

threshold. The way to the self lies through him, behind the dark aspect that he represents there stands the aspect of wholeness, and only by making friends with the shadow do we gain the friendship of the self."

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1 · THE LONG BAG WE DRAG BEHIND US

R O B E R T B L Y

It's an old Gnostic tradition that we don't invent things, we just remember. The Europeans I know of who remember the dark side best are Robert Louis Stevenson, Joseph Conrad, and Carl Jung. I'll call up a few of their ideas and add a few thoughts of my own.

Let's talk about the personal shadow first. When we were one or two years old we had what we might visualize as a 360-degree personality. Energy radiated out from all parts of our body and all parts of our psyche. A child running is a living globe of energy. We had a ball of energy, all right; but one day we noticed that our parents didn't like certain parts of that ball. They said things like: "Can't you be still?" Or "It isn't nice to try and kill your brother." Behind us we have an invisible bag, and the part of us our parents don't like, we, to keep our parents' love, put in the bag. By the time we go to school our bag is quite large. Then our teachers have their say: "Good children don't get angry over such little things." So we take our anger and put it in the bag. By the time my brother and I were twelve in Madison, Minnesota, we were known as "the nice Bly boys." Our bags were already a mile long.

Then we do a lot of bag-stuffing in high school. This time it's no longer the evil grownups that pressure us, but people our own age. So the student's paranoia about grownups can be misplaced. I lied all through high school automatically to try to be more like the basketball players. Any part of myself

that was a little slow went into the bag. My sons are going through the process now; I watched my daughters, who were older, experience it. I noticed with dismay how much they put into the bag, but there was nothing their mother or I could do about it. Often my daughters seemed to make their decision on the issue of fashion and collective ideas of beauty, and they suffered as much damage from other girls as they did from men.

So I maintain that out of a round globe of energy the twenty-year-old ends up with a slice. We'll imagine a man who has a thin slice left—the rest is in the bag—and we'll imagine that he meets a woman; let's say they are both twenty-four. She has a thin, elegant slice left. They join each other in a ceremony, and this union of two slices is called marriage. Even together the two do not make up one person! Marriage when the bag is large entails loneliness during the honeymoon for that very reason. Of course we all lie about it. "How is your honeymoon?" "Wonderful, how's yours?"

Different cultures fill the bag with different contents. In Christian culture sexuality usually goes into the bag. With it goes much spontaneity. Marie-Louise von Franz warns us, on the other hand, not to sentimentalize primitive cultures by assuming that they have no bag at all. She says in effect that they have a different but sometimes even larger bag. They may put individuality into the bag, or inventiveness. What anthropologists know as "participation mystique," or "a mysterious communal mind," sounds lovely, but it can mean that tribal members all know exactly the same thing and no one knows anything else. It's possible that bags for all human beings are about the same size.

We spend our life until we're twenty deciding what parts of ourself to put into the bag, and we spend the rest of our lives trying to get them out again. Sometimes retrieving them feels impossible, as if the bag were sealed. Suppose the bag remains sealed—what happens then? A great nineteenth-century story has an idea about that. One night Robert Louis Stevenson woke up and told his wife a bit of a dream he'd just had. She urged him to write it down; he did, and it became "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde." The nice side of the personality becomes, in our idealistic culture, nicer and nicer. The Western man may be a liberal doctor, for example, always thinking about the good of others. Morally and ethically he is wonderful. But the substance in the bag takes on a personality of its own; it can't be ignored. The story says that the substance locked in the bag appears one day *somewhere else* in the city. The substance in the bag feels angry, and when you see it, it is shaped like an ape, and moves like an ape.

The story says then that when we put a part of ourselves in the bag it regresses. It de-evolves toward barbarism. Suppose a young man seals a bag at twenty and then waits fifteen or twenty years before he opens it again. What will he find? Sadly, the sexuality, the wildness, the impulsiveness, the anger, the freedom he put in have all regressed; they are not only primitive in mood, they are hostile to the person who opens the bag. The man who opens his bag at forty-five or the woman who opens her bag rightly feels fear. She glances up and sees the shadow of an ape passing along the alley wall; anyone seeing that would be frightened.

I think we could say that most males in our culture put their feminine side or interior woman into the bag. When they begin, perhaps around thirty-five or forty, trying to get in touch with their feminine side again, she may be by then truly hostile to them. The same man may experience in the meantime much hostility from women in the outer world. The rule seems to be: the outside has to be like the inside. That's the way it is on this globe. If a woman, wanting to be approved for her femininity, has put her masculine side or her internal male into the bag, she may find that twenty years later he will be hostile to her. Moreover he may be unfeeling and brutal in his criticism. She's in a spot. Finding a hostile man to live with would give her someone to blame, and take away the pressure, but that wouldn't help the problem of the closed bag. In the meantime, she is liable to sense a double rejection, from the male inside and the male outside. There's a lot of grief in this whole thing.

Every part of our personality that we do not love will become hostile to us. We could add that it may move to a distant place and begin a revolt against us as well. A lot of the trouble Shakespeare's kings experience blossoms in that sentence. Hotspur "in Wales" rebels against the King. Shakespeare's poetry is marvelously sensitive to the danger of these inner revolts. Always the king at the center is endangered.

When I visited Bali a few years ago, it became clear that their ancient Hindu culture works through mythology to bring shadow elements up into daily view. The temples put on plays virtually every day from the *Ramayana*. I saw some terrifying plays performed as a part of religious life, in a day by day way. Almost every Balinese house has standing outside it a fierce, toothy, aggressive, hostile figure carved in stone. This being doesn't plan to do good. I visited a mask maker, and noticed his nine- or ten-year-old son sitting outside the house, making with his chisel a hostile, angry figure. The person does not aim to act out the aggressive energies as we do in football or the Spanish in bull-fighting, but each person aims to bring them upward into art: that is the ideal. The Balinese can be violent and brutal in war, but in daily life they seem much less violent than we are. What can this mean? Southerners in the United States put figures of helpful little black men on the lawn, cast in iron, and we in the North do the same with serene deer. We ask for roses in the wallpaper. Renoir above the sofa, and John Denver on the stereo. Then the aggression escapes from the bag and attacks everyone.

We'll have to let this contrast between Balinese and American cultures lie there and go on. I want to talk about the connection between shadow energies and the moving picture projector. Let's suppose that we have miniaturized certain parts of ourselves, flattened them out, and put them inside a can, where it will be dark. Then one night—always at night—the shapes reappear, huge, and we can't take our eyes away from them. We drive at night in the country and see a man and woman on an enormous outdoor movie screen; we shut off the car and watch. Certain figures who have been rolled up inside a can, doubly invisible by being partially "developed" and by being kept always in the dark, exist during the day only as pale images on a thin gray strip of film. When a certain light is ignited in the back of our heads, ghostly pictures appear on a wall in front of us. They light cigarettes; they threaten others with

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guns. Our psyches then are natural projection machines; images that we stored in a can we can bring out while still rolled up, and run them for others, or on others. A man's anger, rolled up inside the can for twenty years, he may see one night on his wife's face. A wife might see a hero every night on her husband's face and then one night see a tyrant. Nora in *A Doll's House* saw the two images in turn.

The other day I found some of my old diaries, and I picked out one at random, from 1956. I had been struggling that year to write a poem describing the nature of advertising men. I remember that, and I recall that at that time the story of Midas was important in my mood. Everything that Midas touched turned to gold. I declared in my poem that every living thing an advertising man touches turns into some form of money, and that's why ad men have such starved souls. I kept in mind the ad men I'd known and was having a good time attacking them from my concealed position. As I read the old passages I felt a shock seeing the movie I was running. Between the time I wrote them and now I'd discovered that I had known for years how to eat in such a way as to keep me from taking in any kind of nourishment. Whatever food a friend offered me, or a woman, or a child, turned into metal on the way to my mouth. Is the image clear? No one can eat or drink metal. So Midas was a good image for me. But the film showing my interior Midas was rolled up in the can. Advertising men, evil and foolish, tended to appear at night on a large screen, and I was naturally fascinated. A year or two later I composed a book called *Poems for the Ascension of J. P. Morgan*, in which each poem I had written about business alternated with a culpable advertisement reproduced from magazines or newspapers. It is a lively book in its way. No one would publish it, but that was all right. It was mostly projection anyway. I'm going to read you a poem I wrote around that time. It's called "Unrest."

*A strange unrest hovers over the nation:
This is the last dance, the wild tossing of Morgan's seas,
The division of spoils. A lassitude
Enters into the diamonds of the body.
In high school the explosion begins, the child is partly killed;
When the fight is over, and the land and the sea ruined,
Two shapes inside us rise, and move away.*

*But the baboon whistles on the shores of death—
Climbing and falling, tossing nuts and stones,
He gambols by the tree
Whose branches hold the expanses of cold,
The planets whirling and the black sun,
The cries of insects, and the tiny slaves
In the prisons of bark.
Charlemagne, we are approaching your islands!
We are returning now to the snowy trees,
And the depth of the darkness buried in snow, through
which you rode all night*

*With stiff hands; now the darkness is falling
In which we sleep and awake—a darkness in which
Thieves shudder, and the insane have a hunger for snow,
In which bankers dream of being buried by black stones,
And businessmen fall on their knees in the dungeons of sleep.*

About five years ago I began to be suspicious of this poem. Why are bankers and businessmen being singled out? If I had to rephrase “banker” what would I say? “Someone who plans very well.” I plan very well. How would I rephrase “businessman?” “Someone with a stiff face.” I looked in the mirror then. I’ll read you the way the passage goes now, after I’ve rewritten it:

*... a darkness in which
Thieves shudder, and the insane have a hunger for snow,
In which good planners dream of being buried by black stones,
And men with stiff faces like me fall on their knees in the
dungeons of sleep.*

Now when I go to a party I feel different from the way that I used to when I meet a businessman. I say to a man, “What do you do?” He says, “I’m a stockbroker.” And he says it in a faintly apologetic way. I say to myself, “Look at this: something of me that was deep inside me is standing right next to me.” I have a funny longing to hug him. Not all of them, of course.

But projection is a wonderful thing too. Marie-Louise von Franz remarked somewhere, “Why do we always assume projection is bad? ‘You are projecting’ becomes among Jungians an accusation. Sometimes projection is helpful and the right thing.” Her remark is very wise. I know that I was starving myself to death, but the knowledge couldn’t move directly from the bag to the conscious mind. It has to go out onto the world first. “How wicked advertising men are,” I said to myself. Marie-Louise von Franz reminds us that if we didn’t project, we might never connect with the world at all. Women sometimes complain that a man often takes his ideal feminine side and projects it onto a woman. But if he didn’t, how could he get out of his mother’s house or his bachelor room? The issue is not so much that we do project but how long we keep the projections out there. Projection without personal contact is dangerous. Thousands, even millions of American men projected their internal feminine onto Marilyn Monroe. If a million men do that, and leave it there, it’s likely she will die. She died. Projections without personal contact can damage the person receiving them.

We have to also say that Marilyn Monroe called for these projections as a part of her power longing, and her disturbance must have gone back to victimization in childhood. But the process of projection and recall, done so delicately in tribal culture, face to face, goes out of whack when the mass media arrives. In the economy of the psyche her death was inevitable and even right. No single human being can carry so many projections—that is, so much unconsciousness—and survive. So it’s infinitely important that each person bring back his or her own.

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But why would we give away, or put into the bag, so much of ourselves? Why would we do it so young? And if we have put away so many of our angers, spontaneities, hungers, enthusiasms, our rowdy and unattractive parts, then how can we live? What holds us together? Alice Miller spoke to this point in her book *Prisoners of Childhood*, which in paperback form is called *The Drama of the Gifted Child*.

The drama is this. We came as infants "trailing clouds of glory," arriving from the farthest reaches of the universe, bringing with us appetites well preserved from our mammal inheritance, spontaneities wonderfully preserved from our 150,000 years of tree life, angers well preserved from our 5,000 years of tribal life—in short, with our 360-degree radiance—and we offered this gift to our parents. They didn't want it. They wanted a nice girl or a nice boy. That's the first act of the drama. It doesn't mean our parents were wicked; they needed us for something. My mother, as a second generation immigrant, needed my brother and me to help the family look more classy. We do the same thing to our children; it's a part of life on this planet. Our parents rejected who we were before we could talk, so the pain of rejection is probably stored in some pre-verbal place.

When I read her book I fell into depression for three weeks. With so much gone, what can we do? We can construct a personality more acceptable to our parents. Alice Miller agrees that we have betrayed ourselves, but she says, "Don't blame yourself for that. There's nothing else you could have done." Children in ancient times who opposed their parents probably were set out to die. We did, as children, the only sensible thing under the circumstances. The proper attitude toward that, she says, is mourning.

Let's talk now about the different sorts of bags. When we have put a lot in our private bag, we often have as a result little energy. The bigger the bag, the less the energy. Some people have by nature more energy than others, but we all have more than we can possibly use. Where did it go? If we put our sexuality into the bag as a child, obviously we lose a lot of energy. When a woman puts her masculinity into the bag, or rolls it up and puts it into the can, she loses energy with it. So we can think of our personal bag as containing energy now unavailable to us. If we identify ourselves as uncreative, it means we took our creativity and put it into the bag. What do you mean, "I am not creative"? "Let experts do it"—isn't that what such a person is saying? That's damn well what such people are saying. The audience wants a poet, a hired gun, to come in from out of town. Everybody in this audience should be writing their own poems.

We have talked of our personal bag, but each town or community also seems to have a bag. I lived for years near a small Minnesota farm town. Everyone in the town was expected to have the same objects in the bag; a small Greek town clearly would have different objects in the bag. It's as if the town, by collective psychic decision, puts certain energies in the bag, and tries to prevent anyone from getting them out. Towns interfere with our private process in this matter, so it's more dangerous to live in them than in nature. On the other hand, certain ferocious hatreds that one feels in a small town help

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one sometimes to see where the projections have gone. And the Jungian community, like the town, has its bag, and usually recommends that Jungians keep their vulgarity and love of money in the bag; and the Freudian community usually demands that Freudians keep their religious life in the bag.

There is also a national bag, and ours is quite long. Russia and China have noticeable faults, but if an American citizen is curious to know what is in our national bag at the moment, he can listen closely when a State Department official criticizes Russia. As Reagan says, we are noble; other nations have empires. Other nations endure stagnated leadership, treat minorities brutally, brainwash their youth, and break treaties. A Russian can find out about his bag by reading a *Pravda* article on the United States. We're dealing with a network of shadows, a pattern of shadows projected by both sides, all meeting somewhere out in the air. I'm not saying anything new with this metaphor, but I do want to make the distinction clear between the personal shadow, the town shadow, and the national shadow.

I have used three metaphors here: the bag, the film can, and projection. Since the can or bag is closed and its images remain in the dark, we can only see the contents of our own bag by throwing them innocently, as we say, out into the world. Spiders then become evil, snakes cunning, goats oversexed; men become linear, women become weak, the Russians become unprincipled, and Chinese all look alike. Yet it is precisely through this expensive, damaging, wasteful, inaccurate form of mud-slinging that we eventually come in touch with the mud that the crow found on the bottom of its feet.

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