

Men, Women and Relationships - A Post-Jungian Approach: Gender Electrics and Magic Beans

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Men, Women and Relationships—A Post-Jungian Approach

This book offers Jungian perspectives on social constructions of gender difference and explores how these feed into adult ways of relating within male–female relationships. Phil Goss places this discussion within an archetypal context drawing on the fairy tale *Jack and the Beanstalk* to consider the deep tension in western culture between the transcendent masculine and the immanent feminine.

Offering both developmental and socio-cultural frameworks, areas of discussion include:

- the use of story and myth to understand gender
- Jungian and post-Jungian approaches: updating *anima/animus*
- working clinically with men and with women
- the developmental pathways of gender difference
- power relations between men and women in the home.

Men, Women and Relationships—A Post-Jungian Approach will be a valuable resource for all those with an interest in analytical psychology, including psychotherapists, psychoanalysts and counsellors, as well as those in the broader fields of social work and education who have an interest in gender difference and identity.

Phil Goss is a Jungian Analyst and a member of the Association of Jungian Analysts and the IAAP. He is also Senior Lecturer for Counselling and Psychotherapy at the University of Central Lancashire.

Men, Women and Relationships—A Post-Jungian Approach

Gender Electrics and Magic Beans

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Introduction

The anima/animus relationship is always full of 'animosity', i.e. it is emotional, and hence collective...often the relationship runs its course heedless of its human performers, who afterwards do not know what happened to them.

(Jung, 1959: para. 31)

What this book is about

In what ways might being a man be different to being a woman? Is it possible to describe those differences without getting caught in double binds about identity, power, role and relationship? How might these differences unconsciously define what happens in a male–female relationship, as Jung implies in the quote above? He asserted that every man carries a contrasexual image of woman—*anima*—and every woman carries the image of man—*animus* (Jung, 1953/1966). How might this, and other readings of female–male relations, help us make fresh sense of gender in our postmodern, pluralistic world?

Furthermore, is it credible to make general assertions about how women and men may develop, and experience, life differently? If so, what can be usefully 'done' with these in our thinking about relationships and parenting? From an analytic viewpoint how might a framework for describing similarity and difference between men and women inform clinical thinking and practice?

This book aims to scrutinise the nature of relationships between the sexes in original ways which can usefully inform academic, clinical and political debates about gender, which remain central to what it means to be a person in westernised societies in the twenty-first century.

I draw on two frames of reference. First, from my training and practice as a Jungian analyst and my interest in the tensions and possibilities inherent in building on Jung's awkward but vivid portrayal of the male-female polarity manifested in both inner and outer relationships. In my practice I find myself reflecting on whether there are ways in which (generally) a woman experiences analysis differently to a man and how the gender of the analyst impacts on this.

My clinical experience has suggested to me that, as well as fundamental similarities, there *are* differences at work, though these are clinically, not to mention empirically, hard to pin down—and, possibly, politically contentious. I will draw on disguised clinical material, which I have permission from patients to use, to explore these differences constructively.

My second frame of reference is a personal one. I grew up as the only male in a female household, after my father died when I was five. Getting to know the world in the company of three sisters and my mother crystallised the reality of being the 'other', gender-wise. This almost certainly shaped my intuitive and intellectual interest in possible differences in how men and women, girls and boys, experience life—and may develop divergently from birth.

Further consonant experiences come from adult life. Before becoming an analyst I spent fourteen years teaching and managing in special schools in the UK for pupils with severe learning difficulties. These schools are staffed overwhelmingly by women; not just a predominantly female

teaching staff, but also many unqualified or partly qualified women who live locally to the schools and perform vital (and low-paid) roles as teaching assistants for often very needy pupils. This is thrown into even starker relief by the trend for boys to predominantly populate such schools (Goss, 2003). So, settings which offered a challenging but fascinating experience of how gendered 'otherness' can operate.

These subjective experiences and observations of 'otherness' between being a man/boy or woman/girl inevitably colour my perspective. I propose this dimension of subjectivity, when used in a critically reflexive way, can be seen as an asset to what is hopefully a worthwhile struggle to scrutinise questions of 'sameness' and 'difference'. I am sure the reader will be able to hold my own subjective influences in mind as well as their own as I develop my argument—this, I suggest, is vital to fostering a healthy mode of enquiry, alongside the upholding of academic and clinical rigour.

My premise is that there are aspects of the masculine–feminine dynamic which remain hidden from view because they are fundamental to sustaining patterns of relating and are core to how we have lived for centuries, so need to be 'taken as read' in order to be preserved. I aim to validate the postmodern emphasis on gender as a flexible and pluralistic notion, while also highlighting these often obscured, embedded aspects of it. I will also offer a developmental framework for understanding these.

This applies particularly to unspoken conditions set up between parent and child—patterns which need to be made conscious in order to help society tackle, for example, the malaise around male identity and capacity for relationship, and the impact of 'absent fathering' on girls. This process could also act as a resource for the recalibration of roles within heterosexual relationships, particularly within the domestic sphere. I also suggest that aggression in the mother/wife role remains relatively unexplored but needs to be aired as an important factor.

Gay and transgendered experience and relationships

There is one aspect of this exploration I have wrestled with in planning and writing this book, which I need to be upfront about from the outset. This relates to the areas of gender, gay identity, transgendered identity and relationships. My dilemma has been whether I can do these areas justice within this book. They would need to be explored substantially alongside my central attempt to make sense of difference and sameness in heterosexual relationships, within a post-Jungian commentary on the developmental, archetypal and constructivist layers of this huge topic.

There is a significant body of writing on these areas. In the Jungian field, examples include McKenzie (2006), with her valuable observations about 'queering gender' (which I explore in [Chapter 2](#)); Kavalier-Adler (2006) on the homoerotic transference; and Young-Eisendrath's (1998) clarifications around the nature of desire in heterosexual and homosexual relationships. I will draw on such literature pertaining to sexuality and gender, including Butler's important ideas (1990).

This moves me towards describing the decision I eventually arrived at, after much deliberation and valuable discussion with colleagues. This is, on the one hand, to refer to ideas and clinical insights on gay and transgendered experiencing and relating where they inform discussion on the nature of 'gender' and the living out of whatever 'it' is. This in turn informs the discussion on, and model for, male and female development I offer in [Chapter 3](#), as well as coming into the reflections on clinical matters and wider social links in [Chapters 4, 5 and 6](#).

On the other hand, I have decided *not* to look explicitly at the nature of gay and transgender relationships closely, as I fear this would end up as rather tokenistic, simply because there is not

the scope to do them justice within the scale and central frame of reference of the book. These ways of being human, and how they translate in terms of subjectivity, sexuality and relationship, deserve a separate book.

Story, archetype and relationship

I will take as my starting point the traditional English fairy tale *Jack and the Beanstalk*, with its powerful imagery of the son having to prove himself to the initially furious mother, and the access he gets to the world of giants as a resource for 'solving' this problem. I will also utilise clinical experience and theory, making connections between psychoanalytic theory (e.g. on narcissism), Jung's notions of *puer/puella* and *anima/animus*, and the presentations of what I argue may be gender-specific difficulties in the consulting room. These include a specifically male form of *anima* 'discontinuity' which can hamper maturation, and ways in which versions of *animus* can trap women in equally pervasive suffering. I will apply to this reworked versions of *anima* and *animus* as they may present in men and women.

The book aims to arrive at a new model for understanding the powerful forces at work between men and women, be this as lovers, parents, siblings or friends. The electricity in the interactive field that lies between and within genders, like the 'magic beans' which make things happen when everything seems stuck, is explored in all its main forms: familial love and relationship, erotic, sexual and aggressive energies—as they might be expressed differently between men and women—and how these may influence our ways of seeing each other.

The search for love and friendship lies at the heart of gender relations. But so does provocation. The electricity of provocation or stimulation is needed for anything to happen, for the circuits of either aggressive or erotic activity to light up and begin, alter, nourish, consolidate or end relationships. People act in relationships when prompted or provoked—by love, anger, attraction, fear or even boredom. People act in response to such provocation in order to get what they need, protect their territory or show how much they care.

This observation pertains to family, friends or lovers and I begin this book with it to provide a wholehearted challenge to the fuzzy but alluring illusion that relations between the genders are meant to be solely predicated on stability and care. For sure, these two elements are enormously important for the long-term preservation and consolidation of loving and familial relations, but they also have a capacity to deaden them without the complementary presence of relational 'electricity'. Without this, the forces of stability fall prey to a harmful form of *enantiodromia*—they turn into their opposite state: destructive and implosive.

I argue that our familiar ways of thinking about relationships between men and women, brothers and sisters, fathers and daughters, and mothers and sons seem to often conspire to filter out the power, the 'charge' of energy at work in the fields within which these relationships operate. Getting behind this pattern can bring a clearer understanding of the intrapsychic and interpersonal processes which may be at work between women and men. This also aims at serving as a basis for making wider social and political extrapolations about their meaning and how they may get us unhelpfully caught between the ideal and reality of *relationship*.

I suggest that there is a deep well of emotional investment at work in us, men and women alike, in preserving the templates of gender relations which have been around in the west for at least a couple of millennia. However, there is another complementary premise to be factored in, I believe: there is an equally strong wish for things to be different to how they are now—where broken relationships, broken families and layers of mutual incomprehension between women and men are wearily accepted as common features of the social and relational landscape. It is the blocks and incomprehensions we buy into both consciously and unconsciously, I suggest, which make it so difficult to properly see how faulty our perceptions of what it means to be either a man or a woman can be.

This discussion is placed within a framework which attempts to blend the many influences on our thinking about gender. These influences are of course multi-layered; from the messages we have each had from family, school, work and wider society of what it means to be a woman or a man, through to the academic and clinical readings of what we might mean by 'gender'. My loose initial definition of gender is: *our experience of being, and identity as, a man or a woman.*

This definition is deliberately open, and accounts for its subjective (*experience of being*) and socially ascribed (*identity as*) aspects. This allows the foggy mix of biological factors, archetypal dimensions and socially constructed aspects of gender scope to reveal forms or insights not often glimpsed—while recognising that this 'fog' is an important part of the 'gender' picture.

Describing gendered experience

One of my aims in writing this book is to see it as a project in which experiences of being a man or a woman can be more confidently described. This refers to what Samuels highlights as 'Not what being a woman is but what being a woman is *like*' (Samuels, 1989:297)—which can likewise be applied to men, of course. I will also try to describe what aspects of being human 'free float' between men and women and might be described as archetypally *human* rather than specific to 'being a woman or a man'.

Culturally the context for this discussion is mainly a westernised one, though with increased globalisation it is important to factor in the influence of, and blending with, the multiplicity of 'other' ways of thinking about women, men and how they relate, which we derive from our encounters with different cultures—face to face or through media and online sources.

This book analyses how unconscious processes relating to gender intimately inform the human condition and how, in turn, these processes may feed into 'gendered experiencing'. The burgeoning literature in depth psychology will be an obvious reference point, but so will research arising from the field of neuroscience, and ideas from psychology, sociology, anthropology and feminist and cultural studies.

In [Chapter 2](#) I will draw on these to look at 'gender as problematic', before proposing a working model for describing the dynamics of gendered experiencing. Then, in [Chapter 3](#) I will attempt to construct a viable model for describing the development of boys and of girls, identifying where these may diverge, informed by an application of a reworked formulation of Jung's *anima-animus* archetypal dyad.

Writing as a man, about women

I am aware of a certain trepidation about writing as a man about what a woman, as 'gendered other', might experience. This is not unlike the anxiety I noticed in myself when I wrote previously on *animus* (Goss, 2008). Fears and fantasies about being labelled as stereotyping or even misogynistic are around as I type these words. Nevertheless, this very situation is a source of fascination for me. What is it about writing as a *man* on what it might mean to be a *woman* that is so fraught?

There is a feeling of breaking a taboo in doing this. I can own some of this as a familiar feeling for me from childhood, when I experienced the territory which seemed to 'belong' to my sisters as a foreign land which I had no permission to explore, let alone speculate about the meaning of. But it also seems to be 'out there' in the culture, where the onus on men and male writers (e.g. Clare, 2001) seems to have been to acknowledge the depth of the 'crisis' in male identity, rather than turning their focus onto what (if anything) women may be contributing to this situation.

There has not been quite the same inhibition for women writing about what it means to be a man (e.g. Gilligan, 1993). This may well relate to the upsurge in collective female consciousness about women's gendered predicament, starting with the seeds sown in the industrialised west over the

last couple of hundred years, and culminating in the strong feminist voices of more recent years.

Women, one could say, have been more conscious about gender than men, as they have been more oppressed by the rigid formulations dominating patriarchal structures of society and of personal relations, though the lack of 'gender consciousness' on men's behalf seems to have shifted when one notices the burgeoning reflective literature on being a man and being a father (e.g. Tacey, 1997; Lewis, 2009).

I want to suggest too the possibility of there being, in western culture, an unspoken prohibition (at least in liberal, educated circles) on men being critical of the 'positions' taken by women on women and men, however much reflexivity and respect they may bring to this. Fear of being perceived as unreconstructed in their approach to gender, or as wanting to hold onto patriarchal formulations to protect their interests, can be factors. Then there may be a deep-rooted perception that men have no right to be critical on gender relations, as it is women who have been oppressed for so long, not to mention the possible anxiety about being perceived as conveying ignorance, antipathy or even misogyny towards women (mother?)—all this and more may have contributed to this situation.

What interests me is the possibility that men in a collective sense may not have worked out how to be constructively critical about what women are, do and represent. Something unconscious may be at work, along with the conscious anxieties about saying something out of turn. This is something I will return to later. I highlight this backdrop not least to enable me to explore related themes without self-consciously activating my own version of a collective *negative animus* (or '*thanimus*' as I call it) complex.

It can feel as if the legacy of patriarchy, which may come to feel like the fear of being accused as a man of sexism, weighs too heavily for men to be 'allowed' to critique women. On the other hand (applying a term in a transgendered way to myself) I can tell myself to stop being a 'drama queen' and engage with the potential risks and rewards involved, which is what I intend to do!

The role of personal myth

As Rowland (2002) notes, Jung's ideas on gender operate at two levels—'grand theory and personal myth' (Rowland, 2002:39). Jung strove to locate key concepts of his, such as *anima* (the image of woman in a man) and *animus* (the image of man in a woman) within the comprehensive and complex theory paradigm he painstakingly constructed over a lifetime. These figures in the psyche will be explored at length in relation to the various arguments presented in this book. It is important, however, to highlight the way they operated for Jung not just theoretically, but as living entities in the psyche and as gatekeepers to the archetypal influences we might need in order to become 'who we truly are', as Jung defined individuation (1921/1971).

In this sense, he saw his most valuable resource as being within himself—i.e. what his unconscious threw up and the degree to which he could notice, wrestle with and utilise what emerged from his conscious encounters with this material. His emphasis on personal myth is pivotal in this regard, as it provides a corrective seasoning to what can come over as a dish he serves up on how women 'are', which is impossible to swallow now we have moved definitively away from many of Jung's essentialist assertions about, for example, the way *negative animus* may leave women prone to 'irrationality'.

The problematic implications of Jung's thinking in this area will be explored in the light of dilemmas thrown up by the presence of essentialist traditions coming into contact with the inevitably deconstructing tendencies of psychological inquiry. However, the notion of 'personal myth' as being something about the way we each make sense of our own existence via

experiences, stories and insights into ourselves provides a vital link between ideas about gender and our subjective experience of it. This is particularly valuable as it has both an 'exterior' quality in that there is a search for definition and clarification in the social and political spheres, as well as an 'interior' quality when considering how 'gender' impacts on each of us. I will therefore apply this notion of 'personal myth' to my own explorations.

Encountering sameness and difference in the consulting room

In drawing on my clinical experience I will offer thoughts on relational experiencing between and within gender dyads—i.e. *man*-*woman* as well as *man*-*man*—which are familiar to me. The latter will form a focus to [Chapter 4](#)'s exploration of what I term male '*thanima* discontinuity'.

To complement this, in [Chapter 5](#) I will draw on the work of women analysts on *woman*-*man* and *woman*-*woman* clinical experiences, explored in the context of a discussion on the value or otherwise of *animus* as a relevant concept in women's experiencing. Joy Schaverien's (2006) edited collection of papers, for example, will be one point of reference for this. She describes how, in the consulting room, 'the confusing web of gender roles and sexual identities that the transference weaves may transfix and enthrall' (Schaverien, 2006:7).

This capacity of the transference to 'transfix and enthrall' seems to reflect an archetypal transfixing presence which likewise can grip our relationships, whether this be falling in or out of love, or our day-to-day need to be needed (or not). In this respect I want to try to keep the air flowing through the space between day-to-day experiencing and what happens in the consulting room. This space, it seems to me, can easily become an *air lock* in depth psychological practice; there is the 'moment-by-moment experiencing'—to borrow a phrase from Carl Rogers (1961)—of the daily life of the patient 'out there', and then they pass through the 'air lock' between that world and the analytic space where, in my experience, the 'moment-by-moment' experiencing is qualitatively different. This has both strengths and pitfalls, and I see this dichotomy as a kind of parallel of the movement between the world 'down here' and the one 'up there' which Jack moves between, up and down the beanstalk.

Suffice it to say at this point that the space between, or even *split* between, a 'big' gendered backdrop to relationships and our daily being in the world (Heidegger, 1962) is a theme in this book's discussion of clinical considerations. In fact, I take a deliberate stance in writing this book to amplify the gendered aspects of life and relationships. I recognise it is possible and maybe more current to 'let go' of possible differences between men and women and let them float to the back of our minds while we all get on with the challenging enough task of being human together. Maybe we do this so as not to get fixated on differences when there is no need to, especially where it can feed tensions, or even ill-treatment.

However, for the purposes of exploring the questions raised in this book, I invite the reader to join me in putting a pair of 'gender spectacles' on and making the most of what really scrutinising this challenging but fascinating area can throw up for us. Feel free to take the specs off when you finish reading...

Being postmodern

Another dimension of the multifaceted nature of 'gender' relates to how the twenty-first-century world can be adequately characterised to reflect the question around sameness and difference which this book aims to explore. The term 'postmodern' can become a catch-all phrase to describe responses and reactions to, or discontinuities from, the rationalist emphasis on enlightenment values and 'modern' ways of thinking. However, it is valuable in situating and opening up discussion on gender.

As Hauke (2000) argues, the powerful influence of feminist ideas, combined with the opening up of fluid perspectives on reality and 'truths' which postmodernism affords, provide new ways of

perceiving gendered experiencing. The essentialist positions on gender which Jung gets roundly criticised for are highly problematic in this context. And yet one of the possible difficulties set up by reacting to the old ways of thinking—in the way an adolescent might react to parental attitudes—is that something of value might be overlooked.

As Hauke (2000:114) acknowledges, the 'grand narratives' of modernist thinking have not disappeared; instead they sit there in the background (or like giants in the sky in the *Beanstalk* story) and influence our attempts at being postmodern. This is not unlike the influence of archetypes, which although pluralist and variable in the different ways they manifest in each of us, are just *there* as psychic realities which can constellate in complexes and then inhabit our bodies, minds and souls. They become 'real' psychically at times, like the other reality discovered by Jack when he reached the top of the beanstalk.

In that respect I see modernist, essentialist, ideas on gender—which after all are still hugely influential across the western world, especially among the older generations—as still alive, *still here*, and functioning like the 'up there' to the 'down here' of the complicated, fluid experiencing of gender we may be familiar with.

Hauke also highlights the possibility that the space between the 'up' and the 'down' may have thinned considerably, and there is 'depthlessness... [to]...the postmodern condition' (Hauke, 2000:67). So, our sense of self as a man or a woman may have changed, filtered through a gathering ambiguity about what our gender identity might 'mean'. Our feeling, thinking, sensing and intuiting about ourselves, others and the grand narratives we have inherited will be influenced by this 'thinning out' of cultural, political and religious 'truths'.

This 'thinning out' may have had a counterproductive impact on our collective attitudes towards gender roles. While we have come to assume 'all has changed', in fact there are ways in which fixed role assumptions in the domestic/familial sphere are overlooked. Perhaps controversially, I argue a real problematic exists in attitudes towards the place of men in the home, which is reflected in an ongoing 'lack of fit' for boys and men in western societies. The suggestion that this may need some psychological work in relation to the traditional 'territory' of women will be a recurring theme, particularly in [Chapter 8](#).

This will follow two discussions which link developmental (psychosexual and neurological), socio-cultural and clinical observations made in earlier chapters with emerging implications for understanding distinctions between female and male experiencing, and heterosexual relationships. The first of these, in [Chapter 6](#), looks at how young men and women experience themselves in adolescence and how this might inform their gender identity. The second, in [Chapter 7](#), attempts to identify the main characteristics of female and male 'territories' and what may be shared between them.

Gender and development

Finally, this book will attempt to frame what it means to be born, to grow and to develop as a man or a woman through a post-Jungian frame of reference. Starting from ways in which our experiencing of parents—outwardly or internally (or in *Beanstalk* language, as '*humans*' or '*giants*')—impact on us I will develop a framework which might offer fresh perspectives on gender difference and sameness.

This is attempted against a backdrop of some thinking which tends to stress gender as a purely social construct, implying most differences in experiencing and development between men and women are a consequence of this. In [Chapter 2](#), I will explore these ideas alongside more essentialist ones, including Jung's, exploring whether between biological 'sex' and socially constructed 'gender' there may be other (archetypal?) layers of experiencing and development which are, in a general way, more peculiar to men than women, and vice versa.

As well as utilising *anima* and *animus* as tools in this task ([Chapter 3](#)) I will draw on thinking from feminist, attachment and psychoanalytic theorising about early development (e.g. Benjamin, 1988), to consider whether fundamental distinctions can be made between the early experience of boys and girls. There will also be a consideration of Jacques Lacan's important ideas for understanding how 'father' can be seen as symbolically crucial for moving through the oedipal phase and into the 'Symbolic Order' of ordinary life (Lemaire, 1977), and how this may inform comparisons between a girl's and a boy's passage through this phase.

The work of Kristeva will also be crucial here, especially her notion of the 'semiotic' as the unstructured 'otherness' which falls outside efforts to structure reality in a patriarchal, 'ordered' way (Smith, 1998) and her valuable insights into how male and female passages through early life may evoke key experiential developmental differences. This will form the basis of a model for gendered development from infancy through to early adulthood. **Home and road**

When I draw together the different strands of these discussions ([Chapter 8](#)) I will suggest where our conventional and 'post-conventional' notions about heterosexual relationships and 'family' need to be further challenged, especially in the ways the 'territories' of men and women come up against each other in shared home, work and social arenas.

The implications considered will include how the locational symbolism of 'home' can shift territorial power between genders, and I will suggest a symbol of 'road' to juxtapose predominant symbolic identifications between women and men. This will lead into a consideration on how mothers and fathers bring their 'territories' to families and how these could be better calibrated in the formative early years of a child's life. I will also tie together discursive strands which run throughout the book on the relationship between male-female and feminine-masculine.

The book as a whole attempts to make some sense of what it is to be a man or a woman in relation to the gendered *other*. My attitude towards this is as open as I can make it as a male analyst, father and partner. The right place to start feels to be the story of *Jack and the Beanstalk*—one I have been drawn to as a personal mirror of my own development as well as a template for exploring the relationship between the personal and the archetypal, and gender relations.

So, are you sitting comfortably?
Chapter 1

Jack and the Beanstalk: Magic beans and angry mothers

'Beans?' said Jack, 'What's so lucky about them?'

'Well, my boy, these are magic beans. If you plant these in your garden they will grow right up to the sky'

Within the folds of the English countryside, contained in turn within the folds of myth and fairy tale, Jack's story is also a story about the liminal space between grounded reality and the archetypal dimension, between chronological time and a pleromatic, acausal space 'outside time', or between the explicit and implicit orders (Bohm, 1981). Like many influential fairy tales it has a revelatory quality, suggesting ways to compensate for aspects of ordinary life which have fallen out of balance (Zipes, 1991).

It also contains the seeds of powerful configurations between the genders. Archetypal feminine and masculine forces (which are *not* synonymous with female and male, a complex relationship of meanings I will explore in later chapters) influence patterns of being and relating, and in the story

these patterns are exposed to the possibility of change. This change can come from anywhere—death and loss, challenges made to authority figures, or the appearance of unexpected figures, natural phenomena and so on.

It is a story which has particular resonance to our developing understanding of what we might mean by 'gender', because it exposes the roots of archetypal patterns of male–female ways of relating and asks us to try and tease out what is open to change and what is perhaps immutable. The beanstalk which Jack climbs provides a powerful metaphor—sometimes we have to reach up and beyond measurable reality to get hold of what is actually there beneath our feet (if we could but see it by simply looking down).

The story

In order to establish the terms of this 'looking beyond', I will briefly elucidate the context in which the story seems to have emerged as well as different possible readings of it from depth psychology. This is done in order to make available the full worth of what it may be trying to say. But first, the story:

'Once upon a time there was a widow who lived with her son, Jack. They were so poor they had had to sell the furniture from their little house so they did not starve. Their cow, Milky White, was all they had left and now she had stopped giving milk. Jack's mother told Jack to stop being lazy and to sell Milky White at the market.

As Jack walked with the cow to market he met an old man.

'Where are you off to?' asked the old man.

'To market to sell the cow.'

'It's your lucky day,' the old man said. With that, he pulled out five beans from his pocket.

'Beans?' said Jack. 'What's so lucky about them?'

'Well, my boy, these are magic beans. If you plant these in your garden they will grow right up to the sky. If you let me have the cow the magic beans are yours.'

The deal was done and Jack took the beans home. But his mother was very angry that Milky White had been sold for a handful of beans. She sent Jack to bed and threw the beans out of the window. When Jack awoke the next morning, the room was in shadow. He looked out of the window and saw an enormous beanstalk which stretched right up to the sky!

Jack decided to climb the beanstalk and with that he stepped out of the window onto the beanstalk and began to climb upwards. He climbed through the clouds until he reached the top. There he saw a road which went straight towards a big castle in the distance.

Suddenly a beautiful fairy appeared in front of him. 'Hello Jack,' she said. 'You are here because in that castle there lives a terrible giant who killed your father when you were a baby and took all that belongs to you and your family. Your mother could never tell you this as she had to swear not to do so as to save you from the same fate.'

The fairy disappeared and Jack understood the task before him. He walked towards the castle and saw a figure at the door—the giant's wife.

'Good morning', Jack said, 'I am very hungry, could I have some breakfast?'

The giant's wife was kind-hearted and said she would, but warned him her husband would be back soon and would eat him if he found him. While he was eating breakfast there was a terrific bang—the giant was knocking on the door. The giant's wife told him to hide and put him into an empty kettle.

When the giant's wife opened the door her husband shouted:

'Fee, fi, fo, fum,

I smell the blood of an Englishman:

Be he alive, or be he dead,

I'll grind his bones to make my bread!

I smell boy! Where is he?'

His wife distracted him by giving him his breakfast. When he was done he told his wife he wanted to count his money. She brought him two big bags of gold and he started to count it. But he was tired and fell asleep. Jack leapt out of the kettle, grabbed the two bags and ran out of the castle, along the road and down the beanstalk. His mother was very pleased as they now had more than enough money.

Some time later Jack decided he would like to go back up the beanstalk. So while his mother was out, he climbed up to the top of the beanstalk again.

Jack walked to the castle and asked the giant's wife again: 'Can I have some breakfast please?' She told him to run off at first but then felt sorry for him and sat him down with a hearty breakfast. Once again the giant returned as Jack ate, so the giant's wife pushed Jack into the oven. The giant roared:

'Fee, fi, fo, fum,

I smell the blood of an Englishman:

Be he alive, or be he dead,

I'll grind his bones to make my bread!'

His wife persuaded him he was wrong, and after his breakfast he told her to bring him his little brown hen. The giant shouted 'Lay!' The hen laid a golden egg not once but three times! Once again he went to sleep. Jack climbed out of the oven and crept up to the table before grabbing the hen and racing out of the kitchen. The hen started squawking but before the giant awoke Jack was away down the road and then the beanstalk. With all the golden eggs the hen kept on laying Jack and his mother had much more wealth than they could spend, but Jack thought it worth climbing the beanstalk one last time.

He knew the giant's wife would not welcome him this time so he crept into the castle through a back window and hid behind the curtain. Peeking around it he could see the giant sat at the table. He watched him lift his big, ugly head and then roar once more:

'Fee, fi, fo, fum.

I smell the blood of an Englishman:

Be he alive, or be he dead,

I'll grind his bones to make my bread!

The giant got up and looked in the kettle, and the oven, before sitting down again. He called for his wife to bring him his golden harp. When he told it to sing it sang the most beautiful lullaby Jack had ever heard. The giant fell asleep and so Jack seized the opportunity to creep out from behind the curtain, grab the harp and leap back out of the window with it. But the harp screamed out 'Master!' over and over. The giant woke to see Jack through the window, running away.

He grabbed his club, and chased Jack down the road. He grew closer by the moment, but Jack was on the beanstalk in a flash and climbing down it, nearly falling off he was going so fast. The giant was less nimble than Jack and made his way slowly down, roaring as he took each wobbly step. Jack shouted to his mother to bring out his axe. When he reached the bottom he took the axe from her and chopped away hard at the base of the beanstalk. It came down with an almighty crash and the giant fell to his end, making the earth shudder for miles around. The sky kingdom was never seen again, but Jack and his mother lived happily ever after, Jack having recovered his father's riches at last.

My contextualisation of the story has a historical flavour (in terms of origins of folk tales and so on) but will mainly draw on theoretical and clinical concepts from analytical psychology and psychoanalysis to elucidate potential links to characters and themes. I also want to acknowledge the temptation to read 'gender' into every nook and cranny of the story. Jack's laziness and irresponsibility at the beginning, for example, could be read as a hallmark of youth, irrespective of gender. However, there is still value in contextualising this within the mother-son dyad and the way it fuels the explosion of *anima* (in Jack) and *animus* (in his mother).

Jack the

lad

Westwood and Simpson (2005:97) note that in folk tales from England: 'Jack is by far the commonest man's name.' As a version of the name 'John', Jack seems to have been a nickname which implies something about the 'common person', or at least the 'common man', who is also able to act heroically. This strongly implies the presence of the *trickster* archetype (Jung, 1954/1968) which can appear foolish but be the instigator of significant change. This applies in the *Beanstalk* story when Jack naively trades the cow for some 'magic' beans and his mother is enraged at this. This is a pivotal aspect of the story, as it opens the door to transformation for Jack and his mother.

This combination of *hero* and *trickster* is a hallmark of the appearance of characters named Jack in cousins of the *Beanstalk* story. *Jack of Batsaddle*, for example, 'killed the last wolf' (and/or wild boar) in England (Murray, 1901). and *Jack O'Kent* traded his soul with the devil for magic powers and then outwitted the latter to keep his soul when he died (Leather, 1912). In *Jack the Butter Milk* (Swift, 1954) Jack gets captured by a witch because, unlike in *Beanstalk*, he refuses to enter a transaction with a stranger—though, as in *Beanstalk* he does outwit and escape the figure which threatens his very survival three times. One of the closest 'cousins' to the story is *Jack the Giant Killer*, differing versions of which portray Jack as disposing of between one (Halliwell, 1849) and seven giants, thereby becoming the saviour of the local community—or the 'Kingdom of Cornwall', as portrayed in the film version (Juran, 1962). There are even stories where Jack *is* the giant—e.g. in *Giant's Hedge* (Bett, 1950)—a good illustration of the projective nature of giants.

Jack as the boy *hero* or *trickster* needs further explication in terms of what we might understand from classical theory about the underlying influences and tasks of a boy in his strivings to become

a man. In *Jack and the Beanstalk* these strivings inevitably take the form of a *quest*, a kind of all-or-nothing struggle with a giant where a mistake would be fatal—a fall to the ground way below, or into the ravenous jaws of the bone-crushing giant. The ubiquity of Jack as a carrier of this kind of quest is well illustrated by the American *Jack Tales* (Chase, 1971), based on an oral tradition from the Appalachian mountains, passed down from the earliest settlers from Europe, of tale-telling about Jack's exploits: 'Are these giants very big 'uns?' asked Jack' (ibid.: 3).

In Freud's view, all wishes and actions have some otherwise unexpressed desire at their root (Freud, 1920/1991). For Jack, the oedipal drama has taken the form of the death of his father. Classically, this must leave the boy with both unresolved guilt about father being gone ('I must have killed him'), engendering a kind of fear of his own authority, and feelings of *lack* in not being able to take father's place in relation to his mother's practical, relational and erotic needs.

As Adam Phillips (2007:4) observes: '[A] little boy doesn't have the wherewithal to marry his mother; for Jack this translates as his being unable to earn a living and "support" her'. This is a dilemma the boy can only try to resolve through acts of extraordinary heroism, confronting the great, angry 'father' in the sky, via a magical and disproportionate blossoming of his phallic power in the shape of the beanstalk.

In turn, Jack needs a little help to access these super-heroic powers, and this is where Jung's notion of the archetypes comes into play. Archetypes are a blend of instinct and image (Samuels *et al.*, 1986:26–8) which haunt every human psyche awaiting constellation, and through them human dilemmas and shortcomings can be usefully reworked. The immanent influence of archetypes comes about via a complex. As Young-Eisendrath elegantly describes them, they are:

Laden with non-verbal meanings and feelings. When a complex is activated it grips our perceptual awareness.

Each complex has both a subject and an object pole. For instance, a particularly idealized father complex might include both a charming, seductive father and a needy child... In adult life either pole can be projected and the other identified with.

(Young-Eisendrath, 2009:97)

In relation to the story, Jack finds himself trying to identify with an idealised, heroic son in order to satisfy the projected needy mother (representing his neediness). The tragedy which has left Jack as surrogate (and 'less than') man-of-the-house has stirred up archetypal waters. The unconscious (as ever in Jungian thinking) tries to point up ways to *compensate* for the lack Jack undoubtedly feels and his inability to satisfy his need to please mother. He is in the grip of a *mother complex*: a blend of the archetype of the (great) mother, who needs to be pleased and nourished by the 'goodness of the son', and the realities of the situation that the bereaved and impoverished pair find themselves in.

The presence of the benign giant-wife in the sky, the archetypal bountiful and loving great mother, who takes care of him (rather than the other way around), is a form of compensation which gives Jack a fighting chance of resolving his predicament. However, Jack is also in the grip of a *father complex*. The death of his real father activates the presence of the archetypal violent and abusive father, in the form of the giant. His father's death unleashed all the uncontained aggressive energies which can manifest dangerously through male forms of violence and abuse. This giant, intrapsychically, becomes the inner figure of uncontained power, perhaps because the boy cannot bear his out-of-control fury, which has 'destroyed' his own father—a notion which links to Klein's ideas of how we 'destroy' our inner (parental) objects in early phantasies (Klein, 1952:63–4).

In this sense, Jack's 'cutting down to size' of this monstrous figure brings him closer to reality, or the 'depressive position' (ibid.: 71–80), where splitting between good and bad father, as well as good and bad mother, is brought into a more reparative frame of authentic relating to the real parent(s).

The archetypal 'good father' is also represented in the shape of the old man on the road. He is benevolent, as well as the chthonic unlocker of Jack's potency, supplying the magic beans which then turn into the beanstalk. He therefore offers a compensation for the bad, mad, father/giant figure.

It is therefore the presence of the archetypal dimension 'up in the sky' which is, in Jungian terms, the compensatory domain needed to enable ego–self balance or 'homeostasis' to return to the narrative, and to the psyche. It is to the psychic 'giants' who inhabit this domain that I now turn.

There might be giants!

The presence of giants in the human psyche has a deep and ubiquitous quality—terror mixed with excited awe characterises our fascination with them. I remember being captivated as a boy by them when they cropped up in fairy tales, as well as ancient and new myths, from *Cyclops* (Graves, 1955/1992:40) through to *Godzilla* (Honda and Koyama, 1954). It is a fascination I can get in touch with now as I sit in front of my computer typing these words—something about giants as liberated human spirit, grown to its full size, perhaps mingled with anxiety about what being so *big* might feel like (uncontained? dangerous?).

Mathew Everitt (2007), who is over seven feet tall, describes himself as a 'giant' and explains what daily nourishment his huge frame requires:

For as long as I can remember, a typical day has begun with a mixing bowl of cereal and a pint of milk, followed by two rounds of toast. By mid morning, I need three packets of crisps or a couple of pasties to keep me going until my three-course lunch. Next up is the afternoon filler of four crumpets and a tin of beans, before a tea of two-inch-thick pork chops, eight or nine potatoes, carrots and peas. I'll cap the day off with another mixing bowl of cereal, though if I'm doing a lot of exercise, I'll swap that for a mixing bowl of pasta.

When I first read this I half expected him to mention drinking 'the blood of an Englishman' with his breakfast. This capacity to routinely consume, on a daily basis, what most of us might manage across two or three days activates a kind of awe and fascination which is reminiscent of our childlike responses to stories about giants. Klein, Winnicott and Jung have some valuable things to say about our fixation on, and internalising of, the presence of 'that-which-is-bigger-than-us'. Klein's ideas about introjection—or the 'taking in' of versions of mother (and before that *parts* of her) or father into our infantile inner world—is framed as a normal feature of the way we negotiate the beginning of life, and helps to explain the template for the archetypal presence of giants.

We put into these internalised figures, according to Klein, our rage at the *badness* (or failings) of the parent as well as our idealisation of their *goodness*. Then we feel unbearable guilt when we sense we have psychically destroyed them in our monstrous (giant?) rage and wish to restore them or make 'reparation' (Klein and Riviere, 1937/1964).

Winnicott's (1960) portrayal of how the infant experiences the start of life and the profound levels of fear and confusion associated with being thrust into the world with no bearings also reflects how the child seems bound to experience themselves to be in a world of 'giants'. There is, according to Winnicott (ibid.: 46–7), the constant threat of 'primitive agonies'—experiences which terrify and undermine, such as feelings of being abandoned (however briefly) or the fear of falling

'forever' (with no beanstalk to provide a 'ladder' downwards to the safety of solid ground).

In response to such terrors the geography of our inner worlds gets chiselled out as the dust settles from the 'big bang' of our entry into the world—between the huge, scary, though at times surprisingly benevolent world of giants (parents) and the territory the infant occupies as they try to hold themselves together in the face of the giant 'land' they are in.

Finally, Jung brings this relationship between little *I* and giant *you or them* into relief via his emphasis on the presence of 'otherness' in the individual psyche, and through his ideas about complexes. The presence of *shadow* in the psyche—i.e. 'the thing a person has no wish to be' (Jung 1954/1966: para. 470) alerts us to how we project outwards what we fear in ourselves. Giants become representative of this in terms of giving form to feelings and ideas about ourselves that are 'too big' or too uncomfortable to cope with in any other way. It is also possible to look at this in terms of the *self* being projected.

The self, in classical Jungian language, is the underlying, prospective, centre (and totality) of who we are, guiding our individuation—the never ending journey of becoming who we are (Jung 1921/1971). Giants could represent this 'fullness' of our potential being; they could also, of course, be a manifestation of grandiosity—when our ego gets identified with the self and loses its sense of humanness, a narcissistic aggrandisement bringing all the psychic and practical dangers associated with a giant running amok.

As indicated, a complex blends powerful archetypal influences and environmental factors from the present and past which 'constellate' together (Jung, 1960/1969: para. 201) to create a significant locus of influence within the psyche. Parental complexes, in particular, can be constellated at almost any time in life, considering how pivotal the role of mother and/or father usually is. When *they* were giants—i.e. when *we* were little and most vulnerable—influence, introjection and impingement occurred through environmental and archetypal frames of reference coming together. In the adult present, when a complex forms, the giants come back to life.

To be a giant is to be superhuman in terms of size, strength and power over others. There is a god-like quality to them, and in the story the giant and his 'giant-wife' live up in the sky, in a version of heaven, or Mount Olympus, which is above and beyond our world. This contrasts with most giant stories, where the colossus wreaks havoc by terrorising our territory, as portrayed famously by Goya (c. 1809–12). This perhaps gives the giant and his wife in *Beanstalk* more of a numinous quality—they are a version of the king and queen of heaven.

This book offers Jungian perspectives on social constructions of gender difference and explores how these feed into adult ways of relating within male-female relationships. Phil Goss places this discussion within an archetypal context drawing on the fairy tale *Jack and the Beanstalk* to consider the deep tension in western culture between the transcendent masculine and the immanent feminine.

Offering both developmental and socio-cultural frameworks, areas of discussion include:

relationships - a post-jungian approach: gender electrics and magic beans

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