

Lost In Translation: Artemis and Dionysus in Love

Bob Roan

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Robert.Roan@post.harvard.edu

Lost in Translation is a story of love between Dionysus and Artemis. Bob Harris, a burned out pitchman for alcoholic beverages, and the girl-woman Charlotte meet in the Tokyo wilderness where they discover the true ecstasy of Dionysus and Artemis and have a tragic, hopeful, erotic and non genital love affair.

Although Tokyo is a teeming and sophisticated metropolis, it functions in this movie as the wilderness. This points out that the wilderness is not a geographic place but a state of mind. Not understanding the language and feeling a strange culture can make anyplace seem like unexplored wilderness. On the other hand, the places we normally think of as wilderness are also teeming with life (just not human) and make complete sense to the animals that live there even if human civilization has not yet put its imprint on them. Sometimes the lights of Tokyo are clear in the movie, but they are also frequently as fuzzy and blurry as the characters' psyches. The billboards on the sides of buildings show Bob Harris drinking and beckoning the people below to join him. They are reminiscent of Dionysus calling people to join him in reverie on the side of the mountain.

Characters with more civilized energies such as those of Apollo and Athena would have difficulty in this environment. However, Artemis and Dionysus are at home in the wilderness and know how to make their way through its mysteries. This was demonstrated in a hospital scene (59:55 to 1:02:43) when Bob took Charlotte to have her foot examined. Although nobody spoke English to them, they were able to trust this wilderness' healing ability. Bob's essentially playful nature let him connect and play with a man in the waiting room (1:01:10 to 1:02:24) with whom

he could not converse with words and Charlotte was able to sense the quiet sincerity of the Japanese speaking doctor and learn what she needed to know about her foot (1:01:01 to 1:02:33.)

Dionysus makes his first appearance as Bob Harris rides into Tokyo from the airport and sees a billboard of himself taking a drink (2:07.) When his car pulls up to the hotel, he is greeted by a group of Japanese (2:32 – 2:54) who will be his followers, both literally and figuratively, during his stay. They engage in the ritual of exchanging cards and giving him gifts.

The scene (1:17) in which Bob is riding into town from the airport introduces us to a major theme of the movie. This scene shows him as completely without energy, emotionally dead to the world. We see this lethargy repeatedly. He is sphinx-like during the photo shoot (8:49), frequently lies sprawled and motionless on his bed, and sits motionlessly watching television. There is also a scene (17:11 to 18:50) in which a woman has been sent to him and he is absolutely unresponsive to her entreaties. All of these events, and particularly the last one, demonstrate that the energy is gone from his current Dionysian persona.

Bob's challenge is to revitalize his Dionysian energy. His way of being Dionysus has frozen in a method that worked when he was younger and could party in endless drunken orgies. As he has grown older and his life situation has changed, this way has grown stale and unworkable. He explains to Charlotte that he and Lydia used to have a lot of fun and laughs (1:11:10) but Lydia has now changed and her loyalties are to the children. Instead of exploring new aspects of Dionysus, Bob has stayed in the old literalization and tried to force a marriage of convenience with Lydia, his Hestian and Hera like wife whose personalized stationary is adorned with a picture of a lamb, or perhaps a wolf in sheep's clothing.

Even in Tokyo, Hestia, in the form of Lydia, hounds him. She makes her first appearance (3:14) with a note telling him he forgot his son's birthday, adding that she is "sure he'll

understand” and an instruction to “have a good trip.” This combines Hestia’s natural concern for the children with a Hera-like manipulative vindictiveness and a characterization of him as someone who can enjoy himself even while his relationships with those he loves are dissolving. Lydia follows this up with a 4:20 AM fax (5:57) asking him to select the shelves for his study, mentioning she is having “lots of quality time with the construction crew” and the hope “you’re having fun.” Here again she is both Hestia building the home and Hera attempting to manipulate him into feelings of insecurity about her relationships with other men. Her hope that he is enjoying himself again addresses him as someone only interested in a good time, even while his wife may be having an affair.

Later (42:28), Lydia sends him a Fed Ex package containing carpet samples and asking him to choose one for his study. She expresses her fondness for burgundy and suggests that whatever he wants will be fine with her, a suggestion he is insightful enough to ignore. In a subsequent (55:24 – 57:26) phone conversation with Lydia, he relates to both her Hestia and Hera aspects. He complements her for her choice of rug color and talks a lot about the houses he has seen and visited and how much she would like them. Then he adopts a Zeusian tone as he instructs, through Lydia, his daughter to eat something. The topic of fun comes up again and he explains it isn’t fun, just different. Lydia thanks him for “checking in” and hangs up before he can tell her he loves her, which is probably the reason he called.

Later (1:19:31 to 1:21:28) Lydia calls to inform him that the burgundy carpet is out of stock and the conversation makes a big turn when he informs her that he is “completely lost” in life. Her Hera nature gets very threatened when he tells her he wants to radically change his diet from “all the pasta” to light Japanese food and she suggests he just stay in Japan and eat it every day. Bob tries to bring it back to Hestia’s territory by asking about the children, but she can’t

resist telling him they are getting used to him not being around. Lydia finishes in her Hera persona when she asks if she needs to be worried about him, to which Bob responds “only if you want to.” She clearly doesn’t want to and shows the depth of shallowness in their relationship by responding that she’s “got things to do” more important than caring for him and they terminate the conversation.

Bob’s interactions with Lydia show how much he wants a home life and how far he is from having one. His willingness to capitulate to her and have the conversations in her territory is a failure because he does not belong in that territory. There is finally some hope at the end when he realizes he cannot go on giving in to her and announces that he wants to start living a more healthy life.

Bob Harris frequently sees himself on billboards with Japanese text or in old movies with Japanese subtitles. This juxtaposition of his own image into a larger context which he cannot read or understand accentuates the alienation he feels from the life context in which he currently finds himself.

It seems that everyone but Bob knows who he is. He is greeted by all the people he passes in the hotel lobby (3:40.) Two men recognize him in the bar (4:54.) He makes a television appearance in Japan (1:17:49 to 1:19:02) with a flamboyant and gaudy talk show host. Not only can’t he understand the host (he’s probably almost used to this by now) but the entire set and feel of the show is about as alien as possible from Bob’s sensibilities. The male host’s striped pink and blue suit is a stark contrast to the subdued colors which characterize the rest of the movie.

Bob is also alienated from his work. He is being paid two million dollars for a one week job posing for a liquor ad, which makes absolutely no sense. During the photo shoot he cannot understand any of the Japanese being spoken. His translator summarizes a 30 second (8:57 –

9:27) instruction in Japanese from the director into “He wants you to turn and look into the camera” (9:33) giving Bob the distinct feeling he has missed something. Bob’s short response to this direction is then turned into a long Japanese statement by his translator.

In a second photo shoot, the director asks bob for a more mysterious face (21:40.) When he learns that Bob is a movie star (21:58) he asks him to adopt the personae of other movie stars, many of them notorious drunks (The Rat Pack, Dean Martin et al.) Although they hired Bob for who he is (a famous actor) they are just as interested in his ability to be who he isn’t, a situation he finds has taken over his life.

Charlotte introduces Bob to a Dionysian side of himself of which he was previously unaware. They race through a video arcade (46:30) which, with its shoot ‘em up theme, is reminiscent of Dionysian orgies of death and destruction. Fortunately it is only the energy, and not the reality, so they emerge unscathed back into the streets of Tokyo where they connect again with their friends. Soon they are in a Karaoke room (48:29) where Bob, in a structured and musical form of Dionysian revelry, articulates a question that may be at the root of his alienation when he becomes Elvis Costello and asks (49:30) “what’s so funny about peace, love and understanding?”

Charlotte, who has until now had long brown hair, is mysteriously wearing a short and sexy platinum blond wig which clearly announces Aphrodite’s presence in their relationship. In her turn at Karaoke, she becomes Blondie and announces that she is “special” and will do whatever it takes to be noticed. Bob’s last song is a love song which they both eventually realize is about them and the scene ends with them sitting outside with Charlotte’s head on bob’s shoulder. An episode that began with Artemis and Dionysus running with wild abandon through

the wild has shifted to a different type of emotional abandon that can recognize and experience love.

Aphrodite's energy is present throughout the movie. The movie starts by showing the sensuous buttocks of a young girl clad in flimsy pink underwear. We might conclude that this young girl is Charlotte; both because she is the only substantial female character and because there is some similarity between the top worn by this girl and the tops later worn by Charlotte. However, we never see this girl's face, so such a conclusion, although tempting, is not warranted nor intended. We are probably meant to wonder.

A manifestation of Aphrodite appears in two separate characters. One is Kelly, a bubbly airhead starlet who has come to Japan to promote an action movie she has just completed. She is an old acquaintance of Charlotte's husband John and bumps into Charlotte and John in the hotel lobby (26:27.) She has long blond hair, plenty of make up and a sexy red top while Artemis-Charlotte is dressed in an outfit that would win approval in a Catholic Girls' High School. John, who had just been giving detached nods of comforting agreement to Charlotte, is easily engaged with Kelly. Her infatuation with herself is infectious and John seems to welcome the chance to move from emotional engagement to bubbling trivialities and multiple "yeahs." Aphrodite-Kelly makes no disguise of her disapproval when John introduces Charlotte as his wife and immediately tells John that he is her favorite photographer, clearly a big sign of intimacy for Aphrodite, to whom image is essential.

As Charlotte watches all this, she looks on John as if she has no idea who he is (27:25.) After Kelly leaves, Charlotte reasserts herself in the only way she seems to have left. She points out one of Kelly's stupid statements (27:46.) John, in an indication of his conflict between

Artemis and Aphrodite, then defends Kelly (“she’s nice”) and criticizes Charlotte for the way she uses her schooling (“not everyone went to Yale.”)

There is another similar scene where Kelly is sharing anorexia stories with John (37:26 to 38:10.) He is totally engaged, while Charlotte rolls her eyes.

The other Aphrodite is the singer in the hotel bar (4:24, 23:50, 37:10 and 1:22:24.) There are only three times she is not singing. There is no singer when Bob and Charlotte talk for the first time (32:00.) This lets their Artemis and Dionysian energies establish their own relationship without any outside influence. This is also one of the few times Charlotte wears anything red (she is a very sensible girl on the surface.) A second time Kelly, the other Aphrodite, takes the place of the bar singer (1:05:36) in an example of their archetypal interchangeability. The third time (1:27:46) there is a male singer while Bob and Charlotte realize how much in love they are. There is enough of Aphrodite’s energy between them and no room for any more.

Charlotte’s Artemis energy shows in her dress, her disinterest in boys, discomfort with culture and fearlessness in nature and the wilderness of Tokyo. Charlotte usually wears very subdued, practical and unrevealing clothes. Although she probably has sexual relations with her husband, she starts to see him and his friends as boys and loses interest in them (24:10 to 25:05 and 38:19 to 38:30.) She even tells a friend that she “doesn’t know who I married” (13:49.) Archetypes don’t “know” each other, so this is a sign Charlotte is moving out of an empty personal relationship and into the archetype before she can reemerge into a new energy configuration. Although Charlotte’s Artemis nature is emerging, John doesn’t have the proper Dionysian energy. He is still an immature party boy, enchanted by the energies of people like Kelly. When he is given a gift of champagne by the people he is working for, he gives it to Charlotte, but doesn’t have the time or energy to share this Dionysian feast with her.

Charlotte has no interest in pop culture as represented by Kelly's action movie and the rock band which John came to Japan to photograph (15:21 to 15:50.) She also spends some time watching boys play in a video game arcade (35:31 to 36:29.) She observes them from a distance but is not taken in by their fascination.

We see her nature energy when she stumbles into a group of traditionally dressed Japanese women in a flower arranging class (29:35 to 30:42.) She also uses the subway to explore Tokyo and ends up in a Buddhist temple (12:03 to 13:13) in a journey similar to the way Artemis might roam the wilderness and visit her temples. Charlotte returns to her Artemis temple later where she passes a group of young uniformed school girls (1:14:15) who remind us of temple priestesses. A little while later she sees a wedding party (1:14:47.) If this is Artemis' temple, then this can only be a symbolic marriage of the goddess, and Charlotte is taken (1:15:04) by the quiet modesty and elegance of the wedding party, which is in sharp contrast to her current marital situation.

There is a rivalry between Artemis and Aphrodite for the two men, Bob and John. Charlotte and Kelly compete for John and Charlotte loses Bob to the bar singer for a night. Bob is very upset when he wakes up in the morning and realizes what he has done (1:22:36.) Although sexual relations with a stranger met in a bar may seem very Dionysian, Dionysus was faithful to Ariadne, his one love. Bob's discomfort with his liaison is an indication he is moving out of a shallow version of Dionysus into something deeper.

Bob is so wild that Aphrodite, a frequent choice of wild people, can't do it for him. He needs a woman of the psychic wilderness. Although Bob gave into Aphrodite for a night, he regrets it and clearly belongs to Artemis. Charlotte comes to his door and discovers what has happened and later (1:24:34) seems disappointed that Bob didn't have sexual relations with her

instead of the singer, but that would have dramatically changed the nature of their relationship. Dionysus is faithful to his wife and Bob and Charlotte are both married. Genital sex would have turned their spiritual relationship into an affair.

This is a story of the connection of the very wild natures of two people. Bob Harris starts out as Dionysus the drunk, but ends up as Dionysus the wild, who leads a young girl away from her husband and on a romp through the wilds (of Tokyo.) They are both married, but Dionysus called them from their respectable lives. Dionysus calls for the night and then the women return to their regular lives. Bob and Charlotte, though tempted to stay together, are also returning to their regular lives. No one would understand that one night. It's even more mysterious than if they had sex with each other. That would be easier to understand, less of a threat, than what really happened.

The phrase "Lost in Translation" can refer to what we miss when we have an unknown explained to us. It can also refer to the sense of being lost when an archetype is being translated from one type of energy to another. Bob's Dionysian archetype was changing from drunk to true ecstatic and Charlotte was learning to combine her Artemis and Aphrodite energies in a way that was more true to her nature. This movement involves a step into what the Tibetan Book of the Dead refers to as a bardo, which is a gap between two psychic places. Bob and Charlotte were each lost in that gap and that's where they found each other.