



Birth-story and the *Unbearable age*.

This dissertation is submitted by Elen Bowman (2205832) to the University of Wales Trinity St David's partial fulfilment of the requirement for a Master's in Psychotherapeutic practice: Humanistic, under the supervision of Doctor Beverly Cole.

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Abstract

Currently there is a wealth of information about birth stories by mothers charting the experience of birth, but a marked lack of research of the birth-story's influence on the recipient. A birth-story has potency when told by a significant adult, intensifying our identification with it and can often be a forerunner of latent psychology within the family. Such a story for instance, can highlight themes rooted in the parent's unconscious as well as contribute to the recipient's lived experience. A heuristic exploration affords an opportunity for an in-depth personal study of the phenomenon. This detailed and explicit work explores how a birth-story, told by my mother during adolescence, contributed to my perception of self and to my relationship with my father with far reaching consequences. The main conclusion of this research considers the role a birth-story takes in forming identity, the power and mythic resonance of its telling on an adolescent mind and, its potential as an aid to explore and illuminate its influences on presenting issues in the therapy hour. Therefore, recommendations for practice suggests that the birth-story can provide a map from which to navigate impressions and questions to relevant areas of therapeutic exploration.

Keywords: Heuristic study, Birth-story, Avoidant attachment, Adolescence, Ancestral trauma, Cults, Narrative identity, Workaholism.

Declaration

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

Signed: Elen Bowman (signed)

Date: 27/06/2025

Statement 1

This dissertation is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters in Psychotherapeutic Practice: Humanistic.

Signed: Elen Bowman (signed)

Date: 27/06/2025

Statement 2

This dissertation is the result of my own independent work / investigation, except where otherwise stated.

Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes giving explicit references. A reference list is appended.

Signed: Elen Bowman (signed)

Date: 27/06/2025

AI Acknowledgement

I acknowledge the use of SCISPACE on 26/09/24 to research this dissertation. I used the single prompt:

1. How do birth stories affect child development.

I confirm that I have not presented any AI generated text as my own work. I confirm I have copies of my drafts, notes, and other resources I used before, and after the use of AI tools which I may be asked to provide in evidence.

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“The child is not a blank slate that can be written on. The child is the slate, the chalk and the person”

(Belsky et al., 2020, p.42)

“I feel very strongly that I am under the influence of things or questions which were left incomplete and unanswered by my parents and grandparents and more distant ancestors. It often seems as if there were an impersonal karma within a family, which is passed on from parents to children. It has always seemed to me that I had to ...complete, or perhaps continue, things which previous ages had left unfinished”

(Jung, 1964, p. 233-234.)

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

According to Ogden and Syder (2022) quantitative research shows how the impactful events of childbirth can affect health and experiences, and stories about the experience of giving birth are well documented. However, few academics have researched this narrative field from the perspective of the child, and evidence is needed about the effects of hearing and processing a birth-story, from infant to adulthood (Ogden and Syder, 2022; Andrews et al., 2015). The fact that birth stories contain such significant personal information but cannot be recalled by the person puts them at the acute junction of autobiography and biography. Andrews et al. (2015), describe it as a means of anchoring the person's life story which has shown repeatedly to unearth important elements of identity (Baerger and McAdams, 1999, McAdams, 1985, McAdams, 2001). McAdams (2019) states that, although "Life stories" usually stem from facts, people will naturally construe and appropriate them in a way that make sense subjectively, striving to make life more meaningful, which becomes especially so during adolescence when our life narrative and who we hope to become, begins its formation (McAdams and McLean, 2013). As a baby is introduced to the world, a birth-story is created and given meaning by the teller, reflecting their values, culture, and assumptions (Reese and Neha, 2015). It can signal to the child the constraints of their identity, who they are to become according to the care givers beliefs and attachment style, creating significant implications for the individuals subsequent relations in life (Dobrich, 2022). Ogden and Syder (2022) make a call for research that can attempt to convey the effects of more regular day-to-day birth stories. To this end, the birth-story was conveyed during adolescence as a joke by my mother and its

sentiments would always provoke laughter. The story provided evidence of my relationship with my father at that time, the echoes of which transpired to affect my identity and life decisions in profound ways such as an extreme cult training, a challenging career, the decision to adopt followed by the challenge of being a mother on a road less travelled. The central aim of this heuristic qualitative work will be to examine the potential of the birth-story as a piece of evidence as well as a source of mythic resonance to assist the client to recognise or understand underlying themes and forces still active in past and present chapters of their lives. Elevated as a significant area of questioning, this work proposes that the birth-story can provide a rich seam of information, which the client and therapist can draw from, to help guide the change process.

Research Question

How can a birth-story, and the era in which it was told, as well as the meaning ascribed to it, affect a person's individuation?

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

According to Ogden and Syder (2022) there is a dearth of evidence about how individuals process birth stories told to them. Their research presents a qualitative review involving ten participants yielding three main themes about how the story formed their feeling of self, how it changed their perception of their relationship with family and how it prompted a prospect of parenting in the future. Also, importantly, it was found how humour can soften the story's impact. Ogden and Syder state -

“this can mostly negate any negative content of the story and ensure that even the most frightening events can become positive influences...if they are told about in a positive way” (2022.n.d).

Research shows that stories can model how we create an understanding of the world and how we hear a story depends on the storyteller and their role in a person's life (Haven, 2007; Hoeken et al., 2016). Even difficult events can be framed in a more encouraging way when related supportively (Ogden and Syder, 2022). Dobrich (2022) states that children often can oblige subconscious constructs communicated by the parent whether it be fantasy or real experiences. Therefore, the information a client will have absorbed about their birth-story could supply an impression of the parent's subconscious thinking about the birth, possibly assisting the unfolding therapeutic journey in understanding life patterns and themes in the person's life (Bromberg, 1996;

Dobrich, 2021; Stern, 2010). The child's birth marks a new beginning which calls upon the parent's dynamic participation and can also highlight if this has been more absent. In this way, the birth-story can be used as a 'trailer for relational expectancies yet to be lived' (Dobrich, 2022). Upon reflection on Ogden and Syder's findings, this literature review, explores research areas based on my journal entries, inspired by the research question of how a birth-story told to me during adolescent may have affected my individuation process.

Avoidant Attachment – I first learnt of my birth-story when my relationship with my father had begun to deteriorate during adolescence. In consideration of this time of conflict, the birth-story therefore was perceived as evidence that I was a disappointment to him in not being born a boy. This is termed as gender disappointment (Hendl and Browne, 2020). Through diary entries, thematic analysis revealed that my father's avoidant attachment style exacerbated my negative sense of self. Cundy (2019) describes this attachment style as a need to avoid intimacy as well as repressing any needs, feelings and memories that can arise for the person and signals a deep wound within. An avoidant person will be used to containing their true feelings from others, which in the long-term will also result in hiding emotions from themselves (Cundy, 2019). Schwartz (2021) explores how absence created by an avoidant father, can be a painful and unrequited love story between father and daughter, which becomes associated with sadness, yearning, frustration, and rage affecting body and mind. Schwartz states that,

“The father is supposed to foster emotional life and value but does not. What the daughter gets instead of love is emptiness which she can neither securely attach to nor separate from. This is often accompanied by masochistic and unloving attitudes, mostly turned onto herself. The result is confusion and denial of autonomy. She is, in effect, imprisoned with the absent father and in this place remains unconscious.” (Schwartz, 2021, p.2).

The ‘dead father effect’ (Kohon, 1999, p. 54) coined by the French psychoanalyst, Andrey Green, can be so difficult that the daughter’s solution is to forget in order to survive. However, a chronic feeling of anxiety often accompanies her during her life journey. By being absent the father compromises the daughter’s ease, expression, and confidence in the world. His unconscious taking of her energy and focus results on a daughter who may not have enough space for interpretation and objectivity. This relationship of yearning keeps the daughter psychologically chained so that she is unable to discover her passion in life, and feels unrequited, frustrated and alone and Schwartz emphasises the importance of grieving this loss of connection with a father (2021). Studies by Gillath et al. (2019) utilising experimental and interactional methods, revealed that adults who felt unwanted/unplanned scored highly with anxiety and unwanted individuals also experienced increased avoidant attachment scores than unplanned participants. The results propose that the avoidantly attached will attempt to cope with anxiety and threat by repressing it to cope with distress (Mikulincer and Shaver, 2002) and this can lead to a lack of value for relationships. When someone has a feeling of

being unwanted, it can follow that they do not feel the need for closeness with others, growing more avoidant and shrinking from contact with family. The review encourages therapists therefore to consider the client's birth situation as a valid line of exploration, providing a probable indicator of the person's attachment status.

The Adolescent individuation process - Erik Erikson's findings defined adolescence as a crisis between needing to sort out the dilemma of identity and role confusion (Erikson, 1968). When I learnt the details of my birth-story my individuation process had already been influenced by a strong urge to rebel against education, due to the fear of being perceived as a failure in my father's eyes. Hearing the story therefore provided the evidence I needed to feel vindicated to defend my self-worth. Frankel (2023) argues that adolescence can be one of turbulence and suffering. Freud et al., (1958) stated that it is the adolescent's need for defence to cope with the strong urges of psychological forces that can blight the psyche at this stage. The disturbance and crisis can be understood as methods for the adolescent to defend oneself. However, Winnicott offers a different angle (1965), and interprets the adolescent's urge to hide away to create a protective shield, enabling a safer place for their individuation exploration. Jung (C.W. 1953) clearly was of the belief that a child is not born a blank slate, but rather a 'sharply defined individual entity' (C.W. 1953, p. 9, para.151). However, he also writes about how the unconscious mind of the parent can impress upon the child; 'the more sensitive and impressionable the child; the deeper the impression'(C.W. 1953,p.2, para 1007). Child therapist Frances Wickes (1927) describes how the family status

quo shifts when a child becomes an adolescent. Puberty can stir up the order of things marking a big change in the parental role, and the child's experience of this can be highly dependent on the parent's response. This is also fuelled by what Jung claims to be an outburst of sexual development (C.W. 1953, p.8, para. 756). This era, titled by Jung as the 'Unbearable age', can create resentment in the child's unconscious, and once provoked, the exasperated pubescent will rail against the parent's wishes. Jung's distinctive rationale about adolescence is that individuation is, at the root, a 'process of differentiation' (C.W. 1953, p.6, para.757) focused on the need to develop the personality. Part of this differentiation process is the adolescent's ability to doubt and challenge the 'collective ideals' of their times and explore the shadow aspect of society's sacred cows (Frankel, 2023). In this period of change from childhood to adulthood, Guggenbühl-Craig (1971) asserts that although the adolescent may follow destructive paths, her fate is determined by her guardians as her tools or weapons are largely supplied by them, as they were once adolescents themselves. To aid healthy psychological development, the adolescent needs to journey through an era of disapproval and disruption so she can prepare and fertilize the inherited values of her parents or form her own. In so doing the adolescent metaphorically is required to dance with the devil to experience destructiveness, to battle through to freedom. Guggenbühl-Craig states that this process is entirely unique to the adolescent and does not feature in the child phase, as the frustrated toddler cannot have the freedom to act out their urges. The teenager 'must have contact with the devil but they must on no account identify with him' (p.118). Accepting, if not honouring, the adolescent's need for an imaginal meeting with the devil, can offer a solution to reduce the attraction

of living the need (Frankel, 2023). A transversal study by Mendo-Lázaro et al. (2019) show how the effects of rejection or acceptance by parents can affect stability during early to mid-adolescence and they report a connection between family dynamics and the adolescent's ability to adjust emotionally (Estévez, Musitu and Herrero, 2005). They find a definite association between emotional and social adjustment and paternal criticism regarding the child's upbringing. The conclusions corroborate research that bear a connection between authoritarian or neglectful parenting and emotional instability in the child, bearing the hallmark of a lack of affection and communication as well as a pattern of internalizing issues (Muris et al., 2004). Therefore, there is a need for acceptance by parents as the adolescent is experiencing personality development, and they will seek out those with whom they can feel an emotional attachment (Rohner and Khaleque, 2012). The research also points to how changing dynamics in adolescence can result in an increase in rejection by the father and more specifically in the later stages of adolescence. Mendo-Lázaro et al. make recommendations regarding the importance of training for parents to illuminate that perhaps *their* behaviour could be the cause of the adolescents' challenges. Parenting should provide welfare and security to help guide and promote emotional balance for adolescents who can be prone to pressures of failure and difficulty. Authors of this transversal study demand that causal associations should not be made. They warn advisedly that the use of self-reports and perceptions made by children/adolescents in this research paper, as the only source of information, could heighten respondent bias (Mendo-Lázaro et al., 2019).

Ancestral Trauma - The quote by Jung at the opening of this dissertation (p.5) refers to his perception that his life was actively affected by the karma of his ancestors (Jung, 1964, p.233-234). Likewise, I perceived how ancestral events subtly featured in the birth-story, distilled within my father's proposed male name planned for me. Expert on inherited family trauma, Mark Wolynn (2017), directs us to look beyond the present psychology of an individual to consider any traumatic happenings in their family and social history. Although Wolynn's background is not scientific, he cites that research within cellular biology and epigenetics as well as developmental behaviourism demonstrates that it is necessary to investigate three generations of a person's past to enable a better understanding of any reoccurring issues. Wolynn illustrates this with his client Gretchen suffering with chronic anxiety and suicidal ideation, expressing a need to 'vaporise' and 'incinerate' herself (2017, p.20). Having worked with descendants of Holocaust survivors he enquired if her ancestors were Jewish. Gretchen remembered that her grandmother's family had suffered and died in Auschwitz, but she never spoke of it. When Wolynn talked her through this connection, the client experienced a startling physiological shift, enabling her to begin a healing process. The ground-breaking work of biologist Bruce Lipton (2000) was seminal in discovering the phenomenon of how a person's DNA can be influenced by positive or negative beliefs, emotions, and thoughts (Gustafson, 2017). Lipton proved that signals from the exterior world could reach through the membrane of a cell within a human body and had the power to switch a gene on or off, as well as effect behaviour and emotions, and that the cell's fate is controlled by the quality and condition of its environment. Discoveries about the chromosomal DNA, which supplies us with our family's

physical aspects such as hair, eye and skin colour actually only forms a mere 2 percent of the total DNA (Park, 2012) and the remaining 98% is made up of noncoding DNA which is responsible for inherited behaviour, emotion and characteristics (Vendramini, 2005). This DNA is understood to be impaired by stressors in the environment, namely low-grade nutrition, stress, and toxins (Skinner and Guerrero-Bosagna, 2014). This affected DNA helps supply important information to the foetus to prepare it for life and survive traumas that its parents has suffered. However, this can be detrimental if a baby, for instance, is reared in the middle of a war, as it may trigger a hyper-alert state and react negatively to any sounds reminiscent of such a conflict, leading to stress and disease (Rodriguez, 2015). Such adaptive shifts are activated by chemical signals in the cells which connect with the DNA and alert the cells to turn off or activate a particular gene. The sequence of the DNA is not affected but the way it communicates is impaired, due to what is termed as epigenetic tags which are enzymes that transform gene expression (Wright, 2013). An important discovery here is that these tags can show differences in how people handle stress as they develop inconsistencies in the DNA 's methylation process (Gustafson, 2017), which blocks off any proteins attaching and affecting its expression, as well as a propensity for health problems which can affect successive generations (Wolynn, 2017). Yael Danieli (Danieli and Maidan, 2023) of the International Organization for Victim Assistance at the United Nations produced a report on multigenerational legacies of trauma which identifies three behavioural coping mechanisms that can form an essential part of a survivor's character. These are *Victim style*, *Numb style*, and *Fighter style*. These mechanisms also influenced the survivor's parenting

approach, shaping the child's identity and beliefs. Yael states "thus are the child's biopsychosocial milieu that ultimately influences the severity of the child's reparative adaptational impacts". Preliminary studies by Greenblatt-Kimron et al. (2023) show that second and third generation descendants of survivors of the Holocaust involved in the current Russo-Ukraine war, revealed intergenerational transference of trauma, with an increased vulnerability and sensitivity to stress (2023). However, in consideration of the role of epigenetics in this phenomenon, a review by Banushi, Collova and Milroy (2025) argues that although there has been compelling progress in understanding the challenging influence of trauma, their application to epigenetic inheritance in people requires further evidence and is currently primarily based on how trauma is activated via social and cultural causes. They propose that new frontiers in therapy such as psychedelic-assisted psychotherapy may offer new and dynamic approaches to help address trauma's imprint on the psyche. To further understanding in this field, they make a call for interdisciplinary participation and culturally considered research practices to strengthen resilience and foundations for intergenerational recovery (Banushi, Collova and Milroy, 2025).

Validation and Workaholism – The birth story signalled a sense of disappointment, in that I was not born of the desired sex. In consequence to this, I experienced a strong desire to prove my validity throughout my working life. Maté (2022) describes the various types of suffering, from the obvious of what he calls the big T traumas, to the more subtle developmental issues titled small T traumas. His classification of trauma is what takes place inside us,

rather than what has happened *to us*. Maté provides examples of how a seemingly 'normal' childhood with conscientious parenting can also be one which has painful, discarded events lying at the core, where experiences of 'profound emotional hurt' (Maté, 2022. p. 228) have been demoted but can appear through addictions such as workaholism. Workaholism, was initially defined as a person with a compulsive, uncontrollable and a constant need to work (Oates, 1971). Coombes (2004) in the handbook of addictive disorders states that a core part of maintaining our mental health is the ability to create and renew relationships as well as investing in a belief system that creates a sense of meaning in life - what Erikson (1963, 1968) termed as psychosocial integration. Failure to achieve this integration triggers a need to cope or mask the suffering which give rise to addictions due to a "dislocation in the psyche causing a need within to attach oneself with a tenacity to something that can temporarily ease the problem" (Alexander, 2000, p.503). Research by Eugenea et al (2021) showed that physical neglect in childhood was the predominant factor affecting workaholic professionals, defined as a deprivation of clothing, food, or adequate care during sickness with safety not being met. A qualitative study has shown (Kenyhercz et al, 2022) that addiction to work can create dysfunction and conflict within family relationships, unhappiness within marriage and mental health issues. High expectations by parents can be transmitted intergenerationally, making children susceptible to the addiction with demanding parenting style frequently associated with the father role (2022). Other positive relations with work addiction (Atroszko, Demetrovics and Griffiths, 2020) were traits of conscientiousness, associated with impulse control, which can relate to social conformity, leading to the need to achieve the

approval and expectations of others in detail and order. Limitations of this study (Kenyhercz et al, 2022) were mitigated due to two researchers independently conducting the data analysis, which diminished bias. However, other limitations were that the data were analysed retrospectively which can affect accuracy and recollection, with a small sample size, and which lacked diversity. Verrastro et al (2024) sought out to explore how perfectionism and neuroticism bear a relationship with workaholism and childhood emotional abuse (CEA) as well as gender differences. Validated self-questionnaires were completed by 1176 younger workers, 50% being women aged 18-25. The evidence showed a positive interplay with workaholism with no differentiation between men and women. The recommendations outlined the importance of trauma informed pathways to help avert or manage possible workaholism. Also, these conclusions point to the need for identifying and processing personality traits such as perfectionism and neuroticism via therapy interventions. I could identify that my tendency for workaholism was derived of feeling a deep-seated sense of worthlessness brought on by the shame of failure at school and paternal judgment. Evidence has shown (Soraci et al., 2022; Kun et al., 2020) that areas of workaholism are derived of issues regarding self-esteem with a characteristic pattern of a hyper vigilance for making mistakes, and at work, such people will focus on their negative states of mind and imperfections and will possess a certain drive for enhancing performance (Kun et al., 2020). Indeed, Schwartz (2021) findings are that daughters can often overcompensate by aiming for exceptional outcomes to finally gain appreciation by the father.

Narrative identity development – Since 1973, the Dunedin research project (Belsky et al., 2020), has observed over a thousand children, identifying their personality continuity as ‘evocative, reactive or proactive’ to their environment (2020, p.41). They use a striking metaphor about how the personality maintains continuity through life: ‘The child is not a blank slate to be written on, the child plays the role of the slate being written on, the chalk doing the writing, and the person holding the chalk’ (2020, p.42). Here they evidence that children are not plasticine that can be moulded by others but have a very active role in presenting and maintaining their personality narrative over a span of time. Research authored by McAdams (2019) states that life narratives become pertinent aspects of selfhood during adolescence and emerging adulthood. It is in this period, that a young person will need to answer existential questions about who they are and, what can provide purpose and a sense of place in their lives. The adolescent will dedicate their time to narrate their lives as a series of developing stories, termed as narrative identity (McAdams, 2013, 2019). A life story, will combine goals, meaning, significant experiences and values to create a somewhat comprehensible person that can support themselves in life (Adler, 2019). Self-directed identity changes can often offer a personal sense of growth and remain a part of the ongoing life narrative which can enhance health and wellbeing (Bauer & McAdams, 2004). Narratives can encourage greater empathy (Koopman 2015; Oatley 2016) and help us process difficult life events from our past. In essence, stories are a powerful modality to create meaning (Akers and Saucier, 2019). Therefore, in relation to the transitions of life and how they are regarded, even a challenging life event can encourage an increased sense of identity (Atchley, 1989). However, adolescents with higher

levels of neuroticism are prone to create narratives about their lives that can show a predominance of negative emotion, and lower rates of development (Lodi-Smith et al., 2009). People with raised levels of neurosis and depression tend to identify what is termed as a contamination sequence, suddenly turning positive events to negative (Adler, Kissel and McAdams, 2006). Additionally, events perceived as loss, fear, failure, or shame, can demand for a reason and explanation, (Pals, 2006) with individuals wanting to find logical explanations and what they might symbolise for them. A study of 627 adolescents (Metts et al., 2021) over a three-year period showed the effects of neuroticism, triggering chronic stress (socialization effects). These findings put forward the importance of managing stress and focusing on prevention strategies for neuroticism in adolescents. Limitations of the study was due to limited perspective of lifespan (Metts et al., 2021). Narrative identity in therapy therefore presents a challenge to such clients as they speak their experience. Furthermore, a research article by Gehrt et al. (2023) argues a lack of a valanced assessment of the effects of active sharing of narrative identity and its efficacy in providing a state of wellbeing. They claim that studies have seldom been successful in proving this. McLean et al. (2020), shows a rigorous analysis based on three samples, offering the most comprehensive published study of the subject. Gehrt et al. (2023) obtained their data for the purpose of reanalysis, and their findings confirm that the connection between life fulfilment and six motivational narrative identity fluctuations, were found to be low (defined as: $r \leq .15$) which supplied a lack of evidence of a relationship between narrative identity and well-being (2023).

Chapter 3: Methodology

According to Dobrich (2022), birth stories are conveyed with symbolised imagery and 'exist in a liminal space between fantasy and reality'. Therefore, a heuristic qualitative approach seems most fitting as it asks us to step through a metaphorical portal to enter a phase of indwelling, where the researcher can inwardly discover worlds of new inspiration (Sultan, 2018). Qualitative research (Lim, 2024) with its accent on experience, context, meaning and perspective, provides an exclusive focus we can utilise to interpret the intricacies of societal experience. Whereas quantitative research offers a logical viewpoint driven by numerical and statistical data, qualitative work aims to capture nuance and subtlety often hard to track with a numerical perspective. Therefore, employing this approach invites an exploration of depth and follows the subjective journey of the researcher as well as creating a practice that feels contemplative and rigorous (Lim, 2024). The Heuristic form is known as a kind of calling in that it chooses the subject and invites them to enter the process of discovery without knowing where the labyrinth leads. This inquiry gifts a wonderful freedom to start at one's feet with a searching and relevant question (Sultan, 2018), unearthing the incidental and the symbolic, the long forgotten as well as acute present life events, to reveal their effects and influence on the subject's relationality in their present world. Sultan states that the form offers an opportunity for self-reflection and self-transformation guiding us to delve daily into the deep woods of our thoughts and experiences, sourcing meaning and

knowledge to help understand the past. Within a finite timeframe, it offers an opportunity to slow down and experience a felt sense of the world to be explored (Gendlin, 1981; Sultan, 2018), aiming for an embodied response so that we can fully allow experience to surface and inform. This sole heuristic exploration examined my own personal experience of the effects of my birth-story on my life. During the immersion stage, when I reflected on my question during 'waking, sleeping and dream states' (Moustakas, 1990, p. 28), I wrote diary entries that spanned seven months which amounted to approximately 27,000 words. From there, I utilised thematic analysis (Clarke and Braun, 2017), which is a systematic process for noting themes and codes from qualitative information. These codes note the smallest units of analysis that help identify key aspects of the data which is most useful and relevant to the overarching research question (Clarke and Braun, 2017). The themes create a helpful framework to sort, distil and interpret the text, paying close attention to the over-arching question as a guidance while also allowing the research question to change in line with the researcher's evolving understanding. I colour coded the themes, for instance, red denoted a need to control during adolescence and grey signified ancestral grief. The titles fluctuated over the months as I efforted to find the clearest containers. For instance, at one time I named 'control' as a key theme which then changed to the need for rebellion as I responded to the visceral expression of the adolescent. With fatigue setting in, there followed an incubation period of around 7 weeks to allow the work to digest. Moustakas describes this as a period which enables an inner tacit knowledge of the work to be processed, clarifying beyond direct awareness (1990), providing a space for seeds of new understanding to grow (Sultan,

2018). The inclusion of Jungian archetypes offered a structure to help probe and identify a way of being, inspired from each theme. Jung described archetypes as living within the subconscious, emerging when the person feels a threat in life and employed to direct the persona to a different mode of being (Jung, 1959). Archetypes can challenge the ego to allow greater vision and help glean the long-term scope of a situation (Kuang, 2023). They helped reframe my experiences as mythical characters that I could sense were still active in my life, echoing an ancient pattern of storytelling experienced by many before me. This autobiographical approach invigorates by encapsulating the lived experience of a birth-story in a rich form, be that text, songs or poetry and other creative modalities such as podcasts and films as well as conversations with family members to help reflect and process. Taking Sultan's advice (2018), I began the literary review early in the process which prompted useful questions and considerations. I focused on research that investigated the phenomenon of birth stories as well as the psychology of adolescence, the era for when I first heard the story. The search terms developed to include Birth-story, Jungian philosophy on father daughter relationships, Jungian Archetypes, Ancestral trauma, Narrative identity and meaning making, Individuation process, Adolescence, Attachment, Parental rejection. The finished literary review featured: Birth-story, Narrative identity development, Adolescence, Avoidant attachment, Ancestral trauma/transference and Workaholism. Each theme was explored mainly using academic papers published in the last five years as well as classic academic texts. The literary exclusion criteria were selected to avoid research detailing experiences of the mother and the event of giving birth. The inclusion criteria were research articles that focused on the effect of stories

from the recipient's perspective and any subsequent effects they experienced through life. The data bases used were: ProQuest, Springer, Sage pub, Taylor and Francis, Wiley Online Library, Elsevier, Psych Net, Google and Google Scholar.

Ethical considerations

A heuristic research project which explores cultural and social human experiences, primarily utilises the research aspects of applied ethics (Sultan, 2019). The dignity, rights and health of any research participant need to have rigorous consideration. Simultaneously, the researcher's duty is to help benefit society, regulate professional integrity and standards, respect local and international laws, and assert demographic differences (Huws, Dench and Iphofen, 2004). My research began once approval was granted by the University ethics committee. I chose a sole heuristic process and was aware that challenging material could arise. Early on I kept questioning if the theme was the most suitable and reminded myself that I could pull out of the process at any time. However, I realised the importance of the theme as a deep-seated unexplored phenomenon that would ultimately benefit my future role as a psychotherapist and decided to continue. I was vigilant to omit material that could harm others, always maintaining an ethical awareness and I therefore safeguarded the anonymity of places and people. To achieve this, I scanned the whole document to bracket out entries that focused too personally on family members. However, at times this was difficult as the entries touched on a fundamental aspect and helped illustrate the effects of the birth-story on myself as a mother. Therefore, I took the step to consult with my supervisor who

advised me to gain the consent of my partner and adult son to include these aspects, of which they were fully supportive. I also decided to mostly bracket out my relationship with my siblings and my mother with some occasional exceptions, to focus on a father-daughter perspective. During the process, the method helped me reflect deeply on my psychology and my awareness of the themes active in everyday life. To safeguard my health and family, I monitored the length of my computer use and made sure I remained physically active, taking walks with the dog, and taking cold-water therapy. At various stages I received counselling from a Jungian coach, Person- centred, Gestalt, and IFS counsellor. This helped with processing my response to the work, for instance at the incubation, where feelings of guilt emerged about choosing my father as the subject of this work. Positively, the heuristic process brought a helpful awareness when difficult life events took place as I was able to respond to these as a researcher with greater objectivity and purpose.

Chapter 4 – Findings

- Immersion
- Explication
- Creative synthesis

October 24th, 4.25 am: I realise now I was an adolescent when I first heard my birth-story; this at a point when I had already experienced failure at school and my father's judgment. Hearing the birth-story at that time confirmed that, being born a girl, I was a disappointment from the start. No wonder I ran away to the theatre...

Immersion

Theme 1 – Avoidant people isolate others

Birth-story: Being a disappointment. Not what was wanted.

Key words: Avoidant attachment, Inadequacy, Abandonment, Isolation

Phenomenological noticing: Something missing in my heart, a waiting, a crying in the belly, longing, numbness, knot in solar plexus, opportunity lost.

The Orphan Archetype: "On the most literal level, orphans are children who are deprived of parental nurture while too young and unskilled to take care of themselves. Perhaps the parents die, literally abandoning the child, or remain on the scene but neglect, victimize, or abuse the child. Many orphans live in what appear to be intact families, but the children are not cherished, nurtured, or guided". (Pearson, 2013, p.44)

Journal entries and analysis

Try harder next time – There wasn't any help in his statement, and I knew I was on my own. I was 12 and I connect now that he was 11 when his father died...in the very same month war was declared, he had to grow up very quickly. There is a distinct feeling of numbness from then on and that I had lost him. Here I reveal the effects of my father's avoidant attachment, portraying a lack of support and loss. Its possible that my father transferred his own sense of need to be strong and independent to me as his 12-year-old daughter. He had been my hero in earlier days. Such was the power of his message that I regarded the advice as my only option, and it was frightening.

Who was I before the burden of purpose? The freedom of existing! I remember when I was around 7, there was a moment of joy when he asked me to go to the village shop with him. His voice was melodious. I felt such a warm glow that he wanted my company, and, in that moment, I felt special. This event makes clear that gaining my father's attention was a brief oasis. I remember stopping to feel this sense of attention that solely addressed me and no-one else. It suggests that a bond between myself and my father was still available in the pre-adolescent phase but, it is presented as a single event that suggests its rarity.

You were reluctant to question my teachers. I tried to tell you - waited at the bottom of the road to make you come to find and protect me. I don't recall you sitting me down later and saying sorry. My father's avoidance stopped him questioning a fellow headteacher and parent to ask questions about issues at my school, which transpired to be physical abuse. There is a yearning for support, a holding and defending that was not made possible.

When I told Dad that I was living with a boyfriend he said he wished I hadn't told him....to which I replied, 'then you wish you don't know me...' This defiant response clearly challenges the avoidant status. There is an indication that my father was used to hiding his feelings from the parental gaze and that my actions in revealing the truth of my situation felt irresponsible and shameful to him.

I am sitting in another meeting, online. I have been told to say the words 'tribunal' and 'discrimination'. I try to explain that education is the right of every individual when I grind to a halt. I crumble. I put my hand over my face. I am experiencing a collapse in a meeting as I try to represent an issue of funding and discrimination. The words trigger a lack of agency and understanding I had as an adolescent, rendering me to feel incapable. Due to

needing to fight for the rights of my son, I feel a rising despair informed by my challenging educational experiences during adolescence being relived here. As a parent I feel more like a child, anxious and alone. Phenomenologically, I placed my hand over my face. There is an intimation here of feeling shame, and a spiral of helplessness.

I have a recurring dream of being left which I also would daydream...wanting to feel the pain of being abandoned. Am I wanting to take control of this event that happened to my dad – the day his father died and left him. Am I wanting to feel it so I can somehow belong with him? Take his burden? In my subconscious, there is a clear need to process feelings of abandonment as well as in conscious daydreaming. There is an effort to understand this need more consciously and a recognition that I am wanting to experience my father's trauma perhaps with the view of belonging. Better to belong in suffering than to be left in isolation.

I wanted to rescue him, to get rid of the disease but he seemed resolute to his fate and was distant. The end of such suffering was a relief. In the funeral while others mourned, I pinned my gaze on the carpet following the patterns. I was numb. It would be a while before I could release any real sorrow. I am exploring the disconnection I felt at the time of my father's death. I observed my father's demise from a distance which inspired a feeling of helplessness and in that decision, I felt separated, unable to help or bridge the relationship.

Reflection: The reflection that attention on me was a rarity suggests that a tendency for my father's absent avoidance was present throughout my life - intensifying during my adolescence. The birth-story therefore crystalised a creeping feeling of absence known to me for some time, the lack of solid defence and protection from my father, an implication that parent's needs are more important than the child, and a numbness about what to do about it.

Please see Appendix 3, Poem 1: **I enter** (p.72)

Theme 2: Humiliated people rebel to survive

Birth-story: The frustration of not being recognised for who I was. 'If I'm not what you really want, I won't care about you or anything else.'

Keywords: Gender, Shame, Rejection of failure, Rebellion

Phenomenological noticing: Striking out, heat in chest, tension in forehead, determination, wilfulness, grabbing, pushing.

The Rebel Archetype: Someone who believes strongly in revolt and finds society's rules and norms a challenge. They value freedom, independence, and being outrageous. The prospect of challenging expectations lies at the root of their personality. They have a reputation for being hot tempered and can overreact and fail to be rigorous in thinking thoughts through. (Singh and Gupta, 2020)

Journal entries and analysis

The 'demolition man' song recalls endless parental criticism, and teachers, who offered no real teaching. 'I'm a three-line whip, I'm the sort of thing they ban, I'm a walking disaster, I'm a demolition man' (Sumner, 1981). It made me question existentially the point of life at a young age. I recall that I felt that I was the demolition man myself and that there was a sense of power of such an encounter, set to destroy the traditional norms of life. The song portrays a destroyer who will act without conscience. This need to destroy is palpable. There is a feeling of living with the dysfunction of my parent's relationship for long periods, and frustration with education. Demolition feels like a cleansing act to rid myself of the feeling. However, the demolition man is also my encounter with the shadow/devil challenging the ideals presented to me - if family and education were so painful, then let's destroy them. What is symbolic however is that the demolition figure is a man. This implies that I identified as a threatening male persona perhaps to take control and this due to the male role model in the family being compromised.

It was the humiliation of feeling educationally different that made the first cut. Term by term I would present my blue book of shame, and he would look through the marks and I would feel pretty bad as well as determined to not care. There is evidence here of deep-seated pattern of shame from a young age regarding education. There is an impression of distance in my father's tactics of dealing with me, his child, as if a pupil at his school. The

shame of failure feels a threat to the relationship and there is evidence of closing down to safeguard emotionally in the name of preserving my self-respect.

I had the fear in my pit of my stomach. That I would be a shame to others. There...that was the root of the Russian director's comment. That I had an objective to be other people's shame. Now I understand that it was the fear of being my father's shame. The Russian director's remark provoked a painful question I could not understand. I felt shocked to be told this. With hindsight I realise that I developed a purpose to rebel against the shame I felt by rebelling against my father and other educators. However, I hadn't realised that I also felt shame for failing and being hard to reach.

There is a wild primitive feeling to Buddug/Boadicea. After all, she led a rebellion against the Romans! Pure natured Gwyn was not the name for a rebellion. I am musing on the historic meaning of my name and how it conjures rebellion. The name gives a sense of drive and purpose in a situation that feels beyond my control. There is also a rejection of the father's choice and that it could not have served me well to tackle the battles I felt I was facing. The etymology of Buddug/Boadicea is one who is *Victorious*. My qualities take on a more male expression of a bloodied warrior archetype. Ultimately there is a rejection of the anima and a comment about a perceived weakness in the father's name choice as a subject fit for battle.

I remember sensing he may have disliked me, and this over the course of adolescence and emerging adulthood right up to his death when I was 25. The rebel could ruin family events with anxious outbursts, slam things, breakdown, say rash things so to keep control. There is a sharing here that I felt not liked by my father and that this feeling resided in a subtle form and accepted as normal in my life for many years. There are clear signs of anxiety and panic that belie a fragile mental health and a free-wheeling anger, lacking self-regulation. However, it is possible that through being angry, I could keep control of my life, warn others away and protect myself from others judging me for failure. The rebel is out of control and is punishing my father for not holding and protecting me. It seems the anima is dominant at this time, and the animus is limping in the dark, too afraid to be recognised.

I was rebelling against the norms and immersing myself in Russian methods with a director who was clearly a rebel in his own right. He glorified being on the outside of recognised British theatre. Here he wished to create an exclusive utopian way of life. How sad that the person who helped me understand so much was also intent on capturing my mind. The pursuit of elitism is visibly an attempt to take revenge on a culture perceived as superficial. However, the undertones are rooted in rejecting my family tradition and seeking a family who will embrace and offer a better life. The leader took extra time to notice and guide each student to understand their

psychology. Having this level of attention was an extraordinary experience which on the one hand helped me learn about myself, but on the other was a capturing by a leader intent on having power.

When I have the need to rail against social services or lack of help by education authority, I am returning to the urges I had as a teenager to expose these same bastions of authority... I write saying 'you have to believe in people.' Here I'm asking the college authority to be progressive, to help young people like my son. I feel still an outsider struggling to manoeuvre my son's needs in the face of mainstream thinking. However, it is my struggle to be heard by my father that is also working here.

My bad grades at A level faded into insignificance when I got a place at x. That acceptance letter totally shook my world. It was a trumpet voluntary to all the sceptics in my life, a fist in the air! The image of the fist in the air is reminiscent of a Boadicean battle cry. There are obvious signs also that I aimed high gaining a place at a world-class college and this to prove my self-worth. The telling of how acceptance letter shook my world expresses how significant this shift was and there is a distinct feeling of shock that my ability to succeed against the odds was now made possible.

As the fires died out and a change of career in mid-life, I felt strangely numb with no idea of what I should do. It felt like a grey, still place. I recognise a burden I have been carrying for most of my life. I remember as a child, the freedom I had to play and just live in the present. Adolescence and its educational pressures brought the burden of having a purpose and responsibility to fulfil and when I could not, the angry rebel could rail in my defence. Later in midlife, a change of career revealed a numbness that had been suppressed all along. The image of greyness is a metaphor lacking passion and life.

Reflection: The rebellious frustration with 'Gwyn', confirmed my father's lack of knowing who I was and nature of my character and being the wrong sex made it impossible to bridge the gap. This gap forged identification with the warrior archetype to help me survive and restore self-respect. With the midlife career change however, the numbing of the rejection was identified as a negation of my identity.

Please see Appendix 3, Poem 3: **Giving Grief** (p.75)

Theme 3 : Abandoned people seek and give rescue

Birth-Story: Feeling bereft of connection and lack of consideration leading to seeking to be saved by men and saving others from similar fate.

Phenomenological noticing: Feeling of dread, free falling, weakness, ragged.

Key words: Rescuing, Cult thinking, Transference on other males, Catastrophising.

The Altruist Archetype: In relation to other people, the Altruist has an empathic and willing nature and can be generous when needs arise as well as being loving and accepting. In its shadow form the altruist has weakened boundaries, martyring the self (Tepes, 2013) (Pearson, 2013).

Journal entries and analysis

The film 'Baxter' (1973), which I saw at 10 years of age, left an exceptional need to help the adolescent boy in the story, which lasted for years....it awakened a profound sense of abandonment, and I felt compelled to rescue. As a child I experienced a profound need to rescue a fictional boy in a film. The event took place pre-adolescence which suggests that I was already tuned to rescue at a young age. Questions arise about how I had been influenced? Perhaps it was my grandmother's stories of traumatic loss which may have triggered this narrative as well as a transference of my father's experience of losing his father as a child.

Dad was a self-confessed *doubting Thomas*. I wanted to find men who were passionate and inspired by life, who could imagine a better place, a utopia perhaps. The resultant feeling of abandonment is a striving to find men who are hopeful and vital and can believe in a better life who seem in opposition to my father's realism and later futility. There is an understanding here that my preoccupation has been about achieving happiness and attention via men. I identify men as my greatest source of learning and here there is an opportunity to replace the lack of attention caused by my father's absence.

I remember feeling that the Russian director looked like my father, even though I knew he didn't, and I felt a mixture of fear and awe every time he stepped into class. I found his talk of rescuing me from myself unbearable and strange as I was so not used to such attention; his commitment was unshakeable. I realise that my attraction to study with a charismatic leader was partly triggered by the need for a father figure and this

shortly after my father's death. A transference played out to such an extent that I believed this man resembled my father physically, elevating his sense of power and authority. There is also an impression that having attention with my education was hard to cope with, such was my experience of being left to my own devices.

I am aware of the long held need for meaning in my life. When I am trying to focus on my son's journey and find ways and means to help, I feel very purposeful. When I step back from the urge to rescue, I feel a nothingness there. Was it my father's story of loss that gave me meaning? Visibly, rescuing can give a sense of dynamic purpose to life that can bring meaning. The invisible was an identification in midlife, that beneath the rescuing, was a feeling of 'nothingness'. At the root, rescuing steals an opportunity for the other to take action and a lack of trust that the other possesses an inner sense of knowing, with which they can feel guided.

When I look into the future, I fear the abyss. What will we do now if the plans are all gone? I feel your pain, but I can't erase it. So I stand with you as you play your computer, a hand on your shoulder. I give the only thing I can - my presence. Here there is a need to release the rescuing instinct in a challenging parenting situation and embrace the sense of simply being there for my child, walking alongside him in presence. In that moment of being rather than doing, I sensed a moment of giving up a fight, perhaps the protest of not being rescued myself; that nothing will come from it. I am allowing myself to stand in the not doing and increasing my capacity to love in the moment without fear of catastrophe.

I became fixed on supporting this group of distinguished people who were defending the victims of 9/11 by exposing the unscientific NIST report on how the tower's collapsed. I was defending them to a friend in the park, and I began to feel a rising panic. It struck me that these architects were doing all they could to defend people who had horrifically died that day, and at risk of damaging their reputation. I realised I wanted my Dad, the headmaster to be like them and rescue me from the abuse and not worry about any issues of interfering in other schools. The transference of needing men to step up and be brave and fight for others is clearly transferred on to the AE9/11 truth group. There is a respect here for men who risk reputation in the name of finding and exposing the truth. The visceral panic in the park of needing to defend this group's good name exposed the panic I felt as a child of not being rescued by my father during a period of abuse.

I remember a paradigm shift I had around 16 years of age. Suddenly, I could see that I was making myself ill. The truth of that moment opened me up to the potential of healing. If I made myself ill, then I could make myself well again. With doctors of the 1980's scratching their heads

around a diagnosis, I felt a rush of hope and I suddenly knew I had the inspiration I needed to save myself. I remember a huge shift in my thinking while suffering a breakdown in late adolescence. It reflects an era of suffering in my life when I had felt trapped and helpless about my health. The realisation that my ailing mental health was due to my own fears gave me a strong understanding about the mind and its power - I could rescue myself and I knew I had the power to do it.

The antidote of rescuing could be a need for faith. Here I clarify that rescuing others is closely aligned with the need for faith. That the issue here is truly a lack of faith in the process of life due to fear/trauma and in turn a lack of faith in my child's life journey. I took on this same pattern and by responding to fear and compressing my child into what is considered as 'normal' or accepted, there is a danger of inhibiting the child from being who they are.

Reflection: The birth-story confirmed a lack of a bond with my father, and to find men who could give rescue. I also became a rescuer of others who suffered a similar fate. There is a need for safety due to earlier abuse and a longing for a perfect idea of life to take away the lack of containment.

Please see Appendix 3, Poem 4: **Mission: Rescue!** (p.75)

Poem 5: **The important one** (p.77)

Theme 4 : Worthless/Shamed people seek validation

Birth-Story: Father did not repair the story.

Key words: Seeking approval. Burnout and sensitivity to absorbing conflict. Anxiety. Shame, Lack of self-esteem, Workaholism. Hyper-vigilance around perceived failure.

Phenomenological noticing: weakness, drooping, quivering solar plexus, paleness, forcing, pushing, nausea/intolerances.

Archetype - The Warrior The warriors family values are to gain 'achievement, competition and justice. Strengths foster achievement, individual expression. Weaknesses foster workaholism, stoicism and perfectionism' (Pearson, 2013, p.241)

Journal entries and analysis

Term by term, I was fending off humiliation as well as hardening my determination not to care. The feeling of shame is clearly captured here. The importance of encouragement during adolescence is well documented. The simple action of communicating and encouraging a child is not met in this situation.

It was there, through the Russian director's questioning that I discovered a belief that I thought I was stupid. I realised I had feared this thought for most of my life and the burden of carrying it was a shock, but also a first step in healing. By frequent repetitive thinking, such as worthlessness or feeling incapable, the fears become more invisible to me. The event provided a significant understanding of how I had been living and triggered a paradigm shift of noticing and healing this aspect of my relationship with my mind. Again, it is pertinent to note that this happened a short time after the death of my father.

I built my house and career on sand and deep inside I didn't have the foundations to support me. I see a connection now between this experience and the illness I experienced later in adolescence. I see my body now as this house. Here, is a biblical metaphor about foundations made of sand (Matthew 7:24 – 27) and is based on Jesus's telling of the Parable of the Wise and the Foolish Builders told in the Sermon on the Mount. It is a

metaphor that compares those who live on solid foundations and others who have built a home on sands that shift and cannot bear the weight of what life can bring. During adolescence I built my life on weak foundations, and in so doing compromised my ability to cope with life's load. This image of unsafe structures connects with other diary entries such as feeling an emotional ruin and the ruin of the world trade centre.

Thinking of trying harder felt impossible, as I felt I already had. These words left a feeling of heat and shame. This seemed to create a sense of flux at the core that took away my sense of self. A feeling of deep uncertainty about my ability. When my father tells me to try harder during adolescence the burden is heavy. This event seems to have affected my experience of education from then on and made me want to try too hard to achieve with too much pressure attached to career goals.

What I ended up doing...was trying way too hard at lots of things...trying too hard as an actor, trying too hard as a friend, at saving others...it was the trying hard that was bigger and more important thing to do and probably the heat of shame that ignited it The need to prove myself by trying hard is most evident and is generalised to most relationships in my life. My sense of worthlessness therefore seems to lace my outward persona in life and was not limited just to career and succeeding. It is also clear that this psychology led to a debilitating low self-esteem and self-doubt.

I am reminded of my total sense of shame when witnessing how other student colleagues in my year seemed to have academically grasped a subject with such rigour. I felt myself collapse inwardly. I am recalling an event where I was needing to give a presentation. Comparing myself to others, my fear of failure and of exposing inadequacies suddenly felt overwhelming and I felt a painful visceral experience of the humiliation I felt as a child failing at school.

I knew and dreaded all at once that this Russian director would be able to tackle my issues. This ability to analyse and get to the root was so cleansing that I felt I had potential to succeed, to be of worth. However, because of my need, I was therefore a fragile candidate for brain washing. My need to validate myself also brought me to dangerous areas, where others could abuse my boundaries. Here I reflect on being brain-washed by a leader as a result of his ability to interpret and analyse my psychology; such was my desperation to understand my psychology in order to ease my self-doubt and prove my worth.

Changing my career revealed a numbness that had faded out the colour in my life. The heuristic process has been key to recognising that at my core I have not been free to live and enjoy my life. I feel a lightness of

being...a release from constraints. With my decision to have a change of career, I struck a lack of purpose that had, until then, been undetected. Analysing the effect of the birth-story, unearthed a burden of needing to feel validated that has dogged my working life. In doing so, there is a feeling of growing more whole, and a renewed sense of purpose that feels natural and true to identity.

I asked my sister about my birth, and she said it was a very happy day. Dad had bought them sweets, so they all felt special. His care felt normal and most evident. She remembered the excitement of seeing me for the first time. Funny how stories can suddenly feel so unreliable! I am testing out the validity of the story and questioning my case. My father's caring response and the atmosphere around the birth could question its status as a reliable document.

Reflection: The birth-story accentuated the thought I was not desired and feeling a failure in education around the time of its telling resulted in feeling inadequate, fuelling a life-long drive to prove myself and to aim to be more than who I was.

Please see Appendix 3, Poem 2: **Dream Taker** (p.73)

Theme 5: Parent myths burden the child

Birth-Story: Gwyn and Buddug. Two names I didn't want.

Key words: Parental myth making, Ancestral Trauma.

Phenomenological noticing: Burdened, heavy, stuck in the middle, compressed in the chest area, wanting freedom, heat in the cheeks, nervous solar plexus

Archetype: The Christ Hero (**Father's archetype**) and the Moral Rebel Hero (**Mother's archetype**). **Christ hero (Gwyn)** - "transforms the entire humanity through spiritual awareness since it is the root cause of polluted humanism...the hero undergoes all sorts of physical and psychological temptations and returns as a legendary figure though he loses his physical existence in this world as Jesus Christ. The beautiful world can be realized when we return to God acknowledging true sense of spiritual love and care"

(Gautam and Chhetry, 2021). **Moral rebel hero (Buddug)** – “willing to take a stand for what they believe in, even when doing so may lead to potentially negative social consequences such as disapproval, ostracism, and career setbacks (Monin, Sawyer and Marquez, 2008). They are willing to defy orders from an authority to engage in behaviour that violates their principles, refusing to simply go along with the group, when doing so would require them to compromise their values” (Sanderson, 2024).

Journal entries and analysis

My father’s intention to name me Gwyn triggered an urge to reject. It made me feel weak. The name now makes me think of my grandfather. I was told he was gentle and sensitive but was not suited to hard labour and his sudden death strengthened this impression. My father had also sacrificed things for his mother and was dedicated to her. I am musing on my father’s name choice as an opportunity to reunite with his own father’s essence due to his unprocessed grief or longing. This Welsh name, means White, Pure, Fair, Holy, Blessed. The impulse to reject the male name during adolescence was due to the name, provoking a feeling of weakness. Phenomenologically, this weakness sparks an impression of martyrdom and, at its most subtle, a figure of ancestral grief and trauma. Instinctively, I distanced myself from this name, feeling at odds with the impression seeking a more protective archetype to support myself.

‘Buddug/Boadicea’ seemed a far stronger force I could live by, but to this day I remain uneasy about the name. However, I am also grateful for my mother’s intent which translates to me as a purpose to be brave. During adolescence, I was cultivating an identity to power my growing sense of rebellion and could identify better with the warring Boadicea (Entomological root: Victorious), rejecting any name that could doubt my strength and determination. There is also an intimation here of a battle between the forces of victory (Life) and grief (Death) instigated by parents in conflict. There is a distinct sense of gratitude regarding my mother naming me victorious and its positive impetus in my working roles and career.

My mother’s choice to dress me as a boy. Hair cut short, many times I was mistaken for one. What was she playing out? She always tried to achieve her goals and dressing me this way was an easy option. There is a reflection here that my mother was perhaps living out a fantasy of making her third child a boy. A playing out of an idea she couldn’t realise while crossing the boundary of my identity at a young age.

My grandmother’s stories were steeped in trauma - the death of her siblings, the early death of her mother, making her a mother at 13 and sudden loss of her young husband. Like my father, a part of my

grandmother was a lost child burdened by tragedy and so, trauma bonded them deeply. Gwyn symbolised this impression. There is a sense here that I am considering ancestral grief passed on to me. Due to trauma of loss, there is a realisation of a bond of grief between grandmother and father. I am exploring my father's need to pass on a similar story or energy to me.

My pattern of catastrophising family situations is still active. I realise that this pattern of thinking can cause an emotional volatility. I can swing from my father's sensitivity to my mother's warrior determination. This is the root of why I changed my name – to encourage more balance. I am musing on my objectives of attracting challenges to me inspired by the nature of my mother's line, but then I experience a collapse and a habit of catastrophising, influenced by the grief and trauma of my father's family line. The change of name is a need to disconnect from my parent's stories and achieve greater balance and recognise my own way forward.

In some ways, I feel I was his alter ego. I was the one that looked most like him and seeing me grow up to have my freedom during his final years may have been difficult. I am questioning here if there was something in me that my father found harder to contact – a likeness as well as witnessing my determination to have my life. There is a reflection here that witnessing me moving forward in life with a sense of entitled freedom triggered a resentment of sorts, due also to his failing health. As a result, the distancing seems to have intensified at that time.

With handling people's constant bewilderment and laughter about how to say my name, it felt like a constant battle. I changed it to a name in a song my grandmother and I would sing together. It was simple and feminine. I know I am still holding back the warrior, defending my boundaries. However, today I feel a sympathy for Gwyn and his gentleness and a regret that I disliked this energy at adolescence. I am reflecting on taking control of the myths handed to me by my parents. I felt a burden attached to both names and a sense that something other was at play in what they wanted me to be. By changing the name there was an attempt to release myself. Adopting a child also feels part of this freeing process.

Discussion: The birth-story held the impression of a burden of other people's myths and desires. Changing the name was an attempt to escape the confines and find balance. Adoption was an attempt to break this. Ideally, I would walk alongside this child, allowing them to grow unburdened by my past.

See Appendix 3, Poem 6: **The girl not boy** (p.78)

Illumination

In the later period of the process, I experienced illumination via a series of discoveries. The first was a realisation that in the telling of the story my mother was actually ridiculing the neighbour, as by sympathising with my father's supposed loss she pointed out my mother's failure. It then occurred to me that my mother came from a farming background where it would have been a pressure to provide a son. With only males inheriting farms, the livelihood could be jeopardised. It is possible that the birth-story, although she offered as a joke, was a protest due to this tradition. Consequently, I realised the story bore little relation to me and lacked any real affirmation. I reflected again that jokes and laughter were often connected to me. I made others laugh and made it a virtue in my professional life. The birth-story crystallised an identity trait I possessed at adolescence and early adulthood - I may have been inadequate but at least I was funny.

Shortly after, I discovered the thread of an existential narrative within the whole research. Due to my father's history and the impulse of my adolescent mind, the name 'Gwyn' inspired a passive image of a vulnerable spirit which conjured my grandfather's character. This revealed a preoccupation around death, passed on to me by my grandmother. Stories were told to me as a child, of how babies, children and adults died leaving her a grief stricken thirteen-year-old to raise her siblings. Moreover, the early death of my grandfather, her husband, added to her trauma and was also passed on to my father. During adolescence, I realised it felt that I too had lost him as he had lost his own father and I would

be walking alone through life. This was why, when he died much later, I felt he had departed a long time ago. Ironically, the birth-story is also a story about death, because being born a girl, my father's hope of a boy had no life. As my mother had to fight to make something of herself with little education, the impulse of her choice of 'Buddug' offered me a fight for life and to ward off tragedy. Therefore, I sensed a tacit impression of a conflict between life and death infused in these names.

It struck me further that my father, was the first male figure who could have prized me. Not achieving this, not only affected my self-belief but also, I realised, my physical body. During this process, a physical exercise session triggered a memory of how I would hide my body during adolescence and continue to do in subtle ways, and I felt that the story created a numbing sense around femininity. Later in my mid 20's when my father was chronically ill, I had a weird obtrusive thought of wanting to cut off my breasts. I have a strong sense that this was the body's attempt to cut away the female and become the boy that was wanted, to aid a connection with him as he was fading. As the exercise session ended, grief surfaced about how this had held me back, followed by inspiration about how the body had so much information stored inside. Moving the body during intensive introspection offered a powerful way to allow thoughts to surface and be cleared out. Jung states "Individuation is not achieved without the body, is it born out of the body" (Jung, 1934).

After this event I also had a flood of feeling about wanting to move house and had been considering moving back to the village of my childhood. My father

built our home there and I could sense a *hiraeth* (Welsh for *longing*) for the place but later identified as a searching for the father I experienced before adolescence. Pursuing this goal, had profoundly felt more important than my own life, making it challenging to realise myself in mid-life – something my father had also suffered with. For the second half of my life therefore I sensed an awakening to keep discovering and find new strength and connection from within myself, to deepen my experience of the things I hold dear and meaningful.

Explication

“The mid-life transition is aided by the archetypes of the Destroyer and the Creator. Together they help us to let go of the identities we spent half our lives creating...in, and to open up to a deeper, more authentic sense of Self. In the process, we find we must let go of much of what we thought we were and recreate our lives. This transformation or rebirth...which leads to the virtue of authenticity, requires finding and expressing one’s true Self at a deeper level” (Pearson, 2016, p.114).

Exploring the birth-story illuminated the era it was told and how adolescence, as an era of meaning making, put me in a reactive state of mind ready to interpret it as a story of rejection. This plunged me down the rabbit hole of needing to prove myself as a person worthy of love. However, I was a highly sensitive child, hearing stories of misfortune and traumatic deaths of ancestors. As a result, there was a silent fight against death and uncertainty and a need to have control. This drew me to the theatre, where great existential stories were experienced within a safe arena. A birth-story will prompt existential questioning as it is a time where mother and baby are closest to death - something my mother, who was a midwife, would often say. I sense that I was named Buddug

as a wish by my mother to be brave and fight for my life. My mother was a lover of life and lived to an old age and certainly had a warrior energy. At the time, Gwyn symbolised a person lacking a life force. Phenomenologically, he felt like a symbol of powerlessness or being castrated at the extreme, which I reflect echoed my father's fate. This reality of my father being emasculated by the women in his life provoked a frustration about his purpose to name me as another emasculated man. In reaction to this there was a determination in me to be a living passionate force he could not model. Not having a father who could understand and contain my needs and fractured self-regulation, I laboured alone. My need to deal with a lack of containment took me to a cult leader who on the face of things became a temporary father but had egotistic motives. I knew in my bones that adoption would be the challenge I needed, and it transpired that this would be my biggest most dynamic opportunity to fully understand the concept of containment. I understand that I was also on a rescue mission and since then have realised the dangers of rescuing within the therapy hour. However, to be a container for my adopted son meant that I couldn't walk away, become absent or collapse due to past traumas. There was no room for victimhood. I had to slay the dragon and insist on life for him as well as myself. Adopting also provided a foil against projecting any further myths of my own on to a child. The ultimate realisation was deep learning about unconditional love and presence; through prizing him I was nurturing the qualities of self-regulation, and self-care. As adoptive parents, we were interviewed and tested and challenged about our roles: we had to prove that we could be trusted, we had to learn how to express his birth-story with care and dignity, honouring him in all that challenged his life. My birth-story's effects on

my individuation process led me to truly aim to 'see' a child for who they were and walk alongside them, effort to respect boundaries, and practice ways of being for those who live and learn differently. This process also opened my eyes to what John Keats named as 'negative capability' (Bates, 1963), which helped understand the importance of embracing uncertainty for clients without "reaching after fact and reason" (Moore, 2021) that rescuing can attract. This is the challenge that adolescence brought, and the birth-story presents the fragments of evidence that document it.

Creative synthesis

Continuing trouble with my name led me, some time ago, to change it to something that could alleviate the issue, and it enabled a kind of rebirth. The name I chose came from a song my grandmother loved, which we sang together. As much as being a source of sorrow she was also a source of great happiness and laughter. The name posed no threat of conflict, and I discovered its meaning later - bright, shining, light, reminding me of my instinctive need to nurture and embrace life. I also accidentally discovered the mythological figure of 'Elen of the ways'. In 'Finding Elen' (Wise, 2015) Elen is described as part goddess, part dream, part saint, seeker of spiritual signs and guardian of ancient pathways symbolised by the Deer. She actually draws together some qualities of both Gwyn and Buddug and provides a grounded metaphor, being at one with the land, seeking out new pathways of knowledge. Significantly though the goddess symbolism felt highly relevant in this journey. Caroline Pearson states that 'Our deep, underlying wound is alienation from the feminine or masculine source within ourselves' (2016, p.114). This helped me recognise

that since my adolescence, I had negated space for the feminine which had been left to languish. Pearson offers that until a woman values the feminine within, it is harder to perceive the masculine as nourishing or loving. Rather it is experienced as a voice of judgment, pointing out the female's inadequacy (Pearson, 2016; Schwartz 2021). It felt appropriate that I created something to focus and symbolize the feminine and therefore I made a rounded ceramic bowl. This also signified a sense of containment that had been lacking and a symbol of my subsequent journey to understand containment as a mother. Bion's 'maternal containing' theory (Mendes and Hinshelwood, 2024), introduced how a mother can process the needs of their child and then return them in a digestible form, doing so with emotional availability. The child, having felt this process, learns to develop their capacity for self-regulation. Likewise, in therapy the client's experiences are shared, received, and heard by the therapist, and then returned to them in a compassionate form. This ritual felt conducive to my experience and helped synthesize the core discoveries. I painted the bowl a favourite colour and added the ritual aspect of a candle to light in memory of my father and also to mark the light this project has given me.

Fig 1: Ceramic bowl with candle.



Chapter 5 - Analysis and Discussion

Theme	Academic Citation	Substantiating Quote
Avoidant Attachment & Rejection	“What the daughter gets instead of love is emptiness which she can neither securely attach to nor separate from” (Schwartz, 2021, p.2)	“I was left to wonder how anyone actually felt about me being a girl and this at an acute time of sexual development”
Humour as a means to ease the birth-story impact.	“Even the most frightening events can become positive influences...if they are told about in a positive way” (Ogden and Syder, 2021)	“It would be appropriate to approach the task with awareness of the recipients long term happiness rather than just easing the moment of its telling”
Objectivity in birth-story interpretation by client	‘The child is not a blank slate to be written on, the child plays the role of the slate being written on, the chalk doing the writing, and the person holding the chalk’ (Belsky et al., 2020, p.42)	“I inevitably met the story with my own lived experiences which included experience of abuse at primary school”
Story as transference of trauma	“thus are the child’s biopsychosocial milieu that ultimately influences the severity of the child’s reparative adaptational impacts” (Danieli and Maidan, 2023)	“My father and grandmother’s experience of profound loss...could be transferred to the next generation”

The following discussion will present the findings and reflections of how a birth-story may provide evidence of the nature of my individuation process and offer a contribution to knowledge of the phenomenon. This heuristic process was

undertaken as a sole investigation, therefore limitations due to subjectivity should be kept in consideration.

Schwartz (2021) research introduces how the father's absence can elicit feelings of sadness, yearning, even rage in a daughter. With a sense of absence already discernible, I was susceptible to feeling a lack of containment by my father and therefore the birth-story was served as confirmation of this lack and that I felt unable to fulfil his happiness. Part of this experience was to remove myself from the relationship creating a shield of protection, proposed by Winnicott (1965) and corroborated differently by Green's findings - that the daughter's solution is to try to forget the loss in order to survive (Kohon, 1999, p. 54). Evidence of this emerged in the 'Explication' part of the heuristic process where I felt guilt about featuring my father in the work. The telling of the birth-story called my identity into question due to being the wrong sex in my father's eyes, and with the lack of a repair, I lacked the certainty of how anyone actually felt about me being a girl and this at an acute time of sexual development. Therefore, the birth-story provided evidence of a question mark around my sex which may have chimed with early experiences of being dressed like a boy as a child. What transpired was a lack of confidence in my femininity, a rejection of my own body and later experiencing intrusive thoughts of wanting to cut my breasts. The excavation of the birth-story therefore provided evidence of a rejection that hitherto, had been felt but not spoken and consolidated the distilled life events of parent and recipient which in therapy can helpfully name the underlying psychology of a client's relational experience.

Regarding the use of humour to help convey the story, the findings challenge Ogden and Syder's (2022) recommendations. Told as a joke by the mother – the tone of her delivery caused the family to laugh at the neighbour in the story. However, when the joke faded, I was able to discern a gut response to the story and the realisation that a repair by either parent would have been appropriate. Therefore, as laughter can be a result of various objectives, generous as well as otherwise, more specificity is needed to safeguard the recipient. The evidence here suggests it would be appropriate to approach the task with awareness of the recipient's long-term happiness rather than easing the moment of its telling. In my case the laughter provoked led to a glossing over of the underlying feelings and as Mikulincer and Shaver state, the individual learns not to share their thoughts or distress with others (2017) and can absentee themselves. In addition to the effects of this, their suggestion that therapists consider the birth-story as a good indicator of a person's attachment status is a highly useful guide for therapy and the featured birth-story presents a contribution to support this recommendation.

Jung's position about the child being born a sharply defined individual (Collected Works, 1953, p 9, para.151) and Wolynn's findings (2022) regarding ancestral DNA, although unscientific, provokes a dynamic debate about what a child brings at birth and its responses to life. In the same vein, Belsky et al. (2020) report their findings with a striking metaphor about how the child can no longer be considered a blank piece of slate to be written upon exclusively by an outside stimulus; the child can inhabit the role of author of their story, with means to decide how they choose to reveal or express themselves (Belsky et

al., 2020). Therefore, as the author of my life, I inevitably met the story with my own lived experiences which included earlier experiences of feeling abandoned during abuse at primary school. Moreover, the research by Lodi-Smith et al. (2009) regarding adolescents suffering with higher levels of neuroticism, coincides with my journal entries portraying myself as an individual who has suffered with anxiety and burn out due to over-work (Kun et al., 2020). Also, the association between social and emotional adjustment regarding parent criticism could have played a role as my father was a headmaster – giving greater impact to his judgment due to his status and expectations (Mendo-Lázaro et al., 2019; Muris et al., 2004). The journal entries relate an individual with anxiety and suggest a personality prone to sensitivity. It is notable that I was told that my grandfather died due to hard work and being too sensitive. The research on workaholism around mistakes and worry (Kun et al., 2020) also highlighted a hyper vigilance regarding needing to achieve during my adult working life. The research showed that a young person with high levels of neuroticism could be susceptible to forming narratives about their life with a preponderance for negativity (Lodi-Smith et al, 2009). Dobrich states that children often have a habit of obliging the subconscious construct that the adult communicates (2022). In lieu of this tendency I may be drawn to mythologise and skew meaning and being a reliable witness may prove a challenge. However, with this awareness a therapeutic process can provide a valuable intervention of how and why a client may interpret events according to their fears or beliefs.

Lipton's findings about how epigenetic tags can reveal fluctuations in how we manage stress in life (Gustafson, 2017) and issues with health in successive

generations (Wolynn, 2022) begs a question about how this played a part in our family make up. It would seem plausible to say that my father and grandmother's experience of profound loss at young ages could be transferred to the next generation and affect my own psychological profile. As featured in the birth-story, by making himself absent and at stressful times, my father was unknowingly passing the same trauma state he suffered as a child – that of non-containment and isolation. Also, the discussion around epigenetic tags (Gustafson, 2017) could offer the reason for a reduction to my tolerance to stress with overuse of adrenaline and cortisol as an adolescent suffering a breakdown, and tendency for workaholism during my professional life.

Recommendations for research would be greater evidencing of birth stories from diverse sources, plus research about how ancestral trauma can influence the nuance/beliefs around the life of a child, possibly signalled in a birth-story, to increase the evidence needed within the field of epigenetics.

Future practice

Focusing deeply on the birth-story supplied many avenues of discovery, from the absent father attachment and its specific effect on daughters, to family trauma triggering beliefs around birth and death. Testing out how the birth-story influenced not only adolescence but also other key areas such as mid-life was fascinating. Experiencing a frozen sense of purpose at mid-life, identifying a need to find my father once more by moving back to the village where we lived, as well as sensing the rejection still living in my body is potent proof of how

impactful moments during the adolescent phase can still be found to be working and driving later life narratives. Searching possible effects of the story upon different eras of a client's life could provide evidence for understanding its legacy.

With research by Gehrt et al. (2023) questioning the validity of narrative identity therapy it would be advisable to explore traumatic birth-stories with a right brain approach, for instance Gestalt, Art therapy, IFS, Jung's shadow work and archetypes. Being a first story told by a family member, traumatic birth stories can bare a heavy burden on the client. Working with trauma informed therapy and Roger's core conditions (1957), to create an attachment bond between client and therapist can help repair the effects of an abusive or absent caregiver to support the client in therapy. Based on my findings and for the therapist's consideration, I offer questions and process ideas for birth-story processing which can be explored and interpreted via right brain modalities.

- **At what age did you learn about your story - What was happening for you at that time?**
- **How was the story conveyed to you?**
- **Why do you think it was told in this way?**
- **How did you feel when you heard the story?**
- **Can you identify any beliefs triggered by this story?**

- **Does this feeling still play out in your life now with this parent / guardian? If so how?**
- **Did you hear any other stories about your family or parents at the time of pregnancy? What was your parent's situation etc.**
- **Does this birth-story echo any impressions of past stories regarding your parent, grandparents, or ancestors?**
- **Adolescence is a phase focused on forming identity and goals for life. How would your birth-story have affected you at that time?**
- **Does the birth-story play a role in your current life phase?**
- **Are there any positive aspects to how you processed this story?**
- **Had a repair been offered, what would you have wanted your parent/guardian to say?**
- **With hindsight, how would you reframe your own birth-story to promote your well-being?**

Chapter 6 - Conclusion.

In his essay titled 'Healing Fiction' (1983), James Hillman states that therapy offers a chance to "tell a more advanced story about your life" (p26), which I take to mean the ability to reflect with greater objectivity. Examining the birth-story has certainly helped me objectify its influences and illuminate its effects. Questioning triggered a constellation of thoughts, which surprisingly addressed my lack of purpose during mid-life and encouraged a better knowingness of who I was. The research highlighted the importance of how it was told which challenged previous research with a caution for appropriation. The findings advocate that as the birth-story is processed with significance by the recipient, compassionate consideration around its telling is necessary. To this aim I compared the deeply considered life-story work of the adopted child, how the story needs to be imparted for the good of the child's well-being and highlighted the need for a repair where necessary. It also highlighted the benefit of analysing the role of other characters in the story and focus deeply on the etymology of names and their tacit impressions. The process revealed its potential as a therapeutic modality, offering a focused discussion to key eras of individuation and pin-pointing psychology from the vastness of a client's life experience. Using it as a magnified moment in time provided an opportunity to understand how ideas and myths about life were put in place by the teller and absorbed by the recipient. Deepening reflection on a birth-story can illuminate clients of a by-gone era and its people, realising their unconscious presence. The project took me full circle back to examine the missed potential in my

youth; as I wrote the dissertation, I felt the poignancy of how I suffered educationally as an adolescent, in dynamic contrast years later, with the writing of this MA dissertation. As a result of my research question, I can concede that the birth-story clearly contributed to the underlying themes of my individuation and were found to be still active in my daily life. Crucially however, the story itself was the handle to open the door on my family's psychology, attachment styles, transference of past ancestral traumas, parent's relationship status and the illumination of their personal beliefs, fears, and dreams about life which my birth initiated. By journeying the birth-story labyrinth, I emerged from a place of unconscious captivity to a new sense of aliveness and freedom.

'Why, what is to live? Not to eat and drink and breathe, but to feel the life in you down all the fibres of being, passionately and joyfully' (Browning and Browning, 1900).

Word count : 15,523

Fig 1:

Ceramic bowl by Elen Bowman 2025

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Appendix1: Statement of ethical consent

I hereby state that my partner and my son have both read the content and feel able to support my interpretation of experiences involving my relationship with them. They give their ethical consent, enabling me to write my experiences as part of this heuristic dissertation, for which I am very grateful.

Appendix 2: Birth story processing for therapists and clients.

Right brain modalities for birth-story investigation

- **What does birth symbolize to you? Draw your impression using your non-dominant hand.**
- **Please select and place stones to represent the constellation of the people involved in your birth-story. Client is encouraged to reflect on their choice of stone and its positioning in relation to other stones/subjects.**
- **Select music you would have listened to as an adolescent. Does the music have any emotion or connection with the birth-story? While listening to the music write or draw any thoughts or feelings arising.**
- **Reflecting on your emerging adult phase, take a piece of clay and shape/build something that symbolises your birth-story.**
- **Can you sense if your story affected the masculine and feminine aspects of your identity. What practices or objects can enhance your connection with either.**
- **What piece of art would you like to create as a ceremony of letting go or making peace with this story to help enhance your future life.**

Appendix 3: Poems written by Elen Bowman in response to the diary entries of the immersion process.

Poem 1

I enter

I enter with a bowl.

I place it at your table.

I wait,

You firmly give it back.

I enter with a sword

You parry with regret.

I lunge again,

It clatters to the ground.

I enter with a fever

the heat is unbearable,

You burn, you roar and screech away.

I put the fire out.

I enter with a magic book

I hope the words can heal,

I wait,

You read with sad eyes,
but give it back.

I enter the garden.

You are silent.

Words unsaid,
stay deep.

I wait.

You read your book,
Half ghost, held captive,
planning your escape.

You exit.

I wait for ever more

Poem 2

Dream Taker

Did you bring this misery?

Doubt my worth?

Kill the joy?

Perhaps it was envy?

You were a nice chap and so thinking it feels impolite,

But was it?

Did you suffer the pain of it as I tried to make my way?

I, who looked like you, had your eyes, your face, limbs.

Did I also steal your dreams?

Determined to take what I could to survive.

In your Autumn years I wanted to escape you,

my tragic hero.

It was obvious you didn't see me,

So I left and walked the long road.

With Summer cried out,

And Autumn a sad folly,

Now the drama decomposes

still and cold under foot.

You were my sad distant dad.

You saw life in me you hadn't had.

Poem 3

Giving Grief

Like a boy

You stood there clutching

a small gold ring.

Then, passing it quickly

like stolen loot

you uttered

'Keep it safe'.

Crushed by the giving

you left.

I sat, motionless.

Your mother's ring in my hand.

And so later,

without too much effort,

I lost it.

Poem 4

Mission : Rescue!

No wonder I rescued!

No wonder I was driven

to grasp your hand
as it swirled in the water.
The effort, the challenge
To right the injustice, to fight
To have what was yours by rights.

On this odyssey of education,
This passage of treachery,
I fight the machines of mainstream
Armed like Sarah Connor in Terminator.
Warning - you will respect him
He has power beyond words.
Before you can see it and mark it
You must believe!

But don't be fooled.
This maelstrom is a mirror.
For him, see me,
It is I that fight the waters,
a lost daughter
swirling in the brine.

Poem 5

The important one.

Begin again!

I will meet you with all I know

I will greet you with open arms

I will not wait to be invited,

I will rush to you and hug you with all my might.

Begin again so you have what is yours

Let not your mother steal you with her tears

Stay out in the garden

Play at the apple tree

Feel the sun on your face

And when the sadness rises then let it be known!

Cry so the world can hear you

Sob so your heart will not break,

Shake and weep and rail against the heavens

Grieve for a father taken too soon.

There is no shame in it.

Begin again with all you know

so you can have what you did not.

I will meet you there,
And you alone will be the important one.

Poem 6

The Girl not Boy

The grief stricken father
sought himself
in her reflection.
Defiant Mother,
claimed her for her clan.
A mirror of their lives
This boy born girl
Grasped saint to safeguard souls.
Grasped warrior to fight her foes,
And as she grasped and rescued
a weakness in her grew.
For how could she,
This boy not born,
Live as girl with any peace?

In the aftermath,
I see I lived them all –

Saint, Warrior,

Rebel, Rescuer.

Figments of fantasies

A refuge for the lost.

A girl in exile,

Waiting to be known.