

Snachismo, or: What Do Women Want?

By Athena Andreadis

Even before hormones signaled my entry into the arena of sex, I had a sinking feeling whenever I contemplated relationships with the opposite gender. I had cause to be worried: I grew up in Greece during the sixties. At that time, the culture was as close as you could get to Islamic outside the Middle East. It approved of strong women – but its definition of female strength was endurance and constant giving. Both the Hellenic and Byzantine legacies of my people were solidly arrayed against uppity women, ready to strike, confine and prune.

So there I was, bright, science-oriented, competitive, unfeminine, demanding equal treatment, expecting my future partners to be both lovers and friends... blessed, too (or should it be cursed?) with my father's unstinting love, as well as his frank appetites and eye for beauty in everything. Glumly contemplating the thorny path before me, I frequently complained to him for bequeathing the wrong chromosome to the zygote that produced me. A pragmatic man with a strong streak of defiant aloneness, he was unrepentant. The fourth of five brothers with no sister, he was ecstatic that his single child was a daughter to whom he could give the name of the mother they lost too early in a terrible accident – even though he had to fight with the priests, because the name was pagan (there was no separation of church and state in Greece at that time).

I took an obvious path out of my difficulties. I left Greece the moment I could, an escape made possible by a Harvard scholarship. There were other reasons to leave, granted: Greece was a military dictatorship at the time, there was no scientific research going on there to speak of... but in the back of my mind, the question of partners lay like a sleeping dragon.

The first thing I did when I arrived in Cambridge and dropped my luggage on my dorm bed was to open a bank account. The second was to visit the student health services and ask for contraceptives. Those were the halcyon days after the Pill and before AIDS, when for one brief shining moment the act of love did not come festooned with punitive legal or medical strings. The dorms were co-educational, and my experiments in the domain of love were as eager, extensive and adventurous as they were in my courses.

About thirty years and fifty men later (counting short-term encounters), I think I'm finally ready to answer Freud's burning question: What Do Women Want? I do not purport to answer on behalf of my entire gender. But I can unequivocally say what I want in my men and to put it in a soundbite, the answer is: Snachismo.

What, do you ask, is snachismo? It is a seamless fusion of snugglability and machismo. Those of you who read excerpts of my story *Spider Silk* saw snachismo embodied in the Koredháni men. For those who didn't, I will briefly explain the concept.

To avoid confusion, I should point out right away that a snacho man is entirely distinct from a Byronic demon lover, a much more common type to whom many women are fatally attracted – sometimes literally, since many in this subgroup start as Heathcliffes and end up as wife beaters.

All the dark brooders found in bodice rippers, including (alas!) Jane Eyre's Mr. Rochester, are not snacho. Neither are alpha males or the so-called strong silent types.

So now that we know what is not snacho, let's see if I can give you the gist of what is. A snacho man is physically, emotionally, intellectually adult. A snacho man, unlike an alpha male, gives his primary allegiance to his partner, not to other men. He actually likes women as people and is not afraid of them as partners or lovers – which means that, in contradistinction to the Byronic brooder, he has no need to dominate or play mindgames and is neither squeamish nor a prude in bed. Nor does he consider it unmanly to laugh, cry, be affectionate or express emotions beyond just anger (using words, not grunts or fists).

These are the primary irreducible attributes of snachismo. They may sound simple and easy but apparently are not, since few men achieve them. Several secondary attributes tend to arise from these. Given the pressure on both genders to conform to social stereotyping, a snacho man is likely to be a maverick and possess an unusual measure of both bravery and dash – an untamed wildcat, not a penned cattlebeast. He is also likely to have more than one active vocation or talent, and at least one in a domain considered not traditionally masculine. So a snacho man will have aspects of the bard, the storyteller, the contrary, the sorcerer, the shaman – roles that today's men have largely abandoned in their apparent frenetic quest to become cubicle rats.

A scholarly essay must, of course, give examples... and not surprisingly, I didn't find obvious snacho candidates among most mainstream fiction. But I can name a few in science fiction: Dominic Harlech, aka Niki Falcon in Emma Bull's *Falcon*; Radu Drac in Vonda McIntyre's *Aztecs* and *Superluminal*; the Servitors in Sheri Tepper's *The Gate to Women's Country* – who turn out to be the real men, rather than the so-called Warriors. And off the top of my head, I can think of four in film: Trevor Goodchild (Marton Csokas) in the film version of *Aeon Flux*; Sam Gillen (Jean Claude van Damme, who would have thunk!) in *Nowhere to Run*; Rob Roy McGregor (Liam Neeson) in *Rob Roy*; and, of course, Hawkeye (Daniel Day Lewis) in *The Last of the Mohicans*. In that film, what pinpoints him as the quintessence of snachismo is not his undemonstrative bravery, the many skills, the untameable beauty, the way he makes love (though they all help!). The unmistakable signal is when Cora takes out her musket during the ambush by the Iroquois – and instead of telling her that ladies don't do that kind of thing, he hands her his gunpowder pouch.

So what about me? Well, thirteen years ago someone looked at me across a room. He had copper hair to his waist and the most intelligent eyes I have ever seen. A month after our meeting he showed up at my doorstep with his toothbrush and moved in. Suffice it to say that he fulfills all the attributes of snachismo, both primary and secondary... so there is hope after all.

Credit must go to Peter Cassidy, who coined the term "snacho". My thanks to Jester for pointing out that Liam Neeson as Rob Roy perfectly fit the snachismo model. This article may not be used for profit, must be reproduced with no changes, editing, or additions whatsoever, and must be accompanied by the following copyright notice: Copyright © 2006 by Athena Andreadis. All rights reserved.