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Women and Brains Go Together: Mapping Sophia Kovalevsky's Animus in Alice Munro's *'Too Much Happiness'*.

By Suparna Karkun¹ and Dr. Anoop Kumar Tiwari²

Abstract

Women and brains have always been an epicentre of intrigue and controversy delineating that women must use brains in dimensions that have been predestined for them by misogynists. An intelligent woman is often marginalized as unfeminine and hoydenish capable of threatening the heteropatriarchy thereby rendering it impotent. Several pioneering works on gender identity and equality began to be written in the eighteen and nineteenth century drawing attention of the intelligentsia as well as the common folk equally, towards this burning issue. Feminist reforms were initiated as a result of the untiring endeavour of writers and critics throughout the world. The first wave of feminism was a signal for the society to revoke the existing patriarchal norms and it was strengthened further by the second and third wave of feminism with formidable writers, activists and revolutionists who fought a long drawn battle to equip women with their share of rights. Women's continued and persistent struggle against patriarchy the world over has led to society's much needed changed perspectives towards women and their intellect. Women have proved the concocted saying "women and brains do not go together" false with their sheer grit and persistent determination. Reverberating similar deliverance, this paper investigates Alice Munro's biography of the renowned first ever female mathematics professor Sophia Kovalevsky in her short story *'Too Much Happiness'* with the archetypal lens of Carl Jung. Sophia, the protagonist in the story is a woman with an extraordinary intellect, a mathematician and a novelist with a rare fascinating power to conquer the world. In times when most women are compulsorily confined to the kitchen, she dares it all to make it to the University of Stockholm in Sweden and challenge the myth that a woman has less of an intellect than man. She is aware of the animus in her which is the so called male domain of a women's psyche and represents the logical thinking faculty in a woman. This paper aims at tracing the renowned Swiss psychologist Carl Jung's archetype of the animus in Alice Munro's portrayal of Sophia, to discern her psyche and to analyse and interpret how her animus affects her life and career as an intellectual in the old school patriarchal world.

Keywords: Alice Munro, Animus, Carl Jung, Brains, Logic, Mathematician, Novelist, Sophia Kovalevsky.

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Introduction

It has been established through several studies that there is virtually no difference in the intellect of men and women (Ankney, 1992); however, patriarchy deems women fit only for certain occupations such as child bearing and rearing, and staying within the confines of the home and hearth. In the present age of space and internet too, women are looked down upon, exploited and marginalised even though their contribution in socio economic and political spheres is no less than their male counterparts. Dynamic women have, in all spheres established the fact that they are equal creative forces in all faculties of human evolution and development. Patriarchal society, albeit unwillingly, is yielding place to include a feminist dimension, and it goes without saying that we have come a long way. Due to the sustained effort of writers, thinkers and revolutionists around the globe spearheading the cause of women's movement, several 'critiques and counter critiques' have been produced in the field of feminist theories, after deliberations regarding the biological, social, cultural, natural, economic, psychological and spiritual attributes of women. Each model of feminism presents a unique analysis, a modern perspective, a growth and divergence that has culminated into the making of the modern, emancipated woman of today. It has also been contended that an individual's brain organisation is dynamic and there is no cause to think that a woman may not be interested or inclined in the capacities of logic, reading and writing (Kimura. D, 1987). Awe-inspiring work such as Jacqueline Rose's "Sexuality in the field of Vision" and Shoshana Felman's '*Literature and Psychoanalysis*' have provided crucial impetus in the long history of feminism and have brought about changes in the mind-set of society at large. Among countless women writers who have written to enlighten and create awareness regarding the binding patriarchal norms is the fiction of Alice Munro who is the central figure of the short story culture in Canada, a Nobel Prize winner (2013) and a writer portraying women as her central characters. Her characters, the young, naïve girls full of innocence and confusion mature into responsible mothers and finally age into powerful old and wise survivors. Her character painting depicts women in all their varied stages of life in all shades-that of a girlfriend, mother, scientist, writer, artist, wife and their combat for independence and survival instincts against all odds.

Objective of the study

Through this study we seek to clarify that Munro's work be seen not only in the perspective of her narrative technique or as a work of popular romance but in her contribution as a writer with profound expertise on the secret pull of the past and her characterisation of women with strong, powerful intellect. The structure of this paper is a qualitative study on the archetype of the animus as propounded by the Swiss Psychologist Carl Gustav Jung in the story of Alice Munro titled "Too Much Happiness". Carl Jung emphasizes in his book "*The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious. The Collected Works of C. G. Jung. Vol 9. Part 1*" that the human psyche is composed of three components namely the 'ego, the personal unconscious and the collective unconscious'. Archetypes, according to Jung, are 'primordial images'; the 'psychic residue' of repeated types of experience in the lives of very ancient ancestors which are inherited in the 'collective unconscious' of the human race and are expressed in myths, religion, dreams, and private fantasies, as well as in the works of literature. So, by narrow definition, an archetype is an original model or type after which similar things are patterned; a prototype; an ideal example. As used in literature, an archetype is a recurrent, universal pattern that evokes a deep, emotional response in virtually all readers as it strikes a chord in their unconscious memory. Jung outlined four major archetypes - namely the self, the shadow, the anima, the animus and the persona. Each archetype has its own characteristics. This study explores the animus, the logical thinking side of a woman's personality and its manifestation in the protagonist Sophia in Alice Munro's story "Too Much Happiness". Although feminists have time and again raised suspicions on Jung's use of the term "the

opposite sex” which they contend is purely biological and limiting because of its direct “masculine” and “feminine” divide, Mary Ann Mattoon and Jennette Jones(1989) in their essay titled “Is the Animus Obsolete?” describe how the animus is misunderstood outside the Jungian community primarily because the fact is not widespread that the animus is not the brain child of Jung in entirety but has been described elaborately by his wife Emma Jung who, as we state further, explained it as she felt it from within- like a woman. Also Jung described it at a time when in Switzerland few women were allowed even to vote. The animus has been re-examined by Mattoon for obsolescence and its relevance in the twentieth century and has corroborated with anthropological and psychological data that establish the appropriateness of the animus in “psychologically healthy women in the late twentieth century” (p.144). Jung’s animus and anima, paves the way forward for queer theory research as the effect of animus projection in lesbian women has not been probed yet, as far as our knowledge goes. Jung’s concept of the contra sexual archetype needs further research in the domain of desire and sexuality as there is still incomprehension and darkness in the area from whence all desires emerge. The Lacanian psychoanalytical theory that also gives strength to Freudian concept of psychoanalysis supported by Kristeva provides feminist perspective a new focus that of the unconscious. We are all really partially masculine or partially feminine. Both anima and animus are contra sexual archetypes.

The anima or the animus develops, incorporating the characteristics that we are not supposed to show publicly. In Jung’s days the division between the two sexes was more marked than it is now. For example men were supposed to be bread winners and behave in a logical, firm and unemotional fashion. Women were supposed to be soft, emotional and unpredictable. But time and again men have behaved emotionally turned soft upon situations when required and have also been enigmatic. Women, on the other hand have also been fairly logical and firm displaying their animus. But such women in Jung’s days have been labelled as rather “mannish” and hoydenish and patriarchal society expected them to don their role as women abandoning their animus which they meekly complied with a foregrounding silence.

Animus belongs to the collective unconscious and originates from the encounters of prehistoric women with men. The task of animus integration is therefore to restore that part of oneself which is adrift or is underdeveloped. The animus can remain detached from a woman’s psyche and can also be integrated in it. Jung’s wife Emma helped him extensively in his understanding and interpretation of the animus. In “*On the Nature of the Animus*” Emma Jung explains the task of men who ‘have to accept what is regarded as less valuable, what is weak, passive, subjective illogical, bound to nature- in a word, “femininity” (Jung.E, 1957, p.41). Such a definition of the word “femininity” certainly seems to suggest sexism in the Jungian evaluation of the Animus. Emma does not say that weakness, passivity and illogicality are feminine attributes, but that because of accepted gender roles, such qualities are generally “regarded as less valuable” (Jung.E, 1957, p.41). This is precisely what is proved as we argue in this paper by the treatment meted out to Sophia in her own country and abroad for being integrated with her animus. Robertson presents further insight remarking, “For a woman, integrating the personal contents of the animus enables her to accept that rational thoughts are a necessary part of life. She is able to act in both the inner and outer world with the swiftness of thought” (Jung. E, 1957, p.134). The animus is responsible for rationality and reason. If the animus is not allowed to become conscious and therefore not fully developed and integrated, then, although opinions continue to be held strongly, they are often illogical and unexamined. This paper then, explores the craftsmanship of these two formidable giants one from the field of literature and another from psychology and seeks to establish how Jung’s animus is brought out in Munro’s Sophia.

Methodology

Alice Munro's story collection *'Too Much Happiness'* (2009) is used as the primary text for this study. For textual analysis her work has been seen through the lens of archetypal criticism propounded by Carl Jung. *'The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious. The Collected Works of C. G. Jung. Vol 9. Part 1'* and *'On the Nature of the Animus'* have been used as the secondary text to find out the characteristics of the animus in the psyche of a woman.

Munro's dissection of Sophia's animus

The title story of Alice Munro's story collection *'Too Much Happiness'* is a biography on the Russian Mathematician Sophia Kovalevsky. Sophia, a nineteenth century Mathematician (1850-1891) was the first woman to become a professor at the University of Stockholm. Munro's stories are replete with intertextual allusions and her works offer a panoramic view of not only Canadian society but of the entire humanity at large (Ventura, 2017). Munro has openly acknowledged reading of Don H. Kennedy's pioneering work on her *"Little Sparrow: A Portrait of Sophia Kovalevsky (1983)* during the writing of this fiction.

Munro also mentions that she had discovered Sophia Kovalevsky in the Britannica and was intrigued because of the paradoxical combination of a fiction writer and a mathematician in her. Her story in flashbacks as is Munro's usual style, presents to us the extraordinary and remarkable journey of Sophia leading to her untimely and tragic death. It is a story about a woman mathematician and novelist but is simultaneously a reflection about how both mathematics and literature are works of the imagination and both discover the unexplored possibilities of the creative mind. In fact it is this amalgamation of the mathematician and the novelist in Sophia that fascinated Munro and propelled her to pen *"Too Much Happiness"* and also bestow the title to her story collection. Munro uses her retrospective narrative technique in several of her stories and is adept at it as she has time and again used this technique to keep her readers spellbound and make them participate in her creative process (Thacker, 1992).

The story commences with Munro describing Maxsim Kovalevsky, Sophia's lover taking a short walk with Sophia, though Munro, in her enigmatic style doesn't name her in the beginning. The woman (Sophia) has a premonition that either she or Maxsim will die within the year. The animus in Sophia whispers in her, the premonition about her death which the reader later on finds to be true. Munro goes on to describe their meeting and how their common language Russian helped them escape "the flimsy formal cages" (Munro, 2010, p.248) of foreign language that they were forced to speak in the alien land. Her alienation in the foreign land brings her closer to Maxsim. She finds herself alone not only because she is in a foreign land but also because she is the only female in the so-called male domain of Mathematics. Sophia is at once smitten by him - "He takes up too much room, on the divan and in one's mind. It is simply impossible for me, in his presence, to think of anything but him" (Munro, 2010, p.248). Munro portrays Sophia in the beginning of the story as an ordinary woman desperately and hopelessly in love. She can hardly concentrate on her work as a mathematician when she is with him and she is sure of his intentions to "make her the woman of his life" (Munro, 2010, p.249). Yet Sophia does not understand Maxsim's insecurity with himself in her dynamic presence. While she, in all earnestness, loves him with all her heart, he feels ignored and perturbed because he knows though she is- [...] quite charming, yet with a mind most unconventionally furnished, under her curls" (Munro, 2010, p.250).

Betty Friedan has aptly described the insecurity of man in presence of a woman with awareness about her animus, a woman who stands her own ground in the hegemony of a predominant male ascendancy- "She could also take a part-time job, he said, but she shouldn't take work away from men who must feed their families, and, in fact, she won't have the skills

or experience for a very 'exciting' job (1969, p.143). These crystalized images in Maxsim's mind reassert his insecurity on finding Sophia talented as well as popular. Jung's Animus has been described as the thinking, logical part of the woman's psyche and can lead her towards knowledge and true meaning. The animus is symbolic of thinking and reasoning and is capable of influencing the rational thinking of women. The fact that Maxsim knows Sophia is a woman with a strong Animus is the precise reason for his insecurity.

Alienation in Sophia

When Maxsim identifies the animus in Sophia, he is wary of her and this causes him to shun her despite the fact that he is close to her. He feels threatened by her animus and starts drifting away from her. Maxsim coldly refuses her offer to visit him with the excuse that he was presently in the company of a lady who needs his attention. He also coaxes her to go back to Sweden where she is more popular and writes to her the final heart breaking sentence, "If I loved you I would have written differently" (Munro, 2010, p.250). Sophia is shattered but is not someone to be in mourning forever. She realizes that Maxsim is envious of her actually because she is a novelist and a mathematician as well and he, "merely a scholar and a man" (Munro, 2010, p.254).

While travelling Sophia has a vision of her dead sister Anuita and her rebellious past in their family estate at Palibino. She goes to meet her sister's son Urey as well as her husband Jaclard but discovers that they nearly detest her because of her animus. Urey makes it clear to her. "being a mathematician isn't necessary, as I see it, [...] just getting prizes and a lot of money for things nobody understands or cares about and that is no use to anybody" (Munro, 2010, p. 264). How Sophia's strong intellect affects others can be understood through the thoughts of Betty Friedan:

"Women's intellectuality is to a large extent paid for by the loss of valuable feminine qualities... All observations point to the fact that the intellectual woman is masculinized; in her, warm, intuitive knowledge has yielded to cold unproductive thinking" (Friedan, 1969, p.137).

So, it is no mystery that Urey doesn't consider her work significant at all. He simply cannot fathom her connection with her Animus. Sophia reminisces about the respect and accolades she received when she was honoured with the Bordin Prize. But in spite of all her extraordinary contribution to science, scientists do not invite her and keep a safe distance. Most women are in awe about their Animus and don't get in touch with it as they continue to live in denial. And anyone with intellectual capacities is to be kept aloof from the patriarchal societal construct and Sophia was no exception: "They would no more think of that than of employing a learned chimpanzee" (Munro, 2010, p. 266).

Munro daringly unravels that the disgust meted out to her act as a prejudice against Sophia. As noted by Rozin et.al (2000) disgust signals danger and the need to withdraw from the noxious or offensive stimuli. Building on this position, Hodson and Costello (2007) argue that disgust has properties relevant not only to danger and avoidance, but also to purity, superiority and hierarchy. As such, disgust sensitivity is theoretically relevant to understanding the prejudicial attitudes, with several recent studies supporting this contention. Friedan elaborates on the conditioning of the psyche of most women-

"Girls don't get excited about things like that anymore. We don't want careers. Our parents expect us to go to college. Everybody goes. You're a social outcast at home if you don't. But a girl who got serious about anything she studied- like wanting to go on and do research- would be peculiar, unfeminine. I guess everybody wants to graduate

with a diamond ring on her finger. That's the important thing" (Friedan, 1969, p.121). Sophia is integrated with her Animus and hence considered different by most of the people of her times. Allport opines that "Prejudiced individuals are more often conservatives" (1954, p.431).

Munro writes this biography in random fragments of past, present and future scenes of Sophia's life not in a linear series at all, so that the reader finds a way out himself in the criss cross of the maze of Sophia's multifaceted life (Boucherie, 2010)

Sophia travels to meet her mentor Professor Weierstrass whose house is a dedicated abode for the study of mathematics. Professor Weierstrass's two sisters Klara and Elise consider it their sacred duty to serve their erudite brother and take good care of him. Sophia wonders how the sisters can devote their whole energy and life to the service of their intellectual brother completely forgetting their individuality surrendering their very life in servitude of Weierstrass. It is the animus in her that provokes her into this rational thinking, identifying the subdued and forgotten animus in the two sisters.

"Sophia climbed the stairs thinking not of the professor but of these two women who had made him the centre of their lives. Knitting mufflers, mending the linen, making the puddings and preserves that could never be trusted to a servant [.....]. I would go mad, she thought" (Munro, 2010, p.278). The sisters are so very detached from their animus that they live only in the world of their self- created cocoon of femininity. This detachment from the animus is seen by Sophia in most women and women consider it obligatory to remain detached from their animus, to remain within the invisible yet rigid social structure of the times. But Sophia is a woman with an extraordinary intelligence. A record of her astounding mental concentration was left by her friend and fellow student, Julia Lermontova:

"Her (Sophia's) ability over many hours to devote herself to concentrated mental labour without leaving her desk was really astonishing. And when [...] she finally arose from her chair, she was always so submerged in her thoughts that she would walk back and forth with quick steps across the room, and finally break into a run, talking loudly to herself and sometimes breaking into a laughter. At such times she seemed completely separated from reality, carried by fantasy beyond the borders of the present [...]. She was never at peace" (Boucherie, 2010, p.146).

Sophia's work spanned an era when her intelligence could not be mapped whereas subsequent studies and research demonstrate that drastically innovative means and methods have revolutionized the concept of intelligence testing. The theory of successful intelligence or WICS, acronym for wisdom, intelligence and creativity, synthesized (Sternberg, 1997, Sternberg, 2003a, Sternberg, 2005, Sternberg and Grigorenko, 2004) would perfectly label Sophia's intelligence superior to those around her in her times.

Several facets of Munro's narrative technique have been the source of cutting-edge research and her usual style of using flash back and ellipses has made this story an engrossing material. Sophia's journey has been presented as a travelogue of emotions and recollections. Modern writers present their characters through their traits, speech and action rather than through generalisations (Duncan, 2011) and Munro has in her characteristic style presented Sophia's inner turmoil and the inherent sadness behind her happiness.

Sophia recalls how when she visited the Professor for the first time he had dismissed her as a frivolous seeker of ornamental knowledge seeking undue attention. So in order to dismiss her candidature he had asked her to solve a series of mathematical problems and come to him after a week. He was amazed when she returned- each problem solved and that too in a unique way. When he heard her explain each problem in detail he felt that-

“[...] he must soothe her, hold her carefully, letting her learn how to manage the fireworks in her own brain” (Munro, 2010, p.270).

Professor Weierstrass later confesses to Sophia that, “All his life he had been waiting for such a student to come into this room. A student who would challenge him completely a student who was not only capable of following strivings of his own mind but perhaps flying beyond them” (Munro, 2010, p.270). He also confesses that people would “bridle” at the word “poet” in connection with mathematical science. Sophia becomes a mathematician at par with her mentor and is treated as a family member in the Weierstrass's house. She confesses to her mentor that she is married to Vladimir Kovalevsky, but that it was a “white marriage”- She had married him to be permitted to study abroad”

“Young women-who wanted to study abroad were compelled to go through with this deception because no Russian woman who was unmarried could leave the country without her parent's consent” (Munro, 2010, p.274).

Sophia enters into a contract marriage with Vladimir happy, not because she is in love but because this was going to be an important step in the emancipation process of women in Russia. She goes off far from Vladimir soon after to pursue her passion for Mathematics. On her return from Paris, she visits her ailing mentor Weierstrass, who has read her novels in the meantime and admires her writing skill. Because of the intellect that Sophia has Weierstrass says. “Truly I sometimes forget that you are a woman” (Munro, 2010, p.280).

Her Recognition

Though for a brief period Sophia is lost in celebrating life and during this period has a daughter Fufu, she soon starts her correspondence with Weierstrass and completely immerses herself in the world of Mathematics. She suffers yet another blow in the form of Vladimir's suicide.

She gets a job as a Professor at the New University of Stockholm, the first University to take on a female Mathematics Professor. Her glory is short-lived as she contracts pneumonia and heart trouble. She succumbs to the illness soon after.

“Her brain, as everybody expected, was large” (Munro, 2010, p.302).

Sophia's happiness is the happiness she gains from the language of Mathematics, a happiness that envelops her so much that she forgets everything else. Her happiness stems from the world of Mathematics and she does not regret dying from “Too Much Happiness”. She is one who has never stifled her creative instincts unlike millions of women the world over- “Even without the help of sex-directed educators, the girl growing up with brains and spirit in America learns soon enough to watch her step. “To be like all the others”, not to be herself. She learns not to work too hard, think too often, and ask too many questions. In high schools, in co-educational colleges, girls are reluctant to speak out in class for fear of being typed as “brains”. This phenomena has been borne out by many studies; any bright girl or woman can document it from personal experience” (Friedan, 1969, p.138).

Is it not then that women throughout the world have been conditioned “to be like others”? Is it not then that they have been conditioned to stifle their animus? And if it is a woman like Sophia who is completely aware of her animus, she is deprived of what she truly deserves.

Emma Jung's Animus

Munro has in her unique stance towards readers presented Sophia's life and struggles in flashback, enabling the reader to peep into her extraordinary life and exceptional talent as a Mathematician. Sophia's personality has integrated herself extremely well with her Animus. Emma Jung in her essay ‘*On the Nature of the Animus*’(1957) has explained four phases of the

animus. The first stage is the Man of Power which is characterized by physical strength or by strength of will. The second stage is the Man of Deed or those who focus their strength upon a particular goal. The third stage is symbolized by the Man of the Word which is understood as being a spiritual guide and as representing the intellectual gifts of the woman (Jung 1957, p.4). Finally the fourth stage is personified by the Man of Meaning, the catalyst of spiritual truth and wisdom. This is the stage of individuation when the animus is fully conscious, fully examined, and fully integrated into a woman's psyche. By this stage, a woman will have learned to criticize and evaluate her own opinions, to stand firm in her decisions after they have been made, and to synthesize these generally masculine qualities with her own feminine nature.

Conclusion

Sophia's animus is of the fourth stage wherein she is in the complete state of individuation with her animus and throughout her short lived career though she struggles to gain recognition, she has always been aware of her animus as well as her potential, irrespective of her gender, to gain a foothold in the male dominated domain of Mathematics. Her strong connection with her animus sets an ideal example to many women to be more aware of their animus and lead a life as complete individuals and not merely fulfil their biological function as a woman. Had Sophia been born in the present era, she would unearth many women with their animus awakened and she would also discover a treasure trove of careers and less ridicule in the society. The awareness of one's animus has undergone the process of slow but steady transformation as we find more and more women in Sophia's shoes but who do not necessarily undergo her plight. Svetlana Alexievich, the Belarusian Nobel laureate (2015), in her revolutionizing book *'War's Unwomanly Face'* creates a record of people's memory during the second world war in 1941 (merely a century from Sophia's times) of how more than 500,000 soviet women who dreamed of becoming brides, became soldiers- not only rescuing, bandaging and nursing fellow soldiers but also firing rifles, blowing up bridges and killing the enemy and facing the war with fortitude. What a drastic change within a span of a century where women in masses became aware of their animus.

A careful study of the animus from Sophia's times (1850-1891) till the present day unfolds the growing awareness of its presence among women, driving them towards successful careers in the hitherto "all men domains" propelling them to question the existing but decaying norms of the patriarchal society, inspiring them with a greater force towards rational and logical thinking and finding within oneself the amazing power of the awakened animus. Sophia Kovalevsky's fate and life would have been of a much higher order and her story would have been entirely different, had she been in the midst of more women like her. A day is sure to dawn when all women of the world with awakened animus will reinforce the significance of the word animus as it will become a ready part of their integrated personality and not delineated as a partial incompleteness to their whole being.

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