

The background of the cover is a dark, almost black, field. In the center, there is a large, dark red rose. The rose is partially illuminated from behind, creating a glowing, flame-like effect that extends upwards and outwards. The petals of the rose are detailed, showing the texture and color variations of the bloom. The overall mood is mysterious and sensual.

# THE FIRE AND THE ROSE

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*The Wedding of Spirituality and Sexuality*

BUD HARRIS, Ph.D.



THE  
FIRE  
AND  
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ROSE

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We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time.  
And all shall be well and  
All manner of thing shall be well  
When the tongues of flame are in-folded  
Into the crowned knot of fire  
And the fire and the rose are one.

—T. S. ELIOT, *FOUR QUARTETS*, “LITTLE  
GIDDING”

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## Chapter 7 (Excerpt)

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### THE SHADOW

Society decides which of its segments are going to be outside of its borders. Society says, ‘These are the legitimate channels to my rewards. They are closed to you forever.’ So then the outlawed segments must seek rewards through illegitimate channels.

—KRISTEN HUNTER, *THE LANDLORD*

In my last two years of high school, I became known to myself and others as someone who was going to achieve a lot in life. Yet, by my second year in college, my ambition and potentials had become as foreign to me as visitors from outer space in a 1950s movie. When I look back, I see a lost young fellow who seemed to have stayed drunk his whole sophomore year until a determined young man began to crawl out of the chaos and pursue success with the devotion of a monk. If I look back at pictures of that young man, I have a hard time recognizing the face staring intensely back at me.

That year I also saturated myself in a sea of reading—Freud, Marx, Bergson, Marcuse, Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, Koestler. My fascination with existentialism—the French philosophical school of the

1950s that focused on man's isolation and estrangement from himself—led me to a new group of friends. Like myself, these young people had become disaffected from the boot camp approach to education at Georgia Tech and preferred to drink beer and talk about books and their themes of life and meaning, or the lack of the same. My memories of those times, however alcohol-infused, seem more wonderful than dark, for the seeds of my desire for wholeness began to grow then.

A passage from Leo Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Illyich* was forged into my psyche and causes deep stirrings in me still, as its lightning words flash through my undying inner storm. These words urge us beyond barely lived lives and push us to know ourselves:

It occurred to him that what had appeared perfectly impossible before, namely that he had not spent his life as he should have done, might after all be true. It occurred to him that his scarcely perceptible attempts to struggle against what was considered good by the most highly placed people, those scarcely noticeable impulses which he had immediately suppressed, might have been the real thing, and all the rest false. And his professional duties and the whole arrangement of his life and of his family, and all his social and official interests, might all have been false. He tried to defend all those things to himself and suddenly felt the weakness of what he was defending. There was nothing to defend.

One of those Saturday afternoons when I was sitting in Leb's Delicatessen drinking beer, eating cheese, and talking with my friends, "alienation" became our topic. This discussion led us to Albert Camus's enigmatic 1956 novel *The Stranger*, first published in England as *The Outsider*. No doubt our fascination with this book reflected our own unhappiness with our institution's practical, scientific approach to learning, which simply ignored the question of how to live one's life. In that decade, technology and engineering offered the promise of the future and a good job and wasted little time on anything else.

In Camus's book, Meursault, his principal character, is sentenced to death for shooting a man he doesn't know. But, more subtly, we see that he is being persecuted for his inability to put on an acceptable social face, to experience normal feelings like love, and to conform to society's expectations. Meursault is a listless figure and his emotional detachment is reflected in the novel's opening sentence: "Mother died today, or maybe it was yesterday." The only intense feelings shown by Meursault are expressed when he confronts a priest shortly before his execution and insists that life is meaningless, as the story concludes. Abandoning hope soothes Meursault and becomes the culmination of his gradually awakening awareness after the murder.

Though Ivan Illyich and Meursault wound their way to a sense of peace with death, their self-alienation never became fully acceptable to me. When depression found me in my early thirties, it was as if all the unanswered questions and longings of my college years reemerged, leaping out to seize me like a troll that had been hiding under a bridge. Through this time, I recognized my soul's desire for wholeness as an urge coming from within, and I became determined to bring my life to a different conclusion than Meursault's lack of meaning.

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When we view the word "stranger" through our mythic lens, it takes on a meaning very different from the existentialist notion of being cast into an indifferent world. In mythology, the stranger may be a mystery, god, devil, or angel in disguise. Zeus and Hermes arrived as strangers at the door of Baucis and Philemon. Carefully disguised to test humankind before the flood, they generously rewarded the old couple for their hospitality. In Greek mythology, to risk seeing a god undisguised was to risk death. However, when greeted in disguise, their services could range from lover to seer. In the Western tradition, Jacob awakened to a night-long fight for his life with a stranger who turned out to be an angel. Abraham and other religious figures had many encounters with angels who showed up initially as strangers.



And in psychological terms, the stranger signifies a part of us that is still wandering in our unconscious, often repressed and unassimilated from the path of personal identification.

The stranger is a personification of part of our shadow, which represents all the attributes we could have brought into our identity but did not. In reaction to our early environment, we have cut these attributes out of our conscious life, yet they remain with us, partly repressed and un-lived. Paradoxically, our shadow may hold along with our darker qualities some of our most positive potentials. But our family, education, society, and other influences led us to reject or repress them during our early development.

We have two fundamental components in our identity. The first, as I've previously discussed, is our ego, our conscious sense of "I." The second is our shadow, the unconscious *stranger* within us. This duality in our personality forms one of the most significant areas of Jungian thought relating to projection, which I previously introduced. Projection is the mechanism by which we first become aware of our latent potentials. It is the outward, unconscious displacement of something originally located within our personality. When we take our projection back, even if it is negative, we enlarge our personality and transform it.

For example, when a young woman, Gina, first consulted me I soon realized she had buried part of herself. Gina's father was the dean of students at a small Southern college. Her mother spent her life as a "faculty wife," while nurturing a secret rage that she hadn't gone to medical school.

Gina had been drawing as long as she could remember, and her only desire was to become an artist. While her parents loved to show off her paintings and drawings, they totally opposed her ambitions. Her father took the position that being a studio artist was a financially insecure, impractical way of life. Her mother urged Gina to join the legions of smart women who were breaking down Old Guard barriers and train for a profession. Both of Gina's parents felt the artist's life was morally disreputable, filled with wanton sex, drugs, and alcohol.

Needless to say, these were heavy shadow projections on their



part. Their fear and rigidity had caused them to repress their own sexuality, creativity, passion, and inspiration in favor of a “sensible” life. The life of an artist represented the antithesis of all they stood for.

Gina’s adolescence and most of her college years were spent in a depression and bouts of promiscuity, a compulsion to act out her parents’ worst fears. She graduated from law school but never practiced. She continued to paint as a “hobby.” After two failed marriages and a series of mediocre jobs, she suddenly found that she was unable to paint anymore. Frozen with fear, she began to feel panicky at the very thought of painting. Though she had felt for a long time that she had betrayed the truest part of herself, she now believed it was too late to change. Nothing is so bleak as losing one’s desire for life. Almost two years of analytic work were required before she could unlock her “inner artist” and value it appropriately.

As we adapt socially, we often learn to repress the parts of ourselves that have a capacity to be openly sensuous and loving, along with our capacity to be fierce or violent. As I noted earlier, we usually take these rejected, repressed aspects of ourselves and project them onto other people and groups. When she was in college, Gina, an artist at heart, lived out her parents’ shadow projection.

Gina’s experience is evidence of the split between our ego and our shadow—between who we think we are and who we are convinced we are not. Becoming aware of this inner split is the first step toward self-knowledge and the foundation of true psychological development.

Usually we are confronted with this reality when life seems to be conspiring against us—when our vitality has dried up, illnesses beset us, and our values seem to have turned on us. Such times are terrifying and depressing because we believe we have lost the ground that supports us. Life is uncertain; the perspectives of church, family, society, or whatever represents our central values appear to be under attack and in danger of fragmenting. We feel inadequate and out of control.

But the confrontation also brings with it a personal, compelling

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need for wholeness. Waking up to our own reality seems to open a door through which life can become more than we could have imagined. If we don't walk through the door, we will pay a price in terms of our health, our relationships, and our vitality.