

1-1-1987

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Recommended Citation

Knapp, Bettina L. (1987) "Nathalie Sarraute's *Between Life and Death*: Androgyny and the Creative Process," *Studies in 20th Century Literature*: Vol. 11: Iss. 2, Article 6. <https://doi.org/10.4148/2334-4415.1199>

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Nathalie Sarraute's *Between Life and Death*: Androgyny and the Creative Process

Abstract

Nathalie Sarraute's *Between Life and Death* deals with the creative process, from the uncreated work of art embedded in the *prima materia* to its completion in the book. The Writer, the focus of Sarraute's attention, takes the reader through the multiple stages of his literary trajectory: the struggle involved in the transmutation of the amorphous word into the concrete glyph on the blank sheet of paper; the pain and anguish accompanying the birth of the created work, alluded to as the "thing" or the "object"; the attitude of the successful Writer, who postures and panders to his public, and the rebirth of the creative *élan* following an inner vision. How does the Writer, like the ancient rates inject "life" into what has previously been "dead," or uncreated: the written word? How does the course of the word from the uncreated to concretion in the empirical world affect both the Writer—as androgyne—and the reader during the happenings in *Between Life and Death*?

Keywords

Nathalie Sarraute, *Between Life and Death*, creative process, art, *prima materia*, writer, literary trajectory, amorphous, word, transmutation, glyph, pain, birth, thing, object, successful Writer, rebirth, creative, *élan*, written word, life, death, dead

NATHALIE SARRAUTE'S *BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH*: ANDROGYNY AND THE CREATIVE PROCESS

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Nathalie Sarraute's *Between Life and Death* (1968) deals with the creative process, from the uncreated work of art embedded in the *prima materia*—the great *void*—to its completion—the book. The Writer, the focus of Sarraute's attention, takes the reader through the multiple stages of his literary trajectory: the struggle involved in the transmutation of the amorphous word into the concrete glyph on the blank sheet of paper; the pain and anguish accompanying the birth of the created work, alluded to as the "thing" or the "object"; the attitude of the successful Writer, who postures and panders to his public; and the rebirth of the creative *élan* following an inner vision.

Like the ancient seer, or *Vates*, Sarraute's Writer is also a miracle worker or a magician, able to inject "life" into what has previously been "dead," or uncreated: the written word. How is such a sleight of hand accomplished? How does the course of words from the uncreated to concretion in the empirical world affect both the Writer and the reader during the happenings in *Between Life and Death*?

Descriptions of the creative process *per se* have been undertaken by many poets and novelists, for example, Nerval, Rimbaud, Goethe, Baudelaire, Woolf, Joyce, and Gide, to mention only a few. Sarraute's approach is different. She concentrates on the word alone: the sensations, feelings, and ideations that make for its *livingness* or its *deadness*. She organizes, on a verbal, conscious level, what might be called polyphonic musical compositions, emerging from the interweaving of successive voices from the unconscious into single or double oft-repeated themes. Sarraute's images and vocal devices take on a fugal quality as they impose themselves—amplified or diminished—at various stages during the creative process, in keeping with her willed, disordered order.

The creative process, as viewed by Sarraute in *Between Life and Death*, transcends temporal philosophical, aesthetic, and sexual schemes. Values and demarcation lines have changed. Heretofore, the notion of giving birth—be it to an object or an infant—has almost always been linked to the Great Mother, since she is the bearer of life, nourisher and devourer, and is identified with *Eros*, the relating principle which brings things together in nature and within the psyche. Spiritual and intellectual factors—*logos*—have usually been associated in the West with the male. Sarraute's Writer, however, exists in an archetypal dimension. Although alluded to as masculine, since the masculine personal pronoun (*il*) is used to identify him, he is neither male nor female. Androgynous, he is composed of both sexes, a complex of opposites, as is the creative spirit in general. He transcends polarities and reaches beyond the empirical into eternal realms. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's remark with regard to the creative process is applicable to Sarraute's androgynous Writer:

Everything in the Universe is made by union and regeneration—by the coming together of elements that seek out one another, melt together two by two, and are born again in a third.¹

Androgyny is archetypal. It is a universal and collective image that implies "unity-totality" emerging from primordial wholeness or nothingness into the empirical world as divided entities (man and woman). Androgyny has been alluded to in the Bible (Gen.2:21), Plato's *The Banquet*, the *Rig-Veda*, the *Tao te Ching*, and alchemical and Kabbalistic tracts, etc. The notion of self-containment in the spiritually and psychologically androgynous being, if approached in a relatively objective manner, may pave the way for expanded consciousness, greater evaluation, development, and maturation. Once the potential for increase has been exhausted, however, death ensues—a return to the uncreated world of the absolute, to be followed by rebirth. Thus is the *circle* completed; thus does it pursue its course in endless gyrations. Androgyny should *not* be confused with hermaphroditism, which has always been considered "an aberration of Nature," writes Mircea Eliade; the former is "not an augmentation of anatomical organs," as found in hermaphrodites, "but symbolically, the union of the magico-religious powers belonging to both sexes."²

Not only is Sarraute's Writer androgynous, he is also physically

unidentifiable. In fact, he is sexless and torsoless. Outside of a few appendages (hands, fingers which gesticulate and mime every now and then), he is all *head*. As a kinetic object dramatizing his emotional experience, he is forever distorting, foreshortening, expanding, rotating, and shifting spatial and sensorial illusions. Nor does this metaform convey much feeling; love, warmth, tenderness are virtually banished in his non-relationships with others or even with himself. Interaction exists only on an intellectual and sensorial level—no other. *Thinking* is the Writer's dominant function. His rational capabilities enable him to structure and synthesize data via categories, concepts, abstractions, and generalizations. As a *sensation* type as well, he is able to perceive and adapt to external reality through his sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell. Introverted in the extreme, his world revolves around his creative output—and later, when he becomes famous, the admiration his works elicit from his reading public. Like a hypersensitive instrument, the Writer is forever monitoring his internal environment via his mind, perceptions, and bodily sensations, which relay information concerning external situations to his inner world, and thereby affect his entire system, including his nerve endings or receptor-neurons. There is little that is human about the Writer. Like Athena, he is all intellect, all mind, all thought; he knows how to develop good tactics during moments of conflict, think clearly when challenged, and avoid personal entanglements. He uses sensation as his catalyst.

Unlike the conventional novel, Sarraute's fiction—and *Between Life and Death* is no exception—has no real plot. It centers around a controlled or contrived situation: in the Writer's case, the creative process. The essence of the work concerns words as individual entities or archetypal forces, as universal recurring images or patterns of behavior. One word interacts with another, affecting the Writer and his listeners or readers, and drawing energy and power to itself from other words, letters, or figures of speech. In the process, pace slackens or increases, thereby altering the meaning, weight, emphasis, substance, rhythm, sensations, and impact of clauses, sentences, paragraphs, pages. This makes for the narration's sharp, frequently brutal, dramatic effects.

Sarraute, to be sure, is not the inventor of this kinetic literary technique based on the energetic power of the word. Nor is she the first to consider words and letters tantamount to God's creation of the world or to Prometheus's creation of the human race and to his theft of

fire. Both notions go far back in history, to the *Sefer Yetsirah* (*The Book of Creation*), which predates the second century A.D., and to other mystical tracts. The *Sefer Yetsirah* describes cosmic creation and ways for humanity to share in it through ten “elementary” or “primordial” numbers (defined as God’s Ten Emanations or the ten expressions of His “unfolding” into matter) and the twenty-two consonants of the Hebrew alphabet. The twenty-two letters are looked upon as composing the structural elements of the universe and are, therefore, the foundation of the world. It is through the infinite combinations and phonetic divisions inherent in these “basic letters” that the “roots of all things” exist. Each letter is thought to be charged with its own energy and varies in power, meaning, sound, and image, depending on its placement in the sentence and on the page. Analogies to the three realms of creation may also be drawn by means of a written character: the human sphere, the celestial domain, and “the rhythmic flow of time through the course of the year.”³

Just as every act of creation (animate or inanimate) occurs through combinations of letters, words, and numbers, as demonstrated in the *Sefer Yetsirah*, so, too, does Sarraute’s kinetic literary technique bring the unactualized into being. Repetitions, flashbacks, reworkings of words and syntax, positional shiftings of clauses: all are used by Sarraute to create emotional experiences, and to alter pitch, pace, and orientation, thereby affecting concentration, perception, and affect.

Bringing forth the word from nothing, as Sarraute’s Writer does, may be looked upon as paralleling a cosmogonic event. It arises from the Beginning, the Void, Chaos (psychologically speaking, from the deepest layers of the collective unconscious—the very source of creation and of reality); it then undergoes a transfiguration, from *Nothingness* to *Something* (or *Being*). The Kabbalists have illustrated this transformation linguistically, by means of the Hebrew words *ain*, which means “nothing,” and *ani*, defined as “I.” A mere rearrangement of the same letters alters the meaning of the words. Such a change implies, symbolically, the passage from “a gap of existence,” or the Void (Nothingness), to existence. It is this instant of transformation, and what leads up to and follows it, that Sarraute’s Writer attempts to understand and to convey.⁴

Since some words and letters—emerging from the Writer’s collective unconscious and considered the living creative matrix of “all of our unconscious and conscious functions”—are archetypal in

dimension, they are endowed with substance, energy, rhythm and patterns of behavior. They are "idea force"—a certain word or letter, capable of instigating a dynamic process, which sets into motion a feeling, an imagining, or an action. Once the letter(s) or word(s) is written, or even thought or sensed, it takes on contour: becoming at once concretion and abstraction, sign and symbol, it also has the potential to develop virtualities and possibilities in time and space.

Since certain words are archetypal in *Between Life and Death* they may appear, disappear, and reappear, assuming not only the role of flesh-and-blood characters, but of affects as well. Suprapersonal and nonindividual, their impacts are frequently inaccessible to conscious awareness. They appear or are sensed every so often as autonomous presences or tonal emanations which hover about for a bit, only to fall back into oblivion. At times, they reappear during other sequences as formless substances, as floating opacities, or as glistening crystallizations in an ever-dilating word/world.

Words in Sarraute's orchestrated prose achieve a scale of nuanced timbres, intonations, and amplitudes which at times triturate, lacerate, exacerbate, striate, bombard, and sear the Writer and reader as well. Or, they may work their charms on listeners by means of velvety, mellifluous, endearing, siren-like harmonics, depending upon their connotations, their positionings in a sentence, and their juxtaposition with other words of the "tribe," as Sarraute calls them.

Cases in point are plentiful. When, for example, the Writer hears a woman at the next table in a restaurant say to her son, "Armand, if you continue, your father will prefer your sister,"⁵ the power of the words he has just heard affects him deeply; they cut and dig into his flesh, insidiously and mercilessly. On another occasion, the Writer's mother unabashedly accuses him of "ruminating": of literally and figuratively chewing his words, swallowing, masticating, pulverizing, regurgitating them as he probes their origin, meaning, and effect upon him during his word-play sequences. She does not understand him—the artist in him—and for this reason is forever attempting to *normalize* him. She would like him to be just like the others. Once he has achieved fame, however, she makes a swift turnabout. She swells with pride—the pride of a Mother who gave birth to a genius. He was "predestined" to become a great writer, she now claims. The minute he was brought to her in his swaddling clothes, "J'ai su" ("I knew"), she states with authority—the way the Virgin *knew* the Annunciation

or the manner in which the priests instinctively chose the child who was to be the Dalai Lama (p. 178). Words in this instance are premonitory signs of some sacred event in the offing; their numinosity transcends the event.

Between Life and Death begins as the Writer attempts to convey to his audiences the stages involved in the creation of his book. Sarraute's verbal and gestural language in the opening image is arresting; it offers the reader a mirror reflection of the Writer's unconscious and conscious attitudes—a world of tropisms:

He shakes his head, puckers his lids, his lips . . . “No, positively no, that won't do.” He stretches out his arm, bends it again . . . “I tear out the page.” He clenches his fist, then his arm drops, his hand relaxes . . . “I throw it away. I take another sheet. I write. On the typewriter. Always. I never write by hand. I reread . . .” His head moves from side to side. His lips are pouting . . . “No, no, and again no. I tear it out. I crumple it. I throw it away. And so, three, four, ten times I start over . . .” He puckers his lips, frowns, stretches his arm, bends it again, lets it drop, clenches his fist. (p. 1)

Sarraute has drawn her Writer, verbally, in a series of studied poses, But are they really studied? Or are they spontaneous? Ambiguity and mystery lie at the core of Sarraute's figurations throughout *Between Life and Death*. Each time she repeats the above sequence in one form or another, repositioning certain words, omitting others or adding some new ones, drama is heightened, as is the acuteness of the pantomimic sequence.

Sarraute's Writer is unforgettable as we see him nodding, frowning, rising, sitting, extending his arm, then bending and lowering it, tearing a sheet of paper out of his typewriter, clenching his fist, opening his hand, grabbing another sheet of paper, inserting it into the machine, typing, reading what he has just written, deciding it is not quite right, tearing it out again, crumpling it up, throwing it away, and so forth. There are times, he remarks in another sequence, when he reaches such a peak of frustration—so preoccupied is he with finding the specific word that will evoke the right idea/sensation—that he leaves his study in a sweat, oblivious to all outside noises or presences. Then, for no apparent reason, the very word or letter he is searching for incarnates itself in his mind's eye and he transcribes it:

"on the white page and sentences form. Miracle. How do we do it? It's a great mystery" (p. 28).

The very *mystery behind creation* heightens the Writer's fascination with the transformatory process, from nothing to being. As he pursues his self-interrogation, even awakening at night in his continuous struggle to find the right word—that single power that will encapsulate meaning and sensation—his obsession imposes upon him a stinging torment. "Why my God, why?" (p. 8), he asks—as if experiencing excoriating martyrdom.

The Writer's continuous quest for *the word*, which he dredges up once he sinks into his unconscious, or which ejaculates without any apparent rhyme or reason, may be considered a kind of transformation ritual. The gestural language used by Sarraute in the opening episode (quoted above) takes on a religious flavor, accompanied as it is by specific *signs*: punctuation, figures of speech, and other literary devices. (Religion here is to be understood in its original sense, derived from the Latin, *religio*, "link"—that which unites.) In keeping with the numinosity of the opening ceremony, its formality, increased each time it is repeated during the course of the narrative, discloses an ontological need on the Writer's part to repeat symbolically the original act of Creation.

The reactualization of a cosmogonic act serves several purposes. It regenerates time for the Writer, lending the entire novel a cyclical scheme and, therefore, a mythic dimension. In such a scheme, time is reversible and the Writer can regress to his childhood, becoming linked with events that have faded out of his consciousness and that he brings back to a present reality. The repeated transformations of the opening episode also commemorate for him the primordial conflict: the passage from *Chaos* to *Cosmos*, which parallels his struggle to articulate the Word and to give substance to the amorphous. In reexperiencing childhood and bringing forth language, the Writer experiences a sense of fulfillment and joy and a *raison d'être*. The written word—indeed, the entire creative process—acts as a compensatory device for the Writer. It takes him out of his world of unbearable loneliness which is caused in part by his inability to relate to people on a human level. Later, when his readers describe his torment using the simplistic and banal term, "unadaptable," they believe they have resolved the entire unresolvable problem. Mystery for them is an open book.

Examples of the Writer's extreme sensitivity to language and to

the impact of meanings, rhythms, amplitudes, sensations, and variations of form and pronunciation are given early in the book. When he was a child, the verb *faire* (with many meanings, including “make,” “do,” and “play a role,” and “give the appearance of being”) disoriented him completely. He recalls the time when he was in school and one of his teachers, noticing he was reading James Fenimore Cooper, questioned him: “Tiens vous ‘faites’ de l’anglais?” [“So you’re ‘doing’ English?” (p. 14)]. The verb is used here idiomatically and actively, as when referring to someone doing the marketing, the ironing and other chores. *Faire* is also used passively as in “Je fais une pleurésie” (I have pleurisy) or “I am having a heart attack.” The verb depicts character traits as well, such as in the description of the Writer: “Vous faites assez inadapte” (p. 44).

The question remains: why did the young boy feel physically and emotionally bruised—even lacerated—by *faire*’s multiple uses? Why did he sense danger ahead for him? His reactions are not as outlandish as they might at first seem. The teacher’s question (and the many examples of the use of *faire* given by Sarraute) aroused heretofore unknown sensations in the highly intuitive lad. The discovery that no one word had just one definition was like stepping into quicksand. He sensed that just as *faire* had many meanings and could be used in multiple ways, depending upon the context, so varied options and courses were open to him in the life experience which was his writing. The straight and narrow path was gone; barriers had vanished, and with them the security he thought existed in the empirical domain of words. Gone was the fixity and solidity—the very foundations—of his psyche and aesthetics. Everything existed in a state of flux; anything could become something else, transform, altering its own consistency and scope.

Only as he grew older and began to write literary works were the feelings which he had sensed as a lad understood consciously. He came to experience the truth that the very idea of security in general is an illusion—in the verbal domain first of all.

Psychologically, we may say that what had formerly been *whole* or *one* had become *differentiated*. The ego was emerging from the unconscious and had to weather the life experience itself, with all of its vagaries, and tensions. The One had become Two. Choice and an unsteady course had superseded the fixed and facile way. But there is more to it than this. Like Proust’s Narrator, Sarraute’s Writer learns in time that he is not even *One* person, so to speak, but the sum total of

all the people and events he has experienced, both passively and actively, during the course of his life. As Sarraute remarked in *L'Ère du soupçon*, there is no single extreme bottom or depth in anyone; everyone is endowed with "multiple depths; and these rise tier upon tier to infinity."⁶ As the multiple selves inhabiting the Writer increase in dimension and scope, so, too, do his feelings of confusion, to the point that he sometimes wonders who he is. Today we label such anxieties as identity crises.

There is, however, a positive side to the Writer's anguish. The very notion of unlimited depths existing within each being may be viewed as an enrichment; like Aristotle's *entelechia*, human potential may be considered infinite. If this is true, so, too, are the Writer's possibilities. Within him, then, exists an inexhaustible source of creativity which he has to learn to tap.

Technique is now called into play. Without discipline, innovative *élan* may be dissipated. To be able to sift the dross from the pure requires a highly tuned *thinking* function: the power to rationalize, to differentiate, to distinguish, and to evaluate the outflow of new contents emanating from the collective unconscious. The Writer's *eye*, one of the most powerful of perceptive instruments, must be turned into a tool. Inquisitive and discerning, it must be object- and subject-observer and participant—wandering about in uncharted territories within his psyche, apprehending the psyche's unknown forces, then integrating them into what will become the work of art. Such a trajectory is arduous, for during moments of intense creativity the Writer must learn to cohabit, to coexist, and to co-function with what may sometimes prove to be mephitic, insalubrious forces inhabiting him, as well as with sublime opalescent sensations—each learning to nurture the other.

Words, for the seven-year-old child, as mentioned previously, were *playthings*—toys which he set in motion or immobilized, whenever the spirit moved him. These treasures, which stimulated further verbal associations and incredible fantasy images, are presented by Sarraute in a spectacular bout of active imagination during a train trip the young boy takes with his mother.

As the train rolls through bleak and snowy countrysides, the lad turns inward, entertaining himself by pronouncing homonyms and homophones in rhythm to the sound of the turning wheels. As each archetypal word comes into consciousness, heteroclitite images form, removing him increasingly from his circumscribed and referential

world, and plunging him more deeply into vaster, more nebulous spheres.

Active imagination can start with a fantasy, a dream, or an impression of a hypnagogic nature. Jung preferred the word “imagination” to “fantasy,” considering the latter a kind of phantasm or fleeting impression. Imagination, on the other hand, he considered to be an “active, purposeful creation.”⁷ The images issuing forth into consciousness through the process of active imagination are endowed with both a life and a logic of their own. Jung described active imagination as “the only way toward a direct encounter with the reality of the unconscious without the intermediary use of tests or dream interpretation.”⁸

The lad’s starting point for his periods of active imagination were words which spurted forth homophonically and homonymically: “Hérault, héraut, héros, aire haut, erre haut, R. O.” (p. 17). Words and archetypal images hurtled forth almost simultaneously, and together they made up an entire story. The child’s creative and pleasurable pastime in his mind’s eye was forever being interrupted by his mother, seated in the same compartment, who criticized him for “ruminating.” Not for one moment did she realize that her son was exploring the magical world of imagination—a domain where wholeness exists.

For the future Writer, *active imagination* “opened negotiations” with powers and forces in the unconscious which must have answered a specific need within him. Introverted and unhappy, living with a mother who had little if any understanding of her son’s real nature, he used active imagination to help him escape into a land of warmth and comfort; but it also challenged and encouraged his creative *élan*. Unlike the dream, which is experienced passively, active imagination can be directed. The lad accomplished just that. The wanted or willed words he activated released images in his mind’s eye, which in turn constellated clusters of sensations and feeling tones.

A whole world of secret desires and compensatory states of being emerged, Hérault (the name of a department in France), herald, hero, an eagle’s nest, a wanderer on high, R. O., were, for the lad, archetypal in dimension. They evoked white landscapes, a lavender horn, a knight followed by others riding a richly caparisoned charger, fog breaking out, dark skies lit by flickering stars. The *R* evoked a bulldog standing erect with his legs firmly set on the ground. The *O* symbolized the closed circle: “Everything closes and we start over again” (pp. 17, 29).

What do these images disclose about the child's needs and his personality? Does he see himself as Herald, Hero, or Wanderer? The words he uses imply aggressivity, power, and energy. He is struggling to be heard, to be understood, and to penetrate areas that will require of him a show of heroic strength. The charger that forges ahead into untraveled, snow-covered terrain will help him achieve his goal. A whole medieval atmosphere is conjured up as a spectacular battle scene unfolds before him: flags, horses, and men arrayed in brilliant tonalities, each bearing the heraldic symbol of his family or master, pursue their heated struggle. This is a violent, cruel, and electrifying *action painting* at its height.

This sequence of active imagination may also be viewed as a prefiguration of the Writer's future fight with words and his symbolical wanderings through opaque and dimly dark inner landscapes, illuminated only every now and then by scintillating stars. His projection onto a hero figure emphasizes his weakly structured ego, his inadequate or painful life experience, and his need to bring into existence what he lacks: strength, direction, and vision. Thus he removes himself from his circumscribed and individual frame of reference and plunges into the collective experience of timelessness.

The whites and purples daubed onto this same verbal canvas show the lad's feel for color and form and also inject a sense of tremulous excitement. Reminiscent in tone of some canvases by Monet, Cézanne, and Matisse, they ally the medieval to the modern in diachronic relational patterns, thereby linking, associating, and fusing past and present in a space/time continuum.

The *R*, associated with the growling bulldog, stands for strength, fortitude, willpower, attention, and feeling. This archetypal protector (the dog as man's best friend), may also be envisaged as a positive father image or the power that will prevent any harm from coming to the boy. The dog is power; but he is also caring.

The *O*, following the *R*, is a semiotic device that stands for all of the Writer's work and the various stages and variants it has undergone. It also includes the techniques and tools—abstract and concrete—used in the actual writing process: lines, spirals, dichroisms, punctuation, sensations, and literary and aesthetic devices, all communicating with each other in a circular round. Psychologically, the *O* stands for the Self: the total psyche comprising both conscious and unconscious spheres.

The train in which the lad is riding is also *sign* and *symbol*. As it speeds across the snow-covered landscape, activating his

imagination, time expands and mythical time is born. The boy feels himself living in the medieval period; the charger in his imagination is festooned in colorful array, and the knight, strong and virile in his coat of mail, bears his heraldic symbols for all to see. Since the train represents the mechanistic world of objects, the boy is also part of the linear time scheme in a contemporary world, which functions scientifically, and with the accuracy of an impeccable clock. Inflexible in its order, disciplined, controlled, and punctual to the extreme, the train is unconcerned with any human factor. It is a link in a complicated communicatory network that links a variety of areas and circadian cycles. Like a human artery which carries the blood from one part of the body to another, it also functions as part of its own vast circulatory system: relocating travelers and merchandise in a continuous round. A train imposes its laws and rhythms on the human being physically and psychologically, since it determines the destinations of all those within its metal frame—both on an individual and collective basis. Another factor also comes into play with the train: its circuit must be set well ahead of time. Such a situation implies the need to define one's course, thereby relying upon discipline and order. Any changes in scheduling or programming must be anticipated beforehand and carried out with precision and care.

Psychologically, the just-discussed sequence of active imagination implies an urge on the lad's part to precipitate the destruction of anything that might impede his course toward creativity or stifle his lunge for life—for creativity. It also suggests the opposite: his dependence upon the scheduled, rational function, the urge to plan ahead, to see to it that all factors in his world are linked, associated, and part of a cohesive whole.

At this stage of his life, the would-be Writer may be said to be symbolically *charging* and fighting his mother, rebelling against her demands that he return to reality. Over and over again, she suggests that he look out of the window at the scenery. But the speed of the train and the child's agitation blot out any definable shapes. Enjoying the freedom of his fantasies and mesmerized by the cadenced rhythmic patterns issuing forth from the repeated archetypal images and the even-sounding wheels as they speed ahead on the tracks, he is endowed with a sense of continuity and contentment.

Although the woman in the train is the young boy's mother, she may also be looked upon as an *anima* figure: a negative, collective mother figure with a decidedly disturbing, provocative, and irritating

bent that the Writer meets in various avatars in restaurants, at gatherings, and at lectures. As an interlocutor who never lets him rest in the serenity of his creative imaginings, she plays the role of Devil's advocate, constantly challenging him at play, and criticizing him for his laziness. She rebukes him for his futile meanderings, his overly introverted ways ("tourné en dedans, en train de ruminer"), his inability to see outside of himself, and his spasmodic span attention. When the Writer later makes a name for himself, this same self-sacrificing and overly critical mother will gloat over what she considers to be her doing. He was "predestined" to become a great Writer, she remarks, because as a child he played with words. Other *anima* figures appear at one of the Writer's lectures: a faceless listener who questions him about his creative bent. The woman identifies with him, kowtows to him, blushes fleetingly as she talks to him, then vanishes into the crowd of worshippers—into non-being—"un chainon anonyme" ["an anonymous link" (p. 11)]. Whether mother, reader, or listener, *anima* figures highlight the Writer's hidden, shadowy, opposing, and conflicting side. The *anima* figure is that force that triggers discussion, provokes argumentation, compels analytical evaluation, and thereby increases the Writer's consciousness. It is the *anima* figure in part that invites the ego to come to terms with the polarities facing it in the differentiated realm—in the unfriendly world of contention.

At the conclusion of *Between Life and Death* the Writer is no longer alone. Rather he is surrounded by his word-protagonists. As an androgynous principle, he is endowed with two selves—the traditionally "feminine" creative force and the traditionally "masculine" analytic force—and from these is born the third—**THE WORK OF ART!**

NOTES

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4. Scholem, p. 218.
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