

Lilith: Notes on the Mythos, Archetype and True Black Moon **June 15th, 2007**

One of the archetypes astrology students and buffs are hearing more about and about is Lilith. I hear people asking each other what's going on with Lilith, and the number of the responses that are warnings not to confuse the three Liliths (asteroid 1181, the Dark Moon and the Black Moon) is more than frustrating. This seems to me a red herring, as it more often than not prevents meaningful communication about the archetype, leaving interested people trying to sort what would be the difference, if any, between the three Liliths before even having a clear idea about any one of them.¹

Some of the substantive responses offer that it's about a person's erratic side, what's hidden below the surface, the part of the person that rages underneath, and very often it's said to be about femininity and sexuality. This is useful, but if we leave it at a few keywords we run the risk of sidestepping some very useful sides of the Lilith story. Also, some of it looks like some of the more intriguing stuff written about Pluto, and it's important to tease out how they're different...because they most certainly are different.

In my counseling practice I use the true Black Moon Lilith (BML), never the mean BML. Often the calculated position of the latter is more readily available, so a lot of people use it. The main reasons cited for the use of the mean over the true position is that the orbit of the BML is highly erratic, with the true position varying up to 30 degrees from that of the mean, and its sudden change of direction and velocity. As Juan Antonio Revilla points out (<http://www.expreso.co.cr/centaurs/blackmoon/lilith.html>), use of the true BML is the only of the two options that lends itself to the "irrational, instinctive, and primal symbolism of Lilith." If you study and open to the story of the myth, you'll see that using the mean position makes absolutely no sense.

I differentiate between the story as we understand it today (it having been shaped by human culture) and what the story is at the core of it, which involves basic elements independent of any culture's telling of the story. With some archetypes this means we have to go back in time to peel away layers of overwriting, but since Lilith has been stuffed into dark closets for so long and therefore tampered with minimally,² I'm not convinced we need to do so; essential elements of the story are still recognizable in human expression of her story.

The essential element of the story is the suppression of the basic, natural creative drive which is an integral feature of each of us, leaving us choosing to ignore a facet of our nature in order to be acceptable to others. Above I quote Revilla using the word

¹ I haven't worked with all three, but the further I get into this work the more I suspect there could be no difference at all, but that there's an eagerness to admit this archetype into our consciousness but simply haven't had any definitive, clear signals about how to do so. Since I suspect that each of the three is ultimately going to refer to the same symbolism, I advise people who ask me about the differences to pick one and get to work.

² Myths are altered to suit the aims and needs of the group telling the story. The cat-fighty and vengeful nature of Juno, for example, is a later addition to her story. For some reason, it became desirable to transform that character into a more petty, angry version than she had been.

“instinctive”: At your root is an animal nature that doesn’t question and doesn’t conceive, it simply is. This part of you operates without regard to anything but its impulses. It’s pre-human; it’s something that we have in common with and ties us to all of life.

When we humans, breaking away from all of our culturally-conditioned control-freak & brainy glory, use that energy to guide our behavior – when we give in to that instinctive side of ourselves – we cannot be controlled. What we as individuals need can be met while steering with this energy, but what we as a society need is threatened by giving this mode sway. Airing that side of ourselves in our Saturn-saturated culture is more than likely to get us into trouble.

Lilith comes in here: The story of Lilith is about an individual consciously choosing to live according to this side of herself, in integrity, and what happens as a result because she lives with others, others trying to maintain a rule of law. She’s making a *conscious* choice to live by *instinct*. The idea of not doing so doesn’t appeal to her, even though in the myth she’s threatened with heinous things if she continues on her path. Her refusal to obey the angels’ command isn’t so much Uranian (anti-Saturnian) as it is simply following her gut instincts about what’s good for her (pre- or a-Saturnian). It isn’t in her nature to deny her nature.

I find it useful to treat archetypes as processes, in order to avoid stereotypes. If we talk about Lilith in less than three dimensions, we’re settling for keywords and likely risk trafficking in stereotypes, missing a critical point: Lilith is in each and every one of us. Using a shorthand for Lilith based in the abundant red herrings surrounding info about her story won’t work. And for that matter, for any of the new bodies and energies we’re looking at in astrology today, we owe it to ourselves to crusade against stereotyping.³

As a counseling astrologer, the most important question in my mind about Lilith is: How do we make Lilith? Why is she raging? In other words, how is a person inspired to bring out that energy? What is it that we do that can bring out such rage from a person? When does that seem the right, the best, or the only thing left to do? I can’t help someone with Lilith issues if I can’t understand and help that person understand the archetype as a process he or she might be living. It’s not enough for me to talk about the myth and end with a couple of keywords; people are walking myths. We regularly take on the stories of mythological figures, whether conscious of it or not – again, people are living, breathing, walking myths – and if you can help someone understand the myth she’s living (and, if she’s coming to see me about it, probably confounded by), you can help her understand what are her choices and why she’s made those she has, and to forgive herself if needed (and with the Lilith part of ourselves, it’s needed frequently). And if that happens, she will naturally see how to make different choices if she desires to, or at least to see where the sticking points that keep her from doing so are.

As stated above, the archetype is generally about suppression of the basic, natural creative drive and a resultant feeling of not honoring a basic element of the self. Through

³ Chiron can become merely “the wounded healer,” Vesta about “service” or “dedication,” and Lilith “angry,” “raging bitch” or even “baby eater.”

the lens of culture, of our lives, this is only where the story begins. The ensuing period of suppression is one of building tension, experienced either actively as anger, resentment or rage, or stuffed into a quiet corner where we think (hope) it won't cause any trouble. But festering resentment/anger/rage always does. The outward manifestation of living the Lilith energy, whether the native is aware of it or not, will cover a vast range of attitudes and behaviors, and can include attitudes of pessimistic passivity, suspicion, resentment for being thought to be uncontrollable, cautiousness in admitting power in any form, whether the existence or importance of one's own or someone else's (as recognizing someone else's will lead us to see our own), as well as the oft-mentioned rage, irrational and instinctual/primal behavior. Since our culture has created the taboos it has, these attitudes and behaviors will be centered on/revolve around issues of sexuality and gender, and how issues surrounding power have informed and shaped them.

Independent of individual chart interpretation, this archetype is about a part of us so far removed from the kind of lives our societies teach us to live that it's hidden deep down, and reaching into it can trigger an explosion. The well of creative energy each of us possesses is in fact the natural sexual energy it's taboo according to society to express freely or embody, making delving into the places we keep Lilith energy a potentially difficult undertaking. I don't believe that the nature of the archetype is about being hidden, but that social conditions have led to an overall necessity of being hidden in the individual. I also don't believe that doing Lilith work is about sexuality per se, but reaching into the part of us which doesn't differentiate our sexual nature from our overall nature.

Lilith's story in particular myths is a container cultures retain in order to keep the energy out of the mainstream, at bay. No doubt the collective understands containing it necessary to its survival. But no matter how hard a culture works, there will always be each energy in existence flowing through all people.⁴ The danger in Lilith energy to the culture is if individuals get in touch with it inside themselves, as then individuals would rely more on their instinctual nature, in all likelihood bringing them to see that certain ways they participate in society don't do them any good. Admission of Lilith in ourselves will in this kind of culture lead to the urge to drop out (or sabotage it, if the influence of anger or desire for vengeance outweighs the primacy of the fact of the individual's freedom to leave), which society does everything it can to prevent. The red herring nature of the three Liliths warning and the promotion of the mean BML position over that of the true position feel to me to be subconscious diversions stemming from the collective. The more time I spend working on this archetype, the more I connect with the threat individuals owning this part of themselves pose to society, and the less ready I perceive the society feels itself to be for people to truly embrace this part of themselves. But here's something: No society is ever ready to admit, recognize or confront Lilith.

⁴ A key point about the benefits of studying astrology is that it is an arena in which to learn to see that since each person has each body and point in the natal chart, each person contains to some degree all the energy available to us as humans. Each of us is running the same energy. From the counseling perspective, it's useful to note that each person can be taught to find any of the energies we speak of in astrology; a person meek from past abuse can be helped to locate and vivify his Mars, even if when presenting as a client it seems totally absent, etc.

Her aims run counter to a society's, and the level to which we're suppressed (we've bought into the suppression) indicates the level of cultural, social and religious conditioning we've accepted.

On the individual level, I often see people ready to and looking in some form to deal with this energy. For these people there is neither an outlet nor (usually) a support structure available to them, and procession can be cautious, if at all maintained once begun. The manifestations of the beginning of this process I see in clients often are shame and anger stemming from pain. These are garnered from personal sexual or creative experiences of varying kinds, the sexual and creative experiences of family members and friends (whether the native is conscious of it or not), and the mores and taboos of the society. In other words, the negative manifestations of Lilith experiences are due to pain and result in shame and anger at the surrounding structures that seem to have caused the pain. Always there is the experience, had or witnessed, of the individual being treated in a hurtful way for being what he or she naturally is because it cannot be controlled, and always at the hand of a group or individuals acting out the fears and taboos of a group. The pain associated with the story of Lilith that we're all carrying is so buried that we act it out by the oblique, indirect mandate of the group; no one understands how to take responsibility for their portion of the energy so the expression is often careless and confused.⁵

The construction of the myth as a vehicle to explain the energy, to create a justification for the energy, is rather transparent. The Hebrew version has Adam created from dust, while Lilith is created from sediment (or filth, perceived to be filth). Her perspective is that they are equals; they are each made from the earth. His position is that they are not equals, that she is made from inferior material and therefore inferior. Wait a minute – just what is sediment? Dirt and other organic material that's been mixed with and transported by water, air and ice – earth that's been mixed with and transported by other organic features of our planet. Regardless of the connotations of sediment to Adam and Judaism, it can be useful to us today: Sediment is *earth plus*, that's seen more of the world and is settling back to offer something new to where it lands.

The evidence of an equal being standing in front of you cannot be reasonably denied, and yet this is what this myth serves to do (or rather, it tries to escape reason entirely, refusing to submit to it). We are in effect told that a being made from the same material as Adam/man is not equal to him, and that as a mate, only a being made *from* him is acceptable. The reason that Eve is acceptable is of course because there is no possibility that she will expect to be treated as an equal. Eve knows her place and that she owes it to Adam's existence.

⁵ Sexual violence of all kinds fits here, whether rape or other violence rooted in sexual issues or themes, or sexual expression touching the borders of the darkest territory inside us. In some of us Lilith is always seeking expression, while others of us are triggered by changes in consciousness (related to transits, progressions or solar arcs) to find avenues of expression. The prevalence of sexual violence has at its root a link to the fact that we don't know what to do with this and other natural, aggressive parts of ourselves.

Lilith, as the first woman, is the mother of women, and Eve is the plastic stepmother introduced as an example to women of what society will tolerate in the form of a woman.⁶ The sticky part is that women are not Eve; women are not created from a portion of men. Men and women are humans, the same species; each is conceived and born in the same way from the same genetic material. And it turns out that you can't convince people of that kind of garbage for very long. It's been just a few thousand years and we're waking up quickly. We can internalize all the red herrings, keep ourselves focused on how we *should* be, but people will always have access to their own true natures.

When clients with a sensitivity to Lilith issues around them come in, I encourage them to begin with themselves in order to get to know the energy. It's often easier to see difficult things in others first. Locating in the self the willingness to look into this space is the first step, since we don't have a lot of positive, culturally sanctioned examples of people taking this journey, and since this archetype about being true to the self, each person has to get there on his own.

Multiple Liliths

I haven't been drawn to work with the Dark Moon, but have been tossing around an idea with the asteroid Lilith (1181). I offer it here as a potential starting point to investigate the relationship between the two: Is the BML our personal connection (associated with the Moon) to the enormity of the suppression and the related mass feelings about it and our capacity to express it, while the asteroid represents a more conscious, and therefore manageable, doorway into understanding?

I wonder if the expression related to the asteroid is easier to deal with, by the very nature of the difference between an asteroid (a body in the sky we can locate) and the empty focus of the Moon's orbit (something we can never see and associated with the dark side of the Moon, also never visible from Earth). Astrologically, we understand how to deal with asteroids; some of us work with a bunch of them and we're generally primed these days to talk about them. The dark side of the Moon, however, has no parallel in our work and thinking.

In this line of thought, transits, progressions and solar arcs to the BML would present urges and opportunities to explode context in significant ways, while those to the asteroid Lilith would work on a more manageable level and, perhaps, be more socially or outwardly oriented, or philosophical or intellectual. I'm thinking of the asteroid in a way as superficial, but I'm not implying that it's not useful or worthy of attention. Only that as the way is paved for an asteroid, the message it brings might be more likely to be more digestible.

⁶ Use of the mean BML is an echo of the preference of Eve over Lilith, of controlled(/-able) blandness over an unpredictable aliveness: the true BML gives us trouble in her erratic travel, just as Lilith gave Adam; the true BML is unmanageable, just as Adam found Lilith. The mean position will never offer meaningful and useful insights into the true nature of Lilith, as Eve can tell you nothing meaningful or useful about Lilith.