

The second example is a story—*Jack and the Beanstalk*.

I've known about this story since my mother began telling it to me when I was four or five years old. But I was well into my forties before I realized that the hidden truth being communicated by this remarkable tale had to do with how these lost or unrealized potentials can be recovered.

THE TALE

Jack lives with his mother in a remote valley and they are very poor. So poor, in fact, they have to sell the very thing they're living off—the family cow. And Jack's mother entrusts her young son with that very important task.

On the way to town, the boy meets a man who offers to trade some magic beans for the cow. Jack is excited by the prospect of owning magic beans, so the deal is made, and he rushes home to tell his mother.

"Ma, Ma, look what I got for the cow!" And he holds out his hand to show her the magic beans.

Not surprisingly, the poor woman is very upset. Any fool can see they're just ordinary beans. She grabs the beans, throws them out the window, sends the boy to bed without any dinner, and has a good cry.

In the morning when Jack wakes up, he discovers a remarkable thing. An enormous beanstalk has appeared during the night and grown all the way up to the sky. Jack climbs to the top of the beanstalk and discovers a gigantic house sitting on top of the clouds. He knocks on the door and it is opened by the giant's wife. He relates what happened and asks for something to eat.

The giant's wife is sympathetic and offers to feed him, but on the way to the kitchen she warns him to be careful because her husband, the giant, likes to eat little boys like him for breakfast. And sure enough, as Jack is sitting at the kitchen table eating some porridge, he hears the approaching giant exclaim, "Fee Fie Fo Fum—I smell the blood of an Englishman!"

Jack panics and hides in the cupboard, just narrowly escaping detection and perhaps even death.

The giant enters the kitchen. He looks around, sees nothing suspicious and relaxes. Then he takes several large sacks of gold from his hiding

place of treasures, sits at the kitchen table to count his gold, and eventually falls asleep. Jack sees his chance, sneaks out of the cupboard, grabs the sacks of gold, and makes his escape down the beanstalk.

Jack and his mother share the gold with the other poor people in the valley, and for awhile everything is all right, but eventually the money runs out. So Jack makes a couple of more trips up the beanstalk and gets two of the giant's other treasures: the goose that lays the golden eggs and the magic harp. The last time, the giant wakes up and almost catches him. There's a desperate chase, but Jack gets to the bottom of the beanstalk first. He chops it down and the giant falls to his death.

And so ends *Jack and the Beanstalk*, the encoded message from the creative unconscious self.

The treasures—the bags of gold, the goose that lays the golden eggs, the magic harp—are the metaphors, the “manifestations in image form,” representing some of the lost potential I've been talking about, and the story is a simple blueprint showing us how this lost potential (these lost inner psychic treasures) can be recovered by the skillful use of the creative imagination. It begins with a creative inspiration; that's what the magic beans represent. Jack is inspired by the idea of possessing magic. This creative inspiration leads to a nonconformist, impractical act: he sells the practical cow. The impractical act leads to consequences: the heat he gets from his mother. These consequences lead to isolation: he is sent to his room without any dinner. The isolation and hunger lead to the awakening of the creative imagination: the beanstalk. The creative imagination, which can bridge the gap between the conscious and unconscious worlds, puts him in touch with his creative unconscious self and the chance to recover some of that lost, unrealized potential, but it involves taking certain risks, and he has to confront, outwit, and destroy a big ugly giant to do it. The big ugly giant represents the negative energies which keep the potential treasures captive and prevent their easy recovery.

* If you are an artist and you follow a real creative inspiration to its fulfillment, you will discover this trail. The creative inspiration will make you aware of other worlds hidden in your soul, and you will realize that if you are to be truly happy, there are other

important things that have to be accomplished in life besides just making money. This will lead you to impractical acts. You will want to quit law school and go to Paris to study art, New York to study music, or Hollywood to break into film. These impractical acts will lead to consequences: the disapproval you are going to get from your parents, your spouse, or other well-meaning, interested parties. Whenever you try to step away from the mainstream, there will be conflict and resistance. These consequences can lead to alienation and isolation, and you may find yourself alone in a garret in Greenwich Village or San Francisco with nothing to eat. Alone and hungry, you may find that your creative imagination will bridge the gap between the conscious and creative unconscious worlds (isolation, meditation, and fasting are well-known avenues to the creative unconscious). Then if you have the courage to pursue these creative adventures, despite the difficulties, you can confront your ogres (negative energies) and one by one recover all of these lost treasures, until finally in the end all of these negative energies have been transformed and you have filled up the lost and missing parts of your self.

All of this is revealed in that simple story. It's a realistic look at what you will constantly face if you choose a life of art—the good news and the bad. And if you reread the story with that in mind, you will realize it was always there waiting for you to discover its secret meanings. It is a special mirror that lets you look into your own soul. And a story that can do that has real power and can live forever.

* Great stories, then, are like collective dreams. They originate in the creative unconscious and have the same relation to society as a whole that the dream has to the individual. They both utilize the same archetypal symbols, but the meanings hidden in great stories are universal, whereas the meanings hidden in dreams are usually personal.

CHAPTER 3

HOW THE OLD GREAT STORIES WERE CREATED

Now, if the creative unconscious used these great stories to communicate with us, then it must have participated in their creation. And so it did. These old great stories, which really could change people's lives, were not authored by individuals the way stories are today but were evolved naturally and instinctively by unconscious processes in oral traditions. And even if they started out as made-up or true stories, revelations or dreams, they still ended up for long periods of time in oral traditions, and that became the principal dynamic behind their creation.

The process goes like this: It begins with a real or imagined incident or event that is worth repeating, something so intriguing that we're compelled to repeat it. It is passed along by word of mouth, from person to person and from generation to generation, until it's been told and retold millions of times and exists in a hundred different versions around the world.

Each time the story is retold it changes. This is due to certain natural but curious tendencies of the mind—the tendency, for instance, to remember things that make a strong impression and to forget things that don't impress us very strongly. There is also a tendency to exaggerate or minimize, to glorify or ennoble, to idealize or vilify. Beyond that, there's a natural, unconscious tendency to analyze things, to take them apart and put them back together in different combinations (recombination), and a natural tendency to simplify or edit. The tendency to conserve energy in nature is very strong in everything we do, including how we organize and store our thoughts and memories. These are all things we're very aware of.

We've all heard about the three-foot-long fish someone caught that was, in reality, barely eighteen inches, or seen someone make

using these curious tendencies, helped sculpt it into a marvelous story that contained powerful bits of that hidden truth. No one had to do anything consciously but repeat the story. And even if there was conscious involvement (i.e., the desire to use the story to instruct or entertain or even to change it), those desires and changes were prompted by feelings which originated in the unconscious, so the end result would be the same.

Examples from History

We can see how this works if we look at certain important historical figures and examine how the real incidents which surrounded their lives and were worth repeating were evolved by oral traditions into marvelous and even miraculous tales that contained important bits of this hidden truth I've been speaking of.

The first involves Achilles and the Trojan wars. While there is no historical record of these events, most scholars, and most people for that matter, believe there really was a place called Troy and a Trojan war which took place on the western shores of Turkey sometime around 1200 B.C. Many important archaeologists, Heinrich Schliemann among them, have devoted their lives to discovering the sites of these ancient events.

The real Trojan war, then, was the incident worth repeating, and Achilles, the greatest warrior fighting on the Greek side, was the Audie Murphy of his day (Audie Murphy being the most decorated soldier in World War II). It is controversial whether someone named Homer, the accredited author of *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, the famous legendary accounts of these wars, actually existed, but assuming he did, the true story of the Trojan war had already spent four hundred years in the oral tradition before he put his poetic stamp on it, and another three or four hundred years in the oral tradition after his contribution, before it was actually written down. In that time it had evolved from the real incidents worth repeating into a truly miraculous tale in which the swift-footed Achilles has become the nearly immortal and invincible son of Theta, a sea goddess—all of the other gods,

including Zeus, have taken sides and are playing active roles in the war, and all manner of miraculous things are occurring. These immortal characters and miraculous occurrences have a psychological significance which goes far beyond anything a factual account of the real incidents could ever have conveyed. They do, in fact, reveal an excellent picture of the human psyche in transformation, and more specifically, the consequences of anger on that transformation—all things we would have difficulty finding in a real account of that war.

Alexander the Great is another good subject to study in this regard because there is both a good historical record in the West as well as a rich tradition of legends in the East. In the West there are no real legends because there was always the real historical record standing as a reference to contradict them. But in the fabulous East, in places like India and Persia, where there was no historical record, he entered the oral tradition and all manner of fanciful and legendary stories evolved—"Alexander Searches for the Fountain of Youth," "Alexander Explores the Bottom of the Sea," and so on. These legendary stories, shaped and molded by these unconscious processes, contain the hidden wisdom we spoke of which the history does not. The historical record reveals reality, the legends that evolved in and were sculpted by the oral traditions contain the hidden, inner truth. The Fountain of Youth, for instance, like the goose that lays golden eggs, is another "manifestation in image form" (metaphor) of the lost potential I've been talking about. And Alexander's legendary adventures, like Jack's, are treasure maps that can, if followed, lead to its recovery.

King Arthur is another interesting case. Many scholars believe that this legendary English king was evolved from a real general named Arturus. General Arturus lived in the fifth century A.D. and won ten consecutive battles against the Saxons before he was finally killed. If these scholars are correct, then after only five or six hundred years in the oral tradition this real general Arturus had been transformed into the legendary King Arthur who wielded a magic sword named Excalibur, consorted with a

CHAPTER 4

WHY THE OLD GREAT STORY TAKES THE FORM THAT IT DOES

The purpose of great stories, then, is to guide us to our full potential. Now let's talk about the nature of story—why the old great story takes the form it does and why its secrets have to be concealed.

The ego that would be guided through these passages presents the self with some pretty thorny problems, the principal one being that it simply doesn't want to do it. We have an incredibly strong, built-in resistance to change. In most cases, we would much rather hold on to some pleasant (or even unpleasant) current situation than give up everything and venture into the unknown. Real life is a serious and deadly game. It involves taking significant risks and facing unpleasant realities and truths.

Someone once asked a buddha about these truths and the buddha showed him a bowl of worms and said, "If you would understand these truths, then you would have to eat this bowl of worms."

The man shuddered with disgust and walked away. The point of the story being, of course, that the truths we have to face in life are sometimes like eating a bowl of worms. They can be that unpleasant.

Two days after I was thinking of using that little story in the seminars I was preparing, I had this dream: I was riding in the back of a convertible. We were approaching a crossroads and there was something there I didn't want to see, so I covered my face with my hands and said, "No, no. I don't want to look." But then, to my credit, I peeked through my fingers, anyway, and this is what I saw.

There was a dinky little RV sitting at the crossroads. On the side of the RV, where the utilities are usually plugged in, there were four very organic-looking holes. And while I was watching, a dozen or so very fat six-foot worms came pouring out of these holes onto the ground.

I woke up in a cold sweat. And it took several hours before I realized what the dream meant. The journey I was about to begin (i.e., the taking of the knowledge of story I had discovered to market) wasn't going to be a pleasant one. I could see that in the dream because I don't like traveling in RVs, especially this type, which was really just a pickup truck with a small aluminum camper on it. And, furthermore, the worms I was going to have to swallow on this journey weren't itty-bitty little worms like in the buddha's bowl, they were big fat ones that were six feet long.

It's not the kind of thing you look forward to.

So we are reluctant to make these passages and we have to be lured or pushed into the process. The strategy that the creative unconscious uses to lure us is the same ingenious strategy nature always uses when it teaches. It covers its medicine with a sugar coat. It hides all of the secret wisdom and purpose of story in an irresistible package with a sugar coat. The sugar coat in story is, of course, the entertainment dimensions. And the recipient doesn't even know what's happening—like a mother secretly hiding vitamin pills in her child's Twinkie.

we have to be persuaded to make changes, even positive ones

You can see this strategy very clearly in children's games, and for this reason they are very much like a great story. Games are fun to play and that's why children love to experience them, but they have an important and secret underlying purpose—to exercise the physical body, develop social skills, etc. In other words, they have an important purpose which the child is not aware of and a sugar coat. The sugar coat lures the children into the experience and they become better prepared for life while they're having fun. If you take the fun out of the game, the child loses interest. If you

CHAPTER 5

HOW THE GREAT STORY DOES ITS WORK

The purpose of story, then, is to guide us to our full potential, and the nature of story is to conceal that purpose in an enticing sugar coat that lures us into the experience. But if the purpose is concealed, then how does it do its work?

The great story does its work in several important ways:

First, it stimulates our imaginations by provoking personal fantasies, which lead to the desire for actions in the real world. Then it gives us a taste, by way of a special feeling, of what it might be like if we were actually to make one of these passages and accomplish some of these things.

When a young girl hears *Sleeping Beauty* for the first time, delicious feelings are awakened which that child has never felt before, and she begins to have fantasies about meeting a real Prince Charming of her own. And when the Prince kisses the Sleeping Beauty and she wakes up, the child feels a sensation which is like a taste of paradise—a taste of what it would feel like if this really happened to her. She wants that feeling again in real life. She longs for it and pursues it in life as a dream.

The same thing happens when we experience a story like *Lost Horizon*. Shangri-la, like paradise, Utopia, or any promised land, is another metaphor for the higher states of consciousness and bliss that can be realized. And when we encounter these images in a story, we get chills and other special feelings which can convince us that such lofty places or spiritual states of mind actually exist and can be achieved. We long to reexperience them and pursue them in life as a goal.

Carl Jung explains it this way: "The auditor experiences some of

★ (the sensations but is not transformed. Their imaginations are stimulated: they go home and through personal fantasies begin the process of transformation for themselves.”

And all of this happens automatically. The story recipients need not be consciously aware that the story is intentionally trying to influence and guide them.

Having lured us into the adventure by fantasies and a taste, the great story then provides us with a road map or treasure map, which outlines all of the actions and tasks we have to accomplish in order to complete one of these passages, and a tool kit for solving all of the problems that have to be solved to accomplish the actions and tasks. Every great story will divulge a little more of this truth, and bit by bit each step of the passage is revealed. Again, all of this is going on without the story recipient's conscious knowledge that it's happening.

How does it do that? By meaningful connections.

★ If it's a great story, we will remember it, and over time, we will make meaningful associations and connections with our real-life situations.

A lawyer friend of mine was recently telling me about a difficult case he was involved in, and how he had suddenly realized why it was so difficult. He had been acting quixotically. He had been fighting windmills. Acting quixotically and fighting windmills, of course, come from Don Quixote. Without even being aware of it, my lawyer friend had made a meaningful connection with his real-life situation. And suddenly having that realization, he was able to resolve the difficulty. And he hadn't even been aware that it was happening, that the metaphor in Don Quixote was there waiting for him when he needed it.

Another friend came to me after seeing *Groundhog Day* and confessed, "This is my life. I'm constantly reliving the same day." A third friend confided he was like the beast in *Beauty and the Beast*. These are meaningful connections. And if you will take the trouble to study them, you will find they are also providing you

with the solutions to these very common problems. These lessons learned, we can transform ourselves back into princes and real human beings.

The more hidden truth the story contains, the more appealing it will be, the more relevant it will be to our lives, and the more likely we are to remember it. We'll cherish and work with it all of our lives, then we'll pass it on to our children.

No one story, as I've said, contains the whole truth. The process is accumulative. Each story contributes a little bit of this vital information. We can be affected by many different stories at the same time. We relate them to our lives when and if we need them and make the necessary course corrections.

It was more than thirty years from the time I first heard *Rumpelstiltskin* until I realized that the secrets hidden in that marvelous tale were about the creative process and how the mind is organized.

In *Rumpelstiltskin* and many stories like it, some endangered princess has to perform some impossible task like transforming a pile of straw into gold by morning or she'll lose her head. Then some miraculous helper like Rumpelstiltskin comes to her rescue and accomplishes the task for her while she sleeps.

Being a writer, I would often fall asleep at night worrying about certain difficult story problems I hadn't been able to solve during that workday. And just as often a marvelous solution to those problems would pop into my head as I was waking up the following morning. Naturally, I wondered who or what was solving those problems.

Suddenly, one day I made the connection. "My God," I exclaimed. "It's Rumpelstiltskin!"

The miraculous little helper was a metaphor, a personification in image form of some unconscious problem-solving mechanism. The secret hidden in the marvelous story had something important to reveal about the creative process and how our minds

function. Namely, that inside our minds there is an unconscious problem-solving mechanism (a Rumpelstiltskin) that continues to work and transform our serious problems (the straw) into precious insights (the gold), while our conscious minds are asleep. Another little piece of the puzzle had been revealed.

And, finally, the great story guides this whole process with incredible insights and wisdom.

In *A Christmas Carol*, when the Ghost of Christmas Future is showing Scrooge his own tombstone, the kneeling, pathetic, nearly repentant Scrooge asks him, “Are these things that will be or things that may be?” The answer to that question, and the point of the whole story, is that these are things that “will be” if he does nothing, and things that “may be” if he does something about it, if he repents and changes his character. If he changes his character, he will change his future. In other words, at any given moment we have a certain destiny. And if we’re not content with that destiny, we can do something about it. We can transform our futures by transforming ourselves. If we change who we are, if we awaken our humanity, we can change our destiny. That’s good news.

Believe it or not, there’s something similar and equally profound in the movie *Back to the Future*. Having seen *Back to the Future, Part II*, and having no desire to see Part III, I have concluded the profundity in Part I got there by accident, but nevertheless, it’s there.

At the beginning of the story, we meet Michael J. Fox and his family. His mother is an alcoholic and his rather pathetic father a serious wimp and a miserable failure. And they’re living in a hovel of mediocrity and despair.

When Michael J. Fox gets involved in his time machine adventure, he gets entangled in the lives of his parents when they are still in high school, on the very day that they met. And they met in a curious way. His clumsy, painfully shy father was hit by a car in front of his mother’s house while lurking there, trying to catch

a glimpse of her. The mother took him into her house to nurse him back to health and fell in love with him out of pity. When Michael J. Fox arrives a moment before the father, he is hit by the car, and his mother falls in love with him instead.

He now has a very big problem. He has to make his mother fall out of love with him and in love with his geeky future father or he isn't even going to exist. He accomplishes this one evening when his mother is being molested in the front seat of a car by the town bully. Fox goads his father into rescuing her, in the process of which, the father knocks out the bully with a lucky punch and his mother is saved. The mother immediately transfers her love from her future son to her new hero.

Now that in itself is profound because it says that a love inspired by heroic deeds is stronger than a love brought on by pity. But there's more. When Fox gets back to the present, everything about the lives of his family has miraculously changed. His mother is no longer an alcoholic, his father is a big success and a real dude, and they're living in a magnificent, creatively appointed house—all because of that one change in the father's character.

The important bit of wisdom has to do with the incredible difference one courageous act can make in our lives. Standing up to that bully had an extraordinary and profound effect far into the future. We encounter numerous such challenges and opportunities to show our courage every day: the phone call we're afraid to make to ask for a date or a job, the little acts of courage that could profoundly and irrevocably change the rest of our lives. That's also very useful to know. *

One final example. In a fairy tale called Aga Baba, a young hero on an important adventure stops to rest at a witch's house. The witch tries to delay him by asking him some intriguing but difficult questions, like: "What is truth?" "Does the universe ever end?" and so on.

The wise young hero looks at her and says, "Shut up and get me

CHAPTER 6

HOW THIS NATURAL STORYMAKING PROCESS WAS CUT OFF

So, what happened to this natural storymaking process? Why was it cut off? Why are stories with this kind of power only rarely or accidentally being created?

While I would be the last person to attack the virtues of the written word, the fact remains that when these old great stories were finally written down, a serious thing happened. They stopped changing and evolving. They stopped growing. This natural creative process came to a dead stop.

I have a copy of *Grimm's Fairy Tales* on my bookshelf. The stories in that book haven't changed in well over a hundred years, not since the Brothers Grimm took them out of the oral tradition and wrote them down. The Old Testament on my bookshelf hasn't changed in over twenty-five hundred years. In time these stories lose their relevance and their effectiveness. They still contain the same wisdom they always did, if you take the trouble to hunt for it, but the average person no longer sees their relevance because their metaphors haven't been kept up-to-date. So they don't get the message. The knowledge they need to make these journeys is lost to them.

If *Cinderella*, for instance, had remained in the oral tradition, it would have evolved into a modern, contemporary story like *Pretty Woman*, and people could see more easily that it related to their lives.

Now, it is in fact true that this evolutionary process continues on today in a modified form. There have been dozens of different written versions of *Cinderella*, and Hollywood is constantly

THE ARCHETYPES

Great stories, then, are complex metaphors, their different characters, places, actions, and objects all reflecting different aspects of this hidden, inner truth. And if you analyze hundreds of great stories, certain patterns begin to emerge. These patterns are called archetypes.

Archetype means “basic form” or “first type.” So these basic forms become an intermediate stage between the raw energy of the hidden truth and the metaphors. It is a first model from which the metaphors will spring. All of the symbolic elements, in fact, that we are going to meet in story represent one of these basic psychological forces—these archetypes.

For instance, let us say that the father figure is one of these archetypes. Then Obi-Wan Kenobi (Alec Guinness) in *Star Wars* (an obvious father figure) is a metaphor of that archetype. Jor-El (Marlon Brando) in *Superman*, Jack Warden in *The Verdict*, and Mufasa in *The Lion King* are other examples. They are all metaphors of that father figure archetype.

The model created from these archetypal elements or patterns is, in effect, a rough sketch of the hidden truth. And that's the third great secret, that a sophisticated model of the hidden truth can be made by analyzing the patterns found in great stories. These patterns are the source of meaningful connections, and seeing these patterns is the breaking of the story code.

These contrasts do not have to involve something that is fantastic or supernatural. It can be the juxtaposition of things in the real world: a contrast between the regular living quarters of a house and a spooky basement or attic; the everyday world of the detective and the shady underworld. In *Chinatown*, it's the everyday world of J.J. Gittes and the San Fernando Valley. In *Titanic*, it's the upper decks contrasted by the bowels of the ship, and later, after the iceberg, the sinking ship contrasted by the open sea. In *Jaws*, it's an island surrounded by the sea. The sea is an excellent metaphor for the unconscious because, like the unconscious, the ocean is a vast, mostly hidden domain that is teeming with mysterious life forms. And the island is an excellent metaphor for the conscious mind, which is very much like an island surrounded by an unconscious sea.

This is a very important pattern, and you will find it, in some form or other, in every great story.

The Character Archetypes

There are nine character archetypes or major players in our study—the Ego/Hero, the Spiritual, the Mental, the Emotional, the Physical, the Anima/Animus, the Trickster, the Threshold Guardian, and the Shadow.

The ego/hero is the archetype of the conscious self, and all of the other characters in the story are metaphors representing the archetypes of the creative unconscious self.

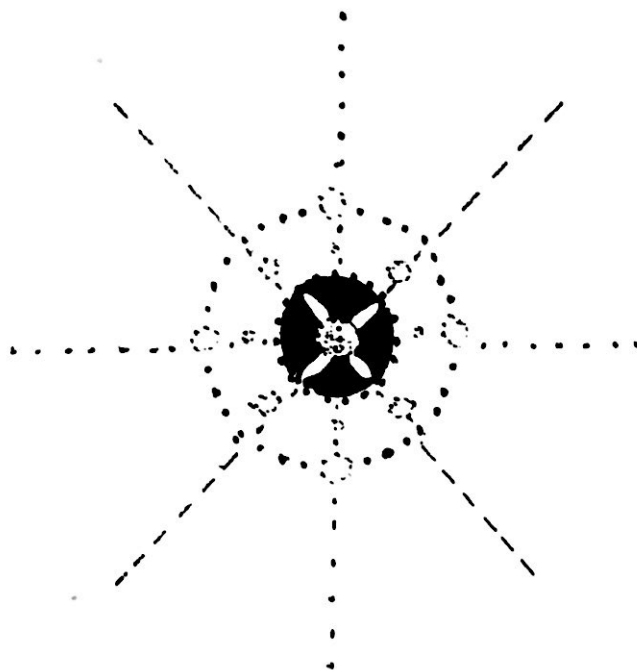
To recall an earlier quote from Joseph Campbell, "Myths and dreams are the manifestations in image form of all of the energies of the body, moved by the organs, in conflict with each other." The archetypes of the creative unconscious self are the personifications of these organic energies in conflict.

We illustrate the different levels of the unconscious self by adding spokes or rays which emanate from the small, conscious center:

We experience these character archetypes, as we do all of the dreams, but we also experience them in story and in life. In real life, we experience them psychologically and in real life called upon to play. Psychologically, we experience them as feelings, thoughts, physical sensations, desires, fantasies, mental images, and so on. Feelings of aggression, desire, and hunger, for instance, are all expressions of the lower, instinctual, physical self.

The shadow is all of the repressed elements of our psychic selves that got stuffed into the trunks of the personal unconscious. These elements can be either spiritual, emotional, mental, or physical, conscious or unconscious, positive or negative.

In Freudian psychology, these repressed elements are all there is to the unconscious. After Carl Jung described the collective, archetypal unconscious we all share in common, he renamed the repressed elements the shadow. We indicate the shadow in our model as the shadowy ring that surrounds consciousness:



In story and dreams, these repressed elements become demons, mummies, ghosts, and archvillains.