

Miller Rothlein's *Forbidden Creature Virgin Whore*

4 Nov 2013

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Stories and myth have great potential and power, yet the stuff of fantasy is often dismissed as a banal and trivial pastime by academics and fine artists who insist that any serious pursuit of it is best left to children. However, fantasy is a place where the unnameable exists. When lives lack justice, the realm of the fantastic provides a place to experience psychic redress; it is a place where we can create imaginative ways to live in a hard world. Fantasy is the social safety valve when dangerous proclivities beckon. Children know this instinctively. Whole worlds of particular logic reside inside the mind that can distinguish truth from social construction. We build elaborate imaginative scaffoldings to support our conclusions about the world, while ignoring hard evidence that would defy those perceptions. Our ability to bolt down stylized interpretations of reality means that we suppress our appreciation of ambiguity and individualized expression. The indelible nature of stories is a testament to this.

Any story, therefore, directly reflects the moral and philosophical mind of the writer, storyteller, or artist. It mirrors a reality, a truth that exists if only in imagined form, a truth nonetheless shaped by actual perception. Metaphors simplify the message, and the meaning can switch and swim through the centuries, ideologically aligned to the next storyteller's social or political agenda. History is filled with this kind of cultural conquest; there is no better way to create cultural change than to write over a story's bones with a different meaning.

Existing stories define a society, produce its identity, and reinforce group behaviors. Gender expression is one of those areas of human behavior that is rigorously policed, and in all traditions, tales of fiction are expressly used in a direct attempt to control sexual behavior. Archetypes, metaphors, and formulaic morphologies have always streamlined this effort, and sweeping generalizations function to predictably move the story forward. We wonder how we continue to be exposed to these particular efforts today if we ask: what does it mean that our male characters still must adhere to strict codes of masculine behavior? What does it mean that our female characters' sexual natures still continue to fall within predictable and recognizable patterns of behavior? That we are living on the inside of the juggernaut hampers our ability to perceive the nuances between real gender expression and those which are shaped by social construction.

In *Forbidden Creature Virgin Whore*, agency emerges as a primary force that drives each of the characters' lives within the story arc. Each character, possessing varying degrees of agency and scope of influence, exerts the force of her/ his unique assets upon the other characters. The quality of the agency and how

creatively each Archetypes can navigate within her/his proscribed roles determines the ability of our characters to move and function within the story arc. Limitations placed on human behavior produce interesting survival strategies as well as generate destructive behaviors and artificial competition between individuals. Once we set our Archetypes into motion with the initial interaction between "actives" determined by traditional stories, we can then experiment with the outcome. What does it mean for an Archetype to "play a role?" Does it need to step outside of that role in order to claim power? Can the roles be redefined, shifted? What is necessary to create the kind of outcome whereby the Archetypes can be broken and real expressions of gender can be made viable?

In our first Archetype of the duality-laden Virgin/Whore, the issue of *threshold*, crossing over from sexual ignorance to one of knowledge is a primary characteristic. The Virgin/Whore seems initially to have the least agency of the three female archetypes. Disadvantaged by youth and inexperience, her sexual potential is rigorously policed for fear that female pleasure should discover itself and become loosed for its own sake. This name of half of the Archetype could be any of the Disney franchise's princesses; she is also Juliet or the Bride. Yet, the other side of the Archetype has plenty of hidden agency, revealed as a cunning survival strategy of manipulation. She is Hannah Montana-cum-Miley Cyrus and her female potency is a veiled threat to order, yet it is a crucial part of society's usual functioning. Her moral strength lies in her ability to maneuver around the restrictions placed in her way. While she remains subject to the whims of masculine desire, she is also poised to find economic security and independence.

The Domestic Goddess is another dual Archetype-- again, at once glorified and bound; her responsibilities afford her some rights by virtue of a sanctioned status. She is the holy bitch who does all the chores; she is the eternal font of physical and emotional sustenance, the giver and indefatigable doer. Call her Supermom and she is Martha Stewart feeling justifiably superior to all other mere mortals in the domestic sphere. Put her in "binders full of women" and watch how corporate competition exacts a heavy price. Call her the Beloved Servant and we see Scott Thorsen's face surgically altered to become Liberace's. The Domestic Goddess is the concubine and employee; her face reflects the power exerted upon her, yet exalted by virtue of the motherhood contract: the physical creation of children and community defines her as a fully-fledged member of society, and she is protected by its moral jurisdiction. The Madonna's strength is in her endurance, love, and fierce devotion to her children and family, and her ability to suffer rejection and loss.

The Archetype who fiercely lives outside the socially accepted norm and for whom the standard life script will not do, is The Forbidden Creature. Armed with claws and awareness, she is dangerous because she lives her life deliberately on the margin of society. This is the loose cannon that bashes holes in the sides of the social

construction and subverts the normal plot. Beware of the Vampire or the Wicked Witch, this creature will kill and consume; Joan of Arc will stubbornly choose immolation over having to wear a dress. It may turn herself or her prey into something unexpected. It does the unthinkable, the unacceptable, and for that offence, the traditional story often writes her into oblivion, yet the character functions as a sharp counterpoint to the story's "norms"; she is the uncomfortable anomaly that exists to defy our perceptions. The Forbidden Creature's goal is to live on its own terms, and its strategy is to know itself and its boundaries. It is the unimpregnable, unignorable, unfuckable *She*.

Finally, our male Archetype, Everyman, is our Prince Charming. The world is his oyster. He confidently, aggressively claims the space around him, unencumbered by any restraints on his libido. Everyman's goal is conquest and his interactions with each female Archetype are driven by his insatiable sexual curiosity. Don Juan's effect, while sowing his oats, is to sow the illusion of separateness and competition between the Archetypes as they all vie for attentions and favors. However, the success of Romeo's encounter with each female Archetype is shaped by the agency each is granted; the more agency she possesses, the less power he has over her. Everyman's tremendous agency is a two-edged sword: the gift that enables him to be the ultimate Bad Boy is also the very thing that suppresses his ability to truly emotionally connect. However, it is also the key that potentially allows him to subvert his paradigm and become the Hero.

The danger and delight is that we see these stories and Archetypes not merely as mental playthings to lightly entertain us but as real examples upon which to model our human behavior. The story's power is in its synthesis of reality; it discards problematic details and exceptions for the sake of its internal logic. Human perception intuitively looks for coherence in much of the world even when it does not exist, which also means that people see the truth better when it is fictionalized. We can make use of this pattern-seeking tendency and bend the logic of a story to our own stated goals-- which is to break the stereotypes and create a plurality of expressions. We subvert the story by focusing on the personal strengths of each Archetype and amplify them so that the characters can grow and thrive. Each discovers what it needs to expand beyond the limits of his/ her roles, finding nuances in a gendered performance. The Virgin/Whore discovers her agency through female pleasure, the Domestic Goddess casts off that which binds her and sees what her creative powers can do, the Forbidden Creature becomes a uniter and teacher, secure in her Otherness, and Everyman begins to freely express his emotions. The liberation of each Archetype comes from shared agency and the willingness to connect and to honor ambiguities and differences.

References

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