

About Heteronormative Male Sexual Fantasy Tropes

2023-07-09

A few weeks ago, I participated in the 1000 words of summer challenge, which was to write 1000 words a day for two weeks. I started a day late but managed to produce 15K+ words by the end of it. My approach was simple. Every morning I would write about the details of my morning, from the time I woke, to going out for a walk, to arriving at my favorite coffee shop. I wrote it in the third person as a fictionalized account. My plan is to further fictionalize and build out from this core of writing.

One of the mornings I wrote about, I had a particularly memorable experience on my walk. A beautiful young woman walked up to me, sporting an unlit cigarette between the index and middle fingers of her right hand, and asked me if I had a light. I am not a fan of smoking, so in my conscious mind I thought, “you shouldn’t smoke,” but this young woman was an astonishing vision. Producing a lighter and lighting her cigarette would have absolutely made my day, or rather, it would have prolonged for a few seconds longer this commune with feminine beauty and sexuality the universe had chosen to send my way. Primal me had taken over. I told her I didn’t have a light, she told me it was ok, she’d find one up the street at the gas station and walked off muttering something about Beacon and five years. I turned and walked to the end of the street, which was not far away, crossed to the other side, and started walking back up Main Street, half hoping I would see her again. She had, however, disappeared into thin air. There was no evidence of her anywhere I looked.

At the beginning of this past week, I decided that an interesting way to extend my writing project would be to write the stories of the people encountered on my walks. I would write them over the same, or similar hours of the morning, over the same 13 days. Their lives and the lives of my protagonist running in alternate universes, intersecting in the brief ways they did, then continuing on in their alternate universes. I decided to start with “cigarette woman,” as I now referred to her, and write backwards and a little forwards from the moment I had encountered her on the street. I had no idea where she had come from or was going to when I encountered her, but I wanted to write a plausible scenario into which the moment she walked up and asked me for a light fit.

So, I wrote about her having hooked up with a redheaded woman in a bar and winding up sleeping with her. I picked up the story in the morning afterglow of a night of passion, when she wakes up and sees what time it is and realizes she has to get to work. The prose flowed out of me and within an hour or two I had the bones and a lot of the flesh of Lila, as I had named her. I knew I was writing something that could be perceived as a male fantasy trope, but I earnestly wanted to lift the story beyond that. I read a rough draft to my wife, who instantly proclaimed it a male fantasy trope. “Come on, she said, two beautiful women kissing up on each other? The stuff of every straight man’s dreams.”

In rewrites, I worked at toning down the two beautiful women kissing up on each other aspect of it a bit. I tried to depict the sensual and physical intimacy that two women might feel if they were sexually aroused by each other and basking in the afterglow of some great love making. I read the piece to my wife a couple more times as it evolved, and she kept having more or less the same reaction to it. Eventually, I asked my wife if the scene I painted was implausible. She said, as far as she knew, it wasn’t. I asked her if I had been disrespectful to women in the way I wrote it. She said I had not. So then, I suggested, the problem is that because a man wrote it, it can’t escape the male fantasy trope critique? She said maybe.

I continued to work daily at refining it. I tried to delve deeper into the moments of intimate contact, not just between the two women, but between Lila and the two elder gentlemen she approached on the street looking for a light.

When I told my wife I was planning to read it at a literary open mic event at the end of the week, she hesitantly endorsed the idea.

The day of the night I was to read, I had scheduled an appointment with my wife’s hairdresser to get my hair trimmed and put into a French braid. I wear a French braid for special occasions and when I want to play the part of an artiste. I had an art gallery opening the next day. During my appointment, the woman cutting my hair and I engaged in idle chit-chat. I mentioned that I was reading some of my fiction at a literary open mic that night. She asked what my story was about. I told her it was about two women having a one-night stand, explained the scenario, and mentioned I had read it to my wife. “And what did your wife say?” she asked, “that it was male sexual fantasy writing,” I said, whereupon she said, “I love your wife.” She had the same “oh brother” reaction my wife did.

That was fine. I knew how it sounded and had anticipated the reaction.


Later, when I read it at the open mic event, it met with, what seemed to me, a lukewarm reception. A reception that seemed more politeness than enthusiasm, and absolutely nobody came up to me to talk about it, as I had actually hoped some woman would do. I wanted to know, is it plausible? Did it get beyond the male fantasy trope bit? If there were gay women in the room, and there were, I wanted to hear from them about the plausibility and accuracy of the physical intimacy I described between my two female characters. It felt more like an embarrassment swept under the rug of audience politeness than anything else.

After the event, I stewed in my juices a bit. I was disappointed in the reaction I got, and disappointed that nobody commented on my French braid, either.

I’ve had some time to contemplate the situation and to realize that yes, my story actually is a male fantasy trope. What else could it be? It was grounded in a moment that was of the stuff that heterosexual male fantasy is made of. A beautiful young woman walks up to a past-his-young-women-days man and asks, in a beguiling, slightly flirtatious way, for a light. My god, centuries of capitalist psychosexual conditioning came screaming at me in that one brief moment. It was primal. My perception of the moment was that this woman had had some kind of late night, had spewed out onto the street from wherever. She wants a smoke and, perhaps, a cup of coffee too. She didn’t come from her place, I surmised. Why would she be without a lighter if she did? No, I decided, this young woman had been out late, maybe all night. Perhaps she had slept somewhere not her home. She was not unhappy, or hungover, or drugged up. She was flirtatious and knew her way around male sexuality. So, for the purposes of my story, I decided she was out on the street after a one-night stand. And then I decided it would be more interesting to set her flirtatious behavior with two random men she encountered on the street in the context of her being gay or bisexual. Ok, from my lizard brain male perspective, it was more arousing that way too.

But here’s the thing. I wrote a scene in which two women do kiss up on each other, but, nobody has told me that what I wrote isn’t a plausible scenario between two women who are sexually attracted to one another. And, nobody has told me I have disrespected women in the way I wrote it. The only difficulty in the situation, as it turned out, was the trouble I had admitting to myself that I had written a male fantasy trope piece. I have decided to embrace that when I tell people about it. I say it’s a male fantasy trope piece right up front. And then I try to describe to them how I think it’s a bit more than that.

But you can decide for yourself. [Here’s a link to the story](#). Let me know what you think. Thoughtful critique is welcome.

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