Reviews

Books


Ann and Barry Ulanov's *Transforming Sexuality: The Archetypal World of Anima and Animus* is a much needed book which will help students and professionals alike navigate the treacherous waters of Jung's seminal ideas of anima and animus. As the Ulanovs point out, Jung himself recognized that these ideas were "irrational and clumsy" (p. 1), and many since Jung's day, from the amateur to the astute, have found it difficult to use these ideas without running aground on sexual stereotypes or insulting generalizations about gender. Fully cognizant of these dangers, the authors manage to illuminate both the theory and practical applications of these archetypal motifs without slipping into simplistic stereotyping or reducing the complexities to essentialist generalizations.

The Ulanovs remind us that Jung's language for describing the psyche was one of images, and they employ a wealth of images to bring the otherwise abstract concepts of anima and animus to life. Their central image is that of a bridge. The anima-animus complex is a bridge that carries us from the familiar territory of the ego into the mysterious country of the Self. If this complex is well-integrated, we barely take note of it, for like a bridge we take in our everyday commuting, it serves us as an unnoticed bearer of traffic between the ego and Self sides of our psyches. But when our contrasexual side is not so well-integrated, then like a bridge with only one lane open—or worse yet, completely shut down because some piece of the span is missing—we find the energy of the Self backing up and unable to cross over so as to renew the life of the ego. The Ulanovs' keen observations paint pictures for us of this crucial bridge complex at moments when it gloriously connects separated shores of human existence, and when its snarled traffic creates all manner of accidents.

Jung maintained, and the Ulanovs agree, that the anima-animus complex serves the psyche in a compensatory fashion, balancing and opening up the ego's conscious viewpoint to new possibilities. For example, if a man possesses a "heavy mien [and] dense conscious attitude" that is "serious and responsible," then his anima may well appear to him in dreams through "elusive erotic . . . figures" who tease and arouse (p. 24). A woman who trembles
in fear of her own powerful sexual instincts may seek to control them by developing a conscious ego that is “all word, transcendence, and order,” but her dreams may introduce her to an animus figure who is “non-verbal . . ., large, silent, a physical presence” who woos her to an orgasmic encounter with her passion (p. 112). These two people, now no longer cut off from the enormous energy and power of their contrasexual sides, have the chance not only to grow into more balanced and healthier egos, but are also brought across the ego’s boundary into the territory of the Self. Here each ego is not merely transformed into a more spacious one. It is de-centered through discovering that the Self is the center of being, and that by living in touch with this new world, one has arrived at “what it is all for, what makes it all worthwhile” (p. 24).

Contrary to those who say that the language of the psyche is self-indulgently personal, the Ulanovs build upon Jung’s insights to explain that the anima-animus complex, like all complexes, is composed of three concentric rings: the outermost ring of which is personal, the next cultural, and the deepest archetypal. Because this is so, the contrasexual complex has applications not just to personal life, but also to interpersonal-social-political-cultural life, and mythological-religious-spiritual life. Their book illumines the applicability of animus and anima to personal life through examples from the rich clinical experiences of Ann Ulanov’s practice as a Jungian analyst. Wide-ranging illustrations of the activity of anima and animus in art, literature, and music come from Barry Ulanov’s keen examination of poets from Dante to Dickinson, musicians from Bela Bartok to Bing Crosby, and artists from Michelangelo to Matisse. Together they investigate the life of the contrasexual in the realm of the spirit by plumbing depths as diverse as the myth of the Sumerian corn goddess, St. Teresa’s interior castle, and the Ungrund of Paul Tillich.

The Ulanovs’ book will be of lasting benefit to all who desire to discern more deeply Jung’s concepts of anima and animus. Whether we apply their work to analyze ourselves or others, to illumine the interaction of masculine and feminine dynamics in culture or politics, or to dive more deeply into the sea of the Spirit, we will come to comprehend Jung’s contrasexual insights more thoroughly. But the Ulanovs’ work does more than this. In a creative way, their book itself builds in us new bridges. These open us to the possibility of more integrated life, as our egos become more balanced and transformed by the mysterious power of the Self that crosses into our conscious lives across the bridge of anima and animus.

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