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What To Do With Shadow? :

Comparing Lafcadio Hearn's 'The Eater of Dreams' and Ursula Le Guin's *A Wizard of Earthsea*

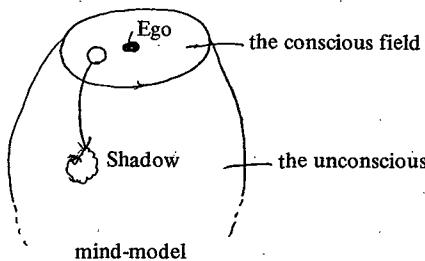
Yuri Mitsuhara

1. Resistance to Rationalism

Recently dreams and fantasies have drawn close attention in Japan. Many people in the field of psychology are interested in and study dreams; a lot of fantasy stories, both domestic and foreign, are published and read extensively. This seems to me the resistance to our long overemphasis on only rational and scientific realities. Some decades ago, it was said in Japan that even novels should be real, and that treating fantasies was nothing but an escape from real life. But I consider this view too one-sided. Sticking to reality means treating only the surface of human nature. It makes us overlook some important truths beyond reality — or rather, some truths located deeper down than reality.

Let me illustrate this point, using a model of our mind.

Figure 1



In Figure 1,¹⁾ the Ego is the center of the conscious field and controls this area. Overemphasis on realism and rationalism would be, in a sense, looking at only the conscious region of our mind and regarding the mind as a flat circle. But our mind has immense depth, with the unconscious region so much greater than the conscious one. When we put too much emphasis on rationality, we expel irrational experiences and feelings from

our consciousness. But they do not vanish in the air; they are just repressed, sinking into the unconscious. There they take the form of a 'Shadow',²⁾ in the term of Jungian psychology. Though we find the Shadow uncomfortable, since it is what we keep trying to ignore, it wants itself to be expressed. As Freud indicates (though he did not use the term 'Shadow'), that is why we sometimes behave quite unexpectedly for ourselves. In such cases we feel awkward and at a loss, yet they are still a healthy reaction.

If one's ego is too rigid and, so to speak, sets up too strong a barrier against the unconscious, in order to prevent the Shadow from expressing itself, then one's consciousness becomes stiff and dry, losing touch with the fertile unconscious. This is dangerous enough, but when this tendency increases, a still more dangerous situation comes. Tatsuhiko Fuji, a Jungian psychologist and theologian, explains³⁾ that such symptoms as dual personality, obsession, and seeing one's Doppelgänger are the result of long and excessive repression of the Shadow. Then the Shadow suddenly rebels with unexpected strength and destroys or occupies the Ego.

Thus our Shadow could be very dangerous, but many psychologists indicate that when our Ego is flexible enough to keep in touch with the Shadow and accept it, the Shadow works complementarily with our consciousness, and our mind becomes healthier, acquiring completeness.

This holds true of the whole society. So the recent trend of dreams and fantasies being in fashion might be a desirable phenomenon. Dreams and fantasies, having their foundation in the unconscious and being irrational by nature, are the best way to express the Shadow. They enable us to get along quite well with the Shadow before it becomes too strong to control, which would be difficult for any realistic style of writing.

Needless to say, we must be careful in dialogue with the Shadow. If we are careless, the shadow may devour our consciousness, which means losing one's identity. What is important for us is to keep a proper relation with the Shadow, initiative being on the conscious side.

From this point of view, I have found an interesting resemblance and contrast between Lafcadio Hearn's dream in his 'The Eater Of

Dreams' and an excellent fantasy written by Ursula Le' Guin, *A Wizard of Earthsea*, on how to deal with the Shadow. First, Hearn's dream shall be examined from this view.

2. Interpretation of Hearn's Dream

'The Eater of Dreams' has a peculiar structure. The former part of the story is written in the style of an scholarly essay, which discusses Baku, an imaginary creature which is said to eat dreams, relating how this creature is depicted in some Chinese legends. In the latter part, however, the atmosphere completely changes: there a fantastic encounter with Baku and a mysterious dream of the narrator (probably Hearn himself, who has written the scholarly essay in the former part) are described. In the dream, he sees a corpse which resembles him very much. Suddenly the body springs at him. Being seized with terror, he destroyed the body to pieces. Baku makes a comment on the dream, which Hearn thinks very terrible and weird, saying that it is a very fortunate dream.

It is possible to regard this encounter as a part of the dream⁴⁾, but I would rather consider it as Hearn's interpretation of his own dream. In that interpretation, the destroyed corpse is considered as the Self destroyed. But I do not agree with this view. I assume that the 'I' who destroyed the body in the dream is his Ego, the center of his consciousness, and that the destroyed corpse is his Shadow, coming up from his unconscious.

This interpretation of mine I owe to Hayao Kawai, who describes⁵⁾ the symptom of seeing one's double (Doppelgänger), whether in illusion or in dream, as 'Kage no Yamai' (Illness of Shadow, Illness caused by Shadow). He says this double, another self, symbolizes the Shadow on its way to acquiring independence of the consciousness, insisting on being expressed.

This interpretation tells us the reason why Hearn feels such terror from the body, and at the same time, cannot resist his 'monstrous curiosity' 'to examine it'⁶⁾. It is both abominable and fascinating to him, since it is his Shadow, another being of himself, which he has been neglecting and yet cannot ignore completely.

There is another reason to regard the body as Hearn's Shadow. Before he sees the body in the dream, he (his consciousness) notices that he 'cast no shadow on the naked floor' ('The Eater of Dreams', p. 152). We usually do not mind whether we cast a shadow in dreams or not. But Hearn notices that his shadow is not attached to him. Then where is it? It is lying there, taking the shape of his body, another 'himself'. It indicates that Hearn instinctively realises that his Shadow is trying to come out of the region of the unconscious and to express itself.

Then how did he react to his Shadow and how should *we* react to *our* Shadow? We shall see it in the next section, referring to the struggle against the Shadow in *A Wizard of Earthsea*.

3. Struggle and Integration with Shadow

- (1) a. . . . that thing [i.e. the body] sprang – sprang from the bed at me, and fastened upon me – moaning, and knawing, and rending! Oh! with what madness of terror did I strive against it! ('The eater of Dreams', p. 154)
- b. And I struck with the ax; – I clove, I crushed, I brayed the Moaner – until there lay before me only a shapeless, hideous, reeking mass – the abominable ruin of Myself. . . . (ellipsis in the original) (ibid.)
- (2) a. And through the bright misshappen breach clambered something like a clot of black shadow, quick and hideous, and it leaped straight out at Ged's face.
Staggering back under the weight of the thing, Ged gave a short, hoarse scream. . . .
Ged fell, struggling and writhing, . . . only he [i.e. Ged's friend] saw the lump of shadow that clung to Ged, tearing at his flesh. (*A Wizard of Earthsea*, pp. 74-75)⁷)
- b. A rage of horror filled Ged and he swung up and brought down his staff whistling on the hood that hid the shadow-face. . . . So jerking and billowing as if blown on the wind the Shadow spread its arms and came at Ged, trying to get hold of him as it had held him on Roke Knoll [i. e. the scene

(2a)]: and if it did . . . [it would] enter into Ged, devouring him out from within, owning him, which was its whole desire. Ged struck at it again with his heavy, smoking staff, beating it off, but it came again and he struck again.
... (ibid., pp. 121-122)

c. In silence, man and shadow met face to face, and stopped.

Aloud and clearly, breaking that old silence, Ged spoke the shadow's name, and in the same moment the shadow spoke without lips or tongue, saying the same word; 'Ged.' And the two voices were one voice.

Ged reached out his hands, dropping his staff, and took hold of his shadow, of the black self that reached out to him. Light and darkness met, and joined, and were one.

(ibid., pp. 197-198)

These two narratives, *A Wizard of Earthsea* and 'The Eater of Dreams' have very little in common; they are completely different in length, style, plots and so on. But when we compare the scenes (1a), (1b) and (2a), (2b), it would be easy to find an amazing resemblance of the atmospheres. Ged's story is very famous and has been analysed from the psychological viewpoint. But we can learn much more through studying this resemblance with 'The Eater of Dreams', which seems to have been undiscussed as far as I know.

This resemblance must come from the fact that these two texts both show how to treat the Shadow, whether the authors were aware of it or not. The scenes (1a) and (2a) describe the encounter of Ego and Shadow; the Shadow's attack on the Ego, probably to devour it. The scenes (1b) and (2b) depict the Ego's struggle and rejection of the Shadow. But while Hearn's dream (1) ends at that stage, (2) has the next scene, the very important climax: the integration of Ego and Shadow.

To proceed into a further argument, I must describe the outline of *A Wizard of Earthsea*. The hero is a young wizard named Ged. In his apprenticeship, Ged uses an invocation spell too strong for him to control, from his false pride and ignorance. As a result, he invoked a 'Shadow' from death's realm. That Shadow takes the shape of a man much like Ged and chases him, trying to catch him and devour him. At

first, Ged is horrified and runs away from it or tries to beat it down in despair. But at last, he knows what to do with the Shadow. He gives the Shadow his own name and holds it, which means he admits this terrible Shadow as a part of himself. Thus he 'had made himself whole: a man: who, knowing his whole true self, cannot be used or possessed by any power other than himself' (*A Wizard of Earthsea*, p. 199).

As is mentioned before, these two tales have little in common as novels. But Ged and Hearn have many things in common in respect of confrontation with the Shadow. They suggest a lot to us on how to deal with our own Shadows.

As the first step, the narrator and Ged recognise their Shadow. As I have discussed earlier, when the consciousness has become too rigid, we fail to notice, or rather neglect the existence of the Shadow. But sooner or later, in the course of our lives, we must notice that there is something dark and mysterious inside ourselves. Metaphorically speaking, consciousness and rationalism and scientific realities are all light, and unconscious and irrational matters are shadow. Where there is light, there should be shadow. Without shadows, the whole world would look just bright and flat, monotonous. The person who keeps on neglecting his/her Shadow would be a dull person like a flat desert, which makes no shadow anywhere. Otherwise he could be a very dangerous person who thinks himself the picture of justice and morality, like the sun which casts no shadow of itself. Thus recognising one's Shadow is a necessary and inevitable step to develop one's personality. Hearn and Ged both take this first step.

At the next stage, they fear the shadow and try to beat it back. So far, their behaviours are much alike. Henceforward they make a clear contrast.

Hearn succeeds in destroying the Shadow in his dream. That means, however, the Shadow is only repressed; he stops there and cannot proceed to the next step.

On the other hand, Ged notices that fighting against the Shadow is useless and succeeds in integrating the Shadow and being 'whole'. Hearn could not do this.

But Hearn's rejection of the Shadow was, perhaps not the best but the second best way to treat the Shadow, since integrating the Shadow needs an incredibly strong will-power. When the Shadow is too strong or the Ego is too weak, it often happens that Shadow devours the Ego. Kawai tells us that, in such cases, before the Ego is devoured 'we should kill the Shadow at once or lock it up somewhere completely. Then the Shadow transforms itself and will appear again someday in a manner easier to accept' (*Kage no Genshogaku*, p. 218, translation mine).

Probably Hearn could not accept his Shadow at that stage -- not yet. It became his task thereafter. I do not know whether he could finally accept it someday or not, though I hope he could.

Anyway, Hearn's dream and Ged's story tell us a very important lesson. Rationalism and science have long overwhelmed the world. Now we feel a vague uneasiness, coming close to the end of the century. Is it not because the Shadow begins to stir in our unconscious, wanting itself to be expressed? We cannot and should not see only light now. Nor should we submit ourselves to the Shadow without consideration. We should follow Hearn and try to go further than him in 'The Eater of Dreams'; to where Ged arrived at last, aiming to be 'whole'.

4. A Theme for Further Study

What was the Shadow for Hearn? What I mean by this question is this. There are various levels of Shadow in our minds. Some are located near the surface of the unconscious, closer to the conscious field. Some are located deep down in the unconscious. The former is called a personal Shadow, which an individual shapes by him/herself in the process of growing up. The latter is called a universal Shadow, which the whole society or all human beings share. Kawai explains as follows⁸⁾ :

Each individual has different personal Shadows, but universal Shadows, such as the act of murder, are shared by all human beings, and come very close to the concept of Evil. The task of admitting the Shadow and integrating it in one's consciousness is difficult enough even in the case of a personal Shadow. In the case of a universal Shadow, the task is next to impossible. (translation mine)

Ged's Shadow must have been near to a universal Shadow, since it is often referred to in the story as the 'Shadow of death', which almost all the people fear and try to look away from. But there is no knowing from 'The Eater of Dreams' whether Hearn's Shadow in his dream was a personal one, having been shaped from his own experiences in the course of his life, or it was a universal one like that in Ged's story. Which was it that he tried to reject so hard?

I have not treated this point in this essay for the coherence of the argument, since its main theme holds true of any Shadow; that is, any Shadow is so difficult to accept, yet we should not look away from it.

However, the question above can be a very interesting theme for further study. A closer and more detailed observation of Hearn's life and his other works might throw light on this point. This will be the main theme of my next essay which I am preparing now.

NOTES

- 1) This is based on the figure in *Muishi no Kozo* (p. 147) written by Hayao Kawai (See Note 8). This and his other books I list in the References have guided me so helpfully in understanding the concept of Shadow and constructing my argument about it in this essay.
- 2) The concept of Shadow is so complicated and made up of many other factors besides irrational matters. But here I focus on its irrational aspect unrecognised by the Ego, in contrast with rationalism of the consciousness.
- 3) Tatsuhiko Fuji, *Yume Kaiun (To Improve Your Fortune through Dreams)* (Tokyo: Gakushu Kenkyusha, 1988), pp. 55-56.
- 4) It is also possible to think that Hearn never had this dream and the whole story is fictional. But it matters little to the theme of this essay whether he really had this dream or not. I believe that, even if he actually did not have that dream, the fact itself that he wrote this fantastic story full of mystery shows a glimpse of his unconscious; we can thus regard it as a sign from his unconscious. So I regard the narrator of this story as Hearn himself in this essay.
- 5) Hayao Kawai, *Kage no Genshogaku (Phenomenology of the Shadow)* (Tokyo: Shisakusha, 1976), pp. 93-101. Subsequent references to this book will be

cited parenthetically in the text.

- 6) Lafcadio Hearn, 'The Eater of Dreams', in *Kwaidan/Kotto*, Vol. XI of *The Writing of Lafcadio Hearn* (Kyoto: Rinsen Book, 1973), p. 153. Further quotations from this book will be cited parenthetically in the text.
- 7) Ursula Le Guin, *A Wizard of Earthsea*, 'Puffin Story Books' (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971). Subsequent references to this book will be cited parenthetically in the text.
- 8) Hayao Kawai, *Muishiki no Kozo (The Structure of the Unconscious)* 'Chuko Shinsho' (Tokyo: Chuo Koronsha, 1977), p. 94.

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