



The Demon Lover - A Psychological Profile

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Foreword

I do not think that anyone can write about a psychological concept - and create meaning in the process - without having something on the line herself. Indeed, that is the case with me and the subject of this essay. But even if it is a personal matter it is my sincere hope that I will be able to communicate it in a general and interpersonal way so that anyone can benefit from reading it, and feel that their experience is empathized with.

Though I do know The Demon Lover this essay is not about *me*. This is about *him* as a powerful psychological image - at what its intense energy does to women and *their* psychic and creative energy.

It is extremely difficult to gather the courage to look directly at him and become fully aware - and conscious - about him. But this essay is an attempt to draw a sketch of him and some of his characteristics so that he will be easier to recognize. A psychological profile.

I will mainly use the book by Marion Woodman "Addicted to perfection" to create a profile of The Demon Lover. I will investigate the way he functions in the psyche of women and how he is related to the evil mother and to the absent father. Then I will look briefly at other concepts of the Demon Lover, namely those by Esther Harding and Linda Schierse-Leonard. Finally I'll try to make a connection or parallel to the energies of Thanatos and Eros, here I will draw on Igra, and again briefly I'll discuss how The image of The Demon Lover can influence the creativity of the woman being under his influence. Here I will use "Witness to the Fire" by Linda Schierse-Leonard.

The picture is an illustration from the fairytale of Bluebeard in which a young woman falls in love with and marries a rich and wealthy man - with an ugly blue beard - only to discover the horror that he has killed all his previous wives. When he realizes that his secret is disclosed he takes action to kill her too.

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The demon lover and his dynamics can be not "understood". Sometimes we just have to be able to look at something, know it for what it is and then walk away, as quickly as possible. Still, in this section I'll try to make a sketch, an attempted profile so that we will know what to look for.

On the most fundamental level The Demon Lover is an aspect of Animus. Animus can shortly be defined as

The Archetypal images of the eternal masculine in a woman's unconscious that forms a link between ego-consciousness and the collective unconsciousness and potentially opens a way to the self" (Stein, p. 233)

"Abstractly Animus/anima is a psychic structure that is (a) complementary to the persona and (b) links the ego to the deepest layer of the psyche, namely to the image and experience of the self" (ibid p. 128)

The Demon Lover is a negative aspect of animus, though. I think that he is more likely to disturb the relation to the Self than to create a healthy connection or bridge. He may be more connected to dark side of the Self, to the shadow side and to chaos.

Thus, the Demon Lover is NOT a real person. The dangerous or seductive man a woman would involve herself with is not The Demon Lover himself, but her animus-projection of him on a particular man. He may be a sociopath or a Peter Pan (a Puer Aeternus), but what she should consider is that something in herself drives her towards this man - or his likes - repeatedly and hurtfully. And that is her own inner complex or image of The Demon Lover.

According to Woodman¹ The Demon Lover is - or can be - constellated when the woman (as a daughter) has an mother that has identified herself with the patriarchy, a woman who is not in touch with her own feminine feelings and values.

This woman then has a child with a man that on his side is more connected with his unconsciousness feminine sides and not with his mature masculinity. In this relationship she will tend to be her husband's "mother" and he will be her "son". Then he is missing somewhere to put his anima which he projects onto the child:

"As such an marriage goes on she tends to slip into the mother role, he into that of her son, so that when the baby daughter is born his inner beloved is projected onto her. There is the perfect seed-bed for the demon lover" (Woodman, p. 135)

The mother is not in touch with her own femininity and then fails to pass this on to her daughter. Thus she does not get an inner feminine core or a sense that the feminine has any worth in itself. Instead the feminine is used to please either the specific father (or her image of him) or the masculine values of society.

The father is feared, adored or/and idealized, maybe even more if he is absent through for example alcohol or death. From early on she has carried her father's anima projection, and thus her femininity is defined by his unconscious feminine traits. Her femininity is created in the image of her father's anima. She becomes perfect:

"Having accepted his anima projection from infancy she has lived to please him, to share his intellectual pursuits and to meet his standards of perfection" (Ibid.)

Woodman further explains that the daughter sees the mother as either absent or as a rival - and herself as the true beloved of the father. The energies of the father-daughter relationship are in fact incestuous, though not played out as a real sexual relation. This means that her love is split off from her sexuality:

¹ Woodman, 1982.

"In fantasy she dreams of her spiritual lover. In reality she remains unconscious of her sexuality, acts it out without love, or fears it as some explosive power that can destroy her. She tends to "fall helplessly in love" with a man that cannot marry her and around whom she creates an ideal world in which she is either adored or dramatically rejected. In life she lives without her body; in dreams she, she appears behind glass ..." (Ibid.)

The consequence of this this is the creation of a series of psychological splits between fantasy and reality, love and sexuality, mind and body.

When her inner lover (in her father's image) creates these splits he becomes demonic and destructive. She will not be able to relate to a real man because she idolizes him instead of seeing him as he is. The problem with the demon lover is his trickster qualities, his duplicity. He appears to be the perfect bridegroom, the perfect match, but may himself be a little boy, looking for a mother creating a symbiotic bond. And this would just repeat the whole story endlessly.

Ultimately this can result in death or an "death-mariage". She will be in danger of actual, emotional or creative death:

"If his powers become magnetic then the woman is in danger of death because she is unconsciously being lured into his trap and without her feminine ground she is not ... connected to her instincts to stay alive. She is vulnerable to the suave manner, the eloquence with words the perfectionism and ideals with which she endows him and her own hold of life is so tenuous that she sets herself up for murder either by the man who is carrying the projection for her or by her own inner lover. The strength she projects onto her demon lover is no longer available to her. In fact the projection drains her, leaving her fragile, physically and emotionally." (ibid. p. 136)

The woman will find herself being caught up in a double trap. She is caught up between her mother's negative animus and her father's perfect anima-image. Plus the animus image she herself has constellated: The inner lover, being and becoming demonic, will demand perfectionism of and will continually haunt her:

"[The] animus voice constantly whispers "You must, you have to, you ought to. In the vacuum left of her loss of feeling the negative animus attacks, telling her she is unloveable, unworthy, ugly and forever his prisoner" (Ibid. p 137)

In turn this will cause a split in her own femininity:

The woman with a demon lover has an inflated view of the imaginal feminine and a deflated view of the actual feminine and while she overendows the masculine, looking for men to save her, her underdeveloped femininity is either terrified by the aggressive masculine or challenges it. (Ibid. p 139)

Her real feminine is fatally underdeveloped and thus in danger of actual, creative or emotional rape or death from masculinity, whether this is in the form of her own inner critic, the man she projects the demon lover onto or the masculinity of society – the values of patriarchy.

Other Concepts of the Demon Lover

Esther Harding² coined the idea of The Ghostly Lover, which I think is a conceptual predecessor of The Demon Lover. To Harding the problem of the Ghostly Lover that may be a fantasy lover or real person, that is either deceased or otherwise lost, will be that he prevents the woman from connecting to reality, to real people in real relationships. He is the ideal, the Prince Charming, compared to whom all other men fall short.

Another important aspect is his association with the element of Air. He lifts up the woman into spirituality and therefore there is an association, Harding suggests, with the spiritual lover. It is this spiritual aspect of animus that seems most important to Harding, while the negative aspect of this is precisely that he drives the woman away from reality.

Another conception of the demon lover is Linda Schierse-Leonard³ linking him to Addiction and his positive counterpart The Creative Daimon to Creativity. I will return to the latter aspect.

² Harding, 1970.

³ Schierse-Leonard 1989, 1987

According to Schierse-Leonard the prototype of the Demon Lover is Dracula, the vampire sucking blood from his victims. There are four ways in which The Demon Lover can take possession over us; as an Archetypal figure of Addiction, through jealousy in love-relationships, as a negative Self-image and through self-doubt, and finally by blocking creativity.

Schierse-Leonard starts her chapter of The Demon Lover simply by stating that to me this signifies that we lose our creativity in the broadest sense, our center and our Eros, when falling under the spell of The Demon Lover.

Eros and Thanatos

On a more abstract level there seems, I think, to be a parallel between the powers of creativity and (the fear of) chaos on one hand and the dual powers of Eros and Thanatos on the other. According to Igra⁴ Eros and Thanatos are tendencies in the psyche that both aim for release of an inner tension, but they use different strategies.

Eros is described by Igra as a power that sustains life by increased complexity by the creation and still more complex totalities. Eros seeks to expand and relate, therefore the most striking expression of Eros is the human sexuality. The Eros way of solving tensions is by meeting, by junction, by building up and by movement. While Thanatos solves the tensions by deconstruction, dissolution and destruction. In its purest sense it seems to aim for total stillness.

Ideally there should be a balance between Eros and Thanatos in the human psyche. In its positive sense Thanatos creates stability and structure in the psyche. But Thanatos as a psychic power can overwhelm Eros, so that it is controlled and limited by Thanatos.

⁴ Igra, 1990.

Just like the psyche of the woman under the possession of The Demon lover is haunted by inner psychological demands of perfection as Woodman describes it, or by addiction, jealousy, self-doubt or a blocked creativity as described by Schierse-Leonard. All these states can be seen as a way of controlling or numbing pain and fear of chaos.

As Thanatos is taking Eros hostage, The Demon Lover as an complex is captivating the creativity, emotionality and true femininity of the woman under his spell. I think The Demon Lover can be seen as an agent of Thanatos in its most destructive aspect.

The Creative Daimon

Finally, I will briefly touch the concept of The Creative Daimon and its contrast to The Demon Lover. Her I will use "Witness to the Fire" by Schierse-Leonard⁵. The Creative Daimon has been known since antiquity:

"Down through the ages the creative person has acknowledged the power of The Creative Daimon. Socrates said it was an inner voice that guided him ..." (Schierse-Leonard, 1989, p. 8)

The Daimon is an inner force, a spirit within that energizes us and calls upon us to be and become creatively ... [A]n indwelling power or spirit that possess human beings with extra-ordinary drive and enthusiasm" (Ibid.)

The difference between being possessed by The Demon Lover and The Creative Demon is that:

"While possession by the Demon lover in addiction leads to monomania – a narrowing of life and vision, reducing the addict to an status of an object defined by its crawling – possession by the Creative Daimon ultimately can lead to a broadening of life, opening up and furthering transformation" (Ibid., p. 11)

Here I see a clear association to Eros and Thanatos. In the previous section I suggested the Demon Lover to be seen as an agent of Thanatos. So The Creative Daimon can be seen as an Agent of Eros.

⁵ Schierse-Leonard, 1989.

I will emphasize here that creativity should be understood in its broadest sense; not only as an artistic concept, but as an ability in the psyche of every human being to create life, and to be able to live within the tension of life's opposites and paradoxes in a constructive way. The Creative Daimon as an agent of Eros is working for the psyche to be open, transforming – ultimately for welcoming Life itself in all its aspects.

Final thoughts

In this essay have tried to make an profile of the Demon Lover and how he works in the female psyche. By reading Woodman I have tried to show what happens when The Demon Lover is constellated in the feminine psyche. The main feature of this animus complex, according to Woodman, seems to be addiction to perfection, and that he viciously draws the woman into dangerous situations, in which her femininity, creativity and even her life may be at stake.

Harding, with her concept of The Ghostly Lover emphasizes his function of driving women away from reality and the real life and into airy spirituality. Schierse-Leonard sees him as the vampire king, sucking life out of his victims an taking possession over us in four ways as mentioned above. On my own part, I have tried to drav some lines to Eros and Thanatos as described by Ingra, and I've considered the contrast to The Creative Daimon.

On a more abstract level – and with a concept borrowed from Discourse Theory – there seems to be some chains of equivalence between on the one hand Creativity – Eros – The Creative Daimon and on the other between Addiction/Perfection – Thanatos – The Demon Lover.

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