

# The Story Copywriter Podcast

Episode 38:  
Rebirth



## 38: Rebirth

[Listen or Download MP3](#)

Estimated reading time: 17 minutes. Contains 3415 words

In my early twenties, I consumed as much marketing information as I could. I followed all of the gurus. I studied web design, copywriting, SEO, PPC. I managed to know it all, without actually doing very much.

In 2007, I decided to put my knowledge to some use and accepted a job at a small software company. At the company, appearing corporate at all times was part of the daily grind. Our solution to every marketing problem was to pound the phones, drive more miles, meet more prospects. For a while I thrived on the pressure of quarterly targets and end of quarter panic attacks.

After four years in the role I felt trapped. I felt trapped in my career. I felt trapped in my suit. I felt trapped within the work I was doing...

I was tired of hammering the phones. I was working with the same partners each year who would blight me with the same gripes and complaints.

In 2012 I decided to leave and work for myself. I thought I had escaped a corporate grind, when actually all I'd done was build a new cage for myself. I'd swapped regular reliable income for irregular unreliable income! Worst of all, I still had no idea of what I really wanted to do, or *why*.

I'd always created processes in the work I'd done, and the work I really wanted to do was copywriting. Not just any copywriting either, but story based copywriting. I'd seen that I had a flare for creating email sequences that delivered a powerful story. The trouble was, while I was good at creating processes for my Google Ads work, systematizing my copywriting felt like a step too far. It felt to me like there were too many variables... like I would always be the bottleneck in the process.

It wasn't until December 2015, that I attended a storytelling workshop by Sean D'Souza. It became apparent that Sean had arrived at the workshop with a process: a process he was able to teach.

Gradually, the confusion of my mid twenties gave way to a more singular focus. Slowly, I realized I wanted to help companies who sold transformational products and services. My work now exists to help people tell better stories about their work, and attract a steady stream of interest prospects.

—

Today's podcast is about the seventh of Christopher Booker's Seven Basic Plots, which is the rebirth plot...

In literature, we really see two branches of rebirth. One is more focused around children's stories. Disney has produced many rebirth stories over the years. Often, these stories are based on older folk stories. Movies like *Sleeping Beauty*, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*, *Beauty and the Beast*. Recently I've been watching *Frozen*, because my kids are slightly obsessed with films that have princesses in. *Frozen* is a rebirth story.

*Frozen* is actually based on a much older story called *The Snow Queen*, which is a rebirth story. Rebirth at its core is really about finding your way. It's about a central long running, ongoing life crisis that is eventually resolved. That's really how it plays out in real life.

The second type of rebirth story is a slightly more grown up version. A good example is *Scrooge*, by Charles Dickens, which we'll examine in this episode.

So as always, we're going to cover three ideas. The first idea is imprisonment. The second idea is redemption. And the third idea is imagery. We'll round off by talking about some use cases for the rebirth plot, and some final comments on the Seven Basic Plots in total.

So let's have a look at the first idea...

# 1. Imprisonment

In every rebirth story, the hero of the story becomes entrapped or imprisoned in some dark state. In the children's version of the plot, stories like *Beauty and the Beast*, this sense of entrapment is imposed or inflicted by a dark character or antagonist (in many cases, an evil witch).

In *Sleeping Beauty* and in *Snow White*, the entrapment is more in a sense of suspended animation. The heroine is put into a sleep that can only be relieved by the hero of the story, breaking through the entrapment and freeing the princess. 'Handsome prince saves helpless woman,' which is quite stereotypical. *Shrek* of course turns this stereotype on its head, as a more modern variant.

We've already seen this sense of entrapment last time in the tragedy plot. If you think back to the tragedy plot, the hero of the story becomes trapped in dark ways. As I've been preparing my notes for this episode I've been thinking: how do we translate the rebirth plot to real life, beyond the movies? How do we translate stories like *Sleeping Beauty*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *Frozen* into real life?

I think the answer is that rebirth is a similar plot to tragedy. Up until the end of the story, the plot is quite similar, in that the hero of the story will become entrapped in dark ways. They'll become inhibited by their own egocentric behavior.

In the children's stories that we have mentioned, this sense of entrapment is imposed by an antagonist. Maleficent puts Sleeping Beauty under a curse. In *Beauty and the Beast*, the witch at the door puts the prince under a curse and turns him into a beast. So it's another character who imposes this sense of entrapment.

In the real world, I think this sense of entrapment is more likely to spring from within, by the egocentric behaviors of the main character.

In *Scrooge*, we essentially join the story partway through the plot. We join the story when Scrooge is already in this sense of entrapment. He's trapped in this dark state of being hyper aware of money, and refusing to engage in Christmas. It's only when we encounter the Ghost of Christmas Past that we go back and explore how Scrooge wasn't always like this, and how he got into this dark state. We see in fact that a singular moment of rejection from a young lady caused him to slip into this dark state. From a plot perspective, this is the 'lie' Scrooge tells himself, that leads to a key character flaw. How this flaw is overcome provides the character arc of the story.

So for real world examples, it's far more likely that the sense of entrapment in a particular situation is going to spring from the hero themselves. It comes from the mistakes we've made. It's the recurring patterns of thought and behavior that have trapped us in a particular situation.

It's these recurring patterns of behavior that your ideal customer is likely to be struggling with as well. By telling a rebirth story you describe how over a number of years you were entrapped in a dark place, or in a particular situation. Then in the resolution of the story, you are illustrating how you got out of it; what your redemption was. This redemption is (hopefully) of critical importance to your ideal customer.

It's worth noting that the specifics of the entrapment or struggle don't have to be the same as your customers. People just need to see echoes of their own challenges reflected in your story.

## 2. Redemption

So this is where we differ from the tragedy plot. In the tragedy plot, there is no redemption. The hero is driven onwards to eventual destruction. The moral of the story lies in the warning that destruction provides.

From a business storytelling perspective, this perhaps makes the rebirth plot more useful. Because we have this fairly long period of struggle where you're spinning your wheels, trapped in a particular situation. But then we have the resolution, and the resolution shines a light of insight onto something important your customer might have missed. It shows them a way out. It inspires them. That's what we're doing by telling the rebirth story.

After the redemption (which in a movie, would be a miraculous last second escape), there should be a foundational upgrade in your perspective that finally enabled you to break out of this dark pattern. In the more adult rebirth stories there will usually be some helpers or catalyst. Scrooge sees three ghosts, and it's this experience that provides him with the perspective he needs to understand how he has behaved.

It's likely that you didn't break free from your state of entrapment by yourself. It's more likely you worked with someone or found a mentor who helped you. Perhaps this person gave you the brutal feedback nobody else could give. Perhaps it was this brutal feedback that you needed to gain perspective on your own behavior.

So there might be helper characters. It seems unlikely to me that you'll break free of the entrapment all by yourself. There normally needs to be some external catalyst to trigger the redemption. Which ties back to one of the key messages of storytelling: we can't achieve great things by ourselves, or by operating in isolation.

The rebirth plot really illustrates personal transformation. Do we achieve personal transformations by ourselves? No, I don't think we do. I think it comes from interacting in situations with other people. And to a degree, this is always ongoing. But the reason that I like the rebirth plot is because it allows you to explore long periods of your life in one story. Often we will get trapped in a situation for quite long periods of time. We're all problem solving as we go through life. We're all trying to improve our situation, and we get stuck by our own patterns of behavior.

I think if you provide a product or service where you help people to change their pattern of behavior, then I think rebirth is going to be an important plot. Rebirth illustrates how YOU got trapped in a damaging pattern of thought or behavior, and what the consequences of that were. And maybe through some external help, how you broke that pattern. The plot then finishes by connecting to your current business purpose, mission or trajectory.

### 3. Imagery

In a Disney film, the redemption is clearly delineated from the phase of entrapment. If you think about how the palace looks in *Beauty and the Beast*, it's a very clear, night and day, before and after visual comparison.

This imagery is something to pay attention to when you're telling your rebirth story. When you are entrapped in the dark state, we want to be using imagery surrounding winter and darkness and feeling like there isn't a way forward.

In the story I told you at the start, I made it clear that I felt trapped in various ways. I felt trapped in my suit. I felt trapped in my role. If I was writing out that story again, I would maybe describe how it seemed to be raining every day. How it was always overcast. I would paint a picture of it being dark times. The bad weather would be a metaphor for how I felt on the inside.

Obviously after the redemption, you describe things in much lighter terms. You present things differently. You see things a different way because your perspective on the world has changed.

### Recap

We're at the end of this episode, so let's do a bit of a recap...

Today's episode talked about the seventh of Christopher Booker's Seven Basic Plots, which is the rebirth plot. As always, we covered three ideas. The first is imprisonment, where the main point of the rebirth plot is that the hero gets entrapped or imprisoned in a dark or suspended state. For a business story, that's going to translate to being entrapped in dark patterns of thoughts; dark patterns of behavior that keep you trapped in a dark or bad situation.

The second idea then was redemption: the idea that there's going to be some catalyst event, or maybe some helper characters that help you to break free from this dark state of entrapment. This is where the rebirth plot diverges from the tragedy plot, and makes it more useful from a business storytelling perspective.

We all get stuck in these ruts for long periods of our lives. We all get stuck in recurring, damaging patterns of behavior. I can only speak for myself, but I definitely make the same mistakes in my life over and over! These same mistakes stem from the same patterns of thought that to some degree I have learned or been taught. I'm always trying to unlearn these things, and become a better version of myself. This 'unlearning' is exactly what the rebirth story is all about.

It's about how you became a better version of yourself at specific points in time. This plot is really going to work for people who have these catalyst events, where there is a quite distinct before and after. It's not just a time when you got another job. It's when you had a complete internal transformation. You're telling the story to illustrate the insight that facilitated or allowed the transformation to occur.

The third idea was imagery. Pay attention to the descriptions and the imagery that you use at both the entrapment phase and at the redemption phase. Make sure that there's a high degree of contrast between the coldness of the entrapment and the warmth of the redemption.

## Using The Rebirth Plot in Practice

As we've been going through this series I've been asking for each plot: Is this one that you would place at the heart of your marketing? I think rebirth is a 'maybe'.

I think there's two questions to guide your thinking. First, are you in a business where you help people transform? If so, then I think rebirth is going to be important.

The other situation I think rebirth could be important is if you yourself have been through one or more major transformations in your life; major significant periods of struggle.

It occurred to me in telling the opening story that I don't think I really have a great rebirth story. For me, there isn't enough of a crisis I could draw on. I told the story to illustrate the plot and open this episode with an example, but I don't think it's my best story, by any stretch.

So it really depends on you. Are you the type of person who has had numerous significant life changes based on big events and insights? Then that's the subject matter that you can use in the rebirth plot.

That's what rebirth is all about. It's about big changes; big changes in perspective. It's about times where you've unlearned older patterns of behavior and patterns of thought, and developed newer, better patterns of behavior and patterns of thoughts.

I think one potential application of the rebirth plot is to follow the example that *Scrooge* provides, and start the story while you are already in the entrapment phase. If you were telling the story chronologically, you'd start with the call and then the dream phase where things seem to go well for a while. And then the dark power encroaches, (perhaps emanating from your own egocentricity), and imprisons you in this dark state.

From a business storytelling perspective, I think it makes a lot of sense to jump straight to the entrapment stage where you're stuck in this dark state. Then you can go back in time if you want and explore the backstory. But telling it that way allows you to jump into the action a lot faster. It's also going to resonate if you're telling the story to people who are also stuck in that same dark state. You'll keep their attention because you're telling a story that has parallels to their current situation and the problems that they're trying to solve. So I think for telling the

rebirth story, following the Scrooge model of opening with the entrapment phase makes a lot of sense.

—

I hope this episode has been interesting and given you food for thought. We're at the end of this series about Christopher Booker's *Seven Basic Plots*. I found it both challenging, interesting and engaging to read around these plots again, and to think: with the benefit of a few more years of experience, how relevant is each plot to business use?

My overall assessment has not significantly changed. Of all of the Seven Plots, there's probably going to be one that really resonates with you. You don't need to use all seven plots. You only need to use one to illustrate your core message, and illustrate your personal transformation. When you use one of these plots, readers will see echoes of their own story and their own challenges reflected in yours. That's really what the plot archetype is all about.

As you've seen from this series, there are common threads that run through every plot. I've repeatedly found myself talking about constriction, encroachment, egocentricity, misunderstandings.

Each plot illustrates the same journey from a different perspective. In an 'Overcoming the Monster' plot, the dark force of the story is in a baddie, or a monster. In a tragedy plot, that baddie or monster is also the hero. So we're just exploring it from different lenses and perspectives. You can pick and choose which plots you run with, and which ones you use in a more supporting role, if you choose to use them at all.

You can even use multiple plots within the same story. Most longer form stories will do this to some degree. *Lord of the Rings* manages to use all seven plots at different points throughout the story, but obviously it's a much longer story. In business storytelling, we're usually being much more succinct, because we don't have people's attention for very long. Attention is expensive to get and difficult to hold. So you're really trying to be more singular in your selection of plot.

I think for most people, rags to riches, voyage and return, and rebirth are probably the main ones I would start with, without knowing anything about your business. Other plots have more specific use cases. If the operations of your business involves potential physical danger, then have a look at the tragedy plot.

To me, some plots that are more supportive. The comedy plot is very usable because it deals with daily events and interactions, but it's more of a supporting plot. It's a plot that you might use to deepen the relationship with someone once you've already told them one of the other plots.

So all of these plots are like tools in your storytelling toolkit. The way to get better at using a tool is to start using it!, To get to work and get feedback on the story. Put it out into the public domain; send it out to your email list.

If you'd like to work with me on telling one of these plot archetypes, then that's the work that we do in my Writers' Circle. My Writers' Circle is my inner circle of copywriters who work with me directly. We have fortnightly support calls and regular training assignments. If you'd like to learn more about that, then you need to go to <https://storycopywriters.com/writers-circle>.

## What else is going on in Story Copywriter Land?

Last weekend I finally ran the Sheffield half marathon. I feel like I've been talking about it for a long time. I actually knocked eight minutes off my time from last year, and finished in 1 hour 40. Which for me is quite fast. I don't think I'm actually any fitter than I was last year. I think I just paced the race better. I guess that's what comes from experience and knowing what to expect.

As I've been saying in this column for a few weeks, experience really comes down to doing the work. It's true in running, and it's true in writing. It's a case of carrying on showing up, carrying on doing the work. Experience allows you to be a lot more effective.

My next big run that I've got planned, this called the Round Sheffield Run, which is coming up in June. So I'll regale you with more running stories closer to then.

If you've had value from this series, please do share it either with your email list, or with any groups that you're part of. I really do appreciate that. And please take a moment to subscribe to the podcast in your favorite podcast app, if you haven't done so already.

Otherwise all that's left for me to say is, thank you as always for listening. I hope this series on the Seven Basic Plots has been interesting, and I will talk to you next time.

---

## Did You Like This Transcript? Buy Rob a Coffee

If you've enjoyed this transcript, you can support the podcast (and the development of future transcripts!) by buying me a 'virtual coffee', for \$5/month. You can do that at [storycopywriters.com/coffee](https://storycopywriters.com/coffee).