

# Anímus Aeternus

Exploring the  
Inner Masculine



Deldon Anne McNeely

*Anímus Aeternus*

*Also by Deldon Anne McNeely*

*Becoming: An Introduction to Jung's Concept of Individuation*

*Touching: Body Therapy and Depth Psychology*

*Mercury Rising: Women, Evil and the Trickster Gods*

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## Contents

Preface	7
1 Introduction	9
2 Unisex or Syzygy	21
3 Animus and Ego	28
4 Relationship with the Divine	47
5 Animus Development	58
<i>Animus Types</i>	67
6 Animus in the Body	71
7 Anger and Creativity	84
8 In the Mother-World	103
9 In the Father-World	116
10 Brother, Hero and Patriarchal Partner	136
11 Equal Partner	152
Bibliography	182
Index	187

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## Preface

Not in stubbornness but in humility, I refused to write for so long that I felt pressed down under the whip of God into a bed of sickness. . . . Beaten down by many kinds of illnesses, I put my hand to writing. Once I did this, a deep and profound exposition of books came over me. I received the strength to rise up from my sick bed, and under that power I continued to carry out the work to the end.

—Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*.

The purpose of this work is to share something of my explorations and excavations, and similar searchings of friends and patients. We try to see and feel all we can of our lives, and Life, and the relationship between the sexes, especially as that relationship is reflected in the poetry of women.

Many people have been with us in this work, helping to focus the lenses and the lights, the natural radiance of the sun, the reflected cyclical moonlight and the Promethean lamps. Others, by their sensitivity to touch where touch is needed, and to music, the great opener, have enabled us to reach feelings which might have remained dormant. Speaking for myself, I would like to acknowledge that many men are among them, men who have touched and opened me through their example, their poetry, their nurturance and love. I thank them all, fathers, sons, husbands, brothers, lovers, teachers, therapists, spiritual advisors, friends, artists. There are countless poems written by men that are brilliantly relevant to this process, for it is not just a woman's work. However, I made the decision to include here only the poetry of women.

Appreciation is gratefully extended to the writers and poets represented here, and to those many wonderful women whose influence has stimulated me. Special thanks to Gayonne Goodyear, Judy Andry and the women's seminar in New Orleans, and to Regina Meadows and Harvey Rifkin for listening seriously.

My aim has been to proceed in the spirit of Edna St. Vincent Millay, whose creative drive for clarity is reflected in this sonnet:

## 8 Preface

I will put Chaos into fourteen lines  
And keep him there; and let him thence escape  
If he be lucky; let him twist, and ape  
Flood, fire, and demon—his adroit designs  
Will strain to nothing in the strict confines  
Of this sweet Order, where, in pious rape,  
I hold his essence and amorphous shape,  
Till he with Order mingles and combines.  
Past are the hours, the years, of our duress,  
His arrogance, our awful servitude:  
I have him. He is nothing more nor less  
Than something simple not yet understood;  
I shall not even force him to confess;  
Or answer. I will only make him good.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Collected Poems*, sonnet clxviii, p. 728.



# 1

## Introduction

Of all Jung's concepts, that of the syzygy or contrasexual archetypes, anima and animus, excites some of the liveliest debate, introducing both confusion and fascination among contemporary theorists. This is due in part to the rapidly changing place of the feminine in the collective unconscious, in part to Jung's personality and his own blindspots in regard to the individuation process in women, and also to the innate elusiveness of archetypal energies. These three factors interact to produce great movements of energy around the terms Jung took from the Latin: *anima*, literally "soul," and *animus*, literally "mind" (also spirit, courage and anger).

They are both personal and collective, always present though fundamentally connected to the past. Bigger than life, they yet occupy the minutiae of our most mundane moments, hiding in our lovers and relatives and exposing themselves when most inconvenient. They lead us down worldly dead-ends and seduce us guilelessly into internal labyrinths. Anima and animus maintain their stride despite the storms, ecstasy and heartbreak in their wake.

Because archetypal energies manifest through our deepest drives and desires and through images that societies accept as "reality," the flow of experience between biological urges and cultural influences creates a continual movement in their expression. Looking at these three sources of confusion in terms of the syzygy makes it clear why one man's attempt to describe the phenomena of contrasexuality would prove to be a heroic undertaking subject to strong reactions.

The changing place of the feminine in the collective unconscious is now unmistakable. Differences in behavior and images regarding woman's lifestyle continue to emerge. Led by affluent Western societies where biological realities can at times be superseded—through contraception, medicine, communication systems and other technological developments—the concept of the reality of woman's world has been radically altered.

Paradoxically, the patriarchy's orientation to nature—its emphasis

## 10 Introduction

on the manipulation of natural resources—has made it possible for the outcry of “Enough!” to be taken up and heard. It is woman who has been freed of her biological constraints through technology, and it is woman who leads the way in calling a halt to the rape of earth’s natural resources.

Woman dancing with hair  
on fire, woman writhing in the  
cone of orange snakes, flowering  
into crackling lithe vines:

Woman

you are not the bound witch  
at the stake, whose broiled alive  
agonized screams  
thrust from charred flesh  
darkened Europe in the nine millions.

Woman

you are not the madonna impaled  
whose sacrifice of self leaves her  
empty and mad as wind,  
or whore crucified  
studded with nails.

Woman

you are the demon of a fountain of energy  
rushing up from the coal hard  
memories in the ancient spine,  
flickering lights from the furnace in the solar  
plexus, lush scents from the reptilian brain,  
river that winds up the hypothalamus  
with its fibroids of pleasure and pain  
twisted and braided like rope,  
firing the lanterns of the forebrain  
till they glow blood red.

You are the fire sprite  
that charges leaping thighs,  
that whips the supple back on its arc  
as deer leap through the ankles:  
dance of a woman strong  
in beauty that crouches

inside like a cougar in the belly  
not in the eyes of others measuring.

You are the icon of woman sexual  
in herself like a great forest tree  
in flower, liriodendron bearing sweet tulips,  
cups of joy and drunkenness.  
You drink strength from your dark fierce roots  
and you hang at the sun's own fiery breast  
and with the green cities of your boughs  
you shelter and celebrate  
woman, with the cauldrons of your energies  
burning red, burning green.<sup>2</sup>

Piercy evokes the power of the feminine accepted by woman as her own, after centuries of projecting it upon men, who responded by demonizing those women who did not project it. The evil one with snakey-locks can now be seen as a fruitful one, growing vines, and the sexuality that once made her a devil is now a source of celebration. No longer depending on others to evaluate her worth, she feels her own value; the cauldrons, once a symbol of her witchy projection, are now the seat of creative fire.

Much has been written about how Jung's personal psychology influenced his thinking and his values. From our current standpoint, we can see his blind spots. But Jung had the courage to say what he saw, and also to encourage those who followed to do the same, rather than be bound to his thought as dogma. Because he wrote from the perspective of a culture dominated by gender stereotypes, Jung's ideas reflect a certain amount of stereotyping, despite the fact that he struggled to be fair and objective. He presented his sexual dichotomy as symbolic, acknowledging that aspects of animus and anima, especially in terms of Logos and Eros, respectively, may be found in both males and females. He expected them to be found in different degrees of development in each. Times have changed and gender roles have changed. What is eternally enduring about sexuality is yet to be delineated.

The following poem, spun off from a woman's dream, reflects the

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<sup>2</sup> Marge Piercy, "The Window of the Woman Burning," *Circles on the Water*, pp. 202-203.

## 12 Introduction

dreamer's relationship to Jung as an animus figure onto which she projects the generative father, as many women have done.

Carl Jung, whose name means "young"  
restored to me a part of myself.  
In gratitude i sat,  
skirtless, on his lap,  
he an old man on the river (but did he feel young!)  
his clothing white and newly changed.  
I was shy  
but laid my cheek on his  
as i fondled his  
yellow crystal necklace.  
He told me it was leather,  
not crystal.  
He told me with his smile  
that my mother and i are sisters  
but our eros natures have  
hair of different waves,  
then indicated the interview was over,  
it was time to feed the dogs,  
time for us all to prepare for the journey<sup>3</sup>

The images in the poem of regeneration and rebirth, and the juxtapositioning of youth and old age, prepare the dreamer for a new relationship with both the feminine images she has inherited and her own instinctual way.

And now the third factor: direct knowledge of the nature of archetypes is out of the scope of human endeavor; that should keep us humble. The puzzling issues evoked by a male/female dichotomy were not invented by Jung. Animus/anima will not go away if we just ignore them. The goddess of vegetation will be known; she will not remain buried under the cathedral forever. Neither will mankind (one aspect of humankind) submit to being forever under her thumb, green though it may be. The adventurous hero who aspires to shooting the moon will likely persevere, resisting attempts to convince him of his folly. The tensions between emanations of the Divine that play us like toys create ever moving chiaroscuros; what is now in the

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<sup>3</sup> Claudia E. Lapp, "Jung," *Cloud Gate*, p. 29.

darkness may tomorrow be in the light. This quality of change, eternally ongoing—physical, psychological and spiritual—is captured by Mary Oliver:

We climbed through a broken window,  
walked through every room.

Out of business for years,  
the mattresses held only

rainwater, and one  
woman's black shoe. Downstairs

spiders had wrapped up  
the crystal chandelier.

A cracked cup lay in the sink.  
But we were fourteen,

and no way dust could hide  
the expected glamour from us,

or teach us anything.  
We whispered, we imagined.

It would be years before  
we'd learn how effortlessly

sin blooms, then softens,  
like any bed of flowers.<sup>4</sup>

In spite of the confusion and shortcomings entailed in the concept of the syzygy, it remains a viable and pragmatic concept in the practice of analysis. That is why many of us continue our efforts to understand and differentiate aspects of anima and animus, while others think in terms of genderless polarities, like soul and spirit, or Eros and Logos. In our present state of development in sexual relatedness, the image of the inner male and inner female is both psychologically appealing and useful. Though it is complicated, it is worth attempting to sort out that pairing in the individuation process. It is all but impossible not to project the contrasexual archetype. It is a natural response in relationships. The question is whether we understand what

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<sup>4</sup> "An Old Whorehouse," *American Primitive*, p. 39.



## 14 Introduction

is happening. There is still much exploring to be done before we can avoid identifying others with these archetypes.<sup>5</sup>

For example, as I set out to write about the animus, I am moved to ask, where is he in this project? Does he motivate me to think about and define him? Does he fuel the writing itself? Does he need me to communicate my thoughts and feelings? Do I need him to be literate? Do I write about him in order to come to the Self or to meet some need for ego-recognition? Does he applaud or dissuade me, or both? Does he want me to be seen and heard in the world, or does he want me to focus exclusively on him, face turned toward the inner process alone?

While sometimes his voice is unmistakably clear, those times are rare. Often I am not sure where he is and what he wants. Sometimes he simply will not speak. During body movement he often disappears—perhaps overwhelmed by the feminine body presence.

Only in dreams do I find the animus unequivocally present in a consistent and communicative way, and then I discover something very interesting. If I write a poem derived from the aura of the dream, he not only appears but brings all sorts of additional information.

I once tried to describe a princely type of male who appeared in a dream by writing a poem about him.<sup>6</sup> He became exquisitely clear in the poem, and also explained the life history behind his narcissistic style. He laid out the family dynamics in a way which I had never thought about consciously, as if he had been in reductive analysis for several years! Suddenly it dawned on me that he did not want to be confronted directly, but wanted to be paid attention in an indirect and activity centered way, like many a shy man. I began to see poetry as an oblique approach which not only gave me information but apparently gave us both a lot of pleasure. Having found this to be consistently helpful, I encouraged it in women who showed an interest in writing; it worked for many of them as well.

In familiarizing analysts with the concept of the syzygy I ask them to imagine a contrasexual partner accompanying them through

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<sup>5</sup> See Andrew Samuels, chapter 7, "Gender, Sex, Marriage," *Jung and the Post-Jungians*, pp. 207-229.

<sup>6</sup> This poem is presented in part in chapter 11.

life, but at a pace that is usually out of step with the conscious personality. If the ego is principally feminine, we look for the male within, knowing that he may be very different in developmental level, in values, interests, etc. But he wants to be acknowledged, wants to be conscious, wants to have his influence, and should be allowed to engage in dialogue with the conscious mind, as numerous Jungian writers have demonstrated.<sup>7</sup>

In his elucidation of the anima, James Hillman warns us that it can be detrimental to listen to anima's ploy, which would be to convince us to describe her only in vague terms because anima is necessarily diffuse.<sup>8</sup> Similarly I believe animus gives messages which defy our efforts to bring consciousness to him in a feminine mode. He would exhort us to continually clarify and refine, to the point of extreme discouragement and abandonment of the attempt. Yet, I see that women find it extremely helpful to write about their experience of the animus, especially when they are naive about Jungian concepts.

Matthew Fox states in his presentation of Hildegard's work that for a time she refused to write "because of doubt and erroneous thinking and because of controversial advice from men."<sup>9</sup> Overcoming this writer's block marked her spiritual awakening. In my personal experience such discouragement comes from within, particularly when writing for possible publication. Even when writing supports the positive animus, the discouragement appears to be sparked by the negative animus. It takes such forms as, "That has already been said," "It's not worth the trouble," and a number of corollaries, such as, "It won't be read," or "It will meet with nothing but criticism," and the most deadly of all: "It's impossible to put all that into any meaningful form."

In trying to write about animus, my mind begins to race through everything I have ever read or heard about him, like a giant computer search with no one at the terminal. There is a traffic jam of images, memories and especially criticisms suggesting that to sort all this out

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<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Barbara Hannah, *Encounters with the Soul: Active Imagination As Developed by C.G. Jung*, and Irene Claremont de Castillejo, *Knowing Woman: A Feminine Psychology*.

<sup>8</sup> James Hillman, *Anima: An Anatomy of a Personified Notion*, pp. 1-5.

<sup>9</sup> *Illuminations of Hildegard of Bingen*, p. 27.

## 16 Introduction

would require a team of genies. Take cleaning up the kitchen after several children have made a meal for themselves and multiply the mess by, say, twenty, and you come close to the feeling-tone of the experience of making the decision to begin. It sometimes seems as if the only solution is to burn the kitchen (and by the way, leave writing to the men). In other words, as the anima says, "To describe me you must be obtuse," so the animus says, "To describe me you must be impossibly precise, nothing less than perfection will be adequate. Better go make bread."

Many female writers have described this problem. Virginia Woolf gave the destructive voice a feminine persona, calling it the "angel in the house," but the experience is the same. She wrote that her house-angel told her to "never let anybody guess that you have a mind of your own."<sup>10</sup> This "angel" is what Jung called an anima woman; her ego has no loyalty to the female sex, but is under the domination of the masculine principle.

It is likely that this relationship was modeled for Woolf by her mother and father. Though strong in her own right, Woolf's mother deferred and catered to her husband, the writer Leslie Stevens. When in Woolf's early adolescence her mother died an untimely death, her father became morbidly self-pitying, subject to outbursts of rage when his children did not accommodate to his moods. Woolf's elder sister bore the brunt of his demands, and had to exercise extraordinary fortitude in order to marry and live in her own home.

Woolf describes how she destroyed the "angel in the house" in order to find her own voice. But later in life Woolf killed again, this time drowning herself. What is the relationship between these two killings? I want to offer some information and understanding of the processes involved in such events.

Poet Glenda Taylor concedes to the animus' demand for being all inclusive by prefacing her work with the following:

I speak, till you cry out  
    "Partial! Only partial!"  
Then I go silent.  
I paint, but you say

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<sup>10</sup> "Professions for Women," *The Death of the Moth*, p. 151.

“One, only one of the limitless possible,”  
and so I cease to paint.

I wish to publish, yet you whisper  
“Ah, but you’ll be penned to one perspective  
and who will know you know there is  
another side,” so I sit, impotent,

Shackled by knowledge of Shiva’s dance  
of endless shifting forms  
in which an any one is all,  
but also none,

Until I promise you this preface  
to fly, a flag of concession,  
in the forefront of all my work,

Honoring the off-setting, never encompassed,  
equally sacred, counterbalancing,  
other side. Tao.<sup>11</sup>

Paula Bennett in her study of female creativity quotes Simone de Beauvoir on this subject of woman’s unwillingness to be “displeasing” in writing. Bennett points out that prior to the 1960s, few women had the courage to express themselves freely as writers. But in the 60s, Adrienne Rich and others

picked up their loaded guns, and with a zeal unparalleled in women’s history, they did everything Simone de Beauvoir said a woman lacked the courage to do; they investigated; they disarranged; above all, they exploded.<sup>12</sup>

Now, in the 90s, the problem is not so much one of courage, nor of finding an audience, but, as Marge Piercy puts it, of “unlearning to not speak.” This is a problem with the inner man, and can only be resolved by inner work.

Blizzards of paper  
in slow motion  
sift through her.  
In nightmares she suddenly recalls

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<sup>11</sup> “In Honor of That Not Spoken,” *Life Is a River*, p. ii.

<sup>12</sup> *My Life a Loaded Gun*, p. 242.

## 18 Introduction

a class she signed up for  
but forgot to attend.  
Now it is too late.  
Now it is time for finals:  
losers will be shot.  
Phrases of men who lectured her  
drift and rustle in piles:  
Why don't you speak up?  
Why are you shouting?  
You have the wrong answer,  
wrong line, wrong face.  
They tell her she is womb-man,  
babymachine, mirror-image, toy,  
earth mother and penis-poor,  
a dish of synthetic strawberry ice-cream  
rapidly melting.  
She grunts to a halt.  
She must learn again to speak  
starting with I  
starting with We  
starting as the infant does  
with her own true hunger  
and pleasure  
and rage.<sup>13</sup>

Most women have known the experience of struggling through confusion to a clear insight into the relationship with a man; you screw up your courage to talk with him about it and . . . Presto! He disappears! He did not have the advantage of mustering courage; you have given him a surprise, which to him felt like a “surprise *attack*,” and he fled. The animus, or inner man, until we have been aware of him for a long time and worked to bring him to a point of conscious development, reacts just like an unconscious man in the outer world. Reacting like the person new to psychotherapy, he is defensive rather than curious about himself. Say, “I feel hurt by you,” and he will not say, “I’m sorry; how have I hurt you?” More often he will argue that you should not feel hurt.

My personal response, after many years learning to relate to an-

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<sup>13</sup> “Unlearning to Not Speak,” *Circles on the Water*, p. 97.



imus figures—both inner and outer—has been to go at them obliquely through my own favorite medium, poetry. Poetry when it's "on" has the authenticity of a lucid dream. I have had the experience of sharing a poem which was not appreciated, or was misunderstood, or disparaged in some hurtful way; nevertheless my attachment to the poem, if it carried truth for me, did not diminish. I may have decided to take it and hide out underground with it for a while, or forever, but I wouldn't discard it. In "Poem Gift," I described the feeling:

I gave a friend a poem . . .  
he swallowed it whole.  
Nothing came back,  
nothing at all.

Later he threw it up  
with someone who felt safe.  
Neither of them  
could digest it.

Poetry is strong medicine.  
Someone said sin  
means missing the mark.  
Can a poem sin?

A bullseye poem is holy,  
cuts through the fog,  
strikes the heart like a harp,  
and whoever can take it in  
knows love.

This is my subjective experience and I would not try to impose poetry on others as *the* way of active imagination. Katherine Bradway has described her use of sandplay to explore the animus.<sup>14</sup> Music, movement and art may also be important, both as forms of active imagination and in amplifying dreams. However, I think the concept of coming at the animus indirectly may speak to many women, and for some, coming at him poetically will be quite fruitful.

Often a poem comes in the form of a statement directed to the an-

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14 "Gender Identity and Gender Roles: Their Place in Analytic Practice."

## 20 *Introduction*

imus; sometimes he speaks through the woman and the poem has a masculine voice; sometimes the voice is that of an animus position reflected in the way the woman speaks about herself.

It is not my intention to present the poems in this book as literature, nor to place value judgments on what a good poem should be. Here we are concerned with the soul-making of the poet, not the art form. This poetry is about becoming whole, about knowing oneself and thereby empathizing with others.

Perhaps these poems will cut through some of the fog; perhaps some will even strike the harpstring in your heart. At the very least, they may demonstrate the usefulness of the concept of the animus. Admittedly, we will not here resolve all the confusion that surrounds the sexual dichotomy. But I hope to shed some clarity on a subject which may forever require more differentiation.

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184 Bibliography

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## Index

- "A Just Anger" (Piercy), 88-89  
"Absent Father" (Taylor), 42-43  
"Ache of Marriage, The" (Levertov), 169  
active imagination, 19-20, 156, 158  
addiction, 67-69, 81, 83, 157  
*Aion*, 21  
Akhmatova, Anna, 129, 147-148  
Alvarez, A., 92n  
androcentrism, 47  
androgynous/androgynous, 23, 36, 66-67, 162, 171, 173, 175-176  
Andry, Judy, 7  
anger, 88-93, 97  
anima, 9, 11-13, 15-16, 23, 29-31, 33, 45, 58, 65, 67, 109, 152, 154n, 155  
animus: as archetype, 30-34, 44  
    and body, 73-76, 80-82  
    and creativity, 17, 59, 69, 82, 161  
    development, 58-70, 76  
    in dreams, 14, 106  
    and ego, 28-46  
    and father, 116-139  
    as "gods," 67, 69-70  
    as hero, 66-67, 82, 86-88, 139, 146-147, 152, 154n, 166  
    images of, 66-70, 106  
    as inner partner, 9, 11-20, 30-40, 44, 60-67, 152-176  
    as jealous lover, 104  
    and mother, 103-115  
    of the mother, 82, 111, 125  
    as "other," 33, 39-40, 42-43  
    and poetry, 14, 18-20, 44-45, 158  
    positive/negative, 15, 44, 69, 80-82, 91, 104-105, 154-155, 163  
    possession by, 44-46, 58, 80-82  
    as psychopomp, 81, 156  
    relationship with, 14-15, 18-20, 44, 58, 76, 80, 102, 152-172  
    stages, 60-67  
    types, 67-70  
    and typology, 81, 156, 162  
anorexia, 80, 83  
Aphrodite, 54, 144  
Apollo, 69, 88, 144  
archetype(s)/archetypal, 9, 12, 14, 21, 23, 30-34, 40, 42, 44, 45n, 51-52, 61, 67-70, 74-75, 86, 106, 109, 114-117, 125, 129-130, 134-135, 152  
Ares, 69  
Ariadne, 173n  
"Ariel" (Plath), 100  
Artemidorus, 71  
Artemis, 90, 144  
"As Difference Blends into Identity" (Miles), 145  
bear, 108-110  
Bennett, Paula, 17, 41, 89-90, 93, 100  
Binswanger, Hilde, 63n  
Bishop, Elizabeth, 55  
Black Madonna, 49-50  
"Black Mary" (McNeely), 49-50  
"Blackstone Rangers, The" (Brooks), 106  
Bly, Robert, 163  
body: 14, 21, 45-46, 61, 71-83, 88, 176  
    contact, in analysis, 77  
    masculine/feminine regions, 71-76  
Bogan, Louise, 92n, 146  
Boissovain, Eugen Jan, 122-123  
Bolen, Jean Shinoda, 67, 69-70, 109, 114-115, 158  
Bradway, Katherine, 19  
"Breasts of God" (Teresa of Avila), 53  
*Brief History of Time, A*, 167  
Brooks, Gwendolyn, 106, 166-167  
brother(s), 136, 139, 142-144  
Brown, Malcolm, 71, 73  
Bucy, Jayne, 159  
bulimia, 83  
Bundtzen, Linda K., 98  
Burden, Jean, 162

- Campbell, Joseph, 50  
 "Candlemas" (Levertov), 168  
 castration, 117  
 "Cats Like Angels" (Piercy), 79-80  
 child abuse, 77, 84-85, 128-131  
 Christianity, 47-48, 69  
 Chrystos, 92n  
 "Colossus, The" (Plath), 126-127  
 coniunctio, 21, 53, 61-62, 147, 169, 171  
 "Consciously" (Taylor), 173-174  
 consciousness, stages of, 21-23, 25, 36  
 "Councils" (Piercy), 152  
 Covington, Coline, 139n  
 creativity, 17, 59, 69, 82, 90-102, 106, 112, 115-116, 118, 138, 153, 157, 162-164  
 "Daddy" (Plath), 127-128  
 "Dance with Hawking" (McNeely), 167  
 "Daphne" (Millay), 144  
 Dash, Joan, 119, 122  
 "Day After Sunday, The" (McGinley), 48  
 de Beauvoir, Simone, 17  
 deficit thinking, 60, 63  
 Demeter, 106-107, 114  
 demon lover, 67, 100  
 desperado, 159-161  
 Dickinson, Emily, 40-42, 57, 59, 89-93, 155  
 differentiation, 21-25, 29, 35-36, 46, 85-86, 139, 141, 156, 162, 166  
 Dionysus, 69  
 "Disquieting Muses, The" (Plath), 97-98  
 Divine: 12, 91, 125  
   Child, 69-70, 120  
   relationship with, 47-57, 125  
 "Dodona" (H.D.), 135  
 Douglas, Claire, 63n, 173n  
 dragon, 85-88, 117  
 dream(s): analysis of, 73-76  
   animus in, 14, 66  
   and compensation, 75  
   of illness as dragon, 85-88  
   of mother, 73-75  
   and poetry, 14, 19  
   of robbers/rapists, 44, 66, 106  
 "Dream Horse Herding" (Lapp), 111  
 DuPlessis, Rachel Blau, 92n  
 dualities, 13, 21-27  
 dwarf, 106, 108-109  
 "Edge" (Plath), 99  
 ego: and animus, 28-46, 139  
   developmental stages, 21-22, 60-67  
   -functions, 61  
   as masculine, 36-37, 85  
   yin-/yang-, 36-40, 139, 151  
 Electra complex, 116  
 Eliot, T.S., 123  
 "Emperor, The" (Piercy), 140-141  
 "Engagement" (Teresa of Avila), 126  
 Engleman, Joan, 173n  
 "Epitaph for the Race of Man" (Millay), 23  
 equal partnership, 65-66, 152-172  
 Erickson, Eric, 60  
 Eros, 11, 13, 54, 64, 73  
 "Evening" (Akhmatova), 148  
 "Exiled" (Millay), 113  
 fairy tales, 45, 108-110  
 falling in love, 53-54, 105  
 "false self," 25n  
 father archetype/complex, 69-70, 116-140, 146  
 "Father of My Country, The" (Wakoski), 118-119  
 father's daughter, 118, 123-132  
 feminine, 9-12, 15-16, 22-23, 47-57, 61-67, 73, 83, 85-86, 88, 92-93, 100, 154-158, 164, 169-170  
 Ficke, Arthur, 122  
 "First Fig" (Millay), 116  
 Fitzgerald, Zelda, 111  
 fixation, 143  
 "Flute, The" (Tiger), 149-150  
 "For My Husband" (Taylor), 169-170  
 Fordham, Michael, 26-27, 60-61  
 Fox, Matthew, 15  
 Freud, Sigmund, 60, 63-64, 116-117, 141  
 Galenson, Eleanor, 64n  
 "Gardener to His God, The" (Van Duyn), 55  
 gender identity, 21-27, 30-40, 47, 60, 64

- Gesell, Arnold, 60  
 Gilligan, Carol, 23n, 60  
 Gimbutas, Marija, 50-51  
 "Girl in White" (Piercy), 103  
 Goddess, Great, 48-52, 54-56, 69-70  
 God-images, 47-48, 51-55, 69-70  
 "good-enough" mother, 25, 143  
 Goodyear, Gayonne, 7  
 Graves, Robert, 54  
 Great Mother, 21, 86  
 "Guest, The" (Akhmatova), 129  
 "Gypsy Desire" (Bucy), 159
- H.D., 135  
 Hades, 69, 106  
 hair, cutting off, 75  
 Hall, Nor, 143n, 172n  
 "Hanging Man, The" (Plath), 96  
 Harding, M. Esther, 173n  
 Hawking, Stephen, 167  
 Hecate, 90  
 Hephaestus, 69  
 Hera, 90  
 hermaphroditism, 22-23, 25, 27, 144  
 Hermes, 54, 69  
 hero/heroine, 66-67, 82, 86-88, 109,  
     117, 136, 139, 146-147, 152,  
     154n, 166  
 Hestia, 172  
 hetaira, 118  
 Hildegard of Bingen, 7, 15  
 Hillman, James, 15, 45n, 132, 154n  
 Horney, Karen, 63  
 Hughes, Ted, 92, 94-95, 98-99
- "I Am a Light You Could Read By"  
     (Piercy), 149  
 "I Would Have It" (Taylor), 39  
 idealization, 136, 140-141  
 identification, 61-62, 66, 139, 143  
 "Illustrious Ancestors" (Levertov), 164  
*In a Different Voice*, 23n, 60  
 "In Honor of That Not Spoken" (Taylor),  
     16-17  
 "In Mind" (Levertov), 84  
 incest, 129-131  
 individuation, 9, 13, 21-23, 32-33, 48,  
     52, 59, 64-65, 109, 146, 149, 155  
 inflation, 45, 48, 77, 117
- integration, 21-25, 52, 62, 66, 73, 152  
 introversion, 81, 155  
 "Invocation to Kali" (Sarton), 56-57  
 Ishtar, 54  
 Isis, 54
- Jesus, 69  
 Jewett, Julia, 172n  
 Jung, C.G., 9, 11-12, 21, 23, 29-33,  
     45n, 58, 60-64, 98, 139, 152n  
 Jung, Emma, 63, 145-146  
 "Jung" (Lapp), 12
- Kali, 56, 90  
 "King Friday," 156, 161  
 Klein, Melanie, 60, 63  
 Kohlberg, Lawrence, 60  
 Kore, 103, 147  
 Krishna, 69  
 Kroll, Judith, 98
- "Lady Lazarus" (Plath), 91  
 "Laocoon Is the Name of the Figure"  
     (Piercy), 108  
 Lapp, Claudia E., 12, 29, 111, 163  
 Lawrence, D.H., 71  
 Leonard, Linda, 67, 143n, 173n  
 Levertov, Denise, 27, 36-37, 84, 164,  
     168-169, 174-179  
 Lindsey, Karen, 92n  
 "Lines Written in Recapitulation"  
     (Millay), 38  
 "Little Exercise" (Bishop), 55  
 "Living in Sin" (Rich), 148-149  
 Loevinger, Jane, 63-65, 116-117  
 Logos, 11, 13, 28, 32, 64, 73, 145  
 Lorde, Audre, 92n  
 "Lullabye" (Sexton), 112
- Madonna, 47, 49-50, 87  
 "Magi" (Plath), 96  
 Mahler, Margaret, 63  
 Mann, Rachel Eliza, 35  
 masculine (*see also* father archetype/  
     complex), 21-23, 30-40, 44, 49,  
     52, 59-60, 62, 73, 82-83, 88, 92-  
     93, 106, 108-111, 115-135, 146,  
     156-172  
 Maslow, Abraham, 60

190 Index

- masochism, 63-64, 91, 155  
"Matins" (Levertov), 176-179  
McAfee, Julia, 110  
McCabe, Annis, 172  
McElroy, Colleen J., 92  
McGinley, Phyllis, 47-48  
Meadows, Regina, 7  
Medusa, 90-92  
"Medusa" (Plath), 97-98  
Meier, C.A., 71  
"Members of the Tribe" (Oliver), 101-102  
"Memo" (Piercy), 100-101  
menstruation, 81-83, 141  
mermaid, 172  
Metis, 70  
Miles, Josephine, 144  
Millay, Edna St. Vincent, 7-8, 23-24, 38, 43-44, 113, 116, 119-123, 137-138, 144  
"Mirror in Which Two Are Seen As One, The" (Rich), 113-114  
missing god, 69-70  
"Moon and the Yew Tree, The" (Plath), 98-99  
"Moon Is Always Female, The" (Piercy), 25-26  
Moore, Marianne, 175-176  
Moore, Robert, 158  
Morrigu, 90  
mother 21, 86, 88, 91-92, 103-118  
"My Life a Loaded Gun" (Dickinson), 93  
  
Nagy, Marilyn, 81  
narcissism, 14, 68, 82, 91, 104, 124-125, 141, 161  
Neumann, Erich, 21, 60-62, 65-66, 85-86, 88, 116-117, 171  
  
"O Animus" (Lapp), 29  
O'Connor, Flannery, 59  
ocean, 112-113  
oedipal conflict, 60, 64  
"Of Robert Frost" (Brooks), 166-167  
"Old Whorehouse, An" (Oliver), 13  
"Older Brothers" (Tiger), 142  
Oliver, Mary, 13, 78-79, 100-101, 128, 130, 136-138, 165-167  
opposites, union of, 53, 61  
  
*Origins and History of Consciousness, The*, 21, 61  
"Oriole, The" (Sarton), 136  
"Orion" (Oliver), 136-137  
"Orion" (Rich), 138-139  
Osiris, 54  
otherness 33, 39-40, 42-43, 62, 136-138, 147, 156  
  
*participation mystique*, 58, 61, 92  
patriarchal partner, 62, 66, 76, 88, 153  
patriarchy, 48, 63, 66, 68-69, 83, 85-87, 91, 116-117, 131, 136, 139-141, 149, 153-154, 161  
penis envy, 63-64, 117, 141  
Perera, Sylvia Brinton, 173n  
perfectionism, 80, 124, 131, 161  
Persephone, 103, 106-107, 109, 173n  
*Phantasia of the Unconscious*, 71  
"Phantom of the Opera," 124  
Piaget, Jean, 60  
Piercy, Marge, 10-11, 18, 25-26, 79-80, 88-89, 100-101, 103, 107-108, 140-141, 149, 152  
Plath, Aurelia, 92, 98  
Plath, Sylvia, 89, 91-100, 111-113, 126-128  
"Poem" (Oliver), 78-79  
"Poem Gift" (McNeely), 19  
"Poet Power" (Levertov), 174  
poetry, and animus, 14, 18-20, 44-45, 158  
polarities, 13, 21-27  
Poseidon, 69  
possession, 44-46, 58, 80-82  
power, 69, 111, 117-118, 123-124  
"Princess Recalls Her One Adventure, The" (Millay), 43-44  
projection, 11-14, 23, 51-54, 62-63, 68, 86, 88, 97, 103, 109-110, 124, 136, 139, 145-146, 149, 151-155  
Psyche, 173n  
puella, 118  
puer, 110  
Pygmalion, 124  
  
rage, 88-93  
"Rage" (Oliver), 130-131  
regression, 26-27, 86, 104, 112-114

- relatedness/relationship(s): 13-14, 18-19, 33-36, 39-40, 42, 44, 46, 54, 58, 60, 62, 64-66, 70, 84-87, 102, 105, 108-110, 115, 117-118, 125, 136-139, 141-156, 172  
 with the Divine, 47-57, 125  
 "Renaissance" (Millay), 121-122  
 Rich, Adrienne, 17, 73, 78, 89, 102, 113-114, 131-132, 138-139, 147-149  
 Rifkin, Harvey, 7  
 "Roofwalker, The" (Rich), 147
- sandplay, 19, 44  
 Sarton, May, 56-57, 92n, 136  
 Seboulisa, 91  
 Sekmet, 90  
 Self, 14, 23, 42, 48-49, 51-55, 61-62, 66-67, 83, 86, 88, 110, 118, 139, 141, 156, 171-172  
 senex, 140-141  
 Sexton, Anne, 111-112  
 shadow, 29, 34, 57, 83, 87, 103, 152n  
 "Shalom" (Levertov), 169  
 Sky Father, 69  
 "Snow White and Rose Red," 108-110  
 "Song for Ishtar" (Levertov), 27  
 Sophia, 54  
 soul, 9, 13, 20, 132, 154-155, 180-181  
 Spencer, Anne, 170-171  
 spirit/spiritual, 13, 78, 82, 103-104, 116-121, 124-126, 132, 146-147, 156, 172, 176, 180-181  
 "Spirits Appeased, The" (Levertov), 174-175  
 "Stanley Kunitz" (Oliver), 167  
 stereotypes, 11, 30, 92-93  
 Stevens, Leslie, 16  
 "Stings" (Plath), 100  
 suicide, 93-94, 99-102, 111, 147  
 symbiosis, 22, 98, 104-105, 109, 115  
 syzygy, 9, 11-15, 21-27
- "Tale, A" (Bogan), 146  
 Tara, 54  
 Taylor, Glenda, 16-17, 39, 42-43, 132-133, 170, 173-174  
 "Tecumseh" (Oliver), 165-166  
 Tepperman, Jean, 71, 77  
 Teresa of Avila, 52-53, 126, 171  
 Thomas, Dylan, 36  
 Tiger, Madeline, 142-143, 149-150  
 touching/touch deprivation, 77  
 transformation, 61-62, 88  
 "Two Loves, an Ant, a Lynx, and a Lunatic" (Mann), 35  
 "Two Sisters of Persephone" (Plath), 95  
 typology, 81, 156, 162
- unconscious: birth of ego from, 85-86  
 as Great Mother, 21, 86, 88  
 "Unlearning to Not Speak" (Piercy), 18  
 uroboros, 22, 36, 62, 132
- Van Duyn, Mona, 55-56  
 "Visitor, A" (Oliver), 128-129  
 von Franz, Marie-Louise, 63n, 152
- Wakoski, Diane, 102, 118  
 "What Are Years?" (Moore), 176  
 Wheelwright, Jane, 23, 31-32  
 White, Father Victor, 51n  
*White Goddess, The*, 54  
 Whitman, Walt, 40  
 Whitmont, Edward, 158  
 wholeness, 51-52, 77, 85-86  
 Wiedemann, Florence, 23n, 63-66, 173n  
 "Wife-Woman, The" (Spencer), 170-171  
 "Wildermann" (Lapp), 163-164  
 Wilson, Edmund, 121  
 "Window of the Woman Burning" (Piercy), 10-11  
 Winnicott, D.W., 25n  
 "Witch" (Tepperman), 71, 77  
 Woodman, Marion, 80n, 173n  
 Woolf, Virginia, 16  
 World Parents, 21-22, 24
- "Yes, Yes, Ramakrishna" (Taylor), 132-134  
 yin/yang: 21, 23, 25, 32-33, 36-40, 139, 151, 164  
 body regions, 72-73, 75-76  
 Young-Eisendrath, Polly, 23n, 63-66, 173n
- "Zeroing In" (Levertov), 37  
 Zeus, 69, 135





Also by by Deldon Anne McNeely

*Becoming:*  
*An Introduction to Jung's Concept of Individuation*  
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*Becoming: An Introduction to Jung's Concept of Individuation* explores the ideas of Carl Gustav Jung. His idea of a process called individuation has sustained Deldon Anne McNeely's dedication to a lifelong work of psychoanalysis, which unfortunately has been dismissed by the current trends in psychology and psychiatry.

Psychotherapists know the value of Jung's approach through clinical results, that is, watching people enlarge their consciousness and change their attitudes and behavior, transforming their suffering into psychological well-being. However, psychology's fascination with behavioral techniques, made necessary by financial concerns and promoted by insurance companies and pharmaceutical companies, has changed the nature of psychotherapy and has attempted to dismiss the wisdom of Jung and other pioneers of the territory of the unconscious mind.

For a combination of unfortunate circumstances, many of the younger generation, including college and medical students, are deprived of fully understanding their own minds. Those with a scientific bent are sometimes turned away from self-reflection by the suggestion that unconscious processes are metaphysical mumbo-jumbo. Superficial assessments of Jung have led to the incorrect conclusion that one must be a spiritual seeker, or religious, in order to follow Jung's ideas about personality. *Becoming* is an offering to correct these misperceptions.

Many university professors are not allowed to teach Jungian psychology. Secular humanism and positivism have shaped the academic worldview; therefore, investigation into the unknown or unfamiliar dimensions of human experience is not valued. But this attitude contrasts with the positive reputation Jung enjoys among therapists, artists of all types, and philosophers. Those without resistance to the unconscious because of their creativity, open-mindedness, or personal disposition are more likely to receive Jung's explorations without prejudice or ideological resistance. There is a lively conversation going on about Jung's ideas in journals and conferences among diverse groups of thinkers which does not reach mainstream psychology. *Becoming* is for those whose minds are receptive to the unknown, and to help some of us to think—more with respect than dread—of the possibility that we act unconsciously.

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*“The animus is the deposit, as it were, of all woman’s ancestral experiences of man—and not only that, he is also a creative and procreative being.”*

—C.G. Jung

Inextricably enmeshed in the life of every woman is a constellation of autonomous energy that Jung called animus, her masculine side. As a woman develops psychologically, animus changes, appearing and reappearing as child or adult, lover or enemy, king or slave, animal or spirit. All these manifestations of animus energy are reflected in her experience of masculinity, both in herself and in others.

*Animus Aeternus* weaves developmental theories from depth psychology with the poetry of women—including Sylvia Plath, Adrienne Rich, Emily Dickinson, Teresa of Avila and Edna St. Vincent Millay—to trace the history and meaning of this lifetime companion, illustrating how animus participates in a woman’s life, whether we are conscious of it or not.

Like dreams and active imagination, poetry speaks in images from the soul. In choosing women’s poetry as well as their dreams to illustrate the essence of animus, the author adds the immediacy of soul-made truths to the lucidity of her conceptual matrix.

Deldon Anne McNeely received her Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology from Louisiana State University and is a member of the International Association for Analytical Psychology. A senior analyst of the Inter-Regional Society of Jungian Analysts, she is a training analyst for their New Orleans Jungian Seminar. Publications include *Becoming: An Introduction to Jung’s Concept of Individuation*; *Touching: Body Therapy and Depth Psychology*; *Animus Aeternus: Exploring the Inner Masculine*; and *Mercury Rising: Women, Evil and the Trickster Gods*.

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