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## THE FEMININE ARCHETYPE IN JOHN OSBORNE'S *LOOK BACK IN ANGER*

When we say "archetype" in analytical psychology, we mean a primordial image which operates within the psyche of human beings and which determines human behaviour unconsciously. "As *a priori* conditioning factors," Jung, argues, "[archetypes] represent a special psychological instance of the biological 'pattern of behaviour,' which gives all living creatures their specific qualities."<sup>1</sup> Such psychic images can manifest themselves in rites, myths and symbols, as in early man, as well as in human dreams, fantasies and creative works. What interests us in this study is the manifestation of the Feminine Archetype or the Archetype of the Great Mother<sup>2</sup> in Jimmy Porter, John Osborne's male protagonist in *Look Back in Anger*, and the way this archetype conditions his relationship with Alison, his wife, and Helena, her friend, the only female characters in the play.

Before, however, we pursue a close examination of our topic, it is necessary that we introduce certain psychological notions indispensable to understanding an analysis of Osborne's play in terms of the Feminine Archetype. Thus, "the Great Round," symbolized by "the Uroboros," the circular snake biting its tail, represents the original situation of the human psyche in which man's consciousness and ego are still undeveloped and in which, in a state of chaos, both positive and negative, male and female, elements of consciousness coexist. The Uroboric totality is a symbol of the united primordial parents. Out of this still undifferentiated archetype evolve and crystalize the maternal and the paternal uroboros or the primordial Feminine and Masculine Archetypes.

Each person possesses an inner, though unconscious, image of both the Feminine and the Masculine Archetypes. As it is widely known, Jung has named a male's archetype of the Feminine *anima*, which he defined as "a personification of all feminine psychological tendencies in a man's psyche,"<sup>3</sup>

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1. Carl G. Jung, *Psychology and Religion: West and East*, Coll. Works, Vol. II, trans. by R.F.C. Hull, New York and London, 1958; 2nd ed., 1963, p. 149.

2. Eric Neuman, in his book, *The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype*, trans. from the German by Ralph Manheim and publ. in the *Bollingen Series XLVII* by the Princeton University Press in Princeton, N.J. in 1972; 2nd printing 1974, p. 11, defines the term "Great Mother" as "a partial" aspect of the Archetype Feminine... presupposing a highly developed speculative consciousness" and informs us that "it is only relatively late in the history of mankind that we find the Archetypal Feminine designated as Magna Mater."

3. Carl G. Jung and M. L. von Franz, Joseph L. Henderson, Jolande Jacobi, Aniela Jaffe, *Man and His Symbols*, Dell Publishing Co., Inc., A Laurel Edition, New York, 1964, p. 186.

and a female's masculine archetype *animus*. The original archetypes of the *anima* and *animus* are, as a rule, formulated by the mother and father of an individual respectively, and further developed, reinforced or modified, by the living experience derived from the relationship each person has with the opposite sex.

"It is an essential feature of the primordial archetype," Neuman points out, "that it combines positive and negative attributes" (p. 12). The positive attributes constitute the benign aspect of the Archetype while the negative attributes constitute the terrible aspect of it. The positive attributes of the Feminine Archetype are manifested in its aspect as the "Good Mother" while its negative attributes in its aspect as the "Terrible Mother." These two aspects arise out of the interplay of two functions which are recognized as the *elementary* and *transformative* characters of the Archetype.

"As *elementary character*," Neuman explains "we designate the aspect of the Feminine that as the Great Round, the Great Container, tends to hold fast to everything that springs from it and to surround it like an eternal substance" (p. 25). The *elementary* character, in other words, is that stable, conservative force which opposes the individual ego's independence and creates a "psychic gravitation," that is, "a tendency of the ego or consciousness to return to its original, unconscious state" (p. 26). Whenever the ego is insufficiently developed or impaired by sickness or fatigue or some other unbearable tension, it finds it difficult to withstand the attraction of the "Terrible Devouring Mother" and, eventually, "sinks" or is "swallowed up" by it. This psychic process becomes evident in myth or folk-tale when the hero is swallowed up by darkness/night, abyss or monsters. As we shall see later, Jimmy sees a python in Alison's love ready to swallow him whole every time.

In the *transformative* character of the Feminine, on the other hand, the emphasis is placed "on the dynamic element of the psyche, which, in contrast to the conservative tendency of the elementary character, drives towards motion, change and, in a word, transformation."<sup>4</sup> Although opposing, the elementary and transformative characters of the Feminine Archetype may often overlap and interpenetrate in their function, as is the instance of gestation, the bearing of children and that of feeding which can be attributed to either its elementary or transformative character, depending on where the emphasis lies. In the former, these functions express the need to create in order to swallow back and obliterate while in the latter they express the need to amplify and change in order to liberate. It becomes obvious, therefore, that both the *elementary* and the *transformative* traits of the Feminine Archetype condition the behaviour of human beings according to the degree of their psychic development.

4. Neuman, p. 29.

Alison and Helena, the two female characters in John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*<sup>5</sup> seem to correspond to the *elementary* and *transformative* characters of Jimmy Porter's *anima*, his individual Feminine Archetype, respectively: Alison, a monument of irresponsible apathy, who, nevertheless, attracts and at the same time threatens to devour Jimmy with her love, and Helena, the "worthy opponent," who fascinates and excites him and who, eventually, brings change to his life by creating the new conditions through which he will relate to his wife in the future. That both Alison and Helena are aspects of Jimmy's *anima* or Feminine Archetype becomes obvious by the fact that both girls while ironing, in Act I and Act III, sc. i, respectively, are wearing Jimmy's "old," "cherry-red" shirt. The shirt and the colour can be taken to signify Jimmy's unconscious psyche. Similarly, the image of Alison and Helena, dressed in Jimmy's shirt, reveals their point of convergence and interpenetration. As characters we see them fuse and invert roles, thus representing, as we shall see later, different phases of Jimmy's developing ego/consciousness.

Alison has all the traits of the *elementary* character of the Feminine Archetype. "Hers is the most elusive personality," Osborne tells us in his stage directions, a characteristic which corresponds to the Great Round's chaotic state of undifferentiated elements. The inertia which distinguishes the *elementary* aspect of the Archetype Feminine is obvious in Alison's incredible apathy and irresponsiveness. "Nothing I could do would provoke her. Not even if I were to drop dead," Jimmy claims in Act I, because Alison belongs to those people who, according to Jimmy, made of "a lump of dough," are unable "to raise themselves out of their delicious sloth" (Act I). He strongly wishes that something as strong as losing a child happened to her, an experience that might wake her out of her "beauty sleep" (Act I). Her ability to get used to things, "a great one for getting used to things," as Jimmy complains (Act I), is evidence of the natural tendency of the *elementary* character to contain and preserve. Instead of reacting towards a dynamic solution to her problem, Alison retreats into resigned exhaustion. Faithful to the *elementary* character she represents, Alison lacks motion and spirit. She is "Lady Pusillanimus," "mean spirited" and "cowardly," "timid of mind" and "of small courage," as Jimmy calls her in one of his destructive moods in Act I. Among Jimmy's violent rages, all Alison wants is "a little peace" (Act II, sc.i). Her silences, however, make Jimmy even more outrageous and offensive.

Alison, in her *elementary* character of the Feminine Archetype, is without "bite, edge, drive" and, therefore, she cannot offer Jimmy the adventurous sense of life he is striving after or even some of the "ordinary human

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5. All references to the text are to the faber and faber edition of 1983, printed in Great Britain.

enthusiasm" he is longing for. All "good brave causes" having been fought for his generation, Jimmy finds life lacking direction and depressingly the same. He is "hurt because everything is the same," Alison tries to explain to her father, and she is too "flegmatic" to offer Jimmy the intellectual and emotional provocation he needs in order to feel he is alive as a human being should be. In spite of her lethargic irresponsiveness, however, Alison loves Jimmy passionately. "Oh, it's not that she hasn't her own kind of passion," he says. "She has the passion of a python. She just devours me whole every time, as if I were some over-large rabbit" (Act I). The python here can be seen as another aspect of the maternal uroboros that "at once bears, begets and devours" (N. 36). Alison, as an Archetype of the Devouring Mother, threatens Jimmy with absorption into its "womb of origination and death." (Neu. 30). Jimmy's archetypal fear of the Feminine, a fact which also reveals Alison as the *elementary* aspect of the Archetype, is succinctly expressed in his final remark on Alison's behaviour at the end of Act I: "She'll go on sleeping and devouring until there is nothing left of me."

Thus, Jimmy experiences the struggle of his developing consciousness to overpower his psychic gravitation towards the unconscious dominant, and to relate to his wife, upon whom he has projected the *elementary* character of his *anima*, on equal terms. The problems he faces on the conscious plane — no good causes to fight for, nothing to keep him alive — accelerate his gravitation towards Alison, whose emotional nature endangers him with annihilation. As a matter of course, Jimmy resists the process and attempts to destroy Alison through his carefully planned attacks. He resents Alison's power of attraction as a dark, half-understood power of his unconscious. Jung's description of the relationship of a man's ego to his unconscious, and further to his wife, succinctly illustrates Jimmy's and Alison's relationship. Writes Jung: "His fear of the dark, incalculable power of the unconscious gives his wife an illegitimate authority over him, and forges such a dangerously close union that the marriage is permanently on the brink of explosion from internal tension — or else, out of protest, he flies to the other extreme, with the same results."<sup>6</sup> What Jung means by "he flies to the other extreme" is that the male ego becomes aggressive, exactly like Jimmy, in his unconscious effort to defend himself against the "perilous image of Woman" that threatens him. When in Act II, sc. i and in Act III, sc. ii, Jimmy, off stage, plays his trumpet, a phallic image, "as if he wanted to kill someone with it" in Helena's remark, what he is actually trying to do is to assert his masculinity as well as his strong desire to live a fully independent life against the conspiracy of the two women who appear on stage alone and engaged in

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6. Carl G. Jung, "The Relations between the Ego and the Unconscious," in *Selected Writings*, introduced by Anthony Storr, Fontana Paperbacks, Great Britain, 1983, p. 109.

intimate conversation about themselves in their relationship to Jimmy. The fact that Jimmy is intimidated by the image of the "perilous Woman" is obvious in his exclamatory question to Cliff, the friend who is sharing house with them: "Why, why, why, why, why," Jimmy exclaims, "do we let these women bleed us to death?" (Act III, sc. i).

Helena, on the other hand, corresponds to the transformative character of the Feminine Archetype, that is, to Jimmy's positive aspect of *anima* which comes to his rescue like Ariadne or the youthful Medea in the Greek myths. Helena bears all the characteristics of the *transformative* aspect of the Feminine Archetype in which "the accent is on the dynamic element of the psyche." Helena's "matriarchical authority" and "alertness" are emphasized in the stage directions by Osborne. He describes her as "a visiting royalty... of that middle-class womanhood... eminently secure in her divine rights" who receives "her due of respect and admiration" and who behaves with "an impressive show of strength and dignity." As soon as she arrives, she takes an active interest in her friend's household as well as her welfare. She sees through Alison's situation and there is no question in her mind that Alison should do something about it: "You've got to fight him," she advises her (Act II, sc. i). She is full of energy and ready to fight Jimmy on her friend's behalf. She does not hesitate to provoke him when he becomes unreasonably offensive. Thus, she asks him directly why he feels the need to always be so "offensive" or "unpleasant." She actually calls him "a very unpleasant young man" and a "bully," rises in the defense of Alison's mother who is abused by him in her absence and hopes to make Jimmy behave "like anyone else" or arouse his sense of responsibility towards his wife. When both Cliff and Alison bow their heads to Jimmy's savage attacks, Helena stands up to him and tells him a piece of her mind after her attempt to use "patient reasonableness" with him fails (Act II, sc. i). She even threatens to slap him on the face, a threat which foreshadows what actually happens at the end of Act II, sc. ii. Although she finds the whole situation irrational, "I don't understand him, you or any of it," she judiciously says to Cliff, she takes command of it all the same. She takes the initiative to wire Alison's father, thus taking the decision for undecisive, exhausted Alison. She questions Cliff as to his role in the whole situation and is the one who is brave enough to face Jimmy's rage on Alison's departure and hand him her farewell letter. She is also the one who takes the initiative to involve Jimmy, whose behaviour she finds "horrifying" and yet "oddly exciting," in a power/love game which, eventually reinforces Jimmy's masculine principle.

In Act III, sc. i, Helena has replaced Alison in Jimmy's attic of a home. Like Alison, she is wearing Jimmy's old shirt over her clothes and, like her, she is also ironing throughout the scene which is actually a repetition of Act I, the only difference being that Helena, unlike Alison, is responsive to Jimmy's

comments on newspaper news and even participates in his improvised song-play. She has come to appreciate his humour and laughs with him and Cliff. At the end of the scene, Jimmy articulates for us the cause of the different way he relates to Helena, when he says to her: "Right from that first night, you have always put out your hand to me first... you made a good enemy, didn't you? What they call a worthy opponent... You stood up and came out to meet me." Jimmy's masculine principle has found a mate in Helena's companionship and Jimmy is grateful enough to recognize it and implore her: "Don't let anything go wrong" (Act III, sc. ii).

Not only did Helena, as a transformative power, bring a positive change in Jimmy's temperament, but she also became the functional power which helped Alison rise to maturity. It was on Helena's initiative that Alison was sent away, as if into the desert (emotionally alone), to have the learning experience of losing her unborn child. As Jimmy had wished her earlier, Alison aborts her child, thus undergoing an extremely painful experience which leads her through humiliation to maturity. This initiation ritual/experience into maturity is actually a process by which Alison is transformed from the Terrible Mother of the *elementary* character of the Feminine Archetype into the Good Mother of its *transformative* or positive aspect. Aborting Jimmy's child, "that helpless human being inside my body," Alison symbolically gets rid of the *elementary* character of the Archetype Feminine, her terribleness, aided into it by Jimmy's fertilization/opposition and Helena's benign influence. As a "bulge around her navel" (Act I), Jimmy, eventually, stirs Alison into change, in spite of his prognostication as to the opposite: "That bulge around her navel — if you're wondering what it is — it's me. Me, buried alive down there, and going mad, smothered in that peaceful looking coil. Not a sound, not a flicker from her — she doesn't even rumble a little. You'd think that this indigestible mess would stir up some kind of tremor in those distended, overfed tripes — but not her!" (Act I).

Similarly, Alison's close contact with Helena and her abandonment to Helena's decision also activate Alison into change. As soon as Helena sees Alison in at the door on the latter's return a few months later, she realizes that, her function as a transformative factor having been fulfilled, it is time for her to go on the excuse of having done "wrong" according to her principles of "good and evil." Thus, Alison and Helena exchange places once more. The way they exchange roles, as characters, on the actual plane corresponds to the dynamics of the dialectic movement between the *elementary* and the *transformative* characters of the Feminine Archetype which are actually aspects of the same whole. As Neuman explains "the two characters are not antithetical from the very start but interpenetrate and combine with one another in many ways... But although both are usually present at once, one of them is almost always dominant." (Neu. 29). Alison

and Helena, upon whom Jimmy unconsciously projects the negative and positive aspects of his *anima*, contain each other in their similarities for they both belong to the same class, are of the same age, and co-operate/interpenetrate in exchanging experience/energy during their conversations. Helena, as the active aspect of the Archetype, sends Alison away for a while, as a cure, and when Alison returns, Helena feeds her with more knowledge of Jimmy's character, teaching her, so to speak, how to become "a worthy opponent." Helena herself seems to recede into the background, as she is preparing to leave, and in so doing she fuses with Alison who gradually conquers the foreground. Alison, in her new configuration, becomes the dominant element in Jimmy's psyche, a positive *anima*, this time, who rescues the hero and his marriage out of the devouring labyrinth of semi-consciousness.

#### ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Μαρία Θ. Αναστασοπούλου, Το Θηλυκό Αρχέτυπο στο *Οργισμένα Νιάτα* του Τζων Όσμπορν

Βασισμένο στην αναλυτική ψυχολογία του Καρλ Γιούνγκ, που ονομάζει τα θηλυκά στοιχεία στον ψυχισμό του άνδρα *anima* και τα αρσενικά στοιχεία στον ψυχισμό της γυναίκας *animus*, το άρθρο αυτό φέρνει στην επιφάνεια τα στοιχεία εκείνα του χαρακτήρα των δύο γυναικών του έργου στην σχέση τους με τον ήρωα Τζίμμου Πόρτερ, που στηρίζουν την θέση της συγγραφέως του άρθρου, ότι οι δυο γυναίκες αντιπροσωπεύουν δυο διαφορετικές απόψεις της *anima* του ήρωα.

Η σύζυγός του, Άλισον, αντιπροσωπεύει, ότι ο Γιανγκ έχει ονομάσει «πρωταρχικό» χαρακτήρα της *anima*, ενώ η Έλενα, φίλη της Άλισον και, για λίγο, ερωμένη του Τζίμμου, αντιπροσωπεύει τον «εξελικτικό» χαρακτήρα της *anima* του. Επίσης τονίζεται ότι η σχέση των δύο γυναικών μεταξύ τους και μέσα στα πλαίσια της σχέσης τους με τον Τζίμμου, αντανakλά την διαλεκτική σχέση μεταξύ του «πρωταρχικού» και του «εξελικτικού» χαρακτήρα της *anima*, κατά την οποία, ενώ οι δύο αυτές τάσεις συνυπάρχουν και συνεργάζονται με διάφορους τρόπους, σχεδόν πάντοτε η μία υπερισχύει.