

## Senex and Puer

Consciously or unconsciously, all people—but especially men—wrestle with a syzygy (a pair of polar opposites) of archetypes, the *senex* and the *puer aeternis*, the archetypes of the old man and the eternal youth.

From the Latin *senex* come the English words *senescence* (old age, especially the infirmities of aging) and *senator* (draw your own conclusion), and from *puer* we derive *puerile* (childish). The *senex* and the king archetypes have much in common, just as do the *puer* and the lover. As a syzygy, one is never far from the other, as they forever maintain a sort of yin-yang relationship.

The *senex* makes laws, creates order, mints money, and differentiates between things. From Saturn, a *senex* figure, we learn that the old man archetype has a dark, leaden, and depressive quality, with a “dirty old man” type of sexuality estranged from the feminine sphere.

In contrast to the heavy, overly-grounded *senex* is the light and airy *puer*, who challenges the authority of old men and often exhibits a puckish quality (recall Shakespeare’s character Puck in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, a wonderful *puer* figure).

Both *senex* and *puer* have positive and negative qualities, and each is necessarily in relation to the other, even though we often see older men who seem heavy with age and young men profoundly under the influence of youth.

There is great complexity to the *senex* and *puer* archetypes, and greater complexity still to the syzygy, but it is clear that living a balanced life involves in part seeking a balance between the extremes of these two powerful archetypes. This seems to work in my life this way: When I am too *solutio* (“light” or “airy”), something happens to let out the air—I become grounded. When I become too *coagulo* (“solidified” or “heavy”), something happens that opens new possibilities—and I am forced to lighten up.