

The Case of the Missing Crone

Although the Persephone/Demeter myth has these two somewhat dependent goddess figures who don't like to be cut off from the other or alone, it also has these two *other* figures--Pluto and Hecate--who are *notable loners*.

Hecate is the crone aspect of the triple goddess. **She's the only part of this female trinity that stands alone, that is not relationally defined or dependent.** She's the mature female being no longer grasping for a relational connection *in order* to experience fulfillment, the wise woman who has already been through the initiation, the radical aloneness, that a Plutonic abduction represents.

Just as Hecate is the one part of the three-fold goddess who stands alone, similarly, Pluto lives alone (for most of each year) apart from all the other gods. *In myths and fairy tales details like this are seldom irrelevant*, so the feature of "aloneness" feels significant, as if in addition to addressing dependency, the myth can also be read as

reflecting an alternative perspective by saying something about aloneness, and the transformational depths that might open for us when we can tolerate, allow, even welcome the state of being radically alone, no longer clinging to relational connection, no longer adapting, or altering our reception of *ourselves* in order to connect with others.

We might say that Persephone needs to get on with it, to leave her mother and marry her own aloneness before she can come out of her abandonment depression, her underworld experience. She needs to shed her old identity (as the naive, traumatized daughter who isn't being externally nurtured) in order to find her own autonomy, and reign as Queen of the Underworld.

Its as if there is a kind of "royal" aloneness in which we have psychically separated from everyone and everything (including the attachment to our own *thoughts*) that paradoxically reveals our connection to all things, and the sovereignty of our being. Conversely, the resistance to this aloneness heightens our dependency, and exaggerates our fear of separation from what the more infantile part of us thinks that it needs. And Pluto--as transformative agent--seems to specialize in taking away from us whatever it was we *thought* we couldn't live without.

But we may have a hard time seeing the value and power in this aloneness. In our culture people tend to feel apologetic if they are not in a coupled relationship. Mythologically, Pluto, the god who lives alone (for three fourths of the year) is invisible. He wears a cap of invisibility. He **can't** be seen. And our culture doesn't seem to **want** to see, or has been incapable of seeing the value of the "divine feminine" which is equally capable of being alone. *This crone aspect, represented by Hecate, has yet to find appropriate worship and devotion from our culture, an American culture that is not only young itself, but seems to worship youth.*

For all its polyglot, ours remains a Christian culture. And Christianity--with its tripartite **maleness** (the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost) has marginalized the feminine to begin with. The Roman Catholic Church still excludes women from its priesthood. The wise feminine, the Sophia aspect (from which our word *philosophy* comes) was burnt at the stake and buried early in the 13th century when the Church slaughtered the Gnostics during the Albagenian Crusades. The Virgin and the Mother (corresponding to Persephone-Kore and Demeter) lived on in Christianity via the

single agency of Mary who is both virgin *and* a mother --*but what's missing completely is the Crone.*

If between the third and the fifth century Christianity managed to become the "market leader," if not assume a monopoly status in Western nations amongst competing middle eastern mystery cults, largely by appropriating some of the broader archetypes (and seasonal holy days) that had long been in existence, then one figure who *didn't* manage to resurface was the **crone** aspect of the goddess.

And when the crone has been overlooked or slighted, then, as in the fairy tale "Sleeping Beauty," some part of the "wise old woman" archetype that we tend to see as a witch and forget to invite to the wedding (or want to burn at the stake) winds up throwing a curse on the whole kingdom. Then everyone seems to go unconscious in some way, even the animals dreaming with their twitching paws. Some part of our wisdom, some part of our intuitive, feeling, and relational capacity winds up surrounded by defensive briars. Our beauty (our essence) slumbers behind a thorny hedge. The kingdom in a kind of trance...

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When the crone hasn't been honored, men don't get to learn what they need to learn from a culture's mature women. The feminine ideal tends to lean in the direction of a "super model," some pretty bimbo--more Playmate of the month than Eleanor Roosevelt. And women seem affected too, and wind up becoming more relationally dependent than they might otherwise be--looking to men for validation, as if there's some "it" they need to get from outside themselves. This in turn can introduce a note of acrimony into male-female relationships when the men can't provide the missing "it" women are looking to *them* for. All of this is "the case of the missing crone," the female elder who isn't invited to the wedding.

In our culture you can look at the television or any billboard and see the lovely maiden seducing our attention with her physical charms. And you can see the mother aspect as well, perhaps pouring some nourishing cereal for her family as might Demeter, or touting cleaning products for the home. But *no crone.*

We put our crones in old age homes where they can't easily be seen. They remind us of impermanence, and our own impending death--and in a youth culture no one wants to look at *that*. Meanwhile everyone in the media is going gaga over the newest Hollywood ingenue or pop singer. These pretty young women are on the cover of every magazine, for women have learned to idealize youth as well--while devaluing and in some way feeling superior to older women, and doing everything in their power to avoid even the *appearance* of aging.

It could be a revealing inventory for contemporary women to take stock of all the time and money spent on trying to look young --and then compare that to how much expenditure goes into cultivating the soul, or doing inner work. For most women, such an inventory would reveal the neglect of Hecate, the neglect--and the *fear* -- of the crone.

And the reason is that in a culture pre-occupied with surface image--versus what poets in the late 1960s were terming "deep image"--in a culture where the imagination is trivialized and youth is idealized, in such a culture to be youthful is to *be loveable*--and to be, or to be perceived as a crone, is to be avoided at all costs.

What have we lost here? And in its stead, what's looking back at us from the magazine racks in the kiosks of airports and subways--or everytime we are waiting in line to buy groceries? Young vapid beauties! They're everywhere. But it seems we're only capable of recognizing or honoring about one crone every fifty years. And now that Eleanor Roosevelt and Mother Teresa are no longer with us, who do we have? Perhaps Hillary Rodham Clinton is a crone in waiting.

Where the crone aspect of the goddess isn't recognized, let alone *honored*, we have Hollywood actresses still trying to look like ingenues thirty years after that was what nature had in mind. Where the crone aspect of femininity isn't valued we have insufficient medical care in large segments of the population at the same time we have a thriving medical facelift and implant industry and billions of dollars being spent on "cosmetic" surgeries.

Where the crone aspect isn't valued we lose the collective perspective of a wise, mature femininity, and strangely, love poems become an endangered species. When you do away with the Hecate/Sophia/crone archetype, it not only becomes harder for us to learn what we need to learn from the culture's mature women, but it perhaps makes it harder for us to reach the depths of feeling

realization we would otherwise be capable of and *need* to be capable of in order to write great love poetry.

Certainly within a hundred and fifty years of the Church burning the Gnostic Cathars--who had influenced the troubadours--the tradition of love poetry in the West entered a severe decline-- and still hasn't recovered its former momentum. We might say that when you turn Hecate into a "witch"--or burn Sophia at the stake, *love and wisdom* become separated from each other. Perhaps when we killed the Gnostics and buried Sophia, we buried our deep images, losing part of our imagination and half of our *philosophy*--leaving us with less wisdom in our loving, as if *love has lost its logos* and become merely *emotional* love--a love that more easily turns into its opposite. And then not only do our love lyrics become trivialized (listen to rap music!)--but our whole culture ceases to be grounded in wisdom.

(Even our word "trivialized" which appears in the last sentence reflects a fall, the devolution of Hecate--in that Hecate was the goddess of transitions--such as birth and death, the goddess of crossroads (the three roads= tri-via), and thus what we now find to be "trivial" was at one time an archetypal coordinate of space/time where we might have turned to Hecate for orientation as we faced the unknown).

The loss, the devaluing, the devolution of the crone... seems to have affected the very maturity of the culture. And thus, along with our devaluing of the crone, *our psychology tends to become fixated on the "inner child."* We also wind up with sex sites on the internet that--out of all numerical proportion--want to show us the naked bodies of women who are "barely legal." We wind up with a male population whose level of psychosexual development has gotten fixated at the "barely legal" level of college freshmen. We wind up with Presidents getting blowjobs by 24 year old interns, and we then wind up having to hear and read about it for months on end.

When the crone aspect of the goddess isn't valued we wind up with women trying to get their missing "it" from men--like Monica Lewinsky wanting to bask in the reflected fame and glory of a president--or in the vain attempt to find a romantic ideal that may not exist in reality. When the crone isn't honored, we wind up with a collective denial around death --and millions and millions of people who don't want to grow up. Lacking in spiritual wisdom and psychological maturity, the culture winds up trying to get its "missing it" from dependency relationships of all kinds--from sex addictions

and drugs to consumerism.

What we have lost here is truly "great." For the loss of the Great Goddess's crone aspect is also reflective of *a loss of eldership*. This forces young people to turn to those no older or wiser than themselves for orientation and guidance. Rather than the wisdom and values of a mature humanity being passed on to the next generation (one thinks, again, of Tibet), we are left instead with a "gang culture" --not only amongst inner city youth, but in education--where the "classics" that have formed the basis for Western civilization are now seen as the culturally irrelevant works of "dead white men." This "gang culture" also shows up in a corporate, group-think, mass-market mentality--a statistical marketing perspective heedless to quality, a "numbers game" that effects everything from a political process too slavishly sensitive to the latest poll (while devoid of real *leadership*) to what books or movies get chosen for distribution.

In this way, when the value of the crone is in a decline, not only is the nation run by a kind of gang or herd mentality, but *individuality itself* suffers. As part of this fall, aging ceases to be conceived in the context of growing into a more individualized, refined, essential version of who we really are--like the fruit of a great wine emerging from its tannins--and instead one is perceived as "over the hill."

With the fall of the crone and the loss of the elder the potential greatness of a culture seems to become deflected. The acquisition of hard-won truths and the skills or perspective that might have been learned from association or mentorship with elders become more of an exception, and less built into the fabric of daily life. There is a lack of apprenticeship and meaningful initiatory ritual, and the best values of the past not only don't get passed on, but become suspect. In this vacuum not only does maturity itself tend to get stunted, but that which is trendy and new becomes overly valued, and what is "popular" becomes the order of the day. Ours becomes an adolescent "pop" culture, with little reference to greatness, in either politics or the arts.

When a culture stops valuing its crones and its elders, elders

themselves can all too easily buy into this perspective--failing to see the meaningful contributions they still have to offer, as they fall instead into a numbing regimen of "trivial" pursuits. And the potential wisdom that can grow out of a healthy solitude? It languishes, sadly, as a largely unlived possibility.

This way of aging is to miss the spiritual as well as civic possibility inherent in the second half of life. And it reflects *a failure of the imagination*, not just a lessening of physical vigor. A failure of vision that can no longer discern "the great" from "the trivial," that can no longer see (let alone embody) "the goddess of the cross-roads."

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