

1987

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Recommended Citation

Portko, Sandra (1987) "Book Review: *Goddesses in Everywoman*," *Grand Valley Review*: Vol. 2: Iss. 2, Article 18.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/gvr/vol2/iss2/18>

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Goddesses in Everywoman

Jean Shinoda-Bolen, *Goddesses in Everywoman*. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1984.

One of the psychologists whose work is generating a great deal of interest in a wide range of disciplines is Carl G. Jung. He has been acclaimed by humanistic psychologists and religious thinkers alike as contributing to a fuller understanding of human nature by exploring the religious dimensions of the psyche and the journey for wholeness that the psyche undertakes. His work focused on understanding and integrating elements of one's personality that are embedded in the unconscious. He called these elements "archetypes," or patterns for understanding and acting. According to Jung, these archetypes can exert their power even though the subject is totally unaware of their existence. These elements, he believed, are so deep in the unconscious and possess so much power because they are part of what he calls the collective unconscious and have been passed on from generation to generation for eons. Jung maintained that each new generation has the opportunity to bring to awareness certain aspects of some of the archetypes. By becoming aware of how an archetype functions, one can reduce the power of the archetype and make decisions on a more conscious, rational level.

Jung worked for years to identify and explain the archetypes. His material was gleaned from mythology, alchemy, folk lore, folk tales, dreams (both clients' and his own), and literature. But in spite of all the study, he felt he had only begun the project of studying the development of the self, and of identifying the archetypes in the collective unconscious.

While the goal Jung set was the understanding of the self, the focus of his work provided a better understanding of the male's experience of the journey toward individuation. For rather obvious reasons, he wrote about what he knew best. He admitted the understanding he had acquired of feminine psychology was sketchy and left that work to be done by others who would follow him.

And follow they did. There has been a proliferation of Jungian studies by a growing number of Jungian-trained, Jungian-inspired authors and therapists. Their mission is to "go where no man (or woman) has gone before" and point out the paths for others. They are committed to the process of raising consciousness and bringing

archetypes into conscious awareness, a process which they believe produces benefits for all. They are archeologists of the soul, excavating half-forgotten myths of antiquity whose messages reverberate in the collective unconscious of the moderns, but whose meaning is not known to the moderns.

One such archeologist is Dr. Jean Shinoda-Bolen, a psychiatrist and Jungian analyst. Through her work with clients and advanced study in Jungian analysis, she became convinced that a new framework was needed to give form to the understanding of psychological development of women in Western culture. She began to look at myths as metaphors for psychic life, “insight tools” as analyst Erich Neumann had described them. She began to look at Greek mythology as a possible source of “insight tools” for modern Western women.

Her book, *Goddesses in Everywoman*, subtitled *A New Psychology of Women*, is the culmination of her efforts in this direction. Through several years of painstaking study of the myths, of her clients’ therapy and dream work, and of her own responses and insights in the process of doing therapy, she distilled what she believes are the seven essential feminine archetypes which are acting upon modern women in our culture. She divides these seven archetypes into three categories: the vulnerable goddesses (3), the virgin goddesses (3), and the alchemical goddess (1).

The vulnerable goddesses are so-named because the essence of their individual identities was contained in relationships. They were “who they were” because of these relationships, and they “became who they were” through the sufferings these relationships inevitably produced. The vulnerable goddesses are Demeter, Persephone, and Hera; and they present the archetypes of mother, daughter, and wife, respectively. Not coincidentally, these are also the roles that have been traditionally identified as the “appropriate” roles for women, and the ones which most women have been expected to fulfill.

The roles of mother, daughter, and wife are examined from the perspective of the goddesses that embody them. The mother Demeter is a powerful, nurturing figure who defies Zeus himself to gain the return of her abducted daughter. She is vulnerable because the great love she bears her child is the source of her great pain when Persephone is taken to the underworld. Her pain is expressed as great sorrow and depression — all living things begin to fail as she bargains with Zeus to enforce Persephone’s return. The mother archetype is a very powerful force, and for a true “Demeter,” the love for one’s children far outweighs the love for a spouse. (A true “Hera” cannot comprehend this!) A Demeter may suffer, but she has the opportunity to grow through her suffering and become stronger, even as the goddess Demeter gained power through her suffering. For a woman whose strongest archetype is Demeter and whose identity

has come from being a mother, the leaving of one's children, the so-called empty nest, can trigger a profound depression.

Persephone represents the archetype of daughter, or young maiden, and in her maturity, she assumes the role of Queen of the Underworld. Most women can more easily relate to the first two. As young girls, women in our culture have traditionally been expected to allow others to make decisions for them. It was not uncommon for a woman to go from being "so-and-so's daughter," to "so-and-so's wife," to "so-and-so's mother" and never know who *she* really was. Persephone embodies this attitude of compliance and not really taking a strong stand for one's own desires. If a Persephone does make a choice, she may not accept responsibility for it, even as the goddess Persephone blamed Hades for the pomegranate seeds.

The third aspect of Persephone as Queen of the Underworld is exemplified by those who become guides to the inner life either as a result of their own suffering or because of the intuitive ability to relate to the suffering of others. In our culture, this particular quality is not as readily observable as are the other manifestations of Persephone.

The last of the vulnerable goddesses is Hera, the wife of Zeus. Hera represents the woman who only feels complete when in a relationship with a man. Status, power, and more importantly, identity, can only be achieved when connected with a man. Everything else, including children, are secondary to the primary relation of wife. A Hera woman can be subject to suffering when the relationship goes awry. The greatest suffering is caused by an unfaithful mate. But, in true Hera fashion, the hurt and anger are directed not at the philandering spouse, but at the co-respondent. A Hera woman always blames "the other woman" for the shortcomings of the mate, and will stop at nothing to seek revenge. Shinoda-Bolen cites the legend of Medea as an example of a Hera-like revenge. (For me, personally, this was an illumination. I have never been able to understand, operating out of my Demeter force as I do, *how* a mother could murder her children to seek revenge on an unfaithful husband. However, murdering the adulterous husband has always seemed to me to be a perfectly rational solution to the problem. Now, thanks to Shinoda-Bolen, I understand my response better.)

The virgin goddesses comprise a group who are "one-in-themselves," the original meaning of virgin. They were marked by their independence, and their accomplishments. They were not considered vulnerable by the author of the book because they were never hurt or transformed by the few relationships that the myths assigned to them. The virgin goddess archetypes are Artemis, Athena, and Hestia.

Artemis is probably the best recognized archetype in our present culture, representing the qualities of independence from men, sisterhood, concern for women and chil-

dren, and achievement. Shinoda-Bolen feels that these are goals of the women's movement and that the Artemis archetype is a symbol of the women's movement. An Artemis woman enjoys her independence and values her own accomplishments. Relationships are secondary to a true Artemis woman, although other archetypes can modify this tendency. The importance of Artemis is that she represents a truly feminine role mode for achievement that was missing in traditional Jungian theory. In the traditional approach, only activation of the animus, the "outside" masculine element, could account for independence and achievement in a woman. While Shinoda-Bolen acknowledges the animus influence as certainly being critical for some women, she believes that the Artemis archetype represents far more accurately the experience of most achievement-oriented women. Thus, achievement and independence in this so-called "male" world are not the result of the "masculine archetype" for an Artemis woman, but rather an expression of her true feminine nature.

Athena, on the other hand, represents a different type of virgin goddess: the superb strategist, the teacher of crafts, and perhaps most importantly, the upholder of the patriarchy. Athena, the goddess, was Zeus' right hand and planned the strategies of war. Her coolness and clarity of thinking in the heat of battle contrasted sharply with Ares, the god of war, and gave her the edge in crucial decision-making.

An Athena woman of modern times may be seen as a coldly calculating upholder of the establishment. Analytical to the point of ruthlessness at times, the Athena woman can easily separate emotional responses and relationships from the official business at hand, much to the dismay of unprepared colleagues. A woman who may be a warm and caring individual in private can be so taken over by the Athena archetype when in situations of authority that she is unrecognizable as the same person. An alternative expression of Athena is the very intellectual, well-organized, competent individual who has very little emotional life and very few relationships because of her overly intellectual approach to life. While these are the negative aspects of the Athena force, the positive aspects of intellectual prowess, organization, clarity of thought, and craftsmanship are qualities which are highly rewarded — especially in academe.

Hestia is the last of the virgin goddesses and the one about whom the least is known. As a goddess, she was the first-born of Cronos and the last-freed from the prison of his body, so qualities of solitude and introversion have long been assigned to her. In the myths, she was free of the conflicts and intrigues of Olympus. In the ancient cultures of Greece and Rome, she was honored as the hearthkeeper, and no home was sanctified until Hestia entered the round hearth of the new home in the fire brought from the old home.

As an archetypal force, Hestia represents the woman who is contemplative, introspective, and able to be in touch with inner values. The Hestia woman is able to focus on her own subjective experiences without being distracted by others. She seeks tranquility and is not to be found in the bustling, competitive, business world, unless she also has a strong impetus from Artemis and Athena. The Hestia influence allows one to achieve a balance within oneself without regard for external mandates on “how to achieve contentment.”

The final category of alchemical goddess has only one representative, Aphrodite. The author refers to her as an alchemical goddess because she combines elements of the other two categories and transforms them. As a goddess, Aphrodite was the only one free to choose her partners rather than *be* chosen in some form. The goddess Aphrodite chose partners often, but even though being in relationships was a crucial aspect of her identity, she was never hurt by these relationships. She retained a certain “one-in-herself” quality that she shared with the virgin goddesses — thus, the necessity of a separate category for her.

As an archetypal force, Aphrodite is responsible for a woman’s enjoyment of love and beauty, sexuality and sensuality. An Aphrodite woman enters sexual relationships for the sake of sex, not for the sake of love, or to please another. The Aphrodite force represents a strong, erotic attraction to others, without regard for circumstances — much like the goddess Aphrodite experienced in the myths. Sexual energy is not the only expression of the Aphrodite archetype — creative work is another. The artist must be involved with her work as intensely and passionately as with her lover in order to bring her visions into existence. During this process, one’s perceptions are heightened just as they are for one who has fallen in love. Sights, sounds, and textures take on a new clarity, and the world is seen as if for the first time.

These are the contributions that Aphrodite can make to a woman’s life. The potentially negative aspects are there as well. Human women, for the most part, do not fare well in our culture when they have numerous sexual liaisons. Goddesses are free from such scrutiny.

This brief summary gives the spirit of the book *Goddesses in Everywoman*, but by no means imparts the substance. The author touches on a number of concepts which are enlightening. For example, she introduces the concept of “focused” and “diffused” consciousness and explains how the different goddess archetypes display one or the other of these qualities.

Briefly, diffused consciousness acts as a radar system to monitor such things as activities, emotional response, and moods, much as a mother monitors her children (diffused consciousness is the source of “the-eyes-in-the-back-of-the-head” ability that

our mothers possessed) or a woman monitors her mate. It is the quality of consciousness that is very much relationship oriented. Focused consciousness, on the other hand, is the ability to stop monitoring everything else and focus much more narrowly, but far more intently on the task at hand. This quality of consciousness fosters the “one-in-herself” attitude and accomplishments displayed by the virgin goddess patterns.

Shinoda-Bolen also discusses at length the psychological manifestations of each archetype: the types of difficulties each archetype is most likely to generate, the possible relationships to which each archetype predisposes one, and the different expressions of the archetypes for heterosexual and lesbian women.

Perhaps more importantly, the author emphasizes her belief that *all* of these modes can be accessed by a woman who is serious about developing her potential and coming to understand herself better in the process. Very few women are pure manifestations of a single archetypal pattern. Most women experience the influence of at least two or three primary goddess patterns quite strongly. When these are patterns which have conflicting goals, problems and confusion abound. Thus, a woman may have a strong Demeter force — being a mother and caring for her children are truly an integral part of such a woman’s identity. Such a woman may have an equally strongly developed Artemis-Athena pattern which leads her to excel in highly demanding areas of intellectual achievement where single-minded dedication to a difficult goal is the norm. Those two value systems are very different and often in direct opposition to each other. From Shinoda-Bolen’s perspective, those two opposing goddess patterns are the heart of the “career or motherhood” dilemma facing so many women of today. Although the focus of the dilemma has shifted more from a question of “Which one?” to a question of “How and When?” the logistics of working out the details of the answer requires the strategic planning of Athena and the single-minded independence of Artemis, as well as the life-force of Demeter, in order to accomplish the goal. For the women themselves who experience these conflicting urges and desires, the situation appears more understandable when viewed from this new theoretical perspective. A person no longer needs to feel apologetic or confused because her personal solution to the dilemma does not match the past standards of choosing one or the other. It is never an “either-or” situation as far as the archetypes are concerned.

Although each goddess pattern exerts pressure to behave in accordance with *her* urges, the woman who is aware of these different urges is no longer at the mercy of unconscious forces. The more a woman understands the power and pull of the archetypes, the freer she is to make decisions that are not based on these unconscious, archetypal forces. That is the value of understanding the archetypes from a Jungian perspective.

The book is extremely engaging. Jean Shinoda-Bolen writes well and has managed to produce a book which deals with rather esoteric information from a lesser known psychological perspective, and yet presents that information in such a way that the reader does not need a degree in psychology to understand it.