Remaking the Imago Paterna: How psychotherapy helps a son reimagine the father

A heuristic enquiry

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Table of Contents

An opening prayer

From the cowardice that shrinks from new truth
From the laziness that is content with half-truths
From the arrogance that thinks it knows all truth
O God of Truth deliver us.

- "Ancient Prayer" (as cited in Weatherhead, 1951)

Abstract

Jung's (1969) concept of imago suggests that inner representations of our objects can often take on a mythic quality. Woven together from subjective experience, sociocultural influence and archetypal forces, the imago can often become more powerful than the real person it represents. In the work of psychotherapy, it is often the patient's imago that is reimagined, as memory is interrogated and reintegrated.

Led by a curiosity about how my psychotherapy journey has changed my relationship with my father, I embark on a heuristic journey to confront my internal representation of him, created through scraps of subjectivity and patched over in the absence of knowledge. Following the heuristic phases outlined by Moustakas, I call on poetry, research, archetype, and myth in order to deconstruct and remake the image of the man, wondering about the ways in which psychotherapy can facilitate such an odyssey.

Comparing psychotherapy to heurism, the research promotes therapy as a creative act of imago rewriting, a rite of passage between father and son, and the inheritance and repair of a transgenerational narrative. Seen through a mythic, archetypal lens, the implications of psychotherapy as a vicarious, transgenerational act of recreation continues to complicate Western ideas of the individual as an autonomous unit. Ultimately, the mythic quest to re-write the imago in therapy is not just the reimagining of a thing, but a powerful re-composing of a transgenerational relationship.

Attestation of authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly acknowledged), nor used artificial intelligence tools or generative artificial intelligence tools (unless it is clearly stated, and referenced, along with the purpose of use), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

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To L, without whom none of this would be possible.
To my family, who are generous with their pride.

To my father.

A note on images

To reflect the process of imago, the included images of my father are artificial composites. They were created by feeding an original photo of him into the generative AI programme Midjourney and asking it to remake the image according to key words from each accompanying illumination. They are computer-generated imagoes.

One: Introduction | Initial engagement

Heuristic enquiry begins as many odysseys do, with the call of a muse. The founder of heuristic research, Clark Moustakas (1990) terms this invocation an initial engagement with the topic of inquiry. It is an embryonic question that demands an answer, often a dissonant siren song that draws us to a necessary deconstruction. While greater context about the heuristic process will follow, this introduction traces the first steps into a necessary unknowing, an unformed curiosity that the heuristic process seeks to contextualise into a research question.

> Of all the imagos of a childhood… none is more important for a youth or a man than that of his father.
>
> Freud (1914/1964, p. 243)

A living eulogy

During my graduate diploma in psychotherapy studies we created genograms. Tracing arterial lines through generations, we plotted out psychic inheritances and biological legacies. I remember staring bereft at my father's side of the genogram, a stump of a thing fading into blankness just above his mother, a white space where his father's side should be. In my accompanying write-up, I confessed *I barely know enough about my father to cobble together a decent eulogy.*

This thought damned me. This stoic, staid man was still a mystery to me. Meditating on the final days of his father rendered incommunicative by illness, Jim Dameron (2015) is left to simply describe "an ordinary guy full of small faults and quiet joys. Just a father." (p. 127). I wanted to be able to say so much more about my dad. I felt the son's burden of ignorance as described by Levant (1996), a sense that perhaps I had never really known my father. At times this felt like Herzog's (2001) father hunger: 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 at the reality of missing years of his son's life due to a protection order. Driving home I pulled my car over and wept in a cul-de-sac, wondering if my father had ever fought for me. On the other hand, I felt a kind of terror. Perhaps it is best *not* to know. Perhaps all I would find is spectres and skeletons. It was the unbearable weight of family secrets that led Oedipus to gauge out his own eyes, choosing blindness over knowledge. I read volumes written by male psychoanalysts who waited to eulogise their fathers in death, all the while wondering if exhumation is preferable to interrogating the living.

One weekend I finally bit the bullet. With an airplane hangar in the pit of my stomach, I drove downcountry to talk to my father. I fumbled through opening gambits: his childhood dreams, the father he never knew, memories of his hometown of Ramsgate. With a wordless shrug, he left the room, returning with an age-worn brown Corolla briefcase. It was a slim, boxy thing, the stuff of TV spies and insurance salesmen. Keying in a code on the brass number lock, he opened the case and slid it towards me. I found myself staring at my father's life, collected in scraps and souvenirs. Torn ticket stubs from a long-defunct cinema. Yellowed theatre programmes. Fraying sepia photos of serious-looking men in uniform. Certificates of births, deaths, and marriages. Newspaper articles annotated by his immaculate, uppercase handwriting. Birthday letters my siblings and I had written him as kids. A pocket atlas of the world, marked with his travels as a seaman in the English merchant navy. 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

> The figure of my father looms large in my imagination.
>
> \- Franzen (1988, p. 39)

This is not the story of my father. Rather, it is a meditation on the image of him. Jung's (1969) imago theory suggests our internal objects are patchworks of subjective experience and unconscious archetypes. These interior psychic images are often projected upon the actual person, rendering them near-mythical (Jung et al., 2014). This is particularly true of parents, the totemic figures of our early development. Freud's (1920/1989) Oedipus complex centred around the child's fantasied father and mother, while Klein (1932) wrote of the myriad relational effects of the child's internalised father. Corneau (1991) describes the father imago as the "sum total of everything that a child has experienced in relation to the paternal order" (p. 44). In the work of therapy, it is often our imagoes which are wrested and reformed, projected and metabolised.

Considering my father's briefcase, I think of the ways in which I have built my internal image of him; a representation whose force is its own reality (Baldwin, 1962). An *Imago Paterna*, constructed from experience, atom and archetype. While I may not know much of the man objectively, he looms large internally, mythic in constructed memory. *Ceci n'est pas un homme – this is not a man.* Archetypal psychologist James Hillman (1983) would situate my father in *Memoria*, the theatre of internal images we call memory, imagination, the unconscious. In this place our imagoes are distorted and

remade by time and phantasy. According to Hillman, there are many entryways to these memorial halls, including the poet's notebook and the internal odyssey of the psychoanalytical couch.

Of course, memory is unreliable, itself just a form of reconstruction. We claim to recall in purity, but in the halls of *Memoria* we also engage in "remembering-what-never-happened" (Hillman, 1983, p. 50). My *Imago Paterna* is more commemorative legend than real person, clouded by my own perception and his historical distance. I engage in *mythopoiesis*; remembering as re-creation. An ethical consideration of my father necessitates this distinction. The heuristic journey is one into the self, into a truth I can only call subjective. But that truth shares borders with that of others. Levinas (1994) reminds us that "the totality of the true is constituted from the contribution of multiple people" (p. 133). My perception of my father, expressed through my *Imago Paterna* is not the totality of him, it is simply my contribution. My disclaimer is that my truth may not even be absolutely true. It is, as Kierkegaard saw it, a "truth which is true for me" (Bretall, 1946, p. 5). As with Rogers' (1951) internal frame of reference, this truth must be honoured before it is transformed. In its complexity, the mandala is viewed from all angles, each view offering a piece of the whole.

Remaking the imago

From the Latin *imago* we extrapolate *image* and *imagine*; a mimesis, both creation and process. The old French *imagene* and *imaginem* channel similar ideas; that of a reflection - but also of phantoms and apparitions. In a poignant epitaph, essayist Erica Hunt (2015) tries to remember her father, instead finding herself tracing the uncertain edges of a spectre, a "man of diffuse themes bundled by character...constrained by the name 'Father'" (p. 98). She wanders the halls of *Memoria* like the mythic Telemachus, trying to catch a glimpse of his ever-elusive father Odysseus. This is all we can ever do. Even when close to the subject in the real, we know there is no singular truth, only a thousand interpretations (Hillman, 1978).

The first iteration of my research question assumed an objective version of my father, someone easily traced and biographed. I was led by a growing curiosity about the changes I had seen in him during my psychotherapy journey. It was as if there was something vicarious about my self-discovery; as I drew close to myself, he seemed to draw closer to me. Rilke's (1981) poem *Somewhere to the East There's a Church* became totemic:

> Sometimes a man rises from the supper table
> and goes outside. And he keeps on going
> because somewhere to the east there's a church.
> His children bless his name as if he were dead.

> Another man stays at home until he dies,
> stays with plates and glasses.
> So then it is his children who go out
> into the world, seeking the church that he forgot.

I imagined my work as his journey *in vicem*. I thought I was finally seeking the church – the destiny, the purpose, the vitality – he had lost. I eventually recognised the naiveté of this position. It made me the writer of some apocryphal Oedipal narrative, a heroic son commandeering a father's unlived life. The son's wish to restore the father is a holy quest, but it often betrays a fundamentally selfish need to rediscover their own life (Real, 1997).

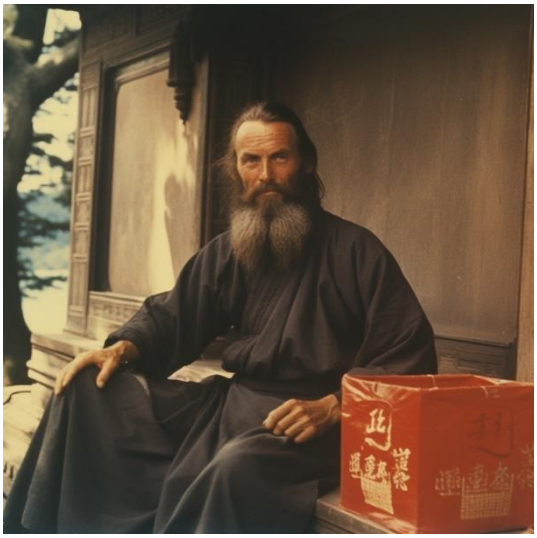
I cannot write my father's story. It would be a fiction based on a spectre, the biography of a construct. He shrugs at me over a briefcase of fragments pleading retrograde amnesia. He may have visited churches in a former life, but where is the proof? It is true that psychotherapy is changing my father, but not in the ways that I originally thought. As with all our significant objects, our internal lens becomes a kind of truth unto itself – this is the effigy of the real that must be interrogated and reimagined. As the apostle Paul writes, we see through a glass darkly, eventually coming to know as we are known. This implicates a reciprocal act. Perhaps the father within me is silent because no-one ever asked him to speak. Perhaps he is a stranger because he was never fully seen by an other. Perhaps we were meant to find the church together. My *Imago Paterna* suffers from a scaffold of assumptions on the part of its architect. It is this scaffolding that psychotherapy aims to reassess. The question then is not how psychotherapy can change my father, but how it can help me recreate my image of him.

Can psychotherapy help a son reimagine the father? Remaking that myth has the power to reshape reality.

Psychotherapy and the imago

Reinterpretation is central to psychotherapy, a process which has been described as mythmaking (Hillman, 1983), historical re-writing (Freeman, 2016), and psychic exegesis (Rotenberg, 2018). As we enter the therapeutic work, all that we thought was canon becomes grist, from memorial dogma to the shape of our internal objects. Re-imagining and restructuring the imago are key tenets of the eponymous imago therapy technique founded by Hendrix and LaKelly Hunt (1988). In this way, psychotherapy can facilitate a necessary confrontation with the archetypal father within (Campbell, 1981). This is the internal reconciliation described by Vogt and Sirridge (1991) as a therapeutic totality of "honor, consciousness, pleasure, enjoyment, meaning, and self-understanding" (p. 205). This journey back to the father within is the first step towards a generative masculinity (Guarnaschelli, 1994) and a move from inner deadness to vitality (Levinson, 1979; Seligman, 1982).

Loewald (1960) called psychotherapy an occultic act, the turning of ghosts into ancestors - the same can be said of remaking the imago, transforming shadow and spectre to sentinel through the alchemy of therapeutic insight.



Illumination I | Silence

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 an economist. He is Hermes the diplomat.

Two: Method/ology

Marrying existentialism and psychology (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985), heuristic enquiry asks the researcher to inhabit their topic of enquiry. Their research tool becomes a self-disclosure which hopes to incite a similar revelation in others. Outlining engagement with the phases and processes of heuristic enquiry, this chapter will show how heurism transcends the safety of distance, promoting self-dialogue with the *Imago Paterna*.

On distance

In Aesop's (1939) classic fable *The Kid and the Wolf*, a cocky young goat goads a wolf from the safety of a thatched roof. Smiling coyly, the wolf replies, "it is easy to be brave from a safe distance."

When I considered studying my relationship with my father, I was tempted to do so from a safe distance, heading to the literature to study the general phenomenon of father-son connections. This is the realm of the objectivist, who wields positivist dogma (Zyphur & Pierides, 2020) from an academic detachment. Intuitively, I realised the resistance in this position, a safe vantage point that allowed me to sidestep introspection and involvement. I wondered with my therapist about my ambivalence towards a deep *knowing* of my father and, by extension, myself. This was a position without bravery, a desire to, as David Whyte (2015) says, study the ocean from the safety of a cliff, to avoid truth by winking at platitudes. There was a lack of conviction to this position, ultimately an avoidance of pain.

I needed to close the distance.

Terra incognita: The heuristic leap into self

> [T]here is a terra incognita that may be far more available for human inquiry than any of these [external] places. This final frontier, I propose, is the interiority of our experience.
>
> - Sela-Smith (2002, p. 54)

> There is no theory that is not a fragment, carefully prepared, of some autobiography.
>
> - Valéry (1957)

I return to my initial disturbance. *I barely know enough about my father to cobble together a decent eulogy.* Levant (1996) 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 (p. 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 all our parents fuck us up (Larkin, 2001).

But this kind of knowing is a distance unto itself. In her description of heuristic inquiry 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 a patient who dryly recounts narrative details without affect. We do this because, while the truth may be ubiquitous, the subjective experience is far from it. It is the same with our imagoes; in one sense they are universal, carved from collective archetype 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.

Popularised by Moustakas (1990), heuristic enquiry locates the phenomenon in human experience; it is existential philosophy as much as psychology (Douglass & 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, p. 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" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 15) into the personal. I imagine this is what Rilke (1929/1992) 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" (p. 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

> Go into yourself. Find out the reason that commands you to write.
>
> \- Rilke (1929/1992, p. 11)

Pioneered by Moustakas (1990), heuristic research exemplifies Rogers' (1961) claim that "*what is most personal is most general*" (p. 26). Fittingly, the genesis of the approach came from Moustakas' desire to understand a personal family crisis which propelled him into an overwhelming loneliness (Moustakas, 1961). There was no academic distance from this experience, so autobiography became his vehicle of discovery. A participant in the human condition, he knew that his personal encounter could speak to universal themes.

Explicating this approach, Moustakas used the Greek word *heuriskein*, meaning to discover or to find. This discovery was an internal search, exploring "the nature of problem or phenomenon as it exists in human experience" (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985, p. 84). The researcher's self is perpetually present as an existential explorer. This requires embracing the subjective realm, the stuff of social constructivism and multiplicities of meaning (Sultan, 2019). Tudor (2022) notes that heuristic research marries traditions of philosophy and psychology including existentialism, phenomenology, and humanism. As a methodology it is a chimera of many parts, borrowing from Maslow's (1956) self-actualisation, Jourard's (1968) self-disclosure, Buber's (1923/2013) dialogue, Bridgman's (1950) subjective-objective truth, and Rogers' (1969) human science.

Souba (2011) suggests that the heuristic process is one of "languaging the unknown" (p. 53). In many ways, the language of heuristics itself illuminates its crucial differences from dominant empirical approaches: Tudor (2023) outlines its vernacular: *engaged, open, creative, improvised, emergent, uncertain*. These words are not those of the detached, clinical observer. Moustakas (1990) himself describes the heuristic journey in near-literary terms as an odyssey into uncharted territory, a call to "let go of the known and swim in an unknown current" (p. 13). Like Rilke, he hears the beckoning of an internal command.

In heurism Moustakas essentially theorises introspection, creating a roadmap for his own dark night of the soul. For Sultan (2019), our lives are a constant heuresis, from our first preverbal fumblings to this present moment. We ceaselessly make sense of the world around us. Heuristic enquiry takes this experience and makes it cohesive through the tools of research, including flexible, systematic enquiry, reflexive self-dialogue, intersubjectivity, and integration. It is a creative act that synthesises a panoply of data in the same way as psychotherapy sees every utterance as "grist for the mill" (Yalom, 2002).

In his original project on loneliness, Moustakas found himself delving into a vast non-empirical cache, including poetry and lyric, as well as artifacts like journals, and artwork. Intuition was his North star, a felt sense of "when to continue to dwell and when...to leave home" (Tudor, 2022, p. 67). 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, p. 98). You follow the muse to "the place where things matter" (Sultan, 2019, p. 79). As Tudor (2022, 2023) notes, this approach has structural implications for research; data collection becomes an intuitive immersion in the subject, while the usual rigour of literature reviews is best re-conceptualised as a literature *view*, not an exhaustive review as much as the researcher calling out to the literature and seeing what resonates (Chue, 2021). The nonlinearity of this approach means that rather than include a discrete review section in this dissertation, I have instead consulted the literature throughout. This imbues the literature with animism; like Virgil guiding Aeneas with insight, the voices of the past step in and offer their wisdom, affirmation, or criticality along the way.

Heuristic enquiry is a kind of organised chaos, or in Sela-Smith's (2002) conception, a leap into a void. As I try and give shape to the research approach, my mind wanders back to my father's battered brown Corolla briefcase. You open the thing, and you are overwhelmed by experiential debris, illuminations from another life. Where do you start? Can there be a systematic sorting? A best practice for investigation? One scrap leads to a question, leads to a conversation, to a tangent. Each artifact has its own life and historical voice. The imago appears like a shattered mirror, in every piece a thousand reflections. A patient of mine dreams of a giant manor with a thousand rooms, each door waiting to be unlocked. The two of us stand at the psychic threshold of *Memoria* and I ask him the only question I can: *where shall we begin?*

Both/and

Tudor (2023) notes that there is continued debate about the philosophical basis of heuristic research, which means that its methodological basis can appear indefinite. Patton (2002) views it as a phenomenological project, while Finlay (2011) focusses on its reflexive-relational qualities. Lumma and Wegner (2021) are deliciously vague, calling heuristics an "open-ended and autobiographical process, which unfolds in a non-linear way" (p. 6). By Douglass and Moustakas' (1985) own admission, heuristics provides a conceptual framework, but "does not prescribe a methodology" (p. 42). While acknowledging a wide variety of viewpoints, many which hinge on semantics, Tudor (2023) proposes that heuristic enquiry, with its links to humanism and person-centred psychology be considered both a method and methodology, a practice influenced by many schools of thought. As a creative, constructionist practice, which borrows from everything from narrative approaches to transpersonal psychology, this synthesised stance makes most sense.

Phase and process

Moustakas (1990) outlines a roadmap for the heuristic journey comprising six phases and seven discovery processes. The phases of enquiry seldom unfold in perfect sequence. They exist as waypoints within uncharted territory (Sela-Smith, 2002). Tellingly, the phases parallel Wallas' (1976) stages of creativity. Polya (1945) recommends the heuristic researcher releases control of the grand route, instead discovering what each stage has to offer. The seven heuristic processes become the mechanisms by which we explore each phase and refine the subject of enquiry.

Moustakas' heuristic architecture is intentionally nonlinear. Structured creativity is often an oxymoron. It is research as emancipation, free from the "restraining leash of formal hypotheses, and free from external methodological structures that limit awareness" (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985, p. 44). Like Theseus navigating the labyrinth, heurism is an often-exasperating pilgrimage of left turns and circular returns. The seven processes, like Ariadne's thread, keep the explorer close to the heart of the quest. Sela-Smith (2002) suggests we surrender to the six phases, admitting that before we are found we must be lost. This evokes Stephen Levine's (1991) meditative concept of submitting to the great "don't know", the ground zero at which we abandon preconceived ideas to access tacit knowing.

The six phases will be explored in detail below, but the seven heuristic processes deserve a brief introduction:

- **Identifying with the focus of inquiry** is an inhabiting of the question (Moustakas, 1990), or as Salk (1983) puts it, an "inverted perspective". It is the opposite of scientific detachment, an imaginative *becoming of the subject* which lends itself to the phase of immersion.
- **Self-dialogue** evokes Jung's (2009) *auseinandersetzung*, a conversation between two internal objects. In this case, the conversation is between researcher and topic of enquiry, both of whom are often the same person. This requires an unrelenting honesty and disclosure with the self through the "act of making yourself manifest" (Jourard, 1971, p. 19) in the research.
- The substratum of heuristic enquiry, **tacit knowing** speaks to the subliminal realm of the unknown known (Sultan, 2019) of experience. Much like Bollas' (1987) therapeutic concept of the unthought known, tacit knowing asserts that our experience of a phenomenon, much like an imago, is created by both explicit and implicit knowledge. As a process, it asks us to think deeply about our assumptions, interrogating all the forces that conspired to create them - Polanyi (1966) calls this a dance between vagueness and sharpness of understanding. The tacit dimension honours "hunches and vague, formless insights" (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985, p. 49), the blurred edges of the problem just outside of our perception. In doing so, we plumb the full range and depth of meaning.

- **Intuition** is the bridge between the tacit and the explicit. Moustakas (1990) notes the immediacy and purity of intuition; it is a process unpolluted by logic and reasoning. This doesn't make it any less robust; while intuition is as ineffable as imagination, it requires a deep curiosity, an ability to "look and look again from clue to clue until we surmise the truth (p. 22). Even when operating within the intuitive realm of "I feel" (Sela-Smith, 2002), the researcher is forming pattern and inference, adjusting their method and moving closer to meaningful discovery.
- Meditative poet Stephen Levine (1991) poignantly describes **indwelling** as "looking inward toward the truth and the truth beneath that as well. Stopping nowhere, continuing the investigation." (p. 19). It is Moustakas' intense, unwavering interior gaze, held until truth appears. In heuristic enquiry, this means inhabiting the research question as a waking obsession, attuned to its presence in the milieu of everyday life, poetry, and conversation.
- **Focusing** is the creation of an inward space, contacting the subject through a sustained relaxed and receptive state. Much like Gendlin's (1978) original concept, the focusing process often opens the researcher to a felt sense of the topic, including the sensory realm.
- Similar to Rogers' (1951) definition, **the internal frame of reference** keeps the experiencer central to the experience. Underpinning all knowledge derived from the heuristic search is the principal question, *what does this mean to me?*

Initial engagement

Initial engagement is like the bursting of a dam or the emergence of a relentless itch. It is the beginning of a question that demands to be answered, an unquenchable *why*. In outlining the heuristic process Moustakas (1990) all but anthropomorphises 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 realise that he was a stranger to me. I had spent enough time in men's groups and with male patients to recognise the archetypal amnesic sons; men who describe their fathers in detached, monosyllabic adjectives. I wondered about our autobiographies, entire chapters cobbled together from scant traces and whiffs of formless, faceless men, more fiction than fact. I was struck by the idea that we were all comfortable with this lack, these missing pieces that could be augmented by greater heroes and cultural figures. I saw rudderless young men swarming towards icons of the modern men's movement; stern and sedate figures who told them to stand up straight, all the while thinking, *these men are looking for the discipline of their fathers*.

I was looking 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 am happy with his replacement.*

There is vast literature about the phenomenon of father-hungry sons and absent fathers (Corneau, 1991; Diamond, 2006; Herzog, 2001; Jones, 2007; Katz, 2002; Osherson, 1986; Pease, 2000; Ross, 1979; Sternbach, 1996; Trowell & Etchegoyen, 2002; Vogt & Sirridge, 1991), but keeping my enquiry at this academic level indicated a type of resistance. Dialoguing with my disturbance, I had to be honest: this was less about my relationship with my physical father than it was about my comfort with his internal effigy. I was happy to fill the gaps of my *Imago Paterna*; I was being kept alive by a fairy-tale father preserved in amber. I didn't want to know why he was so quiet and distant. I admired his mystery and aloofness, even building a life on emulating it. Interrogating my imago meant undoing myself and entering my own vulnerability. You cannot be an impartial observer when it comes to your father; at some point you end up unravelling your own DNA.

But there was an unrelenting itch. It compelled me to drive downcountry to see my father and to bring his visage into therapy. My imago was speaking to me, demanding more information, betraying its composite. It refused to be ignored. Levinas (1984) claims that to encounter the other is to become their hostage. The same can be said of the imago.

Immersion

> Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer.
>
> - Rilke (1929/1992, p. 24)

> Wait without thought, for you are not ready for thought:
> So the darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the dancing.
>
> - Eliot (1963)

Immersion is indistinguishable from obsession. Once the research question has come into view, Moustakas (1990) suggests the investigator's next step is to inhabit it. You become a slave to

immersion. It is no wonder the word itself conjures ideas of drowning or being consumed. This is what it means to live the question in every waking moment, in each thought and sensation.

This requires a single-minded kind of indwelling in preparation for illumination. In the 14th century spiritual classic *The Cloud of Unknowing*, the author describes a similar contemplative stance:

> [The] attitude must be one of longing desire and love...it will involve spiritual watchfulness, a forgetting of the past, a dedicated will, and a determination to reach out (Anonymous, 2002, p. 61).

Immersion is frequency bias. This was Moustakas' intent. In preoccupation, your subject becomes a haunting presence, like a widow's husband spied on every street corner.

Immersing myself in the *Imago Paterna* meant deconstructing it into its constituent parts. Northrop Frye (1980) argues that the original archetype is never original for long, constantly reinterpreted and transformed by culture and creativity. In this way, an imago is like the ship of Theseus, re-cladded and repaired so many times it becomes a different vessel altogether. My dialogue with the imago often took the form of my therapist's favourite Buddhist koan: *show me your original face before you were born*.

I became obsessed with my father's image. Literally. Rediscovering an old archive of digitised family photos, I pored over images of him from before my birth; grainy monochrome prints of him as a schoolboy; shirtless and resplendent in 70's-era corduroy pants; eating beans from a can in the back of a trailer-sailer. I reminded myself that my father existed before my conception of him. He prevailed in purity before I perceived him, was created before I recreated him.

Moustakas (1990) claims that illumination "opens the door to a new awareness, a modification of an old understanding, a synthesis of fragmented knowledge, or an altogether new discovery of something that has been present for some time yet beyond immediate awareness" (p. 30). Levine (1991) imagines this as a meditative process of investigating the very construct of self, right down to the molecular level of thoughts and feelings we take as self-evident. In this way, my own psychotherapy was pivotal to the immersion process. For a while my father was all I wanted to talk about in the room, my sole infatuation, a constant harbinger in my dreams. Moustakas notes a similar phenomenon in his original project on loneliness – in fact, it even became a dominant theme with his own patients. At times, my therapist's mirroring allowed me to outsource my self-dialogue, with him as a naive enquirer to my subjective truth. My therapy took on a schizophrenic quality; I often found myself asking *is this true about dad, or is this my version? Did this actually happen or did I invent it?* This

kind of insanity makes sense - after all, immersion asks us to reside between the implicit and the tacit, a place where reality is tenuous.

Incubation

Incubation is a sacred pause, where the researcher steps away from their obsessive involvement with the subject. This creates a chance for the tacit dimension to integrate new information gained during immersion (Sela-Smith, 2002). Moustakas (1990) suggests that in incubation, the researcher should become entirely detached from their question.

For a Master's student juggling academic deadlines, a caseload of patients, and a demanding placement, stepping away feels like a luxury. Moustakas is clear; heuristic research cannot be hurried by clocks and deadlines – I imagine he would add to this the spatial constraints of a full workload. In a review of 28 heuristic projects, Sela-Smith (2002) notes that the majority are not led by the process proper, but by constraints of time and structure. The implication is that, if you don't give heurism the space or time it needs, you're not doing it right.

I acknowledge this limitation. This dissertation is already bound by a word limit and institutional deadlines. But I wonder if there is an element of idealism, maybe even dogma, in Moustakas and Sela-Smith's conviction. Perhaps Taft (1933) is right when he says that the scarcity of time is fundamental to the human condition. We resist it, but we must accept it. It is the thing that fuels the constant tension in therapy between the patient of limited means who demands a quick-fix and the therapist who knows how long it takes to unravel a life.

I struggled to give incubation the time it deserved, but I also wonder if my understanding - and Moustakas' conception - of the incubation phase was a little uncreative. Moustakas defines incubation as a period, evoking visions of a linearly defined, cohesive stretch of time. Upon reflection, I realise that I experienced incubation as small moments; microcosms within the greater process:

- My therapist, an avid fan of reuniting psyche and soma, prescribed that I join a gym. While singularly focused on my body, I was surprised by how many illuminations arrived in my mind, seeming to pour out of the tacit dimension unbidden. Ironically, this daily ritual became one of the most significant contributions to this project, a moment to inhabit the process in an embodied manner.
- The weeks between my therapy sessions became incubation periods in themselves. For months I settled into a rhythm of immersing myself in my imago, journaling dreams and realisations, and digesting them with my therapist. Therapy sessions became opportunities to

shake this information out, to inhabit and interrogate it. In the week afterwards, this unearthed psychic debris would settle as I went about my life.

- Dreams became incubations. After all, what are dreams but the conscious mind stepping aside for a moment? Often, I would fall asleep, my head humming with meditations on my father – dreams would perform their overnight therapy (Walker, 2018) and I would wake with something integrated and new.

There is unity of thought about heuristic enquiry as a process that must be trusted and honoured. You surrender to the phases, allowing them to unfold in their own time. The same can be said of psychotherapy. Giving the self-search as much time as it needs produces optimal depth, but in a time-poor and attention-saturated world, the idea of an open-ended introspective pilgrimage may be untenable. In the same way as brief therapy models are now being proposed (De Shazer et al., 1986), there may be scope to explore heuresis as a micro-process. It occurs to me that many of the components of heuristic enquiry reside in the arc of a therapy session, in the ebb and flow of mindfulness meditation, a psilocybin ceremony, or the quietude of a 10-day vipassana retreat. Granted, these are shallowed by their restrictions, but deserve consideration.

Illumination

> Memory did not return to Jon, it rolled over him, gathering him up in a torrential flood.
>
> - Real (1997)

Illumination 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) conceptualises 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. While Moustakas originally conceptualised illumination as a defined phase, others doubt the linearity of such a spontaneous force. Sela-Smith (2002) describes illumination as something that can't be planned, taking place in moments and waves of awareness. Tudor (2023) agrees: illuminations can't be programmed conveniently between phases, they are "aha" moments that arrive on their own schedule throughout the research. Writing about the meditative process, Levine (1991) puts it this way:

> Images arise. Forgotten fragrances. Emotional residues. Incessant change...a moment of smelling, changing into a moment of tasting, dissolving into a moment of memory, dissolving to judgement, to wonder, thought, desire, feeling (p. 79).

My *Imago Paterna* revealed itself in transcendent fits and starts, like sprites in a thunderstorm. Memories arrived spontaneously, insistently. Dreams were scrawled down by the light of a bedside lamp. More times than I care to admit, I scrambled to write down thoughts on my phone while driving for fear of losing them. As I sat with patients, my father strolled into the room unbidden like one of Scrooge's ghosts. Thinking of Bion (1988), I politely asked him to wait outside. I was assailed by psychic detritus, the ghosts of *Memoria*.

Illumination feels like the opening of Pandora's box. Deep from within the tacit realm arises a chaotic attractor (Abraham, 1989), a mythic structure that "pulls to it images, beliefs, values, priorities, memories, and emotions" (Sela-Smith, 2002, p. 75). The process finds a corollary in the therapeutic concept of reverie, an intentional space from which insights appear.

Explication

It is easy to think of the explication phase in terms paralleling empirical approaches. This is the data. These are the findings and the discussion. However, Moustakas (1990) makes it clear that, even when themes have emerged, the heuristic process continues – whatever has emerged into consciousness demands more self-dialogue. The questions inherent in explication are *what is this saying about my experience? How do I make sense of this?* In the explication phase, the researcher continues to dwell within the information, self-disclosing their location in the themes. Again, it must be personal before it is universal. This requires attending to awareness, judgements and beliefs, a kind of dialoguing with the data (Tudor, 2023).

Creative synthesis

Much like the contents of my father's briefcase, the material that heuristic enquiry unearths can appear like a psychic salmagundi. This is to be expected from a process that finds us buried in the stuff of poetry, mythology, and dreams. This untamed data will not accede to dry, clinical presentation. Sela-Smith (2002) recommends that, when it comes to synthesising heuristic data, the possibilities are endless, taking the form of music, dance, artwork, even a humble dissertation – the most important thing is that the writer finds a medium which honours their experience. I have these 10,000 words – and words seem fitting. My father has always been a lexophile, his head buried in a book or crossword. Like me, nothing jazzes him more than learning an obscure word for a party favour. A well-placed idiom is his weapon of choice.

A note on resistance

In her critique of his method, Sela-Smith (2002) suggests that, when faced with overwhelming pain inherent in his self-study of loneliness, Moustakas engages in a kind of resistance, moving from the position of *feeler* to *observer of feeling*. This represents a pollution of the process by way of "denial, projection, or incomplete search" (p. 79). The implication is that Moustakas briefly steps outside of the phenomenon, taking comfort in the censorship of distance. Hillman (1983) suggests that a similar resistance can exist in psychotherapy. Undertaking the therapeutic task of remaking our imagoes, we can "forget, distort, conceal in order to retain the first version" (p. 19). This avoidance makes sense: confronting the imago moves us from *terra firma* to *terra mollis*, the unconscious realm of the repressed and rejected (Sela-Smith, 2002). It often means killing our heroes.

As much as I gave myself to heuristic immersion, I also resisted it. My free-fall surrender (Moustakas, 1990) was more of a controlled descent. This was most evident in the way that I dealt with illuminations as they arrived. I recalled fond memories of my father, receiving them like gifts; his heroism, his humour, the rough-hewn hands that betrayed his protestant work ethic. I dusted these off, refixing them in the hallways of *Memoria*. But the flow of immersion is non-partisan. All doors open in unison. I also remembered his hair-trigger temper, the harshness of his discipline, his inability to find the words of affirmation I so desperately needed. I observed myself eschewing these thoughts, resistant to ambivalence.

As I investigated this resistance, I remembered a childhood steeped in the fifth commandment, exhorting children to honour their father and mother, equating this honour with a long life. To speak ill of my father was to desecrate the sacrosanct, to shorten my life - perhaps even assassinate his. Imbuing the imago with this kind of existential power has precedent. Observing the fatherless children of Hamstead nurseries, Anna Freud (1973) found that orphaned boys possessed an idealised paternal image that repressed any negative affect; preserving a positive imago in psychological amber kept them alive.

Meeting this resistance was an insight unto itself, revealing just how heavily edited my *Imago Paterna* was, how dangerous it felt to acknowledge the man – and by extension, myself - as the two-headed *Orthrus*, shaped by the forces of both love and hate.

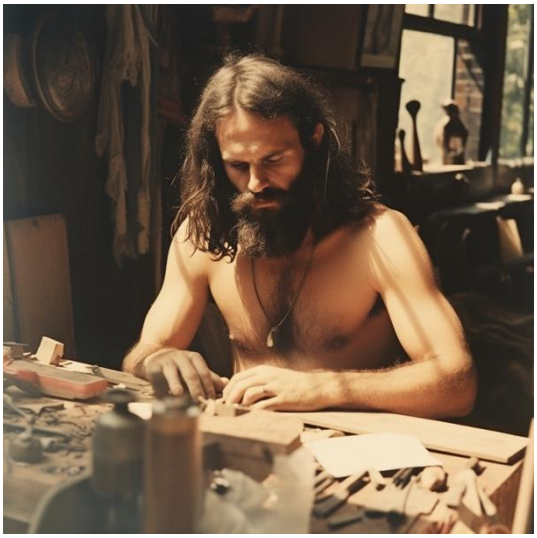
The problem with anamorphosis

Aside from the temporal limitations of heuristic research, I wonder if another limitation of the self-search is its definition of self. There is a privileging of the 'I' in heuristic search, an idea that channels monomyth. Like Campbell's (1949/1993) hero's journey, the heuristic researcher tends to be a man on a mission alone, not unlike Rilke's pilgrim. At times, this idea can parallel the anamorphosis of

Eurocentric psychotherapy, a one-eyed view of individualism and the psyche as separate from a greater cosmos. As Bond and Christensen (2021) point out, monomyth promotes a patriarch who abandons his community in order to fulfil unique heroics alone. Sure, he returns home, but how much of his solitary journey translates?

I am the expert of my subjective experience, but I cannot view the imago as separate from the archetypal and social structures that shaped it. Rewriting my story in therapy, I partake in a generational re-telling. The transformative knowledge Moustakas (1990) speaks of cannot be hoarded; it must be somehow returned to the circle, in the same way as research is bound by beneficence.

But the knowledge may still be monomythic. The story of an anamorphic self; a white self, a male self, one detached from culture by colonial severance. I worry about repeating the sins of Campbell (1949/1993), who borrowed from cultural myth without regard for theology or context. I worry about what I am bringing home.



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.

Three: Explications

Eventually, heurism's chaos theory gives way to tessellation; 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, p. 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. An initial 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.

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.

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, the imago becomes as strong as fact.

To admit that I don't know my father is one thing. Realising 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 in order 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 come from the television. Chivalrous and resourceful like MacGyver (Winkler & Rich, 1985-1992), with the barrel-chested machismo of David Hasselhoff (Berk et al., 1989-2001), and the mischievous savvy of Maxwell Smart (Stern & Sultan, 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" (p. 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 (p. 19).

In this sense, psychotherapy is a kind of autobiographical regression, re-reading 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 in order 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 idealised it without ever questioning its porosity. I see now that there is so much that is tacit about silence, in the same way as Shapiro (1985) imagines his father's muteness as "a temptation to rage and an opportunity to speak" (p. 96).

This realisation 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 realisation 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 baptised. 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?
>
> - Rosenfeld (1992, p. 757)

Rilke's (1929/1992) poem *Somewhere to the East There's a Church* 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, p. 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 (2002) equates the heuristic journey with that of Christ retreating into the desert for 40 days, where he "confronted himself, his feelings, his beliefs, and his myths." (p. 82-83). The same can be said of psychotherapy, a kind of rite where the patient retreats into their vast interior to confront their imagoes including not only their potential selves, but the fathers who didn't initiate them. Internal family systems therapy promotes a reformational encounter with a cast of internal objects (Schwartz & Sweezy, 2020), while depth psychology presents a mythic quest towards psychical archetypes (Hillman, 1975). Chairwork, a mainstay of gestalt and psychodrama, facilitates an imaginal encounter not only with parts of the self, but internalised figures (Kellogg & 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 imago 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 lack? 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 realised 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 paralysed 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 found 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 (p. 51).

My call to initiation demanded Loewald's (2000) *vatertötung* (patricide), a kind of death to my safe and familiar imago. 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 memorialising grief - even psychoanalysis has its own mythology around hair cutting, which 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 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 I, 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 15. One day, in passing, he mentioned to my brothers and I that he had sailed through the Bermuda Triangle three times. This became a singular mythology, whispered with awe amongst 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 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 imago form. 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. Mātauranga Māori achieves this through *whakapapa*, the recognition of "genealogical descent of all living things from God to the present time" (Barlow, 1994, p. 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 (1983) 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 (p. 55).

This explains the un-ease 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?

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. 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 (1997) describes therapeutic healing as “a spiritual gift to those who came before” (p. 209). Just like ripples tear their way through space time, one psyche can reach through aeons 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 – Symington’s (1983) long-suppressed lifegiver. The lifegiver 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, re-writing the story of us; of those who came before, and those yet to follow.

Illumination VI | 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 jeweller'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; Johnny 5 from *Short Circuit*, Doc Brown's DeLorean.

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

Four: Conclusion | All circles begin with an end

Implications/Invocations

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*" (p. 26). If we see the work as transpersonal, multi-generational 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, para. 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 Levinas' (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, p. 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 imago 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, para. 20).

The modern imago

Heuristic research invokes Clio, the goddess of memory and the muse of creativity. When she is in charge, inspiration seems to come from the ether. My use of AI-generated imagoes began as a throwaway idea for creative punctuations. Upon reflection, I realise Clio was at play, creating something larger than the sum of its parts. The process of imago as virtual alchemy has potent implications for the burgeoning field of AI-assisted art therapy. Practitioners like Yoo (2022) and Vogel (2023) are pioneering new methodologies of therapeutic storytelling through AI-generated emotional imagery. Hadjipanayi et al. (2023) argue that AI could offer a co-creative partner for the

patient in art therapy, free of values or influence. As I consider the AI-generated imagoes in this project, I recognise the constituent parts of my father; his intense eyes in one, his untamed hair in another. I see the influence of my subjective memory, plugged in as prompts and influencing the final image. There is something therapeutic about seeing my father's original image transformed by my own subjective input. It is heurism's creative synthesis as art, the process of literally remaking the imago that adds a visceral dimension to the academic discussion.

Ad infinitum

In her research primer Sultan (2019) chooses the infinity symbol to represent the heuristic journey, implying a constant process of creation and recreation. 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 (1807/2019) said, the circle presupposes its end, never realising it is also a beginning. The point of the journey is in the leaving.

This project was inspired by a question prompted by an absence: *who is this man?* The heuristic journey asked me to interiorise 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 *mythopoiesis*; 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 I, one where he was confronted, reimagined, and inhabited. Yet this is far from the end of the quest. Contrary to the thinking of the individualised West, the fabric we weave is *intra-actional*, atomised through generations. In remaking my imago, I also touch my father's, through psychic inheritance and empathy. The poets, heuristic searchers and the psychomythologians conceptualise 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, who I am meeting again.

And again.

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