

Bushwhacking Through Narcissism: The Making of a Jungian Analyst

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Joe

If the preceding analyses suggest it may be an unalloyed advantage for the analyst to remain unconscious of events taking place in the self field, my failure with Joe ought to dispel that illusion. The danger of paying too much attention to the conscious dialogue -- even when it concerns the analysand's dreams -- is that the heart may not be engaged and the soul remain unawakened.

Joe and I were both aware of how difficult it was for us to speak outside of the consulting room, even in the few moments of greeting as he arrived at my house for his session. He complained of this on a couple of occasions, saying he could not understand how we could be so comfortable with one another inside the room and so uncomfortable in the hallway. I could think of nothing to say but to admit that I, too, found it difficult and believed it had to do with my inability to make small talk. I did not say that I consoled myself with the knowledge that Freud had admitted having the same difficulty with *his* analysands -- or that I had also had the same problem with *my analysts*. Not knowing whether to attribute the problem to them or to myself, I had attributed the discomfort to both of us: 60/40 to my first analyst, giving him the burden; and about 30/70 to my second and third analysts, taking the greater share of the blame myself. Unlike Joe, I had never mentioned it. I had wanted to believe that such a difficulty was irrelevant to the "work."

Joe was one of my earliest analysands, a man eight to ten years my junior whose education, interests, and lifestyle were similar to mine. I liked him but felt vaguely guilty that I was missing something and did not know how to address the issue. Half consciously I knew that to challenge him would be to step onto uncertain ground myself. For although I had much of the confidence he lacked, I must have unconsciously suspected there was some serious dis-ease that we shared. If I had had the language then that I have now, I would have said that I was more at ease than Joe in the self field while he was more comfortable than I in the persona field. Outside my consulting room with Joe I had no persona, in the sense of a social identity and a role to play as one man to another. Inside the room I was the analyst and he was the analysand. Our roles being clear, we seemed to be able to get comfortably down to business. Furthermore, we liked one another -- an important fact exacerbating the contrast between the atmosphere inside the room and that of the hallway.

Although an introvert, he had chosen the extraverted profession of a Protestant minister. He seemed uncomfortable with the congregation and his colleagues of the cloth, and never said anything about what he *did* in the church: sermon themes, how he conducted the youth group, etc. Although he probably carried off his work rather well, it seemed to me that he was not really present. He floated through life without conviction or passion, and yet passion seemed to leaking from his very pores. All of this energy was going in different directions, though, so that I felt it as a knot. A knot was in my chest, and a knot was scrambling the air between us.

He was there to speak of his lack of confidence in himself as a minister and husband and of a pervasive sense of directionlessness that left him mildly depressed. I had no difficulty identifying with the Jung of the *Collected Works* who frequently reports telling his analysands, "I haven't the faintest idea what to make of this situation, but let's see what your dreams have to say." No doubt I hoped to be saved from my ignorance by some clear trend in the dreams and some brilliant inspiration like the Turandot ploy. Actually he had a good deal in common with Mara: a decent but failing persona, trouble getting his feet on the ground, and a strong positive projection on Jungian analysis. His dreams, however, were not so "archetypal"; and he felt his pain more acutely in his everyday life. The biggest difference, though, was that he was far less naive in his narcissism.

Many of my analysands who have had a more comfortable relationship to the persona field than I -- regardless of their greater insecurity in the self field -- have seemed to become disappointed in me and terminated their work before we could get to the central issues. If Mara and Joe were more adept in the persona field than I, why did Mara stay and Joe leave? I think the main difference between them may be that Mara failed to pay enough attention to me to notice my inferiority. The game between *us* was that I was to gratify her need to be appreciated for the princess she wanted to believe she truly was. My support and admiration, which was quite spontaneously given, showed her that I saw and valued her grandiose image of herself. With Mara I fell directly into just the *participation mystique* that could hook her. It hooked me, too; and it took the boring emergence of her obsession with the skulker to bring me to my senses. Joe may not have been "hooked" well enough. Perhaps I did not fall in deep enough, quickly enough, with Joe.

One of the major themes appearing in his dreams was a need for notice and respect from elder male figures: senior pastors, high school athletic coaches, his own father. If I had been considerably more than six years his senior or if I had possessed a more worldly-wise persona, his need for a good father might have drawn me into a *participation mystique* as irresistible as the one I experienced with Mara. Now, twelve years later, it seems to me he had as great a need for mirroring as Mara; but I never recognized an opportunity to do so. I felt like a clumsy older brother who had somehow gotten through my doctorate and analytic training knowing I was on the track of my own life in a deep and satisfying way. It had been a kind of grace I hardly deserved and that saved me from having to wrestle with the persona-field issues where he believed his battle to be.

Our marriages, too, were strangely similar but different. We were both married to successful women who dealt with the persona world more successfully than we, although both the wives had a strong sense of inferiority in their respective fields and clung to an ethic of hard work where they felt they were laboring uphill without sufficient recognition from their

colleagues or their husbands. Joe felt largely inferior to his wife but saw her persona-oriented strivings as excluding him. She worked in a field closely related to his own, in fact had a job very much like the one I had resigned in order to move to Zurich. He wanted to cajole or seduce her into affection and love-making but felt rejected and marginal to the main thrust of her life. He had some intuition that another, deeper communication was possible but had no idea how to get there.

I, on the other hand, never felt inferior to my wife and did not feel marginalized in any essential way. I recognized a self-field connection we had that placed her preoccupation with her work in a manageable context for me. Although she resented my inability to support her persona efforts with full enthusiasm, she half-consciously recognized and lived from the deeper level of my support and admiration. All this fell naturally into place for me. Not having gotten to this place through a struggle, but by having relied on my at-home-ness in the self field, I could not be a model for him.

What I hoped for was that his dreams would show us the way to his own accommodation to the self field, which is the only secure source of support in life. What they showed, however, was a blockage in every direction. He was rebuffed not only by father figures but by every dream figure with whom he tried to establish connections. Only music, a frequent theme in his dreams, might have been a way out. We both played the clarinet, but I suspected he was much better at it than I. There were keyboards he could not master and compositions that spoke mysteriously of new possibilities. I had no idea what to do with these resolutionless dreams.

In waiting for the dreams to show me a way out of the multiple impasses that characterized his life, I was overlooking the obvious. What should have been mirrored for this man was the pain of his isolation. Had I only been more conscious at the time of the role that an emotional *participation mystique* had played in my bumbling successes with Mara and Lisa, I might have been able to explore the pain I myself felt in my relationships with my father, my male analysts, and my wife's preoccupation with persona. His presence in my consulting room was an invitation to dissolve my own defenses. My self-field confidence was genuine; but, as a safe contextualizing of my frequent experiences of rejection, it also served as a bulwark against feeling the pain that was overwhelming him.

The question I have often asked myself was why I knew what to do with Lisa -- where we stayed in the pain of the persona field -- while I found myself hopelessly ignorant with Joe. Was it the fact that Lisa's pain was so boundless that I could not ignore it while Joe's was better contained? Or was it possibly the fact that Lisa was a woman, enabling animus and anima to come into play? That gush of love I felt for her two years after her termination when she was safely living hundreds of miles away certainly testified to an erotic undertone to our work. Was Joe's maleness an obstacle to an erotic connection, some threat of homosexuality? Although I probably would have rejected this hypothesis at the time and have been able to offer cogent arguments to support my rejection, I surely cannot rule it out today.

The central theme in Joe's dreams was that of being separated from life by a glass wall. Windows, sliding glass doors, and the like, excluded him from parties, celebrations, and the life of his family of origin. We recognized that these had to do with his being excluded from

a feeling connection with people, but this conceptual knowledge went nowhere as long as I was too stiff to enter his pain. Suddenly one day, nine or ten months after we had begun, Joe announced he was terminating the analysis because his marriage troubles constituted the most important issue in his life and he could not afford to pay both me and a marriage counselor. I was surprised at my reaction. I immediately felt abandoned and was depressed for two or three weeks. In retrospect it is clear I had been appropriating very little of our affective interchange. Not unlike Lisa, Joe had evidently meant a lot more to me than I could bear to acknowledge. If I were to find myself confronted with such an emotional reaction to an announcement of a termination today I believe I would take my depression as a guide: inform him of my reaction, express my misgivings about the intended termination, wonder if there was any substance to the implicit comparison between his marriage and his analysis, and above all invite him to join me in having a look at what has been going on between us.

These moves are more than "good analytic technique." Apart from their possible stiffness, they belong to any caring interchange between two human beings engaged in an intimate piece of work. He evidently wanted me to notice that something was failing between us. Probably he wanted me to make this analysis into a better kind of marriage, to be the partner who understood, who shared his pain and knew it. Although he could not have articulated it this way, he wanted me to find a way through the glass wall isolating him from his wife, friends, and colleagues. But in our work together, he could only talk of specific anxieties and problems that arose at work and with his wife. The emotional character of these issues was hidden from us both -- even though it was unconsciously present between us in our meetings.

Our inability to acknowledge our connection, our frustration, and our sadness all emerged in my depression. These were the unrecognized theme of our joint work. His leaving declared, "If you can't get what this is about, it's too painful for me to go on." Neither of us was able to appropriate this silent declaration. We clung, instead, to his ostensible reason, the acute pain he felt in his unsatisfying marriage. I had no doubt this was a genuine issue for him, but I also knew that his stated motive was incomplete. I was sure he also felt that although he could take his wife to a marriage counselor, he had no recourse in his dealings with me. And surely he had not failed to notice that divorcing his wife would be expensive while leaving me would save him money.

These last considerations were probably too raw for him to express directly; but I heard them clearly, being acutely sensitive regarding my competence as an analyst. I was, indeed, insufficiently experienced. I feared that questioning his intention to seek marital counselling in place of analysis was too self-serving for me -- as though it were only my persona-image as a good analyst or my financial well-being that was at stake. I was thrown into a guilty complex and was determined to avoid all reference to it. As far as they went, my concerns about not influencing him for my own sake were quite appropriate. But I had left out the most important considerations. I failed to ask either myself or my patient how it felt to *him*.

Even more importantly, having relegated my own feelings to the realm of taboo, I neglected to look at what was happening *between* us. In my ethical concerns, I unconsciously clutched at straws to keep myself from drowning in the sea of our joint woundedness -- the fact that we both felt rejected and isolated by the important people in our lives and that we defended ourselves against acknowledging this fact openly. Our ego-centered concerns had isolated us into separate enclaves and obliterated from consciousness the realm of our mutuality.

It would be a poor excuse to say of myself that I came by my defenses honestly, that both of my own analyses with men had ended badly. I left my first analyst in anger for what I took to be mistreatment, although I later used some of his aggressive techniques to excellent effect with Mara. And my third analyst abruptly terminated my analysis without warning, saying that he thought I had lost interest in my work with him. I felt the same depression at that termination as I felt when Joe abruptly ended his work with me, *i.e.*, rejected as unworthy; and the same suspicion of an unconscious homosexual component in the relationship emerged.

As I had in fact *had* a year-long homosexual affair after the termination of my relationship with Patricia, the woman whose specter overshadowed the first phase of my work with Mara, I found it unlikely that I would reject homosexual feelings *per se*. But still the depression that set in with the two terminations felt very similar to what has transpired for me at the abrupt ending of romantic involvements with women. There was most likely a repressed erotic component in both my own third analysis and in my work with Joe. I have had to ask myself in all seriousness where this element resides and why I so thoroughly repressed it.

Pursuit of this question has not been an option with Joe. Or better, I was not yet ready to pursue it during the time I was seeing him regularly. However, the difficulties I had with my third analyst have not been impossible to pursue. We are still in contact by letter fifteen years after the termination and still processing what happened. In his most recent letter, he gave me a detailed list from his notes of our sessions in which homosexual themes appeared in my dreams.

I have gone back to my diaries and studied those dreams but without finding the clue I was looking for. As I read them now, with more than fifteen years hindsight, I feel confident that the homosexual figures that appeared in those dream were raising the issue of my feelings of inadequacy as a male. Not that I feared a sexual involvement with a man, nor even that I feared sexual involvement with a woman, but that I suffered from an inadequacy to function in the persona field effectively. I believe this issue has been addressed finally not in analysis but in my being elected, against what I initially thought was my better judgment, to one political post after another in the New England, national, and international associations of analysts. These positions forced me to adapt to the persona field in a new way.

Nevertheless, I am still not clear about what happened with my third analyst apart from my having felt rejected for my inadequacies as perhaps a son or younger colleague. Joe's rejection of me seemed to be a mirror image of this, in which I was rejected as a father or elder colleague. It does not address the erotic component that can hardly be denied -- or perhaps what we might call the human element. I can draw conclusions about what must have transpired in the self field between myself and the female analysands described in the previous chapters of this book perhaps because their successes are easier to understand than my failures. Joe brought me face to face with my inadequacy in the persona field, particularly my persona as an analyst; and this was an unresolved issue at the time. But I continue to suspect that there was a human, erotic element belonging to the self field that was repressed for unknown reasons both in my work as analysand and in my work as analyst.

According to its deliberate aim, analysis attends to what happens in human interchanges. On that account we hope an analytic relationship -- despite its drawbacks in comparison to unfettered friendship -- will not pass over the essentials. And yet it does, again and again. It did when I was the patient, and it does now that I am the analyst. Too much happens when people interact for us to be able to attend to everything. We appropriate very little of what goes on. The most we can hope for is that the essential matter is not overlooked. Yet, with the best of intentions, we miss it all too often. Indeed, "the best of intentions" often seems to hinder us; for as we strive to do our best, we generally pursue a limited notion of what it means to succeed, denying soul and the caring link that bonds us. Often failure marks the beginning of the right path.

Jungian analyst, Robert Stein (1988) gives an example of how failure -- and even a move that violates the usual canons of professional ethics -- may be exactly what the self field requires of a human interchange. He tells us of a successful, creative man who sought analysis on account of "burn-out" and depression. After working hard at his analysis for some months, keeping a journal and writing down his dreams, the patient came into his session one day seeming rather "out of it," distracted and depressed. Stein asked him how he felt, and the man said he felt like going to sleep. Against all expectations, Stein encouraged him to do so. In fact the *two* of them fell asleep and slept for half an hour. They both awoke refreshed, and the patient found he had arrived at an important insight during his sleep. He saw that he had been in analysis so that he could overcome his "block" and return to his successful career and that this would amount to neglecting the needs of his soul.

I think we would be right to suspect that the patient received some conceptual assistance from Stein in arriving at his insight of "neglecting the needs of his soul." But the fact that he came to it through *falling asleep*, the very antithesis of his previous compulsivity, implies he had to have seen something in a new way. A real "shift" seems to have taken place in his attitude toward living and the soul. Formerly he had tried to live exclusively in the persona field of public success. In falling asleep to that world, he enabled his imagination to present some intuition of a deeper reality, perhaps in the form of a dream.

But he had had dreams before. He even kept a journal. What was different in this case, I believe, is that by not recording the dream in his journal, he failed to make it a portable object that could be carried into the public world. A dream journal may be filled with archaeological shards from the self field: stiff fragments, no longer alive. Stein's patient had been going to analysis to study those shards with forceps and magnifying glass, drawing comparisons between his artifacts and those of the standard references -- the *Collected Works* of Jung, encyclopedias of mythology, and the like. For this man, the archetypal unconscious was a stale container of lifeless debris, an object of study.

When he awoke from his analytic nap, he found himself in a twilight realm: in neither the taxonomic world of shards and briefcases nor the immense horizons of the self field. Anyone who has kept a dream journal is familiar with this experience. It is the reason why a dream that, upon waking, seems too obvious to bother to record can be encountered a few hours later as bursting with marvelous significance. Or an eloquent dream may become unintelligible to us after only a few hours.

In the transition from sleep to wake, the schematic map of our participation in the public world gradually imposes itself over the lush detail of the soul's landscape, diminishing it in every way. Stein's patient retrieved his insight well before the shadings and gridwork of his persona-centered overlay slipped into place. He still had one foot firmly planted in the countryside of the soul. He had not yet forgotten that its vistas cannot be contained by his Day-At-A-Glance calendar.

Thus their falling asleep allowed the self field to enter the analytic session directly and for the first time. Our participation in the landscape of the soul is always lurking at the edges of our habitual preoccupations, waiting for an opportunity to turn things upside-down. It manifested itself between me and Joe in the form of my depression and had already been present for some time as his dissatisfaction and restlessness. Unconsciously, I had to have been in touch with these disquieting realities. Probably they lent urgency to my efforts at puzzling out my patient's dreams. My fault was to overlook the emotional realities that were shouting at us in order to go after the images in his dreams with forceps and magnifying glass.

Clinging to a fairly narrow conception of my role as analyst (rigid persona mask), I fled a dim sense of failure and pain so successfully that I converted these nagging interpersonal realities into a preoccupation with my professional competence. All this despite knowing very well that it was no accident this man had chosen me as his therapist. I knew our destinies were somehow intertwined.[1] Having no notion of joint woundedness at that time, however, I was able to maintain the fiction that it was primarily *he* who was looking to be transformed. Any pain I experienced, I thought, stemmed from my incompetence and really needed to be overcome. For my patient's sake!

In my determination to have integrity, if not competence, I embraced mediocre failure in preference to unnameable catastrophe. I hid fear of my own undoing behind solicitude for my patient's well-being. Robert Stein was more daring and more honest. His falling asleep with his patient was highly unorthodox. He tells us he had to struggle with his conscience, fearing he would not be earning his analytic fee if he spent part of the hour in an unconscious state. The results show, however, that Stein's improbable ploy was grounded in a landscape gathered mutually between them. Indeed, it appears that Stein's patient, for the first time in his life, glimpsed the foundational reality of the self field with sufficient conviction to denounce his habitual but no longer functional worldview. An incident like this can be the beginning of a much longed-for transformation, for it reveals how much the longing had been thwarted by a fear-driven compulsion to banish the soul's deeper realities behind the persona field's schematic overlay.

The heart of every analysis, in fact the heart of every human interchange, lies in the self field and involves our woundedness in some way or other. Because we habitually defend ourselves against encountering our vulnerability, it is difficult to gain access to this deeper reality when we need it. A sensitivity to the landscape of the soul and a certain facility in recognizing the passageways leading to it ought to be the primary aim of both shamanic and analytic training. We expect more of the specialist who deliberately enters certain relationships to help people connect with their souls. But really every relationship opens onto the countryside of soul through the passageways of our joint woundedness. Access is always available. To find it, we require not so much a learnable skill as a flexibility in our defenses.

We need to gain a certain ease around our woundedness. The precincts of pain offer us cobblestone streets and muddy alleys, but they conduct us to the most intimate meeting places.

It turns out, quite to my surprise, that Joe returned to analysis. About a year after his abrupt termination he called for another appointment and told me that he really had hoped to entice his wife into couples therapy but that she had refused. Despite this genuine intention, however, the real reason he had terminated a year earlier is that I had disappointed him. He had expected me to tell him what to do with his life; and when he concluded that I would not do this, he left in anger and disappointment. In the intervening year he had realized the folly of this expectation, that only *he* could determine his life's direction; and so he had returned to continue his work.

He could not have given me a more gratifying explanation. He took the entire blame for our failure upon himself and implied that our forceps and magnifying glass approach was satisfactory. Now that he had reformed his attitude, we could get down to business as usual. It relieved me of all necessity to speak of my feelings about the deeper connection we shared or to begin to mirror his narcissistic feelings of shame and inadequacy. It saved me from having to explore my own. We had fallen asleep and reawoken without learning a thing. This time he stayed in analysis only five or six months and left for the same reason he had given the first time. This time it was different, he said. This time his wife had *agreed* to do couples therapy, and he had to strike while the iron was hot.

I could hardly argue. This time, though, I had no feelings of woundedness to deal with. I knew I had failed again but accepted it with equanimity. Why? I cannot give a confident answer, but it is possible that my earlier brush with depression had hardened my defenses. Perhaps I had walled-off the unsettlement that underlay his conscious complaints. Perhaps this had left us with the boring task of sorting through rubble instead of examining foundations. Perhaps my own self-confidence in the self field had been challenged and I was unconsciously determined not to face it.

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1. This seems always to be the case when a therapeutic relationship "works" -- and sometimes also when it does not. I have collected agreements on this score from a broad variety of psychotherapists from different backgrounds and with different theoretical orientations.