

[The following story by Bertrand Russell was first published in *Courier*, April 1954, then was published, along with other 'nightmares', under the title "Nightmares of Eminent Persons and Other Stories" in 1954 by The Bodley Head. In his short Introduction to the book Russell stated:

The following 'Nightmares' might be called 'Signposts to Sanity'. Every isolated passion is, in isolation, insane; sanity may be defined as a synthesis of insanities. Every dominant passion generates a dominant fear, the fear of its non-fulfilment. Every dominant fear generates a nightmare, sometimes in the form of an explicit and conscious fanaticism, sometimes in a paralyzing timidity, sometimes in an unconscious or subconscious terror which finds expression only in dreams. The man who wishes to preserve sanity in a dangerous world should summon in his own mind a Parliament of fears, in which each in turn is voted absurd by all the others. The dreamers of the following nightmares did not adopt this technique; it is hoped that the reader will have more wisdom.]

## ***THE PSYCHOANALYST'S NIGHTMARE***

### **ADJUSTMENT -- A FUGUE**

It is the fate of rebels to found new orthodoxies. How this is happening to psychoanalysis has been persuasively set forth in Dr. Robert Lindner's *Prescription for Rebellion*. Many psychoanalysts, one must suppose, have their secret misgivings. It was one of these who, though orthodox in his waking hours, was afflicted during sleep by the following deeply disquieting nightmare:

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In the hall of the Limbo Rotary Club, presided over by a statue of Shakespeare, the Committee of Six was holding its annual meeting. The Committee consisted of: Hamlet, Lear, Macbeth, Othello, Antony, and Romeo. All these six, while they yet lived on earth, had been psychoanalyzed by Macbeth's doctor, Dr. Bombasticus. Macbeth, before the doctor had taught him to speak ordinary English, had asked, in the stilted language that in those days he employed, "Canst thou not minister to a mind diseas'd?" "Why, yes," replied the doctor, "of course I can. It is only necessary that you should lie on my sofa and talk, and I will undertake to listen at a guinea a minute." Macbeth at once agreed. And the other five agreed at various times.

Macbeth told how, at one time, had fancies of homicide, and in a long dream saw all that Shakespeare relates. Fortunately, he met the doctor in time, who explained that he saw Duncan as a father-figure, and Lady Macbeth as a mother-ditto. The doctor, with some difficulty, persuaded him that Duncan was not really his father, so he became a loyal subject. Malcolm and Donalbain died young, and Macbeth succeeded in due course. He remained devoted to Lady Macbeth, and together they spent their days in good works. He encouraged Boy Scouts, and she opened bazaars. He lived to a great age, respected by all except the porter.

The statue, which had a gramophone in its interior, remarked at this stage: "All our yesterdays have lighted fools the way to dusty death."

Macbeth started, and said, "Damn that statue. That fellow Shakespeare wrote a most libelous work about me. He only knew me when I was young, before I had met Dr. Bombasticus, and he let his imagination run riot over all the crimes he hoped I should commit. I cannot see why people insist on doing honor to him. There's hardly a person in his plays that wouldn't have been the better for Dr. Bombasticus." Turning to Lear: "Don't you agree, old man?"

Lear was a quiet fellow, not much given to talk. Although he was old, his hair was beautifully brushed and his clothes were very tidy. Most of the time, he seemed rather sleepy; but Macbeth's question woke him up.

"Yes indeed, I agree", he said. "Why, do you know that at one time I became obsessed with a phobia directed against my dear daughters Regan and Goneril! I imagined that they were persecuting me, and had a fantasy that they were reviving a cannibal rite of eating the parent. This last I only realized after Dr. Bombasticus had explained it. I got so alarmed that I rushed out into the storm at night and got very wet. I caught a chill which gave me a fever, and I imagined that a certain joint-stool was first Goneril and then Regan. I was made worse by my fool, and also by a certain naked madman, who encouraged a belief in a return to nature, and was always talking about irrelevant things such as 'Pillicock' and 'Child Rowland'. Fortunately, my illness was such as to demand the services of Dr. Bombasticus. He soon persuaded me that Regan and Goneril were just as kind as I had always thought, and that my fantasies were due to irrational remorse about the ungrateful Cordelia. Ever since my cure, I have lived a quiet life, appearing only on State occasions such as the birthdays of my daughters, when I show myself on a balcony and the crowd shouts "Three cheers for the old King!". I used to have a tendency towards rhodomontade, but this, I am happy to say, has disappeared."

At this point, the statue remarked: "Thou, all-shaking thunder, strike flat the thick rotundity of the world."

"And are you happy now?" asked Macbeth.

"Oh yes," said Lear, "I'm happy as the day is long. I sit in my chair playing patience or dozing, and thinking of nothing whatever."

*The statue:* "After life's fitful fever, he sleeps well."

"What a silly remark!" said Lear. "Life is not a fitful fever! And I sleep well although I'm still alive. That's just the sort of rubbish that I should have admired before I knew Dr. Bombasticus."

The statue allowed itself another remark: "When we are born, we cry that we are come to this great stage of fools."

"Stage of fools", exclaimed Lear, losing for a moment that equanimity which he had hitherto observed. "I do wish the statue would learn to talk sense. Does it dare to think of us as fools? Us, the most respected citizens of Limbo! I wish Dr. Bombasticus could get a go at that statue! What do you think about it, Othello?"

"Well," said Othello, "that wretch Shakespeare treated me even worse than he did you and Macbeth. I only met him for a few days, and it happened that I was at a crisis in my life at that moment. I had made the mistake of marrying a white girl, and I soon realized that it was impossible she should really love a colored man. In fact, at the time when Shakespeare knew me,

she was plotting to run away with my lieutenant, Cassio. I was delighted, as she was an incubus. But Shakespeare imagined that I must be jealous. And in those days, I was rather fond of rhetoric, so I made up some jealous speeches to please him. Dr. Bombasticus, whom I met at this time, showed me that the whole trouble came from my inferiority complex, caused by my being black -- to be black and nevertheless eminent. But he showed me that I had quite other feelings in the unconscious, and that these caused a rage which could only be assuaged in battle. After he had cured me, I gave up warfare, married a black woman, had a large family, and devoted my life to trade. I never now feel any impulse to 'talk grand', or to utter the kind of nonsense that makes right-thinking citizens stare."

*The statue:* "Pride, pom, and circumstance of glorious war!"

"Hark at him", said Othello, "that's just the sort of thing I might still be saying if it hadn't been for Dr. Bombasticus. But nowadays, I don't believe in violence. I find subservient cunning much more effective."

The statue murmured "I took by the throat the circumcised dog."

Suddenly, Othello's eyes flashed, and he exclaimed, "Damn that statue! I'll take *him* by the throat, if he doesn't look out."

Antony, who had hitherto been silent, asked, "And do you love your black wife as much as you loved Desdemona?"

"Oh well," said Othello, "it's a different kind of thing, you know. It's an altogether more adult relation, more integrated with my public duties. There is nothing unduly wild about it. It never tempts me to such actions as good Rotarian must deplore."

The statue remarked, "If it were now to die, 'Twere now to be most happy."

"Hark at him," said Othello, "that's just the sort of remark that Professor Bombasticus cured me of. Owing to him, to whom I can never be too thankful, I have no such excessive feelings nowadays. Mrs. Othello is a good soul. She cooks me nice dinners. And I don't see what more a sensible man could want in a wife."

The statue murmured: "Put out the light, and then put out the light."

Othello turned to it and said, "I won't say another word if you keep on interrupting. But let's hear *your* story, Antony."

"Well," said Antony, "you here, of course, all know the extraordinary lies Shakespeare told about me. There was a time --no long time, by the way-- when I saw in Cleopatra a mother-figure with whom incest was not forbidden. Caesar had always been to me a father-figure, and his association with Cleopatra made it not unnatural that I should see her as a mother. But Shakespeare pretended, so successfully as to have misled even serious historians, that my infatuation was lasting and brought me to ruin. This, of course, was not the case. Dr. Bombasticus, whom I met at the time of the Battle of Actium, explained to me the workings of my unconscious, and I soon perceived, under his influence, that Cleopatra had not the charms with which I had invested her, and that my love for her was only a fantasy-passion. Thanks to him, I was able to behave sensibly. I patched up the quarrel with Octavius and returned to his sister, who was, after all, my lawful wife. I was thus enabled to live a respectful life, and to qualify for membership of this committee. I regretted that public duty compelled me to put Cleopatra to death, for only so could my reconciliation with Octavia and her brother be solid. This duty was, of course, unpleasant. But no well-adjusted citizen will shrink from such duties when they are called

for by the public good.”

“And did you love Octavia?” asked Othello.

“Oh well,” said Antony, “I don’t know exactly what one ought to call love. I had for her the kind of feeling which a serious and sober citizen ought to have for his wife. I esteemed her. I found her a trustworthy colleague in public work. And I was able, partly through her counsel, to live up to the precepts of Dr. Bombasticus. But as for passionate love, as I had conceived it before I met that eminent man, I set it aside and won instead the approbation of moralists.”

*The statue:* “Of many thousand kisses, the poor last I lay upon thy lips.”

At these words, Antony trembled from head to foot, and his eyes began to fill with tears. But with an effort, he pulled himself together, and said, “No! I have done with all that!”

*The statue:* “The brightest day is done, and we are for the dark.”

“Really,” said Antony, “that statue is too immoral. Does he think it fitting to speak of ‘bright day’ when he means wallowing in the arms of a whore? I can’t think why the Rotarians put up with him. But what do you say, Romeo? You also, according to that old reprobate, were somewhat excessively addicted to amorous passion.”

“Well,” Romeo replied, “I think he was even wider of [or off?] the mark where I was concerned than he was about you. I have some dim recollection of an adolescent romance with a girl whose name I can’t quite remember. It was something like Jemima --or Joanna-- Oh, no, I have it! It was Juliet.”

The statue interrupted: “It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night like a rich jewel in an Ethiop’s ear.”

“We were both,” continued Romeo, “very young and very silly, and she died in rather tragic circumstances.”

The statue again interrupted: “Her beauty makes this vault a feasting presence full of light.”

“Dr. Bombasticus,” Romeo went on, “who was in those days an apothecary, cured me of the foolish despair that for a short time I was inclined to feel. He showed me that my real motivation was rebellion against the father, which led me to suppose that it was a grand thing to love a Capulet. He explained how rebellion against the father has been throughout the ages a source of ill-regulated conduct, and reminded me that, in the course of nature, the adolescent who is a son today will be a father tomorrow. He cured me of the unconscious hate towards my father, and enabled me to become a staid and worthy upholder of the honor of the Montagues. I married, in due course, a niece of the Prince. I was universally respected, and I uttered no more of those extravagant sentiments which, as Shakespeare showed, could only have led to ruin.”

*The statue:* “Thy drugs are quick. Thus with a kiss I die.”

“Well, that’s enough about me,” said Romeo. “Let’s hear about you, Hamlet.”

“I”, Hamlet began, “was quite exceptionally fortunate in meeting Dr. Bombasticus when I did, for I was certainly in a very bad way. I was devoted to my mother, and imagined that I was devoted to my father, though Dr. Bombasticus later persuaded me that I really hated him out of jealousy. When my mother married my uncle, the hate of my father, which had been unconscious, showed itself in a conscious hate of my uncle. This hate so worked upon me, that I began to have hallucinations. I thought I saw my father, and in my fantasy he seemed to be telling me that he had been murdered by his brother. I thought it was my duty to murder my uncle. And once, thinking

that he was hidden behind a curtain, I stabbed at something which I thought was going to be him. But it was only a rat, though, in my madness, I thought it was the Prime Minister. This showed everybody that my derangement was dangerous, and Dr. Bombasticus was called in to cure me. I must say he did a very good job. He made me aware of my incestuous feelings towards my mother, of my unconscious hatred of my father, and of the transference of this feeling to my uncle. I had had a quite absurd sense of self-importance, and had thought that the time was out of joint and I was born to set it right. Dr. Bombasticus persuaded me that I was very young and had no understanding of statecraft. I saw that I had been wrong to oppose the established order, to which any well-adjusted person will conform. I apologized to my mother for any rude things I might have said, I established correct relations with my uncle --though I must confess that I still found him somewhat prosy. I married Ophelia, who made me a submissive wife. In due course, I succeeded to the Kingdom, and in disputes with Poland, I upheld the honor of the country by successful battles. I died universally respected, and even my uncle was not more honored in the national memory than I was."

*The statue:* "There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so."

"Hark at the old boy", said Hamlet, "still saying the same nonsense. Is it not obvious that what I did was good? And that what Shakespeare pretended that I had done was bad?"

Macbeth asked, "Didn't you have a friend of your own age who rather encouraged you in your follies?"

"Oh yes." Hamlet replied. "Now you mention it, there was a young man. Now what was his name? Was it Nelson? No, I don't think that's quite right. Oh, I have it --it was Horatio! Yes, he certainly was a bad influence."

*The statue:* "Good night, Sweet Prince, and flights of angels sing the to thy rest!"

"Oh yes," said Hamlet, "that's all very fine. It's the sort of maladjusted remark that Shakespeare delighted in. But as for me, when I had been cured by Dr. Bombasticus, I threw over Horatio and took up with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, who, as Dr. Bombasticus pointed out, were completely adjusted."

The statue murmured: "Whom I will trust as I will adders fang'd."

"And what do you think of it all, now that you are dead?" asked Antony.

"Oh well," Hamlet replied, "there are times --I will not deny it-- when I feel a certain regret for the old fire, for the golden words that flowed from my mouth, and for the sharp insight that was at once my torment and my joy. I can remember even now a fine piece of rhetoric that I manufactured, beginning, "What a piece of work is man." I will not deny that in its own mad world it had a kind of merit. But I chose to live in the sane world, the world of earnest men who perform recognized duties without doubt and without question, who never look beneath the surface for fear of what they might see, who honor their father and their mother, and repeat the crimes by which their father and mother flourished, who uphold the State without asking whether it deserves to be upheld, and piously worship a God whom they have made in their own image, and who subscribe to no lie unless it furthers the interests of the strong. To this creed, following the teaching of Dr. Bombasticus, I subscribed. By this creed I lived. And in this creed I died."

*The statue:* "For in that sleep of death what dreams may come, when we have shuffled off this mortal coil, must give us pause."

"Nonsense, old truepenny!" said Hamlet. "I never have dreams. I am delighted with the

world as I find it. It is everything that I could wish. What is there that humbugs like me cannot achieve?"

*The statue:* "One may smile and smile and be a villain."

"Well," said Hamlet, "I'd rather smile and be a villain, than weep and be a good man."

*The statue:* "All which, Sir, though I most powerfully and potently believe, yet I hold it not here honestly to have it thus set down."

"Yes," said Hamlet, "what is justice to me, if I can profit by injustice?"

*The statue:* "For who would bear the whips and scorns of time."

"Oh don't torture me!" exclaimed Hamlet.

*The statue:* "You go not till I set you up a glass where you may see the inmost part of you."

"O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!" exclaimed Hamlet. "To Hell with Dr. Bombasticus! To Hell with adjustment! To Hell with prudence and praise of fools!" With this, Hamlet fell in a faint.

*The statue:* "The rest is silence."

At this point, a strange shriek was heard, a shriek from the depths, coming up through a tube that the Rotarians had never before noticed. An anguished voice moaned: "I am Dr. Bombasticus! I am in Hell! I repent! I killed your souls. But in Hamlet some spark survived and by that I am condemned. I have lived in Hell, but for what crime. I knew not until now. I have lived in Hell for preferring subservience to glory; for thinking better of servility than of splendor; for seeking smoothness rather than the lightning-flash; for fearing thunder so much that I preferred a damp, unending drizzle. Hamlet's repentance has made me know my sin. In the Hell in which I live, complexes without end dominate me. Though I call upon St. Freud, it is in vain; I remain imprisoned in an endless vortex of insane commonplace. Intercede for me, you who are my victims! I will undo the evil work I wrought upon you."

But the five who remained did not listen. Turning in fury upon the statue, which had brought despair upon their friend Hamlet, they assaulted it with savage blows. Bit by bit, it crumbled. When nothing was left but the head, it murmured, "Lord, what fools these mortals be!"

The five remained in Limbo. Dr. Bombasticus remained in Hell. But Hamlet was wafted above by angels and ministers of grace.\*

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\* Ophelia was co-opted in Hamlet's place on the Committee.