Sex, Archetypes, and Mad Max

by Tyellas

Summary

A short meta essay on sex, archetypes, the Mad Max universe, and fanworks in this area.

Notes

As noted, this piece expanded from a note about a story of mine, Citadel Nights. The conclusion has a few words about that story. If you have a fanwork in this area, I'd love to have you comment with a link, and how your work relates to Mad Max 'verse sexuality.

- Inspired by Citadel Nights by Tyellas

It takes some work to find thoughtful analysis about sex in the Mad Max movies. It’s often overwhelmed by more visceral reactions. Viewers’ enduring response to the films is a sustained scream of primal recognition.¹ The intense action, images, and characters, vivid with power, sex, and death, sear themselves into our brains.

As the four Mad Max movies progress, the world is dying, but libidos live. There’s a knowing edge of kink as civilization falls. In the first Mad Max film, the panoply of characters is described by one reviewer as “all sorts of genderfuckery.”¹ Max and his wife Jessie’s sensuous domestic bliss (their home’s furnishings include pillows shaped like giant breasts) is contrasted with reckless nihilists, would-be ladies’ man Goose, and tough women. Beyond Thunderdome has pansexual brothels, the spectacular Auntie Entity (who IMHO deserves her own sexual orientation, devoted to her) and MRS. WALKER! Road Warrior, the lustiest movie in the series, includes omnipresent BDSM gear, louche survivors,
sexually coded biker raiders, and a striking series of quotes. The Gyro Captain ponders, “You know what I miss most of all? Clean women. Nail polish, perfume, the smell of bicycle seats, cocktails. [Max interjects: Shut up!] Desserts. Lingerie. Remember lingerie?” It’s one of the supposedly benevolent settlers who, with relish, looks forward to escaping conflict and having “Nothing to do but breed!” In contrast, it’s the leader of the villains, Lord Humungous, who declares, “We’ve all lost someone we love,” before summoning his gayboy berserkers and smegma crazies. To this day, a pair of secondary characters, Wez and the Golden Boy, spark queer recognition in many viewers. “They were the very first gay couple I ever saw.”

Most male Mad Max villains evoke Quentin Crisp’s avatar of domination, the Great Dark Man. Each has a sexualising twist that fits their film’s decade. In the original Mad Max film, both the antagonising biker gang and Max’s own boss, Fifi, evoke 1970s leather daddies. From Road Warrior, Lord Humongous is the live-action version of a 1980s He-Man cartoon villain, a monstrous visage over a hypermasculine, exposed body. His varied gang members merge together sexualised ’80s terrors - punks, bikers, and sadomasochists – well before he summons the smegma crazies by name. Fury Road sends out three avatars of resource-hogging masculinity, powerful and prone to libidinal excess, as villains in 2015. The Citadel’s War Boys are also antagonists. But they are placed closer to either honour or redemption, made vulnerable to weapons and objectifying eyes with their bare, scarified chests.

The series’ powerful women, more ambiguous in their alignment, project assurance and rightness, reflected by the pale or metallic surfaces of their costuming. They have complex weapons or jewellery, silver hair or chain mail. Furiosa has her metal arm. Or they wear the light-coloured fabrics that render both Road Warrior’s Warrior Woman and Fury Road’s Wives above our touch. They are poised at a nexus between dominatrices and Joan of Arc: we feel their charisma and appeal, even as we are warned.

Max himself, still aching after the loss of his family in the first movie, tries to hold himself apart from every offered connection. Rejecting sex is one facet of his rejecting other people. This is strongly marked in Road Warrior, where he ignores two women who express interest in him. Ryan Stevenson notes “except for his wife in the first film, Max never has a love interest. The movies never even play up a will-they-or-won’t-they tension between Max and a female character.” After watching with the writer Lauren Wilford, he notes: “Afterward she astutely summed up the sexual dynamics of the complete series as “Mad Max: No Time to Bang.” Max winds up, at the end of all the films, a lone figure receding into myth.

George Miller said, "We repeatedly asked ourselves what price sexuality would pay in this kind of medieval world. It certainly couldn’t function as it does in our contemporary society. People wouldn’t have time for recreational sex. There’s no time for a woman to have a baby, to nurse infants, etc...Women and men and their sexual roles are not as defined in this primitive world as they are in our society. Men and women are simply interchangeable.” He said this in the context of post-apocalyptic harshness knocking everyone back to absolute survival, gender roles discarded as an irrelevant luxury, procreation being unlikely. In Fury Road, it's the villains who cling to those gender roles while those who become heroes transcend them.

Fury Road gave us the Immortan’s breeders and a slew of sexual aspects around the edges, including the homoerotic oil rig/Polecat crews of Gas Town and the concept of “bait.” And Fury Road ignited tremendous debate and inspiration amongst fans as we put our own intimate spin on the world. Was Max, “genitals intact,” an asexual hero? A queer man won over by Nux? Or as devoted to Furiosa as he had been to his lost wife Jessie? Some viewers needed Furiosa to return Max’s perceived devotion. For others, Furiosa, daughter of the Many Mothers, rescuer of women, is the lesbian action hero they’d yearned for. With our limbic systems primed by the ferocious
action, many of us were undone by Furiosa’s first address to Max. Before they begin a fight as
equals, Furiosa roars in defiance – and, perhaps, primal recognition.

All this stimulus has inspired thousands of fiery Mad Max fan works: videos, costumes, fanfiction
stories, and online role-playing. Perhaps the most vivid of these is the Wasteland Weekend event.
At this five-day gathering in the California desert, thousands of fans recreate the Mad Max
apocalypse and its human archetypes in dazzling detail. Picking up on the lusty vibe of Road
Warrior, there are plenty of scantily clad partiers and endless jokes about “butt stuff.” A Lord
Humungous re-enactor, a popular attendee, is consistently asked to wield his fearsome power…as a
wedding celebrant.

I originally put this essay together as a coda for a story I wrote, Citadel Nights. In the roaring
cavalcade of Mad Max fanworks, this tale is only one rider, but it does hoon through the sexual
territory of the Mad Max archetypes and edges. Max is important in both his mythic absence and
rare presence. But to unleash all the sexual possibilities, Citadel Nights’ key characters remix
archetypes from Miller’s Wasteland world. Winsome ferals, golden youths, wanderers willing to
trade sex for survival. Masked men, chained giants, leather-bound pairs whose sole virtue is their
love and devotion. War Boys and seasoned sharpshooters. Bait.

Where most social standards have been shattered, everything is possible. The Mad Max films
encourage me to picture a post-apocalypse where sexual orientation is either non-existent or a
historic relic. Breeding, fittingly, preoccupies one protagonist in Citadel Nights. Another one
begins the story by using sex to reach for power. But their sexual encounters, as in all the Mad Max
films, lead to human connection: for good or ill, inspiring alliances, trust, hatred, love.

To give the characters time and space to come together, Citadel Nights is set inside and around one
possible Citadel, after the Fury Road: a sole Green Place where human freedom and that enduring
libido are combined. This renewing way of being is poised to clash with the wider, crueler
Wasteland — and to change it, too. For, as Nico Lathoris says of Max and his coming to care for
other people in Fury Road, “What's broken is healed by love only.”

References

1 – MAD MAX IS A MOVIE MADE WITH CAPS LOCK ON: Spencer Hall -

“There are all sorts of genderfuckery happening all through this crazy ass movie.”

3 – “They were the very first gay couple I ever saw. Like, I remember asking my dad if the blond
on the bike was a girl or boy. Then when he said boy, I just shrugged and accepted it. They were
boyfriends. The only thing that confused me was The Golden Youths gender and why they wore

Two more notable Tumblr entries:

“These two are to my childhood as Paul Lynde was to America in 1969. We knew something was
up but didn’t want to believe it.” http://tylerkahl.tumblr.com/post/15531208636/greatest-ever-cinematic-duos-countdown-wez
“Wez and the Golden Youth, from Mad Max 2. Sure was confusing growing up gay and kinda guiltily identifying w/ a bunch of villains in movies, games, and books!”
https://kyleyoungblom.tumblr.com/post/135916824468/wez-and-the-golden-youth-from-mad-max-2-sure-was

4 - The Great Dark Man – an impossible, desirable avatar of hypermasculinity – is described in Quentin Crisp’s autobiography, *The Naked Civil Servant*, 1968.

5 - The 10 Gayest Things About the Mad Max Franchise: Outmagazine -

6 - Mad Max: Not Your Fight, Not Your Victory: Wilfordlauren -
http://wilfordlauren.tumblr.com/post/121160499725/madmax


8 - You Are Awaited: A MAD MAX FURY ROAD podcast - Special Guest Episode with FURY ROAD Production Designer Colin Gibson -
https://www.podomatic.com/podcasts/ylowenthal/episodes/2017-02-23T06_45_03-08_00

9 - http://www.wastelandweekend.com/

10 - This Mad Max wedding, officiated by Lord Humongous, will break you: Charlie Anders -


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