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She vs. Shadow

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts
in
Film, Theatre and Communication Arts
Creative Writing

by

Danielle Blasko

B.A. University of Detroit Mercy, 2007

December, 2010

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Dedication

For Claire

Acknowledgments

I am forever indebted to Bill Lavender for the gift and curse of procedure and to Kay Murphy for teaching me the art of revision and for tilting the balance toward love in my love/hate relationship with form.

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Escarp: "In the Kitchen"; *Gutter Eloquence Magazine*: "Fucking Kali";
Short, Fast, and Deadly: "Dream Logic."

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Preface

The unborn work in the psyche is a force of nature that achieves its end either with tyrannical might or with the subtle cunning of nature herself, quite regardless of the personal fate of the man who is its vehicle. –Carl Jung, From “On the Relation of Analytical Psychology to Poetry”

All of the poems included in *She vs. Shadow* were written between September 2007 and May 2009, although the vast majority of the work was written in the much shorter span of four months of intensive writing. The foundation of the thesis began as a series of poems entitled *Dream Shadows*, drafted during the winter and spring months of 2009. While some of the poems here were written prior to the planned series, they prepared me for the journey I would embark on through the dreamscape, as well as for my personal and collective exploration of the human psyche. Initially I was not aware that these poems were connected in any meaningful way; in fact, it took me an entire manuscript draft entitled *Material Mitosis*, exclusively comprised of poems from the series to realize that those other poems categorically belonged in the same collection. These poems are just one poet’s attempt to explore the age-old subject, the human psyche, from a fresh perspective. Readers may feel they are navigating what seems like the dreamscape, and mostly they are; or conversely, they may find themselves launched into a dreamlike, often harsher reality. One thing is certain, at some point, the poems included here took on their own life, whether in the writing or revision processes or in the ordering of poems and reordering of the manuscript itself.

The title, which came to me while I was people watching over a cup of coffee, was my starting point: I wrote, “Everyone here is the Shadow of someone else,” and scribbled the title, *Dream Shadows*, next to it. It was one of those aha moments when I knew that I was onto something bigger than just another disconnected poem. In “On the Relation of Analytical

Psychology to Poetry,” Jung explains that literary works exist in which the author is totally aligned with the creative process and sets out with a particular aim, intentionally producing a specific result through his or her efforts” (310). I embarked on writing what would become a dream series, by setting up a procedural process that I would attempt to adhere to over those several writing-intensive months. My procedure consisted of three main rules: 1) I would record every dream I could recall immediately upon waking in the morning, 2) I would write a minimum of three poems each week, and 3) I would not use the “I” pronoun.

Up until that point in my writing career, I had rarely if ever written poems without the “I” pronoun and was anxious about dropping it, feeling as if I were removing myself from my work. According to Jung, “the special significance of a true work of art resides in the fact that it has escaped from the limitations of the personal and has soared beyond the personal experiences of its creator” (309). I had generally operated on the principle of control and in a way that is what I originally set out to do through my procedure. However, as Jung explains, sometimes “works positively force themselves upon the author; his hand is seized, his pen writes things that his mind contemplates with amazement...sensing that his work is greater than himself, and wields a power which is not his and which he cannot command” (310-311). For several years, I had been arguing in workshops that the speaker of a poem was not necessarily the poet. Now, I feared I would actually have the experience of putting that argument into action, and so I necessarily relinquished control to the creative process. Jung concludes:

We would do well...to think of the creative process as a living thing implanted in the human psyche. Depending on its energy charge, it may appear either as a mere disturbance of conscious activities or as a supraordinate authority which can harness the ego to its purpose (313).

Once I had my procedure in place I purchased a journal for recording dreams and a dream dictionary for interpretation. On the first blank page of the journal, I wrote “Shadow” and followed it with the definition provided for that term in the dream dictionary. What resonated with me most about the definition I copied was the suggestion of a positive aspect of the shadow: “Demands for growth often come from our shadow aspect. Somewhere in the dream in which a shadow aspect appears, or in a subsequent dream, is something representing the gift of the shadow, the potential for wholeness” (Thomson, 473). Generally, people associate the shadow side with darkness and evil that requires repression but Jung explains: “To become conscious of it involves recognizing the dark aspects of the personality as present and real [and] with insight and good will, the shadow can to some extent be assimilated into the conscious personality” (146).

I began keeping a dream journal in which I would jot down every dream I could remember upon first waking up in the morning. Following the detailed dream description, I would make a list of every symbol and using my psychology-based dream dictionary, would interpret the dream, recording definitions for each individual symbol. Interpretations were sometimes Freudian, sometimes Jungian, and at other times relied on mythology or other cultural associations. I tried to incorporate a range of perspectives in my analysis and applied those that resonated the most. Next, I would write poems based upon a combination of the dreams themselves and their symbolic interpretations, which is similar to the way that Freud combined the *symbolic method* and *decoding method* in dream analysis (Snowden, 63-64). Occasionally, during those months, I would generate poems outside of my procedural process but in some way, they always seemed to maintain a linkage to the series. I have included some of those poems, the ones that refused to be left out, in *She vs. Shadow*. In defining a work of art, Jung concludes:

“One might almost describe it as a living being that uses man only as a nutrient medium, employing his capacities according to its own laws and shaping itself to the fulfillment of its own creative purpose” (309).

What becomes clear through the voice of the speaker in the poems in this collection is the inner struggle that takes place between Ego (She) and Shadow. According to Jung, the “personal unconscious” is comprised of lost memories, contents too weak to become conscious, and repressions of painful thoughts and feelings, whereas the “collective unconscious” is made up of instincts and archetypes, like the shadow. I never could have predicted what unfolded in these pages, an exploration of symbols both personal and collective in nature. I never could have imagined the intimate encounters I would have with my shadow side, or the battle that would ensue in attempting to assimilate the Shadow rather than repress it. During this time, I was losing a personal battle with alcoholism, which pushed me to become acquainted with what Jung termed the *shadow*, and I started exploring that side of the psyche as it related to me personally: “Closer examination of the dark characteristics—that is, the inferiorities constituting the shadow—reveals that they have an *emotional* nature, a kind of autonomy, and accordingly an obsessive or, better, possessive quality” (145).

If *She vs. Shadow* can be considered what Jung referred to as an *extraverted* body of work, that is the kind where the artist stands subordinate to the work, then it would be wise to follow the advice of the great analyst and “be prepared for something suprapersonal that transcends our understanding to the same degree that the author’s consciousness was in abeyance during the process of creation” (315). It is my hope that readers will walk away from this series of poems feeling as though they too have experienced transformation on some level.

Alma Mater

When she
returns to this place
where she thought
she had found herself,
the walls do not speak to her,
the Jesuits have become too catholic.
Simplicity lost in purple Lenten Curtains and Air Conditioners.
She asks the same. She listens the same. She, the same,
has come for a diploma but will never leave.
And when she orders coffee, it is
served cold, over a cup
of playing cards.

Home for Christmas

Stoned nostalgic,
sipping a skinny latte
in a hometown Starbucks.
Misshapen stares are
soothing in sweet silver bells.
Everyone here is the Shadow
of someone else.

Searching for a Goddess in a Goth Bar

I.

It is not the divine she is seeking but the doubly divine.
Here, a bleach-blonde messenger sticks out like an erection
in church, but Persephone must be stained brunette.

II.

down
an escalator
in a mall
wearing
nothing
but a
towel

III.

On the far left hang two ice-rusty
silver gates leading back into hell.

She trudges in cement feet. A man
kneels down, runs his hand through her hair.

Through sludge snow, the Shadow
grabs her neck for snapping.

Sacrificial Rite

Tonight, I drink white wine.

I've forfeited my right to beer or liquor.

The label says it tastes of fresh fruit drenched in California sun.

It tastes like church wine to me.

The blood of Christ. Amen.

Dream Logic

To do
is to go back
to sleep. Irritated
gets up and walks out the front door,
smiling.

Change is Coming

When she finds the ancient hotel,
She climbs the narrow stairs to the eighth floor
Where all signs are gold.
She listens for the door that says, "Casino."
It is not FOR HOTEL GUESTS ONLY.
Several screens may
Or may not be video poker.
The light is dim.
A woman asks for I.D.
The id is hidden in a wallet.
If it is found, she may proceed.
She shouldn't expect to find tables.
Only a pit boss, a man.
A girl goes back to better times,
But this is a different room now:
It is cluttered, and she is alone.

Catholics at a Crossroads

It's been years since I've thought of you, Peggy. It wasn't until this afternoon, when the news came that you'd passed away this morning, that I remembered the last time I saw you: it was at Mass.

You didn't look well then, but I didn't have the nerve to tell your granddaughter that. I told her I bumped into you, but never that you looked ill, that you gave the impression something was seriously wrong.

But today, you're gone and still I'm surprised, and so sick-to-my-stomach drunk over not being there for Krystal when she needs me, that I've resigned myself to having another drink.

Sacrifice

sick of wine
white or red

lift the glass

to the mouth
that's like cotton

Morphing

God is a half-domesticated cat: the Shadow,
preparing to pounce on feet.

It takes the food, but scratches
those who try to feed it,

for feeding morphs
fat cats into girls,

turns them homeless
and strung-out.

This body, unowned,
wants more food.

God gets high and says
no need for eating anymore.

In the Kitchen

The womb is a bowl
filled with
water
and
kibble.
She puts
the womb in a cage.

Escape

She is in a house she does not recognize,
and running.

A hidden door reveals itself
in the floor.

She jumps down into a dark hole:

a room leading to a new home with city view
that is bright and lined with windows.

She says, "This is my dream home, déjà vu."

Then, she runs through the halls, laughing,
opening door after door after door.

One Door

Opens, but she
 closes another,
 cages her most
 primitive instincts
to feed them.

From *Nigredo* to *Citrinitas* *

Bathing in the collective unconscious.

Floating face up into alchemical ceiling

as it begins and ends transmutation.

Lying in the bottom of a tomb in Egypt, gazing
at the soul: gold stars on a black ceiling.

* *Nigredo* and *Citrinitas* are stages in the alchemical process. Jung applied the phrases of alchemical change to individuation, the process of becoming one's Self.

Into the Constructed Pond

The scattered soul masquerades
In the forms of dead birds.

Leaping over each flat,
Lifeless creature, she screams,

Each step taking her further
Downhill, but there is hope:

Colorless water cradles
The bottom of the hill.

A man lifts her above
A splayed casualty:

Nowhere to step
But into illusion.

The water is deep. Scared, she
Imagines swimming back

Into the womb.
After emerging, she

Returns to all that is
Basic and primitive

Before finally, she
Is domesticated.

Clearly, You're Dead

I reminisce in sleep.

The town I run through is not the place I remember, not the town
I spent so many days playing in with your granddaughter, my best friend.
But then the old theatre appears smack dab in the middle of the street.

I enter the building ecstatic.

Running through the empty aisles, I feel that young again.
Only I'm not, and neither is she, and neither are you, as you are dead.
But what I mourn in this dream is not your death

Nor the death of my childhood.

And when I realize I'm sobbing
Because we will never be in this place again,
There you are, center stage, making us onion bagels with butter.

Look at She, Look at She

She is always putting on a play.
This time, someone keeps fooling with the curtains.
Her double delivers a letter like an award, a critique of her,
The person. On joyfulness she scores 5 on a scale of 25.
She is very unhappy with the rating, shriveling with anger.
The stage is veiled, leaving her on the apron alone.

Precognitive Aura

black sock
pressed to asphalt

flag pole chimes when its
flag whips against it

water from a bottle
echoes through a body

overhead lights
squint eyes

a voice vibrates
in a distant head

She Recalls the Importance of Titling Dreams & Poems and Remembers “Robbed”

It is the poem that does not write itself.
It is a dream that occurred on January 31st in an already hazy year.
It is an entry in a leather journal hand-crafted in a small town in India.
It is the first entry not to merit a check mark indicative of insight.
It is not the first to raise suspicions weeks later.

The dreamer lies awake in wrinkled sheets,
replaying the scenes of waking life until she overstands
the lump-in-her-throat feeling of déjà vu
that has been ailing her since she realized this morning
she had been robbed by her house guest,
who by then, was half-way back to Detroit,
in a place on Xanax and Vicodin.

She Wants to Try Sober

Wine glass is shattered
but to sobriety the
Shadow is menace.

On the Tenth Day

She shrouds herself in light:
 swizzles it in an etched
goblet of cheap merlot.

She wants to cheat someone
out of a sacrifice, to satiate the Shadow
side with something stronger.

Rim of glass pressed to lipsticked
bottom lip, she sniffs slowly, then sighing,
lifts the tilted head toward stucco sky.

The eyes, slightly shut, open
 when scent hits the palate. She lowers
the glass, swallows, exhales.

A Festival

For Kay

I.

She presents an error-filled
paper about the blues,
 reading it in front of a poet
who knows about the blues,
who believes in the blues.

II.

 She is sinking or else
 swimming in a pool with a man
 who aims a gun at her head;
 he pulls the trigger but
the pistol does not fire.

III.

She is running or else
 jumping away from two men
 who are after her,
 who zip tie her legs together
 as she tries to find her scream.

IV.

She is back at the head of a classroom,
in front of the famed poet
 who might redeem her
but instead turns away,
slamming the door shut as she goes.

Letters on the Wall

She walks through the halls
Finding letters that she's written
But can't remember writing.
One letter is addressed to Mr. Rye:
You are the male Lance Armstrong.
The male lance, arm strong?

At the cafeteria table,
Someone makes a joke about her:
"You know what the terrible thing is?
After you sleep with her, she is in everyone's arms but your own."
She laughs and looks for a friend.
A friend finds her and she never looks back.

Material Mitosis *

An old, broken down house
is a refrigerator filled with beer.

Police raid and take
into custody the Shadow.

They are conductors
of investigations.

They tell her to keep
her hands above the belt.

They call her best friend and
boyfriend a couple of trannys.

* According to Jung, a process occurs in which unconscious material splits into two halves: conscious/unconscious.

Fucking Kali

The Shadow is in the hallway
for all of life's passages.

It has the nerve to tell a woman
Named after a goddess that it
Wants to stick a bottle in her ass.

It has the persuasive power to make her
Crawl down the long corridor,
Begging to be uncorked.

Forsaken by the Messenger

She cannot read the writing on the wall,
Or in the hands of the man in her bed,
Or on the TV screen in a basement
Or in the text message.

Well, with the exception of a text message:

6:30 Does it end?

The time on the phone is 6:36.

The Second 1st Day

She decides not to buy the wine.
She drives halfway to the restaurant/bar
Where she is known as “the groupie”
Before rerouting to her favorite bookstore.

She buys Rimbaud, Melville and Jung.
She tries to steady shaking hands, scanning the pages for something.
Ah! To be saved! To stop the terrible tremors!
What’s one glass of wine? She thinks and unthinks, driving home her headache.

Standing in the kitchen, she drinks
The juice of pressed apples: heartburn.

She tries to wash it away in the shower
But is spooked by the flickering lights.
She peeks out from behind the shower curtain several times
Before stepping out onto the cold tile, sopping wet, and shuddering.

A towel can no more save her than *Une Saison En Enfer*.
She dries herself to no effect.

Before she is dressed her clothes are drenched in sweat.
Clothes can no more save her than a towel,
Or shower, or juice, or books.

She thinks only of sleep,
And thinks and thinks and thinks.

The Shadow

Calls her a bitch,
 says it again,
 then beats her
 into paper, rips
it to shreds.

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Vita

The author was born in Detroit, MI. She obtained her Bachelor's degree in English and a Certificate of Women's Studies from the University of Detroit Mercy in 2007. She joined the University of New Orleans low-residency graduate program to pursue an MFA in Creative Writing with an emphasis in Poetry. Her poems have appeared in numerous literary journals and her reviews have been published in *The Centrifugal Eye* and *Gutter Eloquence Magazine*. Additionally, she is the founder/editor of *The Feline Muse Literary Blogzine*.