

Bushwhacking Through Narcissism: The Making of a Jungian Analyst

by John Ryan Haule

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Dave

The question of what Jung might have meant by "withdrawing the projection" can be answered in general terms on the basis of my experience with Kim and the "inner work" I have since been doing. It was necessary for me to find the borderline part of myself, to appreciate how I, too, am vulnerable to fragmentation and loss of boundaries. I have asserted that my subsequent work with my analysands has been enhanced by my more immediate and emotional access to the shakiness of their coherent sense of having a self -- through its effects upon me. I have become more sensitive to disturbances in the self field which formerly I could only surmise. Unfortunately, I have as yet no cases that have been worked through to termination by which to illustrate how my work has changed.

Dave's work, however, does illustrate something essential about the process of "withdrawing the projection," although he had already terminated his meetings with me before Kim appeared. Dave is unique among my analysands on several accounts, not least for the inauspicious way we began our work. I had an immediate dislike for him. He spoke glibly of his "feelings," and I did not believe a word of what he said. I thought he must either have been lying or else far more seriously disturbed than he knew himself to be. I had no idea of how to work with someone whose statements rang so false. Perhaps he was trying to put something over on me, or on himself. He said he had done a lot of important work with other therapists and hoped to solidify and polish what he had accomplished by working with a Jungian. His life had just begun in earnest. His indecisions and conflicts were mostly behind him. He had just finished an MBA, and at the age of thirty-four was about to take his rightful place in the world. He was interviewing me and another analyst whose name he had been given.

I was not eager to work with Dave and thought that he was sure to choose the other analyst, especially as my colleague was able to accept insurance payments and I was not. In view of the hard work I expected Dave's analysis would require, I also asked a higher fee than I usually charged. Therefore I was surprised a couple of weeks later to hear that he had decided to work with me. When he appeared for our second meeting, he said he had liked everything about our first session except that I had seemed "greedy" when I set the fee. I felt I had been "caught" in my countertransference reaction to him and thought there was no easy way out. I could see no alternative to telling him the truth about my dislike for him. He took

the news undaunted and set to work with a will. As the weeks went on I learned that Dave had no idea at all what his feelings were. He had read New Age literature and worked with therapists who spoke the latest jargon, all of which he had applied to himself with great sincerity and little understanding. Although he was confused about himself, I found he had a great deal of personal integrity. In short order I lost all distrust of him and came to like him very much indeed.

His dreams were dominated by a recurring theme in which he found himself on a rickety bridge over an abyss. I saw this as a representation of the psychological heritage he had from his parents. His father had pulled his own life together by main force of will in his mid-thirties, graduated from law school, and married. He had been a "workaholic" who ruled the family with an iron hand. Dave had been severely punished whenever his grades in school fell below a straight-A average. He had been afraid of his father; and although his father had been dead some years when he began his work with me, Dave still hated him and all that he stood for. The older man had been approachable only for a couple of weeks in the summer when the family relaxed at their lake cottage, which Dave had helped his father build. It appeared to me that Dave's MBA and his current professional ambitions constituted an attempt to pull his own life together in his mid-thirties very much on the model of his father.

How he could so uncritically follow the course of his hated father was explained, I thought, by his mother's fate. She had been psychologically frail, suffered from recurrent depressions, and apparently lived in fear of her husband. She had committed suicide when Dave went away to college. It seemed clear, therefore, that Dave had grown up in a family where feelings were invalid, a symptom of inadequacy, to be suppressed through heroic performance. Because of her fear of her husband, Dave's mother had provided the children no respite from their father's compulsive, hard-driving tyranny. She had been unavailable for sympathy or an alternate point of view on how they might live their lives. Finally she had dramatically demonstrated the hopelessness of an implicit demurral to her husband's way of life through her suicide.

Dave's rickety bridge dreams therefore seemed to represent his attempt to cling to his father's flawed lifestyle as a defense against the constant fear that he might end up following his mother's fate. The bridge of professional accomplishment was in constant danger of collapse, but Dave could see no alternative to protect himself from despair. It seemed an alarming situation to me, and I would have liked Dave to schedule two sessions a week in the hopes of establishing an empathic and supportive environment that might have enabled him to bear the tension between his two frightening alternatives while we waited for the transcendent function to suggest a third.

But Dave was adamant in his determination to see me no more frequently than once every two weeks. He spoke of financial considerations and his years of previous therapy. I was not convinced by the reasons he gave but brought up short by his resoluteness. In retrospect, I would say that I felt a jolt of terror in the region of the self field. I was no more clearly aware of this than I had been with Mara, but it was sufficient for me to yield. I took a "wait and see" attitude at first, hoping the situation might change. But after a month or two, I could see that for Dave intensive psychological work raised the specter of his hard driving father in the unconscious. His insistence on going slow amounted to a defense against projecting his

negative father complex onto me.

Our work on the rickety bridge theme was amply illustrated by the events of Dave's everyday life, for during the time he worked with me he was fired from three MBA-oriented jobs. Each time his employer had dismissed him with regret, praise, and puzzlement. He was told that no one who had worked as hard and sincerely as he had ever before been let go. Dave had tried with the best will and impressive compulsiveness to master every detail of his job, keeping lists of his responsibilities and trying to keep track of every detail. Again and again he found himself overburdened with the list-making alone and overwhelmed with the confusing plethora of conflicting demands. After his third firing, he got the message that he would have to find an entirely new approach to life. Eventually he left Boston and found himself a series of jobs as an unskilled mental health worker in adolescent facilities in California. There his compulsiveness brought order to daily activities in the various clinics. He was loved and valued by both staff and patients.

About halfway through his two and a half years of regular sessions with me, the transcendent function provided some guidance toward his new lifestyle through a dream I appreciated far more than Dave did. In the dozen years that have passed since Dave's termination, he and I have corresponded by letter; and roughly once a year he has reappeared in Boston where we have had lunch and talked for several hours. On each occasion I found opportunity to remind him of his important dream. If he has not consciously been guided by the dream itself, I think it has nevertheless played a central role in his development; for he gives me credit for having broadened his perspective and enabled him to make the discoveries that are changing his life. Here is the dream:

He is leading a hiking expedition in the woods with a group of people he knows from his former attempts at therapy, including his present roommate, a man with whom he feels a good deal of rivalry. They get lost, and his roommate thinks he knows the way. Dave is dubious but allows the roommate to take charge; and, sure enough, he finds the trail marked with the yellow blaze.

Next he and the group are at a lakeside house that reminds him of the cottage he built with his father. He is standing with several people on a balcony resembling the fire escape on his present apartment in Boston. The balcony extends over the lake and he can see that several more people are standing on an identical balcony, and that it is not strong enough. He concludes that all are in danger of falling into the lake.

In the last scene he is standing on the ground outside what seems to be the same building, although it has been transformed into something that looks more "California" in style. There is an outside staircase with a landing on which a strange plant is standing. It is as though a flame had frozen into a steady shape like an upside-down heart and turned green. An old woman who seems wise and possessed of magical powers comes out of the house and descends to the landing where she cuts off the top of the plant, as though it were a pumpkin, and scoops out a clear gel with which she is going to concoct a medicine or nourishing food.

I saw this dream as recapitulating all the essential aspects of Dave's life at the time he had it. It starts with his being lost, as he was in his professional life at least. In his three failed jobs he had lost his ability to orient himself by his compulsive list-making. His sensation function had been inadequate to the task. The roommate's irrational approach to finding the way back to the well-marked trail seems to stand for Dave's neglected intuition. The *yellow* blaze may also be a reference to intuition. If Dave is to find his way in life, he will have to give up his attempts to control every detail and allow his unconscious to speak intuitively. The fact that he is lost with people he knows from his previous attempts at therapy also points to the need

for a new approach.

The second scene finds him again in the position of being suspended over an abyss (the lake) on a rickety structure. The fact that the house reminds him of the cottage he built with his father points unmistakably to the rickety bridge as his heritage from his father. The resemblance of the balconies to the fire escape outside his current apartment brings the problem into the present. The emergency escape route from his life's dilemma at the time of the dream was tainted with his father's inadequate and repressive approach.

The last scene of the dream differs quite strikingly from the first two. It is characterized by an uncanny, archaic, and magical feeling; and there are no references to current figures in his life. The first two scenes utilize imagery from the personal unconscious, while the third present archetypal imagery from a deeper stratum of the psyche. I therefore take it that, symbolically, the balcony *did* fail; and Dave has fallen into the collective unconscious. The abyss is not so disastrous, however, as he always feared.

Having fallen from the "rickety bridge" of his father's compulsive, controlling attitude, he does not find himself confronted by hopeless depression and suicide. Rather he falls into a world dominated by a strong, wise, and benevolent mother figure, someone to compensate for the inadequate personal mother whose suicide has left his life feeling so precarious. The strange plant seems to be a reference to Dave's neglected and frozen feelings because he compares it both to a flame (the fire of emotion) and to an upside-down heart.

Clinging to the rickety bridge of his father's persona-oriented lifestyle had rendered all feelings irrelevant and dangerous. They had to be frozen out to maintain an illusory sense of safety. His own mother exemplified this danger in being a victim of her depressive feelings. But the Great Mother figure in the dream finds nutritious and medicinal value in the shadowy realm of feelings. This was the message of the transcendent function: feelings do not have to be avoided at all cost, for there are helpful feelings as well as dangerous ones.

The dream was followed by several more in succeeding weeks that took up the same theme of an interesting and life-giving realm in the depths. Again and again in these dreams, Dave found himself exploring the life of lakes and ponds -- both from the shore and swimming underwater. I therefore took his big dream as an ideal demonstration of Jung's doctrine that the way out of an impasse at the level of the personal complexes is generally to be found in the deeper archetypal strata of the psyche. A nourishing and helpful Great Mother was certainly a novel third alternative to Dave's habitual way of thinking. However, he seemed puzzled both by the dream and by my interpretation. Consequently I limited my remarks to the simplest reiteration of its message: he felt that to let go of his father's compulsive approach to life would mean a terrifying fall, but the dream shows there is a wise mother to help him in those depths, someone who can transform his feelings.

After terminating analysis, his work as a mental health worker -- what he called a "hippie psychologist" -- was a first step in that direction. To call himself a "hippie" was in direct defiance of his father's compulsive cultivation of a professional persona; and in working with teenagers he was paying more attention to feeling values and rescuing the adolescent in himself that had not been able to overthrow the values of his parental complexes. After about three years of this, his faith in his new hippie-like persona and life-course was greatly

strengthened; and he accepted a position in a third world country as an instructor in English at a university. He found his students intelligent and able to *read* English quite well, though they were too shy to speak it. To remedy this situation, he instituted Wednesday night beer parties to loosen their tongues.

This taught him a great deal about the political and social repression of the country. Women who were not his students began to bicycle in from miles around to discuss their plight in a male dominated society. Eventually he developed a public lecture series that served the double purpose of teaching English and psychology. He even had a radio program that addressed the problems of social repression from a psychological point of view.

Although he had originally planned to stay only a single year, his interest in the country kept him there five or six years. In spite of his successes, he found himself very much isolated from the natives as a foreigner and from other westerners whom he found to be mostly fundamentalist Christian missionaries. He had to spend a great deal of time alone, longing for affection, relationship, and human touch. This isolation became his fall into the abyss he had been avoiding all his life.

At some point in his loneliness he came up with the idea for a novel form of meditation in which he would lie on his bed, hugging himself with his elbows crossed over his chest. He began with the intention of comforting himself, giving himself the affection and touch he so sorely missed. But very shortly he found himself recalling his childhood, his mother's remoteness, and the lack of warmth he had suffered all his life. His meditation sessions became a kind of self analysis with attention to emotional values. He found an article on "the inner child" in the international version of *Time* magazine and ordered books on the topic from the United States.

The most important discovery he made in this work occurred at a point when he had agreed to move to another city in the same country to continue his teaching. The prospect of such a big move into the unknown brought back to him the terror he had lived with all his life. Formerly he had "toughed it out," carrying on in spite of it, trying to distract himself from it as well as he could. This time, however, he decided to face it in his supine meditative posture, arms locked in his self-hug. He found himself surrounded by an ocean of fear that filled the room. He admitted it to himself, saying aloud, "I'm afraid; I'm really afraid." As he did so, he found that the fear in the room drew together and entered his body. He found himself filled with the terror but no longer surrounded by it.

Feeling it inside his body was not pleasant, but it was a tremendous relief. He found he could contain the fear and not be destroyed by it. He could act knowing he was afraid and not be ruled by it. He still had his will and his identity. Fear became a psychological condition, an emotion that affected him; but the world was still just the world and could be negotiated and handled.

Dave described this experience in several letters to me. It changed his whole perspective. He said he had finally understood what I had been talking and writing about for years in connection with that dream of the wise woman who had made a medicine out of frozen feelings. His feelings had been frozen by his terror which he had tried to flee by compulsively controlling the elements in his environment. But now he had gone through a

sensitization process to recognize his loneliness and fear. He found that he could fall into the abyss of his terror and not be lost, actually be comforted and healed.

My appreciation of Dave's dream has grown along with my understanding of analysis. Before my own dissolution through working with Kim, I could not have imagined Dave's "withdrawing the projection" of his terror. I had had only a theoretical grasp of the terrifying abyss that lay beneath his rickety bridge. But Dave's discovery came at a time when I was able to understand it in the emotion-oriented perspective of the self's woundedness.

Dave had not experienced the self field as a placid sea of adventure and discovery. For him it was roiled into an angry ocean by instinct-archetypes rampaging free of all harmonious gathering. His terror was but one over-reaction among many, the attempt by a fragmented psyche to preserve itself by fleeing the scene of disaster. But there was no way out. He was surrounded by an ocean of mountainous waves in which he was drowning. The island or vortex of his individual self was breaking up in the storm. In the midst of all of this, it suddenly dawned on him: "This storm of terror is all *mine*." At that moment he withdrew the projection of the terror-storm into himself, and the world calmed down. A coherent sense of self began to regather around that notion of "It's *mine*."

One moment his coherent sense of self was in danger of dissolution. Its components had assumed monumental proportions. The next moment he sees that they are the shards of a whole that may be reassembled. The self field has this capacity to dissolve individuality to the point that there is no more "me" to contain my forces. They are all outside me, tossing me like foam on the waves. To "withdraw the projection" is to identify with those forces as "mine," to let them back inside me, to appreciate them as the giant forces that *condition* my experience of myself and of the world.