

Mad Pursuits

Therapeutic Narration in Postwar American Fiction

Gwendolyn Haevens



UPPSALA
UNIVERSITET

Dissertation presented at Uppsala University to be publicly examined in Geijerssalan, Humanistiskt centrum, Thunbergsvägen 3P, Uppsala, Saturday, 14 November 2015 at 10:15 for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The examination will be conducted in English. Faculty examiner: Professor Leerom Medovoi (University of Arizona, The Department of Gender and Women's Studies).

Abstract

Haevens, G. 2015. *Mad Pursuits. Therapeutic Narration in Postwar American Fiction*. 186 pp. Uppsala: Department of English. ISBN 978-91-506-2483-0.

Mad Pursuits: Therapeutic Narration in Postwar American Fiction examines three mid-century American novels—J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951), Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952), and Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* (1963)—in relation to the rise and popularization of psychoanalytic theory in America. The study historicizes these landmark novels as representing and interrogating postwar America's confidence in the therapeutic capacity of narrative to redress psychological problems. Drawing on key concepts from narrative theory and the multidisciplinary field of narrative and identity studies, I argue that these texts develop a multi-layered, formal problematization of therapeutic narration: the narrativization of the self through modes of interpretation based on character action and development. The study, thus, investigates how the texts both critique the purported effectiveness of being healed through narrative means, as well as how they problematize their society's investment in this method. I propose that the novels ultimately explore submerged possibilities for realizing what I call fugitive selves by creating self-representations that negotiate and exceed the confines of the paradigmatic models of plot and character of the period.

In Chapter One, I argue that the ego and pop psychological movements during the postwar era encouraged the American public to define and realize psychological health, success and happiness through narrativized means. I show in Chapter Two how careful differentiation between narrative levels of interpretation in *The Bell Jar* reveals the novel's complication of the self created in narrative, with and against the socio-cultural scripts and therapeutic assumptions of the period. Chapter Three concentrates on *The Catcher in the Rye*'s various methods of de-composing the narrative identity of the subject created through developmental and therapeutic narration. In the final chapter, I read *Invisible Man* as a satire of postwar psychoanalytic theory and method specifically concerning racialized narrative identities, and as a reflection on a method of enduring psychological illness. The Conclusion brings together several argumentative strands running throughout the dissertation regarding what the novels contrastively reveal about the perils, and even the possibilities, inherent in the narrativizing of the self in early postwar America.

Keywords: early postwar American fiction, popular psychoanalysis, narrative therapy, narrative identity, narrative theory, representation of identity, script theory, therapeutic narration, fugitive selves, J.D. Salinger, Ralph Ellison, Sylvia Plath

Gwendolyn Haevens, Department of English, Box 527, Uppsala University, SE-75120 Uppsala, Sweden.

© Gwendolyn Haevens 2015

ISBN 978-91-506-2483-0

urn:nbn:se:uu:diva-263167 (<http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:uu:diva-263167>)

For Anders

Contents

Acknowledgements	7
INTRODUCTION.....	9
Scripts	16
Key Aspects of Narrative: Causality, Selection, Endings and Actors.....	19
The Realm of Narrative Men.....	23
Representing the Fugitive Self: Story/Discourse & Self/Identity	25
Methodology: Narrative Levels.....	29
Chapter Summaries.....	31
CHAPTER ONE	
Narrative Men in “The Age of Psychology”	35
Section One: The Popularization of Psychoanalysis	35
Explanations for Popularization.....	38
Ego Psychology and the Adaptive Character.....	40
Section Two: Narrative Influence in Treatment	43
Developing Narrativity	43
Diminished Focus on the Unconscious.....	45
The Focus on Cause	47
Active Participation: Ego Building and “Verbalizing”	50
CHAPTER TWO	
“As by a magical thread”: Eluding the Scripted Self in <i>The Bell Jar</i>	55
Section One: Narrative Identity and Socio-cultural Scripts	57
Negotiating Scripts.....	62
Section Two: Esther’s Narrativized Conceptions of Life and Identity	66
Section Three: Re-scripting Psychoanalysis.....	73
Section Four: The Fugitive Self and the Novel	83
The Comic Genre	84
Shock Narration	87
Concluding Discussion	93

CHAPTER THREE

“You always do everything backasswards”: Zen and Identity

De-composition in <i>The Catcher in the Rye</i>	95
Section One: Literary and Cultural Contexts	97
The Un- <i>Bildungsroman</i>	100
Critique of Psychoanalysis.....	102
Section Two: Zen Contexts	106
Zen Buddhism	108
Section Three: Causality.....	109
Section Four: Linearity.....	114
Section Five: Subjectivity.....	121
Concluding Discussion	127

CHAPTER FOUR

“O well they picked poor Robin clean”: Performing the Blues Self in

<i>Invisible Man</i>	129
Section One: Postwar Psychotherapy and the Black American	133
Critique of Psychoanalytic Theory and Practice.....	138
The Golden Day Episode	139
The Emerson Jr. Episode	142
The Liberty Paint Factory Episode	143
The Unconscious and Existentialism: The Trueblood Episode	148
Oedipal Issues	150
Section Two: Blues People.....	152
Musical Traditions	152
Blues Mentality	155
Blues Method in <i>Invisible Man</i>	158
Developing the Blues Mentality	161
Concluding Discussion: Performing Self-definition	163

CONCLUSION

Wondrous, Dangerous Things.....	167
Summary.....	167
Discussion.....	168
Outlook	173
Works Cited.....	177
Index.....	185

Acknowledgements

I am very grateful for the opportunity to acknowledge the many people who have helped me to complete this finished thesis manuscript. Firstly, I wish to thank my supervisors for their steadfast commitment over the years that this project was completed. I have been constantly encouraged by the time and energy that they have devoted to aiding me improve this project. In draft after draft, my supervisor Dr. David Watson has offered insightful critique that has helped me to clarify the goals of the project, sharpen my focus, and improve my writing. I am indebted to him for his vital guidance throughout the process. The theoretical expertise and support of my co-supervisor, Professor Dorothy Hale, has been fundamental to this study. Her intellectual engagement in the project has been invaluable to its development and a true inspiration throughout its completion.

I offer my sincere thanks to Professor Steven Hartman for his considerable investment in the project, and for his steadfast support. I am also very thankful to Professor Danuta Fjellestad for her generous engagement and leadership during the early stages of the project. Additionally, Dr. Elisabeth Herion Sarafidis offered me encouragement to enter the program and early mentorship, for which I am sincerely grateful. I was also privileged to be welcomed into the department by Professor Emeritus Rolf Lundén and receive his support at the very beginning of my studies.

At the Department of English in Uppsala, this study has benefitted greatly from ongoing work-in-progress seminars; I am very appreciative of the generous feedback that I have received from all past and present members. I am much obliged to Dr. Bo Ekelund for his thorough consideration of the whole manuscript and for his very constructive feedback during my final seminar. I wish to express my gratitude to Dr. Dag Blanck for his kind support as Director of Graduate Studies. I am also sincerely grateful for the guidance of Dr. Per Löwdin. Over the years and often from great distances away, I have been very thankful for the efficient aid of Ruth Hvidberg and Dr. Åke Eriksson with all matters administrative, practical and logistical. I gratefully acknowledge the assistance of the staff at the Karin Boye and Carolina Rediviva Libraries. I am also very appreciative of the help Camilla Eriksson at the thesis production division has given me regarding the final preparation of the manuscript. To my fellow doctoral students I owe my heartfelt appreciation for years of help, encouragement and great times. I am especially thankful for the friendship and support of Anna Borgström, Heli Dahlin, Katherina

Dodou, Chad Henderson, Ola Jönsson, Olof Landin, Sara Lilja Visén and Robert Österbergh.

Being funded to carry out the inspiring and challenging work of a doctoral dissertation is a privilege. My studies have been supported primarily by the Department of English and the Faculty of Languages at Uppsala University. I am also very thankful for the support I have received from the *Odisputerade forskares* Fund. In the final stages of the project I have received generous support from the Professor Erik Tengstrand Foundation, for which I am immensely grateful. I have also been incredibly fortunate to receive several substantial travel grants from the Anna Maria Lundin Foundation through Smålands Nation, which have enabled me to present and carry out research in international settings—experiences which have enriched my study immeasurably. Such grants allowed me to spend a year and a half as a Visiting Scholar at UC Berkeley to work in close contact with my co-supervisor Prof. Hale, develop my research, and take part in international intellectual exchange. I wish to thank Professor Elizabeth Abel and Dr. Eric Falci for generously allowing me to attend their courses and for aiding the progress of my research. I am also immensely grateful to Dr. Dana Draganoiu of Carlton University who, during this same time, generously read my work and gave me guidance and encouragement. I was very fortunate to be able to take part in Prof. Hale's doctoral student seminar where I received insightful and productive feedback on early drafts of my chapters. In this respect, a special mention is due to Dr. Manya Lempert. I am also thankful to Dr. Hertha Sweet Wong for serving as my original sponsor at UC Berkeley. During archival research in Northampton and New York, the staff at the Mortimer Rare Book Room and the New York Public Library Archives were very helpful. I am much obliged to Karen Kukil especially at the Smith College Archive for her very kind and generous assistance. Additionally, I am truly thankful to the Spalding-Lough family for giving me a real home in Berkeley, long after I moved out of their basement.

Of course I wish to thank all of my wonderful friends and family—from Vancouver to Montréal, Umeå to Uppsala, and Karlsruhe to California—for their care during the years I have spent completing my doctoral studies. I am deeply grateful for the enduring support of my parents, Keith and Elizabeth Haevens, and my sister Ellie. The constant stream of emailed comics from my father has also come in handy. I am unspeakably thankful to my in-laws, Dr. Tore Dalén and Ulla Dalén-Wessbladh for their immense investment in helping me to achieve my goals. My boys, Ruben and Seth, have been a constant source of joy and perspective in the last three years. Finally, I dedicate this study to my husband Anders, who has, in every way, enabled its completion. When the fire died down to a spark, he filled up his lungs and blew.

INTRODUCTION

Focusing on characters at a Madison Avenue advertising agency, the hit AMC series *Mad Men* (2007-2015) reflects on American society in the 1960s. In an episode from the first season the central character, Don Draper, initiates the following conversation with his boss, Roger Sterling:

Draper: Let me ask you something. What do women want?

Sterling: (Snorts derisively) Who cares. (Drains his whisky glass.)

Draper: You mentioned the other night that your daughter had been to a psychiatrist. [...] We had one head-shrinker in the army—a gossip, busting with other people's thoughts.

Sterling: Hasn't changed much, it just costs more.

Draper: And you can't shoot at them.

Sterling: We live in troubling times.

Draper: We do? Who could not be happy with all this?

Sterling: Jesus, you know what they want? Everything. Especially if the other girls have it. Trust me, psychiatry is just this year's candy-pink stove. (Drains his glass) It's just more happiness.¹

While a contemporary re-evaluation of the period, this banter astutely reflects several key postwar concerns vis-à-vis the popularization of psychoanalysis: its promotion through the military, its contentious celebration as a new science of the mind, as well as its commodification and its relation to the materialism and purported social conformity of the era. It also implies the pervasiveness of so-called Freudian theory on the American imagination, both in the sexist comments of the cynical ad men regarding “what women want,” as well as through the banter's reproduction of popular conceptions concerning how psychoanalytic therapy could aid citizens in one of their national pursuits: happiness.

This project addresses a fertile intersection of postwar assumptions regarding narrative, psychoanalytic therapy, and the self. It aims to examine and draw greater attention to the critical literary response of postwar fiction and its ostensibly mad first-person narrators to the era's popular presumptions of therapeutic narrative methods of healing psychological illness. The study investigates how three canonical novels—J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher*

¹ Quotation from “Ladies Room,” *Mad Men* Episode 2, Season 1, which aired July 26, 2007.

in the Rye (1951), Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) and Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* (1963)—stage a critique of popularized psychoanalytic theory and practice through narrative techniques informed by, yet irreducible to, their narrators' overt suspicions of the new science's methods. Drawing on narrative theory and the multidisciplinary field of narrative and identity studies, this study aims to demonstrate that these texts develop a multi-layered and formal problematization of the therapeutic value of narrativizing the self. These novels call into question, I argue, popular claims about how psychoanalytic therapy could lead to normalcy, standardizations of character, and thus, happiness through its narrativizing function during therapeutic narration. I define *therapeutic narration* as the narration of a person's life history, the aim of which is to find the cause and give a narrative account of the development of psychological difficulties; it attempts to be therapeutic through the interpretation of life events and by enabling an understanding of why and how the person's psychological difficulties came about. It may also claim to be helpful by aiding the patient, through this telling, in the construction of a so-called *narrative identity*. Finally, the thesis examines to what extent and with which novelistic techniques the novels create less narratively defined representations of self through the incorporation of *fugitive selves* and the negotiation of the era's scripted models of happy or normal lives and characters.² My contention is that the texts in this way explore both the limitations of therapeutic narration, as well as what possibilities may exist for self-representation through freer forms of narrative and narration as an act.

Such a project benefits from recent studies of American culture and literature which have overturned many generalizations regarding the social contentment experienced during the economic boom of the early postwar period. It no longer sounds paradoxical that during the astounding economic prosperity of the "dream era" (as *Fortune* magazine heralded it in 1946) ever-greater numbers of Americans were entering psychoanalytic therapy in search of greater personal happiness.³ By 1957, *Life* magazine had dubbed the era "The Age of Psychology" and commissioned a five-part series devoted to demystifying the terms, methods and founder of psychoanalytic therapy. In the introductory installment, Ernest Havemann underlines the "brand-

² The terms "self" and "identity" are at times used indiscriminately, or as synonyms in some of the research I discuss. This does not reflect my understanding of these terms, but I will maintain the original language of these theorizations to avoid confusion. Later in this Introduction, I will define these terms more thoroughly as distinct concepts. In doing so, I hope to clarify and defuse some of the problems I see regarding the theorization of the self in narrative which come about precisely through the unintentional obfuscation of the difference between the terms. Briefly, "identity" as this project defines it, is a socially-constructed understanding of a person which is generally narratively-mediated, whereas "self" is a broader conception of selfhood which a person holds of themselves in private; it can include even those aspects of subjective perception which are not encapsulated or represented in "identity"—what I will term the *fugitive self*.

³ Quoted from David E. Shi's *The Simple Life* (2007), p. 248.

new and strictly American” way in which psychology and psychoanalysis were influencing the everyday lives of citizens: “In many parts of the world all knowledge of [psychology and psychoanalysis are] still restricted to the college classroom or the doctor’s office. But in the United States, for better or for worse, this is the age of psychology and psychoanalysis as much as it is the age of chemistry or the atom bomb” (3).⁴

It is striking that Havemann considered these comparable concerns in his society. Certainly, in the Cold War context apprehensions about the recent explosion of chemical research and the consequences of initiating nuclear warfare are unsurprising. Developments in chemistry included the accelerated research into and patenting of fatal nerve agents such as Ricin by the US government in 1952, and astounding advances in biochemistry regarding the origins of life—both the discovery of DNA by Watson and Crick and the Miller-Urey experiment into amino acids occurred in 1953. At the same time, the potential risk of nuclear warfare was a guiding, ubiquitous concern in postwar America. Research studying American literature of the early postwar period, “by the bomb’s early light,” as cultural historian Paul Boyer aptly puts it, began in earnest in the early 1990s. Thomas H. Schaub’s *American Fiction in the Cold War* (1991), for example, examines how liberal reassessments of history, politics and human nature (the “liberal narrative”) influenced the literary production of the period. Alan Nadel’s *Containment Culture: American Narratives, Postmodernism, and the Atomic Age* (1995) is another seminal study which investigates how the literature and popular media of the period were influenced by the narrative of Cold War “containment.”⁵ Leerom Medovoi’s *Rebels: Youth and the Cold War Origins of Identity* (2005), Steven Belletto’s *No Accident Comrade: Chance and Design in Cold War American Narratives* (2011), Daniel Grausam’s *On Endings: American Postwar Fiction and the Cold War* (2011), and the collection of critical essays (edited by Belletto and Grausam) *American Literature and Culture in an Age of Cold War: A Critical Reassessment* (2012) mark a recent critical reevaluation of the era. In an effort to underscore the centrality of the Cold War to studies of postwar American literature, this recent research explores the cultural impact and ongoing confusion concerning several chief paradigms of the era. Medovoi’s *Rebels* argues that the figure of the young rebel in postwar American culture (amongst others, Holden Caulfield, James Dean, Elvis Presley, Chuck Berry, and the beat writers) was a “lynchpin” of an ideological contradiction of Cold War order: it guaranteed and assisted in

⁴ Havemann turned the series into a short book of the same name that same year. It won the American Psychological Foundation’s first annual prize for distinguished writing in the field of psychology. All of the following quotations are from this 1957 publication.

⁵ For additional research regarding the limiting pressures of the “containment” culture of postwar Americans, see also Gerald Horne’s *Black and Red* (1986), Elaine Tyler May’s *Homeward Bound* (1988), Robert J. Corber’s *Homosexuality in Cold War America* (1997) and Elaine Schrecker’s *Many Are the Crimes* (1998).

the propagation of an American antiauthoritarian democratic character outwardly, even while this identity was contradicted by domestic politics (3). In this way, Medovoi's study traces the rise of identity politics and the source of our contemporary, politicized concept of identity back to the postwar ideological grounds from which he argues the concepts originated. Belletto's *No Accident Comrade* addresses a collection of American novels from 1947-2005 in his study of how the Cold War's "culture of chance" has had a lasting impact on fiction from the postwar to the present. In *On Endings*, Grausam asks how key texts of American postmodernism can be read as responses to experiences of an uncertain future during the nuclear conflict. While *American Literature and Culture in an Age of Cold War: A Critical Reassessment*, revisits, revises, and extends the research into containment culture and how it has affected American cultural production. The collection of essays attempts to clarify chief paradigms, such as espionage and foreign policy, while expanding the scope—both geographically and chronologically—of the Cold War's influence.

This research is also part of a broader movement which redefines previously held generalizations about the sense of security and social conformity experienced during the period, and suggests that American culture was much more dynamic than previously supposed. Bruce Bawer has suggested that how one perceives the age has more to do with one's political affiliations than other factors. "To those on the right," he explains, "the 1950s were the last good time, an era of sanity and maturity, order and discipline, of adults behaving like adults and children knowing their place"; whereas, "[t]o those on the left, the 1950s were a time of fatuous complacency, mindless materialism, and stultifying conformism—not to mention racism, sexism and other ugly prejudices" (64). David Halberstam's *The Fifties* (1993) exemplifies an early move away from either of these polarizing views; it is a narrative portrait of selected key events and characters which characterized the decade as not merely a placid time of social conformity and prosperity, but also the source of "social ferment" when research and development were quietly laying the groundwork for the radical societal changes of the 1960s (x). Halberstam is quick to point out that even social critics from the era condemned the rampant consumerism and social conformity that they witnessed, and that many people were beginning to question "the purpose of their lives, and whether that purpose had become . . . too much about material things" (xi). This opinion is supported by well-known works of social critique from the period, such as *The Lonely Crowd* (1950) by David Riesman with Nathan Glazer and Reuel Denney, William H. Whyte's *The Organizational Man* (1956), John Keats's *The Crack in the Picture Window* (1956), and John Kenneth Galbraith's *The Affluent Society* (1958). The sentiment is also reflected in contemporaneous literary works such as W. H. Auden's Pulitzer prize-winning long poem, "The Age of Anxiety" (1947), Sloan Wilson's *The*

Man in the Gray Flannel Suit (1955), and Richard Yates's novel *Revolutionary Road* (1961).

Current literary studies of works from the era have also rethought predominant assumptions concerning the period's fiction. Studies such as David Castronovo's *Beyond the Grey Flannel Suit: Books from the 1950s that Made American Culture* (2004) mark a move to study the literature in a way that gets beyond the tidy stereotypes of the period to the disunity and originality which lay in clear sight. In keeping with this development, in *The Twilight of the Middle Class: Post-World War II American Fiction and White-Collar Work* (2005) Andrew Hoberek argues that the postwar economic boom initiated a transformation of the American middle-class that was reflected in the literature from the period.

All of the aforementioned studies productively broaden our knowledge of how the era's politics and society affected American cultural production regarding the rapidly changing identities of postwar Americans. An aspect of early postwar culture that has received less attention is the literary response to the age of psychology and, particularly, how it put pressure on the American public to heal psychological problems through narrative means. Indeed, in spite of recent research and timely re-evaluations of the literary production of the early postwar period, the influence of popular psychoanalytic practice, and its tendencies not only to normalize, but, crucially, to *narrativize* lives and selves have not yet been studied. The novels focused on in this thesis have of course inspired countless readings through psychoanalytic theory since their publications.⁶ Moreover, Richard Ohmann has classified these novels thematically as "illness stories" within the context of a larger collection of canonical novels from 1960 to 1975, including, amongst others, the earlier works in John Updike's *Rabbit* series (1960 and 1972), Salinger's *Franny and Zooey* (1961), Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1963), Saul Bellow's *Herzog* (1964) and Phillip Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint* (1969). "Through the story of mental disorientation or derangement," Ohmann argues, "these novels transform deep social contradictions into a dynamic personal crisis, a sense of there being no comfortable place in the world for the private self. These books are narratives of illness" (217). Ohmann holds that this is a paradigm of the illness story, where "social roles and power relations translate into personal illness" (213). These works express, thus, a structure of feeling concerning how "social contradictions were easily displaced into images of personal illness" (212), that was shared by the class who popularized and canonized these works, and which was explored by these writers before the sentiment was expressed in works of social commentary and made cliché (such as in the term "a sick society") (210). He adds that:

⁶ The specific research addressing these psychoanalytic readings and their significance to each of the novels will be engaged with in the separate analytic chapters.

The structure of feeling gathered and strengthened during the postwar period. It became rather intense by the early 1960's. After 1965 it exploded into the wider cultural and political arena, when black rebellions, the student movement, the antiwar movement, and later the women's movement made it clear, right there in the headlines and on television, that not everyone considered it an age of only "happy problems." (ibid.)

Ohmann's arguments certainly resonate with the concerns of this study: Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*, Ellison's *Invisible Man* and Plath's *The Bell Jar* have become enduring classics and their protagonists' deliberations over their sanity are widely understood as anxieties which point more aptly to their society's mad attempts to conform them to strict identities rather than to congenital mental illness. But there are important differences in the scope and aims of Ohmann's categorization of postwar American fiction and the present study. Most obviously, his research focuses on fiction written after 1960, with an emphasis on the developments that occurred thereafter until 1975. For his method of categorization it is thus important that *The Bell Jar* only became a best seller after its 1971 publication in America. And while he states that the illness story genre was "firmly established" first by precisely *The Catcher in the Rye* and *Invisible Man* in the 1950s, he doesn't evaluate their contribution further. He notes that these three novels are all concerned with the passage from youth to maturity (212), but that those he focuses on from 1960 forwards do not literally portray adolescent rites of passage but rather adults in crisis, "hanging on to childhood" and only "masquerading as productive and well-adjusted member[s] of society" (215). This study conversely concentrates on fiction written and published by 1963, in which the action takes place predominantly from the late 1940s to the mid-1950s, because the novels are read as responses to the age of psychology during the early postwar era (c. 1945-1965). These three novels are, moreover, all first-person narratives, which, I argue all comprise formal investigations of how the proposed narrative apparatuses of popular psychoanalytic theory and treatment influence self-representation and healing. The fact that all of the protagonists are transitioning from youth to adulthood in this project, compared (predominantly) to Ohmann's heroes, suggests that these could potentially be considered two phases of postwar fiction.⁷

This project thus proposes a novel investigation of how these texts problematize not only popular psychoanalytic theoretical notions, but also the narrative method through which psychological healing was assumed to take place. It is possible that the ubiquity of psychoanalytic theory since this peri-

⁷ A more thorough analysis of whether these are indeed two separate phases is beyond the scope of the present discussion. However, while this study does not make any claims specifically concerning the youth of the protagonists, the fact that they are all at an age when their society scripts specific developmental norms for their psychological maturation into adults is certainly pertinent. This fact underlines the implicit pressure and external expectations that they experience before, as well as during their narrations to tell normative stories of self.

od, and our now common understanding of the narrators as not the crazy ones, has short-circuited examinations into the significant inquiries which these novels advance regarding the contemporaneous pressures and possibilities that popular psychoanalysis posed for the common American attempting to heal through narrative form. While they may not be insane, the narrators have suffered psychologically, and regardless of the source, they make attempts to cope in different ways with this suffering through narration. Indeed, these novels share an abiding interest in domesticated Freudian psychoanalysis, which is central to their critique of narrative ordering and interpretive apparatuses. The texts actively engage with popularized psychoanalysis, exploring its methods and questioning its validity as a means for the protagonists to achieve greater future happiness, particularly through the development of socially acceptable *narrative identities*.⁸ “[T]his one psychoanalyst guy,” relates Holden Caulfield, for example, “keeps asking me if I’m going to apply myself when I go back to school next September. It’s such a stupid question, in my opinion. I mean how do you know what you’re going to do till you *do* it? The answer is, you don’t. I *think* I am, but how do I know? I swear it’s a stupid question” (276, original emphasis). In passages such as this, the texts variously expose the societal pressure felt by the protagonists to narrate their lives according to *socio-cultural scripts*—blueprints of normative behavior and action through which they can “know” what they are “going to do before they do it” and, to the extent that the scripts are emulated, their characters can be understood as psychologically healthy. I suggest that the novels collectively iterate, not only a growing awareness of socio-cultural scripts of lives and identities, but also a suspicion of the self-analytic, therapeutic narration, which was encouraged in postwar psychoanalytic treatment. The narrators depict themselves thus as captives: enclosed not only in various mental-health institutions at different times, but also in the confines of the normalizing narrative form of scripted lives.

In addition to Ohmann’s particular emphasis on postwar illness stories, Deborah Nelson has brought attention to the proliferation of confessional life narratives which appeared after WWII, and the political agenda they forwarded:

Speaking personally was . . . enmeshed in the politics of universality – who had it, who wanted it, and who wished to deprive it of its cultural power. The result was profound. The image of the American public would be dramatically pluralized in the latter half of the twentieth century. Writing autobiographically was, therefore, not simply an individual aesthetic choice; it was also a political decision. (23)

⁸ A narrative identity can supposedly give them a clearer understanding of the kind of character they have been, “who” they are now, and, potentially, what future they might like to script for this character. I will explain this contemporary concept in greater detail shortly.

The novels in this study all appeared at the beginning of this larger life writing movement Nelson speaks of, and their protagonists are all literate, self-defined confessional narrators who are aware of their craft. Through the therapeutic narrative mode the protagonists variously depict themselves attempting to find the cause and give a narrative account of the development of their psychological difficulties. While I argue that the narrators are encouraged by analogous, contemporary trends to engage in interpretive narrations of their lives (as characters or narrators), these works are not strictly fictional autobiographies of the first-person narrators. The era's therapeutic assumptions about this mode of life writing qualify these novels as a sub-set of life writing, akin to self-analytic and ostensibly redemptive fictional memoirs. Each offers a narration of a period of psychological breakdown, a process in which their society's expectations of narration's healing potential for the narrator is implicit—a point I will explain in greater detail in Chapter One. The texts are also emblematic of the societal breadth of this movement, being narrated by an upper-class delinquent youth from a mixed-religious background, a middle-class and first-generation American woman, and a lower-class black American man.⁹ All of the novels thus probe the influence that the narrative mode of expression has on self-representation, self-interpretation and identity creation, particularly concerning the therapeutic benefits it was purported to have by the popular psychoanalytic practices of the era.

Scripts

This study aims to demonstrate that the portrayal of the narrators' struggles within the interpretive apparatuses of their narrations is a compelling and novel way of engaging with these classic postwar texts. As I show in the following chapters, they are all, at different levels of awareness, portrayed as negotiating various socio-cultural scripts—blueprints of normative behavior and action, which promise that if their narrative identities can be formulated according to them, their society will perceive them as psychologically healthy, and hand-in-hand with this, perhaps even successful and happy; I

⁹ Two other novels from the period which signal the significance of these concerns across social and ethnic borders are Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* (1955) and Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1962). These novels, narrated in the first-person also by psychologically troubled narrators—the European immigrant Humbert Humbert and the First Nations "Chief" Bromden, respectively—are both fascinating examples of what I would call fictional *covert autobiographies*. That is, the narrators claim that they are telling a story about another character, but in reality they betray the story of their own lives through the narration. However, the tighter focus of the present study is enabled by the present choice of novels in which the narrators openly fashion their narrations toward and against the conventions of the confessional, self-analytic therapeutic narration.

will demonstrate in Chapter One, that these two states often pre-supposed one another in the early postwar era.

Explanations of scripts of this kind, and the way narrative form influences how people create and communicate narratives about themselves and their lives have been forthcoming more recently in various fields outside of literary studies. Indeed, the degree to which individuals' unique life narratives are influenced by the ready-made scripts available to them (by way of their socio-cultural legacy), and the implications of this narrative modeling, remain underappreciated. Already in the 1950s, Psychologist Silvan Tomkins had advanced the term *script theory*. The theory used "the scene" (a "happening" with a clear beginning and end) as its basic unit of analysis (Sedgwick 180). The connected set of scenes lived in sequence was termed the "plot" of a life (ibid.) The script, conversely, did not deal with all the scenes of the plot but with "the individual's rules for predicting, interpreting, responding to, and controlling a magnified set of scenes" (ibid.). Thus, in narratological terms, Tomkins' dramaturgic model for the study of personality divided up the *story* of a person's life (labeled "plot" by Tomkins), while the script could be equated with *discourse*.¹⁰ His work received renewed interest in the early 1990s by narrative researchers in diverse fields, such as from artificial intelligence (AI) researchers Dennis Mercadal and Roger Shank. Contemporary script theory posits that how people use the knowledge structures of scripts, as sequences of actions, has great implications for how they narratively interpret both everyday and historical life events (Shank 89).¹¹

¹⁰ In classical narratology a distinction is made between what actually happens in a narrative, and the way that it is communicated. Originating from the key terms of the "*fabula*" and "*sjuzhet*" from the Russian formalist movement, the English translation of French structuralism, become "story" (*histoire*) and "discourse" ("*discours*," and also "*recit*"). The former of each of these paired terms signals the order of actions and events of the narrative organized chronologically (including the characters and the setting), while the latter refers to the actual order of actions or events as presented in the narrative (the discourse) in a way which leads to the highlighting of some events and the minimizing (or omission) of others. In classical narrative theory the term "story" actually implies an already-narrated world which comes into being in relation to the structures of discourse that evoke it. In this way, it would be more accurate to call the life material of the protagonists' *pre-story* material as (within the reality of the text) it exists prior to the discursive structures and logic which they form the discourse of their narrative. Notably, this division highlights precisely why narrative form can prove problematic outside of fiction: when the discourse of script is brought in to make sense out of real material there is a danger that it can determine what human experience can even exist within its form—that is, be perceived, gathered and regarded as valuable.

¹¹ In the early 1990s Tomkins himself calls his script theory and that of Shank and Abelson's (from their 1977 book *Scripts, Plans, Goals and Understanding*) as equitable—lending themselves to "ready mapping one onto the other, despite terminological differences which obscure important similarities of the entire two theoretical structures" (Sedgwick 181). However, unlike in Shank's action-based script theory (explained further in this section) in Tomkins' theory, scenes are not action but *affect*-based: "The simplest, most primitive scene includes at least one affect and at least one object of that affect" (Sedgwick 179). While Tomkins version of script theory proposes an alternative to action-based scripting, it was not widely known of in the early postwar period, and does not describe the kind of scripting that was common in

Mercadal defines a script as a “description of how a sequence of events is expected to unfold” (255). It represents a “set of expectations” and a “sequence of events that take place in a time sequence” (ibid.). A script is the knowledge of “knowing how to act and how others will act in given stereotypical situations,” Shank explains further (7). The name is apt because by participating in scripts, people behave like they are performing their roles in a kind of theatrical play: “The waitress reads from the waitress part in the restaurant script, and the customer reads the lines of the customer” (ibid.). This means that scripts are generally culturally specific, learned from one’s society and the media (190). As stored knowledge representations, scripts can obviously be very useful: they give people reference points as to what is supposed to happen in a given situation and what others’ actions are supposed to mean (ibid.). They also make mental-processing easier: one does not need to expend energy considering how to behave in everyday situations—these actions instead come automatically (ibid.).

Like the enquiries of narrative and identity studies, Shank’s AI research goes on to ask what it would mean if this kind of scripted, narrative-based understanding of the world were not only true for everyday actions and situations, but also for an individual’s understanding of his or her life or self.¹² He suggests that each culture has a series of these “standard skeleton stories” which describe and evaluate a pattern of actions and events as they usually happen, or are believed to have happened. These skeleton stories, which I call *socio-cultural scripts* in this study, are a kind of “culturally common story” (37). These ubiquitous stories are often encountered in a cryptic, or highly abbreviated form, and they are usually referred to, rather than told in full (38). Shank suggests that, like the everyday scripts of action and behavior, people use the standard stories of their culture to interpret what happens to them in terms of such stories (149).

But the necessity to tell comprehensible and socially acceptable stories of one’s actions and one’s life determines both how people tell their stories and how they are perceived. Shank states that, “to be understood, tellers are “forced, in some sense, to make their story acceptable and easily comprehensible both by their initial attempts to understand the events themselves and by their prior attempts to tell others their story. [...] If parts of the story do not fit the [skeleton story they have chosen], they ignore them” (169). In this way, there is a risk of becoming shaped by the scripts one uses (170). He explains that the stories people tell others to make sense of their actions can

society, and which the novels in this study critique as a limiting method of understanding and healing subjects.

¹² The well-known texts within narrative and identity studies to which I refer include Paul John Eakin’s *How Our Lives Become Stories* (1999), *The Ethic’s of Life Writing* (2004) and *Living Autobiographically* (2011); Jerome Bruner’s *Acts of Meaning* (1990), *Making Stories: Law, Literature, Life* (2003) and *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds* (2009); and Paul Kerby’s *Narrative and the Self* (1991).

lead to “the odd effect of causing us to see our own lives in terms of pre-established, well-known stories that can obscure the ways in which our actual situation differs from the standard story” (147). In fact, Shank found that when study participants were faced with relaying events for which there was no socially-acceptable scripts, “telling stories [became] difficult” and the information which did not fit a certain script was edited out or breezed over (163). Alarming, the explanatory stories people create of their actions can come to define not only a person’s identity, but how they and others perceive their social normativity and state of mental health (44). Moreover, the act of “story-fitting” (the fitting of our life actions into a script) does not only take place after the fact, as an act of explanation (or rationalization) that we have acted in a social-acceptable manner: this behavior can even influence future, planned action. Shank states that when we make a decision or take an action “we like to believe in our choice, especially if that decision or action is a significant one” (160); people therefore “construct a story before [they] take an action to ensure that the action . . . is coherent” (ibid.).

Shank’s research thus suggests that the simplification and standardization of life stories by way of scripts is not always a helpful way of conceiving of human beings. In the following chapters, I demonstrate how the novels carry out a fictional problematization of the effective nature by which narratives and the act of narrating make meaning. Due to their early postwar societal milieu—rife with strict scripts of behavior and action, and their embedded in the popularization of normalizing psychoanalytic narrational practices—the novels are uniquely situated to carry out such a critique. And most importantly, the fact that their first-person narrators are all dramatized as narrating the stories of their ostensible psychological breakdowns at this specific period—when the expectation of the specifically therapeutic quality of this practice was at its zenith—raises the expectations, and thus the stakes, of their efforts.

Key Aspects of Narrative: Causality, Selection, Endings and Actors

In Chapter One, I will argue that popular psychological movements of the novels’ contemporaneous era came to rely on the interpretive structure of narrative to an unprecedented degree. I will demonstrate, moreover, how these movements promoted the construction of what we now call *narrative identity* for expressly therapeutic ends, through therapist-led self-analysis. Philosopher Paul Ricoeur has defined narrative identity as “the kind of identity that human beings acquire through the mediation of the narrative func-

tion” (“Narrative Identity” 188).¹³ Through the refiguring or “emplotment” of the events and actions of one’s life into narrative one creates a narrative sense of the social self. Narrative identity is initiated through the questions “Who did this” and “Who is the agent, the author?” (*Time* vol. 3: 246). In order to answer these questions, Ricoeur holds that one must tell a plotted narrative: the story told tells about the action of the “who” (*ibid.*). The identity of the “who,” the character (“agent”) who carries out the action, must thus be “narrative identity” (*ibid.*).

In order to explain how the novels’ interpretive agents problematize the construction of narrative identities through socio-cultural scripts and therapeutic narration—and following this, why they do so—it is first necessary to clarify how this process effectively promotes the representation of the self as a character acting in a plotted, or scripted, story. The novels, I hold, critique both the practice of conceiving of the self predominantly in terms of an actor in a story of psychological healing (the therapeutic narrative) and the ostensible health reached through this practice. Four interrelated, formal features of narrative, which have been theorized to produce well-formed and emotionally satisfying plots can be isolated as key targets of the novels’ examination. These include: the selectivity of events and actions, a sense of causality, the charged nature of endings, and the valorization of analyzing action over subjective experience as a method of interpretation. These formal aspects, fundamental to our understanding of how narrative functions (i.e. creates its meaningful effects), can still largely be explained in terms of theorizations of the formal construction of tragic plot first outlined by Aristotle in *Poetics* (ca. 330 BCE). Aristotle uses a negative example of narration, the epic style, to argue that if causality is not emphasized, the significance of both the story as a whole and the events lessens as the logic of their connection becomes unclear (98). He explains, moreover, that although “histories” may be written about a “single time, including all that happened during it to one or more people,” they make terrible plots with “no single end” as the events, even if sequential, are related to one another at random (111). He states that poets are mistaken if they believe that the story of an individual will automatically be unified because it is about a single person. Indeed, because an “indefinitely large number of things happens to one person, in some of which there is no unity,” unless the poet is selective and creates causality, a history is likely to fail as a good plot (97). In this way, Aristotle argues that the selectivity of events and actions and clear causality lead to a plot (here of a history of life events) that is more satisfying because its logic is more clearly ordered and constructed.

¹³ Paul Ricoeur’s extensive theorizations (In *Time and Narrative* [in English: 1984, 1985 and 1988] and *Oneself as Another* [in English: 1992]) are generally considered the most ambitious and influential recent theorization of the nature of narrative vis-à-vis time and the construction of human meaning. His work has been instrumental in laying the groundwork for the newest multidisciplinary golden age for the narrative understanding of human life and the self.

In the analytic chapters I argue that the narrators themselves are portrayed as disrupting a sense of causality in their personal narrations—and thus, I hold, the logical development of their narrative identities. Esther’s imitation of the heavy-handedness of the process through a *mise en abîme* depiction of novel writing, Holden’s chronic tactics of digression off the main plot-line, and IM’s philosophizing over the non-linear “boomeranging” manner he has come to learn about the ways of the world, are a few key examples of how the narrators themselves are portrayed as problematizing the causal sense which they intuit that plotted (or scripted) form imposes on their narratives.¹⁴ I will also show how at the broader textual level of interpretation the benefits (to the narrators) of the seemingly natural causality of narrative sense is deeply questioned though alternative, less-linear guiding philosophies at the authorial level. Compared to what Aristotle explains will result in an unsatisfactory, badly-constructed plot for an audience, it is apparent that both the narratorial and authorial disruption of this key formal aspect of narrative is intimately connected to their broader critique of societal, rather than personal, models of narrative interpretation insinuating its sense on the life narration of the protagonists. That is, the novels illustrate that those formal aspects which should create a satisfying plot for an audience, their social environment, would not necessarily result in therapeutic or even personally-satisfying representations of self for the narrators themselves.

Similarly, the novels bring attention to the pressure the narrators feel from society concerning the selection of events and actions that they include in their narrations. By portraying themselves negotiating specific genres of narrative and scripts of gender-, class-, and ethno-specific action and psychologically normative development, the narrators highlight the way that these ready-made plots can affect the selection of life material they relate. Mapping the narrators’ struggle towards personally therapeutic self-narrations onto the narratological distinction between *story* and *discourse* can prove immediately clarifying of how the novels, in practical terms, carry out their critique. This is because the divide is tantamount to the form through which their society demands they make sense of their life material. When this conception is applied to the protagonists’ narrations it becomes clear why the narrators experience pressure to edit their life material in ways that may serve narrative plot more productively than the therapeutic goals of their self-analysis.

In addition to portraying the pressure to create a clear causality through the selection of material in their narrations, the narrators also problematize their depictions of themselves as actors in a story by underscoring the burden to create a “sense of an ending,” in Frank Kermode’s terms. Exploring the therapeutic narrative form, again, the narrators’ struggles for and against narrative closure can be usefully contextualized by Aristotle’s concept of

¹⁴ I refer to Ellison’s protagonist as “IM” in this study.

successful closure in plotted dramatic narrative: *catharsis*. Aristotle maintained that the emotionally satisfying ending of a great tragic plot comprised of the evocation of “pity and terror” by the action of the play, and that a catharsis or purging of these emotions was thus brought about in the audience (95). Hence, the ending of a narrative has traditionally been considered a privileged place within the narrative because it is where a final, definitive interpretation and emotional response to the story can be acquired. Traditionally fine plots are, thus, teleological—goal-oriented towards emotionally satisfying endings.

I contend that when plotted narrative form was recuperated by the popular psychoanalytic practices of the postwar era, the endings of therapeutic narrations once again took on a psychologically cathartic purging function. The novels studied depict, I argue, a pressure analogous to that in their contemporaneous period to reach a psychologically therapeutic ending in their narrations through the alleged purging of unhealthy trauma and the concomitant solving of the mystery of the source of their illnesses. While the novels use diverse techniques to trouble their various endings, I hold that they collectively reveal that the therapeutic assumptions of popular psychoanalysis were under-problematized. I contend that the narrators’ various textual troubles of emotionally satisfying narrative endings ultimately reveal an inconsistency in their society’s understanding of how psychological healing would come about for the narrating client themselves. That is, because the cathartic ending of a plot was originally theorized as an effect produced in the audience of a tragic drama, and not a natural consequence of a narrator engaging in therapeutic narration, the protagonists experience the demand to create socially meaningful characters of themselves, opposed to personally valuable self-representations.

The final formal aspect of scripted narrative that the novels problematize (in close conjunction with the selectivity of story material to create a sense of causality and final closure) is the traditional formal valorization of the meaning of character action over character psychology. Through the narrations of the protagonists as well as at the authorial level, the novels reveal how the formal pressure of this aspect of narrative logic—to select characterial action over other kinds of characterial experiences—turns their narrative selves into actors rather than subjective, psychological beings. Again, this valorization of the action model originated from classical theory. Aristotle’s motivation for arguing for this prioritization of action in narrative involved an ethics he formulated of *real* human life. Recommending the interpretation of life in terms of narrative plots of action and closure, he claims that: “[h]appiness and unhappiness lie in action, and the end [of life] is a sort of action, not a quality; people are of a certain sort according to their characters, but happy or the opposite according to their actions” (95). He states elsewhere that “it is according to people’s actions that they all succeed or fail” (*ibid.*). Aristotle, hence, maintains that because the final result of a per-

son's life (happiness or unhappiness, success or failure) depends on their actions, the story of that life should therefore be a representation of action in life and not of "human beings" (ibid.). In other words, because a person's actions in real life determine to such a great degree the final result or the meaning of that life, in the artistic representation of a life story the depiction of actions is paramount. Thus, actors (here of tragic drama) "do not act in order to represent the characters, but they include the characters for the sake of the actions" (ibid.).

The Realm of Narrative Men

In the analytic chapters of this study, I aim to demonstrate that through the novels' interpretive levels, the texts critique the plot-driven narrativization of the self—the scripting of the self—in therapeutic settings and explore the possibility of less narratively-determined self representations. More specifically, I show that the novels illuminate an innate inconsistency in their society's belief in narrative as a means of therapeutic adjustment and ultimately happiness: that psychological problems can be treated through the construction of therapeutic narrations which are action-based and ending-oriented. The novels, I argue, challenge the belief prevalent in the period (and not absent in our contemporary moment) that though narrativization, the narrators can interpret the meaning of their psychological problems and achieve happiness through the projection of their subjectivities as characters or actors in stories.

To facilitate this analysis, the previous section defined the formal aspects of narrative through which the novels represent and resist the cultural pressure to narrativize the self as a means of therapeutic adjustment in mid-century America. Following this, an understanding of how meaning is created in certain types of literary narratives enables the explanation of how the socio-cultural scripts of action and behavior operate in the narration of the protagonists. Tzvetan Todorov's theorizations of how meaning is constructed in heavily-plotted, action-centered fictional narratives are key to the explanation of how, and even why, the narrators are portrayed as negotiating models of psychological normativity in their efforts towards self-interpretation and iteration. Todorov has studied how the narrative "grammar," or syntax of certain types of narratives dictate the logic of what will happen to characters and the range of their actions.¹⁵ Like previous theorists of plot, his research favors examples amenable to studying specifically the logic of plot, such as myths, folk and fairy-tales.¹⁶ Todorov maintains that

¹⁵ Quotation from "The Grammar of Decameron"(1969).

¹⁶ The theorists I refer to here include Aristotle, the Russian Formalist Vladimir Propp, as well as structuralist theorists including Claude Lévi-Strauss and Algirdas Greimas.

the “proper nouns” of the narrative, the characters, do not determine the meaning of the narrative (*Poetics* 110-111). He argues that the “agent” in these kinds of stories is instead “blank form” which is completed by different predicates (actions or “verbs”) (ibid.), and contends that it, therefore, “has no more meaning than a pronoun such as ‘he’ in ‘he who is brave’” (ibid.).¹⁷ Hence, “the grammatical subject is always devoid of internal properties, for these derive only from a temporary junction with a predicate” (ibid.). Todorov holds, therefore, that the meaning of the narrative in such stories is understood, not through a close analysis of character, but instead the different classes of predicates in narratives (*Poetics* 111). He explains that these kinds of myth- and folktale-based texts, should therefore be understood as “a-psychological” narratives.¹⁸ This is because the action in these narratives does not provide “a means of access to the personality in question, but is instead “important in itself and not as an indication of this or that character trait” (*Poetics* 67).¹⁹ Todorov calls this potentially paradoxical view of how narrative form constructs meaning “the realm of narrative-men” (*Poetics* 70).

This “realm” is a helpful way of understanding where these narrators can find themselves when they attempt to interpret and represent themselves through scripted narrative form. As suggested, the novels’ multi-leveled interpretations of the first-person narrations portray two mutually exclusive pressures from society to create narrative representations of the self. Namely, that narrations of self and life should serve both to heal them privately of their psychological problems *and* provide their society with normative narrative identities. The protagonists experience social pressure to appear psychologically normal and thus to model their narrative representations on socio-cultural narratives based on literary myths, folk-tales, psychological developmental scripts and character stereotypes of action and behavior. These narrative genres are, as we will see, plot- and action-centered, and teleological in their determination towards specific endings of psychological normality and maturity, and concomitantly, success and happiness. But in this realm the narrators, by default, find they become a-psychological actors, “blank form” in the narrative logic of the scripted action. At the same time, they are given to believe—as I will argue in Chapter One—that it *can* represent themselves as psychological beings. That is, that through narrative representations of life and self they will be able to interpret, solve the mystery of, and thus, heal, their ostensible psychological problems and return to the developmental plot towards psychological normality and maturity.

¹⁷ Quotation from “The Grammar of Narrative”(1968).

¹⁸ In “Narrative Men” (1967); Todorov’s examples include: *The Odyssey*, *The Decameron*, *Arabian Nights*, and *The Saragossa Manuscript*.

¹⁹ Todorov was in this way complicating prevailing literary narrative theories of the time (such as those of Henry James) that claimed that it was narrative character which determined action and that the form consists of an illustration of character (*Poetics* 70).

Representing the Fugitive Self: Story/Discourse & Self/Identity

The novels thus problematize the societal assumption that narrative logic is a therapeutic form through which to conceive of subjects. However, as the problematization too is carried out within the formal confines of narrative (through the multi-layered interpretations of the texts before us), I posit that the novels display not only a complex critique of the aforementioned dilemma which societal expectations places on the narrators, but also a certain investment in exploring what possibility the form may still hold for personally significant self-representation. In the following analysis, I hold that the significance of how *discourse* transforms *story* material and the above-mentioned classical focus on significant action when constructing a plot—(even in life histories), is key to bear in mind while reading these texts. This is because as therapeutic narrations the narrative form is not intended to entertain or educate, but as a means of treatment in psychotherapy (as I will show in Chapter One). I maintain that as the application of the form aims to heal, it is especially vital to recall that the form can create the material one perceives and leave other material unable to be gathered in its form. I propose that along with the adoption of narrative form in post-Freudian psychoanalytic theory and practice come the aforementioned Aristotelian preconceptions of the value of action in human life and of creating an emotionally satisfying plot for an audience according to societal scripts. This heavily-plotted style is naturally opposed to a less-plotted kind of narration, which (as I will explain in Chapter One) is actually more similar to that described by Freud: narration that could prove therapeutic or beneficial to an individual's well being, although it is not innately interesting for a broader audience and quite possibly does not make sense in terms of societal scripts of psychological normality.

This study argues that through the defiance of the story/discourse distinction the novels test the potential for more personally significant, although less-interpretive, methods of self-representation. The analytic chapters, for example, demonstrate that the creation of the discourse of their life narrations, makes the narrators more keenly aware of the *story* material (again, pre-*story* material, to be accurate) of their lives and selves which, in keeping with the form, must be edited out of the interpretive structure for effective, normative meaning-making. *The Catcher in the Rye* and *Invisible Man* spend less time than *The Bell Jar* dramatizing their protagonists exploring this issue, and jump, literally from their first pages, into a portrayal of their rebellion against expectations of their a-psychology within the form. Holden does this, for example, through his status as a specific type of actor in a plot of psychological development—the *Bildungsroman* hero. Relatedly, Ellison's invisible man, challenges societal assumptions of the intellectual emptiness and psychological simplicity of his subjectivity as a stereotype of black

character and action. In addition, this study aims to illustrate how at the authorial level an additional critical process is taking place, ironically informing the reader beyond the protagonists' ken of the possibilities of self-representation within and against narrative form.²⁰

In this way, the novels signal the inherent difficulty of representing certain aspects of selfhood in ostensibly therapeutic narrative form. I will use the term *fugitive self* to describe experiences of the self which the novels collectively, though through different techniques, suggest are difficult to capture in the scripted models that they feel societal pressure to utilize. The term can be more simply understood through a comparison with the notion of identity. *Identity* refers to how a person identifies themselves in society, how others identify him or her, with language, through time. It is the version of oneself that one shows to others (and oneself) when one reflects on or engages in self-characterization or narrativization (Jenkins 5). While not all identities are told in recognizable narratives, the term "narrative identity" implies the identity of a person as understood, even if not openly narrated, within the ongoing narrative of their life: a description of the self which is made sense of through narrative means. In this way, "identity," even as it is privately experienced and interpreted, suggests a sense of self that is not only socially, but also narratively mediated and one which is amenable to scripts and narrative models.

The term "self" is of course a broader term with more diverse meanings. It is often used to refer to two quite different ideas; in other words, there are a variety of selves (private and public) a person can experience within a unified sense of "selfhood." In this project, following the novels' exploration of self/identity representation, the unified sense of selfhood will be conceptualized in two parts: the reflective, interpreting self which comprises a person's social identity on the one hand, and the pre-reflective, experiencing-self of the present-moment on the other. Onto this division, the concepts of *narrative identity* and the *fugitive self* can be mapped. In this study, identity will thus be synonymous with *narrative identity*. On the other hand, the term, *fugitive self* will refer to those parts of the self that the novels suggest are edited out of normalized, scripted identities. Like Aristotle's previously-mentioned description of the epic style of narration of personal histories, (and unlike narrative identities) narrations of the self too generally make "terrible plots" for the same reason: because an "indefinitely large number of

²⁰ I do not call this technique *dramatic irony* because the term carries with it the implication that the real authors have intentionally created this effect, particularly through the structure of the novel. It is possible instead that despite the links I show between novels and the authors' other texts, that the authors, along with their protagonists, are not aware of all the ironic meanings created at the authorial level. Dramatic irony in the traditional sense also suggests a kind of plotted fate for the character of which the audience and author share an awareness. In the case of these novels, it would be more accurate to say that because the authorial level is actively complicating controlling scripts of action and behavior (both regarding the narrators' lives and their narrations) the level plays ironically on the notion of dramatic irony itself.

things happens to one person, in some of which there is no unity” (97). However, as suggested, social narrative unity may not be of paramount importance to the person suffering psychologically. The narrators, I hold, instead actively incorporate aspects of their fugitive selves into their narrations, depending on which script they are troubling: Esther, previously sensible and goal-focused, begins to narrate moments of madness and present-moment pleasure; Holden disrupts expectations of his social and psychological development to digress into illogical yet personally meaningful descriptions and thoughts; IM complexifies stereotyped characters of black Americans at mid-century by featuring the puzzling psychological and existential paradoxes which haunt him. In other words, if narrative identity is the self envisaged as a “character” with social roles and personal traits—as well as memories and anticipations which extend beyond the present moment—the fugitive self signals private, often present-moment experiences of the conscious self which are harder to gather because they are rendered senseless or valueless according to the sense-making societal narrative models which the narrators feel pressure to impose on the life material in their narrations.

The term *fugitive self* is also apt for this project because through the denotations of *fugitive* it suggests subjective experiences which elude narrative meaning-making, or which the protagonists find difficult to otherwise capture in the scripted form. It also signals the fleeting nature of these experiences: what cannot be grasped (materially captured or metaphorically understood) faithfully in form and interpreted is understandably difficult to remember as an event in a time sequence. The novels therefore often represent these subjective experiences of the fugitive self as transient, mysterious, and mad, as they are extraneous to the dominant action structures of scripts particular to their characters in society.

Part of the analysis, then, will attempt to show how the narrators variously draw attention to the *story* material of their fugitive selves which they feel pressure to edit out of their narrations, their *discourse*. In contrast to the aforementioned Aristotelian, or, in its more recent reincarnation, Ricoeurian, evaluation of human action as a “fundamental mode of being” which can, through the creation of narrative identity, supply “new value” to the meaning of a person (*Oneself* 20)—these texts suggest instead that in this narrative process, other modes of being may by default be devalued—or neglected altogether.²¹ It is as though when pressured to make sense of themselves, and even heal psychologically, the narrators thus discover that the *story* material also includes great amounts of experience (that of the fugitive self) which does not come under the category of includable actions or events. It also

²¹ In Ricoeur’s theory of narrative identity his focus on narrative’s ability to represent and order human *action* is crucial (*Oneself* 19). Adopting Aristotle’s definition and ethical valuation of it as a representation, an imitation of human action, the importance of *emplotment* is underlined, as it is the means by which human action is represented, organized and, through its emphasis on selection and causality, thus, understood (*Time* vol.1, x).

comprises actions which are likely narratively un-compelling, though possibly personally satisfying. These could include habitual actions which *en masse* are not interesting or suitable material to represent in a narrative identity which assumes an audience.²² But as the narrators express in various ways, this story material consists of personally valuable experiences, some of which their society suffers significantly from not recognizing—most poignantly in the case of IM. The narrators suggest the latter of these in part through descriptions of present-moment experiences of bodily enjoyment—eating, drinking, sleeping, bathing, listening to music, and certain modes of thinking—which appear to take them out of their social, narratively-formed identities. They express the former experiences—which can be metaphysical, disorientating, and identity-fragmenting—through different formally disruptive techniques. Although these experiences are not always immediately appreciated (by their bewildered narrated characters, most often) they are actively incorporated by the narrators—in defiance of scripted emplotment—into their narrations. That is, while the narrator’s *awareness* of this practice of troubling narrative identity in their narrations varies depending on the protagonists and the techniques they employ, all are engaged in its portrayal.

Thus, the following chapters argue that through the problematization of socio-cultural scripts and therapeutic narrative logic, and by the active incorporation of representations of the fugitive self, the novels challenge societal claims implicit in the popular psychoanalytic practice of the era, of the therapeutic emplotment of the self. While we have seen that the formation of a scripted narrative identity can be desirable in other circumstances—as an efficient method of communicating, amongst other things, a synopsis of who one is and that one is psychologically normal—the novels in this study illustrate that when the protagonists wish to express experiences that are less amenable to action-focused emplotment or psychologically normative behavior, the scripted narrative forms provided by their society prove limiting. And while the novels do not suggest that an anti-narrative self-representation of purely un-selected, unordered material would be preferable, they collectively explore the incorporation of more flexibility of form. Above-all, they argue for greater awareness of the narrative processes through which citizens in their society are controlled during the process of narrative identity formation—especially through the ostensibly therapeutic psychoanalytic treatments popularized in their contemporaneous era.

²² As this broader sense of self is not one’s social identity, and does not involve an audience, it does not need to communicate effectively and has no requirement to be emotionally satisfying (i.e. interesting) to anyone else but the individual (unlike narrative identities based on socio-cultural scripts do).

Methodology: Narrative Levels

Fiction has of course a unique way of conveying several different levels of interpretation through a single text. This involves the different interpretations available to the reader through the apprehension not only between the *story/discourse* levels, but also within the *discourse* level, through techniques of narration. The novels studied include most obviously the two levels, or in Genette's terms *focalizations*, of the narrators within the text. There is the narration (and possibly the interpretation of the events) of the narrator in the present when they relate the story, a few months or years after the events have taken place. This differs from their past, narrated character, and that character's more naïve understanding during the action of the story. Along with the representations of their characters, the narrators at times attempt to focalize their narration through their younger selves, and in doing so, represent the interpretation which they had of the events taking place at the time they occurred. Importantly for this project, this type of focalization allows the reader to see that the *discourse* of the script does not only appear as a result of the narrator creating a narrative, but that it influences the actions of the characters in their present time. These focalizations therefore create ironic tensions which enable the reader to differentiate past and present interpretations produced by the narrators of their life material. They also allow the reader to appreciate how the narrators have been encouraged to conceive of themselves as narrative characters while they variously, as narrators or characters, engage in therapeutic narrations; these focalizations also allow the reader to study the effect of this method of trying to understand and heal the self.

Focalization through the characters also suggests to the reader how the narrators might evade the narrative form. For this reason, this study also pays attention to the way in which the texts represent the commentary of the narrators themselves about life narration and its reputed therapeutic capacity while relating and/or just after completing their retrospective narratives. Through the use of first-person narrators the reader is encouraged to tune into moments of irony within the narration: the discrepancies between how the narrator reports that they have interpreted their lives in the past (that of the narrated character), compared to the present moment of the telling (of the narrator).

The explanation of narrative levels up to this point is basically Genettian and it reflects a structuralist understanding of how meaning is made in the text. This understanding, I argue, mimics the way that the narrators find that through too action-based form (such as socio-cultural scripts and the era's therapeutic narrational mode) they become a-psychological characters. But by paying attention to key moments in the texts when the narrators trouble, contradict or draw attention to the meaning-making occurring through this technique, the texts also challenge this narrativized view of the self. The use

of structuralist narrative theory in the analysis therefore highlights the meaning inherent in certain types of basic narrative form, and thus enables the complication of the therapeutic narrative form.

The final narrational level through which I carry out the analysis I call the *authorial* level. This communicates, through authorial (rather than narratorial) irony, an additional level of interpretation.²³ Similar to Booth's conception of the Implied Author, I view the authorial level as a construct for a level of interpretation inferred by the reader, which can be thought of as the de-personified norms and values implicit in the text which are influenced by the real author at the time of the text's production. As Seymour Chatman has explained the concept, though "[the Implied Author] has no voice, no direct means of communicating," it nonetheless "instructs us silently, through the design of the whole with all the voices, by all the means it has chosen to let us learn" (Story 148). Those "means" in the case of these novels is the irony produced from what the narrators remain naïve about, but that becomes evident as a result of their narrations. Those interpretations, formed at the authorial level, are, I believe, immanent in the texts. However, I call this the authorial level, and not by Booth's more common term because this study views the real authors' intentions and awareness during the creation of this level somewhat differently. In light of this study's interest in these novels as, in part, forming a response to their contemporaneous society, the information and interpretations of the real authors is considered germane in reference to the authorial level. The real authors of the novels, I believe, did have a communicative and even persuasive goal with their texts; thus I support my readings with references to the real author's biography, critical theorizations or commentary on their writing processes. However, it is admittedly difficult and subjective to parse precisely what could or could not be known simply from reading the text. Moreover, while I argue that guiding philosophies and myths are immanent in the texts as a result of the authors' contemporaneous interests, I think that the authors themselves may not always intentionally use them in the ways that their texts reflect. For this reason, and because Booth's term implies the creation of textual unity (as the expression

²³ Because of their ostensible psychological problems, the narrators in these novels have been read as "unreliable" (regarding Holden and Esther, for example, see Wayne Booth's "Resurrection of the Implied Author: Why Bother?" in *A Companion to Narrative Theory*, edited by James Phelan and Peter Rabinowitz.). However, the term is not useful in this study's analysis. While helpful in many respects, the term implies that the narrator's values differ from those of the Implied Author of a text. It can also sometimes imply that narrators *themselves* have agency in the discrepancy of meaning created by this technique (that is, that they are cunning and intentionally try to mislead their audience toward some covert reading). It is not a matter of whether narrators lie or not; every story told from a first-person perspective is necessarily subjective. The difference (which can be very difficult to determine) could be explained as such: certain first-person narrators believe the lies they tell are the truth, and others know, ultimately, that they are telling lies. I read the narrators in this study as the first kind. But most importantly, I do not read the core values of the narrators as very different from those intimated at what I will call the authorial level, and therefore, not as unreliable.

of a morally unified self from which the work emanates) I refer to this level rather as *authorial*. Hence, the fact that all of the novels include interpretive agents at multiple levels (characters, narrators and authorial agents) means that they offer three takes on the process of life narration and its therapeutic potential. Indeed, as I hope to make clear, this understanding of how irony is produced between levels in a text is important to how I will read the narrators' and the texts' methods of meaning-making beyond the more strictly chronological, scripted forms of narrative.

Chapter Summaries

In Chapter One, “Narrative Men in ‘The Age of Psychology’,” I argue that the ego and pop psychological movements during the postwar era instructed the American public to define and realize psychological health, success and happiness through more narrativized means than previously. The first section of the chapter establishes the postwar historical and contextual milieu and the societal concerns of the novels in this study: the proliferation and popularization of psychoanalytic theory and methods of treatment at their height in American history. In the second section of the chapter, I argue that as a result of the revisions that schools such as ego psychology made to classical Freudian theory and practice, popular psychoanalytic treatment became increasingly dependent on the interpretive structure of narrative form. It encouraged clients, I hold, to formulate themselves as an ego-character in an ongoing developmental life narrative aimed towards psychological health and happiness.

In Chapter Two, “‘As by a magical thread’: Eluding the Scripted Self in *The Bell Jar*,” I demonstrate that careful differentiation between the three levels of interpretation in the text show how the distinct interpretive agents explore the complications of creating the self in narrative, with and against the socio-cultural scripts and therapeutic assumptions of the era. In the first two sections of the chapter, I contextualize Plath's novel within the period of its production and discuss the ways in which the novel suggests that rag-to-riches life scripts affect the narration of the protagonist, Esther Greenwood. I argue that this script is represented by two simple, gendered plots in the novel: the female version is based on the Cinderella fairy-tale, while the male version follows a Horatio Alger theme—what I term the “Ragged Dick” script. By attending to how Esther portrays herself as a character or actor, formulating her narration according to these gendered scripts—by differentiating herself from the Cinderella script, or aligning herself with the Ragged Dick script—the novel brings to our attention the potentially adverse aspects of Esther's negotiation of selfhood against and within these narrative models. In the second half of the chapter, I demonstrate how, at the authorial level, the narrator's life events are retrospectively re-scripted and re-

interpreted through the Electra Complex script of popular psychology. I will study the novel's examination of the viability of its society's assumptions that a teleological pursuit of personal happiness can be realized through the construction of a narrative identity modeled on life scripts from both popular psychoanalytic theory and popular culture. The final section of the chapter considers how, through the conceit of the narrator and novelistic form, the text assesses Esther's attempts to represent aspects of an unscripted fugitive self. I show how through metaphorical themes and narrational techniques the narrator posits a less-scripted, more novelistic method of conceiving of and representing life and self.

While Chapter Two focuses on how *The Bell Jar* negotiates scripts of action and behavior, Chapter Three, "'You always do everything backwards': Zen and Identity De-composition in *The Catcher in the Rye*," concentrates on the disruption at a more detailed level of the narrative logic of the subject created through therapeutic narration. The novel's problematization of the salutary assumptions of self-analysis through logical, narrative interpretation is thus a central aspect of this chapter's argument. I demonstrate how the use of narrative logic for the purpose of interpreting life and self does not come naturally to either the narrator, or the character he represents. While both rebel against narrative stereotypes of character within their immediate cognition, both are also portrayed as having a notable lack of ability when it comes to using the tools of therapeutic narrative interpretation to create a logical story of self. I argue that this inability is the crux of both Holden's psychological illness (according to his society) and his possible escape route into another, interpretively freer conception of selfhood through an Eastern paradigm.

The three sections of this chapter's main analysis suggest that Holden's ability to self-analyze and make meaning through logical narrative analysis (to construct a normative narrative identity through the therapeutic narrative form) is fundamentally destabilized by philosophical commitments at the authorial level. These sections focus on how the deconstructive methods of Zen practice can shed light on the way the authorial level portrays Holden's negotiation of narrative identity coherence. In the first section, I explore how Zen-like notions of causality trouble the already logically destabilized protagonist's ability to create links between cause and effect at both the characterial and narratorial levels. The second section demonstrates how Holden's penchant for digressing off the linear plot of his narrations (again, both as character and narrator) demonstrates, like Zen notions of linearity, a troubling of the psychologically normative developmental track that he feels pressure to describe himself in reference to. For the character this takes the form of a life script, the "game," whereas the narrator rebels both overtly and covertly (i.e. formally) against the *Bildungsroman* genre which he feels pressure to script the story he is relating upon. In the third section, I argue that at the authorial level the character is portrayed more recognizably as being

conceptually stuck in a *Zen not-knowing space*: as experiencing the dissolution of his ego and unified narrative identity. I also demonstrate how the text represents the narrator's unwitting introduction of a Zen-like non-duality into his narrative through his continual attempts to dissolve the boundaries between himself and his audience. More broadly, I examine how at the authorial level normative ideas of the health of the logical narrative coherence of identity (and accordingly, narrative-based psychoanalytic cures for societal misfits) are de-composed. I suggest that at this level an alternative form of spiritual awakening in the protagonist—something akin to the fugitive self—is portrayed. I conclude this chapter with a discussion about what kind of interpretation or experience the narrator takes away from his ostensibly therapeutic narration: a practice which has troubled logical narrative analysis to the degree that no cure for his purported psychological problems—or teleological development towards a socially meaningful end point of his story—can be appreciated.

The final chapter of the study, “‘O well they picked poor Robin clean’: Performing the Blues Self in *Invisible Man*,” seeks to draw together, historicize, and contextualize several strands of study into Ellison's epic novel. It aims to show how this reveals the text (in addition to its many possible readings) to be a satire of the therapeutic promises of contemporaneous psychoanalytic methods and stereotyped narrative identities. The chapter also explores the novels' methods of improvising off of these identities through musical mentality and literary narrational technique. *Invisible Man*, I hold, like *The Catcher in the Rye* and *The Bell Jar*, therefore posits an alternative idea of healing for the protagonist's psychological suffering than that accepted by the narrational norms of early postwar American society. In the prologue and epilogue IM frames his narration as a confessional narrative of psychological breakdown which carries with it his society's expectations of its healing potential for the narrator through its iteration. Through a contrastive view with *The Catcher in the Rye* and *The Bell Jar*, it becomes clear that carries out its problematization in a unique way due to the differing levels of ironic distance between the interpretive levels and the novel's particular targets of criticism.

The first section of the chapter illustrates how, at both the authorial and the narratorial levels, a complex critique is launched against its contemporaneous society's faith in the theory and methods of popularized notions of psychoanalytic healing. At the authorial level, the text reflects several ideas expressed by Ellison in critical essays which complicate the use of psychoanalytic theory in the diagnosis and treatment particularly of black American mental illness. These include critique of both the supposition that its cause is intrapsychic discord and of the resulting displacement of responsibility (of American society back onto the shoulders of black Americans) for its resolution. At the level of the narrator, the theory and practice of postwar psychological movements and their positive assumptions of the benefits of adjust-

ing individuals to narrative norms of psychological health are censured. Throughout the chapter I demonstrate how IM initially evokes and attempts to negotiate several scripted stereotypes of normative action and behavior particular to IM as a black American man: *The Scholar*, *The Criminal*, and *The Entertainer*. I posit that the narrator of *Invisible Man* counter-intuitively explores the potential for genuine self-representation from within the more static stereotype of *The Entertainer*. In this way, the second section of this chapter examines how the narrator proposes incorporating the philosophy of black American musical tradition into his self-narration to create new possibilities of both privately and publicly enduring psychological illness. Based on analysis of the novel and the idea, woven through Ellison's critical writing, of developing an existential blues mentality as a method for surviving in an irrational society, this section posits that IM intentionally produces an entertaining therapeutic narrative of self for an audience. This narrative improvises off the stereotyped scripts of black American characters and incorporates vital aspects of IM's fugitive self in an effort to bring about not only personal psychological healing, but a more far-reaching societal healing.

My Conclusion, "Wondrous, Dangerous Things," begins by summarizing the arguments of the preceding chapters. It then brings together several argumentative strands running through the project regarding what the novels reveal about the ethical foundations of the practice of narrativizing the self, and relatedly, what therapeutic possibilities of the practice might still exist in light of these. I end the Conclusion by briefly considering what application the issues raised by these works of fiction from the postwar era might have beyond literary studies.

CHAPTER ONE

Narrative Men in “The Age of Psychology”

This chapter begins by establishing the postwar historical milieu and the societal concerns of the novels in this study: the proliferation and popularization of psychoanalytic theory and methods at their height in American history. In the second section of the chapter, I argue that as a result of the revisions that schools such as ego psychology made to classical Freudian theory and practice, popular psychoanalytic treatment became increasingly dependent on the interpretive structure of narrative form. It encouraged patients as well as the broader public, I hold, to conceive of themselves as an ego-character in an ongoing developmental life narrative directed towards psychological health and happiness.

Section One: The Popularization of Psychoanalysis

The political environment of the early postwar era—the aftermath of the atom bomb, policies of containment and McCarthyism—left an indelible mark on the literature of the period. Yet the era also coincided precisely with the unprecedented popular rise of psychoanalysis in the United States. While psychoanalysis had enjoyed a modest vogue among the American elite previously, Nathan Hale, author of the “Freud in America” series, attributes the initial rise of this golden age of American psychiatry from 1945 to 1965 to the field’s broader application during WWII. Precisely the kinds of illnesses in which psychoanalysts specialized, neuroses and psychosomatic disorders, took a heavy toll on American servicemen (187). This, combined with the popular press these “cures” received (which emphasized, even exaggerated, the overwhelming success of the treatments in returning combatants to civilian life) catapulted the idea of psychoanalysis into the popular imagination as an overwhelmingly successful new treatment of mental disease (280). Already in 1947, *Life* journalist Francis Sill Wickware described the “boom” which had “overtaken the once obscure and much maligned profession” and made psychoanalysts the “most sought-after members of the entire medical profession” (98). In publications as various as *Life*, *Vogue*, *Psychology Today*, *Science Digest*, *Time*, *House and Garden*, and *Parents’*, psychoanalysis was popularized, often through dramatic stories of remarkable success,

which aimed both to entertain and boast morale (280-283).²⁴ And while other methods of treatment were also popularized at the time, none promised to have the dramatic impact that “talking” treatment did, and the accompanying catharsis of trauma which ostensibly demonstrated its effectiveness (281).

At the height of popularization in 1957, *Life* magazine writer Ernest Havemann dubbed the era “the age of psychology” and set out to authoritatively inform laymen about how “the new science of human behavior [had], within a few decades, changed the nature of modern life.”²⁵ As his articles were turned into a book that won the approval of the American Psychological Foundation, it serves as a fair example of the popular texts of this type being produced for the interested public.²⁶

Already in his opening vignette, Havemann illustrates the sometimes erroneously represented manner whereby psychology and psychoanalytic theory had come to saturate Americans’ daily lives both at work and in their leisure time. “John Jones, American” begins his day shaving with a razor that he had “bought on the strength of a magazine ad approved by the head psychologist of an advertising agency” (1). In his morning newspaper, he reads “two columns of psychological fact and advice,” one concerning misconceptions about the intuitiveness of the sexes, while the other, a short quiz, invites him to discover his “happiness quotient” (ibid.). At work, Mr. Jones walks past the office of the company psychiatrist, “where he would have been free to go in and seek counsel had he felt especially disturbed about anything that morning” (2). He attends a conference with an “industrial psychologist” who advises on contract negotiations with the union, and then he deals with the disturbing results of a psychological research firm which had been hired to evaluate the public’s opinion of his company (ibid.). At lunch, he reads two more psychological columns in his afternoon paper and a gossip column reporting that his favorite film actress is taking her personal psychoanalyst on location with her to Africa (ibid.). At home that evening, he learns his son was called into the school psychologist’s office that day due to misbehavior (ibid.). He takes his wife out to a double feature that evening; the first movie takes place in a “mental institution” while the second features a farcical psychoanalyst (ibid.). On the news that evening, the government budget for “psychological warfare” is up for debate (ibid.).

While this bombardment of psychologically related societal developments might appear to be a strategic exaggeration on Havemann’s part, his dramatization is not so far-fetched as it might appear. Mass media in the postwar

²⁴ As one soldier was quoted in *Newsweek*: “I . . . hate to talk about it—what happened—but they told me it would do (me) good to talk . . . At first I thought it was the bunk. But after a couple of days when I had these (sessions) with the doctors and when I talked with my buddies—it was a funny thing; my head stopped hurting” (qtd. in Hale 278).

²⁵ These quotations come from the book jacket of the 1957 publication of Havemann’s articles in book form.

²⁶ All of the following quotations of Havemann’s work are taken from this 1957 publication.

era had an enormous influence on the promotion (and distortion) of psychoanalysis and psychology in everyday Americans' lives. As Hale explains, in printed-mass media accounts stereotypes of the analyst, the patient, and the analytic process proliferated and made complex theory seem "natural and understandable" (276-277). Havemann cites such popular newspaper articles as "Know Thyself" in the *New York Post*, which included questionnaires which purported to diagnose questions of normal levels of aggression and contentment with titles such as: "Are your emotions under control?" and "How happy are you?" (ibid.). He claims that 90% of the major US daily newspapers at that time carried at least one column of "psychological lore" (8). Even the newspapers' comics included episodes of psychiatry, such as in *Rex Morgan, M.D.*, which was written by a practicing psychiatrist (ibid.). Moreover, a great number of Hollywood films featuring psychoanalysis appeared, including *The Seven Year Itch* (1955) with Marilyn Monroe, *That Certain Feeling* (1956) with Bob Hope, and *Captain Newman* (1963) starring Gregory Peck (289).²⁷ Created for their entertainment rather than pedagogical value, these films often portrayed much inaccurate information while they furthered popularized the reputation of psychoanalysis as a kind of magical cure for unhappiness (290).

Havemann's claim that these mass publications were utilizing "the newest psychological technique in the advertising field," motivational research, is also accurate (59). In order to perpetuate postwar prosperity, economists held that the public must be taught to consume more (Tindall 902). Vance Packard's best-selling paperback, *The Hidden Persuaders* (1957), for example, explored motivational research in great detail along with depth psychology and subliminal tactics. As suggested in the ABC series *Mad Men* (2007-2015), creating desire for products in the American public through advertising became a more decisive component of consumer culture than ever before. The quotation from the series which opens the Introduction to this study links the use of psychological tactics to induce consumerism with psychoanalysis as a commodified product: "Trust me," says one agency boss, "psychiatry is just this year's candy-pink stove. It's just more happiness."²⁸ Indeed, startling growth rates in the expenditures for TV ads in the 1950s lead the president of NBC to claim in 1956 that advertising was the primary reason for the postwar economic boom, as it had "created an American frame of mind that makes people want more things, better things and newer things" (qtd. in Tindall 902).

In other arenas of society as well, such as schools and workplaces, therapists were becoming a more common presence, and increasingly, psychology was being linked to the notion of social control. Even parents who followed

²⁷ This film was based on the experiences of Ralph Greenson, the L.A. psychoanalyst who later went on to treat celebrities such as Marilyn Monroe.

²⁸ From "Ladies Room": *Mad Men* Episode 2 Season 1, Aired July 26, 2007.

the prescriptions for feeding, toilet training and peer-relationships from Benjamin Spock's enormously popular *Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care* (1946) were ostensibly learning to heed and trust Freud's concepts early in their child's upbringing.²⁹ Moreover, throughout American society, norm-based IQ and psychological testing for both children and adults had become extremely widespread (Havemann 44). Industrial psychology was popular, as mental health—or “happiness”—was being linked to efficiency on the job (Havemann 50). Psychologists had, apparently, long been aware that “one of the greatest problems in business and industry is the disturbed worker” (Havemann 52). But new methods of on-location therapy were suggesting improvements: “there have been some indications, as in the Oak Ridge atom bomb plant during the war, that even a very small amount of on-the-job therapy has considerable effect and carries over into a workman's home situation, making him happier all around” (ibid.). Thus, the exaggerated hype of the societal benefits of psychological applications in homes, schools and the workplace—which could accomplish such rhetorical feats as combining the notions of nuclear warfare and happiness in one sentence—by the mid-fifties thoroughly dominated the American imagination.

Explanations for Popularization

Havemann's conclusion in “The Age of Psychology” sums up the incredible optimism he and many of his contemporaries felt about the positive effect that psychology, the “brand-new and strictly American” applied science of “everyday living,” was having on American society (3):

Even those of us who never took a course in psychology and never saw a psychoanalyst in the flesh are probably a little happier—a little more understanding to our wives and children, a little kinder to our associates, a little less given to superstition and prejudice about human nature. All of us, even the myriads among us who have emotional problems ranging from the light to the serious, have more hope for the future. (107)

In fact, confidence in psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic psychotherapy mirrored the relative optimism and values that proliferated in American society during the era (Hale 289). Popular images of Freud during the period which portray him as “a tenacious worker, a great healer, a truly original explorer, a paragon of domestic virtue, [and] the discoverer of a source of personal energy” arguably reflect contemporary cultural values more accurately than they offer an exact portrait of the master (ibid.). The rhetoric was often linked to national ideologies of independence and freedom to which the public were particularly attuned in the Cold War period (ibid.). For example, Havemann states that psychology is an “irreverent science” which is

²⁹ Dr. Spock's guide had sold over 19 million copies by 1965 (Hale 285).

“ready to question man’s fondest beliefs about himself and his society”; a science that “cannot flourish in a totalitarian state or in a nation which has grown too stuffy and self-important” (10). Psychoanalysis, he claims, follows a non-communist ideology: it “assumes . . . that all men are more than just cogs, and worthy of study and consideration” (ibid.). While “[m]any union people refer to [workplace counseling] contemptuously as ‘cow psychology’—an attempt to get more production out of the worker by keeping him placid and uncomplaining” (52)—the analyst’s main goal, according to Havemann, is to help the patient “gain control” of his fears, and (in renowned psychoanalyst Lawrence Kubie’s words) win “freedom from the tyranny of the unconscious” (qtd. in Havemann 80).

The hype surrounding popular psychoanalytic theory and treatment was also linked to the American ideals of equality in the pursuit of happiness. Freud was regularly identified as a great savior of the unhappy masses in the popular press. In *Scientific American* Robert White claimed that Freud had used scientific method to “investigate our worst selves,” and had “told us, in the cool disillusioned spirit of the scientist, what chances we might have of happiness” (qtd. in Hale 289). In America, the chances of reaching these favorable outcomes were considered quite good. Anthropologist Geoffrey Gorer argued in the *New York Times* in 1961 that in contrast to Europeans (who in his opinion rejected psychoanalysis simply because they accepted ill health as an inevitable part of life) Americans’ broad acceptance of Freud’s ideas was due to the optimism and hedonism of the American people (5). But notably, the Americanized version of psychoanalysis popularized widely in the accounts of magazines such as these made therapy appear a far more hopeful endeavor than its founder had believed it to be. While Freud fully acknowledged the individual’s pursuit of happiness in life, he was pessimistic of the possibility of a person ever attaining lasting happiness, due to the inborn conflicts of his psychology. “One feels inclined to say,” he summarizes, “that the intention that man should be ‘happy’ is not included in the plan of ‘Creation’” (“Civilization” 729).³⁰

Regardless, Havemann’s claim that psychoanalysis is “based on the premise that something can be done about mental illness and human unhappiness,” aimed to echo the relative optimism which was being promoted in the early postwar era (10). And this endemic hope regarding psychoanalytic

³⁰ The entire quotation reads: “What do [men] demand of life and wish to achieve in it? The answer to this can hardly be in doubt. They strive after happiness; they want to become happy and to remain so [...]. As we see, what decides the purpose of life is simply the programme of the pleasure principle. This principle dominates the operation of the mental apparatus from the start. There can be no doubt about its efficacy, and yet its programme is at loggerheads with the whole world, with the macrocosm as much as with the microcosm. There is no possibility at all of its being carried through; all the regulations of the universe run counter to it. One feels inclined to say that the intention that man should be ‘happy’ is not included in the plan of ‘Creation’” (“Civilization” 729).

treatment was routinely linked to the idea that therapy was “a tool” which could “add to human happiness” (Havemann 90). An admirable goal of undergoing therapy was “happiness” in the form of financial and vocational success. In fact, the two notions were often linked. As we have seen, therapists became increasingly commonplace in the office as industry came to believe that emotionally “disturbed” workers made “happiness and efficiency on the job . . . almost impossible” (Havemann 50). Getting an enormous amount of work done was considered “one practical measure of mental health” (Havemann 88), and ego psychologist Heinz Hartmann confirmed that a human being was well-adapted if, firstly, his “productivity” along with his “ability to enjoy life” and “mental equilibrium”—were “undisturbed” (*Adaptation* 23). Indeed, for one successful analysand in *Good Housekeeping*, psychoanalysis reportedly “conferred inner freedom, self-acceptance, real love, and manhood, as well as an ability to sell staggering quantities of insurance” (qtd. in Hale 293).

Ego Psychology and the Adaptive Character

During this same period, psychoanalysis was becoming a major presence in psychiatric departments of medical schools and their literature, due to its acceptance as a fundamental research tool and mode of explanation and treatment (Hale 253). The movement to maintain and develop psychoanalysis as a science and to systematize psychoanalytic theory was taken on by a group of recently emigrated European scholars and their American followers. Heinz Hartmann, the “dean of the refugee analysts” (which included David Rapaport, Ernst Kris and Rudolph Loewenstein) founded what became known as American ego psychology (Hale 234). Aiming for greater pragmatism and professionalism in the field, Hartmann emphasized that psychoanalytic developmental psychology (as ego psychology also came to be known) was a “science of causes,” a study of the “laws regulating mental activity” and not merely a psychology of understanding or a description of patients’ subjective states (“Understanding” 377, 386). In contrast to the methods of analysts such as Carl Jung, Alfred Adler and Otto Rank, Hartmann claimed that a thoroughgoing scientific stance was Freud’s unique distinction (Hale 231). And despite dissenting attitudes, due to the prevailing conservative social and political temper in the United States, Hartmann and his colleagues’ efforts to systematize Freud’s theories were on the whole welcomed (*ibid.*). In the 1950s, American ego psychology became, in fact, the dominant psychoanalytic theory in mainstream American psychoanalysis (Schwarz 191).

A major change that Hartmann and his colleagues made to classical Freudianism was the expansion of the role of the *ego*. According to them, the ego did not develop from the id as in Freudian theory, but instead both arose from an undifferentiated phase governed by innate givens (Hale 235). Ger-

trude and Rubin Blanck—practicing therapists, instructors and textbook authors in the field of ego psychology—explain that “ego building” became of paramount importance, “the very fabric of treatment,” as psychotherapy now “consist[ed] of an attempt to heal the damaged ego” rather than primarily interpreting unconscious motivations (9-10). Ego psychologists held that unlike the “intact ego” of the psychoanalytic patient, the ego of the (ego) psychoanalytic patient had suffered “developmental failures” which impaired its “organizing function” (Blanck 27). Unlike in Freudian psychoanalysis, everyone “regardless of diagnosis and sometimes even motivation” could be a potential patient of ego psychotherapy (Blanck 9-10). Now ego psychologists could provide the patient with an “instrument of normal development against which to measure pathology” which could help them understand these “failures in development,” and thus begin strengthening the underdeveloped ego to withstand the domination of unconscious, maladaptive urges (Blanck 27).

Thus, adaptation to one’s society was a central issue for ego psychology. Hartmann stated that the goal of psychoanalytic therapy was now “to help men achieve a better functioning synthesis and relation to the environment” (*Adaptation* 81). Hartmann argued that the analysis of adaptation promised to “clarify many problems of normal and abnormal psychology, among them our conception of mental health” (23). He hoped that the study of conflict-free ego spheres (egos neutralized of conflicted impulses) and of the ego’s functions in relation to adaptation would open up the no-man’s land between sociology and psychoanalysis and “thus extend the contribution of psychoanalysis to the social sciences” (21). Hartmann claimed that in theory, adaptation, like in biology, was a “reciprocal relationship between the organism and the environment” (24) and that by the term he did not mean “only passive submission to the goals of society,” but also “active collaboration on them and attempts to change them” (32). However, he states paradoxically that in practice (such as when setting therapeutic goals) that though “the individual’s interests will generally outrank society’s [goals]” this will no longer hold “when we have broadened our view to include the needs of society” (27). His arguments elsewhere link the treatment goals of adaptation to rationality and the determination of normality:

In psychoanalysis we often speak about rational behavior: as a contrast to neurotic behavior, as a measuring rod of normality, as a goal of therapeutic efforts, as a guide in education, etc. Since we use adapted behavior too as the same kind of goal and measuring rod, its relation to rational action becomes important to us. (65)

Moreover, with the ego as the “specific organ of adaptation” (50), the neutralization of aggression becomes key (“Aggression” 70-71). Self-control (synonymous with ego control) of the instinctual drives was linked to intelli-

gence (70). In practice, the Blancks state that “blatantly inappropriate social behavior” during an initial consultation with a female patient was one of the “morbid signs of approaching or potential breakdown” (100). In the end report of a case study of therapeutic practice, the Blancks also link rationality, mature adaptation (development) and the sexual norms of the postwar period:

The adult, reasonable ego [of Mr. Baker] became the therapist’s ally in interpreting the misconceptions from the past. [...] When memories of incestuous wishes were presented, the therapist explained that this is a welcome sign of masculinity. Other ways of supporting masculinity were comments such as, ‘Isn’t it good that you developed to the point where you knew you were a boy and would become a man? The homosexual wish was explained as feelings of love toward his father. (112)

In this way, changes to psychoanalytic theory and practice such as those of ego psychology pathologized behavior that was not considered normal, suitable or sane according to the era’s generally conformist behavioral stereotypes.

Broader trends in popular American psychotherapy were also taking a normative turn and focusing attention on the “controls” of the ego, which had become “the real us as we think of ourselves” (Havemann 70). “To the extent that a person’s behavior is controlled by the conscious aspect of his mind—the ego,” Havemann writes, “it is sensible, satisfying and normal” (73). Gone were Freud’s theorizations that a substantial part of the ego occupied a person’s unconscious, along with the id and the superego (“Ego and Id” 631). As Hale explains, even in psychotherapy more generally, adapting individuals to their environment had become par for the course. Recovery “might include the disappearance of the patient’s symptoms,” but “certainly included a real improvement in mental functioning and reality adjustment” (Hale 251). Hale explains further that the goals of therapy now “subsumed insight, acceptance of self, freedom from ‘enervating tensions’; release of aggressive energies for self-preservation; consistent loyal, interpersonal relations; free functioning abilities; [and] improved sublimation; full heterosexual functioning” (ibid.). Normativity and normalization were thus fundamental concepts to both ego and popular psychology.

In sum, Hale’s study makes it clear that postwar societal hopes, if not their reality, were reflected the media’s optimistic claims that psychoanalytic treatment ended as a rule in “marital happiness, personal equilibrium, and vocational success” (299). The domesticated version of Freud’s theories made the outcomes of therapy appear far more hopeful than its creator had believed them to be. It garnered considerable attention during the generally conformist postwar period due to its association with core American values and its alleged promise of freedom from psychological illness and thus the undisturbed ability to enjoy a productive life, normalcy and happiness (277).

Hale's contemporary revelation of the over-exuberance with which psychoanalysis was embraced as a panacea for psychological suffering in the era was, as we will see in the following chapters, already being criticized at that time by, amongst others, literary authors. Indeed, due to the early postwar societal milieu of the novels in this study—both rife with strict scripts of behavior and action, and embedded in the popularization of normalizing psychoanalytic narrational practices (as I will show in the next section)—I hold that the texts were uniquely situated to carry out such a critique.

Section Two: Narrative Influence in Treatment

During the domestication and popularizing of psychoanalysis in early postwar America, the movement's methods of "talk" and interpretive therapies were thus explicitly linked to the core national ideals of attaining freedom from tyrannical internal forces and pursuing personal happiness as it was defined by external postwar society. I suggest that this helps to explain how faith in narrative and interpretive-based methods of treating psychological illness developed during the period and took root in the national consciousness. This section will describe what theoretical and methodological changes domestic ego psychology, and following it, the pop psychological movement, made to classic Freudianism—changes which fostered in the American public a growing faith in the interpretive apparatuses of the narrative form. It will also show how domestic movements encouraged self-analysis, and promoted a collective responsibility for the narrative interpretation of a patient's life.

Developing Narrativity

From the outset, psychoanalytic treatment as it was theorized and recommended by Freud did not rely on narrative practices to the same degree as domestic trends. Instead, in Freud's original conceptions of how therapy should be carried out in sessions with the analyst the "fundamental rule" was that the patient should not be selective regarding the material that he talked about. He should instead associate completely freely and "say whatever goes through [his] mind" without keeping "a connecting thread" through his remarks ("Beginning" 372). Freud recommends that patients should do so in spite of aversion: "precisely *because* [they] feel [it]"; they should not be "tempted to say to [themselves] that this or that is irrelevant here, or is quite unimportant, or nonsensical" (ibid.).

Freud did not suggest shunning a patient's use of narrative by interrupting one who chooses to relate his "life-history" or the "history of his illness"—"the patient must be left to do the talking and must be free to choose at what point he shall begin" ("Beginning" 371). However, although some patients

are eager to concentrate on what they believe to be the “precipitating cause” of their illness, and others “often begin with an account of their whole life-history,” he clearly discourages the use of plotted form in the patient’s communication with the analyst: “A systematic narrative should never be expected and nothing should be done to encourage it” (“Beginning” 372). Prompting the patient to relate “whatever goes through [his] mind” implicitly supports the notion that a patient’s subjective and seemingly random impressions, such as thoughts and dream fragments, could help the therapist to understand the source of his illness through metaphor rather than narrative logic. That is, rather than demanding or specifically searching for narrative logic such as causality and linearity, the source of the illness might rather be gathered here and there by way of interspersed metaphoric or thematic connections.

In turn, the analyst should give equal notice to everything said by the patient without critique or selection (ibid.). Freud discourages analysts from being too quick to actively analyze and edit the contents of the patient’s speech “material” into any recognizable shape: the technique he suggests consists “simply in not directing one’s notice to anything in particular and in maintaining the same ‘evenly-suspended attention’ . . . in the face of all that one hears” (“Beginning” 357) so as not to “select from the material before him” and follow pre-formed “expectations and inclinations” (ibid.). He also discourages note taking in session because a “detrimental selection” from the material “will necessarily be made” (“Beginning” 358). To be sure, the final analysis might be based to a degree on narrative models such as case histories. However, Freud emphasizes that the analyst’s goal is to suspend his interpretation of the material in order to mitigate a biased analysis. Thus, Freud suggests that the therapist too should be cautious regarding the automatic manner that his own mind might allow itself to fall into congenial, preconceived, even narratively-shaped patterns of thought, at the risk of creating a false trajectory of the therapeutic narration or limiting the material of an unscripted case.

The developing affinity in the American cultural consciousness between psychoanalytic treatment and narrative story construction can be traced, I contend, back to popular postwar conceptions of the therapy resulting from the early wonder cures of WWII. As previously mentioned, these promised rapid therapy through the recollection and expression of battle trauma (the emotions and memories which had been repressed or forgotten) and reportedly led to cathartic healing in the patient. Notably, in *Poetics* Aristotle held that a satisfying, cathartic ending was also the aim of classical tragic plots, effecting “through pity and fear . . . the proper purgation [*catharsis*] of these emotions” (qtd. in Harmon 89). Due to the ambiguity in the Greek wording, or perhaps simply by association, the term has also come to be associated with the point of a story at which there is a purging of the complications of the plot (ibid.). It leads to the *dénouement*, the final unraveling or, literally,

“unknotting” of the plot, which involves the satisfactory outcome of the main situation and an explanation of the plot’s mysteries and misunderstandings (Harmon 156). Notably, the hypnotic treatment of war psychoses was quickly judged as too easy and simple—as not solving “deeper” problems, but only banishing symptoms temporarily (Havemann 79). One could, therefore, say that hypnosis was not believed to lead to a substantial and lasting *dénouement* of the patient’s underlying, unconscious issues. However, notably, with these so-called flash treatments the notion of purging one’s trauma through narration was becoming scientifically linked to the idea of bringing about a healing catharsis in the *patient*, the creator of the narrative, rather than in the speaker’s audience.

Diminished Focus on the Unconscious

Freud’s theory of the unconscious posits a revolutionary division of the self into the forces of the id, ego and the super ego through the difficult process of the Oedipus complex. Before this process, the child is said to experience no boundaries between itself and the world. But with the primary repression of incestuous forbidden desires, the unconscious is created. From then on, the child is a subject—a split one—divided between his conscious life and unconscious desires. Psychoanalysis becomes necessary when certain unconscious desires assert themselves, and internal conflict results from the ego’s attempts to defend itself against them (when it cannot sublimate them into some more productive endeavor), and inexplicable symptoms ensue. The internal conflict leads to neurosis. Most issues, Freud held, were due to arrested development in the process of overcoming the Oedipus complex. Importantly, Freud’s unconscious is different than what he termed the *pre-conscious* (popularly termed the subconscious), which implies a place that could be accessed and understood with a bit of digging under the surface of conscious thought. To reach and interpret the seed of the problem (not root, that would just imply deeper digging) in the unconscious, a place totally alien and unrecognizable to the conscious self, a trained analyst was, of course, required.

As explained in Section One, in contrast to Freudian theory, Hartmann formulated his field’s psychoanalytic emphasis on the ego and aimed to foster ego development that would make “the specific organ of adaption” strong enough to withstand the pressures of the unconscious drives of the id and the superego (*Adaptation* 50). This development of the role of the ego was intended to further Freud’s theory and the applicability of psychoanalysis in America, helping to make it a general psychology which could treat not only neurotic patients but also “borderline” cases—those who had suffered “developmental failures” of the ego to the extent that the methods of free association, the lifting of repression and the interpretation of transference were supposedly not possible (Blanck 27). The change was generally well re-

ceived by young psychologists because, as one reportedly expressed, this meant that the focus moved away from intrapsychic conflict of unconscious infantile wishes and took more into consideration a person's "real setting"—his socio-cultural and historical environment and, "the groups and traditions that shaped his identity, and the *mise-en-scène* of interpersonal relations in which his life was played" (qtd. in Hale 238).

This pivoting away from the unconscious also meant that in therapy there was less focus on a patient's childhood and the Oedipus complex. Ego psychology became instead a normal developmental psychology which focused on the patient's whole life with the ego as its organizing function (Blanck 27). During "descriptive developmental diagnosis," the therapist used a graph of normal development on to which they "plotted" a patient's case (Blanck 109). Thus, the "plot" of a case history and how it diverged from the normal developmental pattern could be revealed by this process.

As we have seen, Freud's fundamental rule for patients also had its equivalent for therapists: the analyst should give "equal notice to everything" without critique or selection in order to discourage them from too rapidly seizing on familiar ideas, case histories, or other analytic models and forming the contents of the patient's speech into a recognizable shape ("Beginning" 372). Ego psychological practice appears instead to stimulate narrative connections: questions "designed to elicit information about the way the ego has functioned in life situations" are "always in order" and when "some such direction shapes up in the therapist's mind" she is encouraged to ask the patient questions (Blanck 98). Unlike in Freudian psychoanalysis, a therapist's responses do not need to be kept to a minimum (Blanck 153). The task of the therapist is to show the patient where his "developmental impediments lie and how they came about" then the "natural tendency" of the patient towards linear development can supposedly proceed (Blanck 155).

Diagnosis through the plotting of the patient's psychological development onto the normative developmental graph moreover helped the therapist in the "selection of theme" (Blanck 113). The horizontal "themes" of the developmental graph include: psychosexual maturation, drive taming processes, object relations, adaptive function, anxiety level, defensive function, identity formation, and the processes of internalization (Blanck 114-115). The development of each theme is diagnosed and plotted vertically according to the stages of psychosexual maturation, i.e. how "vertically" developed the person is in each thematic area (these are, from the bottom: Oral, Anal, Phallic and Genital) (ibid.). A patient's pattern according to the graph, as we saw earlier, comprises their specific deficiencies in development; the aim of therapy, is to aid the patient toward the linear, "more favorable development" of "normal" (or, failing this, merely neurotic) individuals (Blanck 109). "It never ceases to surprise" the Blancks remark, "that, when such selectivity [of theme] is exercised, the patient begins to work in a more orderly fashion, too" (ibid.). And while the patient may still introduce "his own theme" or

many different themes in session, according to the Blancks, the therapist works actively “like a skillful weaver” dealing “first with one [theme], then with another, all the while keeping the overall pattern in mind” (113). Once treated, many patients “experience[d] identity for the first time” (141)—a fact which is not surprising when one considers the way that the isolation of a theme brings a sense of order to any kind of narrative, let alone one of identity in therapeutic narration.

The Focus on Cause

As explained earlier, the aim of Hartmann and his colleagues was to create a testable science of causes (“Understanding” 377). The goal was the “explanation of causal relationships” and the systematic study of the “laws” regulating mental activity (“Understanding” 384, 386). In this way, I suggest that patients were being encouraged to search for causality between life events and actions and to organize their talk into an interpretive journey, a kind of mystery, with the goal of finding the source of their unhappiness.

Freud’s investigations naturally also aimed to find the cause of a patient’s neurosis, but his methods were such that he could never claim to reach a true scientific understanding of the cause, due to its transformation through transference. And, as we have seen, he felt that no encouragement whatsoever should be given to the patient eager to find the “precipitating cause” of their illness themselves (“Recommendations” 372). Freud also cautioned the therapist against working on a case scientifically while treatment was ongoing. This was because to “piece together its structure, to try to foretell its further progress . . . as scientific purposes would demand” could threaten the outcome by imposing on the research a certain ending (“Recommendations” 359). He argues:

Cases which are devoted from the first to scientific purposes and are treated accordingly suffer in their outcome; while the most successful cases are those in which one proceeds, as it were, without any purpose in view, allows oneself to be taken by surprise by any new turn in them, and always meets them with an open mind, free from any presuppositions. (ibid.)

Freud’s concerns about too hastily “piec[ing] together a structure,” can also be understood, thus, as an apprehension about limiting the field of expression of the patient’s neurosis by means of form. As these concerns were not as a whole shared by the ego psychologists, and their analysis was extended to the entire life of a patient, there was a risk, I hold, that narrative form could become an interpretive tool actively implemented in therapy. The rhetoric of ego and popular psychotherapy indeed suggests that it is through narrative means that the patient “unfolds his story,” and that cause and effect can be traced by means of a “thread in the patient’s life history” (Blanck 98).

By way of comparison, Freud also often wrote of following “threads” in the patient’s thought—however his vision of where these threads would lead was distinctly non-linear: they belonged to the patient’s psychical material gathered from their diffuse talk in treatment (“On Dreams” 144, 148). For Freud they are not causally related narrative threads, but simply “associative threads” between dream “fragments” (“On Dreams” 145). He proposes that “the threads of association do not simply converge . . . they cross and interweave with each other” (“On Dreams” 154), which suggests that the therapist allows a fabric of these associative threads to take shape, before his thoughts fall into more “logical chains” (“On Dreams” 147). To be sure, this fabric may have a more pre-consciously formed structure than Freud might consider. But its logic, which is guided by the associative meaning-making of metaphor and metonymy is, I suggest, less apt to be expressed in the narrative frameworks, than that of theories which are based on standard developmental life patterns where attention to causality and specific therapeutic goals leading to normative social behavior—namely, a specific teleology of treatment—were encouraged.

In the broader pop psychological movement too, the notion that logical, linear narrative meaning-making should be practiced in therapy was embraced. Havemann explains that the analyst “spends hundreds of hours listening to the patient discussing his past and present life, his dreams and his daydreams,” until the patient’s “pattern” of unconscious or “hidden problems” emerge to the point where they can be “straightened out” (72). A patient’s “mixed-up mental processes” could be “unraveled” by the “right kind of talk between the patient and the expert” (17). As the analyst “leads the patient” down a “trail” through “forgotten memories and emotional storms,” the patient discovers specific causes for his symptoms, such as that “the reason he suffered a stomach upset the previous afternoon was that he had met the company president in the elevator after lunch” (79-80). Hence, in the widespread popularization of psychotherapy too, a patient’s psychological problems were becoming a kind of mystery of cause which could ostensibly be solved through the narration of life events and the discovery of a logic of cause and effect.

Thus, I suggest that the expansion of the ego’s role also encouraged the patient to identify themselves more easily with the concept and as the protagonist of a developmental plot gone awry. In the Blancks’ description of diagnostic exploration, for example, the line between the “patient” and the “ego” is unclear, especially when the latter takes on human agency. For example, questions are designed “to interest the patient’s ego in his [whose?] developmental problems” (98). In these tasks, the “[p]atients are able to perform in varying degrees which often correlate with ego strength,” and (two sentences later) “how well the ego performs is an indicator of its strength and capability” (ibid.) Elsewhere, the “adult, reasonable ego” is given the agency of a person by becoming “the therapist’s ally” (112).

Moreover, ego psychologists claimed that while the most rapid and fundamental features of structuration took place in the early years of life, development became a process that continued throughout the life of the “ego” (Blanck 4). In fact, the view that the whole of a patient’s life history was relevant to treatment effectively necessitated the patient’s “unfold[ing] his story” (Blanck 98). And indeed, “for lasting therapeutic results” the Blancks state that there is “no match for the convergence of past and present *intrasystemically*, as the observing ego confronts the experiencing ego” (156, original emphasis). The Blancks suggest, moreover, that “this type of interpretive work serves to confront the reasonable ego with the influence of past upon present” (ibid.), and that “[i]nterpretation” then apparently “enables development to proceed” (ibid.). Thus, the patient’s role begins to bear a resemblance to that of a narrator viewing themselves like a character in the past.

In Havemann’s popular narrative of the conflicting parts of the mind too, the ego has become “the real us as we think of ourselves”—it is the rational, civilized entity which “does our logical thinking” and “does the best it can to help us lead sane and satisfactory lives in relation to the environment” (70). No longer simply an inevitably split, tripartite subject struggling for internal balance, the patient becomes instead associated here too with the ego itself—the “sensible, satisfying and normal” self that is in conflict with the id and the superego, which can “drive him into erratic behavior” in his social environment (Havemann 73-74). While in Freudian theory, a large part of the ego was also unconscious, in ego psychology, with ego “strength training,” the now more conscious ego could develop “mechanisms of control” against the pressures of the unconscious drives (Hale 234, 240). The ego is described here too like a kind of reasonable lead character. For example, in Havemann’s description, the ego permits the “primitive drives of the id” as long as their satisfaction do not put him in “harm or danger” (Havemann 70). But when “the drives threaten to involve [the ego] in serious conflict—or get us jailed or shot” it “holds them down” (ibid.). In this “constant struggle” the superego is characterized as the ego’s “strong but difficult ally” (Havemann 71). But in contrast, the superego’s standards for right and wrong are mysterious and “far more ridged, unrelenting, fierce and vengeful than anything” the sensible ego would come up with (ibid.).

Apart from casting the ego as a rational heroic character, as we have seen, the language used in pop psychological accounts like Havemann’s presented unconscious forces as something outside of the patient, like a foreign enemy, which, in the Cold War context, was a formulation that played into a charged rhetoric for Americans. Havemann claims that once the unconscious forces become a matter of conscious knowledge in therapy “they lose their ability to terrorize the patient and to drive him into erratic behavior” (74). “Eventually” he goes on to explain, the patient “gains control of the unconscious drives and conflicts and they bedevil him no more” (80). In other words, the “battle” against psychological problems caused by the enemy elements in the

unconscious was a war that could be “won” (ibid.). The ego is thus portrayed not merely as a protagonist, as it is framed in this context, but as though it has the opportunity, or even the responsibility, to be a kind of all-American hero in the war over an individual’s normative psychology.

Active Participation: Ego Building and “Verbalizing”

In Freudian practice the analyst was responsible for making the analysis. It was also his responsibility not to reveal it before the patient was psychologically prepared to hear it, so as not to risk the future success of the treatment by setting off the defense mechanisms of the patient. It was believed that understanding the cause alone would not cure the patient of their neurosis. This was the importance of transference, which provided the analyst (cast into the role of the source of the patient’s psychical issues) with the opportunity to intervene at the right time with his analysis. If this was done, it was thought that the patient could have a decent chance of being cured of his symptoms pertaining to the issue. Intellectualization of the issue by the patient was discouraged as this was considered a method of evading the real issue. Freud explains that “patients who practice the art of sheering off into intellectual discussion during treatment, who speculate a great deal and often wisely about their condition . . . avoid doing anything to overcome it” (“Beginning” 362-363). Indeed, Freud was clear that encouraging or leading patients to logical self-analysis both encumbered treatment, and was simply ineffective:

It is wrong to set a patient tasks, such as collecting his memories or thinking over some particular period of his life. On the contrary, he has to learn above all—what never comes easily to anyone—that mental activities such as thinking something over or concentrating the attention solve none of the riddles of a neurosis [...]. (“Beginning” 362)

In contrast, as explained, ego psychoanalysts were encouraged to move more quickly and decisively into taking an active role in leading the patient into constructing a recognizable therapeutic narrative which could—through the process of selecting and plotting the material—lead to the construction of cause and effect in the patient’s case history (98). In practice, “self-interpretation was encouraged,” as it “builds the ego by exercise of function” (110). Reinterpreting Freud, the Blancks argue that beginning therapists “often make the error of following too literally Freud’s recommendation that the patient determine the material of the hour,” because “even for the psychoanalytic patient, Freud did not mean that the analyst may not deal with latent material after he has listened to the manifest content” (127). They then state that the analyst is in fact “required to point out—if he knows of them—when there are omissions” in the patient’s narrative (ibid.). Moreover, for the

ego psychotherapist it is a “technical error to remain inactive while the patient literally wanders in the wilderness of his incoherent, primary thoughts” (ibid.).

Domestic US movements thus also encouraged the creation of a personal therapeutic narrative through the promotion of therapist-led self-analysis. Rather than acting out problems in therapy, ego psychology fostered the “verbalizing” of issues as a means of creating interpretive distance—“transcending immediacy”—and “helping the ego strengthen itself” (Blanck 162). “As the ego is encouraged to exercise,” the Blancks state, “its functioning improves and structuration proceeds” (ibid.). Self-analysis ostensibly strengthened the ego “by exercise of [its] function,” (110) and with the practice, the bond between patients and the heroic, “enlist[ed]” (157) characters they were becoming through their therapeutic narration was also reinforced. As one exemplary case history summarized the situation, the “adult, reasonable ego became the therapist’s ally in interpreting misconceptions from the past” (112).³¹ The emphasis had therefore moved from enabling the analyst’s interpretation of the analysand’s related life and dream fragments, to authorizing a more collective responsibility for the narrative interpretation of a patient’s life.

As we saw above, questions from the analyst were meant to interest the patient in his “developmental problems” (Blanck 98), a formulation which posits the patient’s life as a causally-connected sequence of “normal” and natural development with a teleology of good mental health from which the patient had deviated. In this way, the developmental story of psychological normality established by ego psychologists became a model against which the therapeutic narrative of the patient was measured. This took place first through negative contrast, to ascertain where the patient diverged from the developmental plot, then through positive alignment, as the goal of therapy was to strengthen the “ego” to the degree that it could manage internal unrest (the antagonistic unconscious drives) without being thrown off the developmental path towards a psychologically mature mind, and the mental health and happiness which, according to popular notions of therapy, naturally followed from this achievement. The Blancks state:

How completely the ego becomes involved in this task tests prognosis as well as diagnosis. If the patient can become actively involved in working on his behalf, it augurs well for the future therapeutic alliance. We shall continuously stress the patient’s capacity and willingness to work in the therapeutic partnership. (98)

³¹ Like in earlier examples, the language used here suggests an analogy between this practice and the so-called war against mental illness.

Thus, not only is the patient's interest in self-analysis encouraged, it is considered a predictor of the success of the treatment in the "therapeutic partnership" (ibid.).

In this section I have contrasted several key aspects of Freudian psychoanalysis with changes made to its theory and practice by popular trends in postwar American psychotherapy. I have argued that through these adjustments—by shifting focus away from the unconscious and making the ego central to the theory and treatment, by "scientifically" refocusing the field on cause, and by actively encouraging self-analysis—the American public was being taught to put faith in narrative logic for understanding themselves and healing psychological issues. My intention has not been to show that Freudian psychoanalysis eschews narrative meaning-making totally, or to defend its methods as a preferable treatment of psychological illness. Insofar as Freudian psychoanalytic theory and practice place faith in the therapeutic nature of the interpretation of the self (albeit through less narratively-determined frameworks) it is also critiqued to an extent by the novels in this study. I wanted instead to clear up what can appear to be an inconsistency in the analysis: that the target of the novels' critique of the normalizing narrative therapy of ego and pop psychology is often misnamed Freudian psychoanalysis.³² But more importantly, I have aimed to demonstrate that through their experiences with clinical practice and mass media, often erroneously under the name of "Freudianism," Americans in the postwar era were receiving the message that undergoing psychotherapy could aid them in becoming better American citizens: more "well-adjusted" and "free"—*from* the "tyranny" of psychological illness, and *to* pursue personal "happiness" in social terms. I argued, ultimately, that the domestic practice of this psychotherapy had come to rely more and more on the narrative form and normative notions of character development for its interpretive work and treatment. It did so by proposing that treatment should be carried out through a narrative model of normal developmental psychology: the self-analytic mystery of the therapeutic narrative which had a specific teleology (mature mental health and happiness) and which ideally led the patient back onto the scripted path of mental health.

The Blancks claim that the patient's attainment of "identity" occurred concurrently with their alignment with a more normal psychological development. I suggest that as the adaptation of the individual to society was central to ego psychology there was also a risk that the "shap[ing] up" (Blanck 98) of the patient could take on the form of normative scripts of action and behavior—models of socially deemed psychologically healthy, happy and successful lives. I do not suggest that therapists intentionally applied broader

³² This is noticeably the case in the analysis of *The Bell Jar* and *Invisible Man*, though all of the novels evince their contemporaneous society's blurring of Freudian theory and popular psychological practice.

life scripts in practice (though it is clear that scripted stereotypes of sexual behavior were encouraged) (Blanck 100, 112). What I argue is that through both clinical and popular conceptions of psychoanalytic therapy, the American public was being encouraged to heal ostensible psychological problems through the practice of therapeutic narration, and that this “talking cure” had taken on the form and interpretive qualities of narratives of development and closure to an unprecedented degree. Through this prescription of narrative meaning-making for the self, identities, that is, narrative identities were thus formed—many, as the Blancks suggest, “for the first time” (141). Thus, the celebrated method of achieving mental health and happiness in the early postwar period is itself the paradigm socio-cultural script of psychological development and narrational action: diagnostic plotting first reveals the mystery of cause in the patient’s “life history” (98) then points the direction for how the ego character must understand themselves in the past and behave in the future by exercising control of internal forces and adapting to outer pressures. Thus primed by this controlling script, my contention is that Americans were made more receptive to the idea of formulating themselves according to broader scripts of gender-, class- and ethno-specific actions that defined precisely what a person’s success and happiness could be during the era. They were at risk, I hold, of becoming Todorovian “narrative men” in the age of psychology.

CHAPTER TWO

“As by a magical thread”: Eluding the Scripted Self in *The Bell Jar*

That our personal stories are profoundly conditioned by our cultural worlds goes without saying at this point. How they are so conditioned is not nearly so straightforward.

(Mark Freeman)³³

In both her private journals and her published writing Sylvia Plath shows an awareness of the power of narrative to affect the interpretation of a life, and equally, the importance of harnessing this power for oneself. “How, by the way, does mother understand my committing suicide?” she ponders in her journal in 1958—“As a result of not writing, no doubt. I felt I could not write because she would appropriate it. Is that all?” (448). In the same passage she suggests that her writing might be a “substitute for [herself],” but that it is “much more” too: “a way of ordering and reordering the chaos of experience” (ibid.).³⁴ As Susan Van Dyne has emphasized, Plath’s habits of self-representation imply that she “regarded her life as if it were a text she could invent and rewrite” (5). Plath’s narrative-based understanding of her life and self are significant to note insofar as they reflect, I suggest, a similar problematic that she engages with in *The Bell Jar*.

Over the years, scholars have become rightly adamant that *The Bell Jar* should not be read as the thinly disguised memoir many of its first critics mistook it for. Many take the time to point out the obvious irony with which the author intended the book to be read and her authorial distance from the work. Indeed, Plath did not intend the reader to take Esther’s opinions at face value, and certainly not as her own. In a letter Plath sent to her British publisher which considered changes in the text to ensure against liable, Plath writes that, while the character of Mrs. Greenwood is based on her mother, Esther is portrayed as clearly unjustified at times in her negative representa-

³³ Quoted from Freeman’s “From Substance to Story: Narrative, Identity, and the Reconstruction of the Self” in *Narrative and Identity: Studies in Autobiography, Self and Culture*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Co. (2001), p. 287.

³⁴ In *The Unabridged Journals of Sylvia Plath*; see also 436, 447, 449.

tion of Mrs. Greenwood.³⁵ Plath also reportedly told her mother that in the novel she wanted to “show how isolated a person feels when he is suffering a breakdown” and thus tried to depict her “world and the people in it as seen through the distorting lens of a bell jar.”³⁶

What has been less closely studied, though scholars have often remarked upon it, is the ironic interpretation evinced by the narrator vis-à-vis the thoughts and actions of her narrated character—specifically, as this reading emphasizes, in light of the therapeutic expectations associated with narrative meaning-making during the novel’s period of production.³⁷ These levels of interpretation can admittedly be difficult, sometimes impossible, to unbraided. The narrator, the fictional constructor of the text, is of course ostensibly responsible for introducing most of the formal qualities of the narrative. But to better understand how the text critiques its contemporaneous society’s faith in the salutary effects of narrative self-analysis, we need to pay close attention to how the narrator focalizes her narration through the character and portrays how her nineteen-year-old self thought, felt and interpreted events at the time they took place.³⁸

The Bell Jar is the story that the protagonist Esther Greenwood relates of her psychological breakdown, suicide attempts and eventual treatment at a psychiatric center at the age of nineteen in 1953. It is told by Esther as narrator at least a year, or more probably several years, after the events take place. In the first two sections of this chapter, I will contextualize Plath’s novel regarding its period of production and discuss the ways in which the novel suggests that scripts affect and have affected, the therapeutic narration of the protagonist. I argue that these scripts are represented by two gendered, rag-to-riches plots in the novel: the female version is based on the Cinderella

³⁵ Typed Letter to James Michie, her editor at the British publishing house Heinemann, November 14th 1961 (letter held in the “Correspondence” folder at the Smith Collage Archive).

³⁶ From a “Biographical Note” noted in Linda Wagner-Martin’s *Sylvia Plath: The Critical Heritage* (1988), p. 107. Plath also sums up in a progress report that by Chapter 10: “the cracks in [Esther’s] nature . . . widen and gape alarmingly. More and more, her warped view of the world around---her own vacuous domestic life, and that of her neighbors---seems the one right way of looking at things,”—which suggests that there are other “un-warped” ways of understanding what is going on around her (Typed letter from May 1962, to the Eugene F. Saxton Memorial Trust held in the “Correspondence” folder at the Smith Collage Archive).

³⁷ See Perloff, Wagner-Martin and Gill.

³⁸ These portrayals are generally signaled through the use of the past tense and exact signals of the time in the past when the character had the thought are often implied or included. For example: “I *thought* it was a lovely story, especially the part about the fig tree in winter under the snow and then the fig tree in spring with all the green fruit. I *felt* sorry when I came to the last page. I *wanted* to crawl in between those black lines of print the way you crawl through a fence, and go to sleep under that beautiful big green fig tree. It *seemed* to me Buddy Willard and I were like that Jewish man and that nun” [emphasis added] (63). To be sure, the reader cannot be certain that the narrator is not misrepresenting her past experience, and it is inevitable that she colors it—relating her story retrospectively, she must necessarily select and edit her material. But, as I hope to show, careful attention to how these differently focalized interpretive agents create meaning in narrative can highlight and clarify aspects of the text’s ambivalence towards narrativized representations and interpretations of lives and selves.

fairytale, while the male version follows a Horatio Alger theme—what I call the “Ragged Dick” script after Alger’s original protagonist. I hold that by attending to how Esther portrays herself as a character and actor, formulating her life narrative according to these gendered scripts—through differentiation or alignment—the novel brings to our attention the potentially adverse aspects of Esther’s negotiation of her self within and against these narrative models. I argue, moreover, that through a re-interpretation of her life and suicide the narrator portrays her character struggling to define herself as something more than an a-psychological actor. I show how the narrator is able to critically evaluate and represent the narrativized view through which she formulated her identity at nineteen and how that identity was informed by scripts of normative health and happiness: thematically by the myths of upward mobility, and formally by the talking cure practices of popular psychoanalytic diagnosis and treatment. In Section Three, I will discuss the re-interpretation and re-scripting of Esther’s story at the authorial level of interpretation. Specifically, I will show how at this level, Esther’s suicide attempt is reinterpreted through another contemporaneously popular script: the Electra complex of popular psychoanalytic theory. The final section of the chapter will study how, through the narrator, the text explores the possibility of making narrative representations of lives and selves less socially-determined or therapeutically teleological through novelistic form. That is, I consider how the narrator investigates what opportunity there may be to rewrite the story of her breakdown and represent aspects of her fugitive self in the form of a novel. Throughout the chapter, I aim to show that careful attention to the three narrative levels (of the character, the narrator, and the authorial agent) and close readings of key passages, can reveal a great deal about how these different interpretive agents explore the creation of identity, particularly within therapeutic narration, with and against the socio-cultural scripts of the era. In this way, I posit that *The Bell Jar* as a whole examines the viability of the early postwar societal assumption that a teleological pursuit of personal happiness could be reached through the construction of a narrative identity modeled on life scripts from both popular psychoanalytic theory and popular culture.

Section One: Narrative Identity and Socio-cultural Scripts

As explained in the Introduction to this study, while life narration can be helpful in creating a sense of order in human lives, there are certain risks inherent to the therapeutic application of narrative means of interpretation. Certainly, the degree to which individuals’ unique life narratives and narrative identities are influenced by the scripts available to them—and the impli-

cations of this narrative modeling—remains underappreciated in contemporary society.³⁹ And while scholars such as Jerome Bruner stress that narrative identities are clearly affected by the life scripts they are based on, researchers like Roger Shank, Paul John Eakin, and Mark Freeman have taken this point even further. Namely, they argue that scripts can influence not only personal life narrations of the past, but actions and interpretations in present, lived moments—as well as those in the future. I will return to these theories, but first, I will contextualize this problematic in *The Bell Jar*.

Bruner has also suggested that by examining scripts one can learn much about the larger construction of an individual's culture.⁴⁰ Plath scholars could not agree more. *The Bell Jar* has been thoroughly historicized and politicized in light of the repercussions of the limitations imposed by 1950s American society on women.⁴¹ As the novel itself aptly displays, being a supportive wife and a good mother was the scripted character role *par excellence* for American women of the era. According to this standard script, if a woman channeled her creativity into the domestic arts of cooking, cleaning and crafting her home into a nourishing environment for her family, she could consider herself successful. As Betty Friedan famously wrote in 1963, in the fifteen years following WWII in the media for and about women, experts told them that “their role was to seek fulfillment as wives and mothers” (13). “Over and over,” Friedan continues, “women heard in voices of tradition and of Freudian sophistication that they could desire no greater destiny than to glory in their own femininity” (ibid.), and thus the “mystique of feminine fulfillment became the cherished and self-perpetuating core of contemporary American culture” (16). As I will argue in more detail shortly, this preeminent script for female social success also incorporates and anticipates the rags-to-riches theme of a Cinderella story for Esther as a young woman of lower-middle class: the dream of so-called marrying up in class to economic security.⁴² However, Esther herself aspires to many different futures, as suggested in an oft-quoted passage in which she likens her choices to the figs on a tree: “I saw my life branching out before me like the green fig tree in the story. From the tip of every branch, like a fat purple fig, a wonderful future

³⁹ See also Bruner's “Life as Narrative” in *Social Research* 71.3 (2004), pages 691-710.

⁴⁰ See also Bruner's “Self-Making and World-Making” in *Narrative and Identity: Studies in Autobiography, Self and Culture* (2001), pages 25-37.

⁴¹ See, for example, Marjorie G. Perloff's “A Ritual for Being Born Twice”: Sylvia Plath's “The Bell Jar” (1972), Pat McPherson's *Reflecting on The Bell Jar* (1992), Linda Wagner-Martin's *The Bell Jar: A Novel of the Fifties* (1992), Jo Gill's “Introduction” in *The Cambridge Introduction to Sylvia Plath* (2008), Robin Peel's *Writing Back* (2004), and Luke Ferretter's study, *Sylvia Plath's Fiction: A Critical Study* (2010). Ferretter's recent study is the first detailed study of all of Plath's fiction including some seventy short stories, *The Bell Jar* and two unfinished novels; it further contextualizes Plath's fiction by situating the novel within its literary, geographical, political and societal settings.

⁴² Disney's film *Cinderella*, the box-office smash hit released in 1950 and re-released in 1957, was a cinematic fairy-tale version of the rags-to-riches motif during this period.

beckoned and winked” (88). Not surprisingly, the first “fig” Esther sees represents domestic feminine fulfillment: “a husband and a happy home and children” (ibid.). This option is followed by Esther’s other aspirations, such as becoming “a famous poet . . . a brilliant professor . . . Ee Gee, the amazing editor,” as well as a world-traveler, the mistress of “a pack of other lovers with queer names and offbeat professions,” and an “Olympic lady crew champion”—amongst many other “figs” she cannot yet picture clearly (ibid.).

However, it is the Horatio Alger script, based on the character of Ragged Dick (a street urchin boot black on the streets of New York), rather than that of Cinderella which resembles more closely the rags-to-riches script with which Esther associates. At the beginning of the novel, Esther is employed for the month of June as the student managing editor of a popular woman’s magazine, *Ladies Day*, in New York City. While Esther admits that she feels herself drawn “like a magnet” to the “whole life of marvelous, elaborate decadence” that Doreen (her new friend amongst the student magazine editors) comes from, she remains ambivalent about its suitability to herself (5). Compared to the majority of girls guest-editing at the magazine and living at the hotel where Esther stays in New York, she feels that her relative lack of money limits her opportunities in life (4). Though she comes from an educated, recently emigrated European background, her family’s economic situation has become severely compromised since the death of her father. Her mother “scrimped” to provide her with a lower-middle-class upbringing in the house they shared with Esther’s grandparents (86). Esther notes that while they always had enough to eat at home, the way her grandmother quoted the cost of meat made her feel she was “eating pennies instead of Sunday roast” (29). Conversely, at a banquet in New York, Esther reports feeling “dizzy” at the abundance of decadent food before her (ibid.). She is sickeningly jealous of the daughters of wealthy parents who sun-tan on the roof of her hotel, who are “simply hanging around in New York waiting to get married to some career man or other” (4). Yet, while she covets their opportunities for life experience, such as world travel, she dislikes their self-described boredom with their foreseeable futures (ibid.). And while she is impressed to hear that the society girls at Doreen’s college are so rich and fashion conscious that they have “pocketbook covers made out of the same material as their dresses, so each time they change[] their clothes they [have] a matching pocketbook” (5), Esther herself, even at the height of her success in New York, displays her necessary frugality and practicality by buying herself a single pair of black, patent leather shoes with a matching belt and pocket-book to pair with *every* dress she owns. These shoes, in fact, even metaphorically connect her character more closely to Ragged Dick the boot blacker than to Cinderella—not only due to their color and relative practicality (they are, after all, no delicate glass slippers) but because they reappear throughout the novel as a metonymic symbol of Esther during all her misad-

ventures to (ful)fill these practical, professional shoes. And at the end of her narrative, she identifies with them strongly, as “cracked, but polished” as she prepares to re-enter society after her psychiatric treatment (284).

In addition to her association with humble beginnings, Esther clearly wishes to provide for her own future rather than marrying-up with a prince-like character. Esther’s sometime medical student boyfriend Buddy is such a potential match, and his mother, Mrs. Willard, symbolizes the archetype of early postwar femininity which Esther abhors: educated and yet “brain-washed . . . numb as a slave in some private, totalitarian state” (98). On imagining the details of the life of a suburban housewife, Esther states:

This seemed a dreary and wasted life for a girl with fifteen years of straight A’s, but I knew that’s what marriage was like, because cook and clean and wash was just what Buddy Willard’s mother did from morning till night, and she was the wife of a university professor and had been a private school teacher herself. (97)

In reaction to Mrs. Willard’s reported truisms of the feminine ideal—“‘What a man wants is a mate and what a woman wants is infinite security,’” and that a man is “an arrow into the future” and a woman “the place the arrow shoots off from” (81)—Esther makes evident her intention to follow an alternative script:

That’s one of the reasons I never wanted to get married. The last thing I wanted was infinite security and to be the place an arrow shoots off from. I wanted change and excitement and to shoot off in all directions myself, like the colored arrows from a Fourth of July rocket. (95)

And Esther makes it clear that no career in the shadow of a man will fulfill her dreams. While Esther’s mother encourages her to learn shorthand in order to secure a good job after college and be “in demand among all the up-and-coming young men,” to transcribe their “thrilling letters” (87), Esther, again, isolates her goal to pioneer her own professional success: “The trouble was, I hated the idea of serving men in any way. I wanted to dictate my own thrilling letters” (ibid.). In this way, Esther demonstrates that she dreams of a personal and professional success that is more congruent with the autonomy of the Ragged Dick script.

Contextualization within 1950s era mental health diagnosis practices can explain Esther’s evident anxiety over her choice of life scripts. The wife/mother script was not, in fact, simply preferable—veering from it could have real, practical consequences. It promised societally deemed psychological normality, acceptance and success to women who modeled their life after it. As explained in the Introduction, postwar psychoanalytic theory and practice were driven by norms of psychological health which promoted scripted developmental behavior and narrative identities. In line with this

finding, Ferretter, in his study of Plath's fiction, asserts that due to the skewed norms of adult behavior in psychoanalytic diagnoses, to be a woman at this time was to be "on the verge of mental illness" in the first place (130): "In order to be considered mentally healthy in the 1950s, a woman needed wholeheartedly to embrace—or at least to tell her doctors that she did—the 'feminine' role of housewife and mother" (131). Indeed, as Carol Warren in *Madwives: Schizophrenic Woman in the 1950s* also makes clear, "[t]he mental hospital of the fifties quite explicitly used the marital relationship and the housewife role as criteria for mental health assessments" (106). Warren's data was collected from case histories and interviews conducted between 1957 and 1961 from seventeen women who were diagnosed as schizophrenic. On their return home from the hospital, their mental health was apparently judged to an unsettling degree by their ability to perform housework efficiently (171).

In fact, entering any profession, even if one became very successful at it, carried with it the threat of being labeled abnormal. As Friedan states, in the early postwar era women themselves were "taught to pity the neurotic, unfeminine, unhappy women who wanted to be poets or physicists or presidents," and that "truly feminine women" did not want the careers, higher education or political rights that first-wave feminism had fought for (13). And if a woman felt troubled or unhappy at this time, "she knew that something must be wrong with her marriage, or with herself" (Friedan 17). Certainly, the opinions of a panel of psychiatrists who took part in an article on marriage in the 1956 *Life* magazine Special issue on "The American Woman," concluded that feminism was responsible for producing a contemporary expression of sexual ambiguity called the "career woman" (Coughlin 110). Dr. John Cotton explicitly connects being a "career woman" with mental illness: according to this specialist, the "New York career woman syndrome" explains why there are so many psychiatrists in New York City (*ibid.*). Thus, during the early postwar period, adjustment to a scripted feminine role was an important measure of female mental health and psychiatric progress.

In the novel, the entanglement of gendered success scripts and therapeutic scripts of psychological normality become apparent at the point where Esther discusses her choice anxiety. Choosing any one of the professions Esther aspires to means relinquishing her other choices (Esther's aforementioned "figs"), as well as her society's confidence in her mental normality. So although Esther appears to have many choices, she is actually limited to what she terms two "mutually exclusive" life paths (109). As we have seen, Esther feels the narrative pull to follow the societal rags-to-riches scripts very keenly—to marry-up with a "prince" towards the roles of wife and mother, as well as to use her industry and creativity towards a career in which she can achieve her own fame and fortune. Vitaly, in the novel Esther's latent desire for two "mutually exclusive" futures is used by Buddy to diagnose her as "neurotic" (*ibid.*). What follows is a more detailed explana-

tion of these mutually exclusive socio-cultural scripts which the character is portrayed as using to make sense of her life before her break down: the *Cinderella* and the *Ragged Dick* scripts.

Negotiating Scripts

When Dick was dressed in his new attire, with his face and hands clean, and his hair brushed, it was difficult to imagine that he was the same boy. He now looked quite handsome, and might readily have been taken for a young gentleman . . . “Look at yourself,” said Frank, leading him before the mirror. “By gracious!” said Dick, staring back in astonishment, “that isn’t me, is it?” “Don’t you know yourself?” asked Frank, smiling. “It reminds me of Cinderella, [...] when she was changed into a fairy princess...” (*Ragged Dick* 24)

Accurately or not, since the 1867 serial publication of Horatio Alger Jr.’s *Ragged Dick: Or, Street Life in New York with the Boot Blacks*, Alger’s name has been synonymous with the rags-to-riches theme and capitalist ideology. “We still think of him as an ‘apostle of the self-made man,’ a true believer in ‘pluck and luck,’ ‘rags to riches,’ bound to rise,” Alan Trachtenberg explains, even as readers have recognized that this is a misrepresentation of the message behind *Ragged Dick* and the over one-hundred similarly-themed books which followed it (vi). The stories themselves might be better described as “rags to respectability” as they depict America as a meritocracy, where all (men) have a fair opportunity to develop their merits. That is, with determination and hard work (“pluck”) to rise up the social ladder, and if they display sufficiently honorable qualities (such as honesty, courage, respect for those of higher class) they might be worthy of receiving some “luck” from their superiors or providence. However, Alger’s name became indelibly linked to the myth that all American citizens have an equal opportunity to pursue personal happiness in the form of wealth and fame. The influence of this Algeresque script was by no means limited to the early postwar period; its ideals blossomed during the Gilded Age of the late nineteenth century and have continued to influence the American public into the present. However, it held a particularly powerful sway on the American imagination and citizens’ ambitions during this time. The post-WWII economic boom of the 1950s and early 1960s led average Americans to be confidently optimistic about their ability to rise financially and socially (Tindall 902). The middle-class swelled, as did affordable private housing complexes in the suburbs. As described in the Introduction, consumerism and advertising proliferated, and for many, luxuries of the past, such as cars, home entertainment, and washing machines, became standard household amenities. Though the reality was for many, just as in Alger’s time, rather closer to rags-to-respectability than riches, the relative achievement of so much wealth so quickly, regardless of its source, convinced many that attaining happiness

through upward mobility in America really was possible for anyone who was just willing to work hard enough for it. But while this script does not take into account the most obvious of societal inequalities amongst its citizens as explanations for not succeeding or reaching the scripted ending, it makes citizens fully responsible for progressing actively up the social ladder. While it is through pluck *and* luck that the person should succeed, the common misconception is that luck is somehow automatically rewarded to those who remain honest and courageous in their efforts to work upward. The most detrimental part of believing in the viability of this life script is that it can become, thus, a personal failure if one does not attain this goal.

This reaction is both unfair and potentially damaging. Elaborating from Todorov's theorization of narrative men in the Introduction, I posit that the subjectivity represented in a narrative of this kind becomes an a-psychological entity, their meaning determined by the actions of the script. That is, within the simple form of socio-cultural scripts, people viewing the narrative representations of themselves can come to believe that the meaning of their self (and not only their societally-defined narrative identity) results from the meaning—the interpretation—of their actions.⁴³

In Esther's narration, the rags-to-riches theme is ubiquitous. The story action of *The Bell Jar* begins in the summer of 1953: Esther is nineteen and has reached a new pinnacle of accomplishment through her prize-winning writing skills—the previously-mentioned summer employment as the student editor of the *Ladies Day* magazine in New York. "Look what can happen in this country," Esther imagines "everybody" thinking about her success—"A girl lives in some out-of-the-way town for nineteen years, so poor she can't afford a magazine, and then she gets a scholarship to college and wins a prize here and a prize there and ends up steering New York like her own private car" (3). But despite this success, Esther admits that she does not feel in control of her destiny—she "wasn't steering anything, not even [herself]" (ibid.). Indeed, the character sees her life era of winning scholarships and prizes now "coming to an end" (88). Esther has based her identity as successful achiever up until this point on excelling in school and winning awards. She poignantly describes the approaching "death" of this prosperous identity that she anticipates after she leaves New York:

I felt like a racehorse in a world without racetracks or a champion college footballer suddenly confronted by Wall Street and a business suit, his days of glory shrunk to a little gold cup on his mantel with a date engraved on it like the date on a tombstone. (88)

⁴³ As explained in the Introduction, this view is supported by Ricoeur's theories of narrative identity, and his attempts to ethically understand life and self through an Aristotelian basis. That is, through valuing the employment of action in narrative over other human experience.

Significantly, the character describes her situation here in terms of predominantly male champions. This indicates that Esther has conceived of herself following a more traditionally male life script towards a successful future.

During her experience in New York, however, she is confronted in an equally powerful manner by the female rags-to-riches script. In stark contrast to the male script that Esther has thus far identified with, the narrator portrays her character as feeling scripted into the Cinderella role. The consequences of this incongruity are contrasted in the following quotation early in the novel of her experience in New York:

I was supposed to be having the time of my life. I was supposed to be the envy of thousands of other college girls just like me all over America who wanted nothing more than to be tripping about in those same size-seven patent leather shoes I'd bought in Bloomingdale's [...]. And when my picture came out in the magazine the twelve of us were working on—drinking martinis in a skimpy, imitation silver-lamé bodice stuck on to a big, fat cloud of white tulle, on some Starlight Roof, in the company of several anonymous young men with all-American bone structures hired or loaned for the occasion—everybody would think I must be having a real whirl. (2)

Here is the Cinderella plot writ small: the lucky girl who gets picked out of thousands to attend the ball in a fancy dress with a host of princes—in the glass slippers that every woman envies. However, here we also get the impression that this is somewhat of a fantasy hybrid of traditionally female/male scripts; the magazine is, of course, also unrealistically promoting its college interns as having-it-all—bright futures both career-wise and family-wise. But through Esther's trenchant critique of the scene, mapped onto her own aspirations, it is clear that she feels predominantly scripted by societal notions of traditional female success in the pursuit of happiness. Esther depicts her narrated character's Cinderella-situation as false: on closer inspection, like at the stroke of midnight, the happy ending disappears. The fancy ball in New York, her ridiculous fairy-tale gown with the "imitation silver-lamé bodice," and the strong-jawed "all-American" hired-gun princes are all simply part of a staged publicity shot for the woman's magazine intended to perpetuate this myth of having-it-all.⁴⁴

Despite the excitement of her month in New York—what should be the realization of her rags-to-riches story as she has described it—Esther becomes despondent when she comes to the sudden realization that she is behaving like a mindless function of society and does not feel in control of her future. Outward appearances notwithstanding, Esther admits that she is not "steering anything, not even [herself]," she simply "bump[s] from [her] hotel

⁴⁴ In reality, Jay Cee, the magazine's editor and the example in the novel of a very successful career woman, is married but has no children. Doreen is outspoken in her lack of respect for Jay Cee because she judges her as unfeminine: "ugly as sin" and not sexually attractive to her husband (6).

to work and to parties and from parties to [her] hotel and back to work like a numb trolleybus” (3). And despite societal expectations of how she “should” feel, Esther feels strangely unresponsive and “very still and very empty, the way the eye of a tornado must feel, moving dully along in the middle of the surrounding hullabaloo” (ibid.). In this way, the character’s sudden realization that society has a different idea of what form her success should take than the life script she believes she is living, is portrayed as initiating her disillusionment and ensuing depression.

Certainly, she has come to understand that the societally scripted and endorsed ending of the rags-to-riches story awaiting her is marriage into a better life than her humble background could have foretold. However, the success Esther herself has been working towards is more similar to a male Ragged Dick hero, who is independently able to acquire a profession through which he will attain respectability and a standard of life far excelling his modest start. And to be clear, Esther appears not only disturbed by the limitations her society places on her through gendered success scripts of wealth and, I posit, mental health, it is also the sheer hypocrisy of societal pretense that any other script—Algeresque or hybrid—would really be valued as much as a strict adherence to the Cinderella script which maddens Esther.⁴⁵ Though all of the student guest editors, like herself, had won their summer jobs at the fashion magazine by their wits, Esther describes the opportunity to further their careers as secondary to the promotion of their societal value granted due to feminine beauty. These career-promoting “chances” are sandwiched uncomfortably between mention of the interns’ opportunities to improve their distinctly feminine value: they are offered “piles and piles of free bonuses, like ballet tickets and passes to fashion shows and hair styling appointments at an exclusive salon and chances to meet successful people of [their] field of desire and advice about what to do with [their] particular complexions” (3). The narrator notes immediately after, in one of the few comments she makes concerning her own present opinions and situation, that she still has the free make-up kit she was given for her “particular complexion” though it appears to have been a source of unease to her. She reports that for a long time after she could not bear the sight of the kit and other promotional gifts that she was given in New York (ibid.). The reader learns, thus, that the items which promote Esther’s sense of worth primarily in relation to outer beauty were anxiety-producing to the degree that they had to be hidden away until Esther felt “all right again” (4). At that time, she “brought them out,” and she reports still having them “around the house” to use and let her baby play with (ibid.). In contrast, now in the present, when she ap-

⁴⁵ Betty Friedan’s description of the “role crisis” of woman in the postwar era—being raised “feeling free and equal to boys” only to find that on reaching adulthood they must undergo “feminine adjustment” (through which they sacrifice their individual mature, identity)—is uncannily similar to the problematic explored here in *The Bell Jar* (67).

pears to follow her own, more modest path towards having-it-all (she is creating a novel-like narration of her past experiences at the same time as she has a baby, lives in a house and is, quite possibly, married) she appears to feel sufficiently in control of herself and her life story to allow these subtle reminders of her society's version of successful narrative identities to co-exist in her world without fear that they will plot (against) her.

Section Two: Esther's Narrativized Conceptions of Life and Identity

The Bell Jar thus highlights Esther's articulation of her narrative identity through the gendered rags-to-riches scripts. Up to this point, one might be tempted to read the character's alignment with the male counterpart of this success-script as emancipatory—as signaling a positive step forward for the character, as well as a growing flexibility of scripts in the society she represents. However, the novel's problematization of these scripts is even more nuanced than this. It complicates, I suggest, more generally the teleological socio-cultural scripts that define too narrowly what the pursuit of happiness and the acquisition of success mean for the individual.

Esther's quotidian understanding of life and identity as narratively formulated and psychologically healed are portrayed in the text in order to show how susceptible she was (as I argued in the last chapter, postwar Americans were) to the influence of scripts in their formulations of psychologically normative therapeutic narrations. Plath's own impression appears to have been that Esther relies on the fantasy that her future success is scripted, destined, and that the character has a "desperate" need to order the ongoing events of her life in a way that creates a definitive meaning. Summarizing the ninth chapter Plath states:

[Esther] is unable to connect with her destiny, or even imagine it—that "Hitch Your Wagon To A Star" destiny of [a] magazine feature. She loses herself in dreams of being a writer, becoming famous overnight [...]. She goes out on a blind date with Marco, a wealthy Peruvian. She is desperate to extract some *final meaning* from this encounter, which ends up in a serio-comic battle over sex and a diamond on the dark lawn of a fashionable country club... (emphasis added)⁴⁶

Plath apparently wanted to portray Esther as emotionally troubled by the fact that her future success and the ending to her narrativized version of her life

⁴⁶ When Plath wrote this progress report in a letter to the Eugene F. Saxton Memorial Trust in May of 1962 she was in a good position to remark on her interpretation of the novel as her journal entries indicate that the full manuscript had, actually, already been completed (Typed letter held in the "Correspondence" folder at the Smith Collage Archive).

is not *actually* scripted and may not play out as she has expected. Esther is thus described as naively absorbing her society's faith in the explanatory capacity of narrative form.

Another instance where the novel addresses Esther's attempt to understand her own situation through narrative form involves the fig tree short story that the character reads in her copy of *The Thirty Best Short Stories of the Year*. As previously explained, one way in which the character is described as using the story to understand her life is as a symbol of the paralysis she experiences at having to choose between the life scripts before her. But at another point in the novel, the character is shown recycling the story's meaning. Esther sums up the plot of the source story thus:

This fig grew on a green lawn between the house of a Jewish man and a convent, and the Jewish man and a beautiful dark nun kept meeting at the tree to pick the ripe figs, until one day they saw an egg hatching in a bird's nest on a branch of the tree, and as they watched the little bird peck its way out of the egg, they touched the backs of their hands together, and then the nun didn't come out to pick figs with the Jewish man any more but a mean-faced Catholic kitchen maid came to pick them instead and counted up the figs the man picked after they were both through to be sure he hadn't picked any more than she had, and the man was furious. (62)

After fantasizing of escaping into the story world of the tale, the narrator reports that she, as character, immediately uses the same source story as a script through which she tries to narratively interpret another key issue: her relationship with her boyfriend, Buddy:

It seemed to me Buddy Willard and I were like that Jewish man and that nun, although of course we weren't Jewish or Catholic but Unitarian. We had met together under our own imaginary fig tree, and what we had seen wasn't a bird coming out of an egg but a baby coming out of a woman, and then something awful happened and we went our separate ways. (63)

Here, even before we witness details from the same story reinterpreted to hold an alternative meaning by the character (the tree of future choices), the character is described as distorting the more obvious meaning of the fig tree story in order to use it to make sense of her own life. From the short synopsis the narrator gives us, the reader can see that the fig tree story is at core Romeo and Juliet-themed, a story of true love unrequited due to greater (here religious) commitments. Despite the superficial similarity of the characters (the story includes a male and a female character who were, or thought they were, in love and the entrance of a new life into the world) the stories are not thematically similar enough for the character's rather heavy-handed manipulation of it to go unnoticed. The character presents this distortion as natural—almost as though she feels she has the right to ignore the thematic integrity of the story and insinuate her own meaning into it. Considered in the

terms of how Barthes has theorized meaning-making in plot and action-driven stories vs. modern psychological novels, it is as though the narrator shows her character, like her contemporaneous society, believing she can treat a modern short-story like an a-psychological fairy tale script.⁴⁷ That is, because the meaning of such a narration is determined by the action taken by the characters and not derived from the psychology of the characters themselves, it makes little difference to the interpretation of the story if two other characters (who are simply *functions* of the story's action) are substituted in. Through the narrator's portrayal, the character's structuralist interpretation of the fig tree story shows the reader how eagerly and, for the character, how uncritically she has been taught to use external narratives to interpret her life.

And the narrator not only aims to present her character's need to elicit a narrative interpretation of her past through explanatory scripts: there are also examples of Esther describing her younger self anticipating her future as though she is living within an ongoing, scripted story. Life writing scholar Paul John Eakin has challenged the idea that the identity created in narrative is simply a retrospective activity (as we saw in the Introduction that Shank's AI research also suggested). In *Living Autobiographically*, Eakin emphasizes that while it is "always tempting to think that living a life would come before making a life story," the art of autobiography is really "part of the fabric of our experience as we live it" (148). Eakin suggests that the ongoing process of life/self interpretation benefits from both ordering in the past and planning in the future: "[o]ur desires and goals have embedded in them plots or 'scenarios' for possible futures that motivate our recovery of the past" (6). In the novel, Esther routinely portrays herself as living narratively towards a scripted future, and as a result, she experiences a relentless series of disappointments when reality does not turn out like she had imagined it in the script. For example, when the "glamorous picture of a man who would love [her] passionately the minute he met [her]" turns out to offer her only a "duty tour of the UN and a post-UN sandwich!" (59-60), or when her own fantasy of giving birth, being "smiling and radiant . . . reaching out for my first little squirmy child and saying its name" is compared to a live birth she observes where the mother, on being told she has delivered a boy, simply "[does not] answer or raise her head" (75-76).

However, it is not until Esther narrates the specific circumstances surrounding her psychological breakdown that it becomes clear that her narratively-primed way of interpreting her life is not benign. The passage in which Esther is not accepted to a creative writing course after her stint in New York is central to her worsening psychological condition (133). After this, she resolves to spend her summer instead writing a novel, to reaffirm her talent (139). When the character feeds "the first, virgin sheet" into her

⁴⁷ The theorizations to which I refer come from Barthes' "An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives" (1966; English translation 1975).

typewriter to write the story of “[her]self, only in disguise,” she begins from “another, distanced mind” to imagine herself as an actor located in a kind of scripted play set: “I saw myself sitting on the breezeway, surrounded by two white clapboard walls, a mock orange bush and a clump of birches and a box hedge, small as a doll in a doll’s house” (140). The character, depicting herself as an actor, introduces yet another interpretive level into the text.⁴⁸ At first, the character feels great “tenderness” towards her character, Elaine, noting that there are “six letters in Esther, too,” which seems “a lucky thing” (ibid.). But after Esther writes two sentences, she just sits for an hour because she cannot imagine a future for Elaine. While she tries “to think what would come next,” she reports that in her mind Elaine, the “barefoot doll,” apparently empty of an individual psychology, just “sat and stared into space as well” (140-141). Moreover, a week later, when Esther begins contemplating suicide, this construction of herself enables her to show a startling lack of empathy towards her a-psychological character:

It would take two motions. One wrist, then the other wrist. Three motions, if you counted changing the razor from hand to hand. Then I would step into the tub and lie down. I moved in front of the medicine cabinet. If I looked in the mirror while I did it, *it would be like watching somebody else, in a book or a play*. But *the person in the mirror* was paralyzed and too stupid to do a thing. (173, emphasis added)

The ease with which the character is portrayed describing her potentially fatal actions and thinking of herself as a kind of fictional character in “a book or a play” suggests a self-alienation which, as we have seen from the last examples, gives Esther a kind of two-edged sword perspective on herself and her situation. She can use this view to empathize with “the person in the mirror” (the narrational representation of herself in the story) or, conversely, to divorce herself from Elaine’s fate.

It is significant that this definitive change in the character’s perspective, from what one could think of as a positive application of self-distancing to a negative lack of empathy for oneself and one’s plight, takes place precisely during the scene where Esther (as character) sits down to write her novel in 1953. It is at this point that Esther portrays herself as understanding the failure of the Ragged Dick script according to which she has been living her

⁴⁸ The allusions to Henrik Ibsen’s early feminist play *A Doll’s House* (1879) here are notable. For example, in Nora’s speech in defense of self-determination to her husband Torvald in act three she states: “I believe that before all else I am a reasonable human being, just as you are—or at all events, that I must try to become one. I know quite well, Torvald, that most people would think you right, and that views of that kind are to be found in books; but I can no longer content myself with what most people say, or what is found in books. I must think over things for myself and get to understand them” (68). Nora also states to Torvald that she has only been engaging in mindless role-playing in their marriage: “I have been your doll-wife, just as at home I was father’s doll-child” (67).

life. While Esther has depicted herself imagining various future careers, the one she fantasizes about most often is that of a successful writer of poetry or fiction.⁴⁹ But when Esther apprehends that she may fail to live out this narrative ending, she begins considering drastic options. Through a different lens than the critique of interpretive narrative that I employ, in *Writing Back* (2002) Robin Peel contextualizes Plath's work regarding the contemporaneous American post WWII political environment. Peel argues that Plath's persistent focus on self-development and achievement (especially during her years as a student at Smith College, 1950-1955) reflects the dominant American ideology of the era (35). Plath, Peel holds, imbibed this need for achievement into her own self-conception so deeply that "success or death" became the rhetorical options to which this ideology was reduced (ibid.). Esther too portrays the effects of an analogous societal pressure to succeed and gain fame and fortune. The character imagines her choices in terms laden with superlatives: she dreams of being a "famous poet," "brilliant professor," and an "amazing editor" (88-89). And the narrator frames her character's impetus to attempt suicide in terms of her conviction that, due to developing mental illness, she will never be able to succeed at the career she wants most.⁵⁰ For example, in conjunction with her dreams of becoming a successful writer, we learn that Esther has applied to attend a summer-school fiction-writing course in Cambridge, Massachusetts with a famous writer. Knowing that her attendance is subject to his judgment of whether she is "good enough," Esther expects that her letter of acceptance will be awaiting her on her return from New York (119). When her mother tells her during the car ride home that she has not been accepted, Esther describes her disappointment in terms of physical pain and a threat to her life. She feels "the air punched out of [her] stomach," then states: "All through June the writing course stretched before me like a bright, safe bridge over the dull gulf of the summer. Now I saw it totter and dissolve, and a body in a white blouse and green skirt plummet into the gap" (133). Poignantly, the body she describes is wearing the same clothes as her character that very day.

⁴⁹ When Esther gets to meet "successful people in the field of [her] desire" in New York, they are all well-known writers (30). She imagines herself as a writer, often a very famous one (46, 88, 95, 117, 119-120, 140), and when the magazine fiction editor, Jay Cee, asks her what she will do after she graduates, she writes that she has always imagined that she would eventually become "a professor and write books of poems," or "write books of poems and be an editor of some sort" (36). She dreams that this future profession will bring her great wealth (46), fame (88), the attention of interesting men (95), the respect of important people in the business (119-120), as well as some sweet revenge (140). Thus, becoming a famous writer is for Esther the way to reach her "riches," the meaningful ending in her Algeresque life script.

⁵⁰ To be sure, Esther's suicidal urges can be explained in other ways, as we will see shortly, depending not least on which point in time and level of interpretation (during the depiction of the character's illness, or from the narrator's position of health, with perspective) that the interpretation of the suicide attempt comes from. Again, this reading is intended to show the narrator's portrayal of how the character in the present of her experience explains her suicidal urges.

In this way, as Esther's confidence in her abilities as a writer begins to falter in earnest, her scripted, Algeresque future becomes more uncertain. Describing the vacuous life of the suburbs about her—where the “soprano scream of [baby] carriage wheels punished [her] ear” (134)—she begins to have difficulty imagining a future beyond it and the housewife's life it represents. She sees no point in getting out of bed, because she has “nothing to look forward to” (137). When she attempts to pull herself together and write the novel of Elaine, as we have seen, she can envisage no future action for her character, and she depicts her simply “waiting for something to happen” (140). Disappointed at her attempts to reaffirm her talent in writing, she is again unable to visualize her future beyond her nineteenth year if it is not certain she will become the famous writer of her personal success script: “I saw the years of my life spaced along a road in the form of telephone poles, threaded together by wires. I counted one, two, three . . . nineteen telephone poles, and then the wires dangled into space, and try as I would, I couldn't see a single pole beyond the nineteenth” (143, original ellipsis). Hence, Esther portrays herself as unable to imagine a future for herself beyond her chosen script, and becomes evermore aware that she is developing mysterious psychological problems which she believes will prevent her from achieving success. As her identity is inexorably bound up with becoming a writer, it is her sudden inability to *physically* write that bothers her the “most of all” of her symptoms (152). Esther then begins contemplating suicide in the abstract. Describing her “little chorus of voices” (171) she frames her decision to act, to make “a start,” (175) in terms of concerns about the direction of her story. These voices taunt her, asking “[d]oesn't your work interest you, Esther?” and telling her “[y]ou know, Esther, you've got the perfect setup of a true neurotic,” and, repeatedly, “[y]ou'll never get anywhere like that” (ibid.).

Esther thus appears to have difficulty distinguishing her self from the identity she has created *of* herself in narrative. Almost immediately after these imaginary admonitions (originally uttered from the mouths of Buddy and Jay Cee), Esther appears to connect them with critique from her creative writing professor of a short story she once wrote. She then generates through these judgmental voices the message that she herself is a fiction who will never succeed: “Factitious! . . . Factitious, artificial, sham. You'll never get anywhere like that” (172). After this, Esther describes herself experiencing something akin to what psychologist Mark Freeman terms *narrative foreclosure*: the conviction that there is nothing left to do with one's life but live out some reified narrative ending. As Freeman explains in *Hindsight* (2010), when an individual believes that the story of their life or life work has effectively ended, this conviction can, in extreme circumstances, “lead to a kind of living death or even suicide, the presumption being that the future is a foregone conclusion, an inevitable reiteration of one's present suffering of paralysis” (125-126). Due to her inability to function physically—to sleep,

swallow, read and, notably, write—Esther becomes convinced that she is going mad. She reads popular drugstore paperbacks about abnormal psychology in which her symptoms “tallied with the most hopeless cases” (187). Here we find evidence that the “success or death” clause, which Peel argues informed the author’s self-conception, operates too in Esther’s life script. She decides she must put an end, not simply to her life in narrative, but to her *actual* life, in a way that she finds preferable to what she now anticipates will be her future. She states that her body, which has “all sorts of little tricks” to stay alive, would have to be “ambush[ed] . . . with whatever sense [she] had left, or it would trap [her] in its stupid cage for fifty years without any sense at all” (ibid.).

In this way, the novel anticipates Freeman’s concept of narrative foreclosure, through its exploration of the dangers related to how scripts can constrict an individual’s field of narrative expression—and the concomitant unproblematic alignment of narrative identity and the self too closely. Indeed, the novel suggests that one of the most pernicious aspect of living and interpreting oneself narratively, comes with this implicit notion that the ending can provide an individual with interpretive, even therapeutic, closure of the story, or, in this case, of a life. The character’s strict attitude towards her narratively interpreted life and identity suggests that if the story cannot end the way it has been scripted to, then she wishes to be the one to determine a new ending. The narrator depicts her character wanting to control the meaning of her story and interpret it in a manner that she prefers, rather than the one she now believes lies before her in an asylum. For this reason, she resolves to “end it in the proper way” (187). And because her character’s story has become inseparable from her being—because she thinks of her whole self as limited to the interpretation of her narrative identity—this decision results in her resolution to commit suicide.

With a clearer understanding of this vital discussion in the novel, one becomes aware of the character’s determination to control the interpretation of her narrative identity by managing the ending of her life story long before she contemplates suicide. The character engages in multiple symbolic deaths in an ongoing attempt to halt her wayward narrative and to start again from the beginning. For example, after a “holy” bath she is “as pure and sweet as a new baby” (22). She is “purged and holy and ready for a new life” (54) after a deep sleep following an accidental ptomaine-poisoning incident. And like a phoenix rising up from the “ashes” of her former self, shortly before leaving the city she throws the “gray scraps” of her New York wardrobe off the hotel roof (129). Thus, rather than simply “being born twice” (284) as she suggests at the end of her narration, Esther actually depicts herself experiencing several rebirths. Moreover, the character’s appreciation of her loss of consciousness through sleep, sickness—and even correctly administered ECT treatments—signals her relief at being able to begin her narrative again. She starts with a new and uncertain sense of identity but also, with a slate

wiped clean “like chalk on a blackboard,” as she puts it (250). By understanding her narrativized understanding of new beginnings in her life, we can better appreciate that, on finding herself alive after her suicide attempt, she is in the position to reevaluate her past and create a new future—a new narrative identity for herself. And it is also precisely at this point, during her treatment at a private psychiatric hospital that she is, at some level, introduced to another socio-cultural script through which to interpret her past: the Electra Complex of popular psychoanalytic theory.

Section Three: Re-scripting Psychoanalysis

In the first two sections of this chapter, I discussed the ways in which the narrator shows scripts influencing her character’s self-conception and representation. I also aimed to show how, as a product of the postwar period Esther represents herself as susceptible to this kind of particularly narrativized understanding of her life. In the second half of this chapter I will turn more specifically to the question of how the novel *qua* novel, through the more overtly interpretive processes of narration re-scripts the character’s story.⁵¹ I aim to show that postwar assumptions of the specifically therapeutic nature of life narration are, at both these levels, though in quite different ways, explored and problematized. I will begin by discussing how at the authorial level a pop-psychological narrative is introduced as a determining script through which to reinterpret the mystery of Esther’s suicide attempt.

Writing about Plath’s work in terms of psychoanalytic theory is complicated by the long, at times vexed, history that has grown around it in critical studies and biographies of the author. Much early criticism of Plath’s work and creative process was grounded in psychoanalytic thought that reduces her life and work to a kind of case study.⁵² “No other writer than Plath,”

⁵¹ That is, the interpretation that the narrator is able to make in her present time (the focalization through her), as opposed to the one she represents her naive narrated character of the past making, and that of the authorial agent.

⁵² See, for example, Jacqueline Rose’s discussion pertaining to this issue in *The Haunting of Sylvia Plath* (1991), especially in the chapter “She” (11-28) and her “Introduction” where Rose comments specifically on the challenge of studying the “psychic processes which [Plath] figures in her writing without turning them against her—without, therefore, turning her into a case” (4). Even in more recent scholarship which particularly addresses representations of psychotherapy in works of literature, Esther is diagnosed as lacking the “ego strength to assert her independence” (In Lilian Furst’s *Just Talk: Narratives of Psychotherapy* [1999], 134). In *The Talking Cure* (1985), Jeffery Berman suggests similarly that Esther’s therapy does not take place through the “agonizingly slow development of ego strength” as improvement in psychotherapy generally progresses (and how he reads Plath progressing in her journals), but through a “magical purgation and rebirth” which Berman finds curious (135). My own reading attempts to account for and make productive the “slip[s]” (148) which Berman reads into the novel’s complex use of narrative levels and lack of clear interpretation at the narratorial level (issues Berman calls “problematic” (141) at the narratorial level and “startling” (148) at the authorial level).

states Jacqueline Rose, “has been more clearly hystericised by the worst of a male literary tradition” (28). Yet there is still great interpretive potential in examining Plath’s work in relation to psychoanalytic theory and its therapeutic practices, and, as Lynda K. Bundzen has suggested, the “multiple *uncertainties* about [psychoanalytic theory’s] explanatory power” (49-50, emphasis added). To be clear, I am not interested in diagnosing or explaining the behavior of the author, or her protagonist through psychoanalytic theory. In discussing Plath’s use of psychoanalytic terms, and the Electra script in particular, I wish to explore the ideas the novel problematizes about the creation of identity in narrative and the therapeutic potential that the form and practice of narration were reputed to have during the height of psychotherapy’s popularization in American society.

In a BBC book review of Donald Hall’s anthology *Contemporary American Poetry* in 1963, Plath stated:

There is a new spirit at work in American poetry . . . an inwardness of . . . images, [a] plummeting subjectivity . . . the uncanny faculty of melting through the leaves of the wallpaper through the dark looking glass into a world one can only call surrealistic and irrational. The analyst’s couch has played a role here, I think—that important and purgatorial bit of American literary furniture. (Sylvia Plath)⁵³

Speaking about Plath’s work in light of psychoanalytic theory is thus complicated by her well-known intellectual interest in psychoanalysis; she was deliberate about her treatment of psychoanalytic themes, imagery and plot lines in her work. Her interests, therefore, reflect the same early-postwar fascination American society had with the science of the mind. Plath herself underwent psychoanalytic treatment and was apparently encouraged by her therapist to self-analyze, as was the trend, and “fashion herself as a patient, an intellectual and artist by applying Freudian and other psychoanalytic doctrines and therapies” (Bundzen 38).⁵⁴ Due to the purported power of its symbolism, Plath believed that the use of psychoanalytic theory could universalize her writing subjects (*Journals* 453) . Its popularity, she also believed, could help her sell her work. When she found two articles concerning woman and mental health in the June 1959 *Cosmopolitan*, she became determined to write a text which could profit from her own experiences:

Read COSMOPOLITAN from cover to cover. Two mental-health articles. I must write one about a college girl suicide. THE DAY I DIED. And a story, a

⁵³ This quotation comes from “New Comment 2—Sylvia Plath on Contemporary American Poetry,” a transmission on 10 January 1963, (BBC Third Programme) held at the Smith College Archive.

⁵⁴ Plath was treated at McLean hospital September 1953 - January 1954. She later engaged the same psychotherapist who treated her there, Dr. Ruth Beuscher, during the fall of 1958 through the spring of 1959.

novel even. Must get out SNAKE PIT. There is an increasing market for mental-hospital stuff. I am a fool if I don't relive, recreate it. (*Journals* 495)⁵⁵

But the author's personal and intellectual interests do not mean that psychoanalytic theory and practice are treated uncritically in *The Bell Jar*. Esther's attitude towards the methods and therapeutic capability of psychoanalytic theory, in both its pop-cultural and clinical capacity, remain ambivalent. When her medical student boyfriend, Buddy, at one point diagnoses her as having "the setup of a true neurotic" (after answering one of his psychology class questionnaires) the analysis is portrayed as being as ridiculous as its diagnostic question: "Where would [you] like to live best, the country or the city?" (108). And when, during her breakdown, she can no longer read anything but "scandal sheets" and "paperbacks on abnormal psychology" from the drugstore, the poor quality of the latter's content is implied (187). These popular texts are also portrayed as contributing to the character's resolve to commit suicide: after consulting one pop psychological list of symptoms, she drastically diagnoses herself as "incurable" and states that from this reading material she has learned "all [she] needed to know about [her] case to end it in the proper way" (*ibid.*). Esther is also uninterested—and rather disparaging—when she reports that her acquaintance at the hospital, Joan, "chatter[s] on about Egos and Ids" (261).⁵⁶ And in the oft-quoted passage at the end of the novel, the character is represented as clearly disappointed that therapy has not fulfilled the expectations that her society has promised. She states that she does not feel cured, made "whole and well" (283)—or even prepared to re-enter society: "I had hoped, at my departure, I could feel sure and knowledgeable about everything that lay ahead—after all, I had been 'analyzed.' Instead, all I could see were question marks" (284).⁵⁷

For those familiar with her poetry, it can be difficult *not* to imagine Plath as a devotee of psychoanalytic theory. Her references to psychoanalytic terms, particularly of the Electra complex, proliferate in some of her most well-known poems. She also promoted her poetry in this way: in a BBC radio broadcast from October 1962, Plath states that "Daddy," is "spoken by a girl with an Electra complex. Her father died while she thought he was

⁵⁵ *The Snake Pit* (1946) was a semi-autobiographical novel written by Mary Jane Ward about a woman's recovery from mental illness. It was a great popular success and was made into an Oscar-winning film starring Olivia de Havilland in 1948.

⁵⁶ Significantly, in this scene Esther notes that her mind turned "to something else, to the brown, unwrapped package in my bottom drawer" (her new diaphragm)—signaling perhaps that this tool towards her sexual liberation (acquired through the connections of her own psychotherapist) will prove more therapeutic than popular psycho-babble.

⁵⁷ Earlier, she also states: "I wasn't sure at all. How did I know that someday—at college, in Europe, somewhere, anywhere—the bell jar, with its stifling distortions, wouldn't descend again?" (280).

God.”⁵⁸ These themes are also at work in *The Bell Jar*, although, unlike the speakers in Plath’s poetry, the character, and even the narrator, appear oblivious to the drama being portrayed through them in the text. Like the Freudian Oedipus complex, the name of the Electra complex (coined by Carl Jung) is inspired by a Greek tragedy, Sophocles *Electra*.⁵⁹ In the play, Electra plots with her brother Orestes to kill her mother Clytemnestra and her stepfather Aegisthus to revenge the murder of their father, Agamemnon. To apply the complex directly to the poem “Daddy” (as Plath suggests in her BBC interview it is to be read), implies that the speaker desires her father sexually, that her body is, as Bundzen explains, “incestuously devoted in this instance to a dead man’s, as Electra’s was to her father Agamemnon’s” (38). These are “symbolic figures enslaving her until the poem’s utterance, which will be an acting out of the internal struggle, intended to free her from paralysis” (ibid.). In other words, conscious knowledge of the family romance being “acted out” (here, literally “talked out” as in psychoanalytic therapy) is supposed to bring about *catharsis*, a therapeutic purging of emotion through an understanding of how she was wounded which then develops into an innate awareness of how healing can come about. But in the case of the poem, despite the fact that she is aware of her complex and utters the emotionally expressive final words—“Daddy, daddy, you bastard, I’m through,” it remains debatable whether or not the speaker achieves resolution (ibid.). But most importantly, the usage of so-called Freudian themes in this poem, as in *The Bell Jar*, are examples of how psychoanalytic scripts could be directly applied by popular psychology in a manner similar to how, at the authorial level, Esther is ironically shown to be unwittingly scripting her life after. Namely, *not* as Freud’s mythic metaphor to explain mysterious symptoms in a (male) client’s adult life—which would appear totally unrelated to the story structure of *Oedipus Rex*—but as an explanatory script for a client’s actual behaviors and actions.

⁵⁸ From *The Spoken Word: Sylvia Plath*. (British Library Sound Archive, 2010. CD.) “Electra on Azalea Path” is another poem dealing blatantly with this theme, though several others are also related to it, such as “Lady Lazarus,” “Poems for a Birthday,” and “Full Fathom Five.”

⁵⁹ Freudians consider the Oedipus complex the central emotional stage which children must pass through in order to achieve mental stability in adulthood. The young boy in the phallic stage of sexual development is said to develop sexual feelings for his mother and a possessive attitude towards her, and thus experiences hostility towards his father. But due to the perceived threat of castration from the father, (and by witnessing little girls without penises, he surmises the threat is real) the boy is said to unconsciously abandon his wish to sexually appropriate his mother. He then instead identifies himself with the father and, eventually, looks to woman outside of his immediate family as potential sexual partners. Conversely, the Electra complex, developed from Freud’s ideas, is the psychoanalytic narrative which suggests that the young girl begins by being emotionally attached to her mother, but once she realizes what a penis is and that her mother lacks one, she becomes disillusioned and blames her mother for her own lack. She then begins to desire her father sexually and wishes to be impregnated by him—the resulting baby making up for the penis she lacks. This stage is said to be resolved when the girl grows aware of other men as potential partners.

The question of resolution, healing, is no less complicated in *The Bell Jar*.⁶⁰ Matters are complicated by the different levels of awareness of psychoanalytic theory attributed to Esther (as character and narrator) and her dependence on and vulnerability to socio-cultural scripts and a narrativized way of conceiving of life and self. Hence, if it is doubtful that the character has enough knowledge before her breakdown to describe it in terms of a psychoanalytic script, it seems that the narrator, with more exposure to psychoanalytic theory (though she portrays her younger self as scornful of it) might have had the time after her release from the hospital to better understand and possibly free herself from her purported unconscious desires. She does, as we have seen, suggest that it took a long time before she was actually “all right” again even after her release from the hospital, but that at the present moment of the narration she considers herself psychologically well (4). However, apart from portraying the character’s dismissive and disappointed reactions to the effectiveness of psychotherapy, the fact that the narrator simply relates, without attempting to explain, certain scenes and seemingly inexplicable impulses of her mind and body could suggest that she too is unconvinced by a psychoanalytic reading of her past life and the motivations of her attempted suicide. The most convincing way to give this interpretation credence is to represent it at the authorial level, as though the narrator includes the scenes without being fully aware of what she is doing (because as the fictional constructor of the story, logically, the narrator is the only one who could actually have put references to psychoanalytic theory there). However, this does not necessarily mean that she *is* being motivated unconsciously in her actions in a Freudian sense. Instead, because the Electra myth can be read as one more script of action (rather than as an explanatory metaphor of unrelated symptoms) it is more likely that the incorporation of this retrospective “scripting” instead, once again, shows how susceptible the narrator is to all types of scripts popularized in the postwar era. That is, she is shown to unwittingly and ironically interpret her suicide attempt through the Electra script—not due to unconscious Freudian motivations, but subconscious socio-cultural influences.

The most obvious of the scenes re-scripted at the authorial level to suggest a pop-psychological interpretation of Esther’s mysterious breakdown (“over” the narrator and character’s interpretation through the Ragged Dick script, that is) occurs just before the character’s definite plan to commit sui-

⁶⁰ In *The Talking Cure* (1985) Jeffery Berman argues that “narrative distance remains problematic” in the novel, as Esther “as an interpreter of her thoughts and feelings . . . usually remains silent making it difficult to determine the extent of her knowledge about herself” (141). He also suggests that Plath made a “startling authorial slip” by including reference to the narrator’s present life situation, and what he reads as attitudes (towards childbearing) which are “impossible to reconcile” (148) between the narrative levels. My own analysis assumes that these gaps between the several narrative levels are intentional and, moreover, it attempts to show how they are productive towards understanding how the novel carries out its investigation of the self created, and potentially healed, in narrative.

cide. She reports having a sudden and peculiar “great yearning” to visit her father’s grave for the first time since he died when she was a child (194). The narrator suggests that she is oblivious to the psychoanalytic significance of such a strong yearning to reunite with her father: she states that at the foot of the grave her “legs fold[]” involuntarily from under her and she can’t understand why she is “crying so hard” (196). And the logical suggestion she does try to give—that it happens because she has never mourned his death—is somewhat undercut by her dramatic attempt to join with her father by laying her face “to the smooth face” of her father’s gravestone, while she “howl[s]” at her loss in the rain (*ibid.*).

However, there are several less obvious key moments where Esther’s narration is re-scripted in terms of the Electra script at the authorial level. The above scene for example, notably, also includes pronounced aggression towards her mother, who the narrator claims did not really love her father as much as she did, because she did not cry at her husband’s death or provide him with a more extravagant resting place. Esther as character (who had “always been [her] father’s favorite”) finds it “fitting” that she should take on “a mourning [her] mother had never bothered with” (194).⁶¹ While Esther evinces a veiled hatred towards her mother throughout the novel, this example is significant: while in other instances the narrator portrays herself as entitled to do so (for example, when her mother suggests that Esther can *decide* to be sane [171]), viewed here from the authorial level, the reader is made to understand that Esther’s blame might not only be unjustified, but scripted too. That is, it is not hard to explain why a mother might want to appear brave and not cry in front of her children at such a time. Nor, due to their new, financially-compromised circumstances, why her father’s grave could not be more ornate, without drawing the conclusion that her mother did not love her father as much as Esther herself claims to. But the novel does not display a simple case of dramatic irony because it is still possible that the narrator *is* aware of how she presents the character’s view of the situation, as she more obviously does in other examples. However, as the narrator never shows awareness of the Electra script, and yet deals in such a detailed manner with character scripting and irony in her own narration, it appears that the text has a more complicated purpose with its use than the standard effect of dramatic irony. Likewise, as we otherwise hear very little about Esther’s sessions with her therapist Dr. Nolan, the scene in which Esther admits that she hates her mother is emphasized. When Esther expects to be punished for this declaration, but instead receives approval from her therapist—the narrator reports that the therapist smiled “as if something had pleased her very, very much” (238)—the authorial level points again towards an interpretation of Esther’s motives through the pop psychological script.

⁶¹ She states elsewhere that her mother secretly hates her father “for dying and leaving no money because he didn’t trust life insurance salesmen” (45).

Another instance of this subtle re-inscription and reinterpretation of events at the authorial level occurs during the scene in which Esther receives electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) for the first time under Dr. Gordon's care. The character interprets the treatment as punishment for some unknown "terrible thing" that she has done (169). She describes herself remembering a time she was similarly punished by electrocution in her own home. But what the narrator portrays (but does not interpret further) as a common domestic accident turns out, through objects specifically symbolizing her mother and father, to be a re-inscription of the plot of the family romance. When probed by the doctor to explain how she feels after ECT, the memory of "an old metal floor lamp surface[s] in [her] mind" (ibid.). She explains to the reader that she had wanted to move this lamp—significantly, "[o]ne of the few relics of [her] father's study"—away from "the side of [her] mother's bed," for her own use at her desk across the room (ibid.). As this seemed feasible ("[t]he cord would be long enough," [ibid.]) she explains that she did not unplug it. However, she finds she is similarly punished by a mysterious, outside force for her covetous behavior and is sent back to the "mother":

Then something leapt out of the lamp in a blue flash and shook me till my teeth rattled, and I tried to pull my hands off, but they were stuck, and I screamed, or a scream was torn from my throat, for I didn't recognize it, but heard it soar and quaver in the air like a violently disembodied spirit. Then my hands jerked free, and I fell back onto my mother's bed. A small hole, blackened as if with pencil lead, pitted the center of my right palm. (169-170)

What is particularly apt in this re-inscription of the Electra script at the authorial level, is that we are given the sense that Esther is divided in terms of her awareness of what is happening to her. This could, of course, be read in support of a view that holds there are unconscious psychological motives—an Electra Complex—that fate the conscious part of Esther (the one who hears the scream). However, again, I suggest that at the authorial level it is instead implied that this psychoanalytic script is simply another plot through which the narrator (now unwittingly) scripts her life events. Hence, while the narrator has shown herself actively negotiating the rag-to-riches life scripts which controlled her character, at the authorial level the point is made that she is still, at the present time of the narration, unaware of the degree to which the Electra myth scripts her present story. In this sense a part of Esther (the "right hand") suffers by implication for what some mysterious other part of her (the "left hand") does—that is, plotting her action by the psychoanalytic script which she has unwittingly absorbed, and causing her to physically suffer from this inscription, in what appears to be "pencil lead," no less (169-170).

Finally, at two other key moments in the novel the narrator suggests that the interpretation of her narrative identity and the happy ending of her story

are mysteriously connected to her father. As before, she does not appear able to interpret why this might be the case. One of these moments takes place when Esther's editor at *Ladies Day* asks her about her life plans—her intended script for success. Esther suggests that her character is motivated by something outside herself when she answers: "Usually I had these plans on the tip of my tongue. 'I don't really know,' I heard myself say. I felt a deep shock, hearing myself say that, because the minute I said it, I knew it was true" (36). Then, when she aligns her script with her selfhood in this way (as we have seen is her habit), she then connects this unearthing of an unrecognized self in terms of discovering, not another "Esther," but instead her "real father" (ibid.). She recognized "the 'truth'" about herself "the way you recognize some nondescript person that's been hanging around your door for ages and then suddenly comes up and introduces himself as your real father and looks exactly like you, so you know he really is your father, and the person you thought all your life was your father is a sham" (ibid.). Moreover, the character later senses that her lack of happiness is intimately connected to the loss of her father at the age of nine (86). Although she does not investigate this notion further, she reports realizing it only when she is out on a date with Constantin, a somewhat older foreign man, and she becomes happier than she had been since she ran "along the hot white beaches with [her] father" (ibid.). She also tellingly says that in spite of all the nice experiences her mother "scrimped to give [her]," as well as her academic success and the inspiring "little new firecrackers of ideas going off every day" she had "never been really happy again" after her father's death until this date with Constantin which she dreams will turn into a love affair (ibid.).

In terms of the Electra script, working like a socio-cultural script (by way of mental health), this suggests that Esther's identity and future happiness are linked to becoming consciously aware of the tragic script that she is enacting in order to move beyond it by uniting sexually with a man who is not her father. Still, the men she tries to seduce, Constantin and Irwin, resemble her father, who was a foreign university professor. Both are a few years older than she, well educated and, in Constantin's case, foreign, and in Irwin's, a college professor with "old-world" habits (267). She dreams, even before she meets him, that Constantin will have the ability to "see through" her exterior to interpret her true identity—"what [she] really [is]" (85). Moreover, she hopes that Irwin, her next hope as a lover, will be "a kind of impersonal, priestlike [*sic*] official, as in the tales of tribal rites" presiding over her loss of virginity (266). Neither the character nor the narrator exhibits conscious understanding of the psychological script ostensibly impelling her to lose her virginity: she claims that she is simply "sick" of defending it as it weighs "like a millstone around [her] neck" (ibid.). And when Esther does finally have sex for the first time, she describes the incident in the least ceremonious way possible: as a farcical but near-fatal hemorrhaging (266-271). I will discuss this scene further, and what Esther's portrayal of it might

imply, in Section Four. At this point, it suffices to say that in fact Esther's acquisition of a means of birth control actually frees her in a practical sense to become sexually active (she describes climbing up on the examining table at the Doctor's office as "climbing to freedom" [259-260]) far more aptly than the psychological explanation of her liberation which exists concomitantly in the text.⁶²

Through the authorial level these issues are brought to the reader's attention, and the point is reemphasized that even beyond a level that she is aware of, the narrator has been encouraged to narrativize her life through culturally defined notions of happiness in the form of socio-cultural success scripts and reputedly therapeutic psychoanalytic scripts. It suggests that a new plot, essentially a Greek tragedy, has come to re-inscribe Esther's narrative, and she as its protagonist, with meaning. However, as the narrator does not signal awareness of the Electra script (unlike the rags-to-riches scripts), she has been unable to negotiate it. That is, the narrator reports that she, even at the present moment of the narration, is uncertain that she has been cured or understands the mysterious cause of her illness to the degree that she can feel confident that she will not become depressed again. Through this technique, the reader is, like Esther, also left with "question marks" at the end of the novel and the impression that none of these narratives—not those offered by Esther's society as life scripts or therapeutic narratives towards the pursuit, finally, of personal happiness—have been able to sufficiently explain the source of her psychological suffering and her suicide attempt. That is to say, though she may interpret various causes for her illness through the scripts available to her, alternative life scripts with which to plan her future or a less-scripted example of understanding the self are not forthcoming from her contemporary society.

Thus, what may appear at the authorial level straightforwardly as dramatic irony (a tragic script structurally controlling the fate of the protagonist) is complicated by the novel's broader revelation of the controlling nature of scripts, particularly regarding therapeutic narration, and the narrator's status as creator of this narration. I posit instead that the relentless dramatic irony of such scripts, normally pertaining to a-psychological characters, is critiqued by the novel precisely for the lack of agency it allows as a model of therapeutic narration. As Freeman in his work on narrative foreclosure has emphasized, if a person creates a life story in narrative, it is vital when they come to a breach in narrative that they can also consciously "reimagine, indeed [...] *rewrite*, the future" (Hindsight 138, original emphasis). If the script a person is following has no future, or an unfulfilling, uninspiring ending, there is a risk the person may suffer from a "death of narrative de-

⁶² This physical (rather than strictly psychological) liberation was also suggested in the passage mentioned earlier when Esther states that Joan, "chatter[s] on about Egos and Ids" and the narrator reports that her mind wanders off instead to think about her new diaphragm (261).

sire,” and give up on the possibility to create a different ending than the one currently envisioned (ibid.). *The Bell Jar*, again, anticipates these concerns and presents a complex view of narrative as a means of understanding one’s self and life. The novel draws our attention towards the unwitting embeddedness of the character in the various scripts of early postwar America. Here, even the socially endorsed, supposedly therapeutic psychoanalytic script which is re-inscribed onto Esther’s previous script could be perceived as a literal dead end. That is, even if it could explain her attempted suicide, the tragic myth would not help her to envisage and re-write a future beyond the one she acts out during her life-threatening liaison with a man other than her father. In this way, the novel fundamentally troubles the assumption that narratives—as socio-cultural scripts based on fictions, fairy-tales or models of psychological scripts based on dramatic tragedy—are a healthy way of interpreting the self.

Beyond the scripts that can determine the plot of selves and lives, scholars in many fields have identified the problems inherent in erasing the distinctions between realistic and fictional discourses in this way (such as assuming that a real life can, just as a fictional story, be scripted in narrative form). As Hayden White has famously put it:

narrative is revealed to be a particularly effective system of discursive meaning production, by which individuals can be taught to live a distinctly “imaginary relation to their real conditions of existence,” that is to say, an unreal but meaningful relation to the social formations in which they are indentured to live out their lives and realize their destinies of social subjects. (x)

White’s work draws attention to the distinct content inherent in the narrative form: that it is patently no neutral discursive form through which we can represent real events. One vital aspect of this pseudo-conceptual content involves what White defines as narrative’s ability to moralize reality—or perhaps more importantly, many individual’s wish for or, our ignorance of this impulse:

If every fully realized story, however we define that familiar but conceptually illusive entity, is a kind of allegory, points to a moral, or endows events, whether real or imaginary, with a significance that they do not possess as a mere sequence, then it seems possible to conclude that every historical narrative has as its latent or manifest purpose the desire to moralize the events of which it treats [...] And this suggests that narrativity, certainly in factual storytelling and probably in fictional storytelling as well, is intimately related to, if not a function of, the impulse to moralize reality, that is, to identify it with the social system that is the source of any morality that we can imagine. (14)

In other words, whether people are cognizant of it or not, narrative, through its structure, introduces the question of morality, through its scripts into the content that individuals put into its form. While White specifically addresses

this phenomenon's occurrence in historical narratives, the way that *The Bell Jar* problematizes narrative identity and therapeutic narration supports his suggestion that this impulse to moralize reality applies equally to fiction.

Section Four: The Fugitive Self and the Novel

Human beings have their great chance in the novel. They say to the novelist: "re-create us if you like, but we must come in," and the novelist's problem . . . is to give them a good run and to achieve something else at the same time. Whither shall he turn? [...] Expansion. That is the idea the novelist must cling to. Not completion. Not rounding off but opening out. When the symphony is over we feel that the notes and tunes composing it have been liberated, they have found in the rhythm of the whole their individual freedom. Cannot the novel be like that? (Plath's underlining in her copy of E. M. Forster's *Aspects of the Novel*, 155)⁶³

In her essay "A Comparison," as well as in her journals, Plath was optimistic about the novel form's interpretive openness compared to poetry—its ability to encompass the disparate details and experiences of being, and its expansiveness of meaning, in Forster's sense. Whereas the poet must select, edit and order more vigorously—must be "an expert packer of suitcases" (57)—Plath, like Forster, suggests that the novel form can encompass and represent life and self more openly, especially regarding endings:

Time flows, eddies, meanders, and people have leisure to grow and alter before our eyes. The rich junk of life bobs all about us: bureaus, thimbles, cats, the whole much-loved, well-thumbed catalogue of the miscellaneous which the novelist wishes to share with us. I do not mean that there is no pattern, no discernment, no rigorous ordering here. I am only suggesting that perhaps the pattern does not insist so much. The door of the novel, like the door of the poem, also shuts. But not so fast, nor with such manic, unanswerable finality. (58)

Whether we agree with Plath's comparison or not regarding poetry, we learn that she was interested in creating works the endings of which left room for debate about their meaning, and also texts that encompassed, rather than edited out, personally significant life material. I have argued thus far that *The Bell Jar* problematizes the concept of therapeutic narration. In this final section, I will look at how the text explores the "expansive" opportunities that the novel as a narrative form allows a subject—how life and self (and not strictly identity) might be conceived of in less scripted and more emo-

⁶³ This E. Arnold and Co. edition of title from 1953 is kept in the Mortimer Rare Book Room at Smith College. Inscribed on the flyleaf is "Sylvia Plath London-1955." There is underlining throughout the book.

tionally satisfying ways for the creator. Through the narrator's use of ironic humor and a kind of *shock narration*, I suggest that the novel investigates more absurd and fragmented notions of conceiving of and representing—rather than interpreting—the fugitive self.

The Comic Genre

The comic aspects of *The Bell Jar* have long been recognized by scholars and readers. Due to the novel's subject matter and the fate of its author, some find them disjunctive and even "macabre," as Wagner-Martin has noted (*Bell Jar* 13). But importantly, these aspects were by no means unintentional, and the author herself considered *The Bell Jar* a funny novel (*ibid.*). "Always I want to be an observer," Plath wrote in 1949, "I want to be affected by life deeply, but never so blinded that I cannot see my share of existence in a wry, humorous light and mock myself as I mock others."⁶⁴ By recasting her life story into a comic novelistic text, the narrator too tries to create a freer interpretation of her life than through the scripts of success and of psychological normality which she concomitantly negotiates. That is, the narrator attempts to use a form that has fewer structural demands than a specific narrative script or developmental form and is, thus, more open-ended.

Through the ironic separation Esther creates between herself as narrator and character she attempts to distance her younger disturbed self from the story that had previously defined her. She turns her frightening story of psychological breakdown into a form of narrative that is both more absurd and potentially liberating, as she separates her self from a specific meaning of self: a specific narrative identity.⁶⁵ The narrator makes light of the general foibles she witnesses in her character. For example, her gluttony at a sophisticated luncheon in New York at the start of the novel—where she "secretly eye[s] the bowls of caviar" then masterminds (and rationalizes) a plan to hog a whole bowl to herself (29). She makes fun of the self-righteousness she feels too, despite her paranoid delusions, in kicking a hospital kitchen-aide in the psychiatric ward shortly after her initial hospitalization, because she "knew perfectly well you didn't serve two kinds of beans together at a meal. Beans and carrots, or beans and peas, maybe, but never beans and beans" (212).

Another way that the narrator creates this distance and represents her life through the comic genre is by her, again, ironic, but also farcical treatment of disturbing and dangerous rites of passage. These include the first time

⁶⁴ This quotation comes from a journal entry from November 13, 1949 in *Letters Home* (40).

⁶⁵ The novel's irony has been appreciated by many critics in the past—for example, Perloff writes: "What makes *The Bell Jar* so moving—and often so marvelously funny—is that the heroine is just as innocent as she is frighteningly perceptive" (512). With a reading which takes into consideration the character and narrator's separate focalizations we can better understand how the narrator creates humor and can be so perceptive.

Esther witnesses the birth of a baby (74-75), the time she is nearly date-raped (126-128); and the first time she sees her boyfriend Buddy naked:⁶⁶

I stared at Buddy while he unzipped his chino pants . . . then took off his underpants that were made of something like nylon fishnet. "They're cool," he explained, "and my mother says they wash easily." Then he just stood there in front of me and I kept staring at him. The only thing I could think of was turkey neck and turkey gizzards and I felt very depressed. (77-78)

The loss of her virginity, which leads to life-threatening hemorrhaging, is also presented melodramatically and mined for its farcical aspects:

I lay, rapt and naked, on Irwin's rough blanket, waiting for the miraculous change to make itself felt. But all I felt was a sharp, startlingly bad pain. [...] I wasn't sure if Irwin had done what he planned to do, or if my virginity had obstructed him in some way. I wanted to ask him if I was still a virgin, but I felt too unsettled. A warm liquid was seeping out between my legs. [...] I smiled into the dark. I felt part of a great tradition. (266-267)

Even Esther's initial suicide attempts are presented laden thick with black humor:⁶⁷

That morning I had tried to hang myself. I had taken the silk cord of my mother's yellow bathrobe . . . fashioned it into a knot that slipped up and down on itself. It took me a long time to do this, because I was poor at knots. [...] Then I hunted around for a place to attach the rope. The trouble was, our house had the wrong kind of ceilings. [...] After a discouraging time of walking about with the silk cord dangling from my neck like a yellow cat's tail and finding no place to fasten it, I sat on the edge of my mother's bed and tried pulling the cord tight. (185-186)

Readers can be made uncomfortable by the narrator's use of black humor and by this method of showing how intrinsically serious content can be portrayed humorously in narrative depending on the way it is presented. But this, I suggest, is precisely the narrator's intention. Attention is drawn, in this way, to the constructedness of narrative identity—how the understanding of identity through narrative is always a more-or-less preliminary and changeable construction, and how the content of one's life events and the interpretation of them is subject to narrative form generally, as well as the specific genre that they are given in narrative.

⁶⁶ Plath described the attempted date-rape episode as a "serio-comic battle over sex and a diamond on the dark lawn of a fashionable country club" in a typed letter from May 1962 to the Eugene F. Saxton Memorial Trust. The letter is held in the "Correspondence" folder at the Smith Collage Archive.

⁶⁷ However, notably, her final, nearly successful attempt at suicide is narrated matter-of-factly, and without humorous overtones.

The pliability of identity through life narration is further evinced through the narrator's evocation of the traditional ending of a dramatic comedy, marriage, only to satirize once and for all any expectations about a Cinderella ending to her story:

I kept shooting impatient glances at the closed boardroom door. My stocking seams were straight, my black shoes cracked, but polished, and my red wool suit flamboyant as my plans. Something old, something new . . . But I wasn't getting married. There ought, I thought, to be a ritual for being born twice—patched, retreaded and approved for the road. [...] Pausing, for a brief breath, on the threshold [of the open door], I saw the silver-haired doctor who had told me about the rivers and the Pilgrims on my first day, and the pocked, cadaverous face of Miss Huey, and eyes I thought I had recognized over white masks. The eyes and the faces all turned themselves toward me, and guiding myself by them, as by a magical thread, I stepped into the room. (284, original ellipsis)

While Esther falls easily into the language of the marriage ritual at the start of a new stage in her life, she contrasts this with the ritual she feels she is going through—the rebirth of the self—which, poignantly, she notes that her society lacks a “ritual” for. Again, she finds her life events do not match the script—her *something old* is her pair of hard-working, “cracked, but polished” black leather shoes, and her *something new*, rather than the white dress of the bride, is a “flamboyant” red dress which calls forth the sexual liberation she has experienced. She then playfully alludes to herself in automotive terms as “patched, retreaded and approved for the road” before entering the room of medical professionals who will, in fact, decide if she is ready to reenter society. But even then the room she enters appears like an odd funhouse of absurd characters, and fragmented “eyes and faces” (284). Regardless of this, and the “question marks” before her about her future, Esther reports that she is able to see the absurdity and uncertainty of life *and* move forward, guided by “some magical thread” into her future (ibid.). Before her breakdown, the inability to imagine her future (the lack of a new script) caused Esther unbearable anxiety and ostensibly contributed to her attempt to end her life. Now she can acknowledge that although she is not narratively healed in her society's sense of the word, through analysis, and she still sees no certain future in the form of a new life script before her, she can go on living. Moreover, she appears to experience her life less like a strictly plotted script than a more interpretively open novel which both evokes the comic genre as it rejects the typical ending of a comedy. That is to say, she is no longer led into the future as an a-psychological character in a plotted script, but instead by this “magical thread” which she suggests enables her to more loosely string together the rather absurd events of her life.

Shock Narration

Through her method of shock narration—fragmented, destabilizing, sometimes, content-wise shocking narration—the narrator continues to cross boundaries in the presentation of her subject matter and investigates less-unified notions of representing and conceiving of self and life. The narrator does this by mimicking the confusion of experiencing sustained fragmentation of the narrative identity, which is likened to the protagonist’s experience during her episodes of madness and after ECT treatment. While this technique can be confusing and Esther also represents the experience in unfavorable terms, there is not a uniformly negative portrayal of the dispersal and loss of narrative identity as detrimental to Esther’s psychological health at either the narratorial or authorial level. Instead, I suggest that through this ambivalence the novel questions to what extent a unified sense of identity is a societal rather than a personal necessity.

As noted earlier, Esther interprets the first, incorrectly administered ECT treatment that she receives at the hand of Dr. Gordon as un-therapeutic, and as a punishment for her maladaptive mood (169). Esther even draws parallels between the treatment and the unjust electrocution of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg earlier that year.⁶⁸ In the car on the way home from the treatment Esther reports that she felt “dumb and subdued” (171). When she tries to organize her thoughts, to concentrate, her “mind glide[s] off, like a skater, into a large empty space, and pirouette[s] there, absently” (ibid.). Thus, the narrator suggests that the initial ECT session is not a legitimate treatment for her depression, but a mind-numbing punishment issued by society for her deviation from societal norms of behavior for (female) Americans—that is, her unwillingness to follow scripts of normative behavior.

“STARLET SUCCUMBS AFTER 68-HOUR COMA,” is the text that follows immediately after this scene. This is a typical example of the shock narration that the narrator employs, which can perplex the reader with its abrupt placement and bewildering content. The narrator uses this technique to mimic the confusion and fear produced in her character by her dispersed thought processes. Rather than narrating her story in a normal, scripted manner, with cause and effect logic and a meaningful selection of actions and events, the narrator thus reproduces the ostensible mental-whims of her character from this period of her life. For example, Esther launches into an account of the jumbled contents of her bag, including an ominous amount of razor blades, and then into a comparison of herself and a dead actress in a newspaper headline:

I felt in my pocketbook among the paper scraps and the compact and the peanut shells and the dimes and nickels and the blue jiffy box containing nineteen Gillette blades, till I unearthed the snapshot I’d had taken that afternoon

⁶⁸ See also Peel in *Writing Back* (2004), p. 48.

in the orange-and-white striped booth. I brought it up next to the smudgy photograph of the dead girl. It matched, mouth for mouth, nose for nose. The only difference was the eyes. The eyes in the snapshot were open, and those in the newspaper photograph were closed. But I knew if the dead girl's eyes were to be thumbed wide, they would look at me with the same dead, black, vacant expression as the eyes in the snapshot. (171-172)

This technique, which can be both shocking and disorienting to the reader, is undertaken early in Esther's narration. She often begins new sections of her narration with abrupt, or startling sentences like: "It was a queer, sultry summer, the summer they electrocuted the Rosenbergs, and I didn't know what I was doing in New York" (Chapter 1, 1); "I'm so glad they're going to die" (Chapter 9, 115); "The face in the mirror looked like a sick Indian" (Chapter 10, 131); and "Of course his mother killed him" (Chapter 13, 181). She signals with this technique her own perplexity at the onset of her illness, and as her case worsens, whole sections of the novel appear more randomly placed together (such as in Chapter 11). After her first ECT treatment, the narrator portrays the continuing decomposition of the narrative logic of her narration as even short sections of the chapters are begun with random events, leaving the reader to play catch-up every few pages with what is happening (e.g. Chapter 13). And after the character's suicide attempt, her re-entry into consciousness is punctuated by short, snapshot impressions, spaced at indeterminable periods of time apart (Chapter 14, 199-214). Rather than a coherent, causally connected life story that produces a normative narration, this impressionistic technique produces rather patches of text. Even when presented chronologically, these text segments have a static quality to them, like collage clippings, as they represent the character's return from her unconscious state into the experience of a being with an established identity. I propose that the experience the narrator is describing corresponds to the apprehension of her past, narratively formed identity as a kind of narrative man in Todorovian terms. That is, through her earlier experiences of narrative identity breakdown (such as her early inability to write a future for Elaine [her character's character] in her own novel) and her loss of the ability to think in narrative logic—due to supposed madness and ECT—Esther begins to appreciate the constructedness of narrative interpretations of herself as *selective* representations and patently not her whole being. In a similarly visually artistic manner, Esther describes the first glimpse of her reflection in a mirror after her rescue as "a picture," an abstract and un-gendered painted portrait:

One side of the person's face was purple, and bulged out in a shapeless way, shading to green along the edges, and then to a sallow yellow. The person's mouth was pale brown, with a rose-colored sore at either corner. The most startling thing about the face was its supernatural conglomeration of bright colors. I smiled. The mouth in the mirror cracked into a grin. (204)

When Esther drops the mirror she is holding, the “glittery splinters” strewn across the floor cause a superstitious nurse to reproach her for her carelessness (205). But the character appears to be equally untroubled by the superstition of *seven years bad luck* as she is by what the mirror comes to represent: her splintered sense of self. In this sly move, the insane experience of the un-unified identity in the “picture” and the shards of mirror are connected to the only un-superstitious, thus, reasonable person in the room: she herself (204-205).⁶⁹

Thus begin the more blatant examples of Esther’s experience of the dispersal of the self into fragment selves as a natural mode of being. And with this experience, the narrator thus suggests that the unified, scripted narrative identity of an actor in a story can be understood as a separate part of the self, constructed according to societal interests and necessity. In other words, the text suggests that as long as one has consciousness, one still has subjective experiences of the self which do not necessarily fit into socially-condoned narrative form. These are experiences of the fugitive self, and the broader sense of selfhood of which this experience can make an individual aware.

Esther’s narratively-primed interpretation of life is also made apparent in contrast to the sense of comfort she exhibits from everyday experiences of the loss of her social, narrative identity: she often craves sleep, as with it she experiences a temporary respite from her otherwise scripted character. For example, as we have seen when the character reads the fig story, she wishes to escape into an alternative “paper” world to sleep: “I felt sorry when I came to the last page. I wanted to crawl in between those black lines of print the way you crawl through a fence, and go to sleep under that beautiful big green fig tree” (62). After one cathartic bath, she, no longer a “dirty, scrawled-over letter,” can put her now “pure” self into the “fresh, clean envelope” of her hotel bed (21). When she is, much later, induced to sleep before an ECT treatment, she notes that the darkness “wipes” her, and, in effect, her story, out completely “like chalk on a blackboard” (250). And when Esther receives an injection to help her sleep after the ptomaine poisoning incident at the *Ladies Day* testing kitchens, she describes losing consciousness in terms of seeing pleasing “blank” pages in front of her: “‘The doctor’s given you an injection,’ the nurse said from the doorway. ‘You’ll sleep now.’ And the door took her place like a sheet of blank paper, and then a larger sheet of paper took the place of the door, and I drifted toward it and smiled myself to sleep” (53).

Sleeping between lines of a story, cleansing away the “scrawled-over letter” of the self, being wiped out like chalk on a black-board, and visualizing blank pages are, I hold, Esther’s way a imagining a therapeutic break from

⁶⁹ Compared to the humorous “two kinds of beans” scene, there does not appear to be an ironic distance in this scene that would suggest that the character is being unreasonable (and does not realize it in her un-reasonable state).

the pressure she experiences from trying to live out her scripted, narrative identity. Insofar as her escape is limited to real sleep, this view of her self is harmless. But when her need to escape more permanently turns into her attempt to commit suicide by an overdose of sleeping *pills*, this narrativized way of understanding her self becomes not only a temporary escape from her narrative identity but destructive of her physical being. However, it still appears to be Esther's intention, even in this case, to seek freedom from her narrative identity, and not from the self of being. This explains why her earlier attempts to commit suicide fail: when she tries to drown herself, her body instead "pop[s] up like a cork" (189). And when she tries to suffocate herself, she finds again that her body has "all sorts of little tricks, such as making [her] hands go limp at the crucial second, which would save it, time and again," whereas if she "had the whole say, [she] would be dead in a flash" (186). And notably, when she tries to cut her wrists in a bath, she realizes from staring at her "white and defenseless" skin that she cannot go through with the action, because "[i]t was as if what [she] wanted to kill wasn't in that skin or the thin blue pulse that jumped under [her] thumb, but somewhere else, deeper, more secret, a whole lot harder to get at" (173). That is to say, with her suicide attempts it is still the intangible socially constructed narrative identity, and not the private, fugitive self and the "thin blue pulse" of the body that she actually wants to annihilate.

The morning after her accidental food poisoning in New York, she describes her return to consciousness as "[swimming] up from the bottom of a black sleep" (57). This description connects her positive experiences of a break from narrative identity in sleep, to those of the loss of this social self when she bathes. Early in the novel, Esther clearly describes the sense of peace she experiences when she bathes—and, most importantly, how this tranquil feeling is brought about not only by the hot water, but also by turning her active attention away from the concerns of her life and its direction, towards, instead, the salutary present moment experiences of her fugitive self:

There must be quite a few things a hot bath won't cure, but I don't know many of them. [...] I meditate in the bath. [...] I never feel so much myself as when I'm in a hot bath. I lay in that tub ... high up over the jazz and push of New York, for near onto an hour, and I felt myself growing pure again. I don't believe in baptism or the waters of Jordan or anything like that, but I guess I feel about a hot bath the way those religious people feel about holy water. I said to myself: "Doreen is dissolving, Lenny Shepherd is dissolving, Frankie is dissolving, New York is dissolving, they are all dissolving away and none of them matter anymore. I don't know them, I have never known them and I am very pure." [...] The longer I lay there in the clear hot water the purer I felt, and when I stepped out at last and wrapped myself in one of the big, soft white hotel bath towels I felt pure and sweet as a new baby. (21-22)

Esther not only feels connected to her fugitive self in this one instance: reportedly every time she bathes she engages this active attentiveness to the present moment:

I remember the ceiling over every bathtub I've stretched out in. I remember the texture of the ceilings and the cracks and the colors and the damp spots and the light fixtures. I remember the tubs, too: the antique griffin-legged tubs, and the modern coffin-shaped tubs, and the fancy pink marble tubs overlooking indoor lily ponds, and I remember the shapes and sizes of the water taps and the different sorts of soap holders. (21)

Several brief experiences during her confined recovery at the psychiatric hospital are other examples of Esther's learning to let go of limiting definitions of her identity and give herself up to the unscripted present moment of the fugitive self. Esther decides that if she "[is] going to fall" that she will "hang on to [the] small comforts" of the body as long as possible (245). Thus, she thinks "with a mild stir of pleasure, of the steaming blue china coffee pitcher and the blue china breakfast cup and the fat blue china cream jug with the white daisies on it" of her morning coffee (*ibid.*). She looks "with love" at a line-up of breakfast trays (246). Then, while she helps Buddy dig his car out of the snow during a visit, she pauses to note, during her detailed attention to the landscape, a shift in her experience of it:

The sun, emerged from its gray shrouds of clouds, shone with a summer brilliance on the untouched slopes. Pausing in my work to overlook that pristine expanse, I felt the same thrill it gives me to see trees and grassland waist high under flood water—as if the unusual order of the world had shifted slightly, and entered a new phase. (278)

The sense of peace that the narrator associates with her temporary loss of narrative identity in sleep, through bathing—and losing her self to the pleasures of the moment—is metaphorically connected to the break-down of the narrative identity Esther experiences as madness. As we saw earlier, after seeing her damaged visage, Esther drops the mirror—which results in a fragmentation of her narrative identity in the splinters of glass (205). Unlike the hospital staff, she is not superstitious about what the breaking of the mirror means—but tellingly she is punished for her behavior by being sent to a larger hospital's psychiatric ward (*ibid.*). This fragmentation of the narrative identity is again experienced as natural, and even enjoyable by her, when, a short time later she intentionally upends a tray of thermometers off her bed. She reports that "[a]round the overturned enamel tray, a star of thermometer shards glittered, and balls of mercury trembled like celestial dew" (213). Again the ward staff promise that she will be punished for her insubordinate behavior, but the episode ends not with regret on Esther's part, but instead her focused joy over the metallic substance. Unattended, she scoops some

mercury off the floor and marvels at it, like the mirror shards.⁷⁰ And like her identity consciousness, and like the drops of bath water that she loses her social self in, the mercury fragments and then comes back together, is divided and yet reflects her image and can re-form “without a crack” into a whole:

I opened my fingers a crack, like a child with a secret, and smiled at the silver globe cupped in my palm. If I dropped it, it would break into a million little replicas of itself, and if I pushed them near each other, they would fuse, without a crack, into one whole again. I smiled and smiled at the small silver ball. (214)

What appear to be the musings of a madwoman can thus be comprehended rather as an understanding of the therapeutic aspects of experiencing the fugitive self, the part of the self that does not depend on fulfilling the societal requirements of narrative identity. By encompassing conflicting interpretations, the novel thus remains ambivalent about seemingly disturbing events in Esther’s life, such as ECT treatment. For example, though she interprets her first round of ECT as a punishment for her social abnormality, later it is shock treatment which disturbs Esther’s ability to make the causal connections of her self-destructive narrative. Coming back into consciousness after a successfully administered ECT treatment, she acknowledges the “purging” of her depression and a sense of peace:

I woke out of a deep, drenched sleep, and the first thing I saw was Doctor Nolan’s face swimming in front of me and saying, “Esther, Esther.” [...] Doctor Nolan led me through a door into a fresh, blue skied air. All the heat and fear purged itself. I felt surprisingly at peace. The bell jar hung, suspended, a few feet above my head. I was open to the circulating air. (251)

Vitaly, Esther has experienced a personal healing *catharsis* which is unconnected to the scripted cause and effect logic of a narratively-interpreted life, and notably, of the plotted tragedy of the Electra script. Quite the opposite, this purging of her depression comes about through the *loss* of her ability to interpret her life according to her previous script. That is, while Esther still expresses some concern about receiving subsequent ECT treatments, she aptly articulates the sense of interpretive freedom she now feels at the concomitant loss of her previous, self-destructive interpretations of the world around her. For example, in contrast to her earlier musings on the “honorable” *seppuku* method of suicide (141), or the reason for carrying nineteen razor blades in her purse, she now states: “I took up the silver knife and cracked off the cap of my egg. Then I put down the knife and looked at it. I

⁷⁰ Earlier, Esther has also compared the substance of mercury to a mirror reflection of herself (21).

tried to think what I had loved knives for, but my mind slipped from the noose of the thought and swung, like a bird, in the center of empty air” (252). Unlike the previous interpretations at the characterial or authorial levels (by way of socio-cultural and psychoanalytic scripts, respectively), the narrator’s reinterpretation of her story does not attempt to account for her suicide through an ongoing, scripted narrative. Instead, it accommodates a more absurd and disjunctive collection of life events and experiences: a less scripted and narratively-determined—and therefore, freer—conception of life and self.

Concluding Discussion

I am still blocked about prose. A novel still scares me. Have been reading “Passage to India” for the first time and admiring the miraculous flow and ease of it. To have the time to show the placing of a red card on a black, the change of daylight and the geography of certain hills: the blessings of the novelists [*sic*] wide untidy landscape art. It would be a certain therapy. (Sylvia Plath)⁷¹

The reader learns little about the present situation of the narrator of *The Bell Jar* except that, as stated, she now has a baby, lives in a house, is possibly married, and is composing a novel-like narration of her experiences (4). The narrator suggests that conceiving of her life more like a novel rather than through scripts may have allowed her a more expansive, encompassing and perhaps even salutary way of understanding—or at least representing—the experiences of her fragmented sense of self. She appears to have benefitted from gaining new perspectives on how one can appreciate life by representing it through a less interpretive and script-driven method—one that can encompass more of the supposedly abnormal experiences of her subjectivity than the scripted actions of a character. For example, when, on Esther’s return home from the hospital, her mother suggests that they “take up where [they] left off,” and pretend that Esther’s experiences with psychological illness “were a bad dream,” Esther refuses to simply forget her experiences, or to edit them out of her ongoing narrative identity (276). She opts instead to maintain them with humor and perspective not necessarily as integral to her linear “story,” but as part of her personal “landscape” (*ibid.*):

I remembered everything. I remembered the cadavers and Doreen and the story of the fig tree and Marco’s diamond and the sailor on the common and Doctor Gordon’s wall-eyed nurse and the broken thermometers and the Negro with his two kinds of beans and the twenty pounds I gained on insulin and the rock that bulged between sky and sea like a gray skull. Maybe forget-

⁷¹ This quotation is from an entry in Plath’s *Journals* dated April 23rd, 1959 (477).

fulness, like a kind of snow, should numb and cover them. But they were part of me. They were my landscape. (276)

But the narrator makes clear near the end of her narration that despite her negative experiences and her indictment of a too-strictly scripted and narrativized understanding of self, she would not choose to live without narrative meaning-making completely. Through Valerie, the lobotomized young woman she meets at the hospital, Esther ultimately censures the removal of one's capacity to interpret life events and judge them through narrative, even if it might lead to experiencing a state of "perpetual marble calm" (224). Valerie's experience of the world in which "so little, bad or good, could happen," (280) means a life basically devoid of narrative interpretation—as something must happen, some action or conflict, for a story of basic narrativity to exist. Valerie may recall that she was "always angry" (224-225) in the past, but that she now feels "fine" and can "go to town . . . or shopping or to a movie, along with a nurse" (225). But without the ability to judge the events of her life and experience negative emotions, nothing will happen to her in a narrative sense. She will not be able to situate her narrative identity in an ongoing, ending-oriented life story, as a lobotomy severs, along with the neural connections to and from the prefrontal cortex, a person's ability to plan for the future. In other words, while Valerie can still experience her fugitive self in the present moment, due to her operation she has lost her ability to fully experience the creation of the resultant social *discourse* of this *story* material: her narrative identity. As Plath's heroine apparently does not wish to experience life devoid of narrative interpretation, despite the inherent perils, her story as a novel can comprise both a warning of the influence of scripts and an appreciation of the expansiveness of novelistic narrative form. In "the rhythm of the whole," in Forster's terms, novelistic form may have enabled Esther to achieve a sense of "individual freedom."

CHAPTER THREE

“You always do everything backasswards”: Zen and Identity De-composition in *The Catcher in the Rye*

...I know for sure now that the book can't be split up into four or five legitimate short stories. It's turned into a real novel on me – a short-story writer's novel, but a novel just the same. (I'm so glad I am a short-story writer – a full-time novelist would have lots of trouble keeping this boy in hand. Especially since I'm letting him tell the story himself. But I've had so much practice at this kind of work, and I am a short-story writer no matter how many novels I ever write.)

(J. D. Salinger)⁷²

Just over a year before the publication of *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951), Salinger wrote the above lines to his *New Yorker* editor, Gus Loblano. Apparently he had been considering whether his ongoing efforts to write the novel could do double-duty and also be published in the magazine.⁷³ But the adaptability of literary form was not the only matter on his mind: Salinger had discovered that the protagonists of different literary forms, though both creatures of narrative, must necessarily have different traits—that his “boy” was still a creation of the short fiction upon which he had built his reputation. Holden was evidently not behaving like the typical protagonist of a novel—some unruly quality made him a misfit from the start, even in his own narrative. But notably, Salinger does not consider this a flaw to be amended. Holden did not need to be kept “in hand” and edited into a more easily recognizable novelistic hero. Instead, it seems the author felt that his skill as a short story writer could somehow mitigate the incongruity of developing traditional novelistic form around the narration of his short story

⁷² This quotation comes from a letter dated May 2, 1950, held at the New York Public Library Archives (*New Yorker* Fiction Correspondence; Box 498, Folder 5).

⁷³ Holden Caulfield had already appeared in Salinger's short fiction; Salinger developed his short story “I'm Crazy” (published in the December 22nd, 1945 issue of *Collier's* magazine) into the episode in Chapter 17 and 18 which included Sally and Holden's date in New York.

protagonist. In the last chapter, I suggested that *The Bell Jar* explores the novel form's possibilities for interpretive openness. In this chapter, I consider how Salinger's text experiments with the ways in which the epiphany of self of short fiction can be realized in novelistic form, in spite of the text's engagement with the genre of novel which is indelibly linked to the psychological development of the protagonist—the *Bildungsroman*.

Like *The Bell Jar*, *The Catcher in the Rye* carries out a complex critique of therapeutic narration at three levels in the text, that of the character, the narrator and the authorial agent. But while the previous chapter focused on how *The Bell Jar* negotiated scripts at these different interpretive levels, the present chapter will concentrate on the disruption of the logic of narrative identity created through Holden's narration. That is, due to Esther and Holden's differing degrees of awareness regarding the use of narrative logic, as well as their targets of critique, the analysis in this chapter will focus more closely on the interpretive space between Holden—as both character and narrator—and the authorial level. The differentiation between the interpretive levels of the character and the narrator remains vital as it contributes to our understanding of how the narrator formulates the representation of his selfhood and his ostensible bout with psychological illness. But due to two main issues, it is less pronounced than that of Esther. Firstly, the chronological distance between the narrator and the character is only months or weeks, whereas that between the narrated and narrating Esther is at least a year, and possibly several years. Time does not necessitate a gain of perspective and the ability to analyze life and self narratively, but in the case of these characters, Esther (as narrator) carries out a more complex interpretation of her character than Holden. The other, more important and less obvious reason which could explain why the interpretive distance is not so great between Holden as character and as narrator is a central aspect of this chapter's argument: the problematization at the authorial level of the salutary assumptions of self-analysis through narrative interpretation. This chapter aims to illustrate that the use of narrative logic for the purpose of self-analysis does not come naturally to either the character of the story's action or the narrator who relates the story. While both rebel against narrative stereotypes of character within their immediate cognition, both are portrayed as having a remarkable inability when it comes to using the tools of narrative interpretation to create a coherent narrative identity. But, this inability, I argue, is the crux of both Holden's psychological illness (as his society understands his state of mind) and his possible escape route into another, interpretively freer conception of selfhood through an Eastern paradigm (as conceived at the authorial level). While distinct and often ironically distanced from his character, the narrator's unwillingness to carry out narrative self-analysis both mitigates the interpretive distance between these interpretive agents, and, in doing so, makes investigating the distance between them and the authorial level intriguing. Hence, the text does not primarily problematize narrative

meaning-making of the self by negative example between the character and the narrator, as in *The Bell Jar*. Instead, it critiques by showing, through a protagonist who appears innately impervious to his society's glorification of narrative logic, that it might be necessary to reach beyond one's immediate culture for a different method of conceiving of a psychologically healthy sense of the self altogether.

This more fundamental destabilization of narrative logic through the authorial level, compared to its partial negotiation in *The Bell Jar*, is not to say that socio-cultural scripts do not operate as determining meta-narratives of Holden's life narration. Holden too, as I will show, is acutely aware of the scripted path (the "game") that is set out for him to behave according to as the upper-class son of a wealthy family. So much so that the character is not portrayed predominantly as trying to negotiate the script—as Esther attempted by aligning her identity with the Ragged Dick script and against the Cinderella script—as physically escape it altogether. That is, Holden's innate awareness of the way that scripts control character action and behavior allows the novel to investigate in more detail how the form of plotted developmental narrative, as encouraged by societal protocols of normative psychologies and narrative identities, can determine the meaning of lives and selves.

Section One: Literary and Cultural Contexts

Scholars generally agree that Holden experiences some form of healing in the novel, but over the years they have debated exactly when and by what means that change takes place. One side of the discussion maintains that Holden's therapeutic breakthrough occurs directly through the narration of his story, in the present tense while Holden is located at the treatment center in California from which he narrates his story. Scholars such as Edwin Haviland Miller (57) and Robert A. Lee (187) hold that it is through the act of narrating and the self-analysis that this brings about, that Holden heals himself.⁷⁴

Other scholars believe that Holden has already experienced some kind of healing in New York before he begins narrating his story in California. As early as 1963, Carl F. Strauch argues that Holden does not require the psychiatric aid that he is receiving in California to heal his ostensible psychological instability, because he has already "miraculously wrought his own

⁷⁴ In "In Memoriam: Allie Caulfield in *The Catcher in the Rye*" (*Mosaic* 15 [1982]) for example, Miller writes: "telling is precisely what he has been doing and in the process Holden has finished mourning. Allie now rests in peace" (130). Lee's essay, "'Flunking Everything Else Except English Anyway': Holden Caulfield, Author," (in *Critical Essays on Salinger's The Catcher in the Rye* (1990) also supports this view; it will be discussed in greater detail in this chapter.

cure” (66). This opinion is shared by James M. Mellard almost thirty years later: through a Lacanian reading Mellard draws the conclusion that “on the evidence of the story [Holden] no longer has any real need of therapy” (211). These scholars and many others locate the pivotal scene of Holden’s breakthrough (rather than breakdown) during the carousel scene in the penultimate chapter of the novel. Holden has stated earlier in his narration that he has a “crazy” wish to be a catcher in a field of rye, who saves children playing there from falling off a great cliff at the edge of the field (244-245). His dream is generally read as a metaphor for a wish to keep the children (and by extension, himself) from falling from innocence into a corrupt and “phony” adult world.⁷⁵ During this central scene, simply rendered, Holden watches his little sister Phoebe ride the carousel in Central Park; with each turn she tries to grasp for the “golden ring” on the carousel (273).⁷⁶ He states: “The thing with kids is, if they want to grab for the gold ring, you have to let them do it, and not say anything. If they fall off, they fall off, but it’s bad to say anything to them” (273-274). He comes thus to the realization that, ultimately, he cannot, and does not need to, keep children from falling into the adult world.

My reading holds with the latter selection of scholars: that Holden experiences an epiphany during the carousel scene. I aim to show in this chapter that though this epiphany is no final panacea for Holden, the authorial agent suggests that it encompasses a significant spiritual realization, a *satori*-like shift in perception, which affirms Holden’s natural resistance to the narrative-based psychoanalytic methods of his era.⁷⁷ Much of this chapter’s analysis will therefore be devoted to revealing the more covert, Zen-based methods by which the authorial agent problematizes the nature of Holden’s mysterious psychological illness. This illness, I hold, is equivalent to the protagonist’s inability to conceive of himself in terms of a socially normative youth of the early postwar era and as an a-psychological character playing a role in a script of normative development towards psychological maturity. Robert A. Lee has suggested that “the privileges of authorship . . . have given [Holden] his occasion as for the first time to elicit pattern, [and] order” in his

⁷⁵ See for example pages 30 and 32-33 of Sarah Graham’s synopsis reading of the novel in *J. D. Salinger’s The Catcher in the Rye* (2007).

⁷⁶ The “golden ring” that Holden reports Phoebe is trying to grab from her carousel horse was a common feature on carousels of the period. From this game came the informal American expression “to grab for the brass ring” which implies going after a great goal, prize or opportunity often in the form of wealth and success. It is an apt allusion in the larger context of the novel’s problematization of societally scripted happiness. (World Wide Words page & Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary) “brass ring.” The American Heritage® Dictionary of Idioms by Christine Ammer. Houghton Mifflin Company. 29 Sep. 2014. <Dictionary.com [http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/brass ring](http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/brass+ring)>.

⁷⁷ *Satori* is defined by Zen specialist D.T. Suzuki as an “intuitive looking into the nature of things in contradistinction to the analytical or logical understanding of it” (*Selected Writings* 98). The basic tenets of Zen will be explained in Section Two of this chapter.

life, and states that “in the mirror of his own ‘composition’ he sees himself whole and clear” (187). But, contrary to this opinion, in the final evaluation of his attempts to narrate the story of his illness, Holden himself appears to show a noteworthy lack of self-knowledge or willingness to self-analyze. Whatever “pattern” or order Holden has found through his narration, it does not appear to have helped him find his way back onto the path towards his society’s notion of a sane and happy life. He cannot, for example, say for sure that he will be able to follow through with future plans:

A lot of people, especially this one psychoanalyst guy they have here, keeps asking me if I’m going to apply myself when I go back to school next September. It’s such a stupid question, in my opinion. I mean how do you know what you’re going to do till you *do* it? The answer is, you don’t. I *think* I am, but how do I know? (276, original emphasis)

When asked about his own interpretation of his narrative, “all this stuff [he] just finished telling [his audience] about,” he states, moreover: “I didn’t know what the hell to say. If you want to know the truth, I don’t *know* what I think about it” (276-277, original emphasis). And rather than considering his narration therapeutic, Holden suggests that he regrets telling “so many people about it” (277). He appears to warn the audience against a similar activity, due to the possibility of uncomfortable or depressing results: “About all I know is, I sort of *miss* everybody I told about. Even old Stradlater and Ackley, for instance. I think I even miss that goddam Maurice. It’s funny. Don’t ever tell anybody anything. If you do, you start missing everybody” (ibid., original emphasis). Thus, the reader is first alerted that Holden is not healed through the act of narration when he, as narrator, does not judge the experience as therapeutic.

In light of the different narrative levels which co-exist and cause ironic distance in the novel, Holden’s opinion is not the only, or final, word on the therapeutic value of the narration he has just undertaken. But to write it off completely as Lee suggests—as simply a “parting shot,” or a last example of the character’s “contrariness” (196)—appears inconsistent. Holden’s final observation on the narration of his breakdown forms the final chapter of his story and is the longest sustained commentary that he makes about the undertaking. If the text is read in the manner Lee suggests (with the expectations of a traditionally plotted story) and Holden is considered the creator of his life history and identity, it would mean that the ending should determine a great deal for the final interpretation of the text. And if the novel is read in this way, through traditional notions of a well-made plot (like a well-scripted narration at the narrator’s level), one risks grappling with what has been read as the novel’s “distinctly unsatisfactory conclusion,” as Stauch has noted (65). As Holden has, in his own words, set out to relate the story of his psychological breakdown (“this madman stuff” [3]), readers have reasonably

looked for signs of a traditional satisfying ending to Holden's narrative, which would involve the healing catharsis of what has been variously interpreted to ail him. This seems to be why if readers interpret his story within traditional paradigms of development—of both literary genre and popular interpretive psychology, specifically concerning closure—the ending can indeed feel emotionally unsatisfactory. That is, despite Holden's mysterious epiphany during the penultimate chapter, there is still the final chapter to account for which appears, with Holden's above claims, rather to open than close the interpretative potential of the novel.

The Un-*Bildungsroman*

You know that apple Adam ate in the Garden of Eden . . . ? [...] You know what was in that apple? Logic. Logic and intellectual stuff. That was all that was in it. So—this is my point—what you have to do is vomit it up if you want to see things as they really are. (“Teddy” 191)

Despite critique of the term, as Warren French notes, *The Catcher in the Rye* is still routinely labeled a *Bildungsroman*, a novel of education or formation which deals with the maturation process and the moral and psychological development of the main character (45). French himself finds the term imprecise. While he calls it an acceptable “pigeon-holing” term, he expresses apprehension about scholars “plung[ing] madly ahead and apply[ing] [such] terminology . . . to a work whose creator and protagonist both distrust logical analysis” (45).⁷⁸ Indeed, when Holden announces at the start of his narration that he will not be relating “all that David Copperfield crap,” (3) he indicates that he will be a very different kind of hero than one might expect from a classic *Bildungsroman*.

It is no accident that Dicken's novel is mentioned in this context. Jerome Buckley has called *David Copperfield* “a conspicuously successful example of the [*Bildungsroman*] genre” (x). The well-known beginning of Copperfield's narrative—“Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or whether that station will be held by anybody else, these pages must show” (Dickens 9)—reflects, as Buckley points out, Copperfield's initial concern regarding his “heroic” identity (xi). But Buckley states that by the end it is clear that Copperfield is the real narrative “hero” as in societal terms he has “discovered and asserted his own his identity . . . through strenuous self-discipline” and learned “to accept the painful realities of experience” (xi). Buckley connects this development with what the identity psychologist Erik Erikson calls “ego integrity” or “the ego's accrued assurance of its proclivity

⁷⁸ French refers here to those scholars in every generation who have struggled to explain the novel and its protagonist in terms of this genre's classically logical, sequentially chronological and teleological terms, and have grappled with its enigmatic ending.

for order and meaning” (qtd. in Buckley, xi).⁷⁹ This is “the ultimate mark of maturity,” Buckley argues, a remark which exemplifies the commonly understood connection between the literary genre and normative psychological development (xi).⁸⁰

As Holden resists telling and interpreting his story within the David Copperfield paradigm, literally from page one, I propose that his narration can be productively explored as an *un-Bildungsroman*. Yasuhiro Takeuchi has suggested that *The Catcher in the Rye*'s subversions of conventional binary oppositions offer “fertile grounds” for further analysis (331). He also points out that whichever theoretical perspective we take to explain how the text subverts (or dissolves) binary oppositions, we “cannot evade the risk of self-betrayal” as “[a]nalysis necessarily divides the analyst and the analyzed, introducing a binary opposition of the very kind it aims to interrogate” (332). Accordingly, I do not read the novel as a pat *anti-Bildungsroman* (which would simply reverse the terms of a traditional *Bildungsroman*) but rather as an *un-Bildungsroman* which intentionally *de*-composes the genre, and with it, societal expectations of the psychologically developing hero. I aim to show that it does so not only thematically, as earlier scholars have illustrated, but formally, regarding the narrative logic of cause and effect, linear development, and the protagonist's subjectivity. That is, while an *anti-Bildungsroman* might imply the re-education of the protagonist (logically, one cannot take away something that has already been learned), the *un-Bildungsroman* rather aims illogically toward bringing the protagonist into states where the binary opposites of ignorance and knowledge dissolve into a Zen-like state of *no-knowledge*. This “emptying out” of knowledge and logic, as the eponymous hero of Salinger's short story “Teddy” (1953) in the above quotation proselytizes on behalf of, enables Holden, I suggest, to experience and represent his fugitive self.

Holden's overt distrust of the popularized psychoanalytic methods of interpretation of his society betray, I hold, the more covert complication of logical narrative analysis and coherence that he and the authorial agent engage in at different degrees of awareness in the novel. The critique carried out by Salinger's text is thus multi-layered. While the character is depicted as dreaming of fleeing physically from the normalizing pressure of socio-cultural scripts (namely, the pressure to become an a-psychological narrative man, in the terms explained in the Introduction), the narrator creates a less-scripted representation of himself which contradicts in fundamental ways the

⁷⁹ Erik Erikson (1902-1994) was a German-born American developmental psychologist and psychoanalyst. He was a key contributor to ego psychology. In his most well-known work “Childhood and Society” (1950) he brought to the public's attention the social significance of childhood, and introduced his theory of the “eight stages of psychosocial development”; he also coined the term “identity crisis.”

⁸⁰ This is not to suggest that Buckley's opinion concerning the nature of the *Bildungsroman* hero is correct in all cases, but only that it is wide-spread.

so-called psychologically mature narrative identity of the traditional, developing *Bildungsroman* hero. I suggest that as the narrator carries this out in the form of therapeutic narration, the text links the *Bildungsroman*'s traditional development plot to those narrative apparatuses of diagnosis and treatment employed by contemporaneous popular psychological practices for developmental and adaptive purposes. This chapter will explore in detail how through the philosophical underpinnings of the novel the construction of narrative logic at both the character and narrator's levels of interpretation are formally de-composed at the authorial level.

In the next section, I will establish how the novel overtly critiques post-war psychoanalytic theory and practice. Following this, I outline several basic tenets of Zen Buddhism and the relevant scholarship addressing the influence of Zen on Salinger's novel and broader oeuvre. I do so in order to establish how the deconstructive methods of Zen practice can shed light on how Holden's ability to use logical narrative analysis to self-analyze and fulfill the expectations of a therapeutic narration are fundamentally destabilized at the authorial level. That is, how it both perplexes, and thus explains Holden's inability to solve the mystery of his breakdown and construct a normative narrative identity. It must be immediately stated that while it is through Holden's narration that we can perceive the influence of this Zen destabilization, Holden himself shows no awareness that this particular philosophy is responsible for the metaphysical disturbances he experiences.

Critique of Psychoanalysis

Within Salinger studies, Holden Caulfield has had a long critical history of diagnoses regarding psychological illness. But, as early as 1963 Carl F. Stauch argued that *The Catcher in the Rye* rejects the therapeutic value of psychoanalytic technique in favor of what he calls "the spontaneous personality" (82). Indeed, through the overt attitudes of the narrator, the optimistic assumptions of the early postwar period about the therapeutic capacity of logical, narrative self-analysis are brought under scrutiny. As we have seen, Holden speaks irreverently about a "psychoanalyst guy" at the care facility in California who repeatedly asks the "stupid question" of whether Holden is going to apply himself at school in the fall (276). What sounds like a straightforward question on the therapist's part (and perhaps a curious lack of self-knowledge or determination on Holden's) may point to the underlying reason that Holden is still receiving treatment: he is judged through society's psychological norms as maladaptive for not explaining himself in terms of a normative script for his particular character. That is, the therapist's question is meant to test if Holden is ready to return to his scripted role in society and function as a good student at his private school who will go on to

college, get married and have a good career.⁸¹ As Holden has been expelled from several schools, but has not made an attempt to understand logically (through causality) why this is the case—as we shall see is his habit—it appears he is *trying* to give an honest answer to the “stupid” question. And therefore, if the question is an examination of his recovery in terms of his intention to fulfill his scripted, psychologically normative role, he fails once more.

Holden’s defensive refusal to relate his “whole goddam autobiography” (3) at the beginning of his narration can also suggest that he will not indulge postwar trends regarding the investigation of childhood memories for an unresolved Oedipus complex: “the first thing you’ll probably want to know is where I was born, and what my lousy childhood was like, and how my parents were occupied and all before they had me . . . but I don’t feel like going into it, if you want to know the truth” (ibid.). While Holden displays a keen interest throughout the novel to be listened to and empathized with, and shares a great deal of other very personal information, he does not appear to consider this information about his early childhood necessary to understanding the story of “this madman stuff” (ibid.). It also signals that Holden is aware of the societal expectation that this information will aid in the diagnosis of his ostensible psychological problems. Due to this skepticism (he implies that the revelation of his experiences will only serve to hurt his parents) he is unwilling to indulge his audience with such otherwise private information.⁸²

Holden also addresses common psychoanalytic practices regarding the therapeutic adjustment of clients to norms of behavior, particularly aggression, when he discusses his reaction to the death of his younger brother, Allie. After describing at length how intelligent and nice Allie was, and how much he cared for him, Holden explains that the night that Allie died of leukemia he, at thirteen, broke all the windows in their garage with his fist. Holden claims that he “hardly didn’t even know why [he] was doing it,” that he did it “just for the hell of it” and, therefore, does not blame his parents for intending to have him “psychoanalyzed and all” for his actions (50). But while Holden does not hold this against his parents, the authorial agent ironically suggests that Holden’s reaction does not need a complicated psychoanalytic—and certainly not an oedipal—explanation. That is, Holden’s reaction

⁸¹ This diagnostic question recalls the study of female schizophrenic housewives referred to in Chapter Two, whose recovery was in part evaluated by their ability to “function domestically” (i.e. fulfill their roles as housewives). See Carol Warren’s *Madwives: Schizophrenic Women in the 1950s* (1987).

⁸² While Holden’s statements might signal that he has had an unhappy childhood, the point is that Holden finds this information irrelevant to the representation of his life and selfhood. Moreover, while this could be read as an ironic technique of the text to imply the opposite (that is, that Holden does indeed have an unresolved Oedipus complex and/or so-called developmental problems), as I will show, this attitude is incongruent with the otherwise predominant attitudes revealed at the authorial level.

is not portrayed as some mysterious symptom masking unconscious desires, but simply an isolated and understandable case of overwhelming grief expressed at the news of his brother's death. Vitally, this does not mean that the death of Allie, as a senseless event in Holden's life, does not go on to affect Holden. On the contrary, he experiences ongoing sadness due to Allie's sudden disappearance. The point is that, even in this case, Holden has not been aided by the logical explanation for Allie's death (that he succumbed to cancer). How the experience of loss and the impermanence of being may be endured, rather than logically explained, is part, I hold, of the revelation at the authorial level of the need for alternative methods of conceiving of life and self outside of the narrative paradigm popularized in the postwar era.

Finally, in Holden's lengthiest conversation directly addressing the topic of psychoanalysis and whether he (as character) should seek treatment, Holden displays overt suspicion and ultimately doubts its therapeutic potential. While in New York, seeking companionship and advice, Holden meets up with his former student guidance counselor from a previous school, Carl Luce, for a drink. Holden relates some earnest concerns he has about his sex life and how it "stinks" because he can never get "really sexy" with a girl that he does not have strong feelings for (191). Rather than receiving empathy or even interest, Holden presents his reception from Luce—significantly, the son of a psychoanalyst—as cold and clinical:

"Naturally it [stinks], for God's sake. I told you the last time I saw you what you need."

"You mean to go to a psychoanalyst and all?" I said. That's what he'd told me I ought to do . . .

"It's up to you, for God's sake. It's none of my goddam business what you do with your life." . . .

"Supposing I went to your father and had him psychoanalyze me and all," I said. "What would he do to me? . . ."

"He wouldn't do a goddam thing to you. He'd simply talk to you, and you'd talk to him, for God's sake. For one thing, he'd help you to recognize the patterns of your mind."

"The what?"

"The patterns of your mind. Your mind runs in – Listen. I'm not giving an elementary course in psychoanalysis. If you're interested, call him up and make an appointment. If you're not, don't. I couldn't care less, frankly."
(191-192)

Here we learn that Holden has not followed through on Luce's suggestion before, and by the end of their meeting we can guess that he is not convinced that seeing a psychoanalyst would improve his situation or his personality.

After sarcastically calling Luce “a real friendly bastard” (192) for his last remarks, before Luce leaves he inquires if he himself has ever been “psycho-analyze[d]” by his father (ibid.). Luce replies: “Not exactly. He’s helped me to *adjust* myself to a certain extent, but an extensive analysis hasn’t been necessary. Why do you ask?” (192-193, original emphasis). Holden answers, “No reason. I was just wondering,” (ibid.). However through his characterization of Luce as a very sophisticated and “intellectual guy”(191), but also a cold, pretentious and unhelpful one, he appears to portray psychoanalytic practice in the same unflattering light. And through the authorial irony with which this scene is portrayed (as Holden appears unaware of the effect created), we can also find further evidence of the normalizing agenda of popular psychoanalysis. That is, that Holden’s psychological problem consists of his concern about not being able to live up to a norm of sexual behavior for young men in his circles—that he can never get “really sexy” with a girl that he is not attracted too—suggests that he believes therapy would consist of adjusting him to this norm. What this scene, thus actually reveals through Holden’s attitudes are not symptoms of psychological illness but simply a moral code concerning his feelings towards sex which differs from his peers.⁸³

Notably, Holden’s lack of confidence in the psychoanalytic profession and its practices is congruent with the attitude displayed more fervently and overtly in Salinger’s greater oeuvre. Throughout the author’s short stories and novellas, characters that promote psychoanalytic methods and diagnoses are routinely presented as insensitive or ignorant.⁸⁴ Moreover, undergoing therapy itself is represented as having the potential to grossly endanger the mental health of two main characters, Zooey and Franny, and to have contributed to the suicide of the Glass family’s oldest child, Seymour. In *Franny*

⁸³ There is an additional episode which deals blatantly with the uncertainty of psychoanalytic theory. At one point in the narrative, Holden receives a written piece of advice from his former teacher, Mr. Antolini which is quoted from a book by the real psychoanalyst Wilhelm Stekel (1868-1940). The advice, which Antolini draws attention to as being “[o]ddly enough” not “written by a practicing poet,” but by Stekel, reads (in the novel): “The mark of the immature man is that he wants to die nobly for a cause, while the mature man is that he wants to live humbly for one” (244). In fact, while the saying is quite accurately transferred, the advice it gives does indeed come from a “practicing poet:” in *The Beloved Ego: Foundations of the New Study of the Psyche* (1921). Stekel ends the section “Aims of Life” with “a few splendid sentences by Otto Ludwig” (1813-1865) the German writer, from the book *Gedanken Otto Ludwigs* (1903). The passage reads: “The highest aim to which he could reach was to die for something gloriously; now he has raised himself to a greater height—to live for something without fame” (Otto Ludwig quoted in Stekel, 41). However, it seems doubtful that Salinger was aware of the original source of the quotation; and as Antolini is presented as yet another adult trying to help Holden with this advice (with mixed motives, Holden fears [249]), the manner in which Holden distances himself from the advice is in line with more overt examples of his suspicion of psychoanalytic aid.

⁸⁴ For example, the character of Muriel’s mother in both “A Perfect Day for Bananafish” and in *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters*; Clay and his girlfriend in “For Esmé with Love and Squalor” (109), as well as Lane and also Bessie in *Franny and Zooey* (1961).

and Zooey, Buddy (Zooey's older brother) states for example that "[v]ery notably, with no exceptions that I know of, [Zooey's] experiences in the apparently divergent fields of clinical, social, and newsstand psychology had been costly for him" (54-55). Zooey is, moreover, portrayed as vehemently contradicting his mother's suggestion that his sister Franny might be helped by "a good psychiatrist" (93), and claims that the normalizing "adjusting" practices of popular psychoanalysis were detrimental to the health of his brother Seymour, and could prove similarly harmful, rather than helpful, to the health of his sister:

All right. I'm *very* serious, now. [...] If you can't, or won't, think of Seymour, then you go right ahead and call in some ignorant psychoanalyst. You just do that. You just call in some analyst who's experienced in adjusting people to the joys of television, and *Life* magazine every Wednesday, and European travel, and the H-Bomb, and Presidential elections, and the front page of the *Times*, and the responsibilities of the Westport and Oyster Bay Parent-Teacher Association, and God knows what else that's gloriously normal—you just *do* that, and I swear to you, in not more than a year Franny'll either be in a *nut* ward or she'll be wandering off into some goddam desert with a burning cross in her hands. (108, original emphasis)

Hence, in Salinger's work more broadly, psychotherapy is critically aligned with the adjustment of postwar Americans to the "gloriously normal," and at times even the promotion, rather than healing, of psychological illness.

Section Two: Zen Contexts

While Salinger's texts disparage psychoanalytic therapy, they also explore alternative methods of framing the one's existence and potentially alleviating psychological suffering. The author's personal exploration of Zen Buddhism appears to have begun at least five years prior to the publication of *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951), and, according to biographer Kenneth Slawenski, to have intensified at the time he was finishing the novel in 1950 (185). Slawenski states that by late 1946, Salinger was actively studying Zen Buddhism (148), and according to Ian Hamilton (in an earlier biography of the author) Salinger was still proselytizing on its behalf in 1953 (127). Additionally, according to a friend of Salinger's, in the same time frame that he was finishing the novel he had befriended renowned Zen scholar D.T. Suzuki and claimed to be considering becoming a monk (M. Salinger 11). While Salinger is well-known for the pan-spiritual devotion of his later works, it appears that Zen Buddhism held the author's attention until *The Catcher in the Rye* was released (McCort 275). However, Zen remained actively and, for the author, unproblematically woven into the hybrid philosophical and religious content of his creations throughout the published texts during the rest of his

career.⁸⁵ Hence, while the influence of Zen on Salinger's work may appear even prior to the publication of the novel its explicit appearance in the author's works after is pronounced.⁸⁶ In 1953, Salinger's *Nine Stories* collection was prefaced with a Zen koan: "We know the sound of two hands clapping. But what is the sound of one hand clapping?" (attributed elsewhere to Zen master Hakuin Ekaku). The final story in the collection, the aforementioned "Teddy," explicitly addresses several major tenets of Zen and Vedantic beliefs, such as the notion of impermanence in the material world (171-172), unity (189) and the power of intellect (logical thought) to blind individuals from spiritual truth and advancement. Zen is such a powerful "conceptualizing force" in Salinger's stories and novellas that Eberhard Alsen surmised that its influence should be at work in Salinger's novel also (74).

Indeed, by 1960 scholars had begun exploring Salinger's novel in light of Zen Buddhism. A majority of the scholarship has posited that Zen is covertly, thematically, at work in Salinger's novel.⁸⁷ That which is relevant to this study will be addressed in the sections to come. In contrast, I will explore how these philosophical underpinnings at the authorial level aid in the formal de-composition of Holden's narration. The character, I argue, is portrayed as an unwitting spiritual aspirant on an experiential journey, stuck throughout most of his narrative in a Zen-like *not-knowing space* which results finally, as earlier theorists have identified, in a *satori*-like experience in the pivotal carousel scene.⁸⁸ In the rest of this chapter, I intend to explore

⁸⁵ Paradoxically, Salinger's interest throughout the 1950s turned to other Eastern religions and Christianity to express his spiritual vision at the same time as explicit mention of Zen became more common in Salinger's Glass Family short stories and novellas—it went from "subtext to text," as McCort explains (275). Thus, as Salinger's religious philosophy broadened and grew ever more esoteric, explicit mention from many traditions—Vedanta Hinduism, Taoism, and Christian mysticism, as well as Zen—grew more noticeable in his works published after *The Catcher in the Rye*.

⁸⁶ James Lundquist in *J. D. Salinger* (1979), like other scholars such as Eberhard Alsen, demonstrates that the influence of Zen on Salinger's fiction can even be traced in several of the short stories published before *The Catcher in the Rye*, and later collected in *Nine Stories*, such as "A Perfect Day for Bananafish" (1948) "Uncle Wiggily in Connecticut" (1948) and "For Ésme—with Love and Squalor" (1950).

⁸⁷ In 1960 Tom Davis (in "J. D. Salinger: 'Some Crazy Cliff' Indeed") suggested some references to more general forms of Buddhism (98). The theme of giving up one's illusions (towards enlightenment) is also not uncommon: in his 1977 monograph *Zen in the Art of Salinger* and an article ("A Retrospective Look at *The Catcher in the Rye*," also 1977) concerning the importance of Zen Buddhism in particular to Salinger's work, Gerald Rosen suggests that the novel's early postwar context makes it "basically a novel of disillusionment" (158). Zen and literary scholars Bernice and Sanford Goldstein have found many aspects of Zen in Salinger's novel, including "the importance of the present moment; the long search and struggle in which reason, logic, cleverness, and intellect prove ineffectual; [and] the inadequacy of judgment and criticism which reinforce and stimulate the artificial boundary between self and other" (23).

⁸⁸ The Goldsteins, for example, maintain that Holden experiences "some degree of enlightenment which results from the non-rational and spontaneous blending of dualities, an enlightenment which permits experience that is complete and unadulterated and makes the moment and, in effect, life, non-phony" (23).

how the influences of Zen Buddhism experientially deconstruct key dualistic conceptual categories regarding the protagonist's experience of cause and effect, linear conceptions of time, and subjectivity. I contend that the text suggests not one final cure for Holden's ostensible psychological problems, but rather suggests to him momentarily the alternative mental health of experiencing and representing aspects of his fugitive self, his less logical and narratively determined nature.

Zen Buddhism

Zen Buddhism, from the Japanese *zazen* (to sit and meditate) developed as a Chinese-Japanese sect of Indian Buddhism which radically transformed the traditional Buddhist discipline of meditation. It is through meditation and intuitive perception that followers reach both temporary enlightenment (*satori*) and full enlightenment (*nirvana*), and not through the study of scriptures and performance of rituals. While *nirvana* is a final state of egoless being, *satori* can be experienced in an ongoing manner. It is defined by D.T. Suzuki as the acquisition of a new view in one's dealings with life and the world—an "intuitive looking into the nature of things in contradistinction to the analytical or logical understanding of [them]" (*Selected Writings* 98). "Practically," Suzuki goes on to explain, *satori* means "the unfolding of a new world hitherto unperceived in the confusion of a dualistically-trained mind . . . Logically stated, all [the world's] opposites and contradictions are united and harmonized into a consistent organic whole" (99).

Zen is not a philosophy in the Western sense although we often use this word to explain it. It is instead "a device to save the philosopher from his conceptual prison" (Barrett xviii). Its philosophy is, therefore, a "non-philosophy" (*ibid.*). William Barrett, in his introduction to Suzuki's selected writings, clarifies that the basic difference between Western and Eastern philosophy is that Western traditions aim to "lead[] us from the lower to the higher world, from the world of the senses to the world of ideas, to leave us abiding in this latter world as much as humanly possible," whereas for the Zen Buddhist, philosophy leads us "beyond the intellect back to the one real world that was always there in its undivided wholeness" (xviii). Thus, as Suzuki explains: "Zen is decidedly not a system founded upon logic and analysis," it is, instead, "the antipode" to logic and dualistic thinking (13). Keeping in mind his western audience, Suzuki likens the practice of Zen to the experience of moments of prelapsarian bliss: "[Zen] enlarges the heart to embrace eternity of time and infinity of space in its every palpitation, it makes us live in the world as if walking in the garden of Eden" (*An Introduction* 22). In other words, it is a form of spiritual inquiry that claims, as Religion scholar Leesa S. Davis summarizes, to "lead the practitioner to a liberating realization of the 'true nature' of self and world" (xiii). In her study *Advaita Vedanta and Zen Buddhism: Deconstructive Modes of Spiritu-*

al Inquiry (2010) Davis explores (and compares with Hindu Advaita Vedanta) the methods Zen utilizes to deconstruct key dichotomized conceptual categories with which spiritual aspirants contend on their path towards enlightenment. Davis' pragmatic study aims to clarify how language and other communicative techniques are utilized in Zen practice—specifically how they subvert, reconfigure and deconstruct the boundaries of conceptual thought and personal dualistic experiences, and “disclose a purported non-dual knowing that . . . is somehow innate but unrecognized” (xiv). As Davis' goal is to analyze what happens concretely in language and through communication in Zen practice, it therefore attempts, like the texts in this study (*The Bell Jar* and *The Catcher in the Rye* especially) to grasp and represent in language otherwise pre-linguistic and pre-logical experiences. Due to the affinities between what Zen calls the perceptions of the “true nature” of the self and experiences of the fugitive self, Davis' explanations of how Zen works tangibly to aid the spiritual aspirant to perceive this pre-logical self are valuable to this analysis of how Zen is introduced to Holden's narration. For this reason I will refer often to Davis' hypotheses and concrete explanations in the following textual analysis of how the novel formally decomposes standard notions of narrative logic in Holden's narration.

Section Three: Causality

One key way in which Zen practice is said to loosen the strict dualistic conditioning of a spiritual aspirant in order to aid them in the realization of their “true” non-dual nature is through the troubling of dualist conceptions of cause and effect (or ends and means) during meditative inquiry (Davis 9). According to Zen, one does not have to do or accomplish anything to become enlightened and gain Buddhahood (one's true *Buddha-nature*): Buddhahood is intrinsic and need only be apprehended by the student. This notion is, by its nature, counterintuitive. It led Eihei Dogen (Zen master, 1200-1253) to develop a profound doubt of the necessity of the sustained, continuous practice of Zen if he was, in fact, already enlightened (Davis 9). Dogen questioned the duality of spiritual practice as a cause (or means) and the realization of his non-dual nature as an effect (or end). But he finally concluded that practice and enlightenment are indeed one through the experiential dissolution of the dualism in his question (94). In other words, to view the Buddha-nature as a teleological goal to be reached, and Zen practice as the means to attain it, is to idealize, conceptualize and objectify the Buddha-nature (95). Instead, Dogen equates the Buddha-nature *with* impermanence, and in this way, he conjoins that which is limited by time and space (impermanence) with that which is beyond time and space (Buddha-nature) (97).

This example explains how the dualistically conditioned mind's quest for causality in all things is, according to Zen, innately flawed. Dogen's convic-

tion that “there is not even the slightest gap between resolution, practice, enlightenment, and nirvana” attests to the fundamental non-duality of the Buddha-nature (ibid.). In other words, the method of continuous Zen practice is “ever circulating” in the sense that in complete realization ends and means are not separable, but rather indicate a “dynamic intersection of irreversibility and reversibility.”⁸⁹ Attainment is not a “thing” that can be reached or grasped; the relationship is not that of a linear causality, but rather of the “dynamic of dependent co-origination” (98). Davis sums up that for Dogen, practice and Buddha-nature “are not dualities positioned in a direct causal relationship,” but that, “[l]ike all things, they are impermanent and in an interdependent co-conditioned relationship” (ibid.). Thus, when a modern Zen master is asked the riddle “What came first: the chicken or the egg?” he answers that “both come together” (Davis 107).

As Brian Richardson points out in *Unlikely Stories* (1997), while cause is “one of the most significant and fundamental aspects of narrative” it has surprisingly also been one of the most neglected and under theorized subjects of narrative theory and criticism (14). He reminds us that those such as Barthes who have engaged with this “mainspring of narrative” maintain that to understand causality, it is vital to look critically at the philosophical theories and ideological values concealed within a text’s conception of causation (44).⁹⁰ In *The Catcher in the Rye* we can decipher the traces of two distinct theories concerning causality: that of Holden (as both character and narrator) and that suggested at the authorial level.⁹¹ Holden’s view is basically the same standard, narrative understanding that his contemporary society holds; it is also the one from which he rebels. Common sense suggests that the narrator ought to be in a better position to piece together the causes and effects of his life events than when he was in the midst of living them. But curiously, he more often simply represents the difficulties that his character had creating or understanding causality, rather than showing that now, through the perspective of narration, he has a different conception of causality. One example of this (of several to follow) is when he decides to sleep in the waiting room in Grand Central Station. He states:

I figured I’d sleep in that crazy waiting room where all the benches are. So that’s what I did. It wasn’t too bad for a while because there weren’t many people around and I could stick my feet up. But I don’t feel much like discussing it. It wasn’t too nice. Don’t ever try it. I mean it. It’ll depress you. (252)

⁸⁹ This quotation is attributed to Abe in *Dogen Studies* (1985) (108, qtd. in Davis).

⁹⁰ Richardson cites Barthes in *Image-Music-Text* (1977).

⁹¹ That is, the narrator’s understanding of causality in California has not changed significantly from the one that he had before his breakdown; he has no new belief of how causality functions compared to his character of a few weeks or months earlier in New York. However, this perspective differs fundamentally from that held at the authorial level.

In this way, Holden as narrator reports that sleeping on waiting-room benches causes depression as though it is a fact and not an opinion that he holds now or an emotion that he had when he was a (exhausted) character. Holden as narrator in fact displays less concern than his character that he cannot, or does not, find a clear, logical causality to the actions and events in his life. He appears intuitively less bothered that this appears to be the case, and this enables him to be able to relate and represent the difficulties he experiences. I suggest thus that some key effects of the novel—such as the mystifying climax at the carousel—can be explained through a better understanding of the ways in which Zen as a guiding philosophy in the novel influences causality formally beyond Holden’s immediate ken.

As stated, the lack of clear, linear causality for the character’s epiphany at the carousel and especially the narrator’s final comments about the ambiguous nature of his therapeutic narration have gained a great deal of critical attention over the years. This is because when read with the standard expectations of narrative plot, the ending is where the final meaning of the text should be able to be determined. Formally, the text appears to gratify this expectation through Holden’s emotional climax during the carousel scene of the penultimate chapter and the brief *dénouement* which brings the reader back to the present of Holden’s narration in Chapter 26. Holden depicts both his character’s detachment from the world, as well as his illogical, and even to him, inexplicable sense of joy and at-oneness as he watches his sister ride the carousel:

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. I don’t know why. It was just that she looked so damn *nice*, the way she kept going around and around, in her blue coat and all. God, I wish you could’ve been there. (275, original emphasis)

This state of mind can confuse readers who try to use logical reasoning to understand how this change came about and what its nature is. However scholars investigating the influence of Zen on the novel have explained these moments in terms of a Zen *koan* leading to *satori*. Koans, such as the well-known “what is your original face before your parents were born?” (attributed to Dogen), are supra-logical aporias that can lift the Zen practitioner above conceptual intelligence to immediate intuitive insight (*ibid.*).⁹²

⁹² The most well-known Zen method of “opening the mental eye” and attaining at once *satori* (and therefore knowledge of one’s non-dual nature) is though the *koan* exercise. To a mind raised in the Western tradition a *koan* can appear to be an absurd riddle. But that *koans* baffle logic, is precisely the point. As Suzuki explains, “[w]hen such problems are given to the uninitiated for solution, what is the object of the master? The idea is to unfold the Zen psychology in the mind of the uninitiated, and to reproduce the state of consciousness, of which these statements are an expression. That is to say, when the *koans* are understood the master’s state of mind is understood, which is *satori*” (*Selected Writings* 160). In other words, in reply

As French suggests, Holden's lack of engagement with logical analysis actually characterizes the whole narration. While one can easily explain the impulsive, unreflective state-of-mind of the character, the narrator's lack of analysis of his past actions and emotions is, as I will show in more detail shortly, pronounced. Moreover, this absence of analysis is all the more noteworthy because Holden does appear to set up his story in terms of therapeutic narration; that is, a narration which may enable him to discover the mystery of his breakdown and the causality leading up to it. He begins his narrative by setting out his understanding of the basic plot of his psychological crisis: "I'm not going to tell you my whole goddam autobiography or anything. I'll just tell you about this madman stuff that happened to me around last Christmas just before I got pretty run-down and had to come out here and take it easy" (3). He makes it clear, therefore, that the "action" of his story is based primarily on the illness leading up to his breakdown (as Holden arguably views it), or breakthrough (as implied at the authorial level). Hence, the plot he aims to tell is symptom-based and ending-directed.

The character appears to be in a state of mind that interferes with his ability to logically analyze his story and establish connections between ostensible causes and effects. He is not simply ornery or lazy about beading together the causes and effects of his narrative as he can make it appear. Instead, I suggest that at this point in the text we can intuit its philosophical underpinnings challenging Holden's dualist conceptions of causality. Holden's difficulty understanding why he feels increasingly depressed throughout the novel is a case in point. Firstly, he uses the word "depressed" repeatedly to stand in for a diverse range of emotions (including guilt, sadness, loneliness and boredom), rarely specifically reflecting on or isolating the negative effects with any specificity. Secondly, the things that do cause him to feel depressed are a mixture of incongruent experiences which he shows little interest in probing significance out of. These include the quietness of his dorms on a

to the *koan*, the master does not want to receive a specific, logically attained answer that has been reached through discursive thought, but instead evidence that the student has grasped the state of mind expressed by the *koan*. Thus, *koans* are *realized*, and not solved or interpreted. "Technically speaking," Suzuki informs us, "the *koan* given to the uninitiated is intended . . . to make the calculating mind die," and while "[t]his may sound murderous" the ultimate intent is to "go beyond the limits of intellection" (*Selected Writings* 164-165). The trope of the *koan* has been a common theme and method (within Zen-related research) of reading Salinger's works in general. Stauch, for example suggests that the final sentence of *The Catcher in the Rye* acts like a Zen *koan* which brings a "shock to the conceptualizing, precept-laden intelligence, a puzzle or paradox that will not yield to logical analysis but that, on the contrary, sends the mind back over the experience recorded" (83). Moreover, in 1997 Dennis McCort argued that in the novel Holden himself is actively working out a *koan* (connected to the way he experiences change and permanence), which he realizes in the carousel scene; this in turn allows him to transcend dualist contradictions (266). James Lundquist also argues that the *koan* suggests a method for reading all of Salinger's later stories (70, 73), and that, according to Salinger's writing philosophy, like a *koan* the stories should bring "spiritual insight" (133).

Saturday night (66), “phony” people like Ernie the piano player and the people who clap for him (110), packing a new pair of skates that his mother has just given him (67), hearing laughing on the street in New York very late at night (106), having more expensive suitcases than his roommate (142), people being excited about going to the movies (150-151), a pair of nuns eating toast while he has bacon and eggs (143), and being wished “good luck” (262). Those causes which Holden does attempt to locate in order to understand and explain the effects, as mentioned above, are symptom-related: when he finds himself feeling worse (one step closer to his final breakdown), he may try to identify a cause. Holden at this point portrays himself in a vicious cycle of depressing causes and effects: he suggests that his feelings of depression actually cause him to act in certain ways, or do certain things that he ordinarily would not do (and that make him feel worse). These include accepting a terrible room at a hotel (79), ordering a prostitute (123), and then choosing not sleep with her (129). To be clear, my point is not that his audience could not piece together a plausible theory of why having more expensive suitcases than one’s roommate might make one feel uncomfortable, but that it is striking and conspicuous that both the character, and especially the narrator, perform so little analysis of why these disparate situations affect him emotionally. Again and again, Holden claims that he just does not feel like explaining, dwelling on and interpreting parts of his story for the listener. He shows his character often relating his emotional reactions to things that are going on in his immediate surroundings, in the present moment of the feeling—but the narrator, apart from reporting these impressions and highlighting their particularity (even connecting them to “crazy” [104] or “madman” behavior [174]), does not talk about them, or analyze them further. One classic example concerns Jane, a girl Holden cares for who his roommate Stradlater took out on a date the night he decides to leave Pency Prep:

Anyway, that’s what I was thinking about while I sat in that vomity-looking chair in the lobby. Old Jane. Every time I got to the part about her out with Stradlater in that damn Ed Banky’s car, it almost drove me crazy. I knew she wouldn’t let him get to first base with her, but it drove me crazy anyway. I don’t even like to talk about it, if you want to know the truth. (104)⁹³

⁹³ Similar examples include: “If you want to know the truth, I don’t even know why I started all that stuff with [Sally]. I mean about going away somewhere, to Massachusetts and Vermont and all. I probably wouldn’t’ve taken her even if she’d wanted to go with me. She wouldn’t have been anybody to go with. The terrible part, though, is that I meant it when I asked her. That’s the terrible part. I swear to God I’m a madman,” (174) and (of his epiphany at the carousel): “I felt so damn happy all of 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. I don’t know why” (275).

Perhaps most remarkable are those instances in the text where the two divergent philosophies concerning causality influence the protagonist strongly: when Holden portrays himself attempting to use analytical reasoning at the same time as he experiences an intensified Zen-like sense of the present moment. As H. Porter Abbott has pointed out, the sense made by selecting key life events and formulating causality in a retrospective life narrative can be unreliable: “Narrative by its arrangement of events gratifies our need for order . . . the perception of cause. If this can make narrative a gratifying experience, it can also make it a treacherous one, since it implicitly draws on an ancient fallacy that things that follow other things are caused by those things” (42-43). Though Holden does not attribute his emotions to psychological “patterns of the mind” or causes, he is sometimes unable to keep himself from attributing his feelings to the concrete situations or actual people in his immediate surroundings. Shortly before his breakdown, Holden describes his character committing the logical fallacy which Abbott warns of—*post hoc, ergo propter hoc*—when he begins to make even more general and illogical pronouncements than previously about what influences his mood. The above quotation in which Holden claims that sleeping on a waiting-room bench will “depress you,” is one example (252). Also, when Holden finds himself having difficulty swallowing his breakfast, he states: “The thing is, if you get very depressed about something, it’s hard as hell to swallow” (255). Holden also demonstrates that he can even create erroneous causal links between occurrences concerning potentially serious matters. After reading two magazine articles about hormones and cancer, he reports that his character recalled a persistent cold sore and became convinced that he would “be dead in a couple months” (254). Again representing the emotions of his character, the narrator emphasizes, without further analysis: “I really did. I was even positive I would be” (*ibid.*). Thus, by studying the challenges that the protagonist has creating basic causality in the body of his narration, we learn that throughout the narrative—and not only in the final two chapters—Holden’s ability to create logical causality is troubled.

Section Four: Linearity

Pheobe: “You can’t think of one thing [that you like].”

Holden: “I like Allie [...]. And I like doing what I’m doing right now. Sitting here with you, and talking, and thinking about stuff, and—”

Pheobe: “Allie’s *dead* [...]. If somebody’s dead and everything, and in Heaven, then it isn’t really—”

Holden: “I know he’s dead! . . . I can still like him though, can’t I? [...] Anyway, I like it now,” I said. “I mean right now. Sitting here with you and just chewing the fat and horsing—”

Pheobe: “That isn’t anything really!”

Holden: “It is so something really! Certainly it is! Why the hell isn’t it? People never think anything is anything really. I’m getting goddam sick of it.” (222-223, original emphasis)

Zen admits of “no linear notions of before and after, here and there” and holds that we only really exist in the now of the present moment (Davis 138). Bringing everything back to the “here and now” is, according to Davis, one deconstructive technique which is employed in Zen practice to undo goal-oriented bifurcations of linear ideas of time. She explains that by situating the practitioner in the here-and-now allows no experimental “room” for temporal or causal conceptual abstractions and projections of *here-and-there*, *before-and-after* and *now-and-then* (ibid.). This technique serves to problematize the dualistic understanding of the self (and things) as stable and independent entities in linear time because if the practitioner “is ‘just doing this’, whatever ‘this’ may be, then there is no conceptual ‘room’ for oppositional modes of thinking or reification” (136).

In one sense, as Mieke Bal points out, a truly anti-linear novel (or narrative text) is impossible to create as “against various other art forms—architecture, visual arts—a written linguistic text is linear. One word follows another, one sentence follows another” (80). And in fact, one can even see a “double linearity”—that of the text as a series of sentences, and that of the *story*, as a series of events (ibid.). But while an anti-linear novel appears impossible, almost equally unique would be a strictly linear novel which does not deviate whatsoever from the chronological sequential ordering of the events depicted. And apart from the time discrepancies that occur from the selection of events (the creation of *discourse*) from the material of the *story*, there are often also chronological ordering changes to the *story*. Most novels of course use what Genette has coined “anachronies”—*analepsis* (flashbacks) and *prolepsis* (foreshadowing)—routinely. However, there is a different sense in which a novel could be anti-linear which has less to do with a parade of building words, sentences, and chapters, or the strict chronology of events. The linearity of a narrative could also encompass the degree to which it relates to or is based upon sequential development. It is this last word on which I would like to focus: the notion that development is built into the sequential building of logical meaning, and, following this, the overt progress of the psychological development or education of the main character as in the case of a *Bildungsroman* or the therapeutic narration. As Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan explains, the defiance of this narrative development is innately anti-social (46). Rimmon-Kenan argues that the way that our contemporary society thinks of development occurring in chronological time is intimately connected to our need as citizens to become socialized and successfully operate in our societies:

Our civilization tends to think of time as a uni-directional and irreversible flow, a sort of one-way-street. [...] Today we might add that not only the object of experience but also the experiencing subject is in a constant flux. To become socialized, the flux must be made measurable. It can become measurable only when a repetitive pattern is discerned within it (e.g. the solar year) or imposed upon it by machines constructed to this end. (46)

This holds true even for maintaining and communicating normative psychology. Therefore, due to the assumptions of the novel's generic and social context, deviations from the standard form reflect, I argue, a concomitant problematization of the narrator's normative ego development and its representation (i.e. his narrative identity). Indeed, as the nature of the *Bildungsroman* genre concerns the education and socialization of the protagonist to a greater degree than other genres, Holden's breaks and digressions from the linear plot can be read as attempts to escape social education, maturation and development, and with it, the natural action sequence of his socially and psychologically scripted role.

In discussing Zen and linearity in the novel, scholars have pointed to the inherent circularity of the text: how Holden begins and ends his narrative in the same place (the therapeutic facility in California) and, minus the time it takes to tell his story, in the same present tense. A symbolic connection of the text to the turning of the Buddhist wheel of life has also been put forth.⁹⁴ However, this framing device also signals a motif of form in the novel: that Holden's journey is not one of linear development moving strictly towards any one teleological goal. That is, obviously not the goal of psychological normality and greater socially imagined happiness. I suggest that it is, rather, a ceaseless quest to both have and represent a less-scripted life and self. It is a quest that is not experienced as building developmentally, but instead as encompassing continual brief enlightenments. In short, the experience of the fugitive self as opposed to a sustained narrative identity.

In his narration, Holden often digresses from the main plot of his story—the overt events leading to his breakdown which take place chiefly during three days of wandering in New York City. He does so in a casual, colloquial manner that many find adds to the charm of the novel. But these digressions away from the chronologically linear script of a standard *Bildungsroman* also signal Holden's avoidance of developing a socially scripted, psychologically mature identity. Digression is of course a well-known technique of creating and maintaining suspense in narrative. However, Holden himself explains that he has an ulterior motive with his digressive storytelling. He expands on the method and claims that it can also bring enjoyment and a greater depth of experience to the narrator and narratee (238). For Holden, the technique appears to be less about using narrative tension to maintain the

⁹⁴ Tom Davis has suggested that the carousel in the penultimate chapter is an allusion to the Tibetan Buddhist Wheel of Life (*Bhavacakra*) (98).

interest of his audience, than in weaving into his narration otherwise illogically connected story material. In contrast to the more horizontally-plotted action of causality, the technique aims to more vertically—metaphorically, thematically and emotionally—deepen his audience’s experience and understanding of his character. Holden explains this technique when he meets up with Mr. Antolini, his favorite English teacher from an earlier prep school whom he seeks out in New York City. Holden begins by explaining that in his Oral Expression class “each boy in class has to get up . . . and make a speech,” he goes on: “You know. Spontaneous and all. And if the boy digresses at all, you’re supposed to yell ‘Digression!’ at him as fast as you can. It just about drove me crazy” (238). When Antolini asks why the course upset him, Holden explains that the “digression business” got on his “nerves,” because he “*like[s]* it when somebody digresses. It’s more *interesting* and all” (238, original emphasis). “I guess I don’t like it when somebody sticks to the point *all* the time,” he admits, although the “boys that got the best marks in Oral Expression were the ones that stuck to the point all the time” (ibid., original emphasis). Holden then gives a sympathetic description of another boy in his class, Richard Kinsella, whose presentations were his favorite precisely because Kinsella veered away from reporting the uninteresting, required facts (e.g. “what kind of animals and vegetables and stuff” grew on his father’s Vermont farm [239]). Instead, Kinsella strays into a poignant story about a letter his mother had received from his uncle who had contracted polio and was too proud and embarrassed to receive visitors to the hospital. “It didn’t have much to do with the farm,” Holden acknowledges, but he emphasizes that “it’s nice when somebody tells you about their uncle,” and “dirty to keep yelling ‘Digression!’ at him when he’s all nice and excited” (ibid.).

The fact that Kinsella passed the course with a D, while Holden reportedly received an F, gives us an idea of the kind of narrative rabbit holes that he too has been digressing down with his classmates. While these particular departures are not made known to us, Holden’s narration is characterized by digressions that send the reader off the character’s ostensible developmental track of actions and events during the story-time of his narrative. The narrator’s detours throughout the text vary: there are the short asides concerning his opinions and thoughts (“If a girl looks swell when she meets you, who gives a damn if she’s late? Nobody.” [162]), as well as longer descriptive passages concerning past experiences, such as going to the Museum of Natural History as a child (158) and descriptions of other characters, like James Castle, a boy he knew who committed suicide (220-222), his sister Phoebe (87) and brother Allie (49-51). In this last, key example Holden pauses the narration of the first evening of his story (when he is still at Pency Prep school in Pennsylvania) to tell his audience about his younger brother. Holden has agreed to write a composition for his roommate Stradlater, who Holden says tells him to write about “[a]nything. Anything descriptive. A room.

Or a house” as long as it is “descriptive as hell” (37, original emphasis). The two-page digression detailing the composition is, in a strict sense, unnecessary to the action of the plot (“this madman stuff that happened to me” [3]) and stalls the chronological flow of the events of the text neatly between two sentences which could logically follow one another without the audience noticing the omission.⁹⁵ In this way, like Holden listening to Kinsella share a “nice” (that is, an emotionally deepening) story about his family, the audience is introduced for the first time to Holden’s much-loved brother. He begins his digression obliquely: because he wasn’t “crazy about” describing rooms or houses, he says he chose to write about Allie’s baseball mitt, which he always kept with him (49). Allie, the “most intelligent” and “nicest” member of his family, had covered this mitt in poems written in green ink (*ibid.*). While the reader does not see the actual composition, from the way that Holden speaks of his brother in the passage, we can imagine that it is indeed “descriptive as hell” (37). In his narration, Holden defines Allie through significant detail: that he had the kind of red hair that could be sensed from “about a hundred and fifty yards behind,” and that his brother “used to laugh so hard at something that he thought of at the dinner table that he just about fell off his chair” (50). “God, he was a nice kid, though,” (*ibid.*) Holden emphasizes. “You’d have liked him,” he tells the listener directly (49).

But even though Holden has followed his instructions, Stradlater is reportedly furious about the paper’s topic when he returns (53). He reacts to the paper like the students who yell “Digression!” in Holden’s Oral Expression class: “For Chrissake, Holden. This is about a goddam *baseball* glove. [...] No wonder you’re flunking the hell out of here. [...] You always do everything backasswards. [...] You don’t do *one damn thing* the way you’re supposed to. I mean it. Not one damn thing.” (*ibid.*, original emphasis). Stradlater’s outburst resembles the judgment Holden feels from his broader society when he does not play the character of the prep-school youth role set out for him. Shortly after, we are told that “it drove [Stradlater] crazy when you broke any rules” (54) when Holden smokes in the dorm to passive-aggressively get back at his roommate. This comment refers equally to the mysterious rules Holden had broken when writing the composition, and points to the fact that Holden is flunking out of not only his Oral Expression class, and his private school education, but, as several characters express, out of his socially scripted place in the game of life.⁹⁶ Hence, Holden argues for,

⁹⁵ The sentences read: “After [Ackley] left, I put on my pajamas and bathrobe and my old hunting hat, and started writing the composition” (49) and “It was around ten-thirty, I guess, when I finished it. I wasn’t tired, though, so I looked out the window for a while” (51).

⁹⁶ Holden has already heard a good deal that day about “playing by the rules” of this game. In a meeting earlier with his History teacher, Mr. Spencer, Holden tells him that the Principal had given him a talk about “[l]ife being a game and all. And how you should play it according to the rules” (12). Mr. Spencer reiterates: “Life is a game, boy. Life is a game that one plays

and himself exhibits, a style of narration which unlike the a-psychological plots of scripted action and identity studied by Todorov, derives its meaning in the more vertical fashion described by theorists such as Barthes of modern literature.⁹⁷ He creates intuitive meaning through digressive detail which serves to develop theme, metaphor and a psychological understanding of the character rather than horizontally advancing the plot. Hence, Holden's style of therapeutic narration attempts to negotiate socially sanctioned form in order to incorporate personally significant digressive detail.

As I suggested earlier, there is also a connection between Holden's affinity for personal digressions from the linear action of his story and his impulses to diverge off the socio-culturally scripted "phony" future that he feels his position in society as an upper-class son of wealthy parents is coercing him into. Holden as character is well aware of the confining teleology of the life script from which he feels he must escape. In a desperate rant in New York to his sometime girlfriend Sally, he starts by asking her if she ever gets "fed up" and "scared that everything [is] going to go lousy unless you did something?" (169). He continues, "I mean, do you like school, and all that stuff?" (ibid.). Like Esther in *The Bell Jar*, we see how conceptually trapped Holden too feels by the pressure to act out his socially scripted role. Holden begins randomly listing other things besides school that he hates, then makes confusing, illogical statements—for example, that he would "rather have a goddam horse" than a car because "[a] horse is at least human, for God's sake" (170). Then he suggests his idea to drive up to New England with Sally to "get the hell out" of his scripted future into an alternate character role and a less-scripted mode of being:

. . . I could get a job somewhere and we could live somewhere with a brook and all and, later on, we could get married or something. I could chop all our own wood in the wintertime and all. Honest to God, we could have a terrific time! Wuddaya say? C'mon! Wuddaya say? Will you do it with me? Please! (171)

Sally calls the idea impractical and "fantastic" (172, original emphasis). She misunderstands his concern to be about travel, rather than psychological escape, and tries to assure Holden that there will be "oodles of marvelous places to go to" besides New England, after Holden goes to college and after they get married (ibid.). But Holden is loath to be herded back onto the plot-

according to the rules," (12). While Holden portrays himself agreeing with Mr. Spencer politely, he makes the following aside to the reader: "Game, my ass. Some game. If you get on the side where all the hot-shots are, then it's a game, all right—I'll admit that. But if you get on the other side, where there aren't any hot-shots, then what's a game about it? Nothing. No game" (12-13).

⁹⁷ In Barthes seminal essay from 1966, "Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative," was published in English in 1975 (in *New Literary History*) and re-published in English in *Image, Music, Text* (1977).

ted path. He tries to explain to Sally just how complicated and absurdly empty life would be for them if they go on playing out their roles—how his vision is not for a holiday from, but a permanent alternative to the script:

. . . there wouldn't be marvelous places to go to after I went to college and all. Open your ears. It'd be entirely different. We'd have to go downstairs in elevators with suitcases and stuff. We'd have to phone up everybody and tell 'em good-by and send 'em postcards from hotels and all. And I'd be working in some office, making a lot of dough, and riding to work in cabs and Madison Avenue buses, and reading newspapers, and playing bridge all the time, and going to the movies and seeing a lot of stupid shorts and coming attractions and newsreels. Newsreels. Christ almighty. There's always a dumb horse race, and some dame breaking a bottle over a ship, and some chimpanzee riding a goddam bicycle with pants on. It wouldn't be the same at all. You don't see what I mean at all. (172-173)

The scene reportedly ends in mutual misunderstanding—with both parties “hat[ing] each other's guts” (173). Holden states that after that point “there wasn't any sense trying to have an intelligent conversation” (*ibid.*). But irony is evinced through Holden's style of speech; here it becomes clear to the reader why Sally might find what he is talking about odd, unrealistic—even incomprehensible.⁹⁸ This irony allows the reader to differentiate between the phony—and to Holden, senseless—actions he feels he is scripted to take and the alternative (in Sally and society's view)—“fantastic” and illogical future somewhere away from society. It becomes clear why this tirade might seem out-of-place in the scripted narrative that Sally hopes to take with her beau: the more desperately Holden tries to explain and make sense out of his feelings, the more absurd they sound to her—the sudden mention of News-reels and apes wearing trousers, for example. This rant can, therefore, be seen as a digression both from their pleasantly planned afternoon date (they have just attended the theatre and gone ice-skating at Radio City) as well as their scripted life path towards marriage and normal upper-class New Yorker lives. It is a digression which moves off the linear plot of their scripted future, both forwards into a different potential future as well as, vertically, thematically and metaphorically, into another kind of meaning-making. That is, in the context of the plotted, horizontal script, Holden's actions and suggestions appear like they came from a “madman” (174)—but when read more vertically—when gathered together with other non-sequential aspects of Holden's narrative—they make a different, and more personal kind of sense.

⁹⁸ While it can be difficult to pinpoint at which level the irony is produced in this kind of passage, I think there is sufficient proof to suggest that the narrator creates it knowingly. Holden shows that he is aware of how crazy his speech must have sounded to Sally at the end of the passage when he remarks that he must be a “madman” as he has no other explanation for carrying on as he did (174).

Holden's non-linear digressions as both the character (in the former example) and as the narrator (in the "Allie" example) thus serve both to retard the creation of his scripted narrative identity, and vertically deepen the reader's emotional understanding of the protagonist. Relatedly, at the authorial level, these digressions can be understood to negotiate the novel's form, ultimately de-composing the expected sequential development of all three levels of progression: the psychologically normative narrative identity of the character, the narrator engaging in therapeutic narration, as well as potential audience expectations (both the narratee and the reader's) that the narration will follow the developmental track of the *Bildungsroman* genre.

Section Five: Subjectivity

Though one can find several similarities between the characters, Holden differs fundamentally from the general understanding of the *Bildungsroman* hero described by Jerome Buckley: Copperfield's formal and school-of-hard-knocks education, troubles of the heart, and his struggle to find his career and place in the world lead him, Buckley claims, to develop an ego which has "discovered and asserted its own identity" (xi). As shown, Holden conversely troubles the logic (the causality and linearity) of his narrative identity throughout the novel. This final section demonstrates how Holden further de-composes its boundaries by blurring the borders of his subjective experience throughout the novel with his audience.

The doctrines of the non-substantiality of the self (or no-self, *anatta*), and of things (or impermanence, *anitya*) contain the main philosophical implications of Buddhist teachings (Davis 69). Zen philosophy holds that there is no such thing as self and other (subject and object). No-self, as Davis explains "is not only the denial of a substantial, fixed entity we call the self but also a recognition of the self and reality as processes in immanent relationship with one another in their dynamic unfolding" (72). Awakening to one's own true-nature, or Buddha-nature (*buddhata*), from one's erroneous belief in a self-nature is to be "in a constant, uninterrupted becoming, in momentary change from one state of existence to another" and to possess no enduring, changeless nature (75). Thus, in the terms of this study, the direct experience of fugitive self is akin to Buddha-nature (the experience of no-self) while social narrative identity bears similarity to Buddhism's self-nature.

One of the most effective ways, Davis explains, that the practitioner can appreciate their true-nature is to be shifted into the "not-knowing space" through the problematization of ontological and epistemological adherence to either side of a dualism (138). When students are given unanswerable, deconstructive questions that challenge their dualistic patterns of knowing to focus on, their attachments to dualisms can become troubled (*ibid.*). For example, the question "Who is doing what?" while a person practices medi-

tation can obfuscate subject-object distinctions. The student can no longer “find” the border between a sense of self in the present moment and the action that they are carrying out (the “what”) (ibid.). Hence, when challenged in this way, either directly by a teacher or in the objectless meditative process of *shikantaza*, practitioners find that they cannot actually locate this substantialized “experiencer,” the “I” to whom they normally attribute entity status (129).

It is revealing to compare this state to that of the a-psychological characters of Todorovian action scripts. As explained in the Introduction, in the realm of narrative men (as characters of scripts) the protagonists find they become a-psychological beings, their social meaning and value determined by their actions. The novels problematize postwar faith in the notion of being psychologically healed through self-analysis. They critique the implicit message that one “is” one’s actions, that meaning and value are bestowed according to one’s alignment with a script of action. Whereas, in the Zen practice of *shikantaza*, being shifted into a not-knowing space suggests that one cannot hold both an experience of the “I” as social identity and the self of pre-linguistic experience in the mind at the same time. In the terms of this study, one cannot be both inside and outside of narrative at the same time: one cannot actually experience the fugitive self while one is thinking of oneself in terms of narrative identity. This implies that the present-moment self (the experiencer) becomes not so much a-psychological, as beyond a personal psychology altogether. In Zen practice, when one “is” one’s actions, “is” does not imply the meaning granted by society, but rather a destruction of the perceptual divide between subject and object. In these terms, for Holden to get out of narration and into the not-knowing space is to escape the meaning/value system of his society.

Trapped in the logical processes of his mind, Holden resembles an unwitting spiritual aspirant. He frequently obsesses about what seem to be, for him, unsolvable problems, such as where the ducks in Central Park go in the winter (18, 78, 107, 200). Dennis McCort suggests that questions such as the duck conundrum operate like *koans* that Holden comes back to again and again without resolution (119). Other personal issues Holden reports thinking of obsessively include what the nature of Mr. Antolini’s affection is towards him (249, 251, 253-254), and that he would like to give Jane, “a buzz” (but never manages to) (77, 82, 137). Holden reveals that he feels increasingly depressed the more he tries to logically understand problems like these (253). With no apparent exit, he portrays himself feeling conceptually stuck due to the things he cannot “know for sure” (ibid.). As Davis suggests is the case for a spiritual student, Holden feels stuck not only mentally, but physically as well. Throughout the novel his mind turns to plans of escape into seclusion—away from his prep school to NYC (where no one expects him), to a cabin in New England (171), out “west” while pretending to be a deaf-mute (257-258), even through suicide (136). Like Esther in *The Bell Jar*,

Holden feels the narrative pull of scripts (172-173) as well as the determination of the narrative logic that his society relies upon for therapeutic interpretation. For Esther, scripting her life according to narrative logic, it follows that the ending of her life narrative can decide the meaning of her life. But for Holden, who is less active than Esther in the narrative negotiation of scripts, the contemplation of suicide has less to do with controlling the final meaning of his story than escaping the scripted character role of the college-educated, rich and successful career man he is meant to fulfill.

But like Esther, Holden finds some hope by exploring a conception of self which is not limited to a scripted identity. In Zen practice, once “stuck” in this not-knowing state of mind, students prompted to logically find the substantialized “I” that is thinking the thoughts, can begin to experience problems. According to Davis, practitioners “commonly report that the boundaries of self and non-self seem to dissolve” (131). This type of ontological falling apart or “disassembling” can be experienced as “disorientating and ‘scary’” (132). Holden similarly portrays himself experiencing frightening and confusing feelings about the loss and incongruence of his identity. He relates having strange metaphysical experiences at the very beginning (the Saturday afternoon) (8) as well as at the ending (Monday morning) of his story, when something “spooky” starts happening and he feels that crossing streets will make him disappear (256); “Boy, did it scare me,” he emphasizes (*ibid.*). He also feels “funny” returning to his childhood school and finding it just the same and himself changed (259). He reports his sense of identity being challenged in a similarly unhinging manner, when he thinks back on his periodic visits to the Museum of Natural History as a child, where “everything always stayed right where it was” and “[t]he only thing that would be different would be you” (158).

In Zen Buddhism, spiritual inquiries into the nature of “selves and things” are undertaken to “uproot and undo static, linear, conceptions of reality and experientially disclose to the practitioner . . . reality as a non-directional flux,” as opposed to a static, linear phenomenon (Davis 72). Awakening to one’s own true-nature (like the fugitive self) from one’s erroneous belief in a self-nature (a socially-scripted narrative identity with “ego integrity”) is to be “in a constant, uninterrupted becoming, in momentary change from one state of existence to another” (75). Similarly, Holden’s confrontations with objects that he viewed as a child at his school and in the museum challenge him with the reality of the insubstantiality of his identity (*ibid.*). Holden emphasizes that he cannot explain the encounters logically: it is not that he is “so much older or anything”—a linear conception of reality (158). He instead describes his experience of self at the museum as phenomenological and chronologically non-directional:

You’d just be different, that’s all. You’d have an overcoat on this time. Or the kid that was your partner in line the last time had got scarlet fever and

you'd have a new partner. Or you'd have a substitute taking the class, instead of Miss Aigletinger. Or you'd heard your mother and father having a terrific fight in the bathroom. Or you'd just passed by one of those puddles in the street with gasoline rainbows in them. I mean you'd be different in some way—I can't explain what I mean. And even if I could, I'm not sure I'd feel like it. (158)

But like Esther, who also believes that she is going “crazy,” though frightened by the dissolution of his narrative identity while wandering physically in New York City, and conceptually in a Zen-like not-knowing space, Holden too appears to make use of the potential of this narrative negotiation of self. Buckley states that a traditional conception of a *Bildungsroman* hero like David Copperfield holds that the hero has both “the need for self-analysis and the ability to relate his friends and adventures to a self-consciously subjective development” (viii). Holden, conversely, attempts to trouble the boundaries not only of his identity but also of his subjectivity through a unique narrational technique concerning his audience. While there has been much speculation about the identity of the “you” Holden addresses his story to, divergent signals in the text make the narratee(s) difficult to isolate.⁹⁹ The reader cannot be certain if the “you” is a singular individual, or the plural “you” of a group (such as, perhaps, a therapy group). Holden uses this method of addressing his audience during short asides throughout the novel, such as: “If you knew Stradlater, you'd have been worried, too” [52]). It also appears strategically at the very beginning (“If you really want to hear about it, the first thing you'll probably want to know is where I was born, and what my lousy childhood was like, and how my parents were occupied and all before they had me” [3]), and at the end of the novel: “Don't ever tell anybody anything. If you do, you start missing everybody” (277). This approach is also utilized at specific times when Holden describes things which he reacts strongly to, emotions which he believes his audience will share.¹⁰⁰ The result of this technique, as earlier readings have suggested, can cause the reader to feel personally involved in Holden's narration, and gain a sense of connection that has been identified as a key aspect of the novel's power.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Suggestions of Holden's audience have included a psychoanalyst, another patient or patients at the care facility, no one in particular (i.e. an imagined audience), or a general audience of like-minded (young, male) readers.

¹⁰⁰ For example, how Holden feels about his younger siblings, Allie and Phoebe: “[Allie's] dead now. He got leukemia and died when we were up in Maine, on July 18, 1946. You'd have liked him. He was two years younger than I was, but he was about fifty times as intelligent” (49) and “You should see [Phoebe]. You never saw a little kid so pretty and smart in your whole life. [...] You'd like her. [...] Old Phoebe. I swear to God you'd like her” (87). Another example is how the protagonist feels about “phoniness” (the un-genuine): “He was putting all these dumb, show-offy ripples in the high notes, and a lot of other very tricky stuff that gives me a pain in the ass. You should've heard the crowd, though, when he was finished. You would've puked” (110).

¹⁰¹ See, for example, Graham's synopsis (19).

The novel, like any which has a first-person narrator who addresses his audience in this way, can benefit from not only the directness of the personal pronoun “you,” but also from the ambiguity built into the pronoun to broaden the scope of directly addressed narratees. For example, as the word remains the same in the singular and the plural, the single reader (amongst the millions and counting) can easily take themselves for the narratee of Holden’s tale.¹⁰² But in *The Catcher in the Rye*, the effect of this usage of “you” is even more comprehensive than this. The text capitalizes on the intrinsic directness and, paradoxically, the ambiguity (concerning singular and plural forms) of the pronoun, but also utilizes the so-called generic-you of casual spoken and written English to great effect. This kind of “you” refers to an unspecified person; for example: “[Stradlater] hated it when you called him a moron” (57). In formal English, the generic-you is equivalent to “one,” (the previous statement would then read: “Stradlater hated it when one called him a moron”). In both informal and formal forms, these terms—the generic you and “one”—refer to an unspecified person and, therefore, normally communicate generalized beliefs (of one person or many people). However, in Holden’s narration, he routinely blurs the boundaries between himself and his audience by using the generic-you to express, instead, subjective emotional and physical experiences. That is, Holden has a habit of utilizing “you” where “I” would be the accurate choice. In the following example, Holden begins by using “I” then switches into this conspicuous “you” habit: “After I got across the road, *I* felt like *I* was sort of disappearing. It was that kind of a crazy afternoon, terrifically cold, and no sun out or anything, and *you* felt like *you* were disappearing every time *you* crossed a road” (8, emphasis added).

The effect is more subtle when the different types of the pronoun are distributed evenly, and when the specific “you” concerns an opinion of Holden’s. For example, when communicating an idea or experience, Holden can begin by speaking in the first-person (“I walked all the way back to the hotel. Forty-one gorgeous blocks. I didn’t do it because I felt like walking or anything. It was more because I didn’t feel like getting in and out of another taxicab”[115]) and then slip into an opinion he holds, using the generic-you to express a personal experience (here, of frustration): “Sometimes *you* get tired of riding in taxicabs the same way *you* get tired riding in elevators. All of a sudden, *you* have to walk, no matter how far or how high up,” (ibid., emphasis added). This is followed by an immediate slippage back into the first-person (“When I was a kid, I used to walk all the way up to our apartment very frequently. Twelve stories” [ibid.]). Obviously, feeling tired from

¹⁰² In connection to this discussion of Holden’s blurring of subjects, it is notable that “you” also remains the pronoun used in both the nominative and the objective case. For example, “you” can be both a subject and an object (unlike the first person pronoun “I”): “I (subject) will write a haiku for you (object),” “You (subject) will write a haiku for me (object).”

riding in taxicabs or elevators might be a more generalized malaise, but the manner in which Holden sandwiches his supposed opinion of this within his personal experience gives the impression that he is unwittingly mixing his feelings with an unspecified other. Holden can also move immediately from the first-person perspective (“I didn’t see hardly anybody on the street,”) into that of a generic-you which seems far too specific to him to be “unspecified”: “Now and then *you* just saw a man and a girl crossing a street, with their arms around each other’s waists and all, or a bunch of hoodlumy-looking guys and their dates, all of them laughing like hyenas at something *you* could bet wasn’t funny” (106). He continues with an opinion which is clearly attributed to himself—“New York’s terrible when somebody laughs on the street very late at night,”—before finally moving from a generic-you (“You can hear it for miles,”) into this mysterious you he has created which expresses his subjective emotion: “It makes *you* feel so lonesome and depressed” (ibid., emphasis added).

Thus, through this technique Holden, sometimes subtly, other times overtly, shifts his perception of the ontological boundaries between his subjective experience and that of his audience. More overt examples of this melding of subject/object often also mix types of the pronoun, but they contain subjective experiences that, unlike the former examples, the listener really could not logically feel. In the next example, Holden changes from a generic-you (which he uses in the first three instances) to this intersubjective-you:

Most girls if you hold hands with them, their goddam hand dies on you, or else they think they have to keep moving their hand all the time, as if they were afraid they’d bore you or something. Jane was different. We’d get into a goddam movie or something, and right away we’d start holding hands, and we wouldn’t quit till the movie was over. [...] *You* never even worried, with Jane, whether your hand was sweaty or not. All *you* knew was, *you* were happy. *You* really were. (103, emphasis added)

And, similarly:

It was lousy in the park. It wasn’t too cold, but the sun still wasn’t out, and there didn’t look like there was anything in the park except dog crap and globs of spit and cigar butts from old men, and the benches all looked like they’d be wet if you sat down on them. It made *you* depressed, and every once in a while, for no reason, *you* got goose flesh while *you* walked. (153, emphasis added)

To be clear, my point is not that the listener might not be able to relate to what Holden is expressing, but that Holden unequivocally expresses very personal experiences in a manner which betrays a troubling of his ontological borders. That is, he presents his subjective emotions as objective, shared emotions which are not limited to his experience. And as is the case with his troubling of the causality and linearity of his narration, Holden’s apparent

lack of deliberation in creating this inter-subjective technique is also quite remarkable. There is no indication in the text that he himself understands the implications of the way he represents his reality. Hence, this unique usage of “you” may reflect not Holden’s rhetorical skill so much as the way he experiences his personal emotions as not limited to the boundaries of his mind and body, but instead more generally as a shared experience with his audience.

Concluding Discussion

Holden finally differs from traditional conceptions of a *Bildungsroman* hero in a key manner: he ends his narrative with no more of the aforementioned “proclivity for order and meaning” regarding a normative narrative identity than he began with (Erikson qtd. in Buckley, xi). When asked about his own interpretation of his narrative, “all this stuff [he has] just finished telling [the audience] about,” as we have seen, he states: “I didn’t know what the hell to say. If you want to know the truth, I don’t know what I think about it” (276-277, original emphasis). Rather than expressing that he has benefitted from the practice, Holden says that he regrets telling “so many people” about his experience (277) and appears to warn his audience against a similar undertaking due to the sense of alienation he now feels after completing it:

About all I know is, I sort of *miss* everybody I told about. Even old Stradlater and Ackley, for instance. I think I even miss that goddam Maurice. It’s funny. Don’t ever tell anybody anything. If you do, you start missing everybody. (ibid., original emphasis)

In this way, the end of the novel remains ambiguous: through the experiences he relates, Holden appears to have learned little about developing the mature subjectivity necessary for carrying out his socially-scripted role. Through his attempt to set his “madman stuff” into narrative, the narrator troubles the therapeutic assumptions of the practice that his postwar society holds. Ironically, if Holden is educated in the novel, (as one would expect from a traditional *Bildungsroman*), according to a Zen reading this takes place through un-learning—the recognition of the non-duality of all things that Holden momentarily evinces through his *satori*-like epiphany in the penultimate chapter. But it seems, from his final warning to his audience, that Holden’s experience of Zen-like non-duality has been disturbed by the act of narrating his story. That is, rather than ease his loneliness, his narration has made him feel separate from others and reintroduced a sense of duality, which he experiences negatively as “missing” them. Through the act of iterating his story Holden has, then, in part re-trained those dualist conceptu-

al categories (here between self and other) that he had, at least momentarily, *un*-learned.

Hence, due to the formal influence of Zen philosophy on Holden's experience and active narration, the protagonist's journey can be rethought from one where, as Lee suggests, "the privileges of authorship" have given Holden "in the mirror of his own 'composition'" the opportunity to "see[] himself whole and clear" (187). A contrasting view could acknowledge that, in spite of his narration, Holden's final lack of certainty about his future narrative identity signals an alternative, concomitant view in the text of what psychological health might be, and how it might come about. Namely, that happiness need not be reached through narrative logic but could rather be realized through a loosening of the narrative demands of sense-making; this could better enable a person to appreciate, even acknowledge, present moment, fugitive experiences outside of societally-scripted definitions of life fulfillment. Thus, the *koan* that leads to brief *satori*-like epiphanies could be an analogy not only for reading Salinger's short stories, as Lundquist has suggested, but also for understanding his hero, the "boy" of short story negotiating the *Bildungsroman* genre. Holden neither logically interprets his "damaged ego" nor does he solve the mystery of his psychological suffering. However, like the intuitive comprehension of a *koan*, through *satori* his fugitive self is briefly realized and represented.

CHAPTER FOUR

“O well they picked poor Robin clean”: Performing the Blues Self in *Invisible Man*

*How will it end?
Ain't got a friend.
My only sin is in my skin.
What did I do, to be so black and blue?
(Waller, Razaf & Brooks)¹⁰³*

Ralph Ellison was once asked in a *Paris Review* interview if the search for identity was a primary theme of American literature. Ellison replied that it “*is* the American theme” as “the nature of our society is such that we are prevented from knowing who we are” (219, original emphasis).¹⁰⁴ Elsewhere, in his essay “Harlem is Nowhere,” Ellison explained that a common reply to the question “How are you?” in Harlem is, “Oh, man, I’m *nowhere*” (323). For him the statement revealed black Americans’ fundamental alienation from postwar American society. He explained that the phrase expresses the feeling that the black American’s identity “drifts in a capricious reality in which even the most commonly held assumptions are questionable” (325). As Ellison believed that the attitudes which bring this state about contradict America’s democratic ideals, he held that black Americans became confused about the relationship of *who* they are to *where* they are:

For this is a world in which the major energy of the imagination goes not into creating works of art, but to overcome the frustrations of social discrimination. Not quite citizens and yet Americans, full of the tensions of the modern man but regarded as primitives, Negro Americans are in *desperate search for an identity*. Rejecting the second-class status assigned them, they feel alienated and their whole lives have become a search for answers to the questions: Who am I, What am I, Why am I, and Where? (322-323, original emphasis)

¹⁰³ From “(What Did I Do to Be So) Black and Blue,” the Louis Armstrong version of which is featured prominently in the prologue of *Invisible Man*. The original show tune from the 1929 Broadway review *Hot Chocolates* was composed by Fats Waller with lyrics by Andy Razaf and Harry Brooks.

¹⁰⁴ While the novel itself and many of Ellison’s critical essays can be said to focus specifically on racialized identity, the author ultimately saw implications for all Americans’ sense of identity bound up in in these issues (“The Art” 219).

Thus, Ellison explains that this state was clearly a waste of human purpose and potential and brought about psychological suffering in black Americans because of the bewildering questions and contradictions it generated. Without answers to these questions, Ellison held that black Americans were thwarted in their efforts to live purposeful, sane lives by the ontological riddles posed by their existence in postwar American society: “One ‘is’ literally, but one is nowhere; one wanders dazed in a ghetto maze, a ‘displaced person’ of American democracy” (325).

The theme of identity is equally fundamental to Ellison’s 1952 novel *Invisible Man*, however the study of particularly narrative identity and its artistic negotiation in light of the social norms of psychological health during the postwar period warrant greater attention. This chapter seeks to reveal the text as a satire of the therapeutic potential of contemporaneous psychoanalytic methods and stereotyped narrative identities and an exploration of their negotiation through a blues mentality and literary narrational technique. In this way, the chapter emphasizes the novel’s formal and thematic connection to other postwar novels that explored these issues. It argues that *Invisible Man*, like *The Catcher in the Rye* and *The Bell Jar*, posits an alternative idea of psychological healing for the protagonist’s psychological suffering than that accepted by the norms of its contemporaneous society. In the prologue and epilogue, the novel’s un-named narrator, who calls himself simply an “invisible man,” frames his narration as a confessional narrative of psychological breakdown—one which carries with it his society’s expectations of its healing potential for the protagonist. That is, IM is ostensibly engaging in a therapeutic narration of self-analysis which should supposedly lead to an understanding of the cause of the illness, its catharsis, and a concomitant formation of a narrative identity based on socio-cultural scripts of normative action and behavior. For example, in the epilogue he states that he tries “be-latedly to study the lesson of [his] own life” (572) and claims to have discovered the cause of his illness: that his “attempt to write it down” has shown him that “at least half of it lay within [him]” (575).¹⁰⁵ Thomas Hill Schaub has similarly defined IM’s narration as a “confession” which can be read as “a form of self-psychoanalysis” (107). He reads this style of narration as indicative of a broader movement in IM’s thinking—and by implication, his society’s, towards psychological forms of analysis (for Schaub, opposed to Marxist modes) (ibid.). Schaub also suggests that IM’s narration is “a form of therapy” for IM’s representative “psychopathology” (104). This chapter seeks to delve more deeply into these claims by exploring the text’s concomitant ambivalence towards popularized, so-called Freudian methods

¹⁰⁵ Vitally, while this example shows IM’s intention to frame his story in this manner, I will later illustrate how the narrator contradicts himself concerning the method through which the source of his illness is revealed.

of self-analysis. It argues that what therapy is finally experienced by the protagonist is not wrought primarily through the interpretive logic of narrative analysis, but instead through the opportunity taken for self-expression beyond stereotypical scripts of behavior.

Like the other novels in this study, *Invisible Man* makes use of the narrational levels of the character, the narrator and an authorial agent. Again, I hope to show that drawing attention to these different levels of meaning in the text from which the text's irony and perspectives originate, aids in the analysis of the contrastive interpretive processes carried out at each level. However, when *Invisible Man* is compared with *The Catcher in the Rye* and *The Bell Jar*, it becomes clear that the novel carries out its problematization of societal assumptions concerning therapeutic narration in a unique way due to the agents' various amounts of awareness and particular targets of critique. The first section of the chapter will illustrate how, at both the authorial and the narratorial levels, a complex critique is launched against the theory and methods of popularized notions of psychoanalytic healing. At the authorial level, the text reflects several ideas expressed by Ellison in critical essays which complicate the use of psychoanalytic theory in the diagnosis and treatment of mental illness in black Americans; namely, the supposition that its cause is intrapsychic discord and the resultant displacement of responsibility for its resolution. At the level of the narrator, the theory and practice of contemporaneous movements like ego psychology and the movement's positive assumptions concerning the benefits of adjusting individuals to the scripted norms of psychological health are censured. I intend to show how IM initially evokes and attempts to escape several scripted stereotypes of normative action and behavior particular to IM as a black American man. These simple, stereotypical identity scripts include (but are not limited to): the *Scholar*, the *Criminal* and the *Entertainer*. These scripts, as I identify and name them in this study, are developed both in the novel (the *Scholar* in contrast to the *Criminal* especially) as well as in Ellison's critical essays (which discuss the *Entertainer* identity in depth). All of these identities are originally formulated in terms of a black man's relationship to white society. The *Scholar*, as I will show, is labeled therefore in positive terms: *non-threatening, productive, industrious*, a College goer and future *leader of his people*. The *Criminal* is conversely *threatening, violent, lawless* and psychologically *maladaptive*. The *Entertainer* is also generally *non-threatening*; his identity, like those before, is defined by his *action* in reference to white society: he entertains.

Stereotypes are often thought of as describing a static type of character—a flat character of expected, habitual traits, such as the donut-eating policeman, the wise and caring elderly grandmother, the gay man with a flair for interior design. Writer Thomas King has suggested that, in the case of North American First Nations people, a stereotype of this kind—the feathered, war-bonneted “Indian” (of the past in this case, created in relation to the

dominant culture's "Cowboy") is "so firmly in place and [has] been repeated and re-inscribed so many times that there is no chance in dislodging it from the culture" (105-106). This stereotype, is "a permanent landmark" which still limits the possibly for writers to represent Native people of the past in a way which diverges from this character, which "demand[s] that Indians [have] to be noble and tragic and perform all their duties on horseback" (106). King suggests that this flat, historical stereotype inhibits the identification of Native people of the past with characters with a future, that is, an ongoing story (ibid.).

In the context of Ellison's writing, the *Entertainer* stereotype falls into this category, as the action of this character is habitual and defined by its relation to the dominant culture. It features no defined future action beyond repetition; the person identified as such has thus no life story of change or development. However, stereotypes of character can also betray a culture's assumptions for not only habitual behavior, but also an expected pattern of life events as a result of typecast behavior. The *Scholar* and the *Criminal* as presented by Ellison's novel fall into this category, although despite allowing the character a story of development, and a future and imagined ending (potentially happy as an orator and *leader of his people*, or tragic as a criminal suffering imprisonment or violent death) Ellison's novel illustrates that scripted stereotypes are not necessarily more empowering than static stereotypes. Although their narrativity may appear minimal in comparison with other social-cultural scripts we encountered in *The Catcher in the Rye*, or *The Bell Jar*, the character stereotypes negotiated in *Invisible Man* can also operate similarly through scripted expectations of narrative action and behavior, and are thus, likewise critiqued as unwittingly controlling, even determining of public and even private expectations of characterial behavior.

But it is perhaps less anticipated that the narrator of *Invisible Man* explores the potential for genuine self-representation from within the more static stereotype of the *Entertainer*. The second section of this chapter will examine how the narrator proposes incorporating the philosophy of black American musical tradition into his self-narration to create new possibilities for enduring, rather than interpreting and ostensibly curing, psychological illness. Based on textual analysis of the novel and Ellison's assertions in his essays regarding the potential of an existential blues mentality to provide the means for surviving in an irrational society, this section posits that IM intentionally produces an entertaining, rather than strictly interpretive, narrative of the self. This narrative improvises off the stereotyped scripts of black American characters and incorporates vital aspects of IM's fugitive self in an effort to bring, first and foremost, not personal psychological healing, but a more far-reaching societal healing.

Section One: Postwar Psychotherapy and the Black American

Questions of psychological health in *Invisible Man* are, in theme, explicitly present and several scholars have recently considered the significance of the novel's engagement with, particularly, classical Freudian psychoanalytic treatment. The text's overt references to popularized Freudian themes and terminology—including frequent references in key scenes to incest, castration, father figures and the unconscious—have garnered consistent, although scope-wise, relatively limited attention since the novel's publication in 1952.¹⁰⁶ But as J. Bradford Campbell points out in “The Schizophrenic Solution: Dialectics of Neurosis and Anti-psychiatric Animus in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*” (2010), it is remarkable that the novel with its “consistent and conspicuous attention to a range of psychological illnesses,” has actually prompted so little critical commentary on the representation of mental illness in the novel until recently (3). Campbell suggests that closer examination of how the novel represents neurosis (and of how Ellison employs and negotiates Freudian concepts more generally) reveals “a radically anti-psychiatric impetus that suspects rather than supports Freud's work” and challenges “many of the larger tenets of psychoanalysis and psychiatry” (ibid.). Shelly Eversley's essay, “The Lunatic's Fancy and the Work of Art” argues that Ellison and Richard Wright's fiction at mid-century enacts a historical turn toward psychology “particularly as it enunciates the emerging contours of a ‘schizophrenic’ American democracy and American Literature” (447). The essay also historicizes and delves deeper into what Eversley reads as the “new alliance” between psychiatry and art forming in black American literary production in the late 1940s and 1950s (ibid.).

What appear to be contradictory claims regarding Ellison and the text's attitudes—critiquing or co-operating to an extent with psychoanalytic theory—are rather evidence that critics have discovered the text's productive engagement with psychoanalytic theory at the postwar moment. In relation to this engagement, Badia Sahar Ahad devotes a chapter in *Freud Upside Down: African American Literature and Psychoanalytic Culture* (2010) to illustrating how Wright and Ellison's works reveal the contradictory and problematic nature of using a psychoanalytic model to address black mental

¹⁰⁶ These key parts include the Jim Trueblood, Golden Day and Emerson Jr. episodes, which will be discussed in detail in this chapter. Early extended efforts to apply Freud's clinical theory of interpretation to the novel include Selma Fraiberg's “Two Modern Incest Heroes” (in *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Invisible Man*, ed. John M. Reilly) and Ellin Horowitz' “The Rebirth of the Artist” (in *A Casebook on Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man*, ed. Joseph F. Trimmer). More recently, in “The World as Possibility: The Significance of Freud's *Totem and Taboo* in Ellison's *Invisible Man*” (*Literature and Psychology* [1995]) Caffilene Allen has analyzed the events of *Invisible Man* through the Freudian theory developed in *Totem and Taboo* (1913). In *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature* (1984) Huston A. Baker also discusses particularly the Trueblood episode in terms of Freudian theory.

illness at mid-century. Ahad examines how the authors' literary and critical interventions within postwar psychoanalytic discourses challenge predominant psychoanalytic theory vis-à-vis the racial politics of the period, but also how the authors' efforts were, for the most part, undermined by the "normalizing imperatives" of psychoanalysis (84). She concludes that the authors' attempts to intervene into the dominant discourse and offer an "emancipatory" psychoanalytic model through which the psychological depth of black subjectivities (the "total Negro" which Ellison suggests eludes popular conceptions of black American psychology ["Harlem" 321]) were ultimately unsuccessful. Ahad holds that the normalizing impulses of postwar psychoanalysis instead simply "recast" stereotyped cultural perceptions of black Americans (109). Building on this recent research, this chapter aims to examine in more detail how Ellison and *Invisible Man* in particular undermine the theory and practice of popular postwar psychoanalysis and side-step its interpretive and ostensibly explanatory authority to suggest a method for enduring, rather than narratively curing common psychological difficulties suffered by black Americans.

Considering that the reader is confronted with the question of the narrator's psychological health from his very first, overtly bizarre pronouncement—"I am an invisible man"—recent interest in the representation of psychological illness in the novel is indeed merited. The nameless narrator ironically reports that though invisible he has a body of "flesh and bone, fiber and liquids" and "might even be said to possess a mind" (3). The prologue is characterized by the strident, emotion-filled narration of this "mind," outlining seemingly cryptic or contradictory assertions and irrational behavior, such as his claim to have wired the entire ceiling of his underground cellar with exactly 1,369 light bulbs in an act of sabotage. "Nothing, storm or flood, must get in the way of our need for light and ever more and brighter light," IM proclaims, as "[t]he truth is the light and the light is the truth" (7). When he is finished wiring up all four walls with light bulbs, he intends to "start on the floor" (ibid.). But despite the many odd assertions and examples of abnormal behavior IM makes in the prologue, he signals that he is keenly aware of how he is representing himself to his audience. When he reports that a white man refused to apologize for calling him an "insulting name" after IM accidentally bumped into him at twilight, IM represents himself acting out the scripted expectation of an unstable criminal (3). Behaving uncharacteristically and becoming "[s]omething in this man's thick head," IM allows himself to be provoked into acting out the expected role and attacking the man:

He lay there, moaning on the asphalt; a man almost killed by a phantom. It unnerved me. I was disgusted and ashamed. I was like a drunken man myself, wavering about on weakened legs. Then I was amused: Something in this man's thick head had sprung out and beaten him within an inch of his life. I

began to laugh at this crazy discovery. [...] I ran away into the dark laughing so hard I feared I might rupture myself. [...] Poor fool, poor blind fool, I thought with sincere compassion, mugged by an invisible man! (4-5)

Besides the immediate questions the prologue raises about the narrator's reliability or the extent to which IM may be employing the form of the confessional, therapeutic narration to intrigue his audience, issues of psychoanalytic treatment vis-à-vis ethnicity in mid-century America are immediately foregrounded. It was indeed Ellison's goal to represent black American subjectivity and interiority in his fiction in order to contradict the still prevalent primitivizing assumptions that black people were intellectually and psychologically inferior. This meant representing characters with minds who were capable of suffering from sophisticated, neurosis-like conditions.¹⁰⁷ IM's sardonic statement that he "might even be said to possess a mind" (3) in the first paragraph, may carry little significance for a contemporary reader of the novel. But in the novel's mid-century context, these details signal Ellison's aim to represent a black protagonist with, in Ellison's own words, "intellectual depth," who was capable of "articulat(ing) the issues which tortured" him ("Introduction" xix). In order to overcome the "restricted structure" ("Introduction" xxi) that American society and political temperament imposed upon his freedom as a writer to "manipulate imaginatively those possibilities that existed in . . . Afro-American personality," Ellison felt it necessary to create a character who could "think as well as act in his blundering quest for freedom" ("Introduction" xxi-xxii). He notes, moreover, that up to that point, the majority of fictional black characters had been portrayed as being "defeated in their bouts with circumstance," and he aimed instead to depict characters capable of "snatch[ing] the victory of conscious perception from the forces which overwhelmed them" (xxi). In the terms of this study, Ellison appears aware of the structural limitations which narrative identities can pose (here in the form of scripted stereotypes) concerning the representation, and, as I intend to show, the psychoanalytic treatment of particular individuals in society.

Indeed, already in his 1945 review of Richard Wright's *Black Boy* (1945), Ellison—while censuring Wright's earlier critics for claiming that the "autobiography" did not "explain" the author—indicts American literary criticism "for so thoroughly elud(ing) the Negro that it fails to recognize some of the most basic tenets of Western thought when encountering them in black skin" (131).¹⁰⁸ Amongst these tenets are "that all men are the victims and the beneficiaries of the goading, tormenting, commanding and informing activity of that imperious process know as the Mind—the Mind, Valéry describes it,

¹⁰⁷ See also Campbell (5), Eversley and Ahad (91) regarding this discussion.

¹⁰⁸ From "Richard Wright's Blues" (1945) in *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison* (2003).

‘armed with its inexhaustible questions’” (ibid.).¹⁰⁹ A similar wording of this central aspect of humanity which Ellison holds has not been notably appreciated in the representation of black Americans, occurs twice in the novel’s epilogue. It appears first when IM states that, even in “hibernation” he could not escape the questions of his puzzling existence: “I got away from it all. But that wasn’t enough. [...] Because, damnit, there’s the mind, the *mind*. It wouldn’t let me rest” (573-574, original emphasis). He later reemphasizes this point, stating that in going underground, he had “whipped it all except the mind, the *mind*” (580, original emphasis).

However, Ellison patently did not want the psychological problems of black Americans to be understood as limited to the biological, or a familial neurosis in a Freudian sense either. In “Harlem is Nowhere,” the essay he wrote in 1948 in support of the Lafarge Psychiatric Clinic, Ellison instead emphasizes societal factors as the predominant source of black Americans’ psychological health issues. Opened in 1946 by Dr. Frederic Wertham, the Lafarge Clinic was operated two evenings a week by volunteer healthcare professionals in the basement of the St. Phillip’s Episcopal Church in Harlem. As it was the only clinic in New York City where both black and white citizens could receive extended psychiatric care at a free or pay-what-you-can basis, Ellison held that it represented “an underground extension of democracy” (320). While Ellison initially states that each patient is “approached dynamically as a being possessing a cultural and biological past” (321), potential “biological” causes of mental illness are never again mentioned in the essay, which instead focuses on the social origins of mental instability and Harlem itself, “[o]vercrowded and exploited politically and economically,” as “the scene and symbol of the Negro’s perpetual alienation in the land of his birth” (ibid.). Ellison explains that a patient at the Lafarge Clinic is “a being who in responding to the complex forces of America has become confused” (ibid.). He refers here to the paradoxical alienation experienced by black people in postwar America as citizens of the world’s most celebrated democracy who are confronted daily with the realities of racist social inequality.¹¹⁰ Ellison states:

When Negroes are barred from participating in the main institutional life of society, they lose far more than economic privileges or the satisfaction of saluting the flag with unmixed emotions. They lose one of the bulwarks which men place between themselves and the constant threat of chaos. For whatever

¹⁰⁹ Ellison would later critique the paucity of Wright’s depiction of “the mind” in literature himself when, in a defense of his own work against Irving Howe, he stated: “Wright as writer was less interesting than the enigma he personified: that he could so disassociate himself from the complexity of his background while trying so hard to improve the condition of African-American men everywhere; that he could be so wonderful an example of human possibility but could not for ideological reasons depict a Negro as intelligent, as creative or as dedicated to himself” (“The World” 167).

¹¹⁰ See also Eversley (445-447).

the assigned function of social institutions, their psychological function is to protect the citizen against the irrational, incalculable forces that hover about the edges of human life like cosmic destruction lurking within an atomic stockpile. And it is precisely the denial of this support through segregation and discrimination that leaves the most balanced Negro open to anxiety. (324)

The Lafarge, instead, recognizes “the total implication of Negro life in the United States” (320). Ellison praises it for rejecting behavioral stereotypes, and concerning itself with the “basic social factors” which shaped the black American’s personality “as a member of a racial and cultural minority, as an American citizen caught in certain political and economic relationships, and as a modern man living in a revolutionary world” (ibid.). According to Ellison, the clinic recognized that psychological damage occurred not due to “the disintegration of a people’s fiber” but instead because of “the failure of a way of life” (326). Finally, he states that although patients could not change the “unreality which haunts Harlem,” the staff were able to provide the bewildered patient which came through its doors not with a psychoanalytic interpretation of his neurosis, but instead “insight into the relation between his problems and his environment, and out of this understanding . . . reforge the will to endure in a hostile world” (327).¹¹¹

Ellison’s intellectual investments, in both his critical and creative writing, are often easy to misread as truly Freudian. In “Beating that Boy” for example, Ellison analyzes the cultural history of America and arrives at a diagnosis of white America as “a nation of ethical schizophrenics”—for while “[b]elieving truly in democracy on one side of their minds, they act on the other in violation of its most sacred principles; holding that all men are created equal, they treat thirteen million Americans as though they were not” (148). He explains, in terms of *repression* that “the Negro has become identified with those unpleasant aspects of conscience and consciousness which it is part of the American’s character to avoid” (149). When, here, the literary artist, attempts to “tap the charged springs issuing from his inner world,” up float “misshapen and bloated images of the Negro, like the fetid bodies of the drowned” (ibid.). Ellison does not mean by this evocative claim that, psychologically, the “Negro problem” is purely an intellectual issue for artists: all of white America suffers from this “guilt problem charged with

¹¹¹ With these statements Ellison appears to have looked with favor on popular trends in social psychology, insofar as these took a person’s environment into consideration to a far greater degree than classical Freudian theory. Ahad has pointed out the strong likelihood of the field’s influence on Ellison’s thought as the author worked for a time in the New York office of the eminent social psychiatrist Dr. Harry Stack Sullivan (101). However, as will become clear, Ellison’s novel is critical of the theory and practices of alternative contemporaneous forms of psychotherapy such as American ego psychology as well as narrative interpretive strategies based on developmental and behavioral norms that prioritize the needs of dominant society over those of the individual.

pain,” the acuteness of which “might be judged from the ceaseless effort expended to dull its throbbings with the anaesthesia of legend, myth, hypnotic ritual and narcotic modes of thinking” (ibid.).¹¹² In this way, Ellison extrapolates on this diagnosis in language that appears to endorse the concept of the unconscious as a site of repressed desires. However, Ellison states clearly that the “unwillingness to resolve the conflict in keeping with his democratic ideals” has caused white Americans “figuratively” to “force the Negro down into the deeper levels of his consciousness” (ibid.). This statement signals, firstly, that Ellison uses this Freudian explanatory term in a metaphorical sense. But secondly, more importantly, in speaking not strictly of the unconscious, but instead “levels of his consciousness” Ellison indicates his own competing commitment to an existential view of how man deceives himself. In his epilogue, IM clearly claims, for example, a degree of responsibility for his “sickness:”

I’m not blaming anyone for this state of affairs, mind you; nor merely crying *mea culpa*. The fact is that you carry part of your sickness within you, at least I do as an invisible man. I carried my sickness and though for a long time I tried to place it in the outside world, the attempt to write it down shows me that at least half of it lay within me. (575)

My reading intends to affirm that this existentialist view, in contrast to a psychoanalytic model of responsibility for psychical motives, is ubiquitously, if more covertly, promoted throughout the novel.

Critique of Psychoanalytic Theory and Practice

In the rest of this section, I intend to show how the text’s satirical engagement with American society’s assumptions regarding domesticated Freudianism at the narratorial and authorial levels work to undercut the authority of popular psychoanalysis vis-à-vis the resolution of black Americans’ psychological suffering. It also signals a more extended treatment of concerns raised about the implication of the *unconscious* engaged with throughout the novel. In addition, I will demonstrate how the narrator critiques more particularly the postwar practices of ego psychology that aimed to effect therapy through the adaptation of the individual to stereotyped narrative ideals of behavior, action and development. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. has shown how black texts “signify” upon other black texts in the black American literary tradition by engaging in formal critiques of language use, rhetorical strategy, or, similar to parody and pastiche, “Literary Signification” (xxvii). This technique has, Gates explains, been “grafted” onto Ellison’s own critical discussions and his Signifiyin(g) relationship to Richard Wright’s work

¹¹² A similar explanation of *repression* appears in Ellison’s review of Gunnar Myrdal’s *An American Dilemma* (“An American” 328-340).

(xxvii, 120). Thus, in terms of Gates' development of the technique of Signifyin(g), like Robert O'Meally (78) and Thomas Shaub (100) this chapter proposes that Ellison's text signify on discursive systems outside of black narrative forms too; namely, the popular psychoanalytic theory and practices in postwar America.

In fact, Gates himself suggests that *Invisible Man* signify on the non-black literary tradition through pastiche, producing "literary echoes" of the texts of authors Ellison identifies as literary "ancestors" (120). Gates explains that this method of "unmotivated Signifyin(g)" does not imply a lack of intention, but rather an absence of the sometimes severe critique of parody, or "motivated Signifyin(g)" (121). Thus, while *parody* is often produced as negative critique, *pastiche* can mean "either homage to an antecedent text or futility in the face of a seemingly indomitable mode of representation" (xxvii). The term thus aptly describes the range of the critique, from pastiche-like incorporation to censoring parody, that *Invisible Man* engages in regarding psychoanalytic theory and practice. I hold that at different narrational and signifyin(g) levels, textual attitudes and the targets (and intensity) of their critique vary greatly: from the comical to the serious parodying of popularized Freudian theory at the authorial level, and from the mimicking of the confessional narrative form to the severe censoring of the practices of popular postwar psychiatry at the level of the narrator. Indeed, a method of engagement attentive to this Signifyin(g) quality can help explain the ambivalence that the text evinces in relation to the ubiquitous postwar presence of psychoanalytic thought and the contemporaneous confidence in the explanatory power of narrative-based methods of practicing psychoanalysis.

The Golden Day Episode

Richard Wright, in his own essay from 1946 in support of the Lafarge Clinic, suggested that the clinic represented "the turning of Freud upside down" (qtd. in Ahad, 4), due to its democratic policy of treatment and its rejection of erudite, abstract notions of psychoanalytic neurosis. Similarly, at the authorial level *Invisible Man* parodies the Freudian notion of the unconscious in obvious ways—making fun of it and upending it in a carnivalesque manner of satirical play—while at other moments more covertly turning its "analytic eye" back onto itself.¹¹³ The scene at the Golden Day, where IM is confronted with about fifty "shell-shocked" war veterans from the local asylum

¹¹³ That is, while this parody is conveyed through IM's narration, the narrator himself does not represent himself as aware of its critical implications for psychoanalytic theory directly. At moments such as these in the text, it is admittedly difficult to ascertain from which level the irony is produced concerning which topic. As IM as narrator never shows any awareness of Freudian theory, I suggest that the spoofing of psychoanalytic theory comes from the authorial level. The ironic ridiculing of the traits of characters (especially including himself) in the narration however, can easily be attributed to the narrator.

and their giant attendant Supercargo, is a good example of this technique. IM drives a white school trustee, Mr. Norton (who requests a drink to treat a case of mild shock) to this bar and brothel. The narrator's description of the raucous scenes that ensue at the Golden Day unwittingly spoofs the drama of the tripartite mind of psychoanalytic theory: Supercargo is personified as the *superego* in his attempts to control the wild, *id*-like desires of the asylum patients.¹¹⁴ The patients identify Supercargo as "a kind of censor" (81), and a thought-controller: "You can't speak your mind when he's on duty!" (84) one patient says; another fears Supercargo is "inside [his] head" (*ibid.*). Halley, the tavern owner, refers to him as a kind of informer sent to infiltrate a group (a "stool pigeon"), and a "joy-killing, nut-crunching bum" who should be keeping order (82). IM adds to this characterization by stating that Supercargo "walked around threatening the men with a strait jacket which he always carried over his arm," and that usually the men were "quiet and submissive in his presence" (*ibid.*). However, when Supercargo was "upstairs" the men had "absolutely no inhibitions" (76). Here Supercargo's authority is undercut, since being upstairs implies that the attendant is giving into his own inhibitions and visiting a prostitute. IM describes the character as ineffectual: in only his underwear he screams "I WANT ORDER!" from the balcony of the second floor when he comes out of his room to find the patients have run completely amok in the Golden Day (83).

IM undermines the authority of the psychiatric profession through other noteworthy details in the scene. For example, he comments that while many of the patients had once been members of professions he had aspired towards "doctors, lawyers, teachers," one "very nutty one had been a psychiatrist" (74). There are clues in the text that this psychiatrist could be the "pock-marked man" who turns up at other key moments during the scene, and who takes the unconscious Mr. Norton's head gently between his hands, examines it skillfully, and then slaps him across the face. "A case of hysteria," the little man diagnoses immediately after, "[a] mere mild case of hysteria" (75). This man leads the charge, when the *id*-like patients then attack Supercargo, violently avenging the authority they feel he has over them. Moreover, IM suggests that violent and sexual acts are alternative methods of therapy for the patients. The patient who felt Supercargo was "inside his head," gets great "relief," for example, from kicking the attendant while he is unconscious, and tells IM that it "feels so good" that IM should also try it (84). Additionally, this relief appears to be therapeutic to the patient in the same way that other patients, who claim that they are sent to the tavern "as therapy," are aided by the freedom of being allowed to consume alcohol and en-

¹¹⁴ Several critics including Doane and Brennan have suggested, without going into significant detail, that there is a *supercargo/superego* connection. See also Krasteva's analysis of Bakhtin's concept of the carnivalesque "turning the world upside down" and "order into chaos" (63-65) in this scene and in the text more generally.

gaggle the services of the tavern's prostitutes (81). One ribald veteran spoofs orthodox methods of psychotherapy when he claims a particular prostitute as being a "therapist of generous nature and great skill, and the possessor of a healing touch," whose "catharsis is absolutely tremendous-ha ha!" (92). Notably, throughout the scene an obvious personification of the sensible ego is absent from the drama, which, considering its central role in postwar psychoanalytic theory and practice, might be the ultimate comic affront.

At the authorial level of the novel, the source of black Americans' psychological suffering is shown to be predominantly external to their psyches. IM says he has often wondered, due to their past professions and their intermittently normal behavior, if the war veterans really are crazy (74, 77). This observation signals a vital point beyond the cliché of the truth-speaking fool. Campbell has argued, for example, that the psychological condition of the veterans, whatever it is, appears on closer inspection to have little to do with the war experiences that apparently left them shell shocked (10). He notes that little of what the veterans say recalls the war or makes them appear preoccupied with it (*ibid.*).¹¹⁵ Campbell instead suggests (as we have seen Ellison does regarding black Americans more generally in his critical essays) that the veterans' madness may instead be based "in the racial experience," and their exposure to "racial social practices that make the fulfillment of [the dream of being a professional] impossible" (11). A case in point is the "utmost degradation" that a veteran doctor suffered at the hands of "ten men in masks" for saving a life (93). And, in fact, on closer reading, this man actually does state that he was ill *before* the war started, and therefore, his illness is, at the very least, not solely a result of his experiences in service (90).¹¹⁶ It is conceivable that the veterans' psychological problems are both based on experiences of racial inequality and their war experiences, as the contrast between how servicemen are treated while risking their lives for the nation's ideals and after their return home (as blatantly un-equal citizens) is a recognized, and widespread source of psychological tension for racial minorities. In this way, the overt, humoristic parody enacted in this scene, which playfully undercuts the authority of this central Freudian concept, operates as a kind of comical sugar-coating concealing the ultimate message at the authorial level: that a theory of intrapsychic struggle is untenable for understanding the psychological suffering brought about in black Americans as a result of ongoing unequal and degrading treatment by the broader society.

¹¹⁵ Exceptions include the veteran who believes he is still a "drum major" leading his troops (now pressing a gaggle of patients from the asylum into service), and the veteran at the Golden Day who announces that a kind of "absolute armistice" which will end the world will occur (72, 74).

¹¹⁶ As described in Chapter One, the treatment of wartime psychological illness was a central contributing factor to the popular rise of psychoanalysis in America.

The Emerson Jr. Episode

Later in the story action, during the episode in which IM meets with Mr. Emerson's son in the hope of securing a job in New York, psychoanalytic theory is further derided at the authorial level by its portrayal as being out of touch with the material factors which can contribute to psychological illness. The only explicit mention of one of Freud's works in the novel occurs when IM spots "something called *Totem and Taboo*" lying open on the young man's desk when he enters the office (180). Although the narrator notes the title of the book, he shows no recognition of its author or substance. However, the title's mention is quite significant to the lampooning of psychoanalytic theory in the scene, as it prepares the reader familiar with its subtitle—"Resemblances Between the Mental Lives of Savages and Neurotics"—for the satirical contrast between the problems plaguing the two characters involved.¹¹⁷ IM has brought the last of his seven supposed reference letters from his college president to the office of Mr. Emerson. He has been led to believe that though he is suspended from his college he may return if he is able to earn the fees for his last year of education during this summer in New York City. He has not gotten any replies after handing out the previous six letters, and has become desperate to find work in order to support himself at the point he enters the lavish, museum-like reception of Emerson's importing firm and marvels, "[t]hese folks are the Kings of the earth!" (181).

In the scene that follows, the narrator critiques the psychoanalytic profession with a similar technique as Holden uses in his critical depiction of Carl Luce, the psychoanalyst's son. Certainly, linking psychoanalytical theory with Emerson Jr. characterizes it as an elitist and navel-gazing analysis of trivial problems in comparison to the real-world subsistence issues from which IM is suffering. Emerson Jr., though professing his wish to help IM, reportedly brings the focus of the interview continually back to the interpretation of his own problems:

"Oh, don't let me upset you . . . I had a difficult session with my analyst last evening and the slightest thing is apt to set me off. Like an alarm clock without control—Say! . . . what on earth does that mean?" Suddenly he was in a state. One side of his face had begun to twitch and swell. I watched him light a cigarette, thinking. (185)

Openly self-involved, he reveals to IM: "You see—well, I'm thwarted . . . Oh damn, there I go again, thinking only of myself" (186-187, original ellipsis). He is portrayed as reacting over-emotionally, even psychosomatically, as he both childishly and self-consciously acts out the role of the son with an Oedipus complex. When IM asks to speak with Mr. Emerson himself ("*Speak* to him? [...] *He* does the speaking—" [187]) the son claims that he

¹¹⁷ Campbell has pointed out this significant detail of *Totem and Taboo*'s subtitle (6)

wishes Emerson Sr. was not his father. He is his father's "prisoner" while IM is "free" of him (192). By noting this comment, the narrator points ironically to the fact that as his last hope of employment by way of his ostensible recommendation letters is from Mr. Emerson, he is by no means free of him.

When Emerson Jr. asks IM to go out with him later to a night club, IM tries to bring a dose of reality into the situation. He replies that he has never been to a club: "'I'll have to go there to see what it's like after I've started earning some money,' I said, hoping to bring the conversation back to the problem of jobs" (185-186). But Emerson Jr.'s train of thought once again returns to the *Hauptbahnhof* of his neurosis: flaunting psychoanalytic terms he replies, "I don't say all this . . . to give myself some kind of sadistic catharsis. Truly I don't. But I know the world you're trying to contact—all its virtues and unspeakables—Ha, yes, unspeakable. I'm afraid my father considers me one of the unspeakables" (188). And when IM repeats his wish to find a job in order to return to his studies, Emerson Jr. asks him, puzzled, "[a]ren't you curious about what lies behind the face of things?" (referring to his egocentric self-analysis, that is) (ibid.). IM replies politely "Yes, sir, but I'm mainly interested in a job" (ibid.). In this way, the text turns psychoanalytic treatment back on itself: when adopted by the likes of Emerson Jr. it reads like a self-absorbed and impractical method of explaining the childish behavior of the over-privileged. While the narrator does not characterize himself as psychologically troubled at this point in his narration, he shows his material sustenance concerns continually ignored by this representative of society's elite who is wholly convinced of his role in the Freudian family drama. As IM leaves Mr. Emerson's office, the impracticality, and for IM's predicament, unhelpfulness of psychoanalytic theory is once and for all confirmed when even Emerson Jr. himself realizes that he has not been helpful in any practical way to IM. Here the degree to which psychoanalysis' inward turn blinds members of society to the many basic subsistence problems plaguing it is emphasized: at this recognition, Emerson Jr. then gives IM a piece of news which actually does have the potential to change IM's economic situation for the better: he has heard that the Liberty Paint Factory is accepting applications.

The Liberty Paint Factory Episode

The paint factory hospital scene is central to understanding how the narrator satirizes the theory and practices of movements such as ego psychoanalytic therapy, specifically the treatment goals of adapting the patient to their environment and neutralizing aggressive tendencies. IM is hired by the factory, and after an explosion in the boiler-room he awakens to find himself first being examined and then inexplicably receiving some kind of electroconvulsive shock therapy (ECT) (231-232). The scene represents both the language of the dominant psychoanalytic trends of ego psychology, as well as the

racial stereotyping of mental illness in postwar American society: it describes IM's treatment as an attempt to violently erase his identity and ostensible criminal aggressive tendencies. While it is never stated openly, through IM's description of the events, it appears that IM has been mistaken for the perpetrator of the boiler-room explosion. This leads to the factory officials and doctors treatment of him according to the *Criminal* stereotype. He hears that the machine he is fastened into is meant to produce "the results of a prefrontal lobotomy without the negative effects of the knife," and results in "as complete a change of personality as you'll find in your famous fairy-tale cases of criminals transformed into amiable fellows after all the bloody business of a brain operation" (236). That IM does not fulfill the *Criminal* stereotype is clear to the reader, but the assumptions of the doctors involved says much about the assumed applicability of relevant treatments of psychological problems for different ethnicities and classes of citizens in their society. And that the more obvious culprits of an act of sabotage would be the disgruntled factory workers on strike and agitating against the company for hiring scabs like IM, is made obvious to the reader through irony at the authorial level. It appears that the officials and doctors simply assume because of his ethnicity and proximity to the explosion that IM has violent tendencies and is the criminal responsible for it.

Accordingly, the machine is described more like an instrument of disciplinary torture than treatment. IM states: "I quieted and tried to contain the pain. I discovered now that my head was encircled by a piece of cold metal like the iron cap worn by the occupant of an electric chair" (233). IM's impression of the treatment as punishment links his experience to that of Esther during her first experience of ECT, where she implies that she is being treated for anti-social, even anti-American, behavior.¹¹⁸ Trying to "smother his screams," while blood fills his mouth, IM hears the attendants degradingly suggest the racial stereotype of the *Entertainer*: "Look, he's dancing," one calls out; "They really do have rhythm, don't they? Get hot, boy! Get hot!" another jokes (237). In direct contrast between the anti-social psychological issues the doctors believe IM has (of a primitive mind) and the more refined Oedipus complex of Emerson Jr., one doctor states that he believes it "a mistake to assume that solutions—cures, that apply in, uh...primitive instances, are, uh...equally effective when more advanced conditions are in question. Suppose it were a New Englander with a Harvard background?" (236, original ellipsis).¹¹⁹ And when another voice inquires "[b]ut what of his [IM's] psychology?" the answer comes that it is of "[a]bsolutely of no importance!" (ibid.). Campbell has pointed out, that the doctors do not attend to

¹¹⁸ That is, anti-American in Esther's case due to her treatment's metaphoric link to the execution of the Ethel and Julius Rosenberg. IM is being blamed for this potential act of sabotage to the "Liberty" paints factory.

¹¹⁹ IM has mentioned that he heard Emerson Jr. mumbling something about "nostalgia for Harvard yard" (183).

any ostensible neurosis of the narrator but instead try to “engineer an identity” through treatment which will be less anti-social and “more palatable and amenable to the expectations of white society” (14). Indeed, earlier in the scene a doctor claims that after the treatment IM will “*experience no major conflict of motives*” and “*even better, society will suffer no traumata on his account*” (236, original emphasis). It comes as no surprise, therefore, that the suggestion of castration is raised by one medical professional—and then laughed off with the psychoanalytic joke of another.¹²⁰

While the narrator censures his so-called treatment—which highlights not the violent urges of IM towards society but instead the reverse due to the brutal methods of adjustment used—the critique appears initially to have little to do with interpretive psychoanalytic treatment. However, the following scene in which the doctors appear to test the efficacy of their experimental operation by the successful erasure of IM’s previous identity through a series of flashcards, suggests this connection as well. Immediately after holding up cards to test if IM can identify what his name is and who he is (which he cannot), the doctors follow up with questions about his familial and childhood memories. “WHAT IS YOUR MOTHER’S NAME?” and “WHO WAS YOUR MOTHER?” leave IM bewildered; he is similarly “lost” with regards to remembering his identity when asked where he was born (240-241). But as the questions progress from addressing matters of his infancy to his childhood in the form of a cultural icon, “Buckeye the Rabbit” (which IM recalls singing about as a child), he states that he becomes “giddy with the delight of self-discovery” (241). He is annoyed that the doctors had suggested an “old identity” of his childhood—and he hides his recognition of it from the doctors (*ibid.*). They continue testing his even later memories by asking him if he remembers who “Brer Rabbit” is (IM states that Brer Rabbit was what one called Buckeye “when you were older” though “[a]nyone knew they were one and the same” character) (242).¹²¹ Finally, when IM appears unable to answer their questions and becomes apathetic, the doctors suddenly seem “pleased” and leave him alone for a while before pronouncing him “cured” of his assumed *Criminal* identity and its concomitant aggressive tendencies (243). I will show momentarily how this becomes even more apparent in the next scene; however, two impressions of the character during the short period when he is left alone are worth noting. The first is that the narrator reports that his character, though still confused about who

¹²⁰ The joke reads: “What’s that definition of a surgeon, ‘A butcher with a bad conscience?’” (237).

¹²¹ Brer Rabbit is a trickster figure which originated from African folklore: “The character’s adventures embody an idea considered to be a universal creation among oppressed peoples—that a small, weak, but ingenious force can overcome a larger, stronger, but dull-witted power. Brer Rabbit continually outsmarts his bigger animal associates.” “Brer Rabbit”. Encyclopædia Britannica. Encyclopædia Britannica Online. Encyclopædia Britannica Inc., 2015. Web. 26 Feb. 2015 <<http://global.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/78857/Brer-Rabbit>>.

he is, describes himself in terms of stereotyped roles of behavior. The character feels he is part of a detective game in search of his identity in which the white doctors play some part. He characterizes himself as both a kind of *Entertainer* of them and, mysteriously (to him at this point) a *Criminal*: “Who am I? It was no good. I felt like a clown. Nor was I up to being both criminal and detective—though why criminal I didn’t know” (242). The other notable impression is that the character reportedly becomes aware of the separation of his self from this distinct identity that the doctors are testing him for. He describes experiencing the duality of self and identity as “an old man” trying to catch “a small boy in some mischief” (ibid.). That is, it appears that the character begins here to appreciate the difference between the various social identities imposed on him and his private experience of self—in Du Bois’ terms, he gains a sense of his *double-consciousness*.¹²²

When IM is next sent to visit the hospital director, the narrator draws more obvious attention to the language and treatment goals of the aggressively adaptive methods of certain strains of social psychology (245). While also primarily a form of talk interpretive therapy, as explained in Chapter One, treatment in ego psychotherapy was refocused from the unconscious to the ego. It was held that through ego strengthening the client could better withstand the pressure from the unconscious drives in order to help him (amongst other results) neutralize aggressive tendencies and adapt into a more psychologically healthy, and thus, productive, citizen. Heinz Hartmann, as noted earlier, confirmed that a person was well-adapted if “his productivity, his ability to enjoy life, and his mental equilibrium was undisturbed” (*Adaptation* 23). These goals are parodied in IM’s meeting with the hospital director, who assures him that before he can get back to work he just needs “to become adjusted and get [his] strength back” (246). The hospital director goes on to say, referring superficially to the factory explosion which put IM in the hospital, but more pointedly to the supposed criminal tendencies IM was treated for: “But, after all, any new occupation has its hazards. They are part of growing up, of becoming adjusted, as it were” (247).¹²³ In a question that could be asked equally to contemporaneous ego psychologists concerned with the productivity of their patients, IM puzzles over whether the doctor was in the service of his patients, or of American industry: “Was he doctor, factory official or both? I couldn’t get it” (ibid.).

In light of the hospital director’s stance to treat IM for his supposedly hostile, anti-social behavior, the query of one of the other medical professionals concerning the applicability of castration as treatment also takes on greater significance. Near the very end of his narration, after IM dreams or

¹²² W. E. B. Du Bois coined the term *double-consciousness* in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903). It describes the black experience of divided identity in American society.

¹²³ This statement also reflects similar societal assumptions depicted in *The Catcher in the Rye* concerning the therapeutic goals of the maturation and adjustment of the protagonist to his scripted societal role.

hallucinates that a mob of powerful men castrate him, it leads him to realize that there is an “increasing passion to make men conform to a pattern” in America at the postwar moment:

Just as in my nightmare, Jack and the boys are waiting with their knives, looking for the slightest excuse to ...well, to ‘ball the jack’ and I do not refer to the old dance step, although what they’re doing is making the old eagle rock dangerously. [...] Now I know men are different and that all life is divided and that only in division is there true health. [...] Why, if they follow this conformity business they’ll end up forcing me, an invisible man, to become white. [...] America is woven of many strands; I would recognize them and let it so remain. (576-577)

IM adds wryly: “[w]hence all this passion toward conformity anyway?—diversity is the word. Let man keep his many parts and you’ll have no tyrant states” (576). In this way, he contradicts, and finds patently *un-American* and restrictive, a foundational belief of the ego psychological movement: that through the neutralization of the unconscious drives and by adjusting citizens to societally acceptable behavior that people are more psychologically healthy. Moreover, through the scene’s play on Freudian dream analysis, the overtness of the problems facing black Americans is once again emphasized.¹²⁴

¹²⁴ Another way that the text critiques the notion of unconscious causes of psychological illness is through its depiction of dreams such as the one cited here. While it makes use of the idea that dreams can have meaning and symbolize latent psychological truths beyond the manifest material they depict, the dreams represented in the novel are not that kind that, even according to Freud, would likely necessitate psychoanalytic treatment. In a brochure titled “On Dreams” (1916), Freud explains that when it comes to the relation between latent and manifest content, there are three categories of dreams. The first kind “make sense and are at the same time intelligible, [and]...can be inserted with out further difficulty into the context of our mental life” (148). The second group “is formed by those dreams which, though they are connected in themselves and have a clear sense, nevertheless have a bewildering effect, because we cannot see how to fit that sense into our mental life” (ibid.). The third kind “contains those dreams which are without either sense or intelligibility, which seem disconnected, confused and meaningless” (ibid.). Freud goes on to say that this third category more particularly than the second represents a significant contrast between manifest and latent content. They are also the trickiest to interpret as “there is an intimate and regular relation between the unintelligible and confused nature of dreams and the difficulty of reporting the thoughts behind them” (149). In this way, the third kind of dream is likely the most pregnant with unconscious repressed meaning and hidden wish-fulfillment, and the kind most necessitating a trained therapist to make the interpretation. While I argue that the above example is simply of the first type of rather overt meaning, the dreams otherwise represented in the novel appear to be more often of the second kind, as they are initially “bewildering” and yet the characters appear able to interpret their meaning to their satisfaction (at some point in the text) without the aid of analysis (6-7, 13, 33, 60, 571). That is to say, the latent material of the dream is not repressed in an ostensible unconscious but instead held in the more accessible preconscious.

The Unconscious and Existentialism: The Trueblood Episode

In the remainder of this section, I will address how the former, playful critique at the narratorial and authorial levels signals a more thorough rejection of the concept of the *unconscious* and its implications for individual responsibility engaged with throughout the novel. That is, aside from the text's debunking of the authority of psychoanalytic theory through satire, at the authorial level its philosophical commitment to existential ideas of freedom and the responsibility of the individual would, I argue, make a concomitant belief in the unconscious incongruous. Several earlier studies have explored the influence of existentialism, especially that of André Malraux and Jean-Paul Sartre, on Ellison's work.¹²⁵ One frequently named connection is the link Ellison makes between the crazy-logical narration of his underground "Invisible Man" and Dostoyevsky's protagonist in *Notes from Underground* (1864)—a text that is considered a significant precursor to the existentialist movement.¹²⁶ IM's developing grasp of the "absurdity" of the human condition (a word repeated many times throughout his narration) is another key example. IM's increasing sense of his own freedom, which necessitates taking personal responsibility for his actions, is also indicative of the existential underpinnings of the novel.

As shown, both the text, through its overt Signifyin(g) of aspects of psychoanalytic theory, and the author, through his critical essays, treat the concept of the unconscious with ambivalence. I propose that another way that the text deals with this issue is to demystify the idea of the unconscious in favor of an understanding of conflicting motives and psychical material which is more in line with an existential explanation of the phenomenon. That is, Sartre held that to exist is to be conscious, and while there could be a pre-reflective mode of consciousness seemingly beyond our immediate awareness, the idea of *un-consciousness* would be tantamount to non-existence (Daigle 24). He believed that humans were fully capable of lying to themselves (i.e. living in *bad faith*), which made an explanation of the unconscious motives for human behavior unnecessary (Daigle 25). More importantly, he held that the existence of unconscious motivations striped people of their capacity to take full responsibility for their actions (*ibid.*).

Firstly, as we have seen, the novel does not portray the root problems of the black American characters as caused by repressed unconscious desires, but instead by contemporary social factors. Indeed, the theory of the uncon-

¹²⁵ See especially Esther Merle Jackson's early essay "The American Negro and the Image of the Absurd" (in Reilly) as well as Steele and Anderson. Many other sources mention existentialism in connection with Ellison's work due to its obvious presence in the novel and in Ellison's critical essays.

¹²⁶ Ellison makes the connection in his "Art of Fiction" interview, and directly states that he began with an "underground man" type of protagonist (212-213). A "crazy-logical" manner of reasoning defies expectations by displaying insight; it appears surprisingly apt because it has not been formed through clear narrative logic.

scious is undermined in favor of a view that shifts more of the responsibility for one's actions on to the conscious individual affected by real-world circumstances. As shown earlier, the reader is given reason to doubt that the trauma of the war veterans at the Golden Day has no connection to experiences of their racist reality. The text also depicts the "mad" behavior of the characters of Tod Clifton and Ras the Destroyer as related to the socio-economic conditions of Harlem and their second-class status as black Americans.¹²⁷ In addition, the Jim Trueblood episode is key to appreciating how this fundamental hypothesis of psychoanalytic theory is contradicted at the authorial level. The episode is dominated by the sharecropper Trueblood's narration to IM and Mr. Norton (the white college trustee in IM's charge) of how he unintentionally committed incest due to a dream. The scene is rife with Freudian themes, most obviously the incest taboo (which has received perhaps the most critical interest by scholars of any psychoanalytic aspect of the text) (173). But Trueblood's transgression impels the reader to consider, more fundamentally, the realm of the unconscious. Trueblood claims that his act of incest towards his daughter Matty Lou was caused by a dream he was having, and thus it was not a conscious act, but a "dream-sin" (62).¹²⁸ The issue of consciousness inevitably brings with it the question of responsibility: if Trueblood is telling the truth, and one believes that the unconscious has the power to exert its (here, the *id*'s) wishes through dreams, Trueblood, as he originally claims, cannot be held fully responsible for the act and the pregnancy which has resulted from it. However, the text is not prepared to

¹²⁷ IM cannot comprehend why Tod, who was just a short time before a well-respected spokesperson for the Brotherhood, would "plunge out of history" and begin instead to "peddle an obscenity"—Sambo dolls—to earn his living (438). Throughout his baffled questioning of the event, which ends in Tod's arrest and subsequent death as a result of police brutality, IM finds himself contemplating both the "forces of history" (441) and the societal causes behind the event: that is, who holds the "invisible" threads making the "Sambo dolls dance" (446). The event leads IM to question his education regarding the scientific forces of history from the Brotherhood: "What if history was not a reasonable citizen, but a madman full of paranoid guile and these boys [like Tod] his agents, his big surprise?" (441). Moreover, by the riot at the end of the novel, the character of Ras "the Exhorter" has become "the Destroyer," riding on a large black horse "a haughty vulgar dignity, dressed in the costume of an Abyssinian chieftain; a fur cap upon his head, his arm bearing a shield, a cape made of the skin of some wild animal around his shoulders" (556). IM describes him further as having become a "figure more out of a dream than out of Harlem . . . yet real, alive, alarming" (*ibid.*). But despite what is described as Ras' outlandish new costume, IM's judgment of his insanity is based on the fact that he is prepared to lynch IM for his cause: "when Ras thundered, 'Hang him!' I stood there facing them, and it seemed unreal. I faced them knowing that the madman in a foreign costume was real and yet unreal, knowing that he wanted my life, that he held me responsible for all the nights and days of suffering and for all that which I was incapable of controlling" (558). He concludes: "And that I, a little black man with an assumed name should die because a big black man in his hatred and confusion over the nature of reality that seemed controlled solely by white men whom I knew to be as blind as he, was just too outrageously absurd. And I knew that it was better to live out one's own absurdity than die for that of others" (559).

¹²⁸ See also Eversley for a discussion of this element of agency in Ellison's short story "King of the Bingo Game" (1944) (453-454).

exonerate the farmer completely under these terms. It indicates instead that both conscious libidinous thoughts the farmer has about his daughter (54, 56) as well as the family's poor economic situation (which compels them to sleep together in the same bed) contribute to the crime (54). Scorned by his family and denied the aid of the church, Trueblood suggests that he has suffered for his actions, but does not finally exonerate himself fully for what he has done: "I leaves tryin' to pray, but I caint. I thinks and thinks, until I thinks my brain go'n bust, 'bout how I'm guilty and how I ain't guilty. I don't eat nothin' and I don't drink nothin' and caint sleep at night" (66). Finally, after confronting his sorrow and singing some blues that "ain't never been sang before" he accepts what he has done, and resolves to return to take up his responsibility to his family, telling his wife, "I'm a man and man don't leave his family" (66). Material factors also play into the resolution of the issue, in fact. Despite wanting to leave, he decides to stay, both due to the acceptance of his responsibility for what has happened—"it don't do no good tryin' to run off from somethin' like that. It follows you wherever you go"—and due to material factors: "Besides, to git right down to the facts, there wasn't nowhere I could go. I didn't have a cryin' dime!" (67).

Oedipal Issues

At the authorial level, the absence of unconscious motives leading to IM's ostensible illness is also emphasized in another key manner. IM's struggle against authoritative male figures (he names, amongst others, Jack, Emerson, Bledsoe, Norton, and Ras) has been read through a Freudian lens as proof that IM suffers from latent Oedipal issues.¹²⁹ However, the text also suggests that his concerns are not primarily psychological but palpable. Considering IM's final dream or hallucination of being brutally castrated by these men near the end of his narration, it would certainly seem that a Freudian reading would be apt. But as illustrated, because the text so frequently utilizes psychoanalytic concepts in order to parody them and lessen their authoritative interpretive potential, the text might also be suggesting a more real-world explanation of this dream. That is, that the power that these men assert over IM and young black American men like him poses a material threat to his future prospects and even his physical well-being. Of all the people to disillusion IM in this manner, the threats and betrayal of his college president, Bledsoe ("the example of everything [he] hoped to be" [101]) is the most shocking and hurtful to IM.¹³⁰ Bledsoe was "[i]nfluential with wealthy men all over the country; consulted in matters concerning the race; a leader of his people; the possessor of not one, but two Cadillacs, a good salary and a soft, good-looking and creamy-complexioned wife" (ibid.). In short, as a "leader

¹²⁹ See, for example, Horowitz, Fraiberg and Doane's essays regarding this discussion.

¹³⁰ See also Krasteva (66).

of his people,” and a success both socially and materially, Bledsoe’s life was the fulfillment of the scripted *Scholar* stereotype which IM aspires to.¹³¹

In IM’s disciplinary meeting with Bledsoe after his mishap with Mr. Norton at the Golden Day, IM experiences profound shock, as though he has been physically hit in the head when the college president calls him “nigger” (139): “It was as though he’d struck me. I stared across the desk thinking, He called me *that*... [...] *That*, I thought, noticing the throbbing vein between my eyes, thinking. *He called me that*” (ibid., original emphasis). Bledsoe berates IM for not understanding the fundamentality of being able to lie to white people and accuses him of dragging “the entire race through the slime” (141): “Why, the dumbest black bastard in the cotton patch knows that the only way to please a white man is to tell him a lie! What kind of education are you getting around here?” (139). He then reaches for a leg shackle “from slavery” and tells IM he must be “disciplined” (141). Bledsoe expels IM from the college and, at the sound of the leg shackle striking the desk, IM yells out in protest and threatens to inform on Bledsoe (ibid.). Bledsoe’s answer reveals, ironically, violently selfish and criminal tendencies beneath his gentlemanly façade:

You’re nobody, son. You don’t exist—can’t you see that? The white folk tell everybody what to think—except men like me. [...] Shocks you, doesn’t it? Well, that’s the way it is. It’s a nasty deal and I don’t always like it myself. But you listen to me: I didn’t make it, and I know that I can’t change it. But I’ve made my place in it and I’ll have every Negro in the country hanging on tree limbs by morning if it means staying where I am. (143)

While it is doubtful that Bledsoe is actually threatening to lynch IM, he is ready to do everything in his power to limit IM’s possibilities for success in terms of the *Scholar* script, both at the college and in his career. The reference letters he gives IM the next day to present to prospective employers in New York City are instead written to ensure IM’s failure. Moreover, IM states: “Here within this quiet greenness I possessed the only identity I had ever known, and I was losing it” (ibid.). He has thus become “aware of the connection between these lawns and buildings” and his “hopes and dreams” for a future as an educated leader (ibid.). Hence, Bledsoe’s actions are tantamount to destroying his *Scholar* identity, the narrative identity after which IM has been scripting his life so far. His predicament strikes him like “a stab” (99). IM continues to react physically to the news, as though he has been emasculated: “This time I could barely move, my stomach was knotted and my kidneys ached. My legs were rubbery. For three years I had thought of myself as a man and here with a few words he’d made me as helpless as

¹³¹ Elsewhere IM states that he has also envisioned himself as another, very great, leader: a potential Booker T. Washington (18).

an infant” (144). He states later that Bledsoe’s actions had “practically ordered [him] killed. By slow degrees” (194).

This tangible threat to IM’s physical well-being is echoed in the final riot scene, where Ras and his men *do* intend to lynch IM, for being a “lying traitor” to black Americans for his involvement in the communist Brotherhood movement (558). Importantly, IM tries desperately to convince Ras that this turning of black men against each other has been orchestrated by white society (here, the Brotherhood): “They want this to happen. [...] They planned it. [...] It goes, ‘Use a nigger to catch a nigger’” (ibid.). IM’s belief that his potential lynching is based on “a reality that seemed controlled solely by white men” connects it to Bledsoe’s earlier claims that “the white folk tell everyone what to think” (143). But significantly, it also announces a threatening reality still facing black Americans at mid-century: that of becoming victims of racially motivated lynchings by vigilante mobs. In this way, his text suggests that unlike upper-class white Americans like Emerson Jr., black Americans do not have the luxury (or, arguably, the necessity) of working out unresolved oedipal fears of castration on the psychiatric couch because their fears of physical torture orchestrated by those with authority and power are actually still relevant and *quite* real.

Section Two: Blues People

The existential currents in *Invisible Man* do far more than critique the popularity of psychoanalytic theory at mid-century. Through them, IM explores alternative methods of conceiving of himself and his relation to the world through a growing commitment to a sense of freedom and responsibility. And while Ellison was well-read in the trends of continental philosophy, as is clear from his essays, IM commits to an existential outlook on life not through an acquaintance with *L’Être et le Néant* or *La Condition Humaine*, but through what Ellison considered the uniquely American form of existential living: performing the Blues.

Musical Traditions

Due to frequent references to blues and jazz music in *Invisible Man*, and Ellison’s own essays about the music, scholars have long been fascinated by how the narrator and his story have been influenced by the form and philosophy of the music. Huston A. Baker Jr.’s *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature* (1984) is surely the best known research into this aspect of Ellison’s work, as part of Baker’s broader argument for the inseparability of black literature from the historical, social and economic conditions which shape it. For Baker, the themes and mentality of the blues become a paradigm applicable to understanding both black American literature, and Amer-

ican culture more generally. A guiding hypothesis of Baker's study is that black American culture is both complex and reflexive, and can therefore be metaphorically understood as a kind of blues matrix, as "a womb, a network" and a "point of ceaseless input and output, a web of intersecting, crisscrossing impulses always in productive transit" (3-4). The blues itself is therefore not one form but a synthesis including "work songs, group seculars, field hollers, sacred harmonies, proverbial wisdom, folk philosophy, political commentary, ribald humor, elegiac lament, and much more"(5). They make up an amalgam that "seems always to have been in motion in America—always becoming, shaping, transforming, displacing the peculiar experiences of Africans in the New World" (*ibid.*). Baker describes the blues matrix as a type of "multiplex, enabling script" in which Black American cultural discourse is "inscribed" (4)—a formulation which, quite unlike the socio-cultural scripts of action and behavior discussed in the present study, suggests a thematic or practical understanding of the term that lacks the concomitant determination of scripted narrative logic. This is something that Ellison himself, in both his critical essays and, as I will show, in his novel, relates more particularly to a kind of existential blues mentality which offers his protagonist not a narrative script to follow as a stereotyped character, but rather a philosophy in which especially the most absurd aspects of a black American's life can be incorporated in order to aid his endurance—his psychological and, thus, his physical survival.

Several scholars have also recently studied Ellison's work in light of this musical metaphor or mentality articulated in Ellison's critical essays. In "Ralph Ellison on Lyricism and Swing" (2005) Paul Allen Anderson draws our attention to Ellison's use of jazz music as a metaphor for an ideal democratic society: in "Living with Music" (1955) Ellison states that the early 1930s jam sessions of Oklahoma City's growing jazz scene were a "marvel of social organization" where a "delicate balance" was struck between "strong individual personality and the group" ("Living" 229). As Anderson puts it, Ellison's "literary translation and transposition" of jazz form opens "a window into the intellectual landscape where the author intertwined his musical and social thought" (280). He and other critics such as Shelby Steele, A. Timothy Spaulding, and Andrew Radford, have also explored how black American music shape, not only Ellison's cultural theories, but also the form and content of Ellison's fictional writing.¹³² In these studies, IM is

¹³² In "Embracing Chaos in Narrative Form: The Bebop Aesthetic in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*" (2004) Spaulding explores specific connections between the novel and bebop, which was emerging contemporaneously with the novel's production. He posits that how the bebop virtuoso "struggles to achieve an individual identity through the creation of a unique improvisational voice" can serve as a model and corollary for IM (482). I argue similarly for IM's representation as a kind of blues performer, but the implications of this identification are connected in my argument first and foremost to the role's therapeutic potential, for the narrator as performer and finally, for his audience.

compared to a jazz or blues singer through which Ellison promotes his theories of personal identity. Spaulding and Radford suggest that IM is thus an individualist and improvisational jazz performer and Steele holds that he becomes a blues singer capable of transcendence. In his study, Baker focuses on the Trueblood episode of Ellison's novel to show how the sharecropper, like Ellison himself, is a "self-reflexive artist" who is "fully aware of the contours and limitations, the rewards and dilemmas, of the Afro-American's uniquely expressive craft" (198). Baker does point out the connection of Ellison's project with existentialist philosophy, and the work of André Malraux in particular, regarding how life experience can be given meaning through its expression in artistic form (173).¹³³ However, as Baker's study is focused through the constraints of capitalist ideology, it does not claim philosophical or psychological transcendence for Trueblood but rather a pragmatic appreciation of his "essential self" as the obverse of the "stable, predictable, puritanical, productive, law-abiding ideal self of the American industrial-capitalist society" (190).

Unquestionably, the societal value of black American artistic representations of life and self as entertainers of white Americans is an underlying theme in Ellison's critical essays and his novel. But IM's appreciation and use of this entertaining mode of attracting attention also enables, I hold, the representation of parts of his fugitive self to his audience: his psychologically complex mind, in particular. This does not disqualify IM from experiencing personal transcendence: his blues mentality supports his endurance through the expression of his fugitive self. This section's reading holds thus with Steele's view that for Ellison the blues serve both as a "conceptual foundation from which he relates to the intellectual life of Western culture," (here, existentialism) as well as a unique expression of black American culture as an artistic "ritual of transcendence" (Steele 152). Like the other texts in this study, Ellison's novel negotiates and attempts to offer alternatives to the determinism of the narrative methods of popular postwar psychotherapy. Hence, the novel illustrates how IM in particular develops a blues mentality with regards to his representation (rather than a more strict narrative interpretation) of his life experiences and his sense of selfhood. This blues-inspired mentality is shown to aid IM pragmatically, I argue, in the philosophical/psychological transcendence of his "absurd" life experience. However, he dons the cloak of the *Entertainer* as a narrator in order to disseminate a more complex representation of his selfhood. And it is by mimicking the form of the confessional, therapeutic narrative of a potential madman that IM, paradoxically, is able to complicate his socially stereotyped identity. Namely, by incorporating his psychologically complex mind into his narrative, he redefines the boundaries of his social narrative identity—of what has

¹³³ Ellison states, for example, that artistic significance alone "enables man to conquer chaos and to master destiny" ("Richard Wright's Blues" 94).

been considered personal *story* material and what public *discourse*. As explained in the Introduction of this study, the fugitive self can in representation be analogous to *story* material which is not included, or edited out of the *discourse* of social narrative identity. The material is only made senseless, therefore, when narrative form is brought to bear on it. And that a society values narrative logic does not imply that this vast, edited experience of the story does not have personal value (as we saw in Chapters Two and Three) or should not even have broader societal value, which I hope to make clear in the present chapter.

As explained, Ellison supported the kind of psychological aid offered to patients of the Lefarge Clinic, which did not base its therapy on curing psychological suffering through a specifically narrative analysis of unconscious causes, but on helping people “reforge the will to endure” in the face of overwhelming psychological difficulty which pertained to withstanding the hypocrisy of postwar American attitudes. In the remainder of this chapter, supported by textual analysis and Ellison’s account in his essays of a kind of blues mentality or theory for living in an irrational society, I suggest that the narrator posits an alternative method of enduring psychological difficulty by incorporating the philosophy of black American music into the form of therapeutic narration. That is, by creating a performance, rather than an interpretation of self which improvises off of standard notions of the therapeutic capacity of the narrative form, IM adapts the stereotype of the *Entertainer* to create new possibilities for surviving psychological illness. Specifically, I will explore how the narrator uses narrative form to create an ironic distance between himself and his character, and how he shows the character learning how to confront and transcend his sorrow: to become a performer of his blues. To be clear, IM does not retool the *Entertainer* stereotype by becoming an actual blues performer. IM entertains instead primarily with his confessional, ostensibly therapeutic, narration which plays on his potential readerships’ postwar expectations of the form as an intriguing tale of misadventure which should lead, by the end, to his psychological healing through narrative logic. But instead, I aim to show how the survival of the physical self through this blues mentality and his entertaining narrative performance, enables the self-definition of the narrator beyond scripted stereotypes of character and psychological healing.

Blues Mentality

In a series of essays Ellison wrote between the mid-1940s and mid-1960s published in *Shadow and Act* (1964) he develops an ethics based on music, predominantly folk, traditional jazz and the blues.¹³⁴ Through the example of

¹³⁴ The differences between the musical styles are not insignificant, however Ellison sometimes goes between the forms unproblematically due to the similarities he perceives of Afri-

Bessie Smith's significance to the black American community, he explains in "Blues People" (1964), how the blues mentality formed a philosophy of life to which many black Americans were religiously devoted:

Bessie Smith might have been a "blues queen" to society at large, but within the tighter Negro community where the blues were part of a total way of life, and a major expression of an attitude toward life, she was a priestess, a celebrant who affirmed the values of the group and man's ability to deal with chaos. (287)

Ellison also suggests here that the blues as an art form also operated as a technique for surviving the chaotic contradictions of black American existence, an idea that, as we have seen, he developed in several other essays. Through an exploration of the affinities between Wright's novel *Black Boy* (1945) and the blues, Ellison posits reading Wright's text as a blues piece, "an autobiographical chronicle of personal catastrophe expressed lyrically" ("Richard Wright's Blues" 129). As Steele points out, the existentialist underpinnings in Ellison's novel grew out of and are evinced through his theorization of blues as an existentialist form of musical expression (161-164). In Ellison's analysis of Wright's novel, he explains that the blues form's attraction lies in "express[ing] both the agony of life and the possibility of conquering it through sheer toughness of spirit" (143). Moreover, it falls short of the tragic genre, only in that it provides "no solution, offers no scapegoat but the self" (ibid.). Though this belief in the responsibility of the individual to confront their painful reality and to express it—"to finger its jagged grain"—Ellison holds that the blues artist is able to transcend his experience by "squeezing from it a near-tragic, near-comic lyricism"(129). Elsewhere, in "Blues People" (1964), Ellison attends to the origins of this distancing method which enables survival in the wake of senseless suffering:

The blues speak to us simultaneously of the tragic and comic aspects of the human condition, and they express a profound sense of life shared by many Negro Americans precisely because their lives have combined these modes. This has been the heritage of a people . . . whose need to live despite the dehumanizing pressures of slavery developed an endless capacity for laughing at their painful experience. (286)

Ellison not only describes here how performing the art form, with its tragicomical quality, can help one endure and transcend painful experiences in one's life through laughing at them, but more importantly through the psychological distance the artist creates through this mentality. As Steele has aptly summarized Ellison's conception of blues transcendence, "[the pain] is not overcome or defeated in an unrealistic or romantic sense; it is simply

can-American expression and the overlap of, for example, lyrical style or similar features, such as improvisation.

brought under control and deprived of its demoralizing power over the individual” (153).

Thus, in order to find something comic about a painful experience, a person, in a sense, needs to get beyond her subjective perspective of the moment (a position from which there is likely nothing comical about the situation) and take on an objective view of herself. This view, I argue, is similar to the narrator of a character, which in narrational practices creates a distance from an immediate, subjective pain and can lead to viewing and expressing the experience within a broader perspective.¹³⁵ Similarly, in “On Bird, Bird-Watching and Jazz” (1962), Ellison’s analysis of traditional and modern jazzmen, he underlines the importance of developing a more immediate separation between a private sense of self from the public performance of identity—the performer from the performance:

Certain older jazzmen possessed a clearer idea of the division between their identities as performers and as private individuals. Offstage and while playing ensemble, they carried themselves like college professors or high church deacons; when soloing they donned the comic mask and went into frenzied pantomimes of hotness . . . and when done, dropped the mask and returned to their chairs with dignity. Perhaps they realized that whatever his style, the performing artist remains an entertainer. . . (260)

Ellison makes his point in this essay through a comparison between Louis Armstrong and Charlie Parker (the “Bird” in the title). Ellison defends Armstrong’s role as an entertainer against accusations by the artists and followers of the bebop movement that he was essentially an Uncle Tom who pandered to white audiences. According to Ellison, beboppers such as Parker instead enacted a “grim comedy of racial manners, with the musicians employing a calculated surliness and rudeness” towards the audience (259). Ellison believes that this “rejection of the traditional entertainer’s role” and Armstrong in particular by Parker’s generation was misguided, as it “confused artistic quality with questions of personal conduct, a confusion which would ultimately reduce their own music to the mere matter of race” (ibid.). He emphasizes instead that Armstrong, and even the audience, were aware that his clownish behavior was an act; he was “basically a *make-believe* . . . clown—which the irreverent poetry and triumphant sound of his trumpet makes even the squarest of squares aware of” (261, original emphasis). Ellison concludes that the pathos of Charlie Parker’s life and his early death at thirty-four, lies in the ironic reversal that through his attempts to escape the *Entertainer* role exemplified by Armstrong, he became “a sacrificial figure whose struggles against personal chaos, onstage and off, served as entertainment for a ravenous, sensation-starved, culturally disoriented public” (260).

¹³⁵ It is vital to note, however, that as we saw in Chapter Two there is nothing *innately* therapeutic about this objectifying way of viewing the self in narrative.

While the accuracy of Ellison's personal opinions about the artists is certainly up for debate, he argues here that with the stereotyped *Entertainer* role comes the capacity for a powerful ironic distancing between the performer and the performance which can enable him, firstly, to differentiate between his private self and his social identity, and secondly, to survive to communicate the former through the latter to an audience. Ellison underscores the importance of disseminating the blues mentality through the *Entertainer's* role with the example of the performance by the Blue Devils Orchestra of the tune "They Picked Poor Robin:"

Oh, they picked poor robin clean
(repeat)
They tied poor robin to a stump
Lord, they picked all the feathers
Round from the robin's rump
Oh, they picked poor robin clean. ("On Bird" 265)

Ellison states that while the "poor robin" of the song was "picked again and again, and his pluckers were ever unnamed and mysterious," the tune "was inevitably productive of laughter" in the audience, even when the audience themselves were its object (265). Ellison states moreover that the crowd's "defeats and failures, even [their] final defeat by death, were loaded upon poor robin's back and given ironic significance and thus made more bearable" (ibid.). Hence, Ellison suggests that through the performance the artists not only created an ironic distance from their own lives, but taught the audience this vital technique for endurance as well.

Blues Method in *Invisible Man*

In *Invisible Man*, the text contradicts the notion of a path to psychological healing through standard notions of narrative analysis and interpretation, not only through the parody of popular psychoanalytic theory and practice shown in the previous section, but also through the portrayal of IM using this blues method of the *Entertainer/Performer* to endure, rather than narratively interpret psychological suffering. The term *Performer* is meant to signal IM's empowering improvisation of the role. The fundamental way that this is shown in the text is through the ironic distance created between the character of the past and the narrator of the present which enables the introduction of this comic distancing into the text. Not unlike *The Bell Jar*, as *Invisible Man* deals with the serious circumstances of IM's often-tragic fate, the humor of the novel has not always been appreciated by readers.¹³⁶ Ellison is

¹³⁶ However the use of humor, and especially satire, in the novel has received attention from literary critics. See, for example, Earl H. Rovit's "Ralph Ellison and the American Comic

quoted in his *Paris Review* interview in 1955 interrupting himself in what appears to be a sudden apprehension of a possible misreading by his interviewers; he asks: “Look, didn’t you find the book at all *funny*?” (221, original emphasis). The humor throughout the text is not gratuitous—it is evidence of the narrator’s distancing and survival tactics. Accordingly, it is often in the most humiliating or detrimental episodes in which the narrator represents his character and situation comically.

The narrator often builds humor throughout an episode by juxtaposing his character’s straightness (his seriousness and his single-minded dedication to his goal of fulfilling the *Scholar* role) with the absurd, chaotic, and even terrifying situations carrying on around him. The scene with Emerson Jr. is one example of this distancing technique. As we saw, while Emerson Jr.’s mind wanders incessantly back to navel-gazing self-analysis, IM doggedly brings the interview back, again and again, to the subject of employment. The episode in which IM gives a speech before the home of an elderly, evicted couple in Harlem is another example of this comical method of coping. IM portrays himself naively trying to fulfill the *Scholar* role—educated to lead his people by rhetoric with principles of peace—while he remains ignorant of the reality of the problems faced by Harlem’s residents. IM’s persistent effort to carry out his erudite, yet superficial speech about the tragedy of the situation and what a peaceful “brethren” Harlem’s residents are is continually interrupted by members of the on-looking mob seeking a more immediate alternative action against the evictors. While the residents express the truth of the situation in a less eloquent manner than IM’s speechifying oration, through this humorous comparison their common speech is shown to more aptly grasp the reality of the situation and their limited options for taking action. Forcing himself up onto the stairs between the angry crowd and the armed marshal (who is guarding the men carrying out the eviction) IM yells “Black men! Brothers! Black Brothers! That’s not the way. We’re law-abiding. We’re law-abiding people and a slow-to-anger people” (275). He repeats the last phrase, and then reports that “[t]hey stopped, listening” and that “[e]ven the white man, [the marshal] was startled” (ibid.). “Yeah, but we mad now,” a voice calls out (ibid.). IM continues: “Yes, you’re right . . . We’re angry, but let us be wise. Let us, I mean let us not . . . Let us learn from that great leader whose wise action was reported in the newspaper the other day,” only to be interrupted and tested for his lack of specificity: “What mahn? Who?” a West Indian voice shouted” (ibid.). Another group member yells, “[c]ome on! To hell with this guy, let’s get that paddie before they send him some help” (ibid.). This leads IM to entreat the crowd to “organize” and to follow a leader, like the “wise man” whom he does not name, but claims was “strong enough to do the legal thing, the law-

Tradition” (1972) and William J. Schafer’s “Irony from Underground—Satiric Elements in Invisible Man” (1970).

abiding thing,” and turn a fugitive over to the “forces of law and order” (276). In answer, a crowd-member hollers “Yeah . . . yeah, so they could lynch his ass” (ibid.). The scene continues:

“He was a wise leader,” I yelled. “He was within the law. Now wasn’t that the wise thing to do?”

“Yeah, he was wise all right,” the man laughed angrily. “Now get out of the way so we can jump this paddie...” [...]

“But wasn’t that the human thing to do? After all, he had to protect himself because—”

“He was a handkerchief-headed rat!” a woman screamed, her voice boiling with contempt.

“Yes, you’re right. He was wise and cowardly, but what about us? What are we to do?” (ibid.)

The narrator then describes himself carrying on for some time with a rambling, repetitive and largely descriptive speech about the people being evicted, until he is interrupted by a “heavyweight” summing up the situation for him: “I’ll tell you! . . . Hell, they been dispossessed, you crazy sonofabitch, get out the way!” (278). IM portrays himself stubbornly continuing his long-winded speech about the victim’s belongings (280). When he finally asks, “[s]o where do we go from here? Where do we go from here, without a pot—,” he is definitively interrupted by the “heavyweight” man: “We going after that paddie” (ibid.). At this point, the crowd rush the marshal to enact their own sense of justice, and IM’s self-important attempt to control them through rhetoric is shown to be ultimately ridiculous.

Another key example of this technique arises in the presentation of the Battle Royal scene, at the meeting of white town leaders, when, despite the excruciating humiliation and physical pain that IM endures, he describes his character as unreasonably engrossed in thoughts about being able to perform his valedictorian speech. Because the speech was the real purpose of his visit to the meeting, he states early on, “by the way,” that he had some “misgivings” about participating in the battle royal (17). The narrator states that the character envisioned himself as a potential Booker T. Washington, and he portrays himself naively “suspect[ing]” that fighting a battle royal “might detract from the dignity of [his] speech” (18). In this way, the scene can be read as a concomitant battle between the scripted stereotypes of the *Criminal* and the *Scholar*. Tellingly, both stereotypes in this scene make *Entertainers* of the young black men. IM and the nine other black boys are threatened by the white men into fighting each other blindfolded. While getting prepared, IM describes himself going over his speech, each word “bright as a flame” (ibid.). Blindfolded, IM says he had “no dignity” and “stumbled about like a baby or a drunken man” (22) during the “complete anarchy” of the fight

(23). “The harder we fought the more threatening the [white] men became. And yet, I had begun to worry about my speech again. How would it go? Would they recognize my ability? What would they give me?” (24). Finally, IM is left to fight it out with the biggest of the fighters, Tatlock—whose “face was a black blank of a face, only his eyes alive—with hate of me and aglow with a feverish terror from what had happened to us all” (ibid.). At this point he says: “I became anxious. I wanted to deliver my speech and he came at me as though he meant to beat it out of me” (ibid.). In the midst of the fight, IM hears a white man betting against his odds and represents his character questioning if he should continue defending himself, pondering: “Would not this go against my speech, and was not this a moment for humility, for non-resistant?” (25). However, a punch that “sent [his] right eye popping like a jack-in-the-box” settled his dilemma (ibid.). Even after IM is finally knocked out, he describes his character as still only really being concerned about not being able to present his scholarly speech about humility being “the very essence of progress” for black Americans (17):

When the voice drawled TEN I was lifted up and dragged to a chair. I sat dazed. My eye pained and swelled with each throb of my pounding heart and I wondered if now I would be allowed to speak [...]. Looking up front, I saw attendants in white jackets rolling the portable ring away and placing a small square rug in the vacant space surrounded by chairs. Perhaps, I thought, I will stand on the rug to deliver my speech. (26)

By contrasting his character’s optimism and determination with the ongoing humiliations and antagonism of the situation, the narrator ironically reveals both his naiveté and the fact that the ludicrous abuse of the black youths is still far from over: the rug is covered with the fighters’ pay, but it is also electrified. To be sure, in this episode, as those shown before, the comic aspects which the narrator introduces are not certain to provoke laughter in the reader due to the at times heavy sense of tragedy with which they are contrasted. However, I hold that these episodes are indeed instances in the text where it is clear that the narrator is trying to introduce comic elements to enable himself the emotional distance from his character to make the portrayal possible.

Developing the Blues Mentality

In addition to the introduction of humor into otherwise serious, even appalling, scenes in his story, the narrator represents his character slowly learning to use this blues method to withstand psychological suffering through his various encounters with blues characters and practice. IM first portrays himself coming into contact with the blues method of transcending personal suffering when he meets the sharecropper, Trueblood. As we saw earlier,

after fleeing the scene of his crime, being denied help from his preacher, and deliberating over his guilt in the matter until he thinks his “brain go’n bust” (66), Trueblood suddenly starts singing the blues one night, and it becomes his way of both transcending the pain of his mistake and deciding to confront the issue:

Finally, one night, way early in the mornin’, I looks up and sees the stars and I starts singin’. I don’t mean to, I didn’t think ‘bout it, just start singin’. I don’t know what it was, some kinda church song, I guess. All I know is I ends up singin’ the blues. I sings me some blues the night ain’t never been sang before, and while I’m singing them blues I makes up my mind that I ain’t nobody but myself, and ain’t nothin’ I can do but let whatever is gonna happen happen. I made up my mind that I was goin’ back home and face Kate; yeah, and face Matty Lou too (ibid.).

But, IM is evidently unprepared to appreciate the blues method for himself until some time later. Shortly after IM arrives in New York City, he portrays his character as trying to behave in a more sophisticated manner than the next blues singer he meets, Pete Wheatstraw, a small-time junk collector. Walking behind Wheatstraw, IM hears the blues he is singing and it transports him briefly back home to the South (173). He grins when the blues man talks to him in a riddling black argot, and does not know how to answer his questions, but still derives “a certain comfort” from walking with the man (175). “I’d known the stuff from childhood, but had forgotten it,” he explains (176). After hearing Wheatstraw’s blues song again, he finds it “strange” when he tries, now as an adult, to analyze and understand it logically, rather than gasp its emotional core:

What did it mean, I thought. I’d heard it all my life but suddenly the strangeness of it came through to me. Was it about a woman or about some strange sphinxlike animal? Certainly his woman, no woman, fitted that description. And why describe anyone in such contradictory words? (177)

In fact, it is not until IM learns of Bledsoe’s betrayal from Emerson Jr. and is faced with the permanent destruction of his dream to return to his college and fulfill the *Scholar* role in the college president’s footsteps that IM finally describes himself becoming receptive to the blues. At first IM depicts himself leaving Emerson’s office in confusion and anger. Again he tries to use logic to understand something which seems absurd—the sadistic “joke” he felt was being played on him by the powerful men (193): “My mind flew in circles, to Bledsoe, Emerson and back. There was no sense to be made of it. It was a joke. Hell, it couldn’t be a joke. Yes, it is a joke” (ibid.). Then, not unlike Trueblood, in the midst of his confusion IM hears himself humming the same tune he hears another man whistling: “*O well they picked poor Robin clean*” (ibid., original emphasis). His first impulse is

again to try to grasp the song's text through intellect, as he had attempted to do with Wheatstraw's tune. He poses questions to the song: "What was the who-what-when-where-why of poor old Robin? What had he done and who had tied him and why had they plucked him and why had they sung of his fate?" (193-194). When he reaches his lodgings he finds himself "shaking with anger" at his situation, thinking about how the reference letters from Bledsoe had destroyed his future, had "practically ordered [him] killed" (194). But then he begins comically identifying instead with the plucked "Robin" of the song: "I laughed and felt numb and weak, knowing that soon the pain would come and that no matter what happened to me I'd never be the same. I felt numb and I was laughing" (ibid.). No longer a victim of his situation, his first impulse thereafter is to murder Bledsoe—to avenge the symbolic death of the *Scholar* identity. But then, like Trueblood, he is moved to confront and deal pragmatically with his immediate problem: instead he directly follows up on his lead for a job at the Liberty paint plant (195). Similar to the real blues performers of the same song in Ellison's essay, IM is shown learning to create an ironic distance between himself and the character in the song in order to finally confront and transcend his sorrow and symbolic death. That is, he learns in the manner of a *Performer* of the blues, to endure the lack of the logical progression of his character script and his absurd "boomerang[ing]" treatment by society (6), through the creative construction's expression. To experience, hence, a conceptual division of self from scripted identity.

Concluding Discussion: Performing Self-definition

There is, by the way, an area in which a man's feelings are more rational than his mind, and it is precisely in that area that his will is pulled in several directions at the same time. [...] I have been called one thing and another while no one really wished to hear what I called myself. (*Invisible Man* 573)

Near the end of the story action, IM is chased by Ras' lynch mob into the underground cellar from which he communicates his tale. The style of his narration often mimics the confessional, self-analytic narration of a person suffering psychologically. However, his blues mentality, by giving him the ability to narrate his absurd experiences with the ironic distance of a blues *Performer*, helps him to a greater degree in this undertaking, I hold, than the healing potential of scripted narrative logic. The narrator's ability to relate painful experiences in this manner contributes directly to his self-definition through narration.

In the epilogue of IM's account, at the close of his narration, the narrator professes to reveal his motives for writing and what the process has taught

him. IM appears to play into standard notions of therapeutic narration—the ending is, after all, the traditional place in narrative at which the definitive interpretation of the related story can be reached. He says that he tries “be-latedly to study the lesson of [his] own life” and his reality that he is “an invisible man and it placed [him] in a hole—or showed [him] the hole he was in” (572). IM claims to have discovered the source of his illness, and that his “attempt to write it down” has shown him that “at least half of it lay within [him]” (575). He states that “the real soul-sickness” is not accepting the fact that you yourself are to blame if you allow yourself to become a victim of your troubles (ibid.). Though IM says he is not sure what the next phase is for his society or himself, he states that his “world has become one of infinite possibilities” which is “a good phrase and a good view of life, and a man shouldn’t accept any other” and that this much he has learned underground (576). He also announces that he has come to a decision: he now feels prepared to leave his underground home and re-enter society (581). Likening himself to the performer Louis Armstrong, he wishes to be “up and around” with his “dancing and his diversity” (ibid.). Though still “invisible” he is “coming out nonetheless” as he has “overstayed [his] hibernation,” and because there is “a possibility that even an invisible man has a socially responsible role to play” (ibid.).

However, the last statement the narrator makes in his narrative proper, immediately before the epilogue—“The end was in the beginning” (571)—suggests that his narrative might not conform to such tidy, formal conventions of linearity and teleology as it at first suggests. In fact, a return to the prologue is revealing: IM describes there these same insights that he claims to have discovered *through* narrating his story. In the opening statement of *Invisible Man*, it is clear that while still suffering psychologically, the narrator has already worked out the major cause of this instability. He is an “invisible man,” IM states, not due to his own biology, “a biochemical accident of [his] epidermis,” but because society refuses to “see him,” to perceive the humanity behind scripted notions of his identity. The source of his worn “nerves” (3) is that they cannot see beyond the stereotypes of his “surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination” (ibid.). So, even before he narrates the story of how he has gotten to the point where he is illegally living in an underground cellar, IM states that through being “boomeranged” across his head by his experiences (6), he has already come to several insights that he claims in the epilogue to have only arrived at *after* relating his story.

IM does begin by portraying himself as a victim of his circumstances in the prologue: he explains that he would not be ready to accept responsibility if he murdered a white man due to his violent anger at not being “seen,” being bumped into, and taken for a *Criminal*: “Who was responsible for that near murder—I? I don’t think so, and I refuse it. I won’t buy it. You can’t give it to me. *He* bumped *me*, *he* insulted *me*. Shouldn’t he, for his own safe-

ty, have recognized my hysteria, my ‘danger potential?’” (14, original emphasis). However, IM then states that he does not want to fulfill this scripted role and remain a victim of his society’s blindness. His outlook is, again, existential as he expresses an acceptance of responsibility for his actions vis-à-vis his society (ibid.). But until now he has been in a state of inertia, “snarled in the incompatible notions that buzzed within [his] brain” (ibid.). He has shirked this responsibility, he states, and not been prepared to re-enter society (ibid.). Unable to take any action, he has tried to escape social roles altogether through his “hibernation” (ibid.). But IM suggests that he no longer identifies, or wishes to identify with this trait of irresponsibility regarding society: he confesses that his character was “a coward” (ibid.). Referring back to the jazz/blues tune “(What Did I Do to Be So) Black and Blue” sung by Armstrong which he enjoys listening to on repeat in his cellar, IM ends the prologue: “But what did *I* do to be so blue? Bear with me” (ibid., original emphasis). His question, again, frames the story he is about to tell in terms of a confessional, self-analytic narration: he claims to have solved the mystery of the cause of his illness, and healed to the degree that he is now prepared to reach back outside his cellar to share his story with the society from which he once felt driven to escape (572).

In this way, IM diagnoses his psychological suffering, his blues, as caused by social factors in the wake of his stereotyped, narrative identity. He now wants to accept responsibility, and relate what he did to contribute to his victimhood, and thus, his continued suffering. That is, to ask simply what he did to be so “black” would lead to victimhood, as the way he is treated due to his skin color is out of his control. But to ask what he did to be so “blue” empowers IM to become accountable for the perspective he holds of his situation. And the line—“But what did *I* do to be so blue?”—suggests, since it refers to the Armstrong recording, precisely the method by which IM himself will take responsibility: through the development of a narrative performance of the troubles he has faced which incorporates the philosophy of a blues performer, rather than a logic-seeking, self-analytic interpreter of his absurd black experience.

The narrator asks himself if his compulsion to write about his state—“to put invisibility down in black and white”—could be his own “urge to make music of invisibility” like Armstrong (14). Notably, he desires to make “music,” not meaning. Thus, in his characteristic style, brimming with questions and paradoxes, IM at the same moment states: “And so I play the invisible music of my isolation. The last statement doesn’t seem just right, does it? But it is; you hear this music simply because music is heard and seldom seen, except by musicians” (ibid.). In doing so, he draws the audience’s attention to a more covert aim of his story telling: the definition of his black subjectivity, the “invisible music” of his fugitive self, against the white dominance of the page of his contemporary society. Through this performance of his experience he hopes to make himself not only listened to, but seen and

defined—not simply in the sense of being understood, but actually materialized from an invisible “phantom” into a living, thinking, human being (5). In this way, IM aims to treat the source of his psychological suffering not with a therapeutic narration of self-analysis, but instead through an entertaining performance of his absurd experiences; a performance which has the potential to materialize him as a human being in the minds of those who have previously refused to see him. Rather than playing into the expectations of the psychoanalytic narrative and offer, in the epilogue, a realization of the cause of his illness, the narrative performance forms a realization of a fuller representation of his selfhood which incorporates the psychologically complex mind which he portrays as so often denied him by social stereotypes.

In sum, IM’s ostensibly self-analytic and therapeutic narration through which he entertains his audience does not heal him through narrative logic. The personal healing that takes place appears to occur through the expression of a self which is not strictly scripted: a self of psychological, intellectual and emotional depths rather than an un-complex stereotyped identity of societal value. But the greater therapeutic value to which the narration aspires is to heal not the protagonist, but his predominantly white audience by changing social stereotypes of black characters in society. In this way, the narrator seeks both to express the complexity of his psychology—aspects of his fugitive self—and effect a kind of healing in the audience, his broader society. Ultimately, the success of IM’s endeavor to effect real social change outside his underground home is represented as uncertain at the authorial level. Despite IM’s survival through his blues mentality and his cleverly executed definition of himself within the dominant discourse as an entertaining *Performer* of his psychologically complex “blues”—and despite his adamant claim that it is high time for him to perform his “music” back in society—within the text, IM does not emerge from his cellar (581). IM ends his narration in following way:

“Ah,” I can hear you say, “so it was all a build-up to bore us with his buggy jiving. He only wanted us to listen to him rave! But only partially *true*: Being invisible and without substance, a disembodied voice, as it were, what else could I *do*? What else but try to tell you what was really happening when your eyes were looking *through*? And it is this which frightens me: Who knows but that, on the lower frequencies, I speak for *you*?” (ibid., emphasis added)

Thus, in rhyming verse, narrating the blues of his black experience, IM too suggests that the success of his plan to cure his society as a whole of its mad attitudes towards black Americans, depends upon his personally healing act of narration being transmitted, understood and acted upon by a broader audience in American society.

CONCLUSION

Wondrous, Dangerous Things

Summary

In this study I have investigated how works of first-person fiction from the early postwar period responded critically to the proliferation and popularization of psychoanalytic theory. My aim has been to show how J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*, Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* and Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* trouble postwar societal assumptions regarding the therapeutic value of the narrative interpretation of the self. With the aid of narrative theory and theoretical concepts from the multidisciplinary field of narrative and identity studies, the goal of this thesis has been to demonstrate that beneath the surface of the protagonists' overt engagement with popular psychological trends, these texts develop a multi-layered and formal problematization of narrative therapeutic practices. This problematization, I hold, ultimately troubles the era's assumptions about the nature of psychological health and happiness. My contention has, furthermore, been that the texts explore not only the limitations of therapeutic narration, but also what possibilities may exist for self-representation through less scripted forms of narrative and narration as an act.

I began this study by positing that as a result of the revisions that schools such as ego psychology made to classical Freudian theory and practice, popular psychoanalytic treatment in postwar America became increasingly dependent upon the interpretive structure of narrative form. Popular psychoanalysis encouraged patients, I argued, to engage in therapeutic narration: to formulate themselves as ego-characters taking part in ongoing developmental life narratives plotted towards socially prescribed notions of psychological health and happiness. I went on to demonstrate that a theoretical understanding of how simple narratives make meaning can clarify how the contemporary concepts of narrative identity and socio-cultural scripts actually operate. It can also, thus, show that the novels problematize a fundamental paradox of postwar psychoanalytic practice: the assumption that psychological problems could be treated through the construction of narratives based on a predominantly a-psychological model.

By focusing on the dramatization and formal complication of therapeutic narration, I demonstrated through the analysis of the novels how each inves-

tigates the possibility of mitigating the dominant action structure of simple, socio-cultural scripts. I proposed that at different interpretive levels, the novels problematize the construction of narrative identities. The troubling of scripts has in part been highlighted by paying close attention to how the novels variously target four basic, interrelated formal features of narrative—the selectivity of events and actions, a sense of causality, the all-importance of the ending, and the valorization of action over character subjectivity as a method of interpreting meaning.

In light of the *story/discourse* divide of traditional narratology, I have suggested that the protagonists explore the limitations of scripted narrative models and test the potential for more personally significant methods of self-representation through alternative narrative forms. I have posited that the narrators and authorial agents experiment with narrative forms which they present as less demanding of narrativity and self-analysis: Esther Greenwood's fragmented novel, Holden Caulfield's Zen-like *un-Bildungsroman*, and the existential blues performance of Ellison's invisible man. In the creation of these forms, in contrast to scripts of societal discourse, my thesis has aimed to demonstrate how the narrators incorporate different aspects of their fugitive selves into their narrations, depending on which script they are troubling. Thus the narration of Esther in *The Bell Jar*, previously sensible and goal-oriented, becomes an irrational pastiche of moments of madness and present-moment pleasure once she is severed from the destructive scripted logic of her past narrative identity; in *The Catcher in the Rye* Holden disrupts expectations of his social and psychological development to digress into illogical, and personally meaningful descriptions and impressions; and IM complicates stereotypes of black Americans at mid-century by drawing attention to the puzzling psychological and existential paradoxes which haunt him. Hence, the novels collectively demonstrate that if narrative identity is the *discourse* of a subjectivity envisaging itself as a character playing a particular socially-scripted role, then there is a danger that the subjective experiences of the fugitive self of the present-moment—conceptually analogous to the *story* and *pre-story* material which is not gathered by these scripts—can be rendered senseless and without value.

Discussion

I will conclude this study with a short discussion that brings together several argumentative strands running through the previous chapters. In light of these texts' problematization of the therapeutic effects gained through narrativizing the self, this short discussion will outline how the ethical underpinnings of the practice are revealed by this problematization and what salutary possibilities the novels suggest might exist from a non-interpretive narration of self.

With the aid of theories of poetics, both Aristotelian and Todorovian, my aim has been to show how the novels collectively illustrate the implicit ethical stance, pertaining to living a “good” life, that underwrites both societally mediated scripts of normative action and behavior and interpretation by way of basic narrative logic more generally. Therefore, this study began by returning to Aristotle’s theorizations of plot in *Poetics* (BCE c.330). While the basic aspects of plot could have been explained with the aid of another narrative theorist since Aristotle’s time, my intention was to introduce, at the same time the ethical foundation of Aristotle’s theory of narrative plot, especially concerning the valorization of the meaning of character action over character psychology.

To reiterate briefly, Aristotle’s motivation for arguing for this prioritization of action in narrative had to do with an ethics he formulated of real human life. Aristotle wrote that: “Happiness and unhappiness lie in action, and the end [of life] is a sort of action, not a quality; people are of a certain sort according to their characters, but happy or the opposite according to their actions” (95). He states elsewhere that “it is according to people’s actions that they all succeed or fail” (ibid.). Aristotle, hence, argues that because the result of a person’s life (happiness or unhappiness, success or failure) depends on their actions, the story of that life should therefore be a representation of action and life and not of “human beings” (ibid.). Paradoxically, it is because a person’s actions in real life determine the final result—the meaning of that life—in the artistic representation of a life story that, according to Aristotle, the depiction of actions is paramount.

The texts in this study reveal that this valorization of character action is not a defunct method of interpreting the value of a human life. With the aid of, particularly, Todorov’s theorizations (through the lineage of the Russian Formalists), this study has argued that the narrators dramatize the pressure to plot their narrative identities and therapeutic narrations with regards to scripts of normative psychological action and behavior. Hence, the protagonists face the dilemma of both having to tell the right story (through a psychological models of narrative form which are action-based and highlight development and progress towards specific endings) as well as to heal psychologically through this activity. The right story is, moreover, not only a cleverly plotted narrative, aimed traditionally toward maintaining audience interest and enabling the audience’s emotional satisfaction, but through its form there is thus an inherent ethical evaluation of the value of that life which is socially, rather than personally, constructed.

A more recent reincarnation of Aristotle’s narrative ethical theory is philosopher Paul Ricoeur’s evaluation of human action as a “fundamental mode of being” which can, through the creation of narrative identity, supply “new value” to the meaning of a person (*Oneself* 20). Taking seriously Socrates dictum that a life worth living is a life worth recounting, Ricoeur argued that people can learn if their life has been good in ethical terms by reading it as a

story, and themselves as characters (*Oneself* 170). That is, an ethically good life is a life worthy of being recounted and to aim at a good life is to have ethical intention (*Oneself* 172). In Ricoeur's theory of narrative identity his focus on narrative's ability to represent and order human action is, thus, crucial (*Oneself* 19). Hence, the importance of emplotment is again underlined, as it is the means by which human action is represented, organized and, through its emphasis on selection and causality, understood. Ricoeur's theory is described as a hermeneutics of the self: a pragmatic method of interpreting the self, rather than seeking to understand the ontology of the self or to express the self by other means.

Though the novels pre-date the term, I have employed Ricoeur's concept of narrative identity throughout the analysis because it most accurately explains the kind of identity that the narrators are portrayed as negotiating due to the societal pressure to heal through narrative apparatuses. And as Ricoeur's theorizations regarding narrative and the self also encompass a profound ethical evaluation of the narrator's life, I suggest that through these texts' problematization of the therapeutic potential of narratively-formed identities and their concomitant efforts to highlight fugitive aspects of the self, this ethics is implicitly called into question.¹³⁷

This study has not meant to suggest that every aspect of formulating the self in narrative is harmful or unhelpful to each narrator's sense of self. The analysis has been focused on interpretive therapeutic narration and socio-cultural scripts of action and behavior. A final comparative reading of the texts in this study can consider what therapeutic possibilities the narrative form, at the level of "narration" might still hold for the protagonists. According to Barthes' and Todorov's systems, at the horizontal level (of functions and actions), a subjectivity becomes an a-psychological narrative man.¹³⁸ This is because the meaning of their story (here of life and self as ostensible self-analysis) is produced by way of an analysis of action through which ethical worth is determined. However, at the level of narration the novels can explore not only the potential problems latent in the form, but even consider what aspects of the practice of formulating the self as both the narrator and protagonist might prove beneficial—namely, not as a self-analytic interpreter, but rather by creating a forum simply for self-representation and the reception of that representation. The isolation of key moments which show these two interpretive levels in practice (what the character experienced then

¹³⁷ Importantly, despite Ricoeur's ethical stance concerning narrative interpretation of the self, Ricoeur himself did not argue for its therapeutic applications. When asked in an interview if narrative had "positive therapeutic potential" he proposes that it could offer "a reflection on the capacity 'to bear'—to *endure*" (qtd. in Kearney 157-158).

¹³⁸ Barthes famously outlines these levels in "An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives" (243-266). In line with Todorov's theorization of narrative men, Barthes states "[I]ndeed, the psychological person (belonging to the referential order) has nothing to do with the linguistic person, which is never defined by natural dispositions, intentions, or personality traits, but only by its (coded) point of intersection in the discourse" (263).

and how the narrator interprets it) reveals, along with the pitfalls of the practice, the potential for a narrator to create a psychological distance from their experience as a character and strategies for re-appropriating and coping with psychological suffering. Esther, for example, suggests that her self-representation can become spatially imagined, like a “landscape,” and incorporates aspects of her experience that she feels societal pressure to edit out. Holden, as a compelling narrator, appears to seek an intimate connection, a mirroring back of his emotions, from the “you” to whom he addresses his narration. And IM, most explicitly of all, attempts to portray his character with the dark, comic perspective a blues performer both to endure psychological suffering and effect change at the level of *discourse*—that is, influence the socio-cultural scripts which caused his “invisibility” in the first place.¹³⁹ These examples suggest that narration may have proven beneficial by counter-intuitively aiding the narrator realize the complex *story* and *pre-story* material in contrast to societal models. Thus, ironic distancing might aid in the mitigation of suffering by creating an opportunity for the expression and communication of self, rather than through the interpretation of the self.

Moreover, the authorial levels of these texts create an additional perspective of the process beyond the ken of the protagonists. Unlike the levels of the character and the narrator, this level has no analogous counterpart in a real-world therapeutic situation. It is, however, relevant to this literary study of how the texts as a whole critique and complicate the reader’s understanding of the therapeutic assumptions of postwar psychoanalytic theory and practice. I have argued that this critique is further complicated at the authorial level in ways that were influenced both formally and philosophically by the interests and beliefs of the real authors of the novels: by Plath’s idea of novelistic openness of meaning, and the Zen and existentialist blues mentalities which Salinger and Ellison investigate. The interpretations at this level, as distinct inquiries into the effectiveness of narration as a formal strategy of therapy, thus offer different opinions which can now be contrasted.

In Chapter Two I showed how Esther as narrator, through metaphorical themes and narrational techniques, posits a less-scripted, more novelistic method of conceiving of and representing life and self. However, this hopeful journey of the developing interpretive openness of novelistic form that Esther narrates is tempered by the re-scripting at the authorial level of her narration through the Electra script of popular psychoanalysis. This move suggests that despite Esther’s growing awareness and problematization of the narrative logic in her narration, the character is still determined by other powerful socio-cultural scripts operating beyond her immediate knowledge.

¹³⁹ This reading thus contradicts the Ricoeurian understanding of how narration could help a person “endure” mentioned earlier—that is, not through the interpretation of action, but through an artistic expression of the problem or the individual’s subjective suffering.

While this re-inscription need not finalize the text's tone as pessimistic, it certainly checks the narrator's optimism to be led forward by a "magical thread" into her future (284).

I proposed in Chapter Three that the authorial agent represents Holden as conceptually stuck in a Zen not-knowing space which fundamentally destabilizes his ability to self-analyze—to make meaning through logical narrative analysis and to construct a normative narrative identity. I also demonstrated how the text represents the narrator's active, however unwitting, introduction of a Zen-like non-duality into his narrative through his continual attempts to dissolve the boundaries between himself and his audience. In this way, the text insinuates that it could be necessary to reach beyond contemporary American culture for a different method of conceiving of a psychologically healthy sense of the selfhood. While the authorial agent of *The Catcher in the Rye* appears, therefore, more constructive than that of *The Bell Jar*, as far as helpful philosophical alternatives go, it is however not more forthcoming with the information towards the narrator of the text than in Plath's novel.

Conversely, the degree of interpretive distance between the narratorial and authorial levels of *Invisible Man*, specifically concerning an alternative aesthetic and ethic of self-representation, is not as substantial as in the previous examples. In Chapter Four, I argued that the narrator incorporates the philosophy of black American musical tradition into his self-narration to create new possibilities of both privately and publicly enduring, rather than interpreting and ostensibly curing, psychological illness. I posited, moreover, that the narrator intentionally produces an entertaining therapeutic narrative of self for an audience, one that improvises off stereotyped scripts of black American characters and represents vital aspects of IM's fugitive self in an effort to enable self-creation, personal psychological healing and, ultimately, societal healing. As IM is not shown finally emerging to perform his "invisible music" of self back in society (581), the authorial agent appears finally ambivalent about the success of IM's endeavor to effect real social change outside his underground home. However, this does not imply that the philosophical/ethical alternative that IM himself holds is contradicted at this level. I propose instead that this uncertainty is ironically introduced to impress upon the reader that the success of IM's plan to cure his society of its mad attitudes towards black Americans depends upon his personally healing act of narration being transmitted, understood and enacted upon by a broader audience in American society. It is, thus, the uncertainty at the authorial level of the readiness of the audience for this challenge that is exposed. Of the novels studied in this thesis, *Invisible Man* is therefore the text that most evidently boomerangs the diagnosis of the narrator and a certain responsibility for his or her psychological suffering back at American society. However, in all of these texts, despite the varying psychological distances between the levels, the authorial agent ultimately creates a sense of urgency to the

disparate understandings of the narrators regarding the need for greater societal awareness of narrative meaning-making for the self: particularly regarding the flexibility of scripts, the integration of alternative philosophical perspectives, and the prevalence of and method by which standard modes of narration create meaning through an interpretation of action over subjective experience.

Outlook

This study has focused on how three canonical novels from the postwar period problematize assumptions—some of which still circulate in contemporary society—regarding the therapeutic value of psychological treatment through a structure that innately focuses on action to the detriment of other human experiences. It is then possible that the ideas problematized in novels such as these have the potential to inform contemporary applications of narrative by extra-literary fields which aim to effect therapeutic results. One-to-one comparisons cannot of course be made between the fictional narrators in the texts and real people attempting to heal through the therapeutic application of narrative. However, I suggest that the pressure to heal through narrative is analogous when the underlying ethical evaluations of the good of representing human action come into play. An understanding of narrative meaning-making can, to a degree, also explain how narrative form functions vis-à-vis the stories of self created by real people.

One example of this application could be to contemporary fields of narrative therapy. Despite the precipitous decline of confidence in interpretive “talk” therapies in America from 1965 to about 1985 (Hale 301) there is a revived belief in narrative’s therapeutic capacity within psychology, psychiatry and medicine—one which has gained momentum over the last twenty-five years in conjunction with the broader “narrative turn” in contemporary thought (Phelan 166). These relatively newly formed fields of narrative therapy make various claims for the therapeutic benefits of diverse practical and theoretical applications of narrative form to their work with patients. These disciplines often frame their work with nuanced understandings of both narrative literary theory and of how personal narratives are influenced by cultural models. Michelle Crossley explains, for example, that in the practice of Narrative Psychology “the question becomes not what is the true nature of the self, but how is the self talked about, how is it theorized in discourse?” (9). Bradley Lewis suggests that in Narrative Psychiatry, narrative psychiatrists aim to “help patients reauthor their stories in more helpful ways” through various larger cultural narratives (xv). Lewis goes on to explain that looking at a patient’s situation through different clinical models can reveal an array of life options (or narrative paths) to choose from (ibid.) and that the narrative (re)turn of Psychiatry can also give psychiatrists “an expanded and

rejuvenated set of tools for helping people understand the stories of their lives and make changes for the better” as well as make “more informed choices about the options for storying and restorying their lives” (xvi). Rita Charon, likewise, explains that Narrative Medicine benefits “from learning that which literary scholars and psychologists and anthropologists and storytellers have known for some time”; that is, comprehension of “what narratives are, how they are built, how they convey their knowledge about the world . . . how narratives organize life,” (11). Hence, these fields undertake various methods of utilizing narrative form toward therapeutic purposes with a much more sophisticated understanding of contemporary critical thought and concepts than in the past.

However, as the narrative therapy of all of these fields is implicitly and explicitly supported by Ricoeur’s theorizations of narrative identity, there is a risk that the same ethical imperatives critiqued by the texts of this study in reaction to an earlier societal pressure to heal through narrative interpretation are unintentionally fostered through the form.¹⁴⁰ There is also the possibility that in assuming that beneficial results of self-understanding result from the interpretive capacity of narrative form as earlier generations of theorists have, other potentially therapeutic aspects of self-narration that do not involve narrative analysis might be overlooked. That is, while certain aspects of the narrative form in practice may be therapeutic, if it is to be respected as medicine, greater knowledge of its side effects as well as the way it achieves its results are necessary. Patients might, for example, be more effectively aided through narrative therapy if we could better understand if it is indeed narrative interpretation which helps patients and healthcare practitioners, or some aspect of the act of narration, such as the receiving of empathy from a good listener.

This appears to be the case, for example, in Charon’s conception of the *narrative competence*, “the ability to acknowledge, absorb, interpret, and act on the stories and plights of others,” which practitioners of Narrative Medicine train through developing close reading skills (“Narrative Medicine” 1897). Charon states, for example, that “[n]arrative competence permits caregivers to fathom what their patients go through” (11), and that when practitioners “turn the corner towards affiliation and contact, [they] know that [their] narrative competence has yielded its most dividends in enabling [them] to bear witness to suffering and, by that act, to ease it” (xi). She holds

¹⁴⁰ Crossley discusses and references Ricoeur’s work explicitly (49, 50, 64, 111, 192, 199) and implicitly throughout in her explanations of how via the “process of emplotment” (49) people form their stories like a literary text through the selection and omission of certain elements in order to “make sense” in relation to one another. Charon also references Ricoeur’s work in her explanations (42, 73, 74, 121, 137, etc.) and states, for example, that by “telling stories to ourselves and others—in dreams, in diaries, in friendships, in marriages, in therapy sessions—we grow slowly not only to know who we are but also to become who we are” (vii). Lewis calls Ricoeur the “ideal philosopher to anchor work in narrative psychiatry” (xiii).

elsewhere that “[t]hese are narrative skills” which “enable one person to receive and understand the stories told by another,” but immediately after that “[o]nly when the doctor understands to some extent what the patient goes through can medical care proceed with humility, trustworthiness, and respect” (3-4). And while in this example it is the medical practitioner’s ability to interpret the story of the patient (and respond with empathy) which is at stake, this issue concerning the role of narrative, in the narration of the patient and the understanding of the practitioner, reveals an important concern that the novels in this study also point towards: must the narration of patients be understandable as a narrative and amenable to narrative form to bring about optimal treatment? And following this, is narrativization towards interpretation always the most therapeutic way of conceiving of subjectivities? Comparative studies of psychoanalytic and psychotherapeutic practices at least, have resulted in noteworthy findings concerning the significance of insight achieved through talk therapy. One of the important conclusions drawn by a comprehensive review of these by the Menninger project in 1986 was that long-lasting “structural change” (patient improvement) bore no necessary relation to insight (Hale 317). Hale explains that findings like this which regard long-term structural change occurring without insight imply that “therapy achieved its results through means that are not accounted for by standard psychological theories” (ibid.). I suggest, thus, that there is potential for refining our understanding of what part narrative form actually plays, in the best case scenario, during therapeutic situations—as a means towards patient (or practitioner) interpretation, stimulating empathetic listening, or simply creating a forum for self-expression and representation.¹⁴¹

“Stories are wondrous things,” author Thomas King emphasizes, “And they are dangerous”(9). In contemporary society, for many it has become common sense to respect the power of narrative and narration—its potential to harm just as well as heal. In this project, my intent has been to show that several works of first-person fiction from the early postwar period investigate, to a previously unrecognized degree, just this double-edged quality of narrative in therapeutic settings. Throughout this analysis, my aim has been to more precisely understand how the novels represent the healing and formation of self in narrative as a potentially perilous activity. Thus, I have tried to show how stories in the form of socio-cultural scripts of action and behavior and developmental therapeutic narrations of self are not simply dangerous at the level of content, but of form. These novels reveal, this analysis shows, how the pressure to heal and find happiness through interpretive narrative form was likely a far more complicated and hazardous enterprise

¹⁴¹ Such future research would certainly draw on several vital, multi-disciplinary fields, including the different strains of Narrative Therapy briefly mentioned here, Life Writing Studies (pertaining particularly to the ethics of the practice, for example, the work of Paul John Eakin and Jerome Bruner), and certainly the field of Narrative Ethics (such as the work of Adam Zachary Newton, Judith Butler and Geoffrey Harpham).

than postwar Americans of the golden age of psychoanalysis were given to believe. But the texts also explore what salutary effects may exist for the self beyond the narrative form's celebrated meaning-making function. In sum, this study has examined and aimed to draw greater attention to the critical literary response of early postwar fiction to the popular assumptions of therapeutic narrative methods of healing psychological illness during the American age of psychology. It has, in other words, attempted to better understand what formal dangers these novels suggest narrative and narration might hold for the self—amid all their *wondrous* possibilities.

Works Cited

- Abbott, H. Porter. *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008. Print.
- Ahad, Badia Sahar. *Freud Upside Down: African American Literature and Psychoanalytic Culture*. Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2010. Print.
- Alger, Horatio Jr. *Ragged Dick; Or, Street Life in New York with the Boot Blacks*. New York: Signet Classic, 1990. Print.
- Allen, Caffilene. "The World as Possibility: The Significance of Freud's Totem and Taboo in Ellison's Invisible Man." *Literature and Psychology* 41.1-2 (1995): 1-18. Print.
- Alsen, Eberhard. *Salinger's Glass Stories as a Composite Novel*. Troy: Whitson Pub. Co., 1983. Print.
- Anderson, Paul Allen. "Ralph Ellison on Lyricism and Swing." *American Literary History* 17:2 (2005): 280-306. Print.
- Aristotle. "Poetics." *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. New York: Norton, 2001. Print.
- Auden, W. H. *The Age of Anxiety: A Baroque Eclogue*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2001. Print.
- Baker, Huston A. *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984. Print.
- Bal, Mieke. *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*. 3rd ed. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009. Print.
- Barrett, William. "Zen for the West." *Zen Buddhism: The Selected Writings of D.T. Suzuki*. New York: Three Leaves Press Doubleday, 2006. vii-xxiii. Print.
- Barthes, Roland. "An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives." *New Literary History* 6:2 (1975): 237-272. Print.
- . *Image-Music-Text*. Trans: Stephen Heath. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1977. Print.
- Bawer, Bruce. "The Other Sixties." *The Wilson Quarterly* 28:2 (2004): 64-84. Print.
- Belletto, Steven. "Curbing Containment: Cold War Studies in the Twenty-First Century." *Contemporary Literature* 48.1 (2007): 150-164. Print.
- . *No Accident Comrade: Chance and Design in Cold War American Narratives*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011. Print.
- . and Daniel Grausam, eds. *American Literature and Culture in an Age of Cold War: A Critical Reassessment*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2012. Print.
- Bellow, Saul. *Herzog*. 1964. London: Penguin Classics, 2001. Print.
- Berman, Jeffery. *The Talking Cure: Literary Representations of Psychoanalysis*. New York: NYU Press, 1985. Print.
- Blanck, Gertrude, and Rubin Blanck. *Ego Psychology: Theory and Practice*. New York: Columbia UP, 1974. Print.

- Booth, Wayne C. "Resurrection of the Implied Author: Why Bother?" *A Companion to Narrative Theory*. Eds. James Phelan and Peter J. Rabinowitz. Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2005. 75-89. Print.
- . *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. 2nd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983. Print.
- Boyer, Paul S. *By the Bomb's Early Light: American Thought and Culture and the Dawn of the Atomic Age*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985. Print.
- "Brass ring." *The American Heritage® Dictionary of Idioms* by Christine Ammer. Houghton Mifflin Company. 29 Sep. 2014. Dictionary.com.
- Brennan, Timothy. "Ellison and Ellison: The Solipsism of 'Invisible Man'." *CLA Journal* 25:2 (1981): 162-181. Print.
- "Brer Rabbit". *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Encyclopædia Britannica Online. Encyclopædia Britannica Inc., 2015. Web. 26 Feb. 2015.
- Brockmeier, Jens, and Carbaugh, Donal, eds. *Narrative and Identity: Studies in Autobiography, Self and Culture*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Co., 2001. Print.
- Brooks, Peter. *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1984. Print.
- Bruner, Jerome. *Acts of Meaning*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1990. Print.
- . *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1986. Print.
- . "Life as Narrative." *Social Research* 71.3 (2004): 691-710. Print.
- . *Making Stories: Law, Literature, Life*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2003. Print.
- . "Self-making and World-making." *Narrative and Identity: Studies in Autobiography, Self and Culture*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Co., 2001. 25-38. Print.
- Buckley, Jerome H. "Introduction." *David Copperfield*. By Charles Dickens. 1850. Norton Critical Edition. New York: W.W. Norton, 1990. Print.
- Bundzen, Lynda K. "Plath and Psychoanalysis: Uncertain Truths." *The Cambridge Companion to Sylvia Plath*. Ed. Jo Gill. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006. 36-51. Print.
- Butler, Judith. *Giving an Account of Oneself*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2005. Print.
- Campbell, J. Bradford. "The Schizophrenic Solution: Dialectics of Neurosis and Anti-psychiatric Animus in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*." *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 43:3 (2010): 443-465. Print.
- Castronovo, David. *Beyond the Gray Flannel Suit: Books from the 1950s That Made American Culture*. New York: Continuum, 2004. Print.
- Charon, Rita. "Narrative Medicine: A Model for Empathy, Reflection, Profession, and Trust." *JAMA* 286.15 (2001): 1897-1902. Print.
- . *Narrative Medicine: Honoring the Stories of Illness*. Oxford: Oxford UP. 2006. Print.
- Chatman, Seymour. *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*. Ithaca: Cornell UP. 1978. Print.
- Corber, Robert J. *Homosexuality in Cold War America: Resistance and the Crisis of Masculinity*. Durham: Duke UP, 1997. Print.
- Costello, Donald P. "The Language of 'The Catcher in the Rye'." *American Speech* 34.3 (1959): 172-181. Print.
- Coughlin, Robert. "Modern Marriage." *Life* 24 Dec. 1956. 109-118. Print.
- Crossley, Michele L. *Introducing Narrative Psychology: Self, Trauma and the Construction of Meaning*. Buckingham: Open UP, 2000. Print.
- Daigle, Christine. *Jean-Paul Sartre*. London: Routledge, 2009. Print.

- Davis, Leesa S. *Advaita Vedanta and Zen Buddhism: Deconstructive Modes of Spiritual Inquiry*. London: Continuum, 2010. Print.
- Davis, Tom. "J. D. Salinger: 'Some Crazy Cliff' Indeed." *Western Humanities Review* 14 (1960): 97-99. Print.
- Dickens, Charles. *David Copperfield*. 1850. Norton Critical Edition. New York: W.W. Norton, 1990. Print.
- Doane, Randal. "Ralph Ellison's Sociological Imagination." *The Sociological Quarterly* 45:1 (2004): 161-184. Print.
- Eakin, Paul John. *Fictions in Autobiography: Studies in the Art of Self-Invention*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1985. Print.
- . *How Our Lives Become Stories: Making Selves*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1999. Print.
- . *Living Autobiographically: How We Create Identity in Narrative*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2008. Print.
- . ed. *The Ethics of Life Writing*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2004.
- Ellison, Ralph W. "An American Dilemma: A Review" *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison*. New York: Random House, 1995. 328-340. Print.
- . "Beating that Boy." *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison*. New York: Random House, 1995. 145-150. Print.
- . "Blues People." *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison*. New York: Random House, 1995. 278-290. Print.
- . "Harlem is Nowhere." *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison*. New York: Random House, 1995. 320-327. Print.
- . Introduction. *Invisible Man*. By Ralph Ellison. New York: Vintage, 1995. vii-xxiii. Print.
- . *Invisible Man*. 1952. New York: Vintage, 1995. Print.
- . "Living with Music." *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison*. New York: Random House, 1995. 227-236. Print.
- . "On Bird, Bird-Watching and Jazz." *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison*. New York: Random House, 1995. 256-265. Print.
- . "Richard Wright's Blues." *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison*. New York: Random House, 1995. 128-144. Print.
- . "The Art of Fiction: An Interview." *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison*. New York: Random House, 1995. 210-226. Print.
- . "The World and the Jug." *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison*. New York: Random House, 1995. 155-188. Print.
- Erikson, Erik. *Childhood and Society*. 1950. W.W. Norton, 1993. Print.
- Eversley, Shelly. "The Lunatic's Fancy and the Work of Art." *American Literary History* 13:3 (2001): 445-468. Print.
- Ferretter, Luke. *Sylvia Plath's Fiction: A Critical Study*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2010. Print.
- Forster, E. M. *Aspects of the Novel*. London: Edward Arnold & Co, 1953. Print.
- Fraiberg, Selma. "Two Modern Incest Heroes." *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Invisible Man*. Ed. John M. Reilly. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1970. 73-79. Print.
- Freeman, Mark. "From Substance to Story: Narrative, Identity, and the Reconstruction of the Self." *Narrative and Identity: Studies in Autobiography, Self and Culture*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Co., 2001. 283-298. Print.
- . *Hindsight: The Promise and Peril of Looking Backward*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2010. Print.
- . *Rewriting the Self: History, Memory, Narrative*. London: Routledge, 1993. Print.
- French, Warren. *J. D. Salinger, Revisited*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1988. Print.

- Freud, Sigmund. "Civilization and its Discontents." *The Freud Reader*. Ed. Peter Gay. New York: W.W. Norton, 1989. 722-771. Print.
- . "On Beginning the Treatment." *The Freud Reader*. Ed. Peter Gay. New York: W.W. Norton, 1989. 363-77. Print.
- . "On Dreams." *The Freud Reader*. Ed. Peter Gay. New York: W.W. Norton, 1989. 142-171. Print.
- . "Recommendations for Physicians Practicing Psycho-Analysis." *The Freud Reader*. Ed. Peter Gay. New York: W.W. Norton, 1989. 356-362. Print.
- . *Totem and Taboo: Resemblances Between the Mental Lives of Savages and Neurotics*. 1913. New York: W.W. Norton, 1990. Print.
- . "The Ego and the Id." *The Freud Reader*. Ed. Peter Gay. New York: W.W. Norton, 1989. 628-660. Print.
- Friedan, Betty. *The Feminine Mystique*. 1963. London: Penguin, 1982. Print.
- Furst, Lilian. *Just Talk: Narratives of Psychotherapy*. Lexington: The UP of Kentucky, 1999. Print.
- Galbraith, John Kenneth. *The Affluent Society*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1958. Print.
- Gates, Henry Louis, Jr. *The Signifying Monkey*. Oxford: Oxford UP. 1988. Print.
- Genette, Gérard. *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1983. Print.
- . *Narrative Discourse Revisited*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1988. Print.
- Gill, Jo, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Sylvia Plath*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006. Print.
- , ed. *The Cambridge Introduction to Sylvia Plath*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008. Print.
- Goldstein, Bernice and Sanford Goldstein. "Zen in *The Catcher in the Rye*." *Literary Companion to The Catcher in the Rye*. Ed. Steven Engel. San Diego: Greenhaven Press. 23-26. 1998. Print.
- Gorer, Geoffrey. "Are We 'By Freud Obsessed'?" *NYT Magazine*. 30 July 1961. 5. Print.
- Graham, Sarah. *J. D. Salinger's The Catcher in the Rye*. London: Routledge. 2007. Print.
- Grausam, Daniel. *On Endings: American Postwar Fiction and the Cold War*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011. Print.
- Halberstam, David. *The Fifties*. New York: Villard, 1993. Print.
- Hale, Nathan G. Jr. *The Rise and Crisis of Psychoanalysis in the United States: Freud and the Americans 1917-1985*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995. Print.
- Hamilton, Ian. *In Search of J. D. Salinger*. Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1988. Print.
- Harmon, William, and Hugh Holman. *A Hand Book to Literature*. Upper Saddle River: Pearson, 2009. Print.
- Hartmann, Heinz. *Ego Psychology and the Problem of Adaptation*. Trans: David Rapaport. New York: International Universities Press, 1977. Print.
- . "Understanding and Explanation." *Essays on Ego Psychology*. New York: International Universities Press, 1964. 369-403. Print.
- Havemann, Ernest. *The Age of Psychology*. New York. Simon And Schuster, 1957. Print.
- Herman, David. *Story Logic: Problems and Possibilities of Narrative*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002. Print.
- . "The Age of Psychology in the U.S." *Life*. Jan 1957. 68-82. Print.
- Hoberek, Andrew. *The Twilight of the Middle Class: Post-World War II American Fiction and White-Collar Work*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2005. Print.

- Horne, Gerald. *Black and Red: W. E. B. Du Bois and the Afro-American Response to the Cold War 1944-1963*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986. Print.
- Horowitz, Ellin. "The Rebirth of the Artist." *A Casebook on Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man*. Ed. Joseph F. Trimmer. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1972. 238-253. Print.
- Ibsen, Henrik. "A Doll's House." *A Doll's House, The Wild Duck, and The Lady from the Sea*. London: Dent, 1958. Print.
- Jackson, Esther Merle. "The American Negro and the Image of the Absurd." *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Invisible Man*. Ed. John M. Reilly. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1970. 64-72. Print.
- Jenkins, Richard. *Social Identity*. London: Routledge, 2008. Print.
- Kearney, Richard. *On Paul Ricoeur: The Owl of Minerva*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004. Print.
- Keats, John. *The Crack in the Picture Window*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1956. Print.
- Kerby, Anthony Paul. *Narrative and the Self*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1991. Print.
- Kermode, Frank. *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000. Print.
- Kesey, Ken. *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. 1962. London: Penguin Classics, 2006. Print.
- King, Thomas. *The Truth about Stories: A Native Narrative*. Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 2003. Print.
- Krasteva, Yonka. "Chaos and Pattern in Ellison's *Invisible Man*." *The Southern Literary Journal* 30:1 (1997): 55-72. Print.
- "Ladies Room." *Mad Men: Season 1. Writ. Matthew Weiner. Dir. Alan Taylor. Lionsgate Television*, 2008. DVD.
- Lee, Robert A. "'Flunking Everything Else Except English Anyway': Holden Caulfield, Author." *Critical Essays on Salinger's The Catcher in the Rye*. Ed. Joel Salzberg. Boston: G.K. Hall & Co, 1990. 185-196. Print.
- Lewis, Bradley. *Narrative Psychiatry: How Stories can Shape Clinical Practice*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2011. Print.
- Lundquist, James. *J. D. Salinger*. New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1979. Print.
- May, Elaine Tyler. *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*. New York: Basic Books, 1988. Print.
- McCort, Dennis. "Hyakujo's Geese, Amban's Doughnuts, and Rilke's Carrousel: Sources East and West for Salinger's *Catcher*." *Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations: J. D. Salinger's The Catcher in the Rye*. New York: Infobase Publishing, 2009. 45-62. Print.
- McPherson, Pat. *Reflecting on The Bell Jar*. London: Routledge, 1991. Print.
- Medovoi, Leerom. *Rebels: Youth and the Cold War Origins of Identity*. Durham: Duke UP, 2005. Print.
- Mellard, James M. "The Disappearing Subject: A Lacanian Reading of *The Catcher in the Rye*." *Critical Essays on Salinger's The Catcher in the Rye*. Ed. Joel Salzberg. Boston: G.K. Hall & Co, 1990. 197-214. Print.
- Mercadal, Dennis. *A Dictionary of Artificial Intelligence*. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1990. Print.
- Miller, Edwin Haviland. "In Memoriam: Allie Caulfield in *The Catcher in the Rye*." *Mosaic* 15.1 (1982): 129-40. Print.
- Nabokov, Vladimir. *Lolita*. 1955. London: Penguin Classics, 2000. Print.

- Nadel, Alan. *Containment Culture: American Narratives, Postmodernism, and the Atomic Age*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1995. Print.
- . "Ralph Ellison and the American Canon." *American Literary History* 13:2 (2001): 393-404. Print.
- Nelson, Deborah. "Plath, History and Politics." *The Cambridge Companion to Sylvia Plath*. Ed. Jo Gill. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006. 21-35. Print.
- Ohmann, Richard. "The Shaping of a Canon: U.S. Fiction 1960-1975." *Critical Inquiry* 10:1 (1983):199-223. Print.
- O'Meally, Robert G. *The Craft of Ralph Ellison*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1981. Print.
- Peel, Robin. "The Ideological Apprenticeship of Sylvia Plath." *Journals of Modern Literature* 27:4 (2004): 59-72. Print.
- . *Writing Back: Sylvia Plath and Cold War Politics*. Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 2002. Print.
- Perloff, Marjorie G., "A Ritual for Being Born Twice": Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*." *Contemporary Literature* 13.4 (1972): 507-522. Print.
- Phelan, James. "Narratives in Contest; Or, Another Twist in the Narrative Turn." *PMLA* 123.1 (2008): 166-175. Print.
- Pinsker, Sanford, and Ann Pinsker. *Understanding The Catcher in the Rye*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1999. Print.
- Plath, Sylvia. "A Comparison." *Johnny Panic and The Bible of Dreams*. London: Faber and Faber, 1977. 56-58. Print.
- . Letter to Eugene F. Saxton Memorial Trust. May 1962. "Correspondence" Folder. Sylvia Plath Collection. Smith College Archive, Northampton, MA. 5 October 2011.
- . Letter to James Michie. 14 November 1961. "Correspondence" Folder. Sylvia Plath Collection. Smith College Archive, Northampton, MA. 5 October 2011.
- . *Letters Home*. New York: Harper Perennial, 1975. Print.
- . Recorded Book Review of Donald Hall's anthology *Contemporary American Poetry* titled "New Comment 2—Sylvia Plath on Contemporary American Poetry." Transmission 10 January 1963, BBC Third Programme. Smith College Archive. October 6 2011.
- . *The Bell Jar*. 1963. New York: Harper Perennial, 2009. Print.
- . *The Collected Poems*. New York: HarperCollins, 2008. Print.
- . *The Spoken Word: Sylvia Plath*. British Library Sound Archive, 2010. CD.
- . *The Unabridged Journals of Sylvia Plath*. Ed. Karen V. Kukil. New York: Anchor Books, 2000. Print.
- Radford, Andrew. "Ralph Ellison and Improvised History." *The Midwest Quarterly* 52:2 (2011): 113-13. Print.
- Richardson, Brian. "Linearity and its Discontents: Rethinking Narrative Form and Ideological Valence." *College English*. 62:6 (2000): 685-95. Print.
- . Ed. *Narrative Dynamics: Essays on Time, Plot, Closure and Frames*. Columbus: The Ohio State UP, 2002. Print.
- . *Unlikely Stories: Causality and the Nature of Modern Narrative*. Cranbury: Associated University Presses, 1997. Print.
- Ricoeur, Paul. *Oneself as Another*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995. Print.
- . *Time and Narrative: Volume One*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984. Print.
- . *Time and Narrative: Volume Two*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985. Print.

- . *Time and Narrative: Volume Three*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988. Print.
- Riesman, David, Nathan Glazer and Reuel Denney. *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of Changing American Culture*. 1950. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale UP, 1958. Print.
- Rimmon-Kenan, Shlomith. *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*. 2nd ed. London: Routledge, 2002. Print.
- Rose, Jacqueline. *The Haunting of Sylvia Plath*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1991. Print.
- Rosen, Gerald. "A Retrospective Look at *The Catcher in the Rye*." *Critical Essays on Salinger's The Catcher in the Rye*. Ed. Joel Salzberg. Boston: G.K. Hall & Co, 1990. Print.
- . *Zen in the Art of Salinger*. Berkeley: Creative Arts Book Company, 1977. Print.
- Roth, Phillip. *Portnoy's Complaint*. 1969. New York: Vintage, 1995. Print.
- Rovit, Earl H. "Ralph Ellison and the American Comic Tradition." *A Casebook on Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man*. Ed. Joseph F. Trimmer. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1972. 254-263. Print.
- Salinger, J. D. "A Perfect Day for Bananafish." *Nine Stories*. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1983. 3-18. Print.
- . "For Esmé with Love and Squalor." *Nine Stories*. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1983. 87-114. Print.
- . *Franny and Zooey*. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1961. Print.
- . "I'm Crazy." *Collier's*. 22 Dec. 1945. 36, 48, 52. Print.
- . Letter to Gus Loblano. 2 May 1950. Folder 5. Box 498. *New Yorker Fiction Correspondence*. New York Public Library Archive, New York, NY. 12 Oct. 2011.
- . *Nine Stories*. 1953. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1983. Print.
- . *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour: An Introduction*. 1963. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1959. Print.
- . "Teddy." *Nine Stories*. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1983. 166-198. Print.
- . *The Catcher in the Rye*. 1951. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2001. Print.
- . "Uncle Wiggily in Connecticut." *Nine Stories*. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1983. 19-38. Print.
- Salinger, Margaret A. *Dream Catcher*. New York: Washington Square Press, 2000. Print.
- Salzberg, Joel ed.,. *Critical Essays on Salinger's The Catcher in the Rye*. Boston: G.K. Hall & Co, 1990. Print.
- Schafer, William J. "Irony from Underground—Satiric Elements in *Invisible Man*." *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Invisible Man*. Ed. John M. Reilly. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1970. 39-47. Print.
- Schaub, Thomas Hill. *American Fiction in the Cold War*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991. Print.
- Schrecker, Elaine. *Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America*. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1998. Print.
- Schwartz, Joseph. *Cassandra's Daughter: A History of Psychoanalysis*. London: Karnac, 2003. Print.
- Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky, et al. *Shame and its Sisters: A Silvan Tomkins Reader*. Durham: Duke UP, 1995. Print.
- Shank, Roger C. *Tell me a Story: Narrative and Intelligence*. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern UP, 2000. Print.

- Shi, David E. *The Simple Life: Plain Living and High Thinking in American Culture*. Atlanta: University of Georgia Press, 2007. Print.
- Slawenski, Kenneth. *J. D. Salinger: A Life Raised High*. Pomona: West Yorkshire, 2010. Print.
- Spaulding, A. Timothy. "Embracing Chaos in Narrative Form: The Bebop Aesthetic in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*." *Callaloo* 27:2 (2004): 481-501. Print.
- Spock, Benjamin. *Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1946. Print.
- Stekel, Wilhelm. *The Beloved Ego: Foundations of the New Study of the Psyche*. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co, 1921. Print.
- Strauch, Carl F., "King's in the Back Row: Meaning through Structure –A Reading of Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*." In *Critical Essays on Salinger's The Catcher in the Rye* Ed. Joel Salzberg. Boston: G.K. Hall & Co, 1990. Print.
- Steele, Shelby. "Ralph Ellison's Blues." *Journal of Black Studies* 7:2 (1976): 151-168. Print.
- Steinle, Pamela H. *In Cold Fear: The Catcher in the Rye, Censorship Controversies and Postwar American Character*. Columbus: Ohio State UP, 2000. Print.
- Suzuki, D.T. *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism*. New York: Grove Press, 1964. Print.
- . *Zen Buddhism: The Selected Writings of D.T. Suzuki*. New York: Three Leaves Press Doubleday, 2006. Print.
- Takeuchi, Yasuhiro. "The Burning Carousel and the Carnavalesque: Subversion and Transcendence at the Close of The Catcher in the Rye." *Studies in the Novel*. 34.3 (2002): 320-336. Print.
- Tindall, George Brown, and Shi, David E, *America: A Narrative History*. 4th ed. New York: Norton, 1996. Print.
- Todorov, Tzvetan. "Narrative Men." *The Poetics of Prose*. Trans: Richard Howard. Basil Blackwell, Oxford: Cornell UP, 1977. Print.
- . "The Grammar of Narrative." *The Poetics of Prose*. Trans: Richard Howard. Basil Blackwell, Oxford: Cornell UP, 1977. Print.
- . *The Poetics of Prose*. Trans: Richard Howard. Basil Blackwell, Oxford: Cornell UP, 1977. Print.
- Trachtenberg, Alan. "Introduction." *Ragged Dick: Or, Street Life in New York with the Boot Blacks*. By Horatio Alger, Jr. New York: Signet Classic, 1990. Print.
- Urdike, John. *Rabbit Redux*. 1971. London: Penguin Classics, 2006. Print.
- . *Rabbit, Run*. 1960. London: Penguin Classics, 2006. Print.
- Van Dyne, Susan R. "The Problem of Biography." *The Cambridge Companion to Sylvia Plath*. Ed. Jo Gill. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006. 3-20. Print.
- Wagner-Martin, Linda. *Sylvia Plath: The Critical Heritage*. London: Routledge, 1988. Print.
- . *The Bell Jar: Novel of the Fifties*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1992. Print.
- Warren, Carol. *Madwives: Schizophrenic Woman in the 1950s*. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1987. Print.
- White, Hayden. *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1987. Print.
- Whyte, William H. *The Organization Man*. Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1956. Print.
- Wickware, Francis Sill. "Psychoanalysis." *Life*. Feb 1943. 98-110. Print.
- Wilson, Sloan. *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*. New York: Penguin, 2005. Print.
- Wright, Richard. *Black Boy: A Record of Childhood and Youth*. 1945. New York: Harper Perennial, 2007. Print.
- Yates, Richard. *Revolutionary Road*. 1961. New York: Vintage, 2000. Print.

Index

- Abbott, H. Porter, 114
Ahad, Badia Sahar, 133, 134, 135,
137
Alger, Horatio Jr., 31, 57, 59, 62, 184
Allen, Caffilene, 133, 153
Alsen, Eberhard, 107
Anderson, Paul Allen, 148, 153
Aristotle, 20, 21, 22, 23, 26, 27, 44,
169
Auden, W.H., 12
Baker, Huston A., 42, 133, 152, 153,
154
Bal, Mieke, 115
Barrett, William, 108
Barthes, Roland, 68, 110, 119, 170
Bawer, Bruce, 12
Belletto, Steven, 11, 12
Bellow, Saul, 13
Berman, Jeffery, 73, 77
Blanck, Gertrude and Rubin, 41, 42,
45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53
Booth, Wayne, 30
Boyer, Paul S., 11
Brennan, Timothy, 140
Brooks, Peter, 129
Bruner, Jerome, 18, 58, 175
Buckley, Jerome H., 100, 101, 121,
124, 127
Bundzen, Lynda K., 74, 76
Butler, Judith, 175
Campbell, J. Bradford, 133, 135, 141,
142, 144
Carbaugh, Donal, 178
Castronovo, David, 13
Charon, Rita, 174
Chatman, Seymour, 30
Corber, Robert J., 11
Coughlin, Robert, 61
Crossley, Michele L., 173, 174
Daigle, Christine, 148
Davis, Leesa S., 107, 108, 109, 110,
115, 116, 121, 122, 123
Dickens, Charles, 100
Doane, Randal, 140, 150
Eakin, Paul John, 18, 58, 68, 175
Ellison, Ralph W., 10, 14, 21, 25, 33,
34, 129, 130, 131, 132, 133, 134,
135, 136, 137, 138, 139, 141, 148,
149, 152, 153, 154, 155, 156, 157,
158, 163, 167, 168, 171, 177, 178,
179, 181, 182, 183, 184
Invisible Man, 10, 14, 25, 33, 34,
130, 131, 132, 133, 139, 152,
158, 164, 167, 172
Erikson, Erik, 100, 101, 127
Eversley, Shelly, 133, 135, 136, 149
Ferretter, Luke, 58, 61
Forster, E.M., 83
Fraiberg, Selma, 133, 150
Freeman, Mark, 55, 58, 71, 72, 81
French, Warren, 17, 100, 112
Freud, Sigmund, 25, 35, 38, 39, 40,
42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 50, 76,
133, 139, 142, 147, 177, 180
Friedan, Betty, 58, 61, 65
Furst, Lilian, 73
Galbraith, John Kenneth, 12
Gates, Henry Louis, Jr., 138, 139
Genette, Gérard, 29, 115
Gill, Jo, 56, 58, 178, 182, 184
Goldstein, Bernice and Sanford, 107
Gorer, Geoffrey, 39
Graham, Sarah, 98, 124
Graum, Daniel, 11, 12, 177
Halberstam, David, 12
Hale, Nathan G. Jr., 35, 36, 37, 38,
39, 40, 42, 43, 46, 49, 173, 175
Hamilton, Ian, 106
Harmon, William, 44, 45
Hartmann, Heinz, 40, 41, 45, 47, 146

- Havemann, Ernest, 10, 11, 36, 37, 38,
39, 40, 42, 45, 48, 49
- Hoberek, Andrew, 13
- Horne, Gerald, 11
- Horowitz, Ellin, 133, 150
- Ibsen, Henrik, 69
- Jackson, Esther Merle, 148
- Jenkins, Richard, 26
- Kearney, Richard, 170
- Keats, John, 12
- Kerby, Anthony Paul, 18
- Kermode, Frank, 21
- Kesey, Ken, 13, 16
- King, Thomas, 131, 132, 149, 175,
184
- Krasteva, Yonka, 140, 150
- Lee, Robert A., 97, 98, 99, 128
- Lewis, Bradley, 173, 174
- Lundquist, James, 107, 112, 128
- May, Elaine Tyler, 11, 182
- McCort, Dennis, 106, 107, 112, 122
- McPherson, Pat, 58
- Medovoi, Leerom, 11, 12
- Mellard, James, 98
- Mercadal, Dennis, 17, 18
- Miller, Edwin Haviland, 11, 97
- Nabokov, Vladimir, 16
- Nadel, Alan, 11
- Nelson, Deborah, 15, 16
- O'Meally, Robert G., 139
- Ohmann, Richard, 13, 14, 15
- Peel, Robin, 58, 70, 72, 87
- Perloff, Marjorie G., 56, 58, 84
- Phelan, James, 30, 173, 178
- Pinsker, Sanford, 182
- Plath, Sylvia, 31, 55, 56, 58, 61, 66,
70, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 83, 85, 93,
94, 167, 171, 178, 179, 180, 182,
183, 184
- Journals*, 55, 73, 74, 75, 83, 84, 93
- The Bell Jar*, 10, 13, 14, 25, 31,
32, 33, 52, 55, 56, 57, 58, 63,
65, 66, 75, 76, 77, 83, 84, 93,
96, 97, 109, 119, 122, 130, 131,
132, 158, 167, 168, 172, 176
- Radford, Andrew, 153, 154
- Richardson, Brian, 110
- Ricoeur, Paul, 19, 20, 27, 63, 169,
170, 174, 181
- Riesman, David, 12
- Rimmon-Kenan, Shlomith, 115
- Rose, Jacqueline, 73, 74
- Rosen, Gerald, 107
- Roth, Phillip, 13
- Rovit, Earl H., 158
- Salinger, J.D., 9, 13, 14, 95, 96, 97,
98, 101, 102, 105, 106, 107, 112,
128, 167, 171, 177, 179, 180, 181,
183, 184
- The Catcher in the Rye*, 10, 14, 25,
32, 33, 95, 96, 100, 101, 102,
106, 107, 109, 110, 112, 125,
127, 130, 131, 132, 167, 168,
172
- Salzberg, Joel, 181, 183, 184
- Schafer, William J., 159
- Schaub, Thomas, 11, 130
- Schrecker, Elaine, 11
- Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky, 17
- Shank, Roger C., 17, 18, 19, 58, 68
- Shi, David, 10, 184
- Slawenski, Kenneth, 106
- Spaulding, A. Timothy, 153, 154
- Spock, Benjamin, 38
- Steele, Shelby, 148, 153, 154, 156
- Stekel, Wilhelm, 105
- Strauch, Carl F., 97
- Suzuki, D.T., 98, 106, 108, 111, 112,
177, 184
- Takeuchi, Yasuhiro, 101
- Tindall, George Brown, 37, 62
- Todorov, Tzvetan, 23, 24, 53, 63, 88,
119, 122, 169, 170
- Trachtenberg, Alan, 62
- Updike, John, 13
- Van Dyne, Susan R., 55
- Wagner-Martin, Linda, 56, 58, 84
- Warren, Carol, 61, 100, 103, 179
- White, Hayden, 13, 39, 82, 180
- Whyte, William H., 12
- Wickware, Francis Sill, 35
- Wilson, Sloan, 12, 177
- Wright, Richard, 133, 135, 136, 138,
139, 154, 156, 179
- Yates, Richard, 13

