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A Heuristic Enquiry

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Remaking the Imago Paterna

A Heuristic Enquiry

LUKE ORAM  AND KEITH TUDOR 

Based on a heuristic enquiry supervised by the second author, this article applies these concepts and processes to the reimagining of the *imago paterna* of the first author—the “I,” “my,” and “me” voice in this article. Drawing on literature, poetry, and archetype, as well as the first author’s own personal therapy, the article describes how heurism is employed to confront internal representations of the father, created through scraps of subjectivity and patched over in the absence of knowledge. The article also applies, discusses, and critiques heuristic method and methodology but, in true heuristic tradition, begins with the initial engagement with the subject of enquiry.

Of all the imagos of a childhood . . . none is more important for a youth or a man than that of his father.

Sigmund Freud (1964, 243)

A Living Eulogy

During my psychotherapy training we created *genograms*, tracing arterial lines and psychic inheritances through generations. My father’s side was a stump of a thing fading into blankness just above his mother, a white space where his father’s side should be. A thought damned me: “*I barely know enough about my father to cobble together a decent eulogy.*”

This stoic, staid man was a mystery to me. I wanted to be able to say so much more about my dad. I felt the son’s burden of ignorance as described by Ronald Levant (1996), a sense that perhaps I had never really known my father. At times this felt like James Herzog’s (2001) father hunger.

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I got a ravenous envy when I heard my patients describe their ineffable bonds with their fathers. Observing a men's anger group, I watched a bearish man collapse into violent sobs, grieving lost years with his son. Driving home I wept in a cul-de-sac, wondering if my father had ever fought for me. I was also afraid. Perhaps it is best *not* to know. Family secrets can be blinding; Oedipus gouged out his eyes rather than face the truth. I read male psychoanalysts who waited until their fathers had died to eulogize them—was exhumation easier than interrogating the living?

Eventually, I returned, an airplane hangar in the pit of my stomach, to the small country town where my parents lived to interrogate my father about his life. My questions stumbled—about his childhood, his hometown, the father he never knew. With a wordless shrug, he left the room, returning with a worn brown Corolla briefcase, the stuff of British spies and salesmen. Inside it were ticket stubs, theatre programs, annotated clippings, old photos, birthday letters, and a sailor's atlas marked with his voyages. Where my father was once a blank page, he was now a *palimpsest*, a mosaic of pieces creating the living eulogy of a man.

The Imago Paterna

This is not the story of my father, but a meditation on his image. C. G. Jung's (1969) theory of the imago suggests that internal objects, especially parents, are not fixed representations but psychic patchworks of memory, archetype, and projection. This image, shaped as much by fantasy as by fact, becomes mythic in our inner worlds (Jung 2014). Psychoanalysts have long explored this idea, from Sigmund Freud's Oedipal father (1989) to Melanie Klein's internalized paternal object (1932) and Guy Corneau's vision of the father imago as "the sum total of everything a child experiences in relation to the paternal order" (1991, 44). In therapy, these images are not merely recalled; they are wrested, reformed, and metabolized.

In my father's briefcase and in the repository of my own soul, I find not the man himself, but the image I've built: an *imago paterna* made of atom, shadow, and archetype. I may not know much about him factually, but he looms large internally—a mosaic of memory and projection. *Ceci n'est pas un homme—this is not a man*. James Hillman (1983) would place him in *Memoria*, the imaginal theatre where time and unconscious distort and reassemble. Memory is not retrieval; it is re-creation. Hillman calls it "remembering-what-never-happened" (50): my father's image is less biography than commemorative myth.

Emmanuel Levinas (1994) writes that truth is the sum of many perspectives. Søren Kierkegaard calls it "a truth which is true for me" (Bretall 1946, 5). So too with my father. As Carl Rogers (1951) reminds us, such truths must be honored before they are transformed. Just as the mandala in its complexity is viewed from all angles, each view offers a piece of the whole.

Remaking the *Imago*

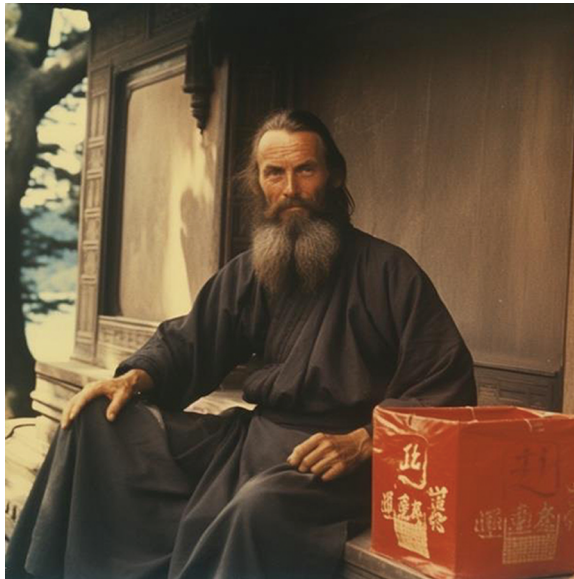
From the Latin *imago* we inherit both image and imagination—a mimesis, creation, and process. The old French *imagine* and *imaginem* channel similar concepts: that of a reflection, but also of phantoms and apparitions. Essayist Erica Hunt (2015) recalls her father as a specter: "a man of diffuse themes bundled by character . . . constrained by the name 'Father'" (98). Like Telemachus chasing the echo of

Odysseus, she moves through *Memoria's* halls seeking a father she may never fully find. So do we all. Even in proximity, we never perceive singular truth—only mosaics of perception (Hillman 1978).

I began by seeking an objective portrait of my father. Prompted by shifts I noticed during my psychotherapy training, I wondered if my own self-discovery was animating something in him. Rainer Maria Rilke's (1981) poem "Somewhere to the East There's a Church" transfixed me: Was I the son completing the spiritual journey my father never finished? This romantic idea—of fulfilling a father's unlived life—was seductive but flawed. It cast me as the hero in a myth of redemptive restoration, a seemingly holy quest that betrays a fundamental need to rediscover my own life (Real 1997). In truth, the quest was not to save Oedipus, but to rescue the parts of myself I had hidden within his image. Psychotherapy reframed the question: not "Who is he really?" but "What have I made of him?"

Like all inner figures, my father is shaped by assumption and longing. He exists as an internal construct assembled from scraps and stories. Psychotherapy helps dismantle this scaffolding, inviting reconstruction and a necessary confrontation with the archetypal father within (Campbell 1981). It is not about revising him but reimagining the image. It is mythmaking (Hillman 1983), historical rewriting (Freeman 2016), and psychic exegesis (Rotenberg 2018).

To remake the imago in therapy is to restore vitality to deadness (Levinson 1979; Seligman 1982). It is an occultic act, turning ghost into ancestor (Leowald 1960), an intergenerational journey to find, at last, the church we were both looking for.¹



Illumination I | Silence

¹*A note on images:* To reflect the process of the imago, the included images of my father are artificial composites. They were created by feeding an original photo of him into the generative AI program Midjourney and having it render the image using key words from each accompanying illumination as prompts. They are computer-generated images.

Rather than a sound, I hear the absence of sound: my father, the man of few words. *L'homme silencieux*, a stilled port in the bellicose chaos of a seven-child home. This was one of the things I admired most about him. He traded in pith and parable as if being taxed by the syllable. When he spoke, you listened. To me, this kind of laconicism was the epitome of wisdom, of mystery, of *power*. I remember resolving to be like this when I grew up. This is what drew me to psychotherapy, this world of sagacious listeners who dole out myth and anecdote.

He is taciturn. He is Hermes the diplomat.

Into Terra Interior

There is no theory that is not a fragment, carefully prepared, of some autobiography.

Paul Valéry and Charles Guenther (1954, 213)

I return to my initial disturbance. “*I barely know enough about my father to cobble together a decent eulogy.*” Levant argues that this is a somewhat universal claim: “Many men are burdened with feelings that they never knew their fathers, nor how their fathers felt as men, nor if their fathers even liked them, nor if their fathers ever really approved of them” (1996, 263).

This gives me a modicum of comfort, a sense that I am not alone in my experience. I find membership in the international association of father-hungry sons. I cling to the solidarity of a maxim, like every patient who takes assurance in the therapeutic fact that our parents disappoint us (Larkin 1988).

But this kind of knowing is a distance unto itself. In her description of heuristic inquiry Sandy Sela-Smith (2002) suggests a more salient question may exist: *How does it feel* for me to say this about my father? A therapist takes a similar tack with the patient who dryly recounts narrative details without affect and whose affect lacks vitality (Stern 2010). We do this because, while the truth may be ubiquitous, the subjective experience is far from it. It is the same with our images: In one sense they are universal, carved from collective archetypal and cultural mores. In another sense, they are *sui generis*, created from our unique lived experience. My father is *Senex*, the eternal man. He is also the sum of my singular history.

Popularized by Clark Moustakas (1990), heuristic enquiry locates the phenomenon in human experience; it is existential philosophy as much as phenomenological psychology (Douglass and Moustakas 1985). Where traditional research approaches seek to explain through objective observation, heuristic research requires “surrendering to embracing subjective experience and leaping into the unknown” (Sela-Smith 2002, 54). I am the data and the investigator, both “I-Researcher” and “I-Participant” (Ozertugrul 2017). The heuristic journey traverses an isthmus between individual and collective, objective and subjective.

In heuristic enquiry there is no safe distance; the meaning of the universal is explored through an “unwavering and steady inward gaze” into the personal (Moustakas 1990, 15). I imagine this is

what Rilke means when he directs the young poet Kappus to “be attentive to what is arising within you, and place that above everything you perceive around you” (1992, 35). Heuristic enquiry, much like psychotherapy, is less about studying the phenomenon than it is about inhabiting it.

Making sense of how psychotherapy can help me remake my father’s image is an exercise in excavating *terra interior*. This is the goal of heuristic self-enquiry, research that moves from the inside out. There is a question within me, calling out to be understood (Sela-Smith 2002). It is a question only I can answer, a church to the east only I can find.

Heuristic Enquiry: A Brief History

Heuristic research exemplifies Rogers’s (1961) maxim that “what is most personal is most general.” Its origin lies in Moustakas’s own confrontation with a family crisis, which he explored through lived autobiographical inquiry. His personal suffering became a portal to universal human themes.

Heuristic comes from the Greek *heuriskein*, meaning “to find” or “to discover”—a process of internal revelation. Moustakas described this as a search into “the nature of a phenomenon as it exists in human experience” (Douglass and Moustakas 1985). The researcher is not a distant observer but a full participant, embracing subjectivity and reflexivity. Keith Tudor (2022) describes heurism as a fusion of existential, humanistic, and phenomenological traditions, drawing from Buber’s dialogue and mutuality (1958, 1965), Bühler’s humanism (1933), Maslow’s self-actualization (1956, 1966, 1971), Gendlin’s experientialism (1962), and Rogers’s human science (1969). The result is a methodology that is structured, yet intuitive, a chimera of multiple genotypes. Tudor (2023) highlights the lexicon of the heuristic enquirer: emergent, creative, uncertain—something distinct from empirical, detached inquiry. Moustakas (1990) likens heuristic enquiry to an odyssey, a letting go of the known and entering unknown currents, guided by an internal summons not unlike Rilke’s call to “live the question” (1992, 24). Unlike the rigorous structure of empirical research approaches, this demands a tolerance for ambiguity, a Zen-like nonattachment and a willingness “to conduct one’s research on behalf of the phenomenon” (Dahlberg et al. 2008, 98). You follow the muse to “the place where things matter” (Sultan 2019, 79).

Nevine Sultan (2019) notes that life is a constant *heuresis*—from our preverbal fumbling to this present moment, we ceaselessly make sense of the world around us. Heuristic research systematizes this meaning-making with self-dialogue, creative synthesis, and intersubjective insight. As in psychotherapy, everything becomes data: memory, dream, dialogue, art. Heuristic enquiry enacts a kind of chaotic attractor (Abraham 1989), a mythic structure that “pulls to it images, beliefs, values, priorities, memories, and emotions” (Sela-Smith 2002, 75).

I recall my father’s old briefcase: chaotic and full of psychic detritus. Like Virgil guiding Aeneas with insight, the voices of *Memoria* step in and offer their wisdom, affirmation, or criticality along the way.



Illumination II | Sapwood pour homme

My father was a woodturner. He spent his days hunched over an industrial lathe in cobalt overalls, fashioning chair spindles and table legs. Eventually, he would emerge from a cloud of sawdust and greet me in the factory tearoom. We would barrel into his work truck and make for home. Sitting next to him, my head would spin with the scent of fresh-cut timber, saw-scorched sap, and Pall Mall cigarettes. Parisian perfumers would kill for the alchemy.

He is a provider. A craftsman. He gets his hands dirty. He is Jesus the carpenter of Nazareth.

The Night Sea Journey

Moustakas (1990) describes heuristic research as a nonlinear journey through six phases and seven processes. These are not fixed steps but evolving waypoints (Sela-Smith 2002). The seven processes of heurism (identifying with the focus of enquiry, self-dialogue, tacit knowing, intuition, indwelling, focusing, internal frame of reference) become tools for exploring and deepening each phase. Heurism, much like rifling through an overstuffed Corolla briefcase, is a creative pilgrimage that echoes Theseus in the labyrinth guided by Ariadne’s thread, or Jung’s psychological katabasis, a visionary journey into the unconscious subterranean. In heuristic enquiry, Sela-Smith (2002) urges surrender to the unknown, echoing Levine’s (1991) invitation to dwell in the “don’t know”—a meditative openness where preconceived ideas fall away and tacit knowing becomes possible.

Moustakas’s (1990) first heuristic phase is *initial engagement*, which is akin to the bursting of a dam or the emergence of a relentless itch. It marks the beginning of a question that demands to be answered—an unquenchable “why.” In outlining the heuristic process, Moustakas anthropomorphizes the topic of enquiry, describing it as something that calls or compels the researcher. My father

has always been around, but it took me almost four decades to realize that he was a stranger. Having spent time in men's groups and working with male patients, I noticed a familiar pattern: the archetypal amnesic sons—men who describe their fathers with detached, monosyllabic adjectives. We cobbled together autobiographies from sparse traces—formless, faceless fragments. Cultural myths helped us fill in the gaps. We were, as Maggie Bortz puts it, “arrested in anachronistic identification with the uninitiated hero” (2011, 29). I saw rudderless men gravitating toward icons of the modern men's movement, seeking in them the discipline of their fathers. I was searching for my father too, yet this was not the full truth. Somewhere below the question was a more disturbing reality. I saw it in the eyes of a depressed patient whose father had abandoned him at a young age, leaving a cast of male relatives to fill the role. “*Aren't you curious about him?*” I asked. He shrugged, his answer implicit in the gesture: “*Why would I want to know my father? I'm happy with his replacement.*”

There is a vast literature about father-hungry sons and absent fathers (e.g., Diamond 2006; Katz, 2002; Osherson, 1986; Pease, 2000), but to keep my enquiry at that level was a defense. I had to admit that I wasn't just researching my father—I was confronting the internal image of him to which I'd grown attached: the *imago paterna*. It was mythic, stylized, preserved in amber. As Jung understood, images that persist across time and cultures often demand amplification, tracking their symbolic links across dreams, myths, and archetypal motifs. The imago, in this sense, is not just a mental representation but an active, living symbol (Jung 1964).

To interrogate the imago was to risk undoing myself. You cannot remain a neutral observer in heuristic research about the father. The image speaks back. It demanded more from me—an unravelling of my own DNA. As Levinas (1984) suggests, to truly encounter the Other is to become their hostage. The same can be said of the imago.

Immersion, Moustakas's next phase, is a kind of obsession. The subject becomes a haunting presence, stalking thoughts and dreams. This is Jung's territory: Symbolic material rises from the unconscious when the conscious mind is willing to suffer the encounter. Amplification, in this context, becomes a method of deepening—not explaining away, but staying close to the symbol's resonance.

In the immersion phase, I obsessed over the image of my father. Rediscovering old family photographs, I combed through images of him—his “original face before [he] was born,” to borrow the Zen koan. I remembered that he prevailed in purity before I perceived him, was created before I re-created him. He became less myth, more human—yet still, the image persisted, shimmering with symbolic ambiguity. In effigy, he interrupted my consulting room like one of Scrooge's ghosts. My dreams became populated with him. My own therapy became a theatre of contradictions—trying to discern: Is this memory real or imagined? Did this actually happen, or did I need it to happen? His image was like the ship of Theseus, re-cladded and repaired so many times it becomes a different vessel altogether.

Such indwelling, according to Jung, is precisely how psychic truth unfolds. Symbols are not decoded—they are amplified, revisited, dreamt again. The *imago paterna*, like a dream image, refuses closure.

After indwelling comes *incubation*, a sacred pause allowing the unconscious to process what the conscious mind cannot. Psychic detritus settles and begins to form new wholes, which

Moustakas (1990) termed *illuminations*. The *illumination* phase is the apex of heurism's alchemical process. As intuition delves into the tacit realm and the conscious dances with the subconscious, a breakthrough occurs. Moustakas (1990) conceptualizes illumination as the moment the process pays off, delivering new awareness, synthesis, and discovery. It is the eureka of Archimedes, the raw material of themes and clusters that make for heuristic findings. Illuminations flicker and flare, arriving through dreams, active imagination, and the emergence of synchronicity. My illuminations arrived unbidden. Memories returned not gently but like a flood. My father appeared in dreams, in reveries, and in countertransference with patients. Wilfred Bion (1988) encourages therapists to sit without memory or desire, but in heuristic research, both are welcome ghosts. These illuminations weren't conclusions; they were intensifications. The symbolic structure of the *imago paterna* became more visible with every step of *anabasis*, the return from the unconscious depths.

Moustakas's final two phases, *explication* and *creative synthesis*, facilitate an attempt to speak what has been shown—in a research sense, to dialogue with the findings. They are the midwives of Jung's *auseinandersetzung* in *The Red Book* (2009), the conversation between two internal objects that is pursued in the therapy room. But as Moustakas reminds us, it is not about “results” in the traditional sense. It is about locating oneself in what has been revealed. The question becomes: What is this telling me about myself? How do I understand my own psychic topography? My own explication culminated in creative synthesis—in this case, writing. Sela-Smith (2002) encourages researchers to honor their process in whatever form suits the soul: poetry, image, or song. For me, words are the natural medium. My father and I are both lexophiles—crossword clues, arcane idioms, obscure words are our dialect. And so, I offered words back to him, shaping my findings into narrative. I also employed generative artificial intelligence as symbolic integration, using the alchemy of technology to bring my reflections of my father to life, rendering his many faces through computer-generated images.



Illumination III | Svengali

Every night after dinner my father would read to us from an oversized bible. Christ and his twelve men. Lions' dens and giants laid low by stones. I forget the stories, but I remember being transfixed at the way my father would weave the bookmark between his fingers as he read, twirling it seamlessly from one to the next. A pirouette flourish, a sleight of hand. A magic show for my eyes only.

He is a scholar. A rabbi. A holy magician.

Explications

Eventually, heurism's chaos theory gives way to a kind of order; disparate threads form patterns of meaning. The same is true of psychotherapy, itself a "heuristic investigation into the nature and meaning of human experience" (O'Hara 1986, 157). As therapists, we know that if we look fixedly enough, humming wholes begin to emerge from complexity. So it is with heurism and briefcases filled with souvenirs. My initial research question—"Can psychotherapy help a son reimagine the father?"—is sacrificed to a formless unknowing. Eventually, themes emerge. Three explications weave a thread through the enquiry, evoking psychotherapy's role as poesis, rite of passage, and generational inheritance.

Rewriting the Imago

The imago is potent, often more powerful than the real object. It exists as a filter through which we view the person, a template we impose. Uninterrogated, this image becomes as strong as fact. To admit that I don't know my father is one thing. Realizing that, in the absence of information, I had created what poet Lee Robinson (2004) calls "a reasonable facsimile" is another.

Perhaps you have a briefcase of your own, my therapist once mused. I understood what he meant. Somewhere inside me was a psychic repository where I had collected my own memorabilia to create an *imago paterna*. Dwelling in this thought, I engaged in meditative self-dialogue with this image. I traced the edges of it, holding it up to my mind's eye like a many-sided prism. I was looking at a composite built from the strata of personal and collective unconscious. A question formed, applied to each angle: *Where did you come from?*

Answers came, scribbled piecemeal in journals. You came from the church, a patriarchal idea borrowed from *Imago Dei*. The head of the house: he who does not spare the rod, the provider. You were created in my men's group, an amalgam of stories about dads we admired, hated, or were destined to overthrow. You came from television. Chivalrous and resourceful like MacGyver (*MacGyver* 1985–1992), with the barrel-chested machismo of David Hasselhoff (*Baywatch*, 1989–2001), and the mischievous savvy of Maxwell Smart (*Get Smart*, 1965–1970).

Hillman (1983) would call this my fiction of choice: a story cobbled together that allowed me to live. It is an archetypal fantasy with an orbit of its own. Advancing psychotherapy as *mythopoesis*, Hillman claims this is the perfect place to start. In therapy the process of reimagining the imago begins by admitting that there are "no bare events, plain facts, simple data" (28)—we all have our stories, and they beg revisiting: "From the moment the person

crosses the threshold into therapy a whole new story begins—or rather, the former story has an entirely new slant as the original tale is re-visioned into the therapeutic genre.” (19)

In this sense, psychotherapy is a kind of autobiographical regression, rereading the old story, fact-checking and editing it where necessary. Sometimes this entails grief; as Corneau (1991) suggests, this often means mourning the ideal father to forgive the real one. Other times, it asks for a meditative kind of introspection, investigating the very idea of “father,” with its underlying substratum of desires, hopes, and “unhealed holdings” (Levine 1991).

Psychotherapy allowed me to rewrite my *imago paterna*, to feel for cracks in its scaffolding. I thought of my father’s enduring silence in new ways. As a child, I saw it as wisdom, a kind of John Wayne–like stoicism that belied a great strength. I idealized it without ever questioning its porosity. I see now that there is so much that is tacit about silence, in the same way as Stephen Shapiro imagines his father’s muteness as “a temptation to rage and an opportunity to speak” (1985, 96).

This realization breeds both mourning and forgiveness. I struggled to remember times that my father had told me that he was proud of me. I have spent most of my life aching to hear these small words that contain kingdoms. There was a profound sadness in this memory, but also a new realization that he was born of a pragmatic generation, that his love was evident in his many acts of service, in the fact that, in a household of seven kids, he found myriad ways to make me feel uniquely his. I felt new understanding for him, a fatherless son with a harsh mother. I wondered if anyone had ever offered *him* those life-giving words, even taught him the vernacular. I remember an illumination striking me with the force of a thunderbolt in the middle of a therapy session: *perhaps he is desperate to talk but waiting for the invitation.*



Illumination IV | Nightwatchman

My father has always been a low-key traditionalist. Late every Christmas eve, he would wake us with a gentle shake, and we would trail in strange procession to the midnight mass

ceremony at the small Anglican church where I was baptized. We were bleary-eyed children in the temple, kneeling silently next to him to receive communion while the clock ticked over to Christmas Day in reverent silence. Him in his Sunday best. Let the little children come to me.

He is our father confessor. A hierophant. Mystic Saint Nick.

A Church to the East: Psychotherapy as a Rite of Passage

What is the role of the father, if not a continuing quest and discovery that the patient pursues within himself for months and years on end?

David Rosenfeld (1992, 757)

Rilke's poem "Somewhere to the East There's a Church" (1992) is emblematic for me as a description of the journey of psychotherapy. There is something about the search for self that requires the courage to leave complacent domesticity. It is a lonely pilgrimage that goes by a thousand different names. It is the quest of Orpheus and Jonah. For Jung (1969), it was a search for individuation, a sacred rite of passage. In another time or place this journey would be a physical one, a ritual marked by the presence of elders, where boys became men, blessed by their fathers to leave the safety of home. The paternal task of transitioning a son "from the womb to the world" (Seligman 1982, 10) would be upheld, bestowing father and son with new roles and reimagining the relationship between them. In Western culture this rite has been largely rendered impotent as a strange relic, stripped of its mythical power and reduced to cultural catechisms and catchphrases. Castellini et al. (2005) argue that this has created a generation of men dissociated from tradition and history, sons sick with a modern strain of initiation hunger.

In the absence of the real thing, psychotherapy offers a psychological alternative, a rite of passage that takes place in the liminal space of the therapy room as an arena of ritual and transition. This journey takes place in the unconscious realm, which is no less haunted by monsters than the mythic underworld (Pittman 1993).

This rite of passage necessitates something often more visceral and mythic than mere self-dialogue. Sela-Smith equates the heuristic journey with that of Christ retreating into the desert for forty days, where he "confronted himself, his feelings, his beliefs, and his myths" (2002, 82–83). The same can be said of psychotherapy, a kind of rite where the patient retreats into their vast interior to confront their images, including not only their potential selves but also the fathers who didn't initiate them. Internal family systems therapy promotes a reformatory encounter with a cast of internal objects (Schwartz and Sweezy 2020), whereas depth psychology presents a mythic quest toward psychical archetypes (Hillman 1975). Chair work, a mainstay of gestalt and psychodrama, facilitates an imaginal encounter not only with parts of the self, but also with internalized figures (Kellogg and Garcia Torres 2021). Christ battled with his divine shadow in the desert, wresting transformation from the encounter; psychotherapy asks us to do the same. In his poem "Forgiveness," Alistair Te Ariki Campbell (1981) envisages this journey as a confrontation with the paternal image for the sake of absolution and intergenerational healing:

Forgiveness is a journey I must take
 Alone into my childish fears, and there
 Confront my fathers for my children's sake.
 I must go back before I cease to care,
 And the world darkens and I cannot move.
 Forgiveness is a journey from despair
 Along a path my ancestors approve.
 I must go back and with them make my peace:
 Forgiveness is a journey into love.

Curiously, my therapy has not unearthed initiation hunger, nor hidden rage at my father's lack of confirmation. I have felt no need for forgiveness or confrontation. What is this absence? Perhaps it betrays a more alarming truth, an admission that I denied him the role of initiator from a young age, that I was too quick to carve out my own path in the safety of imagination. Any avoidant child can tell you that self-reliance is a comfort all of its own.

The more I engaged with my *imago paterna* in therapy, the more I realized that I was terrified at the idea of sharing a quest with my father. I began to notice an ambivalent dance in myself, like the similar poles of two magnets. Observing my self-growth, my father had begun to open himself to me—and on some level, I withdrew. I was hungry enough to be drawn to the table, to open the briefcase, but there was an elemental panic that stopped me at that point. I was paralyzed at the threshold of wanting to know and the responsibility of actually *knowing*. Hillman (1983) captures this ambivalence well: “I need to remember my stories not because I need to find out about myself but because I need to find myself in a story I can hold to be ‘mine.’ I also fear these stories because through them I can be found out, my imaginal foundations exposed” (51).

My call to initiation demanded Hans Loewald's (1960) *vatertötung* (patricide), a kind of death to my safe and familiar image of my father. It meant opening myself up to a new vulnerability, facing my father as a stranger and claiming his history as well as mine. It meant asking him to bless me, to acknowledge his authority and take my place in that broken lineage I had traced in my genogram. The mythic quest was not to kill the minotaur, but to destroy the father that I had created, making room for the one I was avoiding. I could no longer accept a facsimile.

A few months into my research process, my therapist and I were speaking about rites of passage. He mentioned the symbolic practice of cutting hair, a ritual that signifies a panoply of transitions, from entering manhood to memorializing grief—psychoanalysis has its own mythology around hair cutting, which Jeffrey Andresen (1980) ties to Oedipal separation, castration, and reparation. I thought about my own hair, which I had let grow into a shoulder-length tangle and a recent throwaway comment from my father about tidying myself up. I recalled Maurice Merleau-Ponty's (2004) claim that the gestural body has as much creative potential as language. If there was an unspoken need for a rite between my father and me, perhaps it could be answered by an embodied yes. The next day I asked a barber to shave my head like a military cadet.

It was a start.



Illumination V | Major arcane

My father ran away to join the English merchant navy when he was fifteen. One day, in passing, he mentioned to my brothers and me that he had sailed through the Bermuda Triangle three times. This became a singular mythology, whispered with awe among my schoolmates, whose parents were just lowly farmers and real estate agents. This new piece of esoterica seemed to transform him. There were days when I would stare at him and wonder to myself: *Did it change him? Is this even my real father? What if a different version came back?*

He is recherché. Fox Mulder on the high seas. He is a phantasm.

The Forgotten Knowledge: Inheriting the Incomplete Imago

The past is a vital component of psychotherapy, a compass point by which we make sense of the present. In David Malan's (1979) triangle of persons, history is populated by our formative objects. Somewhere in the transition from the past to the poles of therapeutic transference and the out-there present, these objects are often transposed into images. This is what makes remembering such a potent force in therapy; it is the *via regia* from "what is" to "what came before." It is the stuff of case histories and the original symptomology, perhaps the original sin.

Often in therapy remembering comes in the form of nostalgia. This nostalgia betrays its classic etymology, born from the Greek *nostos* (to return home) and *algos* (pain). Patients are sick for home, for something original and uncomplicated. They pine for an origin story in which to locate themselves. Here in Aotearoa (New Zealand), Mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledge) achieves this through *whakapapa*, the recognition of the

“genealogical descent of all living things from God to the present time” (Barlow 1994, 173). Elsewhere, we create genograms and family trees, mapping out the patient’s object constellations, looking for patterns and inheritances. We know that remembering the past gives us roots. Those roots offer us identity, absolution, and permission.

Writing about case histories, Hillman puts it like this:

In that case history is my image, my dignity, my monument. And in it is history itself: my mother had a mother and behind her an ethnic ancestral stream; the son with whom I battle is today, and tomorrow too. There is no part of my personal record that is not at the same time the record of a community, a society, a nation, an age. (1983, 55)

This explains the unease that gripped me as I faced the truncated paternal family line of my genogram. I was looking at stumps rather than rich, complex roots. I was adrift, ahistorical. And if I was feeling that way, how much more so was my father, cut off at the knees by a great paternal silence?

Terrence Real (1997) writes that every man is a bridge, transmitting tradition, image, and inherited masculinity from one era to the next. In this sense, my father arrived to me empty-handed. As Corneau (1991) suggests, this may mean that my dad had a patchwork *imago paterna* of his own, cobbled together from cultural stand-ins or primitive images.

Luckily, psychotherapy is the art of bridge-building. Sándor Ferenczi (1949) described his mandate as feeling his way into the patient’s experience. This same kind of therapeutic indwelling helps me cross over into my father’s frame of reference. I consider my father’s own fatherlessness. I despair for his lost knowledge, a cruel inheritance of lack and silence. I wonder if he ever struggled with the dread of abandonment or the pressure to be the perfect man (Rutherford 2023). I find compassion here. Exploring my own feeling of lovelessness, I wonder how much of it is bequeathed from the ether-like unknown generations above him, surviving his best attempts at transmutation. I also find triumph, lauding my father for the Herculean task of raising seven children without a template.

Real describes therapeutic healing as “a spiritual gift to those who came before” (1997, 209). Just as ripples tear their way through space time, one psyche can reach through eons to heal another. The son who reclaims himself also lays claim to the lost child of the father. Reimagining my *imago paterna* necessitates an encounter with my lost creative self—Neville Symington’s (1983) long-suppressed life giver. The life giver is a daemon of infectious joy, mischief, and spontaneity—the life it gives begets life in others. It is an emissary between my father and me. He cannot help but be affected by its emergence, to be enticed by its muse. In that transpersonal creative space, we begin to work together, rewriting the story of us; of those who came before, and those yet to follow.



Illumination VI | Dr. Frankenstein

My father was an appliance repairman in the small town where we lived. Our garage became a boneyard for irredeemable machines—defunct radios and burned-out TVs. Armed with pliers and jeweler’s screwdrivers, my brothers and I would tear those things apart until they were piles of motherboards, cathode tubes, and copper tuning coils. We’d spend hours repurposing alien components to create great hybrid machines from our favorite science fiction flicks: Johnny 5 from *Short Circuit* (1986), Doc Brown’s DeLorean from *Back to the Future* (1985).

He is a mad scientist. Deus ex machina. A Junkyard superman.

Implications/Invocations: All Circles Begin with an End

Can the solitary journey of the heuristic scholar offer anything to the wider field of psychotherapy? Rogers (1951) asserts “*what is most personal is most general*” (26). If we see the work as transpersonal, multigenerational alchemy, then there must be some ripples.

We sometimes commit the sin of delineation in therapy. We speak of objects, of dyads, of parts, and thus an absent father as a dysfunctional human. We forget that psychotherapy is less like a self-search and more like blowing open Pandora’s box, changing the fabric of the world. We question whether our approaches are one—or two-person modalities, forgetting that the work is always done under a great cloud of witnesses. It is an “intergenerational project, an ancestral conspiracy, a continuous meeting of bodies, a queering of temporality” (Akómoláfé 2018, ¶2).

My father isn't changing because he is a vicarious spectator. He is transformed because my psychotherapy journey is the art of re-storying a collective. At some point, I reached the border of our stories and in that place I found Emmanuel Levinas's (1984) infinite space, an irresistible call to the other. This asserts that psychotherapy as a mythopoetic rite of passage has the power to rewrite "histories rendered mute" (Tolleson 2009, 196), healing the individual severed from his social and familial world. In an archetypal sense, psychotherapy is much more than just the work of an individual; it is a call to a new story, the raising of the dead. Where a son once waited for his father to initiate him, he can now summon the father through his own therapeutic rite, something like the Greek Eleusinian ritual with its phases of descent, search, and ascent. As the son's image is deconstructed and remade in therapy, the call to do the same is extended to the father, who sees his effigy transformed before his eyes. There is an implication here for the Western mind, whose Cartesian view prevails, a need to remember that "the world is not composed of things, it is composed of relationships" (Akómoláfé 2016, ¶20).

Ad Infinitum

In her research primer *Heuristic Inquiry*, Sultan (2019) chooses the infinity symbol to represent the heuristic journey, implying a constant process of creation and re-creation. So it is with the imago in psychotherapy—something that is endlessly reconstructed and revised. Like the alchemic *ouroboros*, the serpent devours its own tail.

It is near-impossible to stop. I return home with a kind of wanderlust. As Hegel (2019) puts it, the circle presupposes its end, never realizing it is also a beginning. The point of the journey is in the leaving.

This journey was inspired by a question prompted by an absence: *Who is this man?* The heuristic journey asked me to interiorize the question: *Who is this man to me? Where is this man in me?* Psychotherapy became the hermetic guide, the *imago paterna* the internal effigy.

Hillman (1983) claims that psychotherapy is *mythopoesis*, the remaking of our internal archetypes. This is often the work that comes before reconciliation of the real. Through a self-dialogue with the *imago paterna*, psychotherapy-as-heuresis initiated a rite of passage between my father and me, one where he was confronted, reimagined, and inhabited. Yet this is far from the end of the quest. Contrary to the thinking of the individualized West, the fabric we weave is *intra-actional*, atomized through generations. In remaking my own image, I also touch my father's through psychic inheritance and empathy. The poets, heuristic searchers, and the psycho-mythologians conceptualize psychotherapy as an internal pilgrimage, but the journey never stops there, the inner work becomes an outward invocation to the other.

So I submit this work as a eulogy to the man I never knew.

The man put to death and resurrected a thousand times in the halls of *Memoria*.

The mythos who became flesh, whose image burns with a brand-new clarity.

My father, whom I am meeting again.

And again.

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ABSTRACT

Jung's *imago* encapsulates mythic, internal representations of others, born from subjective experience, culture, and archetypes. Often, psychotherapy analyzes and reconstructs this image. In this article, heuristics were used to explore the first author's image of his father—assembled from fragmented subjectivity and absence. Following Moustakas's phases, he engaged archetypal themes, literature, and poetry to confront and reimagine this image. Viewed as a mythic journey, psychotherapy becomes both a creative act and a transgenerational rite of passage. The rewriting of *imago* through therapy reimagines relationships and narratives, complicating Western ideals of individuality while reframing familial and archetypal connections.

KEY WORDS

archetype, fathers, heuristic, imago, imago paterna, Jung, myth, psychotherapy, sons