D o you walk out of some movies and long for someone who can go the heights and depths of exploring the metaphors, feelings, meanings embedded in the film? Well, listen up!

Our own Virginia Apperson has teamed up with John Beebe—who has come to seem like one of our own—to give us *The Presence of the Feminine in Film*, a series of in-depth meditations on twenty-plus movies, each explored from a Jungian perspective. I cannot adequately highlight in this 1500 word review the luscious rush of analysis and insight this book offers nor cover every movie chosen, so allow me to present a small sampling of the marvelous adventure available to anyone who wants to better identify the feminine in film and in our contemporary culture.

“Filmmaking, at least in the hands of its acknowledged masters,” suggests John Beebe, “is a form of active imagination drawing its imagery from the anxieties generated by current concerns, and film watching has become a contemporary ritual that is only apparently leisure. Going to the movies has achieved, in this country, almost the status of a religious activity.”

Virginia brings her in-depth, serpentine, feeling gift to this material, with John bringing his concise, straight, to-the-point, thinking gift. John is the editor, Virginia, the emotional, relational sound track. I had to rent several movies before reading the chapters addressing them. Doing that made every difference in my ability to plumb the depths into which I was being invited.

One was “Wide Sargasso Sea.” Having long been intrigued how Mr. Rochester’s mad wife ended up in the attic in *Jane Eyre* in the first place, this movie presents the “front-story” of this Caribbean beauty, Antoinette—“the feminine portrayed here as promising, impetuous and effervescent, eager to love and to be loved, wildly expressive and profoundly sensitive”—and her slow descent into fragmentation and psychosis after being disenfranchised by Edward Rochester’s patriarchal distrust of everything emotional or diffuse, his fear of being devoured in the ultra feminine sea of both ocean and woman, his need to assert control and order, his eventual distain of her needs and of Antoinette herself. Virginia tackles this story, this movie, with sensitive passion and intellectual grounding, citing many Jungian analysts to make her points and Jung’s own thoughts on the feminine and the Great Mother to round out the story. *Very* impressive!

John brings his own unique style, exploring the typology of the main characters of each movie he presents, from Queen Elizabeth (Helen Mirren) in “The Queen,” who has to push past her own extraverted sensation to connect with the introverted intuition she needs to realize it is not her authority but her presence among her people that is important in the death of Princess Diana, to the portrayal of Opposing Personality Types in Alfred Hitchcock’s “Marnie”—with Sean Connery’s de-
tached introverted sensation interfacing with Tippi Hedren’s opposed extraverted sensation in what John calls a “trickster work of art.” He sees Marnie as “masquerading womanliness,” a “female impersonator” who invites us to dig deeper into the mystery of her maternal deprivation.

As a woman, I found Virginia’s exploration of “Dangerous Beauty” and the feminine strength of Veronica Franco, a courtesan who created an uproar in sixteenth century Venice by standing up to a church-led uprising against her and succeeding, to be riveting. “Whereas Antionette illustrated how increasingly constricted feminine potential can spin out of control,” Virginia observes, “‘Beauty’ shows the capacity of the feminine to expand its range under challenge, with refreshing confidence.” Veronica was encouraged by her mother to face life head on, to be a distinctly self-sufficient woman in a world ruled by men, to “love and not the object of love,” to honor eros and relatedness according to her own parameters. No Good Girl education here! She took patriarchy on and she won. Would that we all could have received such parental permission to be the self we were destined to be in those early years!

Virginia and John both explore two movies, “Monsoon Wedding” and “Letter from an Unknown Woman,” in four separate chapters. With “Monsoon Wedding,” each found the movie both celebratory (from a New Delhi perspective) and alchemical, with its arranged marriage, complicated familial drama, monsoon rains, its extraverted sensation panorama of contemporary India, numerous subplots, and the ultimate triumph of integrity. The feminine is paraded in feeling, emotional shows of affection, in the pudgy matrons’ bodies, the supple maidens, and in the final message offered that “love transcends division.” The ultimate negative patriarch of the film, Uncle Tej—“the creep” according to Virginia—is exposed for what he is and everything ends on a note of satisfying delight.

I had to rent “Letter from an Unknown Woman” from Movies Worth Watching, as it is not yet out on DVD, but it was well worth it. This 1948 movie, set in Vienna, stars Joan Fontaine as Lisa, a too-nice anima figure, an “eternal girl,” lost in her tunnel-vision adulation of Stefan (a handsome Louis Jourdan), a young celebrity who gained some fame as a promising concert pianist yet was lost in a promiscuous addiction to seduction, seeking the perfect woman who could never exist in real life (a puer aeternus figure). The movie is framed by a letter written by Lisa to Stefan upon her death, outlining for him her presence in his life, which he had never taken seriously, as she remained a fantasy figure important to him only as projection. Stefan’s adolescent narcissism, which in the end destroys him as well as Lisa, Lisa’s inability to develop her own animus, her own identity, and the dissolution of the feminine is snatched from oblivion in the end by Stephan’s slow recognition, while reading the letter, of his own part in this unfolding tragedy. He does, after reading it, just as we do, after hearing and seeing the movie, get the message, even if too late. Virginia’s and John’s provocative, poignant and persevering layout of this film holds your attention and teaches throughout. I loved these readings.

John Beebe offers, in a separate chapter, what he calls “The Anima in Film.” In film, he explains, an anima figure is often a confusing, deceptive presence with the capacity to engender transformation. “Not every leading female character is an anima figure, but often there are unmistakable signs that an unconscious, rather than a conscious, figure is intended.” These signs, to name but a few John cites, include: an unusual radiance (e.g. Garbo, Monroe); the desire to make emotional connection the main concern of the character; the character’s unusual capacity for life, in vivid contrast to other characters in the film; the character’s ability to offer a piece of advice that is often transformative to another character in the film; and the mystery, having come from some quite other place into the midst of a reality more familiar to us than the character’s own place of origin (Audrey Hepburn in “Roman Holiday”). John explores “A Star is Born,” “Vertigo,” and “Mask” to flesh out this thematic study.

“Schindler’s List” is one of John’s picks of how a film, in the right hands, allows us to “reflect in a related way upon a moral catastrophe,” like the Holocaust. This related, or “indirect” way of looking at something too awful “enables us to hold in memory what would otherwise be too painful to endure,” thus being a “containing as well as entertaining experience, and even a healing rite of vision.” I liked John’s comments on “Brokeback Mountain,” highlighting “the inexplicable unadaptedness of men in relationships” —Ennis, “godlike, sealed off, a somber manly puer” (except when remembering Jack at the end) and Jack, the “soulfully androgynous trickster, just feminine enough to receive the projection of a man who has no other way of connecting to the anima.” John says he left the movie “feeling not just the enormous sadness of Jack’s and Ennis’ truncated love, but the hole in my own heart.”

A chapter on “Silence of the Lambs”, written by Jane Alexander Stewart, is included in this work, exploring “the mysterious power of the feminine to be receptive and responsive in the face of fear.” The closer Clarice comes to accepting her feminine, relating side, the closer she gets to solving the crime—much to the amazement of those trained in the masculine “cover your back” methodology. And Virginia displays her charming, open enjoyment of what-a-woman-brings (when employing feminine intuition and ingenuity) “as emissary of the feminine in a very patriarchal town” in both “Chocolat,” with the delicious Juliette Binoche, and the 1940 version of “Pride and Prejudice” with Greer Garson as Elizabeth Bennett.

The references cited that ground these meditations in Jungian thought, the in-depth study of a character, the archetypes and universal themes explored in such personal, helpful ways, the ability to spot the feminine as she slips across the dark canvas, the fun, the amazing insights—I can go on and on. The Presence of the Feminine in Film is more than a book. It is an experience. I can no more present it properly here than I can act it out on the stage before you. Each person reading these meditations will walk away with just what they needed, just the right metaphor or insight they were looking for, in order to capture the illusive Feminine in that magnificent adventure we call film.