

Beauty and the Beast

'He sees enough who doth his darkness see'

If consciousness is best defined as light, and 'shadow' as those areas of the psyche where the light does not often penetrate, then we are understandably at a loss when first asked to define our 'Shadow' qualities. If we really want to know what they are (which most don't) then we cannot do better than follow the advice of Edward Whitmont in the *Symbolic Quest*.

'Ask someone to give a description of the personality type which he finds most impossible to get along with, and he will produce a description of his own repressed characteristics – a self description which is utterly unconscious and which therefore always and everywhere tortures him as he receives its effects from the other person'.

Here Whitmont raises two important points. The first is the psychological law that what we are unconscious of in ourselves we project onto others mainly because of the ego's intolerance when faced with reconciling opposites within itself: saint and scoundrel; beauty and beast; socialite and misfit; learned professor and village idiot etc.

The projection of shadow is obvious on the collective level when listening to the opposing accounts of sworn enemies (such as currently hold the stage in Palestine) and easily gives rise to inhuman behaviour such as ethnic cleansing. International pressure for a truce is often in vain because a 'climb down' requires a degree of spiritual maturity on both sides.

The second factor implied by Whitmont is that what may be 'utterly unconscious' for the individual about himself is much less hidden for everyone else. In fact the more repressed and unconscious it is, then the more obvious it will become to others. This raises the all important question; 'what do I do about my shadow once it is pointed out to me and I have gracefully owned up to it?

The answer of course is nothing. That is, unless you wish to indulge in endless self-ethnic cleansing. It is enough simply to own it. What is no longer rejected and scape-goated gives surprisingly little trouble. Jung's secretary considered leaving because she couldn't reconcile for herself his wisdom, which she revered, with his quick temper which shocked her. 'If you stay you will just have to put up with it' he said. 'It's only my shadow'.

Accepting one's shadow often leads to real transformation. A colleague in her 70's told me about a recurrent dream she had as a trainee psychotherapist thirty years previously. In her dream she was always being pursued by a man with a knife who wished to kill her. The chase involved teetering and panicky dodging about on roof tops. In the final dream she suddenly remembered her therapist's advice to turn and face her pursuer. Now, summoning all her courage, she did so. He ran straight up to her and stabbed her in the heart where upon she woke up. 'Well done', commented her therapist, 'you have met your own aggression at last'. Later the trainee became an ardent devotee of Ramana Maharshi. I asked her how, exactly, the aggression referred to had manifested. 'It was my sharp tongue' she said. 'I used to be very witty and clever at making wounding remarks. Now I can't seem to do it at all'.

M.R.

Questions:

Describe someone whose nature you least admire.

Describe a time when you experienced a real change of heart towards someone.

Describe a dream in which you are confronted with a shadow figure.