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MALE NARRATIVE IDENTITY IN YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE: AN INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH TO NARRATIVE PSYCHOLOGY AND LITERARY ANALYSIS

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Chapter One: Introduction

Introduction

Literature has played an integral, yet often unacknowledged, role in the history and development of psychotherapy. From clinical psychology’s earliest days, there has been an uneasy tension between narrative and science. Sigmund Freud, the father of psychoanalysis, was often wary of his reliance on narrative. Although Freud championed the “stamp of science” in his work, he also acknowledged that there is “an intimate connection between the story of the patient’s sufferings and the symptoms of his illness—a connection for which we still search in vain in the biographies of other psychoses” (161).

As psychotherapy came of age and constructivism gained prominence, theorists increasingly acknowledged the role of story and narrative in clinical practice. Freud believed in an objective psychological truth that must be discovered by the analyst. Frankland characterizes Freud’s relationship with truth in this way: “Freud casts himself as a rational authority, constantly aspiring to (if not actually arrogant enough to claim) the ‘last word’. If he does deconstruct texts, it is only a means to the end of restructuring them to his own liking” (150). Social constructionism, in contrast, “sees reality as that which people construct together through language” (Pocock). Thus, “[t]he role of the therapist is then to co-construct with system members a new—hopefully more helpful—version of reality” (Pocock).

No longer did story and science have to be at odds with each other. White and Epston, for example, suggested that narrative might be used as an alternative metaphor
in the study of psychology (9). Bruner expounded upon this idea, arguing that reality is \textit{dictated} by these narratives (4). Whereas Freud stressed the importance of the analyst’s interpretations, Bruner’s narrative approach empowered the patient to make meaning out of his or her life. It is within this tradition—known as narrative psychology—that I will situate my thesis.

The relationship between narratives and life experiences is intimate. Our earliest memories are profoundly shaped by the stories we listen to and eventually learn to tell ourselves. Sometimes we are the center of these stories like when our parents tell us narratives about our childhood. Sometimes fictional characters are at the center. Regardless, both memories and fictional stories have an effect on how we conceptualize our own lives. Theorists from a variety of disciplines have noted how the lines between life stories and fictional ones are less distinct than traditional fact/fiction binaries would have us believe. If life stories resemble fiction, then people are texts, capable of being analyzed using a modified form of literary analysis. And perhaps, the converse is also true. Perhaps, texts are people, capable of being analyzed using a modified form of psychology.

This chapter draws from the work of Dan P. McAdams and other narrative and personality-oriented theorists in order to describe their story-based approach to psychology. Then, once explained, I will show how this approach to psychology may be used to analyze literature. I will begin by introducing the narrative psychological approach to life stories and identity formation. Next, I will briefly discuss how narrative identity, defined as a sense of self constructed from one’s life stories, evolves
During an individual’s life. Then, I will focus on one developmental stage—adolescence—and demonstrate its critical role in the construction of an individual’s narrative identity and ability to “author” (or “take control”) of his or her future self. Once this groundwork has been set, I will introduce the fundamental components of the life-story approach that are particularly relevant to literary analysis. In addition to narrative identity, these include the importance of agency, or, the motivation towards individuality; communion, or, the motivation towards affiliation; and imagoes, the main characters through which individuals experience life. McAdams argues that the interaction of these components—the construction of a narrative identity, the struggle to exert agency or achieve communion, and the creation and internalization of imagoes—contributes not only to the creation of an individual’s life story, but to the outcome of that individual’s life story, as well.

With this framework in mind, I will then discuss why the three novels chosen for analysis here—The Outsiders by S. E. Hinton, The Catcher in the Rye by J. D. Salinger, and Life of Pi by Yann Martel—are especially relevant to my purposes. I will conclude this chapter by highlighting the unique contributions this interdisciplinary thesis hopes to offer.

Life Stories as Narratives

Within contemporary narrative psychology, there is no writer more prolific than Dan P. McAdams. His theories about narrative identity and its construction have informed the very basis of contemporary study. A social psychologist with a passion
for stories and narrative, McAdams has pioneered the “life-story” approach to human development.

In his book *The Stories We Live By*, McAdams suggests a “new theory of human identity.” He writes, “The theory is built around the idea that each of us comes to know who he or she is by creating a heroic story of self” (11). This story, which informs identity, is the individual’s personal myth. A personal myth “is a special kind of story that each of us naturally constructs to bring together the different parts of ourselves and our lives into a purposeful and convincing whole” (12).

According to those whose work is built upon this theory, called the life-story approach, “in late adolescence and young adulthood, people living in modern societies begin to reconstruct the personal past, perceive the present, and anticipate the future in terms of an internalized and evolving self-story” (McAdams, “The Psychology” 101). Beginning in adolescence, when the individual has the appropriate faculties for narrative-making, the individual finds meaning in his or her life events by consciously or unconsciously organizing those events into a story. McAdams also argues that people are constant narrators, describing and collecting material from their lives that will form more life stories (McAdams, *The Stories* 91). This process is ongoing. As the individual grows and has more experiences, he or she will narrate these new events into his or her identity. The interwoven story changes and picks up themes, plots, and characters along the way. Eventually, though, narrative-making stops. Eventually, we reach the point of final narratives. McAdams asserts that old age is the time to reflect on the stories we have generated throughout the lifespan and consolidate them:
“During the later years of life, our mythmaking may subside somewhat as we begin to review the myth we have made” (278).

Although McAdams views life stories as fundamental, he spends significant time on the process of narrative development in early adulthood, middle age, and late adulthood. It is for this reason that I will explore adolescent development in young adult literature through McAdams’s life-story approach as outlined in The Stories We Live By. This approach will be supplemented by other key theorists in the field whose views are consistent with McAdams’s but illuminative in their own right. Focusing on the themes of narrative identity, agency, communion, and imagoes as defined by McAdams will allow me to orient the adolescent in a specific developmental moment and will allow me to trace the adolescent’s development in a way that is unique to narrative psychology.

**Life Stories and Developmental Stages**

McAdams argues that narrative is distinctly ingrained. A large segment of childhood entertainment is derived from narrative and story-telling. The fairy tales of early childhood are great examples of simple stories with entertainment value that fundamentally shift the way the individuals look at the world. The genius of these stories, as McAdams notes, is that “[t]he protagonists of these stories are unassuming children, like the listeners. Their deeply felt fears and concerns match closely the unconscious fears lurking in the hearts of children” (The Stories 31). Because these fairy tales are so potent for the young child, the lessons they carry hold great value. Lessons of optimism and good overcoming evil are regular components of these tales.
As the child matures, he or she realizes his or her stories are more exciting when they follow general plot structure—that is, when they have a beginning, middle, and end. People organize the events of their lives into stories to more vividly convey their identities and values to other people. Thus, organizing life events into stories is both social and cultural, and the specific components of those stories will differ depending on the culture with which the individual must communicate. Americans, for instance, as McAdams notes, are especially prone to creating redemptive narratives in which:

A gifted protagonist equipped with moral clarity and conviction journeys forth into a dangerous world, overcoming adversity, struggling to reconcile competing needs for power/freedom and love/community, and eventually leaving a positive legacy of the self for future generations. (*Redemptive* 3)

McLean suggests that part of psychological health is how well an individual’s narratives fit with the canonical narratives. For McLean, canonical narratives are pervasive stories that reflect the dominant, privileged narrative trajectory (“The Emergence” 1696). The stories, then, are certainly important in determining how the individual relates to society.

“Life stories… may be seen as bringing different aspects of the self together into a unifying and purpose-giving whole” (McAdams, Josselson, and Lieblich 5). The redemptive narrative of American culture informs the identities of the individuals who choose to adopt it. Thus, what are perhaps random events and situations may coalesce for individuals to position them as redemptive heroes. The notion of becoming a hero
or other character in one’s own story highlights another key function that life stories serve: shaping one’s narrative identity.

**Narrative Identity**

“`Narrative identity’ situates [individuals] meaningfully in their culture, providing unity to their past, present, and anticipated future” (Singer 445).

The development of a personal myth or life story is requisite for the development of a narrative identity. McAdams largely focuses on the storied part of narrative identity, often linking it to his term *life story* (“Continuity” 1371). Other theorists have used the term more nebulously. For the purposes of this thesis, however, I will define narrative identity as an individual’s evolving sense of self as shaped by the life stories he or she constructs within his or her social context. Narrative identity is influenced by many factors, including life events, personal emotions, social relationships and culture. Failed experiences may give rise to stories of frustration and defeat; in response, some may develop the narrative identity of victims, while others may view themselves as survivors. It is in this way that different experiences come together to form an overarching narrative identity that is informed both by events and interpretation.

It is important to note that narrative identity is not synonymous with identity. An identity, for example, may consist of one’s characteristics and roles, such as a woman calling herself a businesswoman, a wife, a mother, a daughter. In contrast, a narrative identity forms out of a story; it is an identity that arises from internalized life
experiences and events. Thus, setting, characters, and plot are all essential parts of one’s evolving narrative identity.

In the first chapter of his book *The Stories We Live By*, McAdams tells the story of Margaret Sands. Margaret, through interviews with McAdams, narrates a tragic story—one filled with a troubling childhood, a pregnancy while unmarried, and an unsupportive family. Margaret paints herself as victim through many of these narratives (19-24). According to McAdams, “Margaret has provided her life with unity and purpose by creating a tragic personal myth about her struggles to undo a horrible past through assertive action and gentle caring” (24). Unbeknownst to herself, Margaret’s myth reveals her internalized narrative identity: she is a martyr or tragic figure who lacks agency. Her life experiences helped to create this narrative identity, but it was Margaret who allowed herself to internalize it. There is hope, however. McAdams goes on: “Margaret needs to reformulate the narrative of her life so that the story better recognizes her heroic achievements” (24).

In contrast, McAdams also tells the story of Tom Harvester. “Tom’s personal myth is a story of warfare—there is always some battle to be fought” (137). All of Tom’s memories are filtered through this warrior lens: he grew up during World War II; he remembers conflict between “farm kids” and “country kids” at a new school; he describes his time in college as a series of battles with authority figures; he even enlists in the air force (136). While Tom is far from perfect, his narrative identity “serves to embody his agentic goals of attaining power over others and control over
himself” (137). Thus, Tom’s narrative identity helps him navigate life events, while Margaret’s impedes her.

Reformulation in narrative therapy—to move from a story like Margaret’s to a story like Tom’s—requires understanding that there is no full, complete, and correct personal myth waiting for someone who has a narrative identity that is lacking for whatever reason. Instead, narrative therapy asserts that there are story elements that can be refashioned into a more satisfying narrative. McAdams writes:

In psychoanalysis, the client symbolically returns to childhood in order to find new raw materials, new resources for the construction of the self. There is no buried identity, no hidden story waiting beneath the surface. We can never go back to the past to find the personal myth that has been waiting for us all along. The stories we live by are made, not found. (274)

McAdams’s assumption is that people choose, whether consciously or unconsciously, these narrative identities. Acceptance of this assumption means that narrative identity is constructed—that there is a process by which life stories form and by which those life stories are internalized into narrative identities. This process—narrative identity development—is important for the literary critic wishing to apply psychology to young adult literature for two reasons.

First, it places individuals on a continuum. If individuals experience life as a narrative, then there are several different literary roles the individual can take. The individual can be a passive or supporting character (without much conscious control over his or her story); a narrator (with the ability to comment on and relate his or her story but perhaps not change it); an author (with the ability to change the
circumstances of the story), or even a *mythmaker* (with the ability to grant his or her life story universal appeal).

Second, as I will discuss throughout this thesis, the foundation for the narrative identity development occurs in a pivotal life stage: adolescence. **Life Stories and Narrative Identity in Adolescence**

Adolescence is an important time of identify development. As McAdams notes, “Because of certain biological, cognitive, and social changes that do seem to occur in the adolescent years, the stage is psychosocially set for the emergence of identity as a new problem in life at this time” (*The Stories* 75). Whereas the main psychosocial task of childhood has been realizing and understanding the concept of “me,” the adolescent must face the task of understanding the “real me” (44). In adolescence, the individual, for the first time, begins to consider alternative ways of living. No longer must the individual be constricted by his or her former way of living (78).

In this way, adolescence is the first time that an individual can exercise choice in his or her identity. Indeed, without the ability to recognize alternatives, the ability to choose is useless. It is this characteristic that makes adolescence especially interesting to the narrative psychologist. Finally, in adolescence, the individual begins to develop the tools that allow adults to make conscious and subconscious decisions about how to narrate their life stories.

Before adolescence—before an adult-like sense of identity begins to form—the main source of narrative comes from other people. Pre-adolescent children collect
stories from others. Adolescents and beyond, however, *create* stories. This change of ownership introduces new narrative concepts that adolescents must now address. Concepts like agency, communion, and imagoes, which were not needed when listening to a story, suddenly become very important when trying to create and interpret the ongoing story of one’s life.

**Agency and Communion**

McAdams notes that human motivation is the starting point for the creation of stories. What motivates us to act? What factors determine the choices we make? McAdams identifies two important motivators, or desires, that give rise to our life stories: *agency* and *communion*. The first theorist to make the distinction between these sources of motivation, David Balkan, defined them this way: “agency [is] for the existence of an organism as an individual, and communion [is] for the participation of the individual in some larger organism of which the individual is a part” (15).

McAdams adapts this definition slightly in order to better emphasize the conflict caused by pursuing agency and communion. “Agency refers to the individual’s striving to separate from others, to master the environment, to assert, protect, and expand the self” while “communion refers to the individual’s striving to lose his or her own individuality by merging with others, participating in something that is larger than the self and relating to other selves in warm, close, intimate, and loving ways” (*The Stories* 71). Thus, these two motivators can both resolve *and* inspire conflict at different stages in one’s life.
Agency and communion are defined by context rather than behavior alone. Behaviors themselves cannot be immediately classified as agentic or communal. Adults manifest communion and agency in very particular ways, according to McAdams. The adult manifests agency in the “desires for power and achievement” (71). Indeed, McAdams goes as far to say that “power and achievement motivation are the two faces of human agency.” In this way, the individual separates “the self from the surrounding environment by mastering that environment and making it do what the person wants it to do” (72). Thus, agency can only be achieved in adulthood through the separation of the self from the rest of the world. Agency in adolescence, however, is about motivation and control rather than behavior per se. For instance, an adolescent who sneaks out of the house, defying his or her parents, in order to go hang out with a group of other sneaking-out-of-the-house adolescents, is exhibiting behaviors associated with communion rather than agency. Behavior that is motivated by a desire to fit-in or belong is, by definition, not agentic.

In the adult, McAdams says, communion is motivated by the desires for intimacy and love. He writes that “our longings for close and warm relationships with other human beings pull us in a different direction [than our desires for power and achievement], to the private life of intimate interpersonal communion” (72). Communion in the adolescent, however, manifests itself in a different way. The adolescent desire to “fit-in” is largely communal. Indeed, while the communion that promotes segmentation into cliques is perhaps different than the communion that encourages people to come together in worship, the underlying motivation is the same.
This difference is really only one of degree rather than of kind. The second degree of communion comes when the individual realizes there are more things that make people similar than what they do for fun in high school. This journey—from a limited type of communion to a more encompassing one—is a common trope of the young adult genre. Just about every teenage movie involves some kind of cross-clique friendship as one of the main conflicts. The individual befriending someone out of his or her own group is at first met with hardship. Sometimes the individual does not want friendship to happen at all, assuming that the other individual is not worthy or mean. Throughout the plot of the movie, book, or television show, barriers are brought down and the individual learns that all people are three-dimensional.

**Imagoes**

Agency and communion are exercised in adolescence when the exploration of imagoes occurs. Imago is McAdams’s word for “the characters that dominate our life stories” or “a personified and idealized concept of the self” (*The Stories* 122). The adolescent, according to McAdams, begins to define people archetypically, as villains, fools, kings, queens, sages, goddesses, or supernatural aides (78-9). It is during this time that the individual begins to formulate ideas about who he or she wants to be. The character traits the individual collects from peers, family members, and authority figures are an important piece in determining what kind of person the individual will ultimately become.

The teenage years mean larger friend groups, conflicting friend groups, and learning how to deal with an adult world. More exposure to more people means more
characters, or imagoes, to incorporate into the adolescent’s emerging sense of self identity. Additionally, constant players in an adolescent’s life begin to take on archetypal shapes—the bully father, the mentor teacher. Thus, not only does the adolescent find new people with whom to associate—a communal act—but also reconstructs his or her understanding of people who are already in his or her life to gain drama—an agentic act. Both of these tasks—bringing new people into the story and redefining current people—are important. In an attempt to understand who he or she is, the adolescent, says McAdams, will seek to understand who he or she is not. This task allows adolescents to begin to identify other characters within their narratives on a meaningful level for the first time. Authority figures, for instance, begin to receive new meaning within the adolescent’s narrative. Gone are the days of childhood when authority goes unquestioned. Instead, the adolescent assigns authority figures a purpose within a story. Parents, for example, may become symbols of the past and therefore be vilified. Conversely, a particularly caring teacher may become the wise mentor in the adolescent’s myth. In both examples, authority figures are assigned a specific role in a specific story. These are the first breaths of personal narrative.

Agency and communion are important parts of this process. Exploring new characters as they are manifested in other people is communal. The adolescent who is good at communing with diverse populations of people is also going to have more characters available to him or her. Choosing how to define these characters, however, is agentic. The highly agentic adolescent may have many characters where the less
agentic adolescent only has a few. This idea is best illustrated in an example. Two adolescents consider the adage “Respect your elders.” The first is not very agentic. He follows the adage without challenging it. As a result, all of the adults in the first adolescent’s life become wise mentor characters. The second, however, is extremely agentic. She challenges the adage. Thus, the adults in her life take on many different roles. Some become villainous tyrants and others mentors.

Additionally, McAdams notes that imagoes are characterized by some mixture of agentic and communal motivation. About these characters of life stories, McAdams says:

Some personal myths are dominated by agentic imagoes whose forceful efforts push the plot forward. Other life stories present a more communal cast of characters who act in the primary service of love and intimacy. Some characters are agentic and communal at once. Still others seem to avoid both power and love. (133)

For an adolescent, the result of exploring imagoes and the identities that other people play is the choosing of and identification with his or her own imago. This choice has an enormous impact on how an individual narrates his or her life story. Indeed, the important parts of these archetypes are the stories with which they come. Robert Segal, borrowing from Carl Jung, says, “Archetypes shape experience rather than derive from it” (76). The same might be said for imagoes. Thus, imagoes are universal individuals whose story-arcs are not linked to the experiences of a specific person during a specific time. The Jungian analyst Robert A. Johnson says, “We must remember that a myth is a living entity, and exists within every person. You will get the true living form of the myth if you can see it as it spins away inside yourself” (x).
Certainly, myth is a *living* entity, and whether attached to an individual or an imago, it will have an effect on an individual’s narrative identity.

McAdams divides imagoes up into categories of differing levels of agency and communion, believing them “to be the two central themes in stories” (*The Stories* 123). A single person might have multiple imagoes, one in the highly agentic category and one in the highly communal category. A person might have conflicting imagoes. However, when an individual narrates his or her life, only one imago is typically used. If an individual uses more than one imago in a story, then the transition or conflict between the two imagoes will be incredibly important.

Zehnder and Calvert have shown that this ability to recognize duality, though, is linked to development. In a study concerning the archetypes in *Batman Forever*, they found that college-aged students were more likely to understand character complexity than their high-school-aged counterparts. This finding suggests that imagoes (referred to in the article as “archetypes”) take on an important role in adolescence such that it may be developmentally impossible in some cases for an adolescent to assign more than one imago to a person (132).

In thinking about how best to capture and study the nuances of imagoes, I chose to use first-person narratives in this thesis. In first-person fictional narratives, the reader is almost always left with a single imago that the narrator fits. The narrator, like the individual, has difficulty narrating more than one imago at a time. The difference between the narrator and the individual, however, is that the individual can be observed outside of the story he or she tells. The fictional narrator cannot. Thus,
while it may be clear to others that the individual has more characteristics than those represented in his or her most recent imago, the same cannot be said for the fictional narrator.

**Application**

These four concepts—narrative identity, agency, communion, and imagoes—will form the basis of how I will trace narrative identity development through the three novels—*The Outsiders, The Catcher in the Rye,* and *Life of Pi.* In my discussion of each of the novels, I will consider the differing levels of agency and communion throughout. This discussion will not be limited to basic beginning-middle-and-end type considerations. Instead, I will try to pinpoint the specific moments in which agency and communion change or are applied in new ways for the narrator. I will also pay attention to imagoes in each of the novels. I will center on the kind of imagoes the narrator is observing in his environment and how those imagoes are internalized and used by the narrator as his own main characters.

By having these discussions about the novels, I hope to be able to shine some light on how these adolescent narrators advance from listeners to authors. By examining the process of narrative identity formation in these stories, I hope to uncover both the differences in each protagonist’s path, as well as the commonalities. And finally, I will use the commonalities to derive a basic model for the arc of the adolescent male life story, identifying the specific narrative tasks that await the adolescent on the way to adulthood.
McAdams talks very little about adolescence explicitly. Indeed, in *The Stories We Live By*, most of the references to adolescence occur within ten pages of each other. However, this paucity in writing about adolescence is not something that is unique to McAdams. In fact, it is widespread in narrative psychology. As Habermas and Bluck put it, “This gap between research on how children organize past events and research on adults' ability to narratively organize their whole life has been repeatedly noted” (748). This paucity in current theories is especially unfortunate because it is a commonly accepted view in narrative and developmental psychology that adolescence is a pivotal period during which individuals make an important narrative transition from story listeners to authors (McLean, “The Emergence” 1687).

Moreover, adolescence is uniquely linked to narrative identity development. Many of the faculties that develop in adolescence are significant building blocks to identity. Enumerating some of these faculties, McLean notes:

> Adolescents can hold multiple variables in mind at one time, can engage in scientific reasoning, metacognition, and can think about abstractions, such as love, faith, and politics. With the ability to hold multiple variables in mind, one can begin to hold different ideas of the self in mind, particularly the self in terms of the past and the present. (“The Emergence” 1688)

Because of these developments, the study of adolescence is well-suited for the study of narrative identity development. By understanding the building blocks that go into making identity, one can better understand how narrative identity is eventually internalized.

By applying McAdams’s life-story approach to adolescent literature, this thesis unites literature *and* narrative psychology in a new way. Literature will gain a new
critical lens with which to look at young adult literature, and narrative psychology will
gain any insight to be gleaned from treating a fictional narrator as a case study.

Young Adult Literature as Life-Story Narratives

These novels—The Outsiders, The Catcher in the Rye, and Life of Pi have been
chosen for three main reasons. First, they all have male first-person narrators. Any
observations, then, about the differences between the narrators’ narrative identity
development will mostly be attributable to differences in agency, communion, or
imagoes rather than differences in attributes such as gender.

Second, each narrator represents a different part of adolescent development:
Ponyboy is in early adolescence; Holden is in middle adolescence; and Pi is in late
adolescence. I borrow these distinctions from developmental psychologists, including
Habermas and Bluck, who characterize these stages in this way:

in early to mid-adolescence a psychological concept of personality
develops that integrates a variety of emotional and motivational states
with ways of acting in relationships. By organizing an array of
characteristics into the unitary concept of an underlying trait, the notion
of a consistent personality develops. [...]In mid- to late adolescence the
view of personality includes the possibility of conflicts between various
parts of personality and the understanding that some parts of
personality are not easily accessible to awareness. (756-7)

In other words, early adolescence sees the simplification of identity into development
of personality; middle adolescence sees the complication of identity with conflicting
personalities; and late adolescence sees the possible resolution of the complication.

Third, I chose these novels because they are typical of the young adult genre.
According to young adult (YA) literature scholars, Nilsen and Donelson, YA literature
is “anything readers between the approximate ages of twelve and eighteen choose to
read either for leisure reading or to fill school assignments” (3). Using this definition is valuable in that it does not make any assumptions about what an adolescent is capable or not capable of reading. All three novels considered here are widely read by readers between the ages of twelve and eighteen.

Of the three novels considered here, *The Outsiders* is the most conventionally suited for this thesis. S. E. Hinton’s 1967 novel is often given the title of “the most direct ancestor of contemporary YA” (Sutton 231). There is no real reason to dispute this claim. It has all of the components of the genre—an adolescent protagonist, a limited narrator, slang, a single story-line, and themes that relate directly to adolescence. Indeed, *The Outsiders* has the opposite problem of the other novels considered in this thesis in that some might write it off as too simplistic. I hope to show that this is far from the truth.

*The Catcher in the Rye*, although published before *The Outsiders*, is a novel few argue should be placed in the YA genre. In 1959, critics already understood that *Catcher* was a book written in the language of adolescence. Donald P. Costello, writing then, said this of the book: “In coming decades, *The Catcher in the Rye* will be studied, I feel, not only as a literary work, but also as an example of teenage vernacular in the 1950s” (172). If only he knew how correct he was. It is clear that teenagers have been reading *Catcher* since it was published. According to the American Library Association, the novel has been banned or challenged in school settings almost continuously since 1960 (“Banned and/or Challenged Books”). This, of course, wouldn’t be a problem if adolescents weren’t reading the book.
Life of Pi is harder to place into the YA literature box. It was not explicitly marketed as such, and critics have avoided giving it the YA label for fear of devaluing the work. However, the point remains, Pi is extremely popular among young readers. While Life of Pi is certainly written for adults, this sophistication does not necessarily exclude young adult readers. Tim Wynne-Jones, an award-winning YA literature author, argues that Life of Pi is in some ways more suitable for the young adult reader than some marketed YA literature. For instance, there is no offensive language in the book. (269). Despite these arguments, one might still say that Life of Pi is too literary or deep for a young adult to enjoy. To this, Wynne-Jones, responds beautifully, saying “Let us say, then, that […]Life of Pi[…] is a deep pool. You can dog-paddle across the top quite safely and have a fine time. Or you can dive as deep as your lungs will take you” (272). In this way, Life of Pi might be the perfect YA novel, allowing its readers to glean more meaning from it as they themselves grow and reflect.
Chapter Two: *The Outsiders*

**Introduction**

The plot of S. E. Hinton’s *The Outsiders* follows a course consistent with McAdams’s life-story framework, and thus lays the ground work for the other novels considered here. The novel follows 14-year-old Ponyboy as he navigates the often violent conflicts between two competing social factions, the greasers\(^1\) and Socs. Ponyboy begins the novel with a passively accepted but fiercely loyal allegiance to the greasers, whose cultural codes and conventions dictate his identity and behavior. By the end of the novel, however, he has developed a more complex identity independent of the greaser/Soc binary. In essence, he transforms from a passive character in his own story to a central protagonist who owns his evolving identity and can exert his newfound agency to shape it. In this chapter, I will argue that Ponyboy’s relationship to his own life story progresses from being a supportive character to a central narrator; as narrator, he has achieved sufficient distance to recognize that his story is independent from that of his social group’s and to identify his role in shaping his own life events. A narrator, I will argue, can tell his own tale but has not yet authored his experiences. By the end of the novel, Ponyboy has acquired sufficient agency and has developed a more complex view of communion, both of which indicate that he will ultimately own and author future chapters of his life.

\(^1\) The lack of capitalization on “greaser” is intentional. It is how Ponyboy writes the word in the book. “Soc,” on the other hand, is always capitalized. This stylistic choice certainly serves to highlight the hierarchical difference Ponyboy and his friends experience between the two groups.
This chapter traces Ponyboy’s journey from character to narrator, focusing on the events that shape his narrative identity and redefine his sense of agency and communion. I will argue, however, even this final promotion to the role of narrator leaves something to be desired. Erik Erikson, upon whom Dan McAdams draws, writes, “the adult is able to selectively reconstruct his past in such a way that, step for step, it seems to have planned him, or better, he seems to have planned it” (112). This “reconstruction,” then, is what Ponyboy falls short of achieving by the end of the novel. He narrates his story as if it is objective fact, but stories can never be objective and so he misses out on the opportunity to tell the story in a way that gives him control of it. But this accomplishment—growing from a one-dimensional character to narrator—is a prerequisite for achieving a more mature and adult sense of identity and communion later in adolescence.

Naïve Narrative Identity and Communion at the Beginning of the Novel

In *The Outsiders*, main character Ponyboy begins his story by comparing himself to other people. The first comparison is the most blatant. Ponyboy writes, “I was wishing I looked like Paul Newman—he looks so tough and I don’t—but I guess my own looks aren’t so bad” (1). The first picture the reader gets of Ponyboy is in contrast to another person. As the first chapter progresses, Ponyboy uses similar techniques to describe himself and others. About his brothers, Ponyboy says, “I mean, my second-oldest brother, Soda, who is sixteen-going-on-seventeen, never cracks a book at all, and my oldest brother, Darrel, who we call Darry, works too long and hard to be interested in a story or drawing a picture, so I’m not like them” (2).
Ponyboy is also extremely aware of the differences between his gang, the greasers, and their rivals, the Socs. He writes:

> We’re [the greasers] poorer than the Socs and the middle class. I reckon we’re wilder, too. Not like the Socs, who jump greasers and wreck houses and throw beer blasts for kicks, and get editorials in the paper for being a public disgrace one day and an asset to society the next. Greasers are almost like hoods; we steal things and drive old souped-up cars and hold up gas stations and have a gang fight once in a while. (3)

This form of describing the world around him showcases Ponyboy’s immaturity—an immaturity that is not unique to him alone. It is something characteristic of any adolescent at his stage. Describing oneself by one’s own attributes and characteristics rather than the attributes and characteristics of others is a learned ability.

In order to describe one of the struggles that differentiates adolescence from childhood, McAdams says, “In order to know who I am, I must also know who I am not” (78). I would amend this by saying that “In order to know who I am, I must first know who I am not.” The reason Ponyboy must define himself in contrast to others is because like all young adolescents, he has not begun to consolidate the many parts of himself into a unified narrative identity. Even though the entire book is told in Ponyboy’s limited first-person narration, when the book opens, Ponyboy is hardly more than a one-dimensional character. His thoughts and actions almost completely line up with what would be expected of a stereotypical greaser.

Consistently, Ponyboy misses that the other characters in his story are unique individuals with their own motivations. Ponyboy believes that actions against him are easily reduced to feelings against him. For instance, when Darry hits Ponyboy, prompting Ponyboy to run away from home, Ponyboy narrates, “It was plain to me
that Darry didn’t want me around” (50). There are many other motivations for Darry’s reaction to Ponyboy’s disobedience, though. Much earlier, Ponyboy acknowledges that:

| Darry didn’t deserve to work like an old man when he was only twenty. He had been a real popular guy in school; he was captain of the football team and he had been voted Boy of the Year. But we just didn’t have the money for him to go to college, even with the athletic scholarship he won. And now he didn’t have time between jobs to even think about college. So he never went anywhere and never did anything anymore, except work out at gyms and go skiing with some old friends of his sometimes. (16) |

Even with these observations, Ponyboy, rooted firmly in early adolescence, is unable to understand the motivations of Darry’s frustrations. Instead, Ponyboy believes that any animosity directed to him from Darry directly reflects Darry’s lack of love for him.

This over-simplification of identity comes with considerable costs. First, it strips Ponyboy of his autonomy. He is dependent on those around him for his sense of identity. Indeed in a rather long description of the greasers in Chapter One, Ponyboy unknowingly rejects the differences he has previously set between his brothers and himself in order to achieve a kind of low-hanging identity with a group. Ponyboy is a greaser. Ponyboy knows how to describe greasers. Thus, he unwittingly reduces his identity to the identity of the group. Ponyboy would be unable to define himself without the greasers, Darry, or Soda nor would he want to. Ponyboy has no conception of the idea of self-identity, and moreover, identifying with the greaser-group offers protection from the many dangers Ponyboy faces—namely, those threats from Socs.
Transplant Ponyboy into a new setting with a new cast of characters, and there would be almost no sense of who Ponyboy is.

Second, it strips all of the other characters of their autonomy as well. Darry and Soda can only be in relation to Ponyboy—their identities are intertwined. This relationship may not be much of a difficulty in first-person fiction since an audience can recognize a narrator as unreliable. The relationship does create issues, though, for an individual. The “not like me” or “not like them” mentality misses the point of true communion and instead creates a false and arbitrary dichotomy that simplifies complex individuals who have unique and innumerable characteristics. Ponyboy unwittingly relates to others in a stereotype-to-stereotype manner; that is, he communes with other greasers because, in Ponyboy’s mind, they are, for the most part, identical. This communion is naïve and limited. It is hardly different than saying Ponyboy communes with himself; he simply communes with those who share his stock identity.

Eventually, Ponyboy grows, then, from naïve communion—where he believes that people are one-dimensional and can be easily classified—to a more mature communion—where he realizes that people are multi-dimensional and are not easily classified. For instance, Ponyboy’s animosity toward Darry is finally resolved later in the novel. After Ponyboy is reunited with Darry and Soda after he runs away, he observes:

Darry did care about me, maybe as much as he cared about Soda, and because he cared he was trying too hard to make something of me. When he yelled “Pony, where have you been all this time?” he meant
“Pony, you’ve scared me to death. Please be careful, because I couldn’t stand it if anything happened to you.” (98)

Ponyboy realizes that Darry is a complicated individual and this realization actually helps Ponyboy commune with Darry even better than before.

The plot of the novel mirrors this growth. The first third of the novel, is concerned with naïve classifications of people—greasers and Socs. When characters are introduced, they are quickly placed into this binary. The two main scenes of the first act—the movie theater and the fight where Johnny kills a Soc—are constructed around this naïve communion. Ponyboy does not question that the world is divided in this way.

Agency, Identity, and Communion Disrupted

The middle third of the novel begins with violence. Johnny and Ponyboy, alone in a park, are attacked by a group of Socs. In order to save Ponyboy’s life, Johnny kills a member of the rival group. Ponyboy and Johnny decide their only option is to run away. This decision influences Ponyboy to learn to rely on himself and to start viewing the world beyond his simple binary. Ponyboy must confront the fact that the world he had constructed since birth will no longer work as a way to deal with reality. He broods:

So we’d have to be hermits for the rest of our lives, and never see anyone but Dally. Maybe I’d never see Darry or Sodapop again. Or even Two-bit or Steve. I was in the country, but I knew I wasn’t going to like it as much as I’d thought I would. There are things worse than being a greaser. (65)

It is at this point that Ponyboy realizes that his primary identification of greaser is no longer useful in a world where greasers and Socs don’t exist, but he believes that it is
more because he is an outcast rather than that the binary he has constructed is fundamentally flawed.

Free from the binary that has dictated his identity since the beginning of the novel, Ponyboy rounds out as a character. When Ponyboy awakes for the first time in the church to which he and Johnny have escaped, Ponyboy experiences entering into a larger and greater reality. “For a second I didn’t know where I was. You know how it is, when you wake up in a strange place and wonder where in the world you are, until memory comes rushing over you like a wave,” he writes (68). The time Ponyboy and Johnny spend at the church exists in another reality—one without greasers and Socs. In this alternate reality—bookended by the image of gold—Ponyboy is closer to his parents and begins developing an identity outside of the binary. Before Johnny and Ponyboy must go out into the country, Ponyboy dreams about what the country would be like with his parents: “Since I was dreaming I brought Mom and Dad back to life… Mom could bake some more chocolate cakes and Dad would drive the pickup out early to feed the cattle” (48). Ponyboy even describes his mother as “golden,” which becomes the image for the time he and Johnny spend in the church.

The idea of gold implies the ideal reality in which the church exists and separates it from the grungier reality of the streets. Ponyboy struggles to understand how his old naïve identification with greaser fits into his new reality. Ponyboy’s first attempt is to simply relocate the binary of greaser/Soc to his new environment. It is for this reason that he protests when Johnny tells him he needs to cut his hair. Ponyboy, located in a new reality, seeks comfort by clinging to his binary.
This phenomenon is not unlike one McAdams observes in children. McAdams speaks of the differences in story-telling between children and adults. Children, in their occupation with fairy tales, often focus on images. These images have the ability to cross genre and tale and mix with other images. McAdams uses the example of a child preoccupied with Snow White who appropriates Snow White into other stories, like the Wizard of Oz, or gives Snow White new powers, like being able to fly (The Stories 55). In some ways, what Ponyboy discovers in the church is that the images of greaser and Soc are constrained to a single fairy tale, that which exists in the city, and beyond that, they lose their power and meaning. In other words, in this new reality—this “golden” reality—the images of greaser and Soc do Ponyboy no good.

Later on in the chapter, Ponyboy is physically transformed into something beyond greaser when Johnny cuts and bleaches Ponyboy’s hair. “Our hair labeled us greasers, too,” Ponyboy says, “it was our trademark” (Hinton 71). By ridding himself of his physical representation of his greaser-ness, Ponyboy goes through a metaphorical rebaptism (in a church, no less), becoming an individual outside of his heretofore identified group.

Ponyboy’s actions in the church are an almost violent departure from his actions in earlier parts of the novel. While the reader is often told of Ponyboy’s love for reading, the church is the first time the reader gets to see Ponyboy actually reading. The greaser-Soc binary pushes out anything that doesn’t fit neatly into it. Reading is not greaser-related, but it also doesn’t fit into the materialistic image of Socs who are preoccupied with fast cars and crazy parties. Ponyboy’s interest in reading, then, gives
him a foothold in something outside the greaser-Soc binary. However, just as his identity as a greaser is being challenged, his ideas about those still within the binary begin to change. Ponyboy admits, “[Soda, Two-Bit, and Darry] appealed to me because they were like the heroes in the novels I read” (76). This statement is complicated. It simultaneously reinforces these other greasers’ flatness of character—they are only characters in novels—and associates them with something beyond their greaser-ness—namely, heroes in novels. These are among the first steps that Ponyboy takes toward recognizing others as complex individuals.

Indeed, this process happens more quickly with Johnny. Presumably because of the duration of their time as fugitives and because of the Ponyboy’s pre-existing conception of Johnny as an outsider among the greasers, Johnny is the first person Ponyboy disconnects from the greaser-Soc binary. The boys have a telling conversation when Ponyboy decides that he wouldn’t be able to talk about poetry with Two-Bit, Steve, or Darry:

Johnny shrugged. “Yeah,” he said with a sigh. “I guess we’re different.”
“Shoot,” I said, blowing a perfect smoke ring, “maybe they are.” (78)

This exchange is a key moment in Ponyboy’s development. He no longer classifies himself as differing from the norm. Instead, he reverses that rationale, placing Johnny and himself in the “norm” and projecting otherness towards Two-Bit, Steve, and Darry.

This moment is perfectly articulated by the poem Ponyboy recites. “Nothing gold can stay,” the poem says (77). The poem signifies that Ponyboy must now leave
this new “golden” reality and learn how to navigate the reality that includes the Soc-greaser binary. Now, however, Ponyboy has the tools to begin to dismantle the binary in the binary’s environment.

**From greaser to Narrator**

The last half of the novel can be understood in terms of Ponyboy coming to terms with the idea that characters he once thought he knew are actually their own individuals. Ponyboy goes through this process with Dally, Darry, Randy, and then, finally, Bob Sheldon, Johnny’s tormentor and eventual victim. With Dally, this realization is forced upon Ponyboy. As the public begins to see Dally as a hero after he saves Ponyboy and Johnny when their church burns down (93), Ponyboy must begin to alter his narrative surrounding Dally as the fulfillment of the greaser stereotype. When Ponyboy shares what the newspapers said about Dally, he does it in a way that pokes fun at Dally’s hardness: “For once, there weren’t any charges against Dally, and I knew he’d be mad because the paper made him out for a hero for saving Johnny and didn’t say much about his police record, which he was kind of proud of” (108). Dally is no longer objectively greaser-like. Instead, he must actively cultivate a greaser image.

Ponyboy’s new thinking about Randy, a Soc who was present the night Johnny killed Bob, is much less forced. Ponyboy is given every opportunity to continue to use the Soc schema to simplify Randy, but he cannot do it because his observations of Randy conflict with his stereotypes of Socs. “Randy was supposed to be too cool to feel anything,” Ponyboy says, “and yet there was pain in his eyes” (116). Confronted
with these types of contradictions, Ponyboy makes a larger leap than he has made thus far. Even when Two-Bit supplies Ponyboy with a chance to continue to think of Randy only as a Soc—by calling Randy “Mr. Super-Soc”—Ponboy takes his meeting with Randy as an opportunity to deconstruct the Soc grouping altogether. He writes, “Socs were just guys after all. Things were rough all over, but it was better that way. That way you could tell the other guy was human too” (118). The rejection of the binary marks sophistication in Ponyboy’s thinking but also comes at considerable cost. Ponyboy can no longer hide behind a world view in which only greasers struggle and in which greasers and Socs are more different than similar. In contrast, in the beginning, when Bob’s girlfriend, Cherry, gives Ponyboy the “rough all over” line for the first time, Ponyboy muses, “I really couldn’t see what Socs would have to sweat about—good grades, good cars, good girls, madras and Mustangs and Corvairs—Man, I thought, if I had worries like that I’d consider myself lucky” (36).

In order to round out Bob Sheldon and recognize him as a unique individual, in contrast, Ponyboy must rely much more on intuition. Because Bob is dead, there is no external reason for Ponyboy to confront Bob’s complexity at all, but Ponyboy finds it necessary for his own well-being to begin to recognize Bob’s personhood. Ponyboy uses naïve techniques he used in the beginning of the novel to describe himself as a complex tool for imagining the real Bob Sheldon. Just like he described himself in relation to people he knew in the beginning, he describes someone he never knew (Bob) in relation to people he knows. Thus:

But what about the Bob Sheldon that Cherry Valance knew? She was a smart girl, she didn’t like him just because he was good-looking. Sweet
and friendly, stands out from the crowd—that’s what she had said. A real person, the best buddy a guy ever had, kept trying to make somebody stop him—Randy had told me that. Did he have a kid brother who idolized him? Maybe a big brother who kept bugging him not to be so wild? His parents let him run wild—because they loved him too much or too little? (162)

These realizations of other characters’ agency gives Ponyboy a new power—the ability to narrate his story.

The final barrier Ponyboy must navigate is his discomfort with the truth. Before Ponyboy writes his story down, he suffers from the delusion that Johnny is innocent—that Bob died at Ponyboy’s hand. When Randy wants to talk to Ponyboy about the night and mentions that Johnny killed Bob, Ponyboy replies, “I killed him. I had a switchblade and I was scared they were going to beat me up” (165). In a way, it is not remarkable that Ponyboy is unable to make the distinction between himself and Johnny before writing. It is the same battle Ponyboy has fought since the beginning of the novel—recognizing other characters as individuals capable of agency.

Compounded by trauma, this battle becomes too hard for Ponyboy to fight, and Johnny’s actions collapse into Ponyboy’s own memories, threatening to reconstruct all of the deconstructed binaries. When Randy comes to visit Ponyboy at home and implies that Johnny was Bob’s real killer, Ponyboy responds by writing, “He was just like all the rest of the Socs. Cold-blooded mean. Johnny didn’t have anything to do with Bob’s getting killed” (166). Immediately, in order to protect this version of the story, Ponyboy reorganizes the world into the greaser-Soc binary. This reversion is the result of a dying way of thinking about identity and the logical first misstep of a new identity. In Ponyboy’s first understanding of identity, he and Johnny were greasers.
Greasers were good, and SoCs were bad. Johnny killing a Soc was a matter of protection, and SoCs were evil so there were few ethical dilemmas. But in Ponyboy’s new understanding of identity, each individual is unique; no individual is totally bad nor totally good. This recognition leaves Ponyboy with a difficult moral problem. Was Johnny wrong to kill Bob? The Johnny Ponyboy knew was no murderer, and in order to square these two competing visions of the world, Ponyboy assumes the murderous identity.

The remedy to this delusion is in recognizing that there are environmental factors that influence behavior. Johnny did not make a decision to kill Bob independent of his identification with greasers, of his history of abuse, or of the fact that Bob was drowning Ponyboy. In destroying his previous conceptions of identity and communion, Ponyboy has concluded that group identities should have no part in personal ones, and that feeling communion with all of humanity makes it impossible to show allegiance or to trust a smaller group. But, after reading Johnny’s letter, Ponyboy realizes that being a greaser is a part of his identity. He identifies with “hundreds of boys living on the wrong sides of cities, boys with black eyes who jumped at their own shadows” (179).

Ironically, however, Ponyboy’s “discovery” of the truth about Johnny is perhaps his biggest barrier to progressing beyond the role of narrator and into that of author or mythmaker. Because Ponyboy believes that there is an objective reality, the best he can do is “narrate” the events. He hints at his own subjectivity, saying that his English theme is supposed to “tell their [greasers’] side of the story” (179). But this
subjectivity is not fully realized within the novel, nor could it be at this early stage in adolescent development. He still has time to learn how to author and eventually mythologize his own story, and the progress he has made by the end of the novel suggests that he has the faculties that will eventually allow him to do so.

**Conclusion**

*The Outsiders* follows the arc of Ponyboy’s narrative identity development from a passive character who mostly borrows his identity from a stereotype to a narrator who understands he can define his own identity. In the beginning, Ponyboy’s entire identity is that of greaser. This identification creates the illusion of communion but robs Ponyboy of agency. Ponyboy’s identification with greasers fails to generalize to the outside world and lacks both currency and significance. The realization that greasers and Socs represent a limited and circumscribed part of society, rather than all of it, destroys Ponyboy’s narrative identity and requires a rebirth and reconstruction. Over the last half of the novel, Ponyboy constructs a complex identity—one that recognizes the subjectivity and agency of other individuals beyond categorical identities. This new identity gives him the abilities to narrate his own story and commune with people outside of the greasers. It also sets the groundwork for a more mature agency and the concept of authorship. Although Ponyboy never fully embraces his right to author his own story—that is, the right to make choices about plot, character, and figurative language—the reader is left with the sense that Ponyboy is on the path of development that will lead to this greater understanding of agency and
narrative identity.
Chapter Three: *The Catcher in the Rye*

Introduction

*The Catcher in the Rye* by J.D. Salinger follows sixteen-year-old Holden Caulfield through an aimless, unsupervised weekend in New York City following his expulsion from the elite Pencey Preparatory School. Haunted by his younger brother Allie’s death and his own implied history of abuse, Holden finds it hard to relate to and commune with the rest of the world. Centered squarely in middle adolescence, Holden understands that people are complicated but still frequently attempts to simplify and categorize them. This habit largely prevents him from communing with others in any kind of meaningful way, even though he deeply desires it.

Indeed, Holden’s struggle is ultimately one for meaningful communion. As I will discuss throughout this chapter, each encounter he has with others leads to a defining moment wherein Holden must decide how to negotiate that communion. Because he is often ambivalent about what he wants, Holden’s agency is often misdirected and results in either preempting or sabotaging potential moments of communion. Perhaps influenced by earlier traumatic experiences, Holden most often acts on his desire for communion by either taking on the role of Catcher or rejecting the very notion of communion with his theories about “phonies.” As I will demonstrate in this chapter, Holden as the Catcher denies himself communion, whether consciously or subconsciously, by relegating himself to a created imago that has no narrative identity of its own. He thus builds artificial walls between himself and
others in order to both explain away his failed communion and uphold helpful victim/villain binaries.

**Holden’s Trauma**

Holden’s choice of imago—that of the Catcher—is rooted in his remote past. Holden’s narrative identity is largely influenced by two major events—the death of his brother and his own experience of sexual or physical abuse. Allie’s loss to his battle with leukemia, which happened three years before the events of the novel, coincides with Holden’s trouble in school. The death of a younger sibling is perhaps the biggest contributor to Holden’s development of the Catcher imago. Allie was ten or eleven when he died, approximately the same age as Phoebe is in the events of the book. Because Allie is perpetually a child, Holden’s Catcher is concerned only with the innocence of children. Holden describes the Catcher to Phoebe like this:

> Anyway, I keep picturing all these little kids playing some game in this big field of rye and all. Thousands of little kids, and nobody’s around—nobody big, I mean—except me. [...] What I have to do, I have to catch everybody if they start to go over the cliff—I mean if they’re running and they don’t look where they’re going I have to come out from somewhere and catch them. That’s all I’d do all day. I’d just be the catcher in the rye and all. (173)

Holden is so obsessed with turning the role of catching into an identity that he constructs an entire environment around being a Catcher. Everything about this idea is a fantasy. Holden’s focus on children and his own “big”-ness misses a couple of key points. First, Holden was only a child himself when Allie died, either thirteen or fourteen. Second, Allie’s death was something Holden would not have been able to save Allie from so, in that sense, Holden’s ideas about the Catcher are almost entirely
a fantasy. Still, whether or not Holden is correct in believing he could have taken on a larger role in preventing Allie’s suffering, it is a large factor in how he thinks about himself and how he moves through the world.

The other large contributing factor to Holden’s narrative identity is his experience with abuse. This one is much less obvious. The only explicit reference in the novel comes after Holden awakes to Mr. Antolini petting his head, which Holden perceives as sexual molestation. Holden says, “When something perverty like that happens, I start sweating like a bastard. That kind of stuff’s happened to me about twenty times since I was a kid. I can’t stand it” (193). Holden perceives Antolini’s infraction of his personal space as a kind of abuse. Additionally, it is also important to recognize that Holden categorizes Antolini’s actions with other similar events.

Holden’s identification with James Castle, the boy who committed suicide at Elkton Hills after being abused by classmates, further points to Holden as a victim of abuse. Of that event, Holden says, “So they [Castle’s classmates] started in on him. I won’t even tell you what they did to him—it’s too repulsive […]” (170). Holden, though, is not a narrator who has shied away from describing brutal scenes. Holden endures two fights himself, which leads to the sense that something more is at stake here. Additionally, there are strong narrative elements that tie Holden to Castle. Castle is wearing Holden’s turtleneck when he jumps from his dorm window. Antolini is the only person to respond to Castle’s jump and thus becomes a savior figure in Castle’s story as well as Holden’s, at least for a time. Castle, like Holden, is an outsider who is
willing to articulate the perceived shallowness of the majority. These links connect Holden with a victim of abuse in a very intimate way.

As a result of his abuse, Holden constructs two protective binaries. The first is between the real and the phony. “One of the biggest reasons I left Elkton Hills was because I was surrounded by phonies,” says Holden (13). The students of Elkton Hills, though, are semi-synonymous with Castle’s tormentors and so this distinction—phoniness—is largely a mechanism Holden uses to remind himself that he is not Castle’s tormentors and that he is unlike his own abusers. The other end of the binary—reality—has its own problems though. Holden also rejects things that are too real like when he is disgusted by Spencer’s sickness (11).

Second, Holden constructs a catcher/faller binary. Holden’s experiences with abuse contribute to his unique categorization of the world as he delineates a bold distinction between the innocent (the children in the field, Allie, Phoebe, Castle, and himself before the abuse) and those responsible for the corruption of the innocent. Like the real/phony binary, this binary has no place for Holden. He does not see himself as innocent, and, as I shall explore later, he has no real victory in the Catcher category either.

This delineation, in turn, is representative of a larger overly simplistic view of the world Holden sometimes takes. His experience with trauma has led him to the conclusions that things are either good or evil, either innocent or perverse, either phony or real. Unable to consolidate opposing characteristics, Holden is sometimes stuck in a world without nuance. Without nuance, Holden places an immense
responsibility on himself and, sometimes, on those around him. This misappropriation of responsibility contributes to Holden’s trouble communing with other characters. Frequently, Holden initiates communion but then places the responsibility of the success of that interaction on the other characters, placing him at a great disadvantage to achieve the communion he wants.

**Holden’s Lack of Communion**

There are at least four different barriers holding Holden back from true communion: inaction, false binaries, irony, and inappropriate targets.

*Inaction.* In the first, Holden daydreams and then never acts. There is a desire for communion, but no agency. Holden’s daydreams of communion are mostly lessons in impulse. He narrates to his audience every impulse for communion he feels. The most common of these, of course, is his desire to “call up old Jane.”² Holden considers calling Jane approximately ten times throughout the novel. He actually calls her only once: “The only trouble was, her mother answered the phone so I had to hang up. […] I should’ve at least asked her if Jane was home yet, though. It wouldn’t have killed me. But I didn’t feel like it. You really have to be in the mood for that stuff” (116). This instance provides a model for understanding Holden’s relationship with his desire for communion.

First, there exists the impulse. Holden calls Jane (or talks about calling Jane, in most cases) because he wants communion. Second, that impulse is immediately

² See page 59, for instance. This exact phrase is repeated almost a dozen times in the book.
frustrated by a minor complication. The time of day, access to a phone, and, in this case, having to talk to Jane’s mother all contribute to Holden immediately rethinking his impulse. Finally, that complication leads to inaction.

*False Binaries.* Inaction is not always the problem. Sometimes, Holden is disgusted by what his action leads to—namely, reality. In Holden’s second barrier to communion, which stems directly from his evolving narrative identity as the Catcher, dichotomous thinking and Holden’s refusal to consolidate conflicting ideas lead to constructed walls between himself and others. When Holden visits Mr. Spencer to say goodbye to him, Holden is almost immediately repelled by the sickliness of Spencer:

“The minute I went in, I was sort of sorry I’d come. He was reading the *Atlantic Monthly*, and there were pills and medicine all over the place, and everything smelled like Vicks Nose Drops. It was pretty depressing” (7). The reality of the situation is too much for Holden. It makes him uncomfortable, and he immediately regrets his decision to come. Holden wants the communion, yes, but he does not want communion with things that can potentially let him down—sickness, death, or loss of innocence. Spencer represents the first two of these. Getting too close to Spencer could result in loss and so Holden repositions himself far away from Spencer. “But I just couldn’t hang around there any longer,” he says as he prepares to leave, “the way we were on opposite sides of the pole....” (15). This repositioning of his relationship with Spencer gives him safety, providing him protection from the inevitable disappointment of the loss of a friend. In this case, Holden’s move toward communion leads to withdrawal due to fear of loss.
Holden’s sexual identity leads to a similar, but not identical, withdrawal. Within the events of the novel, sexual togetherness is almost always framed as in conflict with real communion. When Holden orders a prostitute, he withdraws from the sexual act but desires a deeper communion with the girl. Holden tells the girl he wants to chat. But he quickly realizes he does not know what to talk about. “I couldn’t think of anything to talk about, though. I thought of asking her how she got to be a prostitute and all, but I was scared to ask her. She probably wouldn’t tell me anyway” (95). So, instead, Holden says very little to the girl, and she ends up growing annoyed and leaving.

Just as the reality of death is a barrier to real communion for Holden so is the reality of sex. Holden, in his naiveté, seems to believe that the sexual act is contrary to intimacy and respect—two things necessary for real communion. For instance, the closest he has come to having sex with Jane (“the only time old Jane and I ever got to close to necking” (78)), the reader learns, is a tender moment when Holden comforts Jane, kissing her all over, but never on the lips. It is unsurprising, though, that their relationship never progresses past this point physically because Holden associates Jane with “real” forms of intimacy—superb hand-holding and Jane putting her hand on the back of his neck during a movie. Jane is also the only one Holden allows to see Allie’s glove (77-80).

Jane, Holden continually reminds his audience, is different. She is markedly different from the girls Holden mentions in Chapter 13 when he says, “The thing is, most of the time when you’re coming pretty close to doing it with a girl—a girl that
isn’t a prostitute or anything, I mean—she keeps telling you to stop. The trouble with me is, I stop” (92). Again, Holden sets up a dichotomy where he finds it impossible to both respect and have sex with a girl. Holden’s inability to commune with Sunny the prostitute comes from this dichotomous thinking.

_Irony_. Holden’s third barrier to communion is his adoption of an ironic, false tone with people. When Holden meets Ernest Morrow’s mother on the train away from Pencey, he decides to keep his real name from her and “shoot[…] the old crap around a little bit” (55). These decisions result in an almost entirely fictitious conversation where Holden sings the praises of her son even though Holden believes he is a “rat.” Halfway through the conversation, though, Holden begins to regret giving Mrs. Morrow a false name. “I liked her, though,” he says. “I was beginning to feel sort of sorry I’d told her my name was Rudolf Schmidt” (56). Holden goes into the interaction expecting the conversation only to be good for his own amusement and so does not give her any details about his own life that would have led to intimate communion. Instead, when Holden realizes that he likes her, he steps into the Catcher role. He continues to tell Mrs. Morrow lies about Ernest in order to shield her from the truth of the situation which he thinks is damaging: “But I’ll bet, after all the crap I shot, Mrs. Morrow’ll keep thinking of him now as this very shy, modest guy that wouldn’t let us nominate him for president. She might. You can’t tell. Mothers aren’t too sharp about that stuff” (57). In Holden’s world, Mrs. Morrow will go on believing Ernest is a good guy for the rest of her life and so Holden has successfully protected
her from the vile truth. Of course, this perception is only a rationalization that stems from a botched attempt at communion.

This tendency to judge how an interaction will play out before he has gotten into it creates a lot of strife for Holden. It creates tension between him and Ackley, for instance. In the first scene where the audience sees Ackley with Holden, Holden is intentionally joking around with Ackley in order to annoy him: “I was only horsing around, naturally. That stuff gives me a bang sometimes. Besides, I know it annoyed the hell out of old Ackley. He always brought out the old sadist in me” (22). Holden, however, seems to understand that Ackley is a complicated individual—not just someone he should write off. So Holden invites him to the movies (36). Then, after he fights with Stradlater, Holden attempts real communion with Ackley, but it is rather obvious that Ackley wants very little to do with him. While some of this rudeness may be due to Ackley’s personality, Holden’s behavior towards Ackley certainly is not helping the situation.

*Inappropriate targets.* Holden’s relationship with Ackley has characteristics of another barrier to Holden’s communion with others—when Holden picks people with whom he knows he will have problems communing. In this fourth barrier, Holden shows a lot of agency, but it is almost entirely misdirected. Perhaps the strongest example of this barrier is Holden’s date with Sally. He elects to call Sally instead of Jane as a second choice for companionship, but he does not seem thrilled about the prospect of spending time with Sally. Holden takes shots at both her intelligence and her ability to get along with him: “If somebody knows quite a lot about those things
[theater and plays and literature], it takes you quite a while to find out whether they’re really stupid or not. It took me years to find it out, in old Sally’s case” (105). And then, “She gave me a pain in the ass, but she was very good-looking” (106).

The date with Sally exemplifies Holden’s pattern of self-sabotage. Holden knows that he and Sally will be unable to connect on any real level. However, Holden manages to convince himself that a real connection could happen. “The funny part is, I felt like marrying her the minute I saw her,” he says upon seeing her (124). Over the course of the date, though, it becomes clear that it is not going to end well. After the show, Holden says, “I sort of hated old Sally by the time we got in the cab, after listening to that phony Andover bastard for about ten hours” (128). Still, he attempts to share with her all of the thoughts he has been having about society and phonies and the uselessness of schools.

Holden chooses Sally as a confidant because she is safe. He knows she will not understand and so he knows that she will dismiss him as crazy and unrealistic. In a way, this interaction allows Holden to not take himself too seriously. It invalidates Holden’s perception of the world, which, in a way, is good for him because the role he wants to fill—the Catcher—does not have its own sentiments about the world.

Holden as Catcher

The Catcher, as the title of the novel suggests, emerges in Holden’s story as the main imago. It is foreshadowed early in Holden’s obsession with the well-being of the Central Park ducks: “I was wondering where the ducks went when the lagoon got all icy and frozen over. I wondered if some guy came in a truck and took them away to a
zoo or something. Or if they just flew away” (13). Holden’s first guess about the ducks is that someone takes care of them, showing his early belief in the Catcher/falling binary. This reading of the Catcher ideal is consistent with McAdams. He says, “These characters [imagoes] function in our myths as if they were persons; hence, they are ‘personified.’ And each has a somewhat exaggerated and one-dimensional form; hence, they are ‘idealized’” (The Stories 122). Even so, there seems to be something imperfect about Holden’s attempt at the Catcher imago. While McAdams believes an imago may be one-dimensional (and the Catcher certainly is), he also says that “each imago may serve to bring together different roles under a single narrative category” (123). The Catcher, by contrast, is defined by its single role. There are no “different roles” here needing to be consolidated. The Catcher, then, becomes another way for Holden to simplify his world. This simplification becomes a cage for Holden. A Catcher cannot catch itself and so neither can Holden. He must always be either falling or catching.

The idea for the name of the role comes from a mishearing of the Robert Burns lyrics “Gin a body meet a body/ coming thro the rye.” Holden hears a small boy singing them, and hears, “If a body catch a body coming through the rye” (115). While the name comes from this scene, it is evident that this is a way that Holden has long been approaching the world. Throughout the novel, Holden seems to have a heightened sense of empathy that, at times, borders on the absurd. When he is “shooting it” with Mrs. Morrow, for instance, he rationalizes his lying away by claiming that it is actually good of him to protect her from the truth that her son is a
“bastard” (57). The thought that Holden’s revisionist storytelling can actually benefit Mrs. Morrow seems like an absurd, retroactive rationalization rather than a life philosophy, but it is consistent with Holden’s identification as the Catcher.

Holden’s reluctance to tell his own parents about being kicked out of Pencey follows a similar course. Of course, it is easier to *not* tell them, but Holden adds another level of meaning behind his decision to forego telling them. Of his mother, Holden says, “She hasn’t felt too healthy since my brother Allie died. She’s very nervous. That’s another reason why I hated like hell for her to know I got the ax again” (107). Holden does not seem to grasp that being kicked out of Pencey is bad for*him*. Instead, he focuses on how his actions are bad for other people.

This example shows some of the inherent flaws in the Catcher role. First, it shows how being a Catcher closely resembles the colloquial vice of “people-pleasing.” One of the problems with the Catcher is that it is almost completely other-focused, leaving little room for the individual. Using this other-focus, the Catcher attempts to be a communal imago. However, what distinguishes the Catcher from more traditional communal imagoes—the lover, the caregiver, or the friend—is its impossibility. A lover can love a beloved even through situations the lover has no control over; the caregiver can provide support through those situations; and the friend experiences those situations with other individuals. The Catcher, in contrast, is meant to completely protect other individuals from low-control situations. Holden cannot realistically protect Mrs. Morrow from her son’s nastiness, and he cannot realistically forever protect his own mother from the news of his failing out of Pencey. The
Catcher is reactive, waiting for bad things to happen to other people before it acts, while traditional communal imagoes are proactive, loving, caring and providing friendship any time.

The other issue with “people-pleasing” is that it often erases Holden from the equation. Phoebe raises a form of this criticism when she notes that Holden has misheard the lyrics of the Robert Burns poem. “To meet a body” is the same from both sides. It matters little which body does the meeting. “To catch a body,” though, is asymmetric. One body becomes the catcher; the other becomes the caught. This asymmetry relegates both to interdependent roles, and it does not matter that Holden, specifically, is there to catch, just that someone is. Holden is not important by himself through the Catcher lens; he is only important because of his role.

Interestingly, though, Holden waffles between desiring to be the catcher and desiring to be the caught. Because Holden sees the world through this lens, when he finally seeks out real communion with Mr. Antolini, he does so because he believes Antolini, in a sense, to be a Catcher. The decision to call Antolini happens quickly and Holden has no qualms about telling Antolini about flunking out of Pencey. Holden seems to trust Antolini quite a bit: “He was the best teacher I ever had, Mr. Antolini. He was a pretty young guy, not much older than my brother D.B., and you could kid around with him without losing your respect for him” (174). Holden also thinks of

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3 Interestingly, and perhaps ironically, the real Robert Burns lyrics are incredibly erotic, and there exists a much more explicit alternate version. In some ways, then, this Burns poem is the worst poem for Holden to use as a worldview for protecting innocence.
Antolini as the Catcher in James Castle’s story. Antolini was the one who carried Castle away.

Ultimately, though, Antolini fails as Catcher for both Castle and Holden. With Castle, he arrives on the scene too late, and with Holden, he abuses the boy’s trust. Ironically, seeing the only Catcher-like character fall forces Holden further into the role. Instead of realizing that the Catcher-ideal is unattainable, Holden begins to act more and more like the character. It is after his meeting with Antolini that he famously rubs out the curse words at the school (201).

**Holden’s Narrative Identity**

Holden’s identification as the Catcher brings the novel to its conclusion. He wants to run away, but the threat of Phoebe coming with him forces him to reconsider. In an attempt to keep Phoebe in school and in New York, Holden promises to stay as well. Something about the Catcher imago breaks down here, though. Watching Phoebe on the carousel at the zoo, Holden says, “I felt so damn happy all of a sudden, the way old Phoebe kept going around and around. I was damn near bawling, I felt so damn happy, if you want to know the truth” (213). Holden seems to be reacting to Phoebe’s freedom, but she can only be free without a Catcher. If Phoebe does not need a Catcher, where does that leave him? And so Holden’s reaction to this end scene seems to prove that the Catcher identity is flawed and tragic.

However, it is important to note that making decisions through the Catcher lens allows Holden to face the reality of the situation. He finally owns up to his mistakes and prepares to enter his life instead of fantasizing about running away. While the role
of Catcher impedes Holden’s quest for communion, it is successful in unifying and influencing his narrative identity.

In this way, Holden’s narrative identity, like all narrative identities is neither completely successful nor completely unsuccessful. It allows him to experience happiness in a moment with his little sister, but it also brings him to a hospital, eventually. Holden’s decision to not give his audience much background in this frame of the novel is intentional. It controls the structure of the plot, painting over the idea of a sick Holden with images of a heroic Catcher Holden.

Moreover, one should not confuse a pessimistic narrative with an unhealthy narrator. McAdams explains how the four general forms of stories combine to create a tone for a personal myth:

Literary scholars have found useful the discrimination between four very general forms—comedy, romance, tragedy, and irony. These forms provide a useful scheme for approaching personal myths as well. They help us to understand a myth’s overall narrative tone. In simple terms, comedy and romance provide an optimistic narrative tone, while tragedy and irony suggest a pessimistic tone. (50)

The reader cannot assume, then, that Holden’s narrative identity or inconsistent communion suggests a tragic future. Holden’s life so far has been tragic and the mode Holden most often uses to navigate that tragic trauma-filled life is one of irony. These truths combine into a pessimistic tone, but Holden himself can still have an optimistic future in front of him. The reader is left with the ambiguity of this conflict between optimism and pessimism.

**Summary**

In this chapter, I described Holden Caulfield’s struggle in *The Catcher in the
*Rye* as one of middle adolescence. Affected by tragedy and trauma, Holden latches on to the Holden-discovered Catcher role. The tension in the novel arises from Holden waffling among different versions of himself based on this Catcher role. Sometimes he wishes to be the Catcher, sometimes the Caught; sometimes he wishes to experience intimacy, sometimes to withdraw; sometimes he is driven away by phoniness, sometimes by stark reality. Without an imago and seemingly unable to consolidate these contradictions in the moment, Holden is often left without the kind of communion for which he strives. The end of the novel, however, and the knowledge that Holden himself is telling the story, suggests that he has found some success in consolidating his many observations into a single narrative identity.
Chapter Four: Life of Pi

Introduction

Yann Martel’s Life of Pi is markedly unlike either The Outsiders or The Catcher in the Rye in terms of how the protagonist negotiates communion, exerts agency, deliberately constructs his own narrative identity, and, ultimately, transforms his narrative into mythology. The novel is complex and tells two versions of the same story. That story is one of Pi, a sixteen-year-old boy in India who is shipwrecked at sea when his family attempts to sell the family-business (a zoo) and relocate to Canada. Losing his family to the sea, Pi’s only companions are surviving animals from the zoo including a zebra, orangutan, hyena, and a tiger. The majority of the novel tells the story of Pi’s survival. At the end of the novel, Pi reveals that there is a second story in which Pi is lost at sea with humans instead of animals, providing interesting studies in authorship. In this chapter, I will discuss how Pi’s survival is dependent on his use of the tools of agency and communion. Pi’s aggressive use of agency gives him the ability to create a story with mythic qualities, allowing him to commune with God and a larger humanity simply by focusing on his individuality. Then, in the bulk of this chapter, I will show how Pi’s strong agency results in Pi’s narrative identity development, arguing that there are four unique, overlapping stages in Pi’s development: character, storyteller, author, and, ultimately, mythmaker.
Pi as Character: “My name is Piscine Molitor Patel”

Pi’s narrative identity evolves dramatically throughout the novel. Agency is tightly linked to identity development, as I will argue, because each change in identity occurs when Pi intentionally exerts his agency for that very purpose.

Agency is central to *Life of Pi*, and Pi begins using strong forms of agency early in the novel. We meet Piscine, a bold character who holds the promise of agency but not yet the reality. Within the first five chapters, the reader learns that Pi is an accomplished academic, learned to swim at a very young age despite his mother’s distress, and renamed himself on his first day of secondary school. And after these chapters, Pi is constantly *doing* something. He takes on new religions; he successfully navigates instances when his mentors meet; he pressures his parents into buying him a prayer rug; he survives on a lifeboat with a tiger, a hyena, an orangutan, and a zebra. Pi exemplifies the masculine hero—resourceful, practical, courageous, and compassionate.

Pi as Agentic Character: “known to all as Pi Patel”

In Chapter Five, however, things begin to change. Pi goes into a lengthy discussion of his full name (Piscine) and how it was often mispronounced. Out of shame and a fear of ridicule, Pi comes up with an ingenious solution: he will control the destiny of his name. Instead of waiting for his name to be mispronounced, Pi takes a more proactive approach. The process he goes through to rename himself is illuminating as a study of Pi’s agency.
The first solution Pi mentions is to simply be known as “Ravi’s brother.” This solution is ultimately thrown out because “following in someone’s shadow wasn’t my escape” (22). By naming himself in relation to someone else, Pi recognizes that he loses part of what it means to be an individual.

The plan he comes up with—to creatively show teachers he wants to be called Pi—requires a lot of action. His fear of humiliation drives him, on the first day of class, to go to the board and write on it without being told to. This event, however, does not only represent an extremely agentic first day of school. It also represents the beginning of Pi taking control of his story.

On the board, when called for attendance, Pi writes, “My name is Piscine Molitor Patel, known to all as Pi Patel. $\pi = 3.14$” (22-3). The genius of this plan is that it shows that Pi understands the relationship between truth (and language) and reality. Before this stunt, he was not “known to all as Pi Patel,” but he realizes that by stating it as fact, he can make it a reality. It does not matter that no one ever called him Pi before because now they will, and for that reason, the statement is both a creation and a truism. For the first time, Pi uses his agency to create reality.

Additionally, this scene, and what Pi writes on the board, is important because it illustrates Pi’s relationship with reality and myth. The first statement, “My name is Piscine Molitor Patel,” is the literal truth. The second, “known to all as Pi Patel,” shows Pi’s agency as author. And the third, “$\pi = 3.14$,” creates something larger than the individual Pi for his audience to relate to. Pi creates an image with the irrational number that allows his statement to stick in the heads of his classmates and teachers.
With the success of his plan, Pi has successfully renamed the main character of his story and ensured, by appealing to larger symbols, that no one will ever forget it.

Having created his name and announced its mysticism to his classmates, Pi is no longer a mere character in this story. He begins, at this point, to author it, as events on the lifeboat will later further demonstrate.

**Pi as Sage**

In Part Two, the conflict of the novel finally arrives and Pi, on a relocation trip with his family across the Pacific Ocean, is thrown to the mercy of the sea. On a life raft with several animals from his family zoo—a hyena, an injured zebra, an orangutan, and a Bengal tiger named Richard Parker—Pi must carve out his own path for survival.

The first turning point on the raft is much like Pi’s turning point in the first part of the novel. Just as he goes from a passive observer in the classrooms that bastardized his name to an active participant who demands a rebaptism, so does he move from a silent occupant of the raft to the hero of it. When the hyena kills the orangutan, Pi decides it is time to kill the hyena. This decision is notable for the confidence with which Pi executes it. There is no inner dialogue about the merits or possible outcomes of such a decision. It is treated as a fact of nature. Pi’s attack of the hyena is inextricably linked to the hyena’s attack of the orangutan: “It [the fatally wounded orangutan] was a sight horrible to the eyes and killing to the spirit. Just before throwing myself upon the hyena…” (132). This is the only discussion of the attack the reader gets because it never actually happens. Instead, Pi is stopped by the realization
that Richard Parker is still on the boat. Richard Parker, then, becomes a symbol of Pi’s agency. Pi’s first real act of survival on the lifeboat is halted by Richard Parker, but also, because Richard Parker is Pi’s will to survive, Richard Parker, in a sense, enables Pi’s first real act of survival.

This pattern is repeated throughout the second part of the novel. When Pi realizes that he has a powerful will to live, for instance, Richard Parker is there: “Richard Parker started growling that very instant, as if he had been waiting for me to become a worthy opponent” (148). As Richard Parker prepares to kill the hyena, Pi prepares a mini-raft so that he can get off the lifeboat and presumably to safety. These two actions are linked together. The narration switches back and forth from Pi’s tasks to Richard Parker’s posturing. Just as Pi is about to finish the raft (he “only had to hitch the other end of the rope to the raft”), Richard Parker attacks the hyena (150). Thus, Pi and Richard Parker work at parallel tasks that ultimately ensure Pi’s survival.

Pi, viewed through the lens given by McAdams, would be an agentic character. There is much of The Sage, one of McAdams’s agentic imagoes, in Pi. “The sage is an extraordinarily agentic imago. Through knowledge come power and mastery, and knowing the world (or the self) can be likened to conquering one’s own external (or internal) environment,” writes McAdams (141). Pi certainly seems wise and, because of this wisdom, powerful, and the events of the novel only make him wiser and more powerful. This imago, though, does not make Pi unique. There are many sages in both literature and history. What sets Pi aside from his sage peers, then, is his willingness to
take strong authorial control. Whereas the simple sage discovers knowledge and thereby gains power, Pi uses his knowledge and power to create his own meaning.

**Pi as Author: “π = 3.14”**

Pi’s agency, however, does not stop here. There is a second layer. Pi has just as much impact on *how* the story is told as what happens in the story. Later in the novel, Pi recounts the story of the raft to two Japanese government officials who are questioning him in an attempt to discover the reasons for the sinking of the ship.

It is here that the “good story” of a tiger and a boy on the raft starts to take on new meaning. Pi the Sage now becomes Pi the Author, as he reveals to the men that the animals were symbolic representations of humans: the hyena was the ship cook; the injured zebra was a sailor with a broken leg; the orangutan was his mother; and Richard Parker was Pi himself. He then tells the human version of the raft story. As Author, however, Pi cannot help but amusingly elicit feedback from his audience:

> “So tell me, since it makes no factual difference to you and you can’t prove the question either way, which story do you prefer? Which is the better story, the story with animals or the story without animals?”
> Mr. Okamoto: “That’s an interesting question…”
> Mr. Chiba: “The story with animals.”
> Mr. Okamoto: “Yes. The story with animals is the better story.”
> Pi Patel: “Thank you. And so it goes with God.” (317)

After having heard the human story and after admitting to Pi that the animal story is better, Mr. Okamoto says, “We’ll be careful when we drive away. We don’t want to run into Richard Parker” and Pi responds, “Don’t worry, you won’t. He’s hiding somewhere you'll never find him” (317). The mention of Richard Parker after the
human story has been told gives Richard Parker mythical qualities and suggests that Pi understands both the reality and fantasy of Richard Parker.

The animal story might be understood in a way in which Pi has this understanding of Richard Parker’s fantasy and reality even on the raft. If understood in this way, Pi’s relationship with the animals becomes multidimensional. As the only rational thinking being on the raft, he becomes the master, and author, of his story. The cook whose gluttony Pi had partaken in on the raft becomes a flat archetypical hyena. His mother whose relationship with Pi was sometimes strained on the raft because of Pi’s lack of discipline becomes a positive maternal orangutan, incapable of showing disdain. And the sailor who Pi saw brutally murdered becomes a zebra, a symbol for exotic majesty. He narrows each of the players into one feeling or thought. The hyena becomes his target of hatred; the orangutan family; the zebra beauty and sanctity of life. While on the surface this move simplifies the story, robbing the characters of their complexity, it actually propels the story into mythical realms. The story is no longer about the brutal murder of his mother and a sailor. Instead, it is about the loss of innocence. In a sense, this simplification paves the way for Pi’s own myth of adolescence. Pi re-authors his own story as it is happening, helping him deal with the trauma of the situation.

Other Authorial Actions

Pi is a fun and, at times, tricky author because he has no illusions about being able to convey objective reality to his audience. He knows he cannot. Instead, he manipulates his inability to provide unbiased fact into an opportunity to confound the
audience. Pi exercises authorship in a number of ways. He reduces characters to archetypes when it suits him; he keeps the number of chapters to one hundred; he intentionally places digressions next to key parts in the plot; and he never makes any promises to his audience about truth or fact.

Sometimes, in order to make a scene more palatable, Pi reduces otherwise round characters to archetypical figures. A great example of this is Chapter 23. In it, Pi and his family are bombarded on the beach by the religious figures Pi has spent the previous chapters befriending. In the chapter, each of the religious leaders accuses Pi of not practicing a singular religion. They believe this keeps him from engaging with any real truth of any of the religions. Throughout the chapter, none of the religious leaders is called by name. Instead, the chapter exists as a kind of story within a story. It is a parable in which the religious leaders are no longer real people but instead stand-ins for their respective religions.

While this chapter strips these three characters of nuanced individualities, it greatly augments Pi’s identity. Pi becomes the one with the answers. Narration is extremely important in this chapter as Pi explains how this situation came to pass. Pi says, “Teenagers always hide a few things from their parents, isn’t that so? All sixteen-year-olds have secrets, don’t they? But fate decided that my parents and I and the three wise men, as I shall call them, should meet one day” (64). In this passage, Pi simultaneously renames his religious teachers and takes a large part of the ownership of what is about to happen. By casting his religious leaders to the background, Pi forces the onus of this seemingly unfortunate incident onto himself. In so doing, Pi
demands that he be perceived as the rational, thinking one. Additionally, Pi chooses the placement of the reader. In some sense, this placement is near Pi’s parents. Like Pi’s parents, the reader does not have the “full” story, and there is the feeling that Pi is keeping secrets from the reader as well.

As the chapter progresses on page 67, less than half of the quotes are given speakers. Pi leaves the reader to determine what sentences go with which speakers. In this way, Pi compacts the religious leaders’ characters further. Not only do they each represent their own faith, they also collectively represent organized faith in general. They are “the three wise men.” They are a group, and Pi reminds the reader of this at every turn. By the end of the chapter, the three wise men have almost become a single character—a character who believes that Pi cannot practice more than one faith.

Not only does Pi control the components of the story—characters, plot, and symbols—he also manipulates the infrastructure of the narrative. Consider, for instance, the number of chapters in the novel. There are exactly 100. This number, like the collapsing of the three wise men, is no accident. In chapter 94, as an aside to the fictionalized Yann Martel, Pi says, “Where we can, we must give things a meaningful shape. For example—I wonder—could you tell my jumbled story in exactly one hundred chapters, not one more, not one less?” (285). This passage is remarkable because it strips the fictionalized Martel of one of the fundamental tools of authorship—chapter delineation—and gives it back to Pi.
Pi the Mythmaker

Pi is certainly a strong author, but also, Pi flirts with mythmaker status. A myth differs from a traditionally authored story because it is universally known and collectively owned. A myth is a story that not only belongs to the teller (the mythmaker) but also belongs to the audience. Additionally, an author makes decisions that affect how the story is told while a mythmaker makes decisions that affect the delineation between fact and fiction. Pi routinely makes the argument that facts are less important than imagination. The entire two-story structure of the novel speaks to this. Additionally, Pi’s story, as Pi and others point out throughout the novel, is not just about a boy lost at sea with a tiger. It is also about God and warns against a bias towards stories that sound rational and reasonable.

The theme of Part One—a theme largely ignored in Part Two—is religion. Pi’s focus on religion, however, allows him to change the stakes of the story. By frontloading religion and foreshadowing the events of Part Two, Pi makes his story about something bigger than survival. He makes it into, as Mr. Adirubasamy (the man who introduces Martel to Pi’s story) would say, “a story that will make you believe in God” (x). Thus, by elongating Part One, Pi creates the spin of his narrative. He provides the literal meaning as well as the editorialized meaning. The fictionalized Martel understands this arrangement, as well. It’s why “[i]t seemed natural that Mr. Patel’s story should be told mostly in the first person—in his voice and through his eyes” (xi-xii).
Ultimately, Pi’s ability to imbue his own story with deeper meaning that has universal appeal is what carries him from author to mythmaker. He imbues his story not only with characters, plot, and setting but also with archetypes, myth, allegory, and symbolism. Pi is definitely the author of his story, but he is also something more—he is, in some cases, quite literally creating his own reality.

Several times throughout the first section, Pi hints at his more fluid type of storytelling. Myth and reality are going to be blurred, Pi warns his readers. For instance, at the end of Chapter 20, Pi describes an experience he had where he saw the Virgin Mary. He situates the experience long after the main plot of his story, distancing it from the main story’s mythical qualities and implying that reality-making is something that the adult Pi continues to do. What is unique about Pi’s account of this religious moment is not that it is unrealistic. This moment is unique because Pi recognizes its unrealistic nature without weakening his belief in it. He says, “When I say I saw her, I don’t quite mean it literally, though she did have body and colour. I felt I saw her, a vision beyond a vision” (63). By saying this, Pi makes the occurrence less concrete (he didn’t actually see her) while attaching to it a heavier kind of reality (it was “a vision beyond a vision”).

This play between the duality of reality and myth occurs again only a page later. Pi spends a short chapter explaining the difference between atheists and agnostics. For Pi, the atheist still has a chance at religious salvation. When presented with God at death, the atheist believes in God because he or she is practiced in commitment. The agnostic, by contrast, remains skeptical till the very end and is
thereby unable to ever have faith. Pi articulates this problem by saying that agnostics “lack imagination and miss the better story” (64). The “better story” for Pi can only be achieved through imagination, a function not normally associated with reality and science. It is almost as if Pi recalibrates meaning-making around myth and imagination rather than truth and reality.

Sometimes, Pi, the mythmaker, is less transparent about his motives. Reality sometimes becomes a part of myth, for instance, rather than its opposite, meaning that Pi, in his narration, makes no distinction between the two. Some of these conflations deal directly with agency and communion. Pi’s treatment of religion exemplifies this tension. Religion, for most, is communal. It brings people together and connects them to something bigger than themselves. Agency is usually set up in opposition to these sorts of concepts. Pi, however, thwarts this binary. For him, religion is a tool and is, in that way, a very agentic sort of thing.

While religion is very important to Pi in the first part of the novel, it is forced to the background while he is on the lifeboat so that themes of survival and struggle can take its place. Chapter 74, however, deals with religion in the foreground. For this reason, it is illustrative of Pi’s raw feelings on religion. “I practised religious rituals that I adapted to the circumstances,” Pi says (208). The word “adapted” is a strong one, implying that Pi has ownership of the rituals. Pi inverts the typical understanding of religion. Religion, typically understood, is bigger than man and so therefore connects man to things beyond himself. For Pi, though, religion is man-made and perhaps smaller than man but is just as important. Pi would probably argue that it
is more important in this adaptable way. Once religion has been taken down from its pedestal, it becomes even more meaningful to people because it meets them where they are. They are able to adapt it for their own lives and situations. Thus, through an agentic act (adaptation), Pi makes a communal thing (religion) even more communal.

But perhaps Pi’s biggest form of mythmaking—the one that elevates Pi’s story from a simple one about survival to a complicated one that is universal—happens in a way that suggests Pi is confounding himself. Indeed, Pi not only uses his multi-layered story as a way of easily avoiding traumatic memories but also uses it to deal with traumatic events as they happen. As Pi survives on the raft, he simultaneously creates and lives in his animal-filled reality.

Pi connects his tale to objectivity for the reader through his diary. It is not till Chapter 73 that he mentions it, but because it is the only log of the story as it happened, it is perhaps the most informative artifact of the raft. Interestingly, Pi tells the reader what he wrote in his diary, saying, “I talked about what you might expect: about things that happened and how I felt, about what I caught and what I didn’t, about seas and weather, about problems and solutions, about Richard Parker. All very practical stuff” (208). Upon the first reading, this passage seems understated but not particularly noteworthy. With a tiger on a boat, it would be troubling if Pi did not write about it. Knowing the ending, though, raises some questions about this passage. If the story with Richard Parker is not the story that factually happened, then what can be made of Pi describing Richard Parker in his diary?
Richard Parker, of course, has a serious role to play in this myth. It is no wonder Pi feels he must keep Richard Parker alive, both physically (in the animal story) and in his diary (in the human story). Richard Parker is not just a stand-in for Pi; he is also Pi’s link to sanity and (in a very Jungian sense) his animus. When Pi trains Richard Parker, Pi is disciplining himself—learning how to control his own savagery and raw lust for life. The conflict with Richard Parker is an outward projection of the inward struggle Pi, like every adolescent, must eventually survive. None of this, though—not the mythmaking nor the navigation of this adolescent struggle—can happen unless Pi believes it as it is happening. The key to the mythmaking is Pi’s re-narration of the story to himself as it is happening, which empowers him to make difficult decisions, and ultimately, to survive.

There is one more component that cements Pi’s story into myth—the role of Yann Martel. Martel, unlike Hinton and Salinger, makes himself achingly visible to his reader. The most obvious instance, of course, being the fictionalization of himself. The book opens with the author’s note: “This book was born as I was hungry. Let me explain. In the spring of 1996, my second book, a novel, came out in Canada. It didn’t fare well” (vii). For the real Martel, 1996 was the publication of his second book (“Conversation”). The power here is that Martel not only fictionalizes the author but he fictionalizes himself. The Martel of Life of Pi subsumes all of the real Martel’s history, and because of association, Pi’s story becomes more real.

There are other ways Martel attempts to convey realness into Pi’s story. In an interview on PBS, Martel said, “So I was sort of looking for a story, not only with a
small "s," but sort of with a capital "s"-- something that would direct my life”
(“Conversation”). This statement again suggests that Pi’s story existed somewhere in
reality and that Martel found it, but even more than that, it suggests that Pi’s story was
useful for Martel. The myth Martel creates is therapeutic for himself. It’s an amazing
statement.

Finally, there is the question of Richard Parker’s name. Part of the tiger’s
mythology within the novel is his baptism as Richard Parker—a clerical error (133).
But the question of Richard Parker’s name also adds to the mythology of the novel as
a whole. The name comes from at least two separate true historic instances where men
named Richard Parker were shipwrecked and then became victims of cannibalism at
the hands of their co-survivors (Martel, How Richard Parker). By rooting Richard
Parker definitively in reality, Martel ensures that Pi’s story will be more than one
about a boy and a tiger surviving at sea.

Conclusion

What differentiates Life of Pi from typical adolescent literature is its
willingness to create something bigger. Pi, an incredibly agentic character, allows the
narrative to be more than self-discovery or acceptance, thereby creating a myth which
actually articulates the adolescent struggle succinctly. First, Pi must find himself and
his name (something that Ponyboy and Holden are just barely completing by the end
of their novels). Then, he must conquer his animus, learning to control his passions.
And then finally, he must learn how to narrate these events to others. However, these
tasks still do not give a full picture of the novel. They unfairly separate motivations
from actions, as if Pi is actually three different characters. The more interesting
analysis of the text occurs when you collapse these three layers back on top of one
another and realize that Pi was mythmaking while on the raft and simultaneously
accepts both the falsity and truth of his story.

In summary, Pi, the most mature and complex of the characters considered
here, is a master of both consolidation and existing in multiple narrative identities. Pi,
through both agency and communion, learns quickly how to take control of his own
identity (“rebaptising” himself) and how to communicate that identity to others. He
also shows competency at existing in multiple narratives (the animal and the human
story) and using those narratives (both the real and the mythic) to his own advantage.
By taking ultimate control of his story (down to the number of chapters), Pi also
controls almost every aspect of how he interacts with the world. Pi’s last achievement,
something that McAdams only hints at, is his propulsion of his story into the realm of
parable and myth. Because of his skill with the elements of narrative identity, Pi’s
story takes on universal appeal.
Chapter Five: Conclusion

In *The Stories We Live By*, McAdams shows how individuals develop personal myths across their lifespans. Although these personal myths are unique to the individuals creating them, McAdams acknowledges that there are common features that correspond to specific stages of life. Borrowing largely from Erikson, McAdams describes the narrative arc of the adult life, from early adulthood to old age. Each stage of this arc consists of developmental needs and tasks as well as different expectations for agency, communion, and imago selection. Unfortunately, however, this arc in narrative psychology often does not extend to adolescence. In this chapter, I will extend the arc into this often-overlooked life stage.

In Chapters Two through Four, I explored the unique personal myths of three fictional adolescents as shaped by agency, communion, and imagoes. Although there are differences among these three stories, they also reveal commonalities that can inform a more generalized arc of adolescent narrative development. Based on the narrative arcs of the three novels, McAdams’s research, as well as the work of other psychologists, I argue that there are three distinct tasks that bridge childhood and adulthood in adolescence: First, the individual must form a narrative identity; next, the individual must consolidate this narrative identity into an imago; and finally, the imago will begin to not only describe behavior but also to predict and influence behavior, especially in the areas of agency and communion.

It is important to note that these tasks exist in adulthood as well. McAdams points out, for instance, that imagoes are like characters in stories and “enter myths in
specific opening scenes” (Stories 128). He continues that “we often specify particular scenes in the story wherein characters ‘are born’ or ‘come onto the stage’” (129). Another narrative psychologist puts it this way: “I treat adult transformations not as separate developments beyond identity formation during adolescence and early adulthood but as continuations of identity formation, but in new forms” (Barresi 204). The assumption behind these ideas is that adults are continually refining their narrative identities in such a way that new imagoes are needed. Narrative identity is a repetitive process in which the individual is constantly adding and renovating new levels of stories for his or her evolving identities. Thus, narrative identity requires continual refinement and can house many imagoes over time. The new adult, then, after successfully completing the third task I set out above, will necessarily loop around to the first to make sure all of the assumptions that were made there are still cogent.

The First Narrative Identity

A literature review of studies in narrative psychology by Habermas and Bluck found that in “[r]esearch on autobiographical remembering during the first 10 years of life […] the focus is on social-cognitive abilities that prepare the grounds for, but fall short of, the adolescent capacity to coherently consider one's whole life” (752). While young children may be able to organize a single event into a narrative format, there is no evidence that they can organize multiple events into a coherent autobiographical narrative. Thus, narrative identity is not something that is innate nor is it something that can simply be mimicked by observing others.
In adolescence, the necessity for a narrative identity is derived from an individual’s new-found ability to consider alternatives—to reason using counterfactuals. David Elkind, reflecting on Piaget, says the adolescent has three ways of thinking that the child does not: combinatorial logic, or, the ability to deal with problems with many factors; the ability to symbolize symbols; and the capacity to construct ideals (100). Whereas the child can only see things the way they are, adolescents can think about the way things might have been or could be. In Elkind’s words, “the adolescent now sees a host of alternatives and decision-making becomes a problem” (101). Faced with this new problem, developing a narrative identity to help guide decision-making becomes a priority. Thus, in early adolescence, the individual for the first time has both the faculties and the motivation to develop a narrative identity.

There are consequences for failing to develop this narrative identity. Ruthellen Josselson provides a case-study of her patient Heidi. Heidi began therapy with Josselson at 19 as a “strikingly brilliant and beautiful and, on the surface, quite well-adjusted” young woman (111). However, Heidi seemed to lack the agency to narrate her own story—she questioned her own opinions and was in constant confusion about her future. Through her lens of narrative psychology, Josselson’s interpretation was that “[Heidi] was the protagonist of a story her mother was narrating” (112). The consequence of not having a unique narrative identity is dependence on others for a story, and in some sense, an identity.
All three of the characters studied here—Ponyboy, Holden, and Pi—achieve a rudimentary narrative identity in their respective novels. Ponyboy’s identity development is one of the central conflicts of the book. In the beginning, Ponyboy strongly identifies with the greaser ideal, thereby limiting himself to a very strict set of characteristics. Identification as a greaser, though, does not translate into the world outside of Ponyboy’s city. In fact, identification as a greaser is actually something that can harm Ponyboy, making him too easy to notice. When he and Johnny must run away, Ponyboy must take actions to separate himself from his greaser image, like cutting and bleaching his hair. In so doing, Ponyboy begins to realize that there are many things that make him unique and differentiate him from the typical greaser. The turning point is when Ponyboy begins to think that maybe it is not his fault that he does not perfectly conform to the greaser image—maybe the typical greasers are different from him (78). This ability to identify with something other than just greasers allows Ponyboy to develop a unique narrative identity. The empirical evidence of this change, of course, is Ponyboy writing down that narrative. *The Outsiders* is not a book about greasers; it is a book about the individual Ponyboy.

In *The Catcher in the Rye*, Holden’s tale starts where Ponyboy’s ended; whereas Ponyboy’s task at age 14 was to differentiate his identity from others, Holden, at 16, is clearly aware of the host of characteristics that uniquely define him. The audience is quickly introduced to a rough sketch of what will eventually become Holden’s personal myth—his slang, his philosophy of phoniness, and his experience with his younger brother’s death (38). Similarly, Pi’s foundation for narrative identity
occurs relatively early in the exposition. When Pi renames himself from Piscine (denoting a “pool”) to Pi (connoting infinity) it marks a distinct change in how Pi relates to the world (22). It is after his renaming, for instance, that he begins to practice multiple religions despite the disapproval of his family and his spiritual teachers.

**Consolidation into Imago**

Once the basis for narrative identity has been set, the adolescent must begin to consolidate stories, roles, and characteristics into an imago—a main character. Again, the unique faculties and dilemmas of adolescence give rise to the right kind of environment for moving the adolescent along in his or her narrative identity development.

The typical adolescent who has begun the process of developing a narrative identity is, in many ways, the perfect complement to Heidi. The adolescent, for the first time, is beginning to form his or her own thoughts and opinions about the world but, like Heidi, this adolescent is trapped by the idea that one set of thoughts and opinions (in Heidi’s case, her mother’s; in the typical adolescent’s case, his or her own) are universally correct. Elkind explains this phenomenon, which he terms a kind of egocentrism, in this way: “This egocentrism emerges because, while the adolescent can now cognize the thoughts of others, he fails to differentiate between the objects towards which the thoughts of others are directed and those which are the focus of his own concern” (91). The adolescent knows that other people also have thoughts; he or
she simply believes those thoughts concern the object of his or her own thought—namely, the adolescent’s self.

Moreover, this particular kind of egocentrism leads to a fascination with audience: “the adolescent is continually constructing, or reacting to, an imaginary audience” (Elkind 91). This obsession is especially fertile for the development of imagoes. Adolescence, as a time of audiences, is also a time of performances. Imagoes allow adolescents to perform in a way that is recognizable to others—the class clown, the loverboy, the athlete, the geek, the cool girl, the musician, the friend. Whether these primitive imagoes are created as defense (like Holden taking on the Catcher in order to ignore his own trauma) or as reflective (like Ponyboy taking on the Friend because he genuinely wants resolution between the greasers and the Socs), they always result in internalization.

Indeed, as McAdams points out, “imagoes are forged from interpersonal relationships” (Stories 130). This idea of internalization based on interpersonal relationships is explained by Kate McLean who theorized from a study on adolescent memory-telling that:

Parents appeared to have a role in the immediate working out of experiences for adolescents, regulating the emotion of the events. On the other hand, peers were told memories that had already been well formed and were used to develop intimacy for both male and female adolescents. (“Late Adolescent” 688)

Similarly, adolescents create their imagoes from models and characteristics of people who are most important to them and then use those already well-developed imagoes to better relate to their peers.
It is no accident, then, that Ponyboy begins to form an imago after his time spent hiding in the church with Johnny. Without parents and with a group of boys with whom he fails to see many shared characteristics, Ponyboy begins to use Johnny as a model for Ponyboy’s budding imago. Ponyboy begins to see the characteristics that make him different from the greasers in someone else. Johnny, too, likes stories, and he appreciates beauty and poetry. He is also kind, thoughtful, and protective—qualities that Ponyboy seems to try to emulate. Thus, Ponyboy, because of his friend Johnny, begins to project a Friend imago.

Holden, also, looks past authority figures and his peers as good models for possible imagoes. Instead, Holden develops his imago of Catcher through what he wishes his authority figures would be. This desire for a Catcher model is exemplified in Holden’s relationship with Mr. Antolini. Holden, at first, conceptualizes Antolini as a Catcher. He seeks him out when he can think of nothing else to do, and he has vivid memories of Antolini carrying (an action quite similar to catching) James Castle after Castle’s death. Antolini, however, betrays the Catcher and Holden, and ultimately drives Holden even further toward the Catcher imago. For Holden, the Catcher is a way to consolidate both his own experiences with trauma and his belief that other people are not always aware of the world around them.

Unlike in *The Catcher in the Rye*, an imago never explicitly appears in *Life of Pi*. However, it is evident from the very beginning that Pi’s experiences are consolidated into a certain pattern. The second line of Pi’s story is “Academic study and the steady, mindful practice of religion slowly brought me back to life” (3). Pi is
drawn to knowledge and its ability to affect life. His knowledge of religion and of faith allows him to retain hope on the raft, and his knowledge of zoo animals helps him survive. These examples suggest the imago of Sage for Pi—an imago that is foreshadowed in Pi’s renaming. Not only does Pi write his new name on the board for his peers, he also gives them a small math lesson, realizing that linking his renaming to real knowledge will underscore his new identity of Pi the Sage.

**The Imago Predicts and Influences Behavior**

Whereas the primitive imago is first formed in order for the adolescent to communicate a message to his or her peers (e.g., I am rebellious, funny, friendly, or cool), the complete and final imago, through internalization, predicts and influences behavior. McAdams, in a discussion of the difference between imagoes and roles, gives this example:

> Similarly, someone who develops an imago of the judge may be concerned, as a judge would be, about issues of justice and fairness in many different realms of life. The person might act and think as if he or she were a judge in situations in which even a real judge isn’t one, as when with family and friends. *(Stories 127)*

The adolescent moves from simple identification with an imago to acting out that imago. This transition is evident in the three novels.

Ponyboy, having internalized the Friend imago, seeks to achieve communion beyond the greaser-Soc distinction and begins to write his story. Although Ponyboy is dragged back into greaser identification a couple of times (most notably when he goes to the greaser-Soc rumble), Ponyboy also makes a greater effort to find similarities between himself and Socs. He talks about sunsets with Cherry (Hinton 130), and he
tries to consider what Bob Sheldon had been like from Bob’s friends’ points of view (162). But perhaps the biggest achievement of Ponyboy’s Friend imago is the realization that his trauma, his experiences are relatable and can therefore be used to help others like him and his friends. He says:

There should be some help someone should tell them [kids like greasers] before it was too late. Someone should tell their side of the story, and maybe people would understand then and wouldn’t be so quick to judge a boy by the amount of hair oil he wore. It was important to me. (179)

His newfound empathy from the internalization of the Friend imago makes him desire to help people he does not know.

*The Catcher in the Rye* also ends in a scene where its main character is acting out an imago-influenced action. In the action leading up to the scene, Holden performs mini-catches—scuffing out obscenities in public places (201) and telling little kids about Egyptians (203). The culmination of these scenes is when he takes Phoebe to the zoo in order to console her. When they come to the carousel, he urges her to ride it but refuses to ride it himself, choosing instead to watch over her protectively (211). Holden, then, chooses to remove himself from the experience in order to be prepared to act if the experience goes awry.

Similarly, Pi’s Sage imago influences the resolution of *Life of Pi*. As I mentioned above, it provides him both with hope and requisite ability to navigate trauma while on the raft, but it is also the main factor in determining the outcome of his interview with the Japanese men. Showing his sage wisdom, Pi both gives the Japanese men the answers they desire and challenges them to grow. “Which is the
better story,” he asks, “the story without animals or the story without animals?” (317). He gives them the facts but challenges them to look beyond the facts for something even better.

**Final Thoughts**

My analysis of *The Outsiders*, *The Catcher in the Rye*, and *Life of Pi* using the life-story framework from McAdams has shown clear similarities among the narrative structures of the novels. The developmental arc of adolescence that spans narrative identity formation to imago internalization aligns with research and observations of adolescent developmental psychology. It is important to remember that the analyses done here have only been limited case studies. They were limited to the male perspective and so, while I have tried to draw conclusions based on similarities, there is still work to be done before these ideas can be universalized. Nevertheless, these case studies have shared a broad and enduring readership, each having won awards and enjoyed bestseller status. This suggests that the fictional voices of Ponyboy, Holden, and Pi reveal psychological truths about human development whose applications extend beyond the realm of fiction. Perhaps, then, narrative psychology need not be as bereft of knowledge about narrative identity development in adolescents as it currently is. Perhaps it is just looking in the wrong place.
Works Cited


