

CONFRONTING THE UGLINESS OF BEAUTY: WHY MARRYING YOUR MUSE IS NOT A GOOD IDEA!

A commentary on the film 'Effie Gray' in the light of Jung's concepts of 'anima' & 'animus.'

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PART 1 – ENCHANTMENT

Many people have tried to describe the difference between infatuation and true love. One way of putting it goes like this:-

In infatuation, the subject is a passive victim of the spell of conceived attraction to the other person.

In love, there is an active appreciation of the intrinsic worth of the object of love.

Why is it that these two people, Effie and Ruskin, who are so different, become infatuated with each other, with such disastrous results?

RUSKIN

Of all the powerful images in this film, and there are many, the one that impresses me most is the image you get just as Effie and Ruskin are leaving the wedding ceremony. Effie has just stepped inside the carriage. Ruskin looks at her through the window and, because of the reflection, we see the two faces superimposed.

So what's going on inside Ruskin's mind at that moment? He tells us:-

'My friends, consider me a man who is not an artist but has nonetheless been granted a Muse.'

It is a moment which sends a shiver down my spine.... a moment which reminds me of that unfortunate interview where Charles and Diana are

asked whether they are in love. And she replies 'Of course!' and he says 'Whatever "in love" means....' And so we are reminded that fairytale weddings often turn out to be anything but.

Why is it that so many men become infatuated with unsuitable women and end up in disastrous relationships? At one level its usually something to do with the sex drive of course. At another level its often something to do with aesthetics. But at the deeper psychological level, its invariably something to do with the unconscious projection of unmet needs.

I was 16 when I first heard about Jung from a teacher at my boarding school in Dorset. It was one of those life-changing moments. I was so excited that I got out my bike and pedalled 5 miles into Blandford, the nearest town, to look for a book. I went into a old-fashioned bookshop, and for the princely sum of 2/6d, purchased 'An Introduction to Jungian Psychology' by Frieda Fordham.¹

Back in my dormitory, snuggling beneath the bedclothes, and using a torch for illumination, I read that Jung taught that every man has a feminine element within his psyche which he called the 'anima.' I instinctively knew what Jung meant. It made perfect sense to me. The reason was that I already knew her. My experience of anima was real and palpable.

I further read that a man's anima will often represent herself in the image of a woman in his dreams, in his fantasies, and in his creative works. She is *autonomous* said Jung. In other words, she has an independent mind and an independent personality – often with quite a different agenda from the man in whom she dwells.

So when a man becomes infatuated with a woman, what's happening is: he is falling in love with his own soul, his anima.



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The anima is his Muse – which he projects on to the woman. The woman is the screen. He is the projector. And it is his own unconscious needs which operate the projector and determine the image which he sees.

The trouble is: if the projected image is nothing like the reality, then the man is setting himself up for a terrible fall when the projector stops running and the illusion fades.

So why does this projection-phenomenon happen? Is the anima something like an evil spirit maliciously determined to bring about the man's destruction? Is she just playing a ghastly trick? Or does she actually have a more constructive and purposeful intention?

The answer from Jungian psychology is this:-

Whenever the anima becomes activated in the form of a projection what she is aiming to do is to force the man to become more complete and more whole, in other words to 'individuate.'

That's why the personality of the anima is usually so very different from the personality of the man in whom she dwells. And that's why the woman he is attracted to is so often so completely different from himself.

So whereas Ruskin is such a dry stick-in-the-mud, Effie is bubbling and fun-loving. Whereas Ruskin is cold and unfeeling, Effie is warm and emotional. Whereas Ruskin is a tireless workaholic, Effie is more concerned about relationship and the feeling-values that go with it.

There are two paradoxes within Ruskin – two inner conflicts. Firstly, he is a man who is totally dedicated to the feeling-values of art and romanticism. And yet he's utterly incapable of serving the feeling-values within himself. Secondly, he is a man who is totally dedicated to the ideal that art should faithfully represent nature *exactly as it is*, with all its imperfections, '*rejecting nothing, selecting nothing, and scorning nothing*' as he says. And yet, when it comes to the reality of what a woman looks like underneath the nightdress, he cannot cope with the ugliness of beauty.

And so, just as he represses his anima, his own feeling-values, so he represses Effie, and, under the influence of his parents, locks her up in a cold and forbidding dungeon.

See how a man treats a woman and you will see how he treats his anima, his soul. And if a man attempts to lock his anima up in a dungeon, the chances are that she will do all that she can to seek a way to break out. For, as Jung reminds us, the anima is not only '*man's solace for all the bitterness of life*' but also...

'.... she is the great illusionist, the seductress, who draws him into life with her Maya - and not only into life's reasonable and useful aspects but also into its frightful paradoxes and ambivalences, where good and evil, success and ruin, hope and despair, counterbalance one another.'

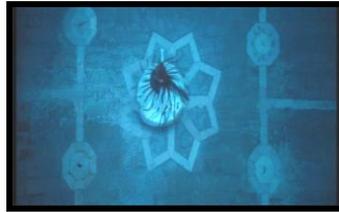
So when a man's anima, or indeed his woman, attempt to break out, no wonder he will see them as a harlot.



Ruskin's terror of Effie's harlotry, as he sees it, is in fact the terror of his own inner harlotry.

Ruskin, it must be acknowledged, is a man who is extraordinarily creative. And , it is true that, when a man is creative, it is his anima which is the engine of his creativity. But anima isn't just that, she's so much more besides.

Above all else, she is *'the archetype of life.'*



And if a man cannot embrace her, then he condemns himself to living an empty existence where he is to all intents and purposes emotionally dead.

Notice how the image of Effie dancing on the marble floor in Venice becomes a mandala – the symbol of wholeness and individuation, said Jung. And, as Joseph Cambell, the famous mythologist, has written:-

'People say that what we're all seeking is a meaning for life. I don't think that's what we're really seeking. I think that what we're seeking is an experience of *being alive*....'²

Someone who knew all about the rapture of being alive was Dante – he of the most famous infatuation of all times – the infatuation for Beatrice. And this is how Dante described his first meeting with Beatrice, when she was only 8 years of age: -

'Her dress on that day was of a most noble colour, a subdued and goodly crimson, girdled and adorned in such sort as suited with her very tender age.

At that moment I say most truly that the Spirit of Life, which hath its dwelling in the secretest chamber of the heart, began to tremble so violently that the least pulses of my body shook therewith; and in trembling it said these words:

"Ecce deus fortior me, qui veniens dominabitur mihi" (Behold a deity stronger than I, who, coming will rule me.)³

So Dante became infatuated with Beatrice, and she carried the projection of his anima and became his Muse. But fortunately for Dante he refrained from making the mistake that Ruskin made which was to marry his Muse. For marrying your Muse is not a good idea!

EFFIE

Now let's go back to that image of looking through the carriage window.



Let's now turn the whole thing around and ask what's going on inside Effie's mind at that moment.

Whereas most men, in my experience, instinctively know what 'anima' means, the corollary doesn't seem to be true with women. When I broach with my female clients the idea that they might have a masculine sub-personality called 'animus', many of them seem to find it difficult to get a sense at first of what it is I'm talking about.

Its easiest when I talk about the concept of the negative 'animus'– that harsh, criticising, inner voice, which sits like a parrot on a woman's shoulder, talking into her ear, and saying things like: 'You're *no good!*' and 'What makes you think that you can do things like that!' and 'You're *nothing but a heap of rubbish!*'

Most women can recognise that form of *negative* animus. But when I start to talk about the animus of a woman in its *positive* aspect, many of them look at me blankly. And yet it is the *positive* animus which is projected on to a man when a woman becomes infatuated by him.

So, at the very moment when the man is projecting his positive anima on to her, so she is simultaneously projecting her positive animus on to him. Like the anima, the animus is autonomous and tends to have exactly those *other* qualities which the host person needs in order to achieve wholeness and completion.

In my view calling them masculine qualities leads to unnecessary confusion. It's much better to see them as the *other* qualities – the *other* qualities which represent latent potential for change, buried deep within the woman's unconscious.

I learnt this way of looking at the animus from the late June Singer, who wrote:-

'The animus of the woman is not so much the repressed masculine as it is the repressed Other, the unconscious Other that she has been prevented from living out.'⁴

So to find out about Effie's animus, look at the qualities of Ruskin. But not Ruskin as he *actually is*, but Ruskin as she *perceives him to be* at the time of engagement.

So the Ruskin that Effie perceives and hopes him to be is:-

1. A man who will value and cherish her. After all he went to all the trouble of writing a fairy story especially for her when she was 12 years old.
2. A man who will be her prince-escort when she attends all those dazzling balls and social events in London.
3. A man who will satisfy her feminine, maternal instincts by giving her a family.
4. A man who will satisfy her urge for creativity by making her an accomplice in his creative endeavours.
5. A man who will be her intellectual guide and mentor and initiate her into his world of culture and learning.

There are two more qualities in addition which I believe Effie must have imagined and hoped for from Ruskin. The reason is that they are qualities that pretty much every woman hopes for from her man, and projects on to him at the stage of infatuation, and those are:-

6. She hopes and imagines him to be a man who will give her strength and support in all her endeavours.
7. A man who will *understand* her, and thereby help her to understand herself.

This last is probably the most important of them all. For, more than anything else, in my view, what a woman wants from a man is to be *understood*.

So, just as with Ruskin the spell of anima-projection is quickly shattered, so too with Effie. The whole bubble of illusion is quickly burst, starting with the horror of the wedding night that doesn't happen.

PART 2 – STUCKNESS & DEVELOPMENT

If Effie as well as Ruskin are both victims of the mechanism of projection, what's the difference between them? The difference, of course, is that Effie learns and Ruskin does not.

If anima in a man, and animus in a woman, represent potential for growth and development, then what we see during the course of the film is: Effie eventually integrating more and more of the unconscious, animus qualities within her, and Ruskin, to put it bluntly, remaining static and unchanged.

RUSKIN

In the film, the only time that 'Eros' comes alive within Ruskin, outside of his work, is when he's talking, all too weirdly, to Sophie – Effie's pre-pubescent and virginal younger sister.



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And those who know something more of Ruskin's biography, beyond the scope of the film, will know that 3½ years after the end of his marriage to Effie, at the age of 38, he met another young girl, aged 10, for whom he began to develop an obsessive affection.⁵ She bore the curious name of Rose La Touche.



Its not known exactly when Ruskin fell in love with Rose La Touche – she was somewhere between 14 and 18 when it happened. And when she was 18, and he was 46, he proposed marriage. She eventually refused him and, after a lot of illness, died, tragically, when she was 27. After her death, Ruskin, now 55, turned to spiritualism in order to try and contact her. And his continuing obsession for her triggered a series of mental breakdowns. There were at least five bouts of madness during his later years, when he became violent and abusive.⁶

But Rose wasn't the only one. In a letter to his doctor dated 15 May 1886, Ruskin wrote:-

'I like my girls from ten to sixteen – allowing of 17 or 18 as long as they're not in love with anybody else but me – I've got some darlings of 8 – 12 – 14 just now, and my Pigwiggina here – 12 – who fetches my wood and is learning to play my bells.'⁷

One of Ruskin's biographers⁸ has labelled him a paedophile. Other scholars disagree. And nobody suggests that he ever did anything indecent. However, whatever you think about the accusation, at the very least, from a psychological point of view, here is a man whose anima is seriously out of control.

And that's exactly what can happen if a man doesn't learn to serve his anima correctly. For ultimately the anima is a man's capacity to relate to his inner self and to his inner emotional depths.

She is, however, a vengeful Goddess. And if a man doesn't serve her correctly, she will attempt to destroy him. That's why so many men go through a mid-life crisis. And, as in the case of Ruskin, she may even make a man mad.

EFFIE

With Effie however the story is quite different. She does grow and she does change. She does integrate the qualities of her animus-potential, not least the quality of strength.

Please don't misunderstand me to be suggesting that Effie starts off as a weak woman. She's anything but weak - even at the beginning. For evidence, look at the way she deliberately breaks the stem of one of the Evil Queen's beloved roses. (By Evil Queen I mean of course the Mother-in-Law played by Julie Walters.) Then again look at how she challenges Ruskin at the Royal Academy dinner. And look at the way she attempts to defy the Evil Queen by insisting on taking over the mending.

But she's not strong enough to win her battles yet. And we see how quickly she succumbs to the terrible poison administered by the Evil Queen. Inertia, stuckness and depressive passivity set in. She's imprisoned - like Rapunzel in her Fairy Tale tower. *'There's nothing to be done.'*

Rapunzel at least had beautiful long hair which enabled her to get out of her prison-tower – but Effie loses hers. Hair is a symbol of potency – hence the story of Samson and Delila. And so the loss of Effie's hair symbolises the loss of her animus-potency.

How on earth is Effie going to get out of her prison-tower?

The turning point in the film is the trip to Venice. There she meets a very different kind of animus-projection figure in the form of her would-be seducer. He doesn't succeed in making her unfaithful. But he does succeed in awakening her sensuality, her aliveness. And that's a most important step for Effie in her task of beginning to get back into better relationship with her animus.

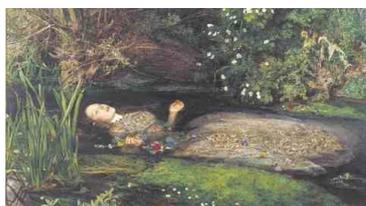
The scene in which she insists on seizing hold of the oar of the gondola is, in my view, highly symbolic.



It is an action instigated by the impulse of her animus, demonstrating her determination to take control of the boat, and symbolising, on a deeper level, her yearning to take control of her life.

'Be careful!' says the Gondolier. 'A woman drowned in the canal last month.'

The word 'drowning' introduces an important theme. The famous picture by Millais of Ophelia drowning in the river is shown not once, but twice during the course of the film.

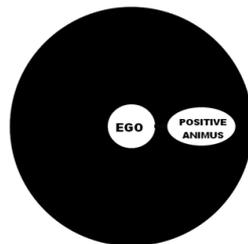


This is, I suspect, not an accident. For whereas Ophelia, you will remember, was driven into breakdown by being spurned by the man who should have been her lover and her strength, namely Hamlet, so Effie is driven into breakdown by being spurned by the man who should have been her lover and her strength, namely Ruskin. And whereas Ophelia's rejection led to death and dissolution in the river, so Effie's rejection leads to death and dissolution too, not literally, but symbolically and emotionally.

Think of the scene in the bathroom at the hotel in Venice where Effie lies back in the bath and her face kind of dissolves and notice how it reminds us of Millais picture.



What we're seeing here, from a psychological point of view, is the death or dissolution of what Jung calls the 'Ego.' By this he means the 'Executive Agency' within the psyche. It is that part of the psyche which, in a healthy personality, needs to be firm, proactive and decisive – the 'Inner Director' if you like.



In the psyche of a healthy, well-functioning woman the 'Ego' gets its power by being in good alliance with a positive animus which is both strong and

virile. However when a woman has a depressive breakdown, then the positive animus is nowhere to be seen and the 'Ego' dissolves.

Jung calls this psychological situation the state of 'Solutio,' which means 'The Dissolving.' He gets that name from the medieval texts of alchemy. For Jung's idea is that many of the ancient alchemists were using metaphors to describe, not so much scientific, but psychological processes.

A typical picture depicting the experience of 'Solutio' is to be found in an alchemical textbook called 'Atalanta Fugiens' which was published in 1617 by Michael Maier.⁹



The picture shows the Old King drowning in the sea, crying out to be saved. Interpreted psychologically, it symbolises a breakdown. In other words, it symbolises the dissolution of the old, worn-out, not-strong-enough 'Ego,' melting or dissolving in the waters of the unconscious.

Yet another image from the film which depicts Effie in the state of 'Solutio', comes shortly after they have returned from Venice back to the London home.



Effie is standing in the drawing room near the window gazing blankly into space. She is obviously brooding and heavily depressed. It is pouring with rain and the camera man takes the shot from outside the window looking

in at her. The raindrops running down the glass pane have the effect of making her face dissolve.

Is the death of the Old King within a person's psyche a disaster? Only if there isn't a New King to take his place. The discovery of the New King within the person's psyche would be the symbol of rebirth and renewal. A typical image of the arrival of the New King appears in this picture from 'Splendor Solis,' another ancient alchemical textbook, this time from the 16th century.¹⁰



The New King in the foreground, bathed in welcoming sunlight, is clear to see. But if you look carefully you can also just about make out the Old King drowning in the sea in the background. *'The King is dead... Long live the King!'* as the saying goes. But sometimes there has to be a long and unhappy interregnum before the New King can be found. And sometimes, tragically, the New King is never found at all.

So when a person has a breakdown one of two things can happen. Either, the person get stuck in that state for the rest of their life. Or, they learn from it, and find a way to come out the other side, all the stronger for the experience.

So one way of looking at a breakdown is that it's brought about by the animus (in the case of a woman), or the anima (in the case of a man), in order to force the person to try to find a way out from the prison in which they find themselves. If the person can use it in that way, that's what we call a 'creative breakdown,' a kind of regression for the purpose of going forward.

In this kind of state, the psyche thrashes about looking for an answer, a way out. And the answer often comes, said Jung, in the form of a symbolic image.

And so, in her thrashing about in her attempt to find an answer, Effie remembers the beautiful sculpture by Bernini which Ruskin had shown her when she was a young child.



The sculpture depicts the story of Daphne and Apollo. Apollo was the all-powerful Father-God and Daphne's dilemma was how to escape from him. To succumb to him would have meant her destruction. And there appeared to be no way out.

And then she hit upon the brilliant idea of turning herself into a tree.

So Effie remembers this myth, and in the misery of her imprisonment, she becomes obsessed by this story and even develops hallucinations in which she looks at her hand and imagines that it is beginning to grow foliage.

She suffers from 'hysteria', says Ruskin to the doctor:-

'Hysteria, seeing things growing upon her person.... organic matter, bark....'

Now turning herself into a tree is not an ultimate answer, of course. But at this phase of her individuation process it has two important functions. Firstly, it has the protective function of immunising her from the bullying of Ruskin and his parents. And, secondly, it gives her a kind of a hibernation – in which she can recover from her wounds, build up her strength and work out how on earth she is going to get out of the mess she is in. Hibernation is all about renewal.

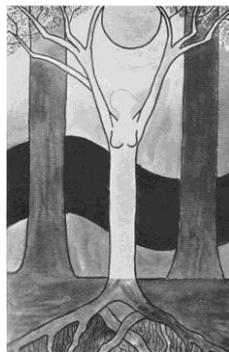
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For the tree is like a womb. It is the womb of the Great Mother – symbol of the unconscious in its positive healing aspect – what Jung calls the archetypal mother. Here is how one creative woodcarver has imagined the idea:-



And in Jung's 'Alchemical Studies' you can see two pictures¹¹ made by patients of Jung who were probably going through a similar phase in their individuation process.



Now, in the Fairy Tales - like Sleeping Beauty or Snow White, for example - it is of course the arrival of the prince who enables the heroine to awaken from her sleeping-coma and come back to life. In Effie's case the Rescuing Prince comes in the form of John Everett Millais. And when Millais comes on to the scene the stage is set for Effie to transfer her animus-projections on to a more worthy recipient.



There's nothing wrong with making projections you see – we all do it whenever we're attracted to another person. The only problem occurs when the discrepancy between the projection and the reality is too great. With Ruskin that discrepancy is a huge chasm – with Millais the gap is much smaller.

PART 3 – AFTERMATH

What happens to Ruskin and Effie after the events shown in the film are over?

RUSKIN

In the case of Ruskin, his subsequent career was undoubtedly brilliant. He achieved great fame from his work. But his emotional life remained a disaster. And he never married again. The image in the film of Ruskin's portrait minus his face says it all.



In Ruskin's case, there was no real shuffling of the deck, and the challenge to individuate, to develop the wholeness of his personality, was never met. Seen through the lens of Jungian psychology, his bouts of madness can be seen as the revenge of an anima unsatisfied.

EFFIE

In Effie's case, her courage and determination in defying the mores of the time to bring the scandalous petition of annulment cannot be underestimated. However she survived the scandal, and after a while became a popular and famous social celebrity. She had a happy and fruitful marriage with Millais, and together they produced eight children. She was also a talented administrator, and in that capacity proved all the back-up that Millais needed to pursue his career. She was a brilliant social networker, used her skills in that regard to promote Millais' work, sign up new commissions and make sure that Millais was not only successful artistically, but also financially. In short, she was a successful accomplice in all his creative endeavours.

In all these respects she honoured and integrated the animus-potential within her. The deck was well and truly shuffled.

¹ Frieda Fordham: 'An Introduction to Jung's Psychology', Publ. Penguin Books Ltd, 1953.

² Joseph Campbell: 'The Power of Myth', Publ. First Anchor Books, 1991, page 1 (italics mine).

³ Dante: 'La Vita Nuova.'

⁴ June Singer: 'Boundaries of the Soul', Publ. Prism Press, 1995, page 193.

⁵ Merryn Williams: 'Effie: A Victorian Scandal - From Ruskin's Wife to Millais's Muse', Book Guild Publishing, 1st Edition, 2010.

⁶ See Merryn Williams, *ibid*.

⁷ From letter by John Ruskin to his physician John Simon on 15 May 1886. Source: "Ruskin on his sexuality: a lost source" *Philological Quarterly*, Fall, 2007, by Van Akin Burd.

⁸ Tim Hilton, cited by Merryn Williams, *ibid*.

⁹ Emblem 31: 'The King Swimming in the Sea Cries Out with a Loud Voice: He that Delivers Me Shall Have a Great Reward', from 'Atalanta Fugiens', Michael Maier, 1617.

¹⁰ Emblem 7: 'The Drowning King' from 'Spendor Solis', 1532-1535.

¹¹ Figures 23 & 26 respectively, from 'Alchemical Studies', CG Jung Collected Works Vol 13, between pages 272-273, Publ. Princeton Univ Press, 1967.