

16.

## The Shadow Prompt

Jung said that one of the major tasks of midlife is to recognize and incorporate one's own shadow. Robert Bly called the process "swallowing" the shadow. When we divide our inner life into binary assumptions such as light and dark, good and bad, right and wrong, conscious and unconscious, we split ourselves in two. No one is wholly good or wholly bad.

Jung said: "One does not become enlightened by imagining figures of light, but by making the darkness conscious." There is a vitality that lives in the shadow, a creative energy. Jung said it can be "pure gold."

**Let your poem today be a peephole into the complexity and perplexity of the human shadow, your own perhaps.** Let it somehow focus on the spiritual process of incorporating your own shadow-side or learning to show compassion for blatant displays of shadow in others.

I've been told that we should generally leave a few shadow threads in each of our poems even if only for contrast.

To go into the dark with a light is to  
know the light.  
To know the dark, go dark.  
Go without sight, and find that the dark, too,  
blooms and sings,  
and is traveled by dark feet and dark wings.

Wendell Berry

Perhaps all the dragons of our lives  
are princesses who are only waiting to  
see us once, beautiful and brave.  
Perhaps everything terrible is in  
its deepest being something  
that needs our love.

Rainer Maria Rilke

Man's shadow, I thought, is his vanity.

Friedrich Nietzsche

This thing of darkness I acknowledge mine.

Shakespeare

One thing that comes out in myths is that at the bottom of the abyss comes the voice of salvation. The black moment is the moment when the real message of transformation is going to come. At the darkest moment comes the light.

Joseph Campbell

Something we were withholding made us weak,  
Until we found it was ourselves.

Robert Frost

I dreamt last night,  
oh marvelous error,  
that there were honeybees in my heart  
making honey out of my old failures.

Antonio Machado

(Many of the above quotations appear in *Meeting the Shadow: The Hidden Power of the Dark Side of Human Nature*, edited by Connie Zweig and Jeremiah Abrams)

### The Appointment

This is my wolf. He sits  
at the foot of the bed  
in the dark all night

breathing so evenly  
I am almost deceived.  
It is not the swollen

cat uncurling  
restlessly, a house  
of kittens knocking

against her flanks;  
it isn't the hot fog  
fingering the window locks

while the daffodils  
wait in the wings  
like spearholders;

not the children fisted

in three busy dreams  
they will retell at breakfast;

and not you, clearly  
not you beside me  
all these good years

that he watches.  
I lie to him nightlong.  
I delay him with praises.

In the morning we wash  
together chummily.  
I rinse my toothbrush.

After that  
he puts his red eyes out  
under the extra blankets.

Maxine Kumin  
in *Selected Poems 1960-1990*

I love the dark hours of my being.  
My mind deepens into them.  
There I can find, as in old letters,  
the days of my life, already lived,  
and held like a legend, and understood.

Then the knowing comes: I can open  
to another life that's wide and timeless.

So I am sometimes like a tree  
rustling over a gravesite  
and making real the dream  
of the one its living roots  
embrace:

a dream once lost  
among sorrows and songs.

Ranier Maria Rilke

in *Rilke's Book of Hours: Love Poems to God*  
trans. by Anita Barrows and Joanna M