story is about. i.e. A mad scientist makes a monster from body-parts.
- Expand on the sentence into a short summary - including the set-up, the climax and the conclusion.
- Write summaries of each major character.
- Now, with a grip on who your characters are, write a one page short story of your summary.
- Go back to your characters and write fuller biographies of each of them
- Let those details add complexity to your short story.
- As you can see, this is about expanding from a single point, adding complexity and detail.

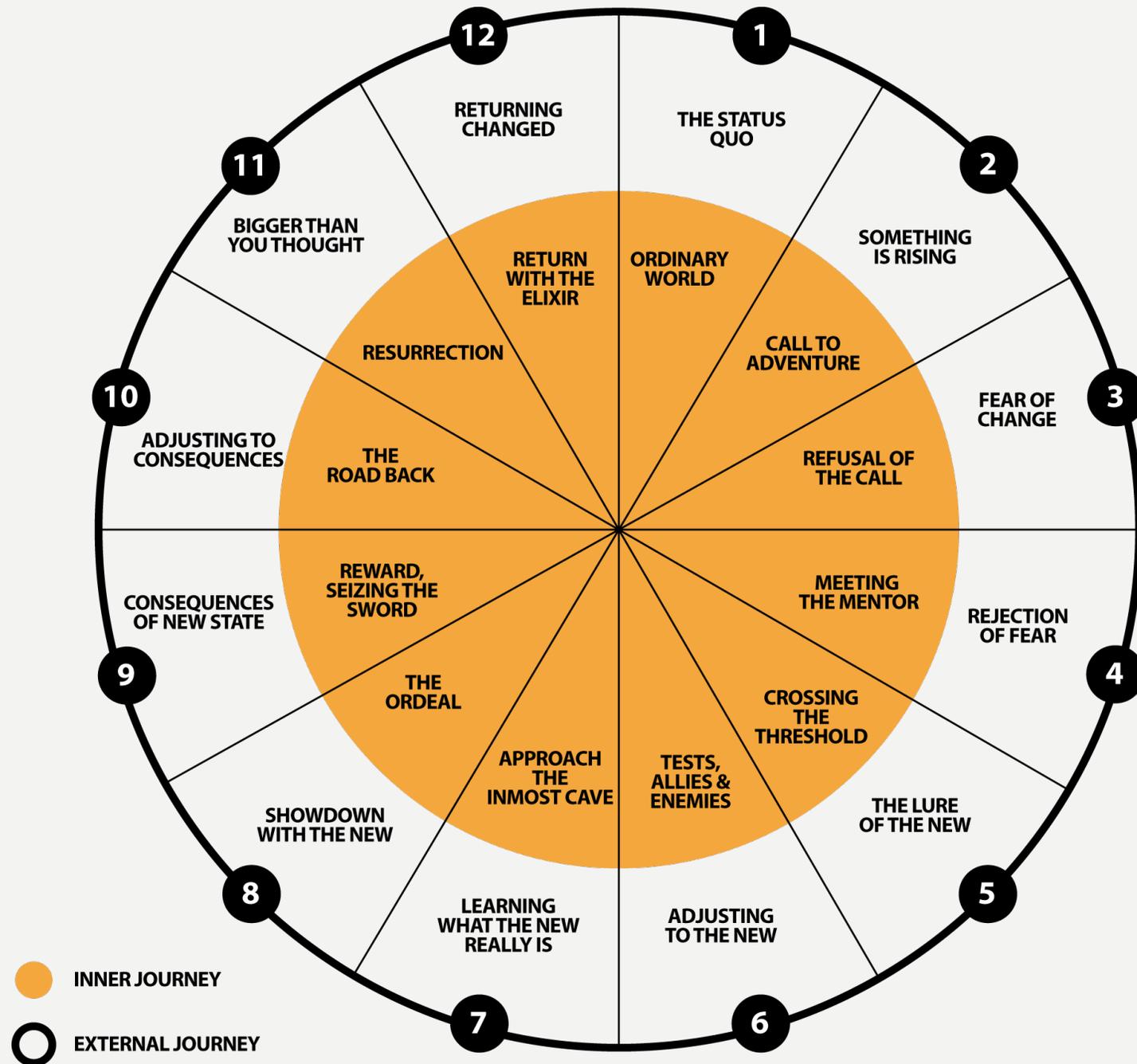
If this method interests you, go to <https://www.advancedfictionwriting.com/articles/snowflake-method/>

THE PERVERT'S JOURNEY

- The **Hero's Journey**, also known as the **Monomyth**, is another structural framework for building a long narrative.
- Originally formulated as a way to study and classify recurring narrative patterns in myths, folk tales and religious stories from all over the world, it was popularized by Joseph Campbell¹ and reworked as a structural narrative guide by Christopher Vogler².
- It forces you to add conflict and complexity that often doesn't come naturally, especially to writers who have only written erotic fantasy before.
- It prompts you to add characters that open out the story and give it a wider scope
- It prompts you to imperil your character!
- It's structure is designed to drive the story onwards.
- It provides a pattern that can be repeated within each stage, kind of echoing the snowflake method .

1. Campbell, Joseph (1949). *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Princeton: Princeton University Press

2. Vogler, Christopher (2007). *The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure For Writers*. Seattle: Michael Wiese Productions



THE PERVERT'S JOURNEY: THE VANILLA WORLD

I. *The Ordinary World*

The introduction of the main character and their context.

This can actually be quite a long segment in a novel. You establish the setting, the time period, the everyday world that your character exists in – their job, friends, family, etc.

From an erotic perspective, this is where you get to set the baseline for who your character is, and what they feel comfortable with. You need to really establish this so that when the shake-up comes, it is a dramatic shake-up for the character (and the reader).

THE PERVERT'S JOURNEY: *DEBAUCHERY CALLS*

2. *The Call to Adventure*

The introduction of the main character and their context.

A precipitating event or idea cause the character to step outside their everyday world. In the case of an erotic plot, this should be the prospect of something radical enough to jolt the character out of their comfort zone.

By the end of this section, your character should have their first real conflict – confronting something scary, uncomfortable, forbidden, dangerous.

THE PERVERT'S JOURNEY: *OH, NO, I COULDN'T POSSIBLY DO THAT!*

3. *The Refusal of the Call*

This is the negative response to that first conflict.

It doesn't mean that your character needs to refuse, but that there is something standing in the way: their own inner limitations (they don't think they have the courage), social restrictions (gender, sexual orientation, peer pressure, racial issues), material impediments (disability, poverty, geography).

Basically, this is just the first of many hesitations before the story moves onwards.

In an erotic context it could be a desire the character is ashamed of, or even initially disgusted by, or something the character doesn't think they could handle emotionally, or perhaps it would require cheating on a partner, or breaking a taboo.

THE PERVERT'S JOURNEY: MEETING THE MADAM

4. *Meeting the Mentor*

In this stage, the character meets someone or gleans some new insight that helps them overcome their initial refusal of the call to adventure.

It can be emotional reinforcement, practical and material support, or the realization that NOT answering the call carries its own set of perils.

THE PERVERT'S JOURNEY: WE'RE NOT IN KANSAS ANYMORE, TOTO

5. Crossing the Threshold

In this step, your main character takes their first baby steps out of their comfort zone. In the traditional Hero's Journey, this is where the hero steps out of the ordinary world and into a liminal, sometimes supernatural one.

In an erotic fiction context, this should be your characters first venture into a place where they are no longer emotionally or physically quite safe. Think... exciting but scary!

THE PERVERT'S JOURNEY: DARES, LOVERS AND REJECTIONS

6. Tests, Allies & Enemies

This is where your character gets a glimpse into what the world beyond their previous boundaries might look like, and to introduce characters who might be their allies, fellow perverts, or characters who might threaten their safety in this new paradigm.

THE PERVERT'S JOURNEY: APPROACHING THE BOUDOIR

7. Preparing for a seminal change

This is the stage where the enormity of the boundaries being crossed start to become clear.

The risks are highlighted and loom large.

Circumstances or characters who pose a threat to living in this new state of being turn out to be more of a threat than previously thought.

THE PERVERT'S JOURNEY: THE FIRST BIG-LITTLE DEATH

8. Ordeal

This is, metaphorically, the first show down. While in a non-erotic story, I would say 'avoid making this first battle an internal one', it's different for erotic novels. Because, realistically, in an erotic journey, the first major battle is usually with the self.

The outcome of this battle needs to be incomplete and it's a good idea to set it up so that some really major painful consequences can later be brought to light. It's very important to remember that this first 'battle' should not be decisive.

THE PERVERT'S JOURNEY: AFTERSHOCKS

9. The Aftermath of the Little Death

This is where the main character discovers the true outcome of that first struggle. She takes stock of what happened, and what the consequences are. It is also where the character recognizes that, even in victory, something terribly important is lost.

Very often, it is where the character finds out that they were, in fact, battling the wrong thing or person.

THE PERVERT'S JOURNEY: A GLIMPSE OF THE NEXT PEAK

10. And, The Next Cliff

This is where the main character puts the knowledge they've gained from that first battle into preparing for what they suspect will be a second, more difficult one.

It requires the formulation of new strategies, perhaps new allies, to do battle against 'the real enemy'.

THE PERVERT'S JOURNEY: THE BIGGER PLUNGE

II. The Real Problem

This is the second 'ordeal', and if the first was internal, this second one should probably be external, or visa versa. The goal is to make this second 'showdown' the bigger and definitive one.

This is also a really good place to put the changes your character has undergone into practice.

Whatever was learned from the outcome of the first ordeal should be put to good use in this one.

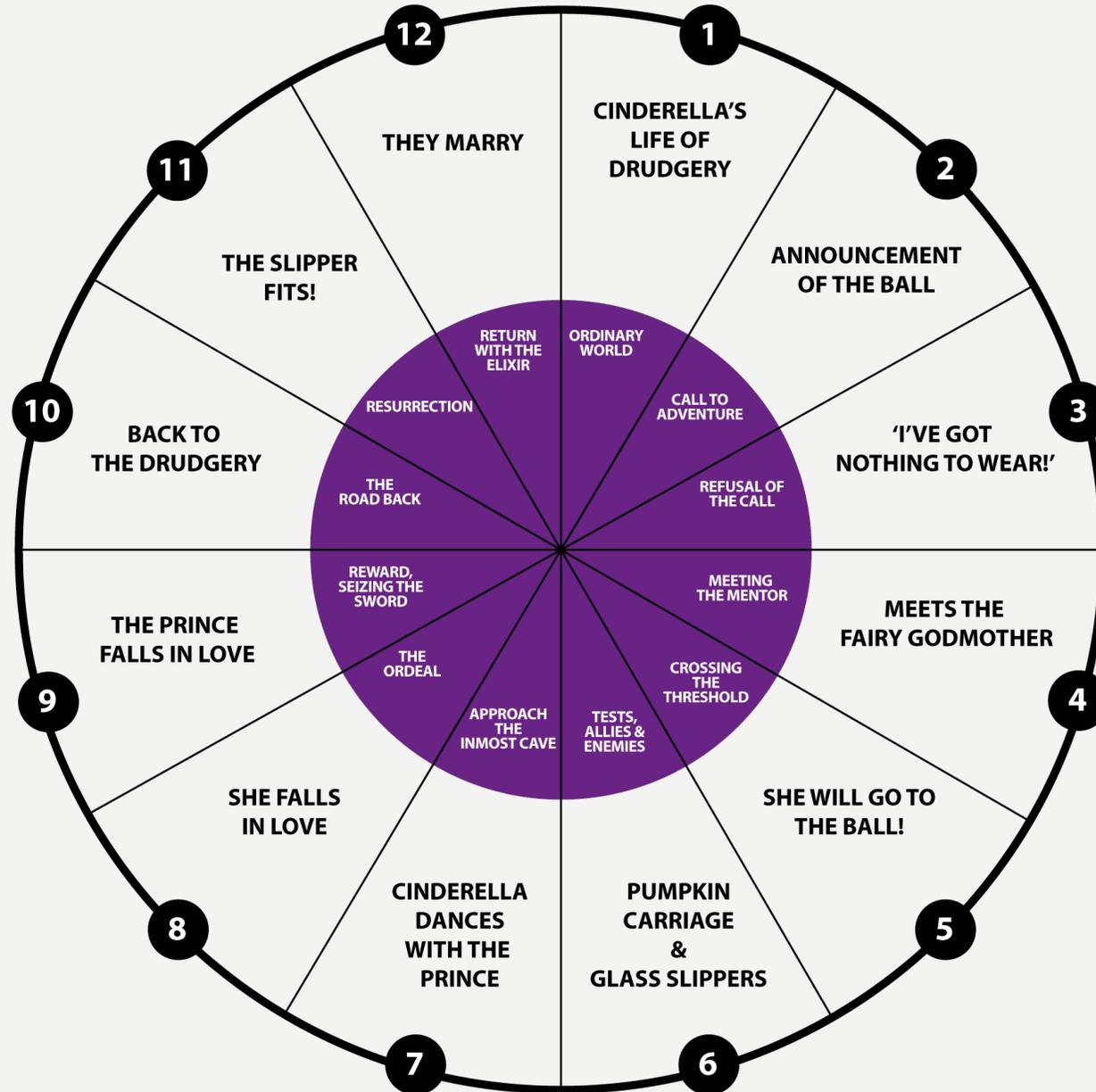
THE PERVERT'S JOURNEY: RETURN WITH THE RIGHT LUBE

12. "The real voyage of discovery consists, not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes." *Proust*

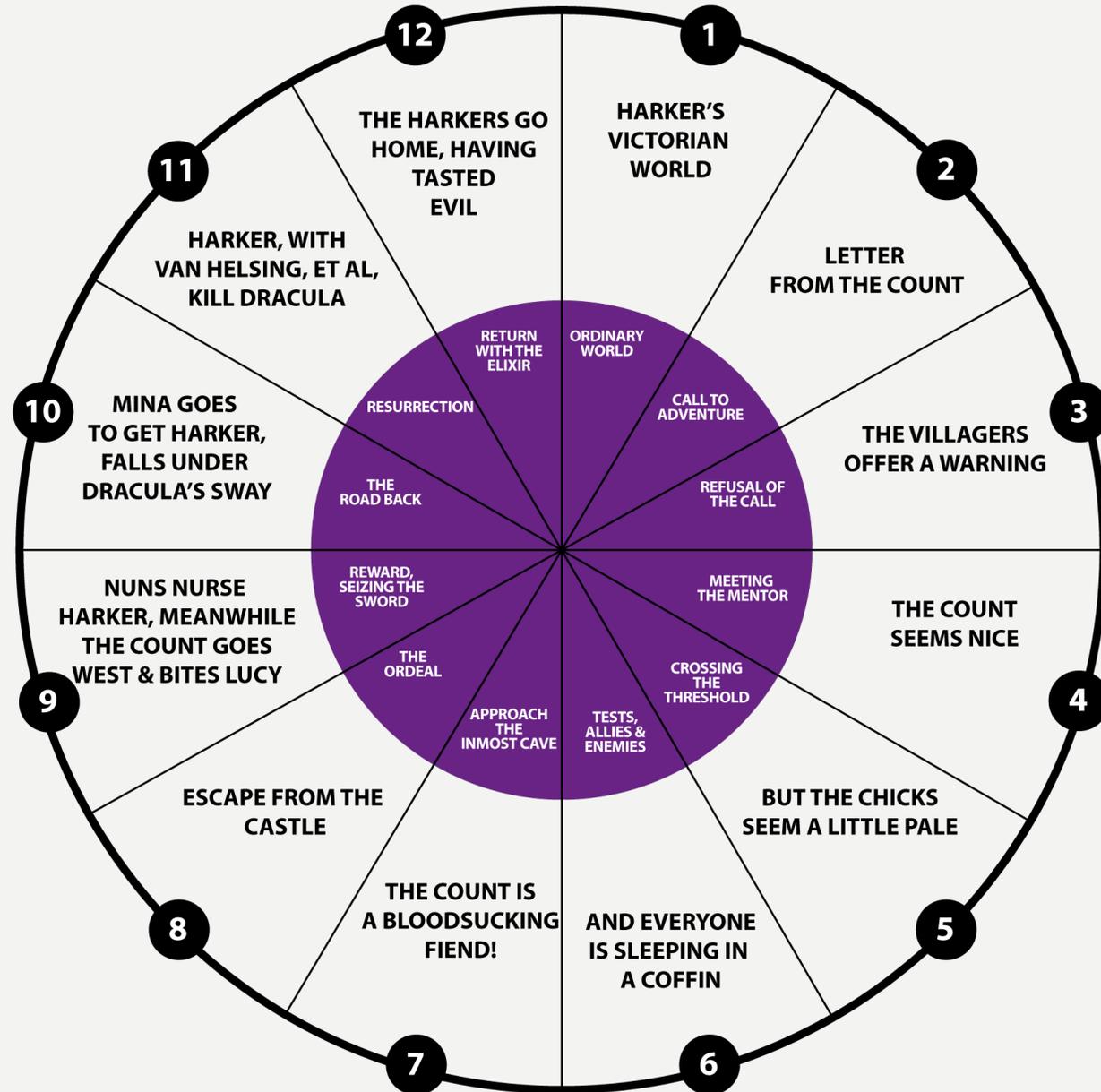
The traditional Hero's Journey calls this stage 'Return with the Elixir'. The stress needs to be put not on the concept of 'return' but of the fact that the character able to carry the 'elixir' has changed.

Really *good* hero's journey narratives always acknowledge the emotional depth and poignancy of the fact that 'there is no going home'. The character has changed, dramatically. So even when they 'return', they return with 'new eyes'.

CINDERELLA



DRACULA



PITFALLS IN THE PERVERT'S JOURNEY

While the Hero's Journey method can be rewarding, it has its pitfalls

1. It's been used so often, the pattern's familiar and so somewhat formulaic unless the peril is great enough to blind the reader to the framework.
2. Extremes – life or death / sanity or madness – are essential to the form. You can't pussy-foot around with peril that isn't really extreme.
3. This means that using it for a wholly sex-positive fantasy narrative is just not feasible.
4. It can be very easy to get stuck at some of the stages.

Don't think each stage in the Hero's Journey needs to be the same length – it indicates structure, not content! Some stages can take only one sentence. Some can take up half your chapters!

KNOWING WHERE YOU'RE GOING

- Many writers say you need to know the ending before you start: I disagree. And if I wrote that way, I'd be bored half-way through.
- BUT you need to have a very firm idea of **what you are trying to say**, but **how you say it** (i.e. how your ending will illustrate your point) often emerges after that first Ordeal.
- And I'd encourage you to keep an open mind about your ending until you reach that stage, instead of trying to stick to an ending that, once you develop your story, may turn out to be unrealistic or have less impact than it could if you let the progress of the story inform you.
- The writing IS a journey for you as a writer. If you don't discover anything new along the way, then it's an unrewarding experience.

GENERAL HINTS ON FINISHING

- I'm very bad at this.
- The only thing that works for me is an immovable deadline.
- If you get stuck in one part of the story, skip to the stage where your interest and emotions are calling you to write, and go from there.
- Leave blanks. You can always go back and fill in later.

SOME TIPS FOR PROCESS

- Never obsess over the style of your work in the first draft. It's only ever about getting the story out of your head and onto the page. Don't be self-critical.
- Concentrate on how language makes for great reader emersion in the second draft. Be self-critical NOW. Be on the lookout for clichés, stereotypes, formulaic tropes, superficialities, and useless, unproductive conflict.
- After the second draft, get an editor. Pay one. Not a set of beta readers to flatter you! Get someone who has worked as an editor before. Preferably on a book you admire.
- Remember that a novel isn't your baby. It isn't you. It's an artwork for readers that will benefit from refinement guided by someone who isn't you. **Make a promise to care more about the work than you care about your own feelings.**