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“Get My Revenge On”: The Anti-Hero’s Journey in *Veronica Mars* **Paul Zinder**

The relationships in Veronica Mars’s life shape her into a character who thrives on adversity, particularly when a threat befalls someone she loves (or has loved). Veronica’s confidence in her ability to solve the problems of others is driven by her own intelligence, which she trusts to solve puzzles laid in front of her. A reading of the narrative structure of select episodes from the three seasons of *Veronica Mars*, however, reveals a protagonist who battles the main players in her immediate domain, including those closest to her, as often as she does traditional “villains,” exposing the truth of a weary existence. By the end of the series, her approach to such challenges makes her a tragic archetype, a figure whose actions never satisfy her own psychological needs. While her quests in the series’ stand-alone mysteries are often undertaken for weaker individuals, they are not always altruistic. Frequently, self-involvement rules her choices, each mission formulated to draw her closer to the life she seeks, one with a caring mother and a moral community, one that can never exist. The final episode of *Veronica Mars*, in fact, leaves her defeated and defined by a selfish decision to earn personal retribution for the tattering of her reputation at the expense of the person she loves the most, her father Keith Mars (“The Bitch is Back,” 3.20). This irrevocable act individualizes Veronica Mars as a specific kind of character.

Joseph Campbell defines the hero as one with “strength, cleverness, and wisdom” and an “extraordinary capacity . . . to face and survive [each] experience” (*The Hero* 327). Although she manifests numerous characteristics of the archetypal hero, Veronica’s isolation from her peer group tags her an outcast and her overt rebellion against the social hierarchy defines her reality, which marks her more appropriately an anti-hero (Vogler 42). She does not necessarily, however, deflect audience sympathies during her quest. The following close-reading of *Veronica Mars* reveals that many of its protagonist’s decisions classify her teenage journey as that of a postmodern anti-hero. Veronica Mars is fallible, relatable, and human, which leaves the audience wanting more as she recedes from the camera in the rain and her image fades to black for the final time in the series (3.20).

As the female teenager of a single dad, *Veronica Mars*’ titular character does not abide by Joseph Campbell’s frequent relegation of a woman to the role of the “mother” and “protectress of the hero” (*The Hero’s Journey* 93).¹ In fact, Veronica’s function and achievements in many of the jobs undertaken by Mars Investigations equal those of her father. Major narrative arcs in the series define her hero’s journey. Using Campbell’s terminology, the first season of the series represents Veronica’s “Departure”, the second her “Initiation”, and the third her “Return.” As a postmodern anti-hero, however, her Return does not prove triumphant.

Departure of a Former 09er: Veronica’s Quest

“If you’re like me, you just keep chasing the storm.”
--Veronica Mars in “Meet John Smith” (1.3)

In season one of *Veronica Mars*, the murder of Veronica’s best friend Lilly Kane obsesses her and catalyzes her initial call to adventure (Pilot). As the homicide occurred months before the narrative present of the series’ pilot, Veronica’s character has already experienced a seismic shift in her societal station when the show launches. Her former self, a happy and proud

member of the “09ers,” the most popular of Neptune High School’s in-crowd, was fortunate enough to be the daughter of the local sheriff, Keith Mars, and the girlfriend of Duncan Kane, the son of one of the wealthiest and most respected of the town’s citizens (Pilot). Lilly’s murder, the arrest of a questionable suspect, Duncan’s rejection, and Veronica’s father’s very public downfall from his position of authority make her an outsider in her own peer group, a prerequisite in the development of an anti-hero (Vogler 41).

Joseph Campbell notes that a hero’s removal from her “center of gravity . . . to a zone unknown” signals a “call to adventure” (*The Hero* 58). Veronica’s new persona, one of a cynical, unpopular teenager who doesn’t “know what’s true anymore” (“Credit Where Credit’s Due,” 1.2), is partially rooted in feelings of betrayal due to her mother’s disappearance shortly after Keith’s removal from office. As Veronica says, “the best way to dull the pain of your best friend’s murder is to have your mother abandon you as soon as possible” (“You Think You Know Somebody,” 1.5). Had these personal tragedies not occurred, the series offers no reason to conclude that Veronica wouldn’t have remained an average teen content to “talk on the phone and paint [her] nails like the other girls” (“Normal is the Watchword,” 2.1). Instead, Veronica takes it upon herself to “bring this family back together” (Pilot), by choosing to depart on a personal journey of discovery (*The Hero* 58), leading to the crushing disappointment of Lianne Mars’ repeated lapse into alcoholism and duplicity (“Leave it to Beaver,” 1.22).

As with most heroes, Veronica’s subconscious accosts her as she undertakes her initial journey (*The Hero* 55). The narrative composition of *Veronica Mars*’ first season utilizes both flashback and dream sequences as equally important indicators of Veronica’s unconscious thought and of the challenges that lie before her. In the series pilot, scenes that catalyze Veronica’s stubborn pursuit of the truth are introduced in a heavily-filtered (mind-altered) visual style pronouncing each moment a facet of Veronica’s larger memory. Duncan’s unceremonious (and unexplained) rejection of Veronica occurs near the Neptune High lockers, filmed through a dark blue filter as overexposed backlight shines in the far distance, as though Veronica’s happiness sits just out of her reach. The hue covering the flash of Lilly’s pronouncement that “I’ve got a secret, a good one” is a softer blue, and accentuates the golden highlights in Lilly and Veronica’s hair, making them angelic spirits of the past. When Veronica awakens in flashback to find herself a victim of sexual assault, a counterintuitive high-contrast cheerful yellow light mocks her despair, as she weeps quietly in the morning sun. The harsh blue filter returns when Sheriff Lamb dismisses her reported rape in his office, in images whose clarity confirms his infuriating incompetence (1.1). A unique visual strategy transfigures each of Veronica’s retrospections, separating the scenes from her current reality, which lends them an otherworldly (unconscious) significance.

Veronica’s discovery of her mother’s relationship with Jake Kane makes her wonder if she has engaged in incest with ex-boyfriend Duncan Kane (“The Girl Next Door,” 1.7), which denotes a situation that Campbell might label “the herald” that “sound[s] the call to some high historical undertaking” (*The Hero* 51). Later in the first season, the audience is informed of the whereabouts of Lilly’s parents on the night of her murder through Veronica’s scattered memories of a conversation with her drunken mother in a roadside bar (“Betty and Veronica,” 1.16). In these scenes, which are framed by a stand-alone mystery involving Neptune High’s stolen mascot, Veronica’s vocal quality evokes both a young child (“You should have seen me last night . . . We had an ‘80s dance at school”) and her mother’s superior (“I know about you and Jake Kane”). Whether Veronica sits across from Lianne in the grimy pub’s booth or stands next to her against an oppressively lit wall as her mother smokes, images from the conversation

continue to interrupt Veronica's daily activity, as though they need further review (1.16). These individual flashbacks demonstrate the potency of the hero's subconscious (*The Hero* 72), ultimately completing the whole of Veronica's latest discovery: that accused murderer Abel Koontz has a daughter that he may be trying to save ("Betty and Veronica," 1.16).

The complex story design of "A Trip to the Dentist" encompasses flashbacks that imbue Veronica's visual mind with several points-of-view, as multiple characters afford her with differing eyewitness accounts of the events leading to her alleged sexual assault at Shelly Pomeroy's party the previous year (1.21). Campbell notes that during the hero's Departure, "regions of the unknown . . . are free fields for the projection of unconscious content [including] incestuous *libido*" (*The Hero* 79). As Veronica was drugged during this encounter, her experience "forgotten," the personal ramifications tied to the truth (including whether or not she was raped and whether she slept with Duncan, who she fears may be her half-brother) depend solely on her ability to tie pieces of the disparate tales together in her mind's eye, her "detective work . . . a method of regaining control of her environment" (Martaus 77). Ultimately, the revelation that Duncan and she had consensual sex offers little immediate comfort, though this investigation eventually impacts significant psychological revelations, most notably the welcome proof that Keith is her biological father, final substantiation that she hasn't engaged in an incestuous relationship ("Leave it to Beaver," 1.22).

Dream also plays a role in Veronica's Departure. The specter of Lilly hangs over the entire first season, appearing in flashback form in several episodes (including: "Credit Where Credit's Due" [1.2], "The Wrath of Con" [1.4], "The Girl Next Door" [1.7], etc.). Her ghostly presence also appears in Veronica's dreams, as the hero's "guide" (*The Hero* 55) in "Kanes and Abel's," when she (correctly) informs Veronica that her parents aren't murderers (1.17), and as a "protecting power" (*The Hero* 71) when she warns Veronica of future suffering by insisting, "you know how things are going to be, don't you" ("Leave it to Beaver," 1.22)?²

Veronica Mars' first season finale provides its protagonist with obstacles that challenge her known experience. Veronica's discovery of videotapes that implicate Aaron Echols as the lover of Lilly Kane forces her to brave conventional boundaries (*The Hero* 82), as his status of fame and power make him too influential an entity to be taken lightly as a suspect in Lilly's murder. The danger inherent in her climactic physical confrontation with Aaron is visualized in the violent sequence in which he traps Veronica in a refrigerator and sets the area aflame ("Leave it to Beaver" 1.22). According to Campbell, the hero, at this stage in her Departure, "instead of conquering or conciliating the power . . . is swallowed into the unknown, and would appear to have died" (*The Hero* 90). Keith's arrival to save his daughter implies the truth of her limited strength (she is a teenager, after all) and becomes a harbinger of future events ("Leave it to Beaver," 1.22). By the end of the first season, Veronica is shaken and weakened by her adventure, and unknowingly prepared to be victimized.

Neptune High Initiation: Kidnapping, Rape, and Murder

"I was wondering where we were drawing the ethical line this year."

--Wallace Fennel in "Normal is the Watchword" (2.1)

Veronica Mars contains several major narrative arcs that Campbell might have described as events "where [the hero] must survive a succession of trials" (*The Hero* 97). During the show's second season, the mystery surrounding the bus accident ("Normal is the Watchword,"

2.1), the disclosure (and eventual impact) of Duncan's impending fatherhood ("My Mother, the Fiend," 2.9), and the confirmation that Cassidy Casablancas is a rapist and murderer ("Not Pictured," 2.22), form part of Veronica's Initiation period as a hero. Her responses to certain challenges complicate her heroic character, however, and test audience sympathies. As an anti-hero, Veronica does not experience her "perilous journey into the darkness" (*The Hero* 101) without fiddling with her moral compass.

Although one could argue that Lianne Mars's desertion of her family denotes personality flaws that bestowed upon her daughter the cynicism of an anti-hero (Vogler 41), Veronica's private inquiry regarding her mother's high school suspension in "My Mother, the Fiend" (2.9) generates an unexpected outcome. One of the hero's goals during her Initiation phase is to find "the 'bad' mother . . . the absent, unattainable mother" (*The Hero* 111). In fact, Veronica insists to Keith that she just needs "a little proof that my mom was a good person" ("My Mother, the Fiend" 2.9). Although Veronica discovers that Lianne's suspension was due to her defense of Mary Mooney, the deaf lunch-lady who as a student became pregnant with the child of the Vice Principal at Neptune High, her behavior during this pursuit remains instructive. Veronica's health class assignment in "My Mother, the Fiend" makes her the "mother" of an animatronic baby, and her frequent disregard for her own "progeny" throughout the episode echoes that of her mother for her (2.9).³

Veronica's risky embrace of anti-hero territory in "Donut Run" (2.11) also relates to a baby's welfare. After Meg Manning dies from injuries sustained in the bus accident, leaving Duncan the single-father of the baby dubbed "Faith" by Meg's fundamentalist parents, Veronica assists Duncan in the kidnapping of his own child (2.11). Veronica's wide experience in skirting rules usually serves as an indicator of her high intelligence as well as her remarkable (and often admirable) ability to conquer societal barriers. The emotional power of the narrative construction of "Donut Run," however, reminds the audience that Veronica remains at times a selfish teenager, one who is willing to hurt others by inviting risks she believes worthwhile.

An anti-hero dismisses directives by the governors of the social order (Vogler 42). Veronica misinforms the civil agencies (including the sheriff's department and the FBI) of her knowledge of Duncan's whereabouts. Her disregard for her own father throughout "Donut Run" (2.11), however, specifies an important moment in her (anti)hero's Initiation. Campbell notes that conflict between father and offspring is crucial in the Initiation phase of a hero's journey, as the knowledge attained during this experience serves the child in moving to a place of authority (*The Hero* 136). Veronica's contempt for certain power figures in the status quo, however, defines her anti-hero status (Vogler 42) and informs her everyday activity (as seen in her counterattacks on the Kanes' security chief Clarence Wiedman in "Silence of the Lamb" [1.11] and "Betty and Veronica" [1.16], in the bugging and duping of Sheriff Lamb in "Blast from the Past" [2.5] and "Donut Run" [2.11], etc.). Her compulsion to save Duncan and his baby places Keith under this umbrella of disdain. Veronica covertly coerces him into two unfamiliar roles - as an investigator who loses the truth, and as the father of a daughter willing to hurt him ("Donut Run," 2.11).

Keith believes that Veronica suffers early in "Donut Run" due to her breakup with Duncan and reminds her that "anything you need, honey, I'm here."⁴ But after Veronica dismisses her arrest and Sheriff Lamb with a snarky comment, Keith slams his hand onto the interrogation table and insists, "this is not a joke . . . What Duncan has done is wrong and if you've helped him in any way you're going to prison. Now shape up!" By employing his parental authority, Keith places the serious accusations leveled against Veronica into proper

perspective. After he finds that she “played” him, his voice quivers as he declares, “it’s not just your life you’re gambling with, Veronica. I would not survive without you.” Keith’s childlike assertion acknowledges Veronica’s diminishing of his patriarchal command (2.11). In fact, Campbell might label this scene “a radical readjustment of [her] emotional relationship to the parental images” (*The Hero* 137), another common attribute of a hero’s phase of Initiation.

Veronica has, however, neglected the “great care on the part of the [hero’s] father” (*The Hero* 133). Her contention that she “had to” betray Keith in “Donut Run” dismisses his claims to the contrary. When Veronica lies to Keith in the interrogation room, she claims that she sold Celeste Kane’s jewelry so that Duncan could hire a lawyer and begin proceedings to adopt his baby, a viable, legal option. Her distrust of both parental facility (Meg Manning’s parents, the baby’s grandparents, are proven abusers [“Nobody Puts Baby in a Corner,” 2.7]) and societal jurisdiction (Neptune’s courts operate as part of “a corrupt justice system” [Martaus 82]) leads her to choose criminal abduction over proper procedure (2.11). Veronica’s perspective on the kidnapping of Duncan’s baby positions her as an archetypal postmodern anti-hero, one who characterizes morality in shades of gray (McWilliams 71; and see Edwards 76). Her actions in “Donut Run” are never again queried in the series, validating her questionable treatment of Keith.

Although Keith’s declaration that he may never trust Veronica again after her deceit is “forgotten by the next episode” (Ramos 109), the emotional impression of the aforementioned father/daughter scene in “Donut Run” (2.11) would surface again in “Not Pictured” (2.22), the second season finale of *Veronica Mars*. The mystery surrounding the school bus accident serves as the season-long plot-arc equivalent to the search for Lilly’s murderer in season one. Keith’s physical absence from the site of Veronica’s climactic rooftop brawl with the rapist/murderer Cassidy “Beaver” Casabancas in “Not Pictured” (2.22) prevents him from assuming a protective role for her as he had in his physical battle with Aaron Echolls the year before (“Leave it to Beaver” 1.22), and serves as an integral component of her Initiation, as she must finally “face the world of specialized adult action” without parental aid (*The Hero* 136). Keith’s “abandonment” of Veronica (Millman 57) in “Not Pictured” actually facilitates her advancement as a hero (2.22).

Veronica’s horror upon believing that Beaver had detonated a bomb aboard Keith’s plane strikes the very heart of her emotional being. As she points a shaking gun at Beaver, Veronica reminds Logan Echolls and the audience of what’s at stake. “He killed my father, he killed everyone on the bus, he raped me!” While Logan’s proclamation that “you’re not a killer, Veronica!” proves accurate, her experience on that rooftop provides her character with imperatives necessary to continue the anti-hero’s journey (“Not Pictured,” 2.22).

Early in “Not Pictured,” Veronica experiences a utopian dream. Lianne stands in the kitchen enjoying a happy breakfast with her husband and daughter. As the sequence continues, Keith appears in his sheriff’s uniform, Veronica meets Wallace for the first time in Neptune High’s hallway (instead of at the flag pole in the series “Pilot”), and Veronica sees Lilly frolicking in front of the Lilly Kane Memorial fountain, all of which validate the sequence as pure fantasy (2.22). This vision elucidates the meaning of Veronica’s second dream in the episode, which emerges as she grieves the loss of her father.

The morning after the horrifying events on the roof of the Neptune Grand Hotel, images again pervade Veronica’s subconscious, appropriate markers for the completion of her Initiation (*The Hero* 121). As she sleeps on Logan’s lap in a classic Pietà position,⁵ Veronica dreams of a happy childhood puppet show performed by Keith. Sitting on a blanket giggling, little girl Veronica listens to her father make goofy noises, a sock-puppet on each of his hands. Bright

morning sun saturates the scene, representative of both a new beginning and a long-ago past (“Not Pictured,” 2.22). The absence of Lianne in Veronica’s latest vision is instructive, as the consideration that her father may have died remains shockingly real, implying her own potential “orphaning.” The significance of the dream relates to one of Keith’s comments in “Donut Run” (2.11), but reverses the figures in power. Can Veronica live without her father? When Keith appears moments later in their apartment in the narrative present and recites dialogue reminiscent of her dream (“Is that breakfast I smell?”), Veronica’s catharsis overcomes her (“Not Pictured,” 2.22).

The anguish Veronica experiences throughout her Initiation phase evinces her continuing development as a hero-figure (*The Hero* 190). However, her refusal to learn from her mistakes, to harness her less desirable qualities, will trigger her final punishment as an anti-hero in the third season of the series.

Return of the Anti-Hero: Defeatist Adolescent Fury

“You don’t care now but holy crap are you going to care when I start to get my revenge on.”
--Veronica Mars in “The Bitch is Back” (3.20)

Season three of *Veronica Mars* deconstructs traits of the archetypical hero’s journey. After her escape from potential defeat at the hands of Cassidy Casablancas and realization that her father avoided the doomed plane bound for Neptune (“Not Pictured,” 2.22), her Return to her teen existence disallows her from experiencing Campbell’s “magic flight” to a society improved by her actions (*The Hero* 197). Christopher Vogler defines this stage in the journey as a time when a “story’s energy” increases again, as a hero’s Return offers the protagonist fresh hardship (193). Veronica’s new daily habitat, Hearst College, simply replaces Neptune High as the crime-ridden center of her universe.

Structurally, *Veronica Mars* changes in season three. Veronica’s major investigations into the murder of Lilly Kane and the bombing of the school bus full of students took the entirety of each of the first two respective seasons to conclude. The serialized nature of the show intertwines individual long-term mysteries with several subplots, making the first and second season finales series pinnacles (“Leave it to Beaver,” 1.22 and “Not Pictured,” 2.22). Two major subplots steer Veronica’s main activities in the third season of the program: the search for the Heart College rapist (“My Big Fat Greek Rush Week,” 3.2) and for the person who shot Dean O’Dell (“Spit & Eggs,” 3.9), which dilutes the narrative substance and impact of each. The closing curtain, “The Bitch is Back” (3.20), the open-ended series finale, punishes Veronica for embracing her anti-hero vocation.

Campbell writes that under normal circumstances, a hero’s Return may be delayed by her questioning of self and refusal to re-engage with the local populace (*The Hero* 193). The hero may decide to retreat from the life she knew before her adventures, allowing her fellow humans to fend for themselves (*The Hero* 218). Veronica abides by an alternate approach, taking inspiration in the demise of another character (*The Hero* 238). Veronica seems remarkably stable after her own near-death experience and the suicide of Beaver Casablancas, and welcomes a return to her informal occupation when tendered her first task at Hearst College.

In “Welcome Wagon” (3.1), Veronica braves the flimsiest season premiere mystery in the history of *Veronica Mars*. Wallace’s new roommate, Piz Piznarski, finds that all of his possessions have been stolen out of his car by a group calling themselves the “Hearst College

Welcome Wagon Committee.” The comical nature of the circumstances epitomizes a common trait of the Return phase of hero-narratives (*The Hero* 197), as the culprit proves to be a college student mentor to three prepubescent thieves (3.1).

Rape again dominates a seasonal subplot, as the Hearst College assailant becomes Veronica’s significant foe (“Spit & Eggs,” 3.9). Her discovery that she was in the same room when her friend Mac’s roommate Parker Lee was attacked prompts Veronica’s mission to stop the rapist, as she stands accused of failing to act (“My Big Fat Greek Rush Week,” 3.2). Guilt evidently motivates Veronica’s determination to identify the campus rapist, as she shows little interest in the horrifying events when she witnesses an anti-rape rally in “Welcome Wagon” (3.1). Her renewed devotion to the journey (Vogler 195) dominates the first half of *Veronica Mars*’ third season.

“Spit & Eggs” (3.09) utilizes a chase sequence as a framing device to place the bloodied Veronica in the shadow of the rapist at both the opening and closing moments of the episode. Christopher Vogler contends that chases are common ingredients in a hero’s period of Return, and Veronica’s situation recalls her experience at Shelly Pomeroy’s party three years earlier, which ramps up the tension of the pursuit (197). After she escapes from the rapist Mercer Hayes (by stabbing him with a symbolic phallus, a model unicorn) and finds comfort in Moe’s dorm room, Veronica realizes that the tea he’s given her has been laced with a date-rape drug, which weakens her for another sexual predator.⁶ The drug proves only a “delaying obstacle” (*The Hero* 201), however, as Veronica’s rape whistle alerts Parker and fellow students to her aid (3.9). She has, this time, escaped the horror of sexual violation.

Thankfully, the appeal and sway of romance does not abandon Veronica at any point during her journey. Her on-and-off relationship with Logan Echolls continues in the third season of the series, providing the proceedings with ample passion at opportune moments. As Rhonda Wilcox observes in this volume, Logan exhibits qualities often attributed to the romantic hero, which only adds an intriguing suitability to their match. Both characters seem to recognize, however, that Veronica’s “Crossing of the Return Threshold” requires the push and pull of her heart (*The Hero* 228). If their relationship progressed smoothly and without dramatic interruption, Veronica’s development as a hero would conclude.

The couple sits on a campus bench trading barbs about the Clint Eastwood marathon they recently enjoyed (“Welcome Wagon,” 3.1), Veronica places a tracking device on Logan’s cell phone when feeling insecure and alone (“Wichita Linebacker,” 3.3), she actively (and angrily) avoids him when Logan admits to running from the scene after Mercer set fire to a motel in Tijuana (“Of Vice and Men,” 3.7), and they break up twice (in “Spit & Eggs” 3.9 and in “There’s Got To Be A Morning After Pill” 3.12) only to remain intimately connected as Logan beats the stuffing out of students he believes to have disrespected Veronica in the series finale (“The Bitch is Back,” 3.20). As Campbell notes, the “encounter and separation, for all its wildness, is typical of the sufferings of love” (*The Hero* 228).

In his analysis of fictional paradigms, Frank Kermode argues that a text “imposes . . . development, character, a past which matters and a future . . . determined by the project of the author rather than that of the characters. They have their choices, but the novel has its end” (140). As the final episode of *Veronica Mars*, the narrative design of “The Bitch is Back” (3.20) shoulders definitive responsibility for the concluding impact of its protagonist’s televised existence, thereby retaining significant meaning that may have been lessened had the series not been untimely canceled with questions left unanswered. Joseph Campbell theorizes that “the conclusion of the childhood cycle is the return” when the hero’s “true character is revealed” (*The*

Hero 328). As an absolute text, *Veronica Mars* completed its run (and evolution) in its third season finale, so the episode's content leaves a lasting impression of Veronica's moral fiber. "The Bitch is Back" (3.20) characterizes Veronica Mars as an immature, self-involved, and ultimately destructive anti-hero.

When a secret Hearst society distributes an intimate videotape of Veronica and Piz to the entire campus ("Weevils Wobble but They Don't Go Down," 3.19), Veronica's final case will lead her to betray Keith one last time. Veronica breaks into the Kane mansion, steals Jake Kane's hard drive, pressures Cindy "Mac" MacKenzie to crack the drive and retrieve information regarding the members of the clandestine group, "The Castle," all while her father (currently Acting Sheriff and campaigning to be officially elected to the position) fends off Kane and Clarence Wiedman, whose witness confirms that someone who fits Veronica's description scaled the fence to enter the Kane estate. Pop culture anti-heroes have a compulsion to "be heard at all costs" (Bostic 55). Veronica's refusal to return her father's calls (disguised pleas) and his realization that his daughter has once again broken the law compels Keith to erase the security video that connects her to the theft in an effort to protect her. This actionable offense (Keith faces indictment for destroying evidence at the end of the series) will likely result in his defeat in the election for sheriff, costing him the fulfillment he deserves ("The Bitch is Back," 3.20).

Considering Veronica's progression as an anti-hero, her knowing betrayal of her father (with impunity) in "Donut Run" (2.11) actually prepares her to disregard the consequences of her actions in "The Bitch is Back" (3.20). While she believes that personal retribution in this latest quest represents an appropriate response to unethical behavior by others (she hands a list of the members of The Castle to a reporter from the school newspaper), her insistence that Jake Kane spare her dad from reprisal comes "a little too late" (3.20). Veronica's conceit matches that of many heroes during the Return stage, as her "self-righteousness leads to a misunderstanding, not only of oneself but of the nature of both man and the cosmos" (*The Hero* 238). Her behavior also corroborates Keith's doubt in "Donut Run" about whether he should ever trust Veronica again (2.11).

Veronica, unable to surrender her ego to assuage her own father, ensures them both of unhappiness. Jean Paul Sartre notes that when a character "commits himself to anything, fully realizing that he is not only choosing what he will be, but is thereby. . . a legislator deciding for the whole of mankind – in such a moment he cannot escape from the sense of profound and complete responsibility" (qtd. in Kermode 143). Veronica's inability to see past her own thirst for revenge in "The Bitch is Back" (3.20) leaves the audience of *Veronica Mars* with a lasting image of stormy despair, one of our teenage detective wandering into the distance after again failing to find comfort in a world without justice. Serves an anti-hero right.

Notes

¹ Many feminist scholars have problematized Joseph Campbell's definitions of mythological archetypes, particularly his tendency to gender the hero's journey as male. The immense bibliography of notable work is too formidable to list here, but see Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble*, Jane Gallop's *The Daughter's Seduction: Feminism and Psychoanalysis*, Estelle Lauter's *Feminist Archetypal Theory: A Revision of Jungian Thought*, Pam Morris's *Literature and Feminism*, Carol Pearson and Katherine Pope's *Female Hero in British and American Literature*, and Annis Pratt's *Archetypal Patterns in Women's Poetry* for important examinations of gender construction in art and literature.

² Lilly also serves as a protecting power in *Veronica Mars*' second season premiere, when her specter beckons Veronica at the gas station, prompting her to miss the school bus that would plunge off the edge of a cliff minutes later ("Normal is the Watchword," 2.1).

³ In this volume, Rhonda V. Wilcox's "So Cal Pietà: *Veronica Mars*, Logan Echolls, and the Search for the Mother" includes an extensive discussion regarding the impact of Lianne Mars as Veronica's absent mother.

⁴ See Mayer in this volume.

⁵ As Wilcox writes in this volume, the choice to include the Pietà image in this scene harkens back to the beginning of the second season, when the roles were reversed and Veronica assumed the "mother" role for Logan in the *mise-en-scène* ("Normal is the Watchword," 2.1).

⁶ Veronica's lack of caution in this scene is rather curious, as she had previously been drugged and prepared for assault two episodes earlier only to be saved by Logan in "Of Vice and Men" (3.07).

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