The Archetypal Female in Mythology and Religion: The Anima and the Mother

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Abstract

Carl Jung observed that myths and religions across cultures contain common themes and entities: for example, images of the mother, father, wife, husband, lover, fool, devil, shadow, hero, saviour, and many others. The stories woven from these beings, as gods, goddesses, semi-mortals, heroes, and demons, constitute the myths and religious stories of humankind. Carl Jung postulated that these myths about such archetypal entities constitute the ‘dreams’ of cultures, and that the stories and archetypes originate in the dreams and fantasies of individuals. This study explores, in two parts, two of these archetypal entities: the anima and the mother, and how they manifest as goddesses in the myths of various cultures and sometimes combine with each other. Part one describes the two archetypes, their characteristics and manifestations, and how they can be divided into three categories or realms: goddesses of the underworld, the earth, and the sky or celestial realm. It details the difference between the anima in male consciousness and the animus in female consciousness. Using a personal dream example and Jungian theory, it then demonstrates that the anima in dreams and mythology can be relevant to women as well as men. Focusing on the anima, it then explores the underworld – the myths and entities of this shadowy realm as an expression of the unconscious mind of
the individual and whole cultures. Part two extends the exploration to the animas and mothers of the earth and sky, and how in these realms, the mother excels.

While this exploration focuses mainly on the primary sources from Jung, world mythology, and personal experiences and intuitions, it also draws on the work of post-Jungian thinkers such as James Hillman, Ginette Paris, Marion Woodman, and Michael Vannoy Adams.

Keywords: Carl Jung, archetypes, anima, animus, mythology, goddesses

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**PART ONE**

The Anima and Animus, and the Anima and the Mother in the Underworld

Like many people I have talked to, my first encounter with Carl Jung was through his autobiography, Memories, Dreams, Reflections (Jung, 1977). This is the best introduction to Jung that comes to mind, as the copious volume of his writing is daunting to a beginner. Also, without some sort of gentle introduction to his ideas, his writing can seem impenetrable, for no matter where you start, knowledge is presumed and terms which the reader has not had time to digest are used with casual frequency.

From Memories, Dreams, Reflections, it was only a small step to the introductory reader titled The Portable Jung, edited by Joseph Campbell (1971), a well-known mythologist with Jungian leanings. This gem of a book contains many of Jung’s significant essays, translated from the German and taken from the Bollingen Series. I continue to recommend this text to people interested in Jung, but who find his collected works formidable. I think it is important to read Jung’s own words, even though in translation, rather than rely on interpretations by Jungians and others. Until one is familiar with Jung and has formed one’s own understanding of his ideas, it is possible to be confused or led astray by interpretations of his work. Once you have Jung’s ideas ‘under your belt’, it is then possible to enter a fruitful dialogue with other interpreters. Until then, it difficulty reach any critical or appreciative evaluation of secondary writings. Besides, contrary to what many say, most of Jung’s work is very readable and clear, although copious.

Myths are the dreams of cultures. Like dreams, they are open to interpretation and can have personal meaning or convey archetypal truths about human nature. They can be investigated for their meaning in the culture that ‘dreams’ them, or they can be reinterpreted to illuminate life’s meanings as they unfold in subsequent and other cultures. For example,
Shakespeare used the underlying themes of the conflicts within the Greek character of Orestes to tell the story and struggles of Hamlet, another mythical man living many centuries later. As Ginette Paris says, “myths have no dogma” (Paris, 1990/2003, pp.41-41).

Jung discovered that archetypal elements in myths often have parallels in many cultures, and similar myths and entities can be identified pan-culturally. Often these elements take similar shapes, and appear in myths and religions as deities or spiritual entities, recognisable as fathers, mothers, demons, special children, fearsome destroyers, creators, wives, lovers, heroes, and husbands. Jung called these representations manifestations of primordial archetypes, active within the mind of each individual human being and active in the wider culture. Thus he postulated that, although each individual and each culture differ in many ways, underlying these differences is a unity of ideas and forms. This unity he called the Collective Unconscious, because we share it collectively and it operates unconsciously within individuals and cultures.

This study explores two of these archetypes – the anima and mother – and how these two very different female energies manifest and interact in various mythologies. Sometimes their qualities co-exist in the same mythological being; at other times, an entity is clearly one or the other. Usually the mythological beings manifested by these female archetypes take one of three forms: a goddess of the underworld, an earth goddess, or a celestial/sky goddess. Again, sometimes a specific goddess will display qualities of more than one realm, and behave differently depending on which aspect is explored in any given myth.

This discussion is in two parts. Part one begins with an explanation of the Jungian concept of the anima. The anima in Jungian theory is the unconscious image of ‘woman’ in the mind of men. However, I explain how this concept can also be relevant to women. From there, the discussion moves on to female divinities, both anima and mother, explaining the nature of both. Part 1 then explores underworld animas and their relationships with the mother archetype. Part 2 explores the animas and mothers of the earth and sky, with an emphasis on the mothers. Both parts use examples from world mythology and religion, and draw heavily on material from the work of Carl Jung.

**Anima and Animus**

Anyone familiar with Jung’s ideas, particularly regarding the archetypes and the Collective Unconscious, will have some understanding of these main female archetypes, the anima and the mother. Their counterparts in the
Collective Unconscious are the animus and the father archetypes. To understand the anima, the image of woman present in the male unconscious, it is necessary to understand the animus – the image of man in the female unconscious, according to Jungian theory.

When I first read Jung’s ideas on the anima and animus, I felt very uncomfortable about the animus, and I thought that Jung was not particularly clear about it. He said that the animus was the unconscious male counterpart to a woman’s conscious feminine personality, and is projected onto living men, such as “tenors, artists, movie-stars, athletic champions, etc.” (Jung, 1951, p.197). The animus in dreams seems to be an indistinct creature, often appearing “as a painter or has some kind of projection apparatus, or is a cinema-operator or owner of a picture-gallery” (Jung, 1951, p.197). The anima, however, which is the similar counterpart in men, but is female, seems always to have a far more exalted projection, manifesting as goddesses, female demons, and powerful mythological women, such as Eve and Aphrodite, as well as the more prosaic projections onto wives and lovers. As well, she is an active protagonist in dreams and fantasies, not a passive pointer, like the animus.

Not being particularly captivated by movie stars and projectionists, I wondered about the veracity of the animus and also how the animus would have been projected before the era of film. Was this just a sexist, essentialist understanding of the female psyche, which, in Jung’s time and world, had to be the opposite of the male psyche simply by definition? In Jung’s view, men and women are essentially different and opposite, and this exclusivity is an inexorable part of their makeup, resulting in definable femininity and masculinity in healthy women and men (see esp. Jung, 1938, pp.209-210; 1959). Jung had a particular loathing for what he regarded as masculine women, that is, intellectual, independent, trouser clad women (1) with university degrees. His emotionally charged criticisms of animus-dominated
or ‘animus-ridden’ intellectual women and women who take up ‘masculine’ professions, and his belief that “a man should live as a man and a woman as a woman” (Jung, 1927, p.118) betray a deep sexism and essentialism, if not misogyny, as he reserves his most vehement criticisms for ‘unfeminine’ women (see esp. Jung, 1927; Jung, 1938, pp.158-159, 208-209). He also appears not to be particularly interested in the animus. In his treatment of mythology, it features far less than the anima. This may be a reflection of mythology, itself. With the exception perhaps of Hermes, the male figures in mythology and religion, such as Apollo, Jesus Christ, Zeus, Re, and Hercules, to mention a few, seem to be projections of the father or hero archetype rather than the animus.

It seems obvious from art history and mythology that animas are everywhere: Aphrodite, Hathor, Inanna, Athena, Artemis, Durga, Parvati, Astarte, Dakinis—the list seems infinite. Male artists painted and sculpted the female form in profusion, and it is still common practice for art schools to employ female models more frequently than male models. All the odalisques, nymphs, and semi-clad women in the history of art attest to the importance of the anima in male projections. When men are the subject, with few exceptions, such as Michelangelo’s David, they are usually portraits, not representations of something essentially masculine, and even in the case of David, we are looking at a purportedly historical character as well as the hero archetype. When female images are firstly portraits, they are often elevated to near divinity, as in the Mona Lisa or Vermeer’s Girl with a Pearl Earring.

The existence of the anima in the male unconscious is easily attested in mythology and the history of art, both largely the product of male writers and artists. With the anima such an obvious psychological reality in men, one would think that women, if they have as Jung says, a male counterpart in their unconscious, would project male images in the creation of artistic images. But now that women are free to make ‘serious’ art, the images that appear are rarely male. Instead, a multitude of female images have been born. In the area of religion, goddess worship is increasing in popularity, and the ‘reclamation’ of ancient goddesses fills library shelves. Male animus images do not seem to come out of the creative projections of women as one would expect, according to Jungian theory. No projectionists or gallery directors have been elevated beyond the level of celebrity to the level of divinity. Even male movie stars rarely achieve the level of immortality enjoyed by the Marilyn Monroes of Hollywood, and no Cinderella male could ever surpass Princess Diana, who was worshipped like a goddess after her death.

The animus and the anima just do not seem to be equal complements in the
spiritual and psychological lives of men and women. The animus may exist, but it is something qualitatively different from the anima. In Jung’s own words, “Anima means soul” (Jung, 1954a, p.26). “It is something that lives of itself, that makes us live; it is a life behind consciousness that cannot be completely integrated with it, but from which, on the contrary, consciousness arises” (Jung, 1954a, p.27). The anima is “the chaotic urge to life”, but it is also wisdom of “a hidden purpose which seems to reflect a superior knowledge of life’s laws” (Jung, 1954a, pp.30-31). Jung does not say this about the animus. The animus is a passive pointer, not the spark of life, and to deny women an anima means to deny them a soul.

Jung, however, does admit, albeit briefly and with very little elaboration, that women also have an anima, or an anima-like archetype. This he calls the Kore, and when it manifests in men it is the anima; when it is observed in women it is the “supraordinate personality” (Jung, 1951, p.183). In Jung’s words, “The ‘supraordinate personality’ is the total man [sic], that is, man as he really is, not as he appears to himself” (Jung, 1951, p.187). It is “the ‘self,’ thus making a sharp distinction between the ego, which...extends only as far as the conscious mind, and the whole of the personality, which includes the unconscious as well as the conscious component” (Jung, 1951, p.187). Jung is using the word ‘man’ here in its inclusive sense, that is to mean ‘humanity’ or ‘human kind’, so obviously, the “supraordinate personality” is also woman as she really is, the whole personality, not just the ego, and it manifests as the Kore, or an anima-like archetype, which takes the same forms as the anima in mythology and religion. So the soul of a woman is the Kore, or anima, not the animus, the counterpart of the male anima. No wonder women’s creativity and religious expression have exploded into a plethora of female images.

It seems that Jung recognised, although he gives little time to it, that the anima in women does not function entirely like the anima in men, that is, as a complement or balance to the conscious nature. He implies that in men, the anima functions on both personal and archetypal levels. On the personal level, it is projected onto wives and lovers and functions as a balance to the masculine ego. In women, it functions more on the archetypal than personal level. It is a soul force, and hence finds expression in artistic and mythological projections.

James Hillman also postulates that the anima is relevant to women as well as men, but on both the archetypal and personal levels. Archetypal anima projections such as Maya, Shakti, and Sophia cannot “be contained by the notion of contrasexuality...[and bear] upon the psyche of women too” (Hillman, 1985, pp.53-55). He observes that, on the personal level,
“[w]omen have little girls in their dreams, and whores; they too are lured by mysterious and unknown women” (Hillman, 1985, p.57). He also suggests that the animus may be associated with ego-consciousness, while the anima, as Jung says, is something from which consciousness arises (Hillman, 1985, pp.89-91).

Therefore, I think we have to consider that the anima, although she may differ qualitatively when experienced by men or women, is that force of soul or psyche within both men and women which prompts and pushes the individual towards psychic and spiritual maturity, towards individuation — a mediator in the development of a consciousness much wider than the ego (Hillman, 1985, pp.89-91).

If the anima is the “chaotic urge to life” and a force beyond the controlling ego, then it is not surprising that both in the individual psyche and world mythology, she manifests as an inconsistent creature. Jung characterises her character as “bipolar”. She can:
appear positive one moment and negative the next; now young, now old; now mother, now maiden; now a good fairy, now a witch; now a saint, now a whore. Besides this ambivalence, the anima also has ‘occult’ connections with ‘mysteries,’ with the world of darkness in general, and for that reason she often has a religious tinge. (Jung, 1951, p.199)
The French would call her a ‘femme fatal’, and, on the personal level, in the dreams of men I have talked to, she can be cruelly provocative, taunting, seductive, and terrifying on the one hand, and gentle, solicitous, and wise on the other. Her mutable, untamable nature makes her a fascinating mythological creature, displaying opposing, compelling tendencies, often fatal to the other mythological beings she entices.
The anima “has affinities with animals, which symbolize her characteristics. [In both myths and dreams] she can appear as a snake or a tiger or a bird” (Jung, 1951, p.200). Roughly, animas can be from the underworld (snake), the earth (tiger), or the sky (bird), but often they can combine multiple animal attributes and cross the arbitrary boundaries between realms. In dreams, animals are often assumed to represent our ‘animal’ or ‘lower’ nature, that is our instincts for reproduction, territory, power, and survival. But in mythology and religion, animals frequently represent divine forces, and according to Hillman, to “look at them from an underworld perspective [as in dreams] means to regard them as carriers of soul, perhaps totem carriers...there to help us see in the dark” (Hillman, 1979, pp.147-148).
The combination of human and non-human attributes displayed by the anima and mother archetypes in their goddess manifestations connects them to both the natural world and the unconscious depths of the human psyche. The
The archetype is so far removed from the conscious mind that it cannot be totally expressed or projected in human form. The non-human part is expressed in objective, abstract symbols (Jung, 1951, p.187), appearing as attributes of anthropomorphic divinities (Jung, 1951, p.188).

The mother archetype tends to manifest more frequently in the realms of earth and sky, especially the earth: mother earth as Gaia, Tiamat, Kali, Cybele, and Demeter, for example. However, sky goddesses can also be mothers, as in the case of Isis and to some extent, Inanna/Ishtar. The mother also displays animal associations and has a dual nature. As the ‘loving’ mother, she displays nurturing, wisdom, fertility, growth, and rebirth (Jung, 1954b, p.82). On the other hand, she is the ‘terrible’ mother (Jung, 1954b, p.82), devouring her children, poisoning, burning, suffocating, and drowning. She can be seen at work in the benign fertility of spring or the devastation of drought and flood.

Having outlined these two archetypes and having established good reasons for the relevance of the anima to both men and women, let us now explore their many manifestations, drawing from Jung’s own writings as well as other sources. The following discusses the animas of the underworld, their relationship with the mother archetype, the nature of the mother archetype on her own, and her relationship with the underworld.

**The Underworld**

The anima, or soul, appears as a young girl, maiden, a dancer, a nymph or nixie. A Nixie is a water sprite whose fishtail connects her to her “superhuman nature” (Jung, 1951, p.184), and she inhabits the watery underworld of lakes, oceans, rivers, and ponds. We all recognize the Nixie image in the mermaid – both a young girl or maiden with a fishtail, connecting her to the realm of the supernatural or spiritual. In German literature, the Lorelei are nixies who sit on rocks beside the Rhine River and lure men to their deaths:

The water-sprites were apt to appear to men, though frequently to men’s undoing. The nixie women were supposed to be dazzlingly beautiful. They loved to sit in the sun on the river bank and comb their long golden hair. They sometimes fell in love with handsome young men whom they dragged down to the bottom of the water and who where never seen again. Some who had seen them, or heard their melodious songs, lost their wits. They were, by and large, cruel spirits who delighted in doing harm to men.

(Guirand, 1968, p.279)

These water-sprites conform to the classic anima model in men. But what if such a creature were to appear to a woman, in dreams or fantasies? What
would she mean if she weren’t a temptress, using sexuality to drag one into the depths of the unconscious to the destruction of the conscious will and ego and into the wider world of the ‘Self’(2)? I would like to relate a personal story, which might help explain one role of the Nixie anima figure in a woman’s unconscious.

Situation: I have enrolled in a Master’s program in Religious Studies and my first unit is Christian Theology. I know nothing about Theology; in fact, I have to look the word up in a dictionary. Unsurprisingly, I do not do well on my first assignment and am in a state of indecision about whether to drop out of the program, which I had struggled very hard to get into. That night I have a dream:

I am underwater. I see a creature swimming towards me. I can tell that it is female from its face. It has a human head and a sea-creature’s body. It doesn’t have a fish-tail, but instead its body tapers to a single point. On one side, it has long flowing hair; on the other a single fin. Its body is polished gold. It glides through the water, at first towards me, then past me. It doesn’t look at me, but straight ahead, purposefully, as though it knows precisely where it is going but is not in a hurry. I know the creature is there for me, to show me something. When I wake up, I know exactly what I have to do. I drop out of the program. (see photo of “Sedna”)

Already under water, ‘at sea’, as it were, I was not pulled further into unconsciousness, but allowed to let go of conscious ego concerns and enable unconscious elements to guide my journey, although no goal was in sight – an act of soul or Self rather than of ego. In Hillman’s terms, she helped me to “see in the dark”. Ultimately I completed a PhD in Studies in Religion, but by a more circuitous route.

On a less personal, more collective level, the creature in this dream becomes a recognised mythological figure from the North American Inuit tradition. Some months after the dream, a Canadian friend came to visit for a week. Orland had worked with Inuit people in Northern Canada and he talked about Inuit myths and religion, as well as the high status of women in Inuit cultures. The story he related about Sedna is one of many Sedna myths I have since encountered, but I will recount his here:

Sedna was a young, unmarried Inuit woman whose father decided it was time for her to marry. He arranged for a number of suitable young men to sleep with her. The traditional arrangement stipulated that Sedna would choose her husband from among them after she had slept with each in turn. However, Sedna did not want to get married. Her father insisted, but she remained obstinate. Her father then took his disobedient, shameful daughter out to sea in a boat, where he threw her overboard. Sedna tried to climb
back into the boat, desperately clutching the side. Her father cut off her fingers on one hand with his hunting knife, and Sedna and her severed fingers sank into the sea.

Her fingers became the mammals that the Inuit feed on: seal, walrus, whale, and polar bear. Sedna took up a new life at the bottom of the sea and was mistress of the sea mammals. She established an underwater throne as ruler of the sea, and placed a vicious dog at the entrance to her abode to ward off all intruders. Her hair became matted, and she became ferocious in appearance.

Only the Inuit shaman can approach her, but even he must plead and bargain. During lean times when the animals are scarce, the people approach the shaman, petitioning him to visit Sedna and plead for the return of the sea creatures. The shaman enters a trance, and, in this altered state, approaches the entrance to Sedna’s underwater throne. Cautious, but undaunted by her monstrous appearance, he knows her bounty and bargains with her for the return of the sea creatures. He soothes her by combing her wild, matted hair. In order for the creatures to return, he must promise that his people will no longer break taboos. For only the breaking of taboos causes the animals to disappear, and only a vow not to break them again can make them reappear.

The shaman returns to his people with the agreement he has made. In Jungian terms, Sedna is an anima projection, being a maiden with human and sea-creature attributes, a Nixie. “The maiden’s helplessness exposes her to all sorts of dangers, for instance of being devoured by reptiles or ritually slaughtered like a beast of sacrifice” (Jung, 1951, p.184) – in this case, mutilated and subsequently drowned by her father (3). However, as a ferocious guardian of the sea, Sedna is also a projection of the mother archetype, for she has power over life and has attributes that transcend the vulnerable, sometimes provocative sexuality of the anima.

In her transformation from young maiden to ferocious crone, Sedna has assumed a “primitive or animal expression of face” (Jung, 1951, p.185), characteristic of the Great Mother. The manifestation of the mother archetype is both creative and destructive, both nurturing and terrifying, for she gives life and takes it away. Kali is probably the most familiar example of the dual nature of the mother archetype. Hindus worship her as the universal mother of all beings; while simultaneously giving birth to all humanity, she devours her own children and wears a bloody belt of severed heads around her waist and a necklace of severed arms. Like Sedna, she is both formidable and the source of life.

Demeter and Gaia are also other familiar manifestations of the mother
archetype, each formidable and potentially wrathful, with her own relationship to the underworld. Demeter, mother of Persephone, is at once the Great Mother of all, and at the same time, inflicts devastation and drought in retaliation for the capture of her daughter and her imprisonment in the underworld. She is not the provocative or maidenly anima – that belongs to Persephone, the classic, vulnerable form of the anima, who is abducted and ‘devoured’ by the Underworld. Demeter, while her daughter’s protector, is also a savage force of destruction, much like Kali.

Gaia, or Ge, the early Earth Goddess of the Greeks, described as “the deep-breasted earth”, is the first being to emanate from Chaos, which was “vast and dark” (Guirand, 1968, p.87), like the unconscious. Gaia, an earth goddess, has underworld attributes as she originates from it, and like Demeter and Kali, is full of savage destruction as well as creativity. When her son/lover Uranus grew horrified at the monstrous children they had created, he imprisoned them in the depths of the earth. Gaia, true to her Great Mother archetypal nature, first mourned, but then grew angry, and with the help of her youngest child, Cronus, conspired to castrate her husband Uranus during the sexual act. Uranus’ genitals were thrown into the sea, and from the foamy sperm arose the classic anima, Aphrodite (Hesiod, Theogony, lines 188-201, pp. 15-16). Even Aphrodite, goddess of love and life, has underworld connections – the “chaotic urge to life” arising from the sea of the unconscious, home of the sexual instinct.

From these myths and Jung’s observations, the Great Mother is both savage and protective, having an intimate relationship to the underworld. There is nothing coy or sexual about her; although she unabashedly gives birth to all creatures, including anima figures, from the depths of her body, she then destroys those who defy her.

As an all-powerful female, it is not surprising that she should be a threat to the increasingly patriarchal nature of society at the time of the early state-based societies, built on wars, power struggles, and territorial disputes. The development of male-ruled societies required the destruction or disempowerment of the Great Mothers (D. Relke, 1999, pp.11-22). While Gaia, like Sumer’s Ninhursaga, gradually declined in power and became relegated to lesser duties concerning births, marriages, and sometimes prophecy, Sumer’s sea-goddess and mother of humanity, Tiamat, was utterly destroyed (Dalley, 1989). In fierce protection of her progeny, she rebelled against her husband, Apsu, when he planned to destroy them for making too much noise. Her rebellion brought down the wrath of all the gods, and Marduk was chosen to defeat her in battle, as she was perceived as the demon of chaos. This archetypal masculine hero rent her in two during the
archetypal power struggle of civilization over such demons (consciousness over unconsciousness; intellect over instinct). He turned Tiamat’s severed body into earth and sky, took over rulership of earth, and recreated humanity ruled by an all-male divine council, excluding even the great goddesses Inanna and Ninhursaga.

Tiamat is often imagined as a huge serpent. Of the typical animal motifs – the snake, the tiger, or the bird – the snake or serpent is the most complex and ambiguous of all. Like the fish or archetypal sea creature, snakes inhabit a non-human underworld – dark, murky, and fraught with unknown, liminal forces.

Jung provides an example of the anima expressing itself in a dream in the form of a snake. He does not say whether this dream belongs to a man or woman:

A female snake comports herself tenderly and insinuatingly, speaking with a human voice (Jung, 1951, p.201).

The account does not include what the snake says, but a talking snake is a familiar mythological image, most recognizable in Genesis 3: 1-4 (Holy Bible). In this myth, the serpent speaks to Eve. What it says contradicts God’s threat that she will die if she eats from the tree in the middle of the garden. The serpent says instead, that if she eats from this tree, she will not die, but her eyes will be opened, and she will be like God, knowing good and evil. The snake confers upon humanity, in this case via a woman, supernatural knowledge – knowledge forbidden by the god of Genesis, but not necessarily by the gods in contemporaneous cultures at the time this myth was written.

Like the contemporary dream recounted by Jung above, supernaturally endowed snakes in mythology are associated with women, that is, the anima and mother archetypes. Medieval art works often depict Eve as a snake with a human female head, conflating the subtle serpent of Genesis with Eve, the mother of all living. Female knowledge is often described as intuitive and non-rational. Through women, the chaotic impulse of life is expressed, and for cultures that elevate the rational above the non-rational, this kind of knowledge threatens personal and social order, hence the curse upon both the snake and the supernaturally endowed woman, Eve, and all women who descend from her.

In the earliest Greek civilization, one method of contact with the supernatural for divination and healing purposes was through the Pythian oracle at Delphi, possibly the site for contact with Ge (Parke & Wormell, 1956, pp.6-8). The priestess who functioned as the oracle was the embodiment of a python – a snake in contact with the supernatural underworld. It was believed that, in
the oracular cave, the priestess, called the Pythia, in her incarnation as the python, sat on a small stool over a fissure in the earth. From the dark depths of this fissure rose fumes, which the Pythia inhaled. Inhalation of this breath from the underworld put the Pythia into a trance, during which she answered questions in poetic or cryptic form. These sayings were interpreted by priestesses in charge of the oracle.

The origin of the Pythia is pre-Indo-European, Neolithic, a period in which women are thought to have been powerful and goddesses prominent. When the patriarchal Indo-European civilisation of Ancient Greece adopted the Pythia, it became “the simple mouthpiece of the god Apollo”, who served the will of Zeus (Dillon, 2002, p.99). Apollo descended from Mt. Olympus, “slew a she-dragon”, and named the site “Pytho” (Morford & Lenardon, 2003, pp.230-231), taking over the Pythia. He vanquished the non-rational female approach to the supernatural, and replaced it with the Apollonian intellectual, analytical, conscious approach, which Ginette Paris contrasts with the instinctive, subterranean energies of Dionysus (Paris, 1990/2003, pp.22-24) and Aphrodite (Paris, 1986, pp.25-32). Like Marduk, Apollo vanquished the great demon serpent, symbol of the unconscious forces of chaos, and brought order to the world – an example of the archetypal battle underlying so many mythologies and cultures (Fontenrose, 1959, pp.1-3). The Pythia remained female, but the spirit she mediated was male – Apollo. The interpreters of the Pythia’s sayings translated the messages according to the perceived wishes of the petitioners and took payment for their services.

Under Apollo, often the Pythia became a political tool to be manipulated into the desired answers to questions concerning rulership and war (Dillon, 2002, pp.98-99), important concerns of the male-ruled culture.

What better anima figure could be found than the Pythia, the embodiment of a snake who mediates the dream-like contents of the murky unconscious mind, drawing up non-rational knowledge from the depths of the psyche, to be interpreted and applied by the conscious ego? The pagan anima, and its “chaotic urge to life”, “with a superior knowledge of life’s laws” (Jung, 1954a, pp.30-31) was anathema to the Hebrew mythmakers, trying to differentiate their rational culture and their monotheistic transcendent god from the female-saturated pagan world of oracles, trances, and supernatural, forbidden knowledge. In the early Christian writings of Origen, the Pythia is thought to receive the pagan god, Apollo, through her “private parts”, and is morally contrasted with the purity of the act of the Virgin’s birth of her son, Jesus, which also brought supernatural knowledge and healing into the world:

when the prophetic spirit of Apollo, pure from any body of earth, secretly
enters through the private parts the person of her who is called the priestess, as she is seated at the mouth of the Pythian cave! Whereas regarding Jesus and His power we have no such notion; for the body which was born of the Virgin was composed of human material, and capable of receiving human wounds and death. (Origen, Bk.III Ch.XXV)

In Genesis, Eve and the serpent communed, as did the Pythia with the python, but they were cursed for their illicit knowledge and behaviour. Although illicit sex is not explicitly mentioned in the Genesis account, Origen’s comment strongly implies it to the point of bestiality, as Apollo enters the Pythia in the form of his Python spirit – like a snake entering a vagina. Perhaps in the Greek and Roman world, Hebrews, and subsequently Christians, were forbidden from consulting the Pythia or other oracles popular at that time, and the Genesis myth warned of God’s wrath should they disobey. The Book of Enoch warns at least three times against women who have been taught “enchantments” and “mysteries” and have subsequently committed evil (1 Enoch 7:1, 8:3, 16:13). The Pythia and Eve, like the ‘Sedna’ of my dream, represent the use of non-rational, sub-conscious knowledge outside the individual’s control – an act of soul, or Self, rather than ego.

In addition to fearsome and ambivalent chthonic non-human creatures, according to Jung, the anima can be sister, wife, mother, and daughter, often with an incest motif (Jung, 1939a, p.285). In the ancient world, this ambivalent relationship with a male counterpart is best expressed by Isis of Ancient Egypt. She is both the sister and wife of the god Osiris. Their son, Horus, is the ruling god on the throne, but in the afterlife, becomes Osiris. Therefore, Isis is simultaneously mother, wife, and sister to this archetype of male divine and temporal rulership (4). Like her Hebrew counterpart, Eve, Isis also obtains forbidden knowledge through a snake. According to Egyptian myth, the highest god, Re, who is also a ruling god, maintains his absolute power over the gods and humanity through the concealment of his name. To know a name in Ancient Egypt meant to obtain control. Words had magical power, and to utter a spell brought the same result as acting out the directions of the spell. For example, to feed a soul in the afterlife, the priest had only to recite the spell associated with food in the afterlife. To have control over a deity, one only had to recite its name. Re’s name is unknown. Isis, desiring control over the highest god, contrives to obtain his name. She causes a venomous snake to bite the god. Like the Pythia, Isis is a healer, in this case a healer of snake bites, and only she can reverse its deadly poison. Re begs her to remove the spell, but she refuses unless he tells her his name. Ultimately, he has to reveal it in order to
survive (Anthes, 1961, p.77). He lives, but Isis has control over him and uses it to mediate between humanity and the highest god. In comparison to the techniques of the Pythia and Eve, this may be a somewhat different way of obtaining supernatural power and knowledge, but still a snake is the medium for obtaining such knowledge, in conjunction with the female power of healing.

**Conclusion**
For Jung, the underworld was the realm of the unconscious – home of the instincts, the non-rational, the supernatural. When the ego or conscious mind enters the unconscious, it relinquishes control and becomes subject to the non-rational forces of life. The anima figures, in particular, personify these non-rational forces as the “chaotic urge to life”, and appear in dreams and fantasies as seductive and inspirational female figures, such as goddesses and the archetypal females of art and literature. In individuals, anima figures can appear in both men and women as guiding or maddening forces, always urging the individual into the unknown and opening one up to supernatural, perhaps forbidden knowledge.
As the mother, the female archetype becomes the powerful, elemental creator and destroyer of life. The mother both gives birth to and takes back each individual life. She is the vernal spring and the harvest as well as the blasted landscape, ravaged by drought, fire, or flood. In myths she is often destroyed, as humanity fears her all-encompassing power, her desire to never relinquish her children and to keep them infantile forever. Part two on the earth and sky female archetypes explores both the anima and the mother in these realms, but focuses more on the mother, as the enthralling force that Jung believed we must all escape in order to become fully human.

**Footnotes**
1 “But the worst sight – oh – is the women in trousers parading the decks! I often wondered if they knew how mercilessly ugly they looked.” (Jung, 1939b, p.521)
2 ‘Self’ with a capital ‘S’ is used throughout in contradistinction to the smaller ‘self’ or ego. It signifies the wider psyche of an individual, which includes the ego and the unconscious.
3 I found, and still find, the juxtaposition of this myth with the supposed high social position of Inuit women disturbing and contradictory.
4 For general information on Egyptian mythology see, for example Rosalie David (1980; 1982), Erik Hornung (1983), Stephen Quirke (1992), Barbara Watterson (1984), Angela Thomas (1986), and George Hart (1986; 1990).
References


