

# Rescuing the Feminine: The Problem of the Animus in Women

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*Practising psychotherapists in the West are becoming familiar with the emergence of the psychological problems that are affecting “liberated” women. A large number of women who are highly successful and competent in outer terms are plagued with a deep-rooted inner feeling of worthlessness, lack of value and inferiority. The conventional approach to this malaise has been to ascribe it to psychological overloading, or the necessity for these women to become yet more ambitious and striving.*

The Jungian concept of the animus is particularly suited to dealing with the problems facing the new women. Jung discovered that the human psyche was androgynous and consisted of both masculine and feminine. Because of gender-identified ego-development, however, the masculine element in the woman and the feminine element in the man remain unconscious and undifferentiated. When any psychological content is unconscious it follows two courses – either it becomes projected outwards onto an external object, or leads to identification with it.

While a woman’s animus remains unconscious it too will follow these channels for expression. Whilst the “unliberated” woman will project her animus outwards through romantic novels, stereotyped relationships and an existence lived through the men in her life, the liberated woman falls into the other side of the trap, i.e. she becomes identified with her animus and loses the vital link with her feminine identity, living on a false (for a woman) masculine level. Such a woman will then find herself in a double-bind situation, where her idealisation of the masculine leads her to denigrate the feminine. Considering the thousands of years of the patriarchal inflation of the male principle it is hardly surprising that women who introject this find themselves in the grip of a tyrannical, powerful and judgemental force that undermines their individual identity. Together with this the woman also introjects inferior images of the feminine, images that are based on the two classic reactions of the male to the female: horror and fascination. The witch at one end of the pole suggests woman in her demonic aspect, devouring, ugly, isolated, and phallic, representing everything that is despised and rejected in the feminine. The enchantress on the other end of the pole is sexually voracious, a siren and a Circe who traps men and turns them into swine. On the individual level each woman carries this rejected aspect of the feminine in her shadow side.

Women who are presenting with this problem in analysis will often have initial dreams of witches, hags and down-and-out women, which is how they see themselves unconsciously. Thus identified with the negative side of their shadow they find that the moment the animus emerges it allies itself with the shadow, leading at the moment of greatest outward animus-fulfilling achievements to the most dejected feelings of inner worthlessness.

## The Father Complex

Because the first carrier of the woman's animus is her father the condition and force of her personal animus will be determined by the father-complex. If her father has been too strong, she will internalise the voice of judgement and critical authority. If he is too weak, she will have no opportunity for internalising the masculine and will lead a vegetative, unconscious existence, ready to serve the projections and needs of all the male forces in her life. The animus also provides a woman with the ability to question, think, and for spirituality. It must not be forgotten that the animus does have a positive role to play in the psychological development of women. When it is activated in its positive aspect, it releases positive masculine energy, focused attention, concentration and every quality associated with logos thinking, the ability to connect in consciously with what was previously unconscious. It can also be a positive "father-force", carrying encouragement, protection, principle and containment.

In dreams the animus can appear as a collective body of men, soldiers, sailors, jury, committees and other symbols of masculine authority. It can also appear as the father, brother, lover, husband, son or other male figure from the dreamer's life. More undifferentiated animus symbols includes clouds, wind, rain, thunder, penetrating phallus, animals such as snakes, bulls, horses and dogs. In its more collective archetypal force the animus can appear as a king, a warrior, a wise man as well as mythological figures such as Pan, Adonis, Dionysus, Appollo and Hermes.

Apart from the father aspect of the animus in its mantel of law, order, authority and establishment, the animus also presents itself in the unexpected guise of the trickster both on the outer and the inner plane. In this aspect, the animus is an amoral dissolute adventurer who yet performs the necessary function of releasing the woman from the tyranny of established law (father) to a life of adventure, instability and subversion. On the outer level, women often get involved with Don Juans with whom they can only enjoy a transient non-committal relationship which they can use as a tool of rebellion against an authoritarian father. On the inner level too the trickster-animus has a similar function, providing a woman with a counterpoint against the father-animus. Pan, Hermes, monkeys, goblins, dwarves, knackers, clowns, harlequins, leprechauns etc. are images of the trickster in dreams. Over a period of time, the trickster has a way of evolving from an amoral, half-human creature to its rightful function as a symbol of transformation and then it appears increasingly in dreams in the various guises of Hermes, ringing bells, knocking on doors, demanding attention, bearing gifts, guiding journeys, and generally being indispensable in the woman's psychological development.

It is important to keep in mind that as in any psychological process, there is no strict logical order; the analysand is having to deal with different aspects of the animus at the same time, and this will be reflected in her dreams. It will generally be well into the process of differentiation when dreams contain different aspects of the animus. When this happens, it is important to pay attention to what is presenting, allowing the woman to reclaim what is hers and reject that which is psychologically alien. A woman engaged in this process dreamt:

*"While my father, my husband and I are out of our flat, my maid has let in a 14 year old boy who had come selling sachets of herbal perfume. He needs a job as he is quite poor, and there is something very honest about him. My father sees red, and says he will only break things. But the boy assures me he is very careful and always pushes back drawers that he has opened. I have a struggle with myself, my first instinct being to listen to the better judgement of my father. But then I decide that I can find a job for the boy, he can take charge of the daily shopping for groceries."*

The dream indicates a distinct turning point in the dreamer's struggle for liberation from an idealised father. The boy is the new emerging personal animus who will be in the service of the woman, the rightful place psychologically speaking for a woman's masculine element. Both perfume sachets and shopping indicate the feeling values, which is what the dreamer needs to balance her thinking-orientated activities. The boy is very careful to push back the drawers which to the dreamer held contents that were intimate, for instance jewellery and underwear. So this animus can be entrusted with exploring the secrets of her psyche whilst yet providing a container that is safe and private. This would be yet another function of the positive animus.

The above dream occurred about two years into the woman's analysis. Her previous dreams had consisted of negative male figures constellated both by her father-complex and her partner. In its negative aspect, the animus constellates as the inner critic, judge, sadist, murderer, evil magician and the proverbial cad who constantly informs the woman that she's ugly, worthless, stupid, and unlovable. It disrupts all the feeling-relationships of the woman, in the face of all reality "proving" to her that her partner doesn't love her. This is the inner critical voice that every woman has heard. It always strikes when something has already occurred to shake the woman or when she has been very successful, to deflate her. This inner tyrant holds complete sway and she finds herself yielding areas of her life that gave her pleasure and enrichment. Every time she tries to enjoy a well-deserved rest or treat the animus will taunt her with the accusation that she's wasting her time, she'd be better off doing something "productive".

This is the introjected father-turned-judge who lays down the laws of acceptable behaviour and feelings. It convinces us that if we go against these dictates we are letting some authority down. In the presence of this voice every woman will be made to feel like a silly little girl, who possesses no dignity in her own right.

### **The Inner Tyrant**

The classic manifestation in dreams of this inner tyrant is as a Nazi imprisoning the woman in a concentration camp. If we keep in mind that the Nazis considered themselves *Übermänner* (Supermen) we can see how apt a symbol of this inflated masculine the unconscious has chosen. Women often have dreams of trying to escape from a camp, being chased or shot at by the Nazi guards. Rapists, killers, and burglars are also common symbols. As well as violation, invasion, mutilation and dismemberment all indicate the masculine principle turned awry and attacking the feminine identity. The following is a dream of a 26 year old woman before analysis:

*"It is night-time. There is a young, beautiful homosexual man inside a military camp. Outside the military camp, under a street lamp, sits a dwarf in a wheelchair. The young homosexual man passes by. The dwarf calls him over as if asking for help. When the young man comes up to the dwarf, the dwarf pulls out a big knife and cuts the young man up in pieces."*

The violence perpetrated in this dream is on the emerging personal animus. The young, beautiful aspect of the animus has an ambiguous masculinity, i.e. he is homosexual. The young and beautiful also suggests a narcissistic quality which in fact is a reflection of the dreamer's father who suffered a narcissistic personality disorder. The dwarf is a stunted animus who is guarding the military camp and who cuts up the young animus with a huge (and phallic) knife.

The experience of sexual abuse can greatly affect the woman's introjection of the masculine. When this has been the case the analyst has to take special care to disentangle the symbolic from the literal. For instance, a woman who had been sexually molested when she was eight, as an adult often had dreams and fantasies of being attacked by several large penises. She also felt extremely uncomfortable with male physicality. During the course of the analysis the possibility that she had been abused began to emerge. In her case, the invasion by the masculine had been a literal one, and had contaminated her animus so that the animus too had turned against her. She was obsessive about her work, cut off from feeling type activities, highly successful but also with an inbuilt feeling of worthlessness which reflected her damaged femininity. The task of therapy was to cut down the animus to size by enhancing and encouraging the feminine.

### **The Wise Man**

Another aspect of the animus is the Wise Man, the man who knows everything, whose function it is to inform, guide, teach and lead us. In its positive forms this is the archetype of wisdom. Like Moses or Solomon this man can relate to an idea in a subjective way and represents the true thinking function which is not split off, cold, sterile and objective as it is assumed to be, but passionate and original. However, if the woman identifies with the wise man archetype, she can become totally, and dangerously, caught up with the ideal way to be, invaded by the "spirit-father". She will then seek achievement in masculine spiritual and cultural terms seeing herself as a sybil, a genius or a pure unearthly angel untainted by the blood and flesh of her feminine identity. Or she could live out this fantasy vicariously, through serving as the anima of some great man.

Identification with any aspect of the animus, negative or positive, incurs the enmity and wrath of the Great Mother archetype (the mature feminine) which turns negative and appears in the woman's dreams often as a witch, devouring, malignant. The negative great mother can also manifest in physical symptoms such as irregular menstruation, amenorrhoea and fertility problems.

High-achieving, animus-possessed women can also suffer from compulsive disorders such as bulimia or anorexia nervosa. Because of the lack of a strong female matrix, the body is attacked by the negative animus, and the woman becomes split off from the feminine. Women who suffer from these disorders will in fact often acknowledge that it is their own femininity they are attacking, and will often say that it is an internal dictator who drives them in such a regimented and forceful way to the brink of death. Angelyn Spignesi, in "Starving Women" (1) quotes an analysand who describes the "morbid urge which rules her" as "an enemy, a man with a drawn sword, or an armed man who surrounds me and stops me whenever I try to escape his domination."

The animus possesses such extraordinary power within the woman's psyche because it is an archetype. It is impersonal, inhuman and autonomous. If we don't relate to it and allow it a conscious channel, it can obliterate the ego-identity. It has a life of its own, which is not under human control. Barbara Hannah pointed out that the animus jumps in whenever the feminine ego is not functioning, choosing and discriminating. Emma Jung wrote that women have need for the spiritual. When this need is denied, the animus appropriates the Self.

Jung, in the Visions Seminars (2), wrote that "the animus is a very greedy fellow, and everything that falls into the unconscious is possessed by it. He is there with open mouth and catches everything that falls down from the table of consciousness...if you let some feeling or reaction get away from you he eats it, becomes strong, and begins to argue " So becoming more conscious of

her thoughts, feelings and values is crucial to the woman. This is particularly so as regards hurt feelings which if not expressed in a related way, can turn into animus attacks. These attacks take the form of being caught or possessed in a spiral of rage, which gathers momentum and leads us on to say the most appalling things. The animus can damage marriage or close relationships by cutting off the feeling function, and also by unconsciously engaging the man's anima. When the anima and animus begin to argue they are fed by a store of suppressed feelings of anger, resentment, envy, power, coldness and fear, each fed by the parental complexes of the partners.

### **Redeeming the Personal Father**

In dealing with the problem of the animus the therapist will first have to deal with the father, since the main problem of the animus is constellated by the father-complex. The woman's main task in this process is to redeem her personal father, or rather her inner relation to her father. By attempting to see her father in both his dark and light side she can get out of the trap of being caught in opposite sides of a spectrum which is what gives a complex its force. The dark side of the father consists of anger, lack of control and incompleteness, the positive side offers power, generosity and creativity. But as long as the woman is caught in an idealised/rejecting pole she will be disowning elements of her own psyche. Being whole also requires the withdrawal of projections by reclaiming the parts of ourselves that we have projected externally. Because the father also represents authority and something, by rejecting him the woman is also rejecting her own authority.

If the woman's attitude to her father is too idealised on the other hand, it will have the effect of cutting her off from her own professional capabilities. She will only be able to succeed on her father's terms, and will have great difficulty in accepting and developing her own talents. They will always appear slightly inconsequential to her. Too positive a relationship to the father can also prevent the woman from having a real relationship with another man, as any prospective partner will be compared to the idealised father and inevitably found wanting. To internalise the father principle, the woman then has to break the idealised transference to her father by acknowledging his negative side.

Linda Schierse Leonard, writing in "To Be a Woman" (3) says that "ultimately, redeeming the father entails reshaping the Masculine within, fathering that side of ourselves. Instead of the "perverted old man" and the "angry, rebellious boy", we need to find the Man with Heart, the inner man with a good relation to the Feminine."

The emergence of this man with heart was signalled for an analysand in the following dream:

*"A friend of my partner's called Sweetman has called on me. He has a briefcase in one hand and a doll in the other. He says that the doll had gone bald but he had transplanted hair back onto its head. He never went anywhere without it now."*

The bald doll represents a sterile logos, thinking without heart. One is reminded of Yeats' "Bald heads forgetful of their sins". By restoring hair, Sweetman restores to it the crowning glory of the feminine. This is the man who is sweet, who has found a balance between the masculine and the feminine. Now he never goes anywhere without the feminine.

Of course the integration with the feminine is still only in its formative stages, since it appears as a doll, but it's a start and this analysand's subsequent dreams show how the doll becomes a flesh and blood woman, a positive shadow figure who is "at her side".

### **Strengthening the Feminine**

Apart from redeeming the father and the masculine the woman, in her efforts to humanise the animus, also has to strengthen the feminine within her. This means not only restoring value to the feminine in the face of patriarchy and her own rejection of the feminine but also to acknowledge her female ancestors. Modern woman, in order to free herself from the shackles of subservient femininity also rejects her mother and the collective archetype of femininity. The conscious separation from the mother's model of life and marriage also separates the woman from the emotional and instinctive part of herself. So an intrinsic part of the healing will be to develop a strong feminine container, which can reconcile the woman to her nurturing, receptive, biological identity.

The therapist's role is crucial to this process in providing a safe maternal container. The unwary therapist can worsen matters at this stage if he/she has political feminist views which are concerned with liberating women from the feminine rather than liberating them to be feminine. Counselling the animus-identified woman who secretly feels inferior to be more assertive and ambitious is the worst possible thing. In fact, the therapist has to make it possible for the analysand to be more receptive, intuitive and feeling.

Rituals are particularly good for grounding in the feminine. Anything that the patient relates to is valuable e.g. drawing, sculpting, clay-modelling, dancing, knitting. It enables the patient to act out the boundaries outside that she's trying to create inside. Rituals provide containers which allow one to play within a pattern. Acting them out can be tremendously healing. I have found rituals to be of particular help to women suffering from eating disorders.

Women should also be warned against sacrificing their personal instincts and feelings for an ideal, an achievement or external goal, a particularly strong temptation for the conscious female. Animus, being very goal-oriented keeps woman on the move. Whenever this voice dictates, women should try and resist it, by taking time off or treating themselves. Humour can quickly restore a sane perspective, deflating the pompous self-importance of the animus. Indulging oneself in trivialities too can be very healing. One woman, in the grip of her animus, dreamt that she was in a large store in Grafton Street looking at little trinkets. She then bought a perfume called "Sweet Nothings". The dream was a gentle hint to pay more attention to the sweet nothings of life.

Caught in the grip of the animus, a woman feels cut off from precisely the sweetness of life. Activities that help us to use our feeling function of relatedness are perhaps the best antidote to the grip of the animus. Taking time off to play with the children, giving attention to a pet, cultivating a garden, these are all activities that centre around nurturing life. They have to be undertaken in a very deliberate manner, even though this might seem unspontaneous at the time.

## Channelling Energies

If a woman is in the grip of the “spirit-father: (see above) animus, she can be caught up in thinking that she is a creative genius or get involved in some project that is vague and inflated. At this time, what is needed is a very specific project that the woman can channel her energies into. This grounds the high-flying animus, at the same time offering it a channel for its energy. Emma Jung wrote in “Anima and Animus” (4) that “confronted with one of these aspects of the animus, the woman’s task is to create a place for it in her life and personality. Usually our talents, hobbies and so on, have already given us hints as to the direction in which this energy can become active. Often too, dreams point this way, and....will mention studies, books, and definite lines of work, or of artistic or executive activities”.

Confronted with the difficulties that the animus creates, women sometimes wonder whether it is not best left alone. The animus in fact is extremely important in the psychological development of women, enabling her to extend her consciousness, and through the capacity for objective, independent thought, allowing her to reclaim territories of her psyche previously unconscious and in the possession of extrinsic authority. The big struggle that now faces women is in learning to contain the animus both in its archetypal and personal spheres.. It is time to explode the fallacy that men and women are the same. Being equal does not mean having to be similar. Perhaps the time has come when we can afford to be different yet equal.

## Notes

1. Angelyn Spignesi, “Starving Women: A Psychology of Anorexia Nervosa. (Spring Publications) p.31
2. CG Jung, “The Visions Seminars Vol 2” (Zurich: Spring Publications) pp497-98
3. Linda Shierse Leonard, “Redeeming the Father and Finding the Feminine Spirit To Be A Woman”. Ed. Connie Zweig (Jeremy P Tarcher, Inc) p133
4. Emma Jung, “Animus and Anima: Two Essays” (Spring Publications) p39