Thinking blondes and heroes: interpreting Jungian theory and hero stories for women’s psychology

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CHAPTER SEVEN

Arranging the Souvenirs
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Dreams behave better,
if you hold them under the surface
for a while,
just till the struggling
stops.


The journey is over, the goal reached (I hope) and safe return achieved. I can now arrange and reminisce over the souvenirs - prepare for the dreaded “slide night”. I relive the experiences in memory; see the sights, feel the emotions all over again. But the re-living is not a repetition, it is a new kind of experience in which the often puzzling events, the sometimes aimless wanderings, the apparent irrelevancies, are pulled into shape and overlayed with coherent narrative form (“No wonder I sobbed, watching Fried Green Tomatoes!”, “So that’s why The Carpathians got to me!”). Now is my chance to tell myself what I think it all means. Have I really found my grail?

Review:

Just how to draw together the several threads which constitute the thesis remains problematical. Narratives as psychology, specifically in this case myths and associated works of fiction (the content of the thesis) are elaborated for the purpose of better elucidating ways in which women’s experiences can be recorded as a psychology which does not have to be prescriptive. In an attempt to use demonstration as well as argument, a number of stories have been discussed in terms of their interpretive value to a psychology of women.
At this point a review, summation and conclusion (however tentative) are requirements, whether I use the framework of narrative (a story with beginning, middle and end), or alternatively a theoretical exposition (a psychological theory - in this case Jungian theory).

That my conclusions should be tentative is both inevitable and necessary, given the approach I have taken. Even the results of formal scientific studies, it must be said, are advanced with only cautious optimism. Within a narrative model I am constrained as well by the implicit requirements. Jerome Bruner (1990, p. 77) attempted to clarify these with his “four crucial grammatical constituents”, namely, an emphasis on goal directed human agency; a standardised, linear “sequential order”; a respect for “canonality”, for the social rules of narrative; and finally a “narrator’s perspective”.

The thesis would seem to have fulfilled Bruner’s requirements. The importance of goals, of human agency and intentionality, have been stressed throughout as fundamental aspects to an understanding of human action, and consequently implicit in the construction of narratives told to explain and make sense of people’s experiences. Giving a linear form to narrative would seem more specifically a traditional Western requirement, but as such it is entirely appropriate here. Certainly I could find no feasible alternative to apply to the construction of an academic thesis, and it is an important element in the stories referred to as examples. Postmodernist claims that narrative, the novel and the self are dead - like Mark Twain’s reported demise - are exaggerated. Yet I am reluctant to generalise too far to other cultural traditions or even other times, on the need for linearity; it may be that the current Western fascination with causal explanation has an unduly powerful influence in other accounts as well. The dilemma is resolved tangentially, as it happens, by Bruner’s fourth point on narrative perspective. By refusing to use the accepted academic convention of
speaking in the depersonalised, authoritative voice, by explicitly identifying myself and my perspective to my reader, I provide her or him with a definite point of orientation. This is an account of my journey, not an account of the journey, into the strange country of the doctoral thesis.

By using myths and related modern stories I have provided myself with examples of narrative, couched in a framework of archetypal psychology, which readily fit the third point, the cultural requirements as defined by Bruner (1990). The form does not have to be seen as a restriction. On the contrary, it provides the framework, sets the guidelines, so that story-teller and audience can move freely and securely based on their shared assumptions about both structure and purpose of stories. The elements come together to enable “dialogical acts”, to use Taylor’s (1991, p. 310) term. If one adds to the canons of narrative the found (rather than invented) quality of the pertinent image - for story-teller and for audience - the convergence between stories and realities becomes apparent. Robert Duncan expressed the compelling quality of the apt theme:

... my purpose here has been to give some idea of how little a matter of ‘free’ association and how much a matter of actual times and actual objects the living reality of myth is for the poet. ... The surety of the myth for the poet has such force that it operates as a primary reality in itself, having volition. (Duncan, 1985, p. 13).

Mostly because by their very nature they deliver generalities about human behaviours and experiences, psychological theories have a more difficult task in combining general, essentialist pronouncements with wide scope for individual freedom, for human uniqueness. Psychological theories have not been immune from the seduction of social ideals, particularly the ideal of individualism, an ideal so pervasive in Western culture as to be paradigmatic.
As an ideal form, in broad terms (as a proposal that people should be able to pursue their individual interests and goals) it is admirable enough, if rather simplistic. However as soon as it is detailed, shaped, directed, "individual" requires quotation marks. As soon as individualism is spelled out it becomes a collective prescription. The spirit of the ideal, awkwardly expressed as "being oneself" or "true to oneself", is a noble aim. In terms of psychological potential though, it is something which can only happen, it cannot be prescribed (D. Mixon, 1997). Individuality, in the true sense of the term, need be neither exceptional nor notorious. It should not have to imply a larger collective against which it has, of necessity, to be defined.

Admittedly, archetypal psychology provides a broad, generalised theoretical framework for the thesis. The psychodynamic view of the human psyche and archetypal forms, particularly the anima, animus and Self, provide guideposts, frames of reference, with which to locate the mythic themes in the context of personal psychological experience. However personal narratives are not reduced to universal, essential mythic themes. Rather the grand themes provide points of orientation and associations such that an abundance of stories can be explored, enriching and expanding the possibilities for interpreting the personal. In the process the personal is enhanced, but the general, the traditional and formal story told by others, can also become intimate, particular, personalised, mine.

The long established traditions of story-telling have ways of avoiding prescriptive generalities, so they can offer to psychological theorising well-tried, sophisticated techniques for providing examples other than the bland statistical average. Yet, as Jungian psychology has learned sometimes to its detriment, simply using narrative and personification is no guarantee of escape from prescriptive theorising. For instance, although it can have useful
explanatory value in identifying trends and patterns, identifying the gods and goddesses closely with personality types is to be treated with caution. Christine Downing (1981) offered her reader an intensely personal, at times even voyeuristic, insight into her own responses to the Greek goddesses. By way of contrast, Jean Shinoda Bolen (1984) presented an ostensibly useful, structured typology based on the characters of the goddesses. Downing not only leaves the readers to make their own connections with the goddess forms, but also describes her, Downing’s, changing relationships to the goddesses over time. Bolen’s typology however, is clearly defined and easily applied, but also restrictive. The interpretations of myths as patterns for life stories can easily tighten into formulas for living, and ultimately devolve into quick-fix pop psychology. Downing’s (1981) illuminating stories finally offer a richer and more rewarding range of possibilities than does Bolen’s (1984) well intentioned but limiting categories.

No single story can cover all contingencies; some stories or myths will appeal, be more meaningful than others, at a given stage in an individual’s life. Such stories deserve full attention and careful evaluation, but their applicability is unlikely to be permanent. Mythologically speaking, the gods are jealous, and to court one only is to risk calling down on one’s head the wrath of the others. Hence James Hillman’s (1977, 1980a) advocacy of a polytheistic approach is more flexible (and safer), Hillman’s own predilection for Hermes notwithstanding. The whole process then becomes more complex, messier, less secure but also richer and more realistic. It does not however need to degenerate into relativism. It is not that any choice of image is as good as any other, but that the more comprehensive the range of choices, the greater the chance of discovering the most apposite image at the crucial moment.
The use of narrative with an underlying framework of Jungian archetypal theory is proposed as a viable approach to organising meaningful accounts of human action, without resorting to restrictive generalisations. As such it makes for promising psychological theorising on the experiences of women, so long marginalised and often pathologised in traditional psychological theories. Feminist, postmodernist and social constructionist perspectives have provided alternatives from which some of the more limited and restricted psychodynamic presuppositions have been questioned. In particular, the tendency to hierarchical organisation (usually androcentric) of concepts, developmental processes, even socially sanctioned ideals, and the equally unfortunate and related tendency to treat the individual as an isolated, detached, abstract unit (balanced precariously in splendid isolation at the peak of the hierarchy) have been reconsidered in the light of well-founded criticisms.

_Snapshots and Souvenirs:_

There are innumerable other stories which could illustrate my chosen subject matter; there is in fact an embarrassment of riches. So once again, the examples which will be mentioned in this chapter are idiosyncratic personal choices, restricted only by the requirements that they be the work of women authors, about women heroes, and that they represent a variety of styles. They are introduced at this late stage simply to provide a counterpoint to the examples explored in more detail in the preceding chapters.

The journey began in chapter one with Jason and Medea and the classic heroic quest for the quintessential goal, the Golden Fleece. The story was chosen for its complex themes; the quest was not straightforward nor was there a happy resolution. Psychologically it introduced the themes of conscious and unconscious intentions, and the human capacity for self-deception. These two themes are central to the particular approach to psychology advocated here.
The use of metaphor, especially myths and stories as metaphor, provides a fertile ground for imaginative exploration of possibilities and alternatives. The goal is not to recommend a correct resolution of problems associated with intentionality and purpose, but rather to show how they can be more fully explored, and the consequent likelihood of self-deception reduced.

Janet Frame’s (1989) *The Carpathians* is a modern journey and quest story. The narrator, Mattina, herself a writer, travels from America to an isolated town in New Zealand, seeking inspiration, and in particular the Maori legend of the Memory Flower. The engaging story of encounters with local eccentrics suddenly becomes surreal when one night it rains letters of the alphabet, and people awake to find they have lost their capacity for language, so ultimately their ability to live. Although she escapes, Mattina too dies on her return home. Frame accentuates the novel’s preoccupation with language (as individual expression and hence life) in the maddeningly confusing prologue, a “Note” by Mattina’s son, who presents Mattina’s own record as his “second novel”, rendering it a fiction within a fiction. He continues “... I became absorbed ... with the urgency with which each character equated survival with maintaining point of view, indeed with being as a point of view. “ (Frame, 1989, p. 7). Here, the hero’s quest and the story as quest are juxtaposed such that issues of identity and understanding are highlighted.

There is no hint of journeying to strange and remote lands in Jane Austen’s (1961/1816) *Emma*, but, at a pinch, Emma too can be seen as the questing hero. As self-appointed benefactor, she busies herself with matchmaking among her friends and acquaintances. She makes a boon of the affections of her hapless companions, generously presenting them to the person she, Emma, has decided would make the most appropriate partner. Thus, the indifferent portrait of Harriet, and the affected verse charade (made by the insufferable Mr. Elton, to
impress Emma herself) are, with unjustified confidence, offered to Harriet as proof of Elton's interest. Emma says with satisfaction: "I could never tell whether an attachment between you and Mr. Elton were most desirable or most natural." (Austen, 1961/1816, p. 87). In her sparkling, witty account of late eighteenth century parochial life, Austen, predictably but exquisitely, depicts Emma's own journey to self-awareness as a slow and embarrassing process which occurs under the tutelage of the sternly avuncular, and future beloved, Mr. Knightley.

Truly classic heroic adventures are recounted in the fantasy stories for adolescents, _The Earthsea Trilogy_ (Le Guin, 1993). They are engrossing though dark and at times painful tales of the hero-magician, the archmage Ged. However in the much later sequel, _Tehanu_ (Le Guin, 1993), (although still an adventure of magic, journeys and quests) it is one of Ged's protagonists, the once priestess of dark powers, Tenar, who is the central character. Tenar and Ged meet again in later life. Tenar is now a widowed countrywoman, her own children adults, but she is caring for a disturbed and horribly abused girl child. Ged is ill, distressed and shamed, having lost his magic powers in a final battle with the evil force. _Tehanu_ is an excellent example of histories told beyond the youthful hero's quest. It recapitulates the adventure and quest themes, but takes account of the continuity of lives. As the story progresses Tenar and Ged settle into a warm, accommodating relationship. They pragmatically accept their changed circumstances and set out with enthusiasm to establish a new life as subsistence farmers.

Something of the same appreciation of the heroic, of the remarkable in ordinary life is captured, with immediacy and frankness, in Davida Allen's art, as evidenced in the drawing at the beginning of this chapter (Allen, 1991). In the pictorial novel, from which the illustration is taken, events from everyday
family life are assembled into a biographical narrative. Allen’s work combines the domestic and high art. Her special talent is to bring life and art together without allowing one to be subsumed by the other. She does not demystify art in order to domesticate it, to make it easily accessible; her work is confronting and often enigmatic. Neither does she attempt to reify womanhood, motherhood or the demands of daily life. All the muddles, joys and preoccupations of living are recorded in her art, often with shocking intimacy. She makes high art from her everyday experiences while the making of her art is intrinsically part of her everyday experience - there is no separation.

Oedipus represents the hero form in unequivocally larger than life and tragic guise. His journey began as flight, rather than quest, and his heroic victories spawned even more tragedies. In this case overconfidence and ignorance result in appalling consequences. Oedipus’s unknown (or unconscious) origins provided the ideal metaphor for a discussion, in chapter two, of the value of a psychodynamic approach to understanding the human psyche. Oedipus’s flight towards his original parents exemplifies the inevitability of certain events, the self-fulfilling prophecy, attributed to the fates in a classical epistemology, or to the unconscious in a psychodynamic psychology. Jung’s (CW 9i) theory of archetypes, in this case specifically those of anima, animus and Self, provides a bridge between the two forms of explanation. By being able to imagine the unconscious tendencies as persons, characters interacting with context and plot (goddesses, gods, heroes, other memorable characters) vague and hazy hunches can be explored with a freedom not easily achieved in analytical thinking. Later analysis and decision making is then enhanced with expanded possibilities.

Unconscious origins are taken to an extreme in the novel Orlando (Woolf, 1960), in which the life’s journey as transformation spans several lives.
Orlando, the young Elizabethan nobleman, misfit and aspiring writer, is haunted and inspired by the image of the unkempt old poet (who just might have been Shakespeare). Orlando then lives on through several reincarnations until she finally arrives as a writer in twentieth century London. Gender is fundamental to Virginia Woolf’s satirical exploration of creativity, sensitivity and self expression, as Orlando experiences life in different epochs and as both man and woman. “For the probity of breeches she exchanged the seductiveness of petticoats and enjoyed the love of both sexes equally.” (Woolf, 1960, p. 200).

A much less fanciful but very moving account of unknown origins is played out in Sally Morgan’s (1987) autobiographical novel My Place. The author’s understandings of who she is, and who she can become, undergo a bewildering shift when she discovers that her dark skin is not the legacy of an exotic Indian ancestry, but of her Australian Aboriginal origins. As autobiography, the story narrows the gap between fiction and lived experience, although the reader will still use exactly the same imaginative capacities to share the author’s perspective.

The third chapter, dealing with feminists and fighting women, addressed directly ways in which women’s experiences are circumscribed by their gender socialisation; women continue to be treated in terms of being “other”, different. The socially sanctioned ideal of development, broadly analogous to individualism (an androcentric and bizarrely unrealistic ideal), is both familiar to, and somewhat remote from, the experience of women. Like the Amazons and other warrior women (Athene for instance) some women fight for the right to share in the dominant practices and rewards. For others, fighting against assimilation, the aims are to highlight or to discover more acceptable alternatives. Consequently, many women stand apart from the social
conventions of both masculine and feminine ideals, and as such seem closer to Artemis, the unpredictable goddess of wilderness. Paradoxically it is from the frustrations of exclusion, and confusions about identity, that some of the most original and creative alternatives have emerged, within the various feminist groups.

Dorothea, in George Eliot’s (1964/1871-2) Middlemarch, is very much the Athene woman. She is imbued with a deep respect for the Enlightenment ideals of good scholarship, artistic creativity and social responsibility. She is a single-minded young woman with commitment and integrity, but as a woman of her times, she sees her role as helpmeet and support for the men she admires. Ironically, her contributions are dismissed by her husband, Casubon, who interprets them as interference. Socially, she is treated either with pity or suspicion, as she persists in her attempts to bring her goals to fruition.

In the lightweight, but wicked romp, The Cloning of Joanna May, Fay Weldon’s (1989) women characters fight simply and resolutely for revenge. After discovering that her mad-scientist husband had secretly created four clones of herself, Joanna makes contact with her younger daughters/sisters, so that together they might wreak vengeance. Along with all the outrageous action however, are some clever comments on the nature of power and control, and on issues of identity.

Initially at least neither Rose, nor the reader, find much to smile about in Eloise Mixon’s (c. 1991) The Other Rose. Rose is forced into a harrowing transformation, a violation and hellish descent, occasioned by medical interventions. After an unnecessary hysterectomy, the young Rose (deemed not to be grieving appropriately) is scheduled into a psychiatric institution. Her metagenesis, after her release, is achieved through a series of uncompromising relationships (mostly sexual) with men, all pursued with a fierce integrity. Her
revenge for the injustices she endured is sweet but not cruel. Her self-respect is reclaimed by mastery over men, with the firm resolve that she would never be the victim again. Her personal politics and her methods are genuinely unconventional (she neither accepts nor rejects the social mores, she ignores them). This makes Rose a striking exemplar of individuality and difference in the true sense of the terms.

Interpersonal relationships, especially those between women and men, were discussed, in conjunction with the Psyche and Eros myth, in chapter four. The inevitable complexity of human relationships involves a continual interplay between defining and maintaining individuality on the one hand, and successfully attending to interpersonal concerns on the other. As only object of desire, Psyche became increasingly isolated. It required a painful process of differentiation, of individuation in Jungian terms, for her to be able to interact with Eros from the totality of her person. In the light of my exploration of the myth I suggested that, like Eros himself dismissed to sulk on Olympus, the Eros capacity for relatedness, especially in men, has been undervalued and discredited as a crucial aspect of socialisation. Psyche, lost and confused, is left with sole responsibility for redeeming and maintaining relationships.

Complicated personal relationships are explored sequentially, throughout Dorothy Richardson’s (1979) four volume Pilgrimage. In this semi-autobiographical work, set in turn of the century England and Europe, the central character, Miriam Henderson, puzzles and agonises over the difficulties in developing successful relationships in her working and social life. Her judgements of herself and her acquaintances are often damning:

That was feminine worldliness, pretending to be interested so that pleasant things might go on. Masculine worldliness was refusing to be interested so that it might go on doing things. Feminine worldliness then meant
perpetual hard work and cheating and pretence at the door of a hidden
garden. Masculine worldliness meant never being really there; always
talking about things that had happened or making plans for things that
might happen. ... Nobody was ever quite there, realizing.

(Richardson, 1979, vol 1. p. 388).

The thirteen novels in the series, spanning adolescence to mid-life, provide a
detailed account of the experiences of a rather aloof, impoverished woman,
struggling to establish herself as a writer, and trying to come to terms with her
situation and the inanities and injustices of her social milieu. Broad issues of
identity and self-expression are alluded to in Richardson’s outpourings of
compelling stream of consciousness prose.

Ursula Le Guin explored successful heterosexual relationships within a
fantasy of physiological androgyny, in The Left Hand of Darkness (Le Guin,
1969). Normally androgynous, the characters in the novel spontaneously
develop sexual characteristics complementary to those of the person to whom
they are attracted. It is important to note that Le Guin (1989) later regretted the
exclusive heterosexuality of her utopian fantasy of ideal relationships. The
general issue of interpretation and re-interpretation of stories is satisfyingly
documented by Le Guin (1989) with her essay, Is Gender Necessary? written in
1976, then annotated in 1988. The original essay had been written as a
response to, what seemed to Le Guin, excessive public and critical
preoccupations with the androgyne theme in the novel. However in her later,
1988, comments, she accused herself of having been overly defensive, as well
as identifying other changes she would have made to the essay. She then
commented wryly on the entire exercise: “Clearly it would have been unethical
to rewrite the 1976 text, to disappear it; so it appears here, complete, but with
remarks and annotations and self-recreminations from later years. I do hope I
don't have to do this again in the nineties.” (Le Guin, 1989, p. 2). She has identified, and demonstrated precisely, issues which interest me here. Interpretations must be true to the spirit of the original, but cannot with confidence be definitive - even the story-tellers themselves are plagued by problems of implication and meaning.

The relationships portrayed in the movie, *The Piano* (Campion, 1993), are those between the silent young pianist, her repressed husband and her passionate, obsessive lover. Jane Campion accentuated the theme of a journey to isolated, foreign lands by exaggerating to gothic proportions the claustrophobia of the sodden, impenetrable New Zealand forest. There are no real surprises in the central plot, but many compelling moments in the voyeurism of the quirky love scenes, the awkward, often cruel interactions between husband and wife, as well as in the brooding magnificence of the setting, where landscape has as much presence as the people (what happens here could not happen in the same way elsewhere).

Since relationships between women have tended to be neglected in psychological theorising, chapter five was devoted specifically to the issue. The same juggling of interpersonal distance and intimacy applies, as with the previously discussed relationships between women and men. But other aspects of woman to woman relationships remain equivocal. Mother and daughter relationships are sometimes sentimentalised, but more often pathologised; sister and peer relationships are neglected; lesbian relationships remain marginalised. The myth of Demeter and Persephone, with its exclusivity, tragic separation and partial reunion, provides several scenarios from which to speculate on mother, daughter and friendship interactions between women.

There are relationships between mother and daughter, but especially between the sisters, Nora and Grace, as well as the very practical friendship
between Nora and Betty which unfold, mostly in flashback, in Jessica Anderson's (1980) *Tirra Lirra by the River*. Towards the end of her life, after much travelling, Nora returns to the family home and the ghost of her difficult relationship with her late sister Grace, a capable, energetic, practical woman who disapproved of Nora's bohemian lifestyle. Unexpectedly ill and bed-ridden, nursed by the neighbourly Betty, Nora has ample time to reminisce and reflect, to sort through her priorities and come to terms with her situation. Finally convalescing, with grudging good humour, she makes accommodations to other possibilities, other ways:

At the hours stipulated by the waterboard, I hose Grace's remarkable garden, but am careful to preserve my amateur attitude towards it, and when I bury my fruit and vegetable leavings instead of putting them out with the garbage, I address to Grace this warning:

"*This is absolutely as far as I intend to go.*"


Joanna and her clones provide another very obvious, if rather warped, version of mother, daughter and sister interactions. Weldon (1989) took delight in playing with the nurture/nature debate, as the cloned offspring are revealed in their difference, but gradually find commonality and singularity of purpose with the original Joanna. In *The Carpathians* (Frame, 1989) Mattina is fascinated and challenged in her developing relationship with the older writer Dinny Wheatstone, enigmatic and self-professed imposter. It is largely through the stories and guidance of other women, especially from her grandmother, that Sally Morgan's (1987) narrator is able to make the difficult cultural transition to, and develop gradual pride in, her Aboriginality.

The discussion of the ideals and possibilities in theories of self, in chapter six, departed from the pattern of using Greek myths as examples. Jung's (*CW*
9ii) own choice of the Christ form as representative of the Self provided such a wealth of illuminating and frustrating angles, I found ample material with which to develop the theme of self, as it might apply in a psychology of women. Frustrated particularly by the androcentric bias, and the tendency to espouse the ideals of individualism which permeated Jung’s descriptions of the archetype of the Self, I decided to review other self theories from the major schools of psychology. The ubiquity of the individualist ideal led me to speculate that psychologies, as culturally embedded as any forms of theorising, cannot be entirely free of ideology so must at least be explicit about their cultural and intellectual orientations.

From the perspective derived from my investigations I proposed a theory of self which is unitary, but also embodied and social. It is also an active and intentional self with both conscious and unconscious capacities. In pragmatic terms, given the continuing preoccupation with male and female differences in Western socialisation, the experience of selfhood is likely to be strongly influenced by gender requirements. Consequently habits of gender need to be investigated and their restrictions highlighted by imagining other possibilities.

Although I have settled for a unitary, intentional and individual concept of self, I am loath to define it in more detail. Discussions of identity make it clear that experiences of selfhood are anything but static, so it is continuity rather than sameness I wish to infer. If Oedipus and Antigone had found themselves in the other’s situation - same time, same context, same dilemmas - it is unlikely they would act in the same way. I am using “act” deliberately, to imply that the particular characteristics, experiences, behaviours, interactions which constellate into an Oedipus are qualitatively different to those of an Antigone. The presence of the particular, intentional self then changes the dynamics of the situation.
Describing and defining the self in psychological theory is inevitably to reduce it, to make it a concept, a “thing”, a dead weight. Just as the chalice (the cup, the vessel) is only the Grail due to the symbolic meanings ascribed to it, theories of self carry implications of purpose, meaning and vitality not obvious in the mere definition, but the theories are never the self, itself. The concept and the experience remain separate. Metaphors and stories can do what the theoretical definition cannot; they can explore and describe, without having to reduce, so they tell me more of myself as possibility, while they engage more of myself as I attend to them; they go some way towards bringing concept and self together.

From the stories discussed above (almost all dealing with issues of identity) the characters, Joanna May, Dinny Wheatstone, Rose, Orlando and Tenar provide interesting comments on self. In an understanding akin to a Lacanian perspective on self, Joanna is inclined to favour a return to the shared experience of childhood, as less isolating:

But is the ‘me’, the ‘I’, really the same as the initial ‘you’ with which we all begin; the sudden bright consciousness of the self as something defined by others? Perhaps we did better in our initial belief, that the shivering cold is jointly experienced, something shared. I wonder.

(Weldon, 1989, p. 6).

Dinny Wheatstone, refusing to be categorised, is more postmodern with her clever play on language:

Impostering or imposture comes from the core of your being because there’s nothing else there. Your central being never develops a self; that’s not a disadvantage entirely, though you do have to fight for your point of view, almost as if you were dead.

(Frame, 1989, p. 44).
The young Rose, left physically traumatised and psychologically shattered, experiences a rare moment of self-assurance shortly before her discharge from the psychiatric institution:

"I'm Rose," she says, happy in herself. "I'm Rose, I'm Rose!" ... After all their efforts to cut her out, see a person not there, Rose is still inside. Not the skull-blasted Rose smashed to smithereens, that one's done for, a rotten egg. Humpty Dumpty off the wall. This Rose naming herself is a germ out of its depth, inconstant, a spore, or offshoot of survived suicide, insulin coma, electrocution, crucifixion on a dais.


Rose's moment of self-confidence presages the determination and dedication with which the older Rose redeems a shattered past - repays a debt to the lost younger Rose - by unstintingly realising the dreams and desires of her youth. Rose finds her freedom in a radical individuality, by breaking conventions and by insisting on her own sense of integrity.

For the twentieth century, female Orlando, also searching for a sense of herself long absent, the recaptured sense is of a settled, unitary self, albeit with ironic overtones from Woolf:

So she was now darkened, still, and become, with the addition of this Orlando, what is called, rightly or wrongly, a single self, a real self. And she fell silent. For it is probable that when people talk aloud, the selves (of which there may be more than two thousand) are conscious of disservice, and are trying to communicate, but when communication is established they fall silent.

(Woolf, 1960, p. 282).

Tenar had fled from her prescribed destiny as priestess of dark powers, in order to free her true self (Le Guin, 1993). She had been confused and
frustrated by Ged's preoccupation and especially his shame at losing his powers - he was still alive, he was still himself, so why the extreme suffering? Now however, as a middle aged countrywoman, she says equivocally of herself, and her own lost powers: "I made myself a vessel. I know its shape. But not the clay. Life danced me. I know the dances. But I don't know who the dancer is." (Le Guin, 1993, p. 667).

In Conclusion; Thinking Blondes and Heroes:
In an attempt to bring into balance my requirements for a non-prescriptive psychology, with a focus on psychological meaning - a valuing of individual experience and purposive action - I endorse a polythematic approach to narrative explanations. Finally though I am pulled back to my own, singular perspective. My perspectives - of the hero, the human agent, the woman as psychological subject, and that of the story-teller, the theorist, the psychologist - are still confidently individualistic, but it is the individuality of a specific person, in a particular context. It is a perspective expressed with the cautious confidence that well told stories, along with an appreciation of the conscious and unconscious aspects of human intentionality, provide valuable techniques with which to develop a psychology of human actions.

Narratives, stories, myths, have long been accepted as valid subject matter in psychotherapeutic encounters, based in the observation that people tell stories to make sense of their lives. However story as psychology is less readily accepted; it is more likely to be denigrated as folk psychology, or relegated to a useful adjunct (a source of information from the patient, later to be translated into "real" psychology by the expert). Alternatively "good" stories are deemed literature, hence outside the realm of psychology. Yet a story will only be successful if it is convincing psychologically. If the literary theorists are prepared to engage psychological theories to investigate their
discipline, perhaps it is time psychologists took more seriously the degree to which they rely on narrative, metaphor and even rhetoric, to present their theories.

To use a psychodynamic perspective in explanations of human action (especially purposive, intentional action) is to add an extra dimension. If the concept of the conscious and unconscious dynamic is imagined - with the accent on dynamic, lively, interactive - the frustrations and paradoxes of explaining human action do not have to degenerate into a rigid, stultifying inevitability. On initial reading the quote at the head of the chapter "Dreams behave better if you hold them under the surface..." (Bradley, 1989, p. 35), seems harsh and relentless. But in the context of the whole poem (reproduced in Appendix 2), there is a wistful quality as well. Dreams, like any creative, unconscious images, refuse to be grabbed at, possessed and controlled - they will slide out of reach, drift away or disintegrate. Patience, delicacy, an oblique approach are more likely to connect with the meanings. Jung's theory of the collective unconscious and archetypal forms provides an organised but flexible system of orientation for theorising about conscious and unconscious aspects of psychic experience. Different interpretations of a story are to be expected from different observers. Then too, one's own version is likely to change over time, sometimes to a more satisfying perspective, sometimes with a cringe of embarrassment at earlier misinterpretations.

Psychology has been criticised for a lack of social context in much theorising, where the focus is exclusively on the isolated individual. Stories give context to characters. With their specific settings and particular interrelationships, stories provide points of comparison, instances and examples, in which, or against which, to locate an issue of psychological importance. It is both unrealistic and dangerous to theorise about people as psychologically
separate, isolated individuals. The ideal of the autonomous individual is easily exposed as a sham, a trick of thorough socialisation into the Western cultural tradition. Story as psychology, especially in conjunction with psychodynamic theory, is not being offered as the final panacea to these difficulties, but is being endorsed as a way of exploring the impasse, in which the interconnections between theory and ideology have not been appreciated.

Gender requirements are an intrinsic and substantial, though often unrecognised, aspect of Western ideologies and psychologies. Given the androcentric bias of the Western tradition, it is inevitable that it would be women who are more obviously disadvantaged. But the cost to men too, is gradually becoming more apparent. In the lopsided accounts of social or individual experience, individual men have tended to take centre stage, as in the case of the hero myth. That heroes are men can be seen as an inspiring ideal, but an expectation that men must be heroes, to be real men, is foolishness. It is left to women in this stereotypical scenario to wait, breathlessly, for rescue; to stay at home to keep the house in order; or if very daring, to attempt to beat the men at their own game. Obviously, heroics and the hero’s quest, make up only a small part of actual lives. Swooning blondes and dashing heroes should be allowed space to consider other possible outcomes to their dilemmas.

If the self is the Grail, then the quest becomes a metaphor for a psychological process. Stories give metaphors life. Myths, narratives, stories as psychology enable exploration of psychological themes, of concepts, where analytical explanation fails to capture, in definition, the vitality and variety of experience. Imagining other possibilities for the hero’s quest has provided the focus for the thesis; not all heroic quests are undertaken by men, and heroic quests only make sense in the context of broader life events. The young hero
who cannot settle to anything but an endless series of adventures, is destined for perpetual adolescence, very busy but very stuck. The hero’s journey, as specific narrative form discussed in the stories chosen as examples, and as metaphor for the research project itself, has been explored as a demonstration of the value of metaphor and narrative to psychological explanation. That it should shed some light on women’s psychological experiences, in the context of female heroes, has been another central aim. However it is not my intention to propose the woman hero’s quest as either preferred metaphor, or preferred theory, of women’s psychological development; that would make it every bit as prescriptive as the theories I have criticised. Rather, the exploration is presented as a demonstration of the invaluable richness of story forms - another means of shedding light in the complicated landscape of human psychology ...

back to the journey again.