

THAT “ODDLY BRIGHT SUNDRINESS:” CONTEMPORARY EXPERIMENTS IN
IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council
of Texas State University-San Marcos
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of ARTS

by

Kristin Joyce Noack, B.A.

San Marcos, Texas
May 2005

COPYRIGHT

by

Kristin Joyce Noack

2005

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the members of my thesis committee, Priscilla V. Leder, John S. Hill, and Shirley Ogletree, whose insights and exacting standards were of great value to me in the creation of this thesis. I am particularly thankful for the guidance of Priscilla V. Leder. Her comments and advice incited the self-reflection necessary for me throughout the writing process.

Erin Pringle's enthusiasm for this project and her gracious offering of her published and unpublished fiction for my exploration were essential for the production of this thesis. I cannot adequately express my thanks for her support.

As the inspiration for many significant personal identity revisions, my partner James R. Stevenson, is a fundamental source for my self-understanding. I am deeply grateful to James, without whom this thesis would not have been possible.

Finally, I thank my family, friends, and colleagues at the Academy of Oriental Medicine at Austin for their patience, understanding, and graceful acceptance of my varied emotional states throughout the production of this thesis.

This manuscript was submitted on April 6, 2005.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
LIST OF FIGURES.....	vii
CHAPTER	
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Artistic Reflections: Justifying the Use of Literature	
Form and Function: Internal and External Contributions to Identity	
Creating Friction for Slippery Terms	
2. MYTH AND MEMORY: CONSTRUCTING IDENTITY THROUGH SUBJECTIVE HISTORY.....	9
The Symbiotic Relationship of Memory and Identity	
Mythic Memory: Employing an Alternate Metaphor	
Experiments in Mythic Memory	
3. ACTING SELF: THE SELF-CONSCIOUS STRUCTURING OF IDENTITY.....	22
“I’d Shoot First and Watch Her Fall”: Identity in Action	
“Our Shadows Count as We Stride Out Opposite Directions”: Conflicts in Identity Construction	
The Position of Self in “Raw as Hands”	
4. UNARTICULATED VOICE AND ESSENTIAL PRESENCE: EXTERIOR CONSTRUCTIONS OF IDENTITY.....	32
An Anatomy of Ella: Uncovering the Pattern amongst the Disparate Voices	
The Essential Presence of the Individual in Identity Construction	
5. PATTERNING SELF: NARRATIVE STYLE AS A REFLECTION OF THE PROCESS OF IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION.....	46

The Internal-External Continuum: Eastern Contributions to a Western
Understanding of Identity Construction
Narrating Conception: An Aesthetic Model of Identity Construction
Understanding Identity: Concluding Remarks on Narration

AFTERWORD.....	59
APPENDIX: “LOSING, I THINK” BY ERIN PRINGLE.....	64
NOTES.....	73
WORKS CITED.....	75

LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 1. A Hen's Egg Organization of Person: Self, Identity, and Defining Aspects of Character.....	7
Figure 2. The Symbiotic Relationship of Memory and Identity.....	11
Figure 3. Anatomy of Ella: A Diagram of Social Inputs to the Construction of Ella's Identity.....	37
Figure 4. Romaine Brooks, <i>Le trajet</i> (ca. 1911), Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington DC.....	43

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“It is very unhappy, but too late to be helped, the discovery we have made, that we exist That discovery is called the Fall of Man. Ever afterwards, we suspect our instruments We have learned that we do not see directly, but mediately, and that we have no means of correcting these colored and distorting lenses which we are, or of computing the amount of their errors Perhaps these subject-lenses have creative power []”
Ralph Waldo Emerson

A fundamental aspect of the human condition lies in the individual’s need for understanding the self. This need has inspired philosophical debate for millennia, at first as a discussion of the soul, or fundamental essence, and later as a discussion of identity. However, self-understanding is important only to the extent that it contributes to an individual’s success in the project of negotiating internal and external realities. Identity is both the vehicle and the product of that negotiation in the sense that the negotiating self exists with the mask of the identity construct, which enables the individual to interface with the external world. This thesis explores the way in which identity is in a constant state of change, involving the interpretation of memory’s ever-changing images, the incorporation of external inputs, and the placement of self through personal action in relation to the rest of the world.

The purpose of this thesis is to illuminate how identity is constructed and how an identity construct operates to enable the negotiation of internal and external realities,

requiring the integration of these forces for successful negotiation. I operate under the assumption that internal and external influences are of equal value in this negotiation, and, like the Eastern concept of yin and yang, are not completely exclusive of one another. They operate as complementary forces at opposite ends of a continuum. Thus, no single contribution to personal identity is entirely internal or exclusively external. Additionally, an individual's recognition of the inherent integration of internal and external forces in the construction of identity is necessary for the successful negotiation of self in the world. This internal-external continuum of identity construction provides the basis for the structure of my argument.

Artistic Reflections: Justifying the Use of Literature

If we take the fundamental project of human existence to be the negotiation of self with the external world, then art operates as an expression (particularly of the emotional consequences) of this project. Literary arts are an expression of a frustration with inadequate self-knowledge for successful negotiation, elation with having negotiated well, or desire for greater self-understanding, and thus, a desire for the knowledge necessary to negotiate more appropriately.¹ An example of this project of negotiation can be seen in J.D. Salinger's narrator Holden Caulfield in *The Catcher in the Rye*, who seems to oscillate between these three emotions throughout the novel. While literature is an expression of the project of negotiating internal and external realities, it is also an example of this negotiation, as it is both a personal and cultural expression. After all, if persons are products of their culture, then literature is in part a creative expression of a culture through the medium of the writer. Consequently, an analysis of literature (a

personal and cultural expression) enables a creative review of the interior and exterior aspects of identity.

Erin Pringle's literary experiments reflect contemporary concerns about the development of identity. The short fiction presented in her collection-in-progress, *The Floating Order*, creatively reflects the theoretical standpoint presented in this thesis. She reveals the fallibility of memory through characters who struggle to construct identity with fragile memories. She explores the relationship between action and the continuity of identity through characters who participate in a self-conscious formation of identity and positioning of self in the world. Recognizing the significant role that social forces play in the development of personal identity, Pringle experiments with protagonists whose stories, experiences, and even thoughts and feelings are narrated by other characters, resulting in stories involving absent protagonists, which offer insight into the social aspects of identity construction.

While fiction frequently represents the development of identity through a quest for self, Pringle's fiction supports the idea that identity is a construct, and provides the material aesthetic necessary for illustrating the theoretical exploration of identity construction in this thesis. On the theme of the quest for self, Manfred Putz observes in his analysis of identity in American fiction of the sixties that the problem of self-definition typically "finds expression in the characters' quest for what constitutes the form and the scope of the self as distinguished from what is not the self among the forms of the 'world' " (28). The identity quest theme is not new in literary explorations of the self, but is rather so intimately connected to literature that it finds its expression in classical plot construction and in Freytag's Pyramid, a 19th century method of plot

analysis involving a conflict, rising action, climax, and resolution (Abrams 226-27).

Pringle's fiction does not involve a quest for self, but rather reveals a determination of self through a self-fashioned network of personal truths resulting from progressively greater self-understanding. Thus, her fiction offers a narrative reflection of the process of identity construction.

Pringle's particular employment of symbolism, characterization, narrative voice, and narrative style produces texts that are necessary for understanding my hypothesis of the way in which identity is constructed. Her fiction explores how an individual negotiates internal and external realities, and constructs an identity for this purpose. Thus, I rely on an exploration of four of Pringle's stories to illustrate the creative expression of the negotiation of self with the external world. In this thesis I uncover several aspects of the process of identity construction, using Pringle's fiction to illustrate and develop these ideas, and ultimately illuminate where the self resides: in the hands of its human designer.

Form and Function: Internal and External Contributions to Identity

This thesis explores three contributory aspects of identity construction, each of which falls at a different point on the internal-external continuum. Chapter 2 considers the relationship between memory and identity, developing a metaphor of memory as myth to illuminate the process by which memory contributes to the construction of identity. This chapter serves as a sketch of an internal aspect of identity construction. Through a review of a significant recurring image in "Losing, I Think," I argue that it is in part through myths of memory that an individual develops a sense of identity, ever-morphing in response to her subjective history.

In Chapter 3, I explore the relationship between action and identity, arguing that action is identity applied, that is, action is a way of impressing one's current identity on one's future identity. Thus, action proves to be an expression of personal identity, and also serves as a mechanism for identity construction. Using my analysis of character in "Raw as Hands," I argue that individuals negotiate their place in relation to the world through action, aware of their position and its assumed effect on their future identity. Thus, action reveals an aspect of identity construction that is both internal (as an expression of self) and external (as a representation of identity in the exterior world) and serves as a self-conscious construction of identity.

Chapter 4 reviews the significance of social contributions to identity, using an analysis of the reader's role in constructing the identity of a silent character in "Remember Ella." The story is an obituary-esque narrative that loosely constructs the identity of its absent subject through the unidentified voices of people from her past. Although the narrators seem to contradict one another in their observations of Ella Prince's character, when organized according to their relationships with their subject, we find a variety of narrative sketches that emerge to contribute to the developing portrait of Ella in the reader's mind. In my analysis in this chapter, I focus on the role that external forces play as a significant source for identity inputs with which individuals construct an understanding of self.

Chapter 5 incorporates the aspects of identity construction discussed in this thesis and proposes a hypothesis of the way in which identity is constructed. While the previous three chapters serve as an exploration of the identity system, an examination of its inner workings, outputs, and inputs, in the fifth chapter I develop a model to describe how the

system works. Using observations of the narrative style in “Looker,” I show how Pringle’s narrative pattern reflects the process of identity construction. Rather than presenting a quest for self, Pringle’s stories illustrate a determination of identity resulting from an active process of selecting and assembling various images and finding the common link between subjective facts.

Creating Friction for Slippery Terms

Identity has been a subject of extensive philosophical, psychological, and sociological discussion for many years, with each field offering its own terminology for describing the operations of identity. This debate has contributed to complex, and often conflicting, definitions of terms such as “identity,” “identity construct,” “self,” and “self-understanding.” For the purposes of clarity and consistency, it is necessary to outline how I will use such abstract terms throughout this thesis.

In this thesis, I operate under the assumption that the fundamental project of human existence is the successful negotiation of internal and external realities and that self-understanding is a means to that end. In this context, “identity” is an expression of that negotiation: an identity construct is in part a by-product of the acquisition of progressively greater self-understanding, and in part an expression of this understanding in the external world. Identity operates as a mask of the self, with “a set of characteristics or relations that establish an appearance of unity within the flux” (Putz 29), and as the means by which the self negotiates with the external world. Thus, it is both the vehicle and the product of the negotiation between internal and external realities. Because identity is a construct, I use “identity” and “identity construct” interchangeably. Also,

“sense of self” is more closely related to “identity” than to “self,” as identity is an entity more knowable to the individual than the self.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines self as “that which in a person is really and intrinsically *he* [...]; a permanent subject of successive and varying states of consciousness.” I interpret this to mean that “self” is the fundamental essence of being that is the core of a person. I use the term “self” to indicate the aspect of inner being which operates as the organizing agent of internal and external contributions to an individual’s construction of identity. Drawing on this understanding of the self, I use the term “self-understanding” to mean a working knowledge of that fundamental essence, which is the means by which we develop a greater ability to negotiate between internal desires and external constraints. Because we are constantly arriving at new understandings of the complex core that is the self, and constructing an identity to express accurately these new conceptions, this process lends a dynamic appearance to both the self and its mask, identity.

It may be helpful to think of the organization of self, identity, and person as similar to a hen’s egg (see Figure 1). The self finds its place in the yolk, identity in the shell, and person as the whole egg. My thesis touches only indirectly on the egg-white, and primarily as a means to explore the shell. But for the purpose of providing an accurate analogy, I suggest that the egg-

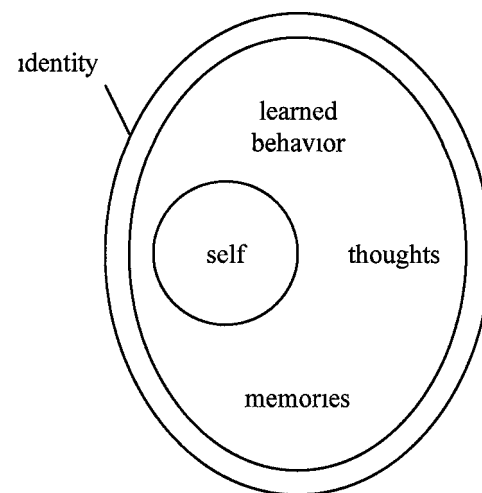


Figure 1 A Hen’s Egg Organization of Person Self, Identity, and Defining Aspects of Character

white is learned behavior, thoughts, memories, and other defining aspects of our person that provide the internal material for identity construction. The egg analogy offers, for me, a helpful visual representation of the organization of self, identity, and person in relationship to one other, and perhaps a fertile opportunity for further penetration into the exploration of self.²

Identity is the product of continual negotiations between the internal and external, the inner self and the social world. My purpose in this thesis is to develop a theory of personal identity through a review of three aspects of identity construction: memory, action, and exterior inputs. I argue that the development of self is in part a process of identity construction that involves creating personal narratives (or myths) of memory, translating one's sense of self into action, and assimilating exterior (social) inputs. Thus, the process of personal development is best described as a continual construction of identity rather than a quest for self. While I make large claims about personal identity, I recognize that I am limited by the scope of this thesis, and cannot possibly reveal the ways of the self to humankind. Thus, I propose a general sketch of identity theory that is based on an equal valuation of internal and external inputs to identity construction.

CHAPTER 2

MYTH AND MEMORY: CONSTRUCTING IDENTITY THROUGH SUBJECTIVE HISTORY

“A conceptual system contains an enormous subsystem of thousands of conceptual metaphors—mappings that allow us to understand the abstract in terms of the concrete. Without this system, we could not engage in abstract thought at all—in thought about causation, purpose, love, morality, or thought itself. Without the metaphor system, there could be no philosophizing, no theorizing, and little general understanding of our everyday personal and social lives.”

George Lakoff

“What then is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, [..] a sum of human relations, which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and rhetorically.”

Friederich Nietzsche

In the last three hundred years since John Locke claimed that “as far as [...] consciousness can be extended backwards to any past action or thought, so far reaches the identity of that person” (qtd. in Martin and Barresi 28), personal identity theorists have been involved in an extensive exploration of the way in which memory contributes to an individual’s identity. Recent approaches to determining how memory functions in relation to self-understanding have tended to focus on puzzle cases, often involving memory transplants and time travel.³ However, many of these theories lack a significant connection to real-life experiences of the way in which memory serves identity. As Marya Schechtman observes, contemporary philosophers concerned with memory and

personal identity theory “say virtually nothing about the self-knowledge question,” but instead attempt to define the “criteria of personal identity over time” (“Personhood and Personal Identity” 71). Hypothetical memory transplant cases and imaginary time travel scenarios fail to take into account the striking uniqueness of the individual, and thus fail to incorporate an important aspect in modeling what it is to be human. These flat representations of the individual ignore Nietzsche’s claim that “at bottom, every human knows quite well that he is only in the world one time, uniquely, and that no accident, however strange, will shake together for a second time such an oddly bright sundriness into the sameness that he is” (qtd. in Hamacher 113).

To contribute to the project of answering the self-knowledge question, an exploration of personal identity would seem to require a more intuitive approach than personal identity puzzle cases allow for. Such an approach must take into account the dynamic aspect of the individual that Israel Rosenfield describes in his study “Memory and Identity:”

When we think about ourselves we do not imagine a static personality; we are aware of ourselves as evolving, changing, adapting, and readapting; [...] And yet we know we are always the same person. (200)

Taking a more intuitive approach to personal identity theory, I argue that memory is a fundamental aspect of personal identity, that “we are, in some very deep sense that past” (Rosenfield 197). Instead of puzzle cases, I define memory in terms of a metaphor, and use that metaphor along with literary explication to explore the relationship between memory and the construction of identity. I intend the theory presented in this chapter to

be merely a sketch of the significant relationship between memory and identity, and to serve as an illustration of an internal aspect of identity construction.

The Symbiotic Relationship of Memory and Identity

Memory and identity operate in a symbiotic relationship in which memory serves self-understanding while developments of identity shape the interpretation of memories (see Figure 2). Memories do not lie

dormant in the mind, untouched by psychological processes until retrieved again for review. Instead, they are constantly subject to psychic revision, contributing to an individual's ever changing sense of self in part because of their malleability. As Rosenfield notes:

“The brain's abstraction of the reconstruction, the synthesis that is our basis of recognition (and ultimately our understanding) of what we have [experienced], is what memory is; and a personality, an identity, is an analogous reconstruction of an ‘I’ in new situations” (202). In its unceasing search for understanding, the mind mythologizes memories with each new development in identity. Ultimately memories become personal myths that develop with new self-understanding and in turn continually promote new and different understandings of the self.

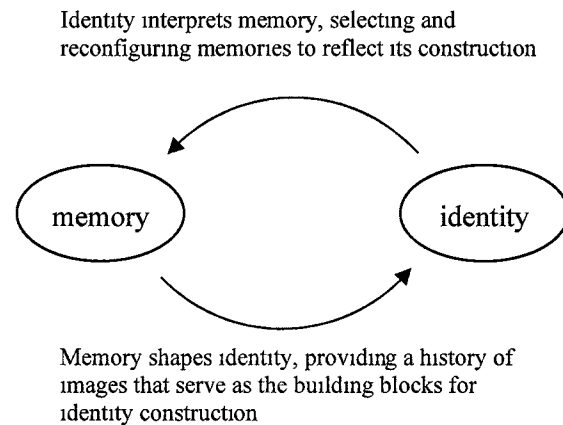


Figure 2 The Symbiotic Relationship of Memory and Identity

Susan Engel employs dissonance theory to explain “why and how we recall the past in ways that shape our current sense of self” (91) in her book on the subject of memory and identity, *Context is Everything*. According to this theory, “we change past experiences so that they confirm how we see ourselves at the moment,” and thus “re-create the self to fit differing social situations” (Engel 91-92). Through the process of creating myths of memory, that is, selecting appropriate images for accurate narratives of the understanding of the self that exists at the present, we are in fact constructing identity. While identity is in part determined by our experiences, more specifically what we remember of our experiences, it is also determined by how we understand those memories. The ways in which we engage our memories as representative of who we are, and the symbolic importance of each image, contribute to an understanding of self and thus our construction of identity. Our personal memories become mythic narratives, whether oral (in the sense of telling our story to a new acquaintance) or written (as in a memoir). The process of selection of memories for mythic narratives results in the self-conscious fashioning of identity.

Mythic Memory: Employing an Alternate Metaphor

Perhaps the difficulty in determining the connection between memory and identity is in part a result of the metaphors theorists have developed to understand the operations of memory. A review of the history of memory theory reveals a complex network of metaphors used throughout time to illustrate the memory process. From wax tablets to photography, holograms to computers, scientists and theorists have offered metaphors for understanding memory that reflect the period in which they were developed. According

to Douwe Draaisma, “metaphors as literary-scientific constructs are also reflections of an age, a culture, an ambiance. [...] In metaphors, we find preserved what the author saw around him when he was searching for powerful images for the hidden processes of the memory” (4).

In *Metaphors of Memory*, Draaisma outlines the history of memory theory according to the metaphors that have been developed throughout time to understand memory’s operations. He argues that metaphors not only describe the characteristics of memory but also impact the way we understand memory by illuminating the intricacy of its operations. Thus, not only did Plato’s metaphor of the wax tablet illustrate his view of the reliability of memory, but this metaphor impacted the way we think about memory and even the language we use to describe its processes. To this day, we speak of memory in terms of “impressions” or “imprints” and think of memories as “images” stamped into our minds. Other important metaphors for understanding memory, such as the book, photograph, and computer metaphors, have contributed in a similar way to our understanding of memory. While the linguistic contributions of these metaphors may be helpful in describing memory, the metaphors themselves do not thoroughly describe its real operations.

The metaphors for memory we have used throughout history have served to describe an idealized process of remembering. Through our metaphors we have claimed that we can recall a moment frozen in time with the clarity of a photograph, or more recently, we can access an image stored in our memory by commanding that our minds function to retrieve the encoded data with computer-like precision. However, in reality, these metaphors fail to illustrate an essential characteristic of memory: its fallibility. Each

moment that is lived is subject to the individual's interpretation at the point that it passes from present to past. The work of memory is that of mythologizing: the mind constructs "truths" from its subjective rendering of facts. While these truths may contain the seed of fact, they are fictional constructions, as they are filtered through the individual's subjectivity, complete with marks of her prejudices, preferences, and presumptions. However much like "guide fossils" (Draaisma 4) these memory metaphors may be, I argue that memory is in fact not like a wax tablet, receiving impressions and maintaining their imprint for future review. Memories are not like photographs that hold a brief moment suspended in time, and free from the possessor's ever-changing self. Instead, a more accurate metaphor for memory is one that describes memory as myth. And it is in part through these myths of memory that an individual develops a sense of identity, ever-morphing in response to her subjective history.

My proposed metaphor for mythic memory preserves the ancient linguistic link between memory and writing by emphasizing the creative connection between memory and identity. As Draaisma notes:

The Latin *memoria* had a double meaning: 'memory' and 'memoir.' Earlier, now obsolete, uses of the English noun 'memorial' included both '(a) memory' and 'written record.' This duality underlines the link between human memory and the means invented to record knowledge independently of that memory. From the very beginning, that is, from the wax tablet onwards, human remembering and forgetting has been described in terms derived from prosthetic memories. (24)

Understanding memory as a collection of myths is not a great divergence from the etymological roots of memory. Instead, the metaphor further develops these linguistic

roots, assuming a dual “writing” process in which memory records experiences that are constantly reinterpreted to develop personal myths that contribute to self understanding. An individual is the author of her own identity, and constructs this identity in part with myths developed from interpretations of her memories.

Experiments in Mythic Memory

Considering the etymological roots of memory, it follows that literature should provide an appropriate illustration of the way in which mythic memory contributes to identity construction. Indeed, in Erin Pringle’s short fiction, we find characters engaged in a continual process of construction and reconstruction of identity (whether their own or that of another character), and memory serves as a primary tool for this identity-revision process. Pringle’s story “Losing, I Think” provides a necessary illustration of the role of mythic memory in identity construction.

In “Losing, I Think,” the narrator struggles to develop a sense of identity in a present that is no longer consistent with her memory of herself in the past.⁴ Pringle’s narrator is an individual suspended in time, seemingly asleep to herself like the fairy tale Sleeping Beauty she dreams of: “I dream of spindles and sleeping one hundred years, or as many as it takes until I can’t blame you for not kissing, for not hacking away thorns” (69). She spends her life (20 years, to be exact) among postcards and stamps, waiting for her traveling lover to return to make life happen again, to restore her sense of identity. Pringle’s narrator is, as Nathan A. Scott, Jr. interprets Ernst Bloch’s definition of man, an individual who “dwells away in the uncertain space falling between that which is and that which is not yet;” her present is “a kind of non-being” from which she seeks liberation (580). However, it is precisely this suspension in time, the intermingling of past with

present, and the extent to which her memories inform her present sense of self, that serve as the means by which she constructs her identity. The narrator of “Losing, I Think” is similar to Gail Godwin’s Violet Clay in the sense that she is “both agent and recipient of the narrative process [...], trying always to arrive at a self-definition that is continuous with the past and appropriate for the future” (Frye 69). Her life is one of memory mixed with waiting for a future she can’t help but hope for, although she knows better.

In “Losing, I Think” the narrator’s shifts in tense indicate her ambiguity regarding time. The story is not presented according to a standard chronological sequence, but rather the narrator dips into memory (reflected by a shift from present to past tense) in an attempt to make sense of the present through her memories. The seemingly fragmented progression illustrates Thomas Mann’s observation that “time is the medium of narration, as it is the medium of life” (qtd. in Burton 40), reflecting that the present is not only informed by the past but also contains it. She is unable to keep her memories separate from the present, and the co-mingling of past and present results in a co-existence of past and present that informs her identity. As Stacy Burton observes of characters in stream-of-consciousness writing, the narrator of “Losing, I Think” illustrates that “character is not a state of being, but rather a ‘process of becoming’ ” (40).

In the opening lines of the story, addressed to her estranged lover, we are immediately introduced to the way the narrator’s memory serves her construction of identity in the present:

The delivery goes well. A scar across my abdomen and stretch marks treading flesh. Mother crosses herself and dangles a rosary—pink and white swirled glass—above my head. It reminds me of when we were kids, and you pushed me

into the pond to prove you could save me. Ice ripping and numbing. Breathing out without an in. The punch and paralysis. I whisper your name to our baby—her name is Eleanor because I remember how much you like The Beatles. Or maybe it's me. (64)

These opening lines, indicating the fallibility of the narrator's memory (is it her lover or she who likes The Beatles?), establishes a pattern that operates as the unifying function in this story punctuated by fragments in the chronological sequence. As Frye observes of the narration in the novel *Violet Clay*, "such memories are accumulated into coherent narrative not by the chronology of a past self yielding to a present self, but by the constructed story of a present self growing into recognition of the future narrating self" (72). Indeed, the cogency of Pringle's text lies in the pattern of her narrator's active construction of identity; shifts in chronological sequence link memories, or old constructions of identity, to the present constructing self.

The recurring image of the 7-up bottle emphasizes the narrator's suspended state, as it describes the moment she fell in love with her traveling lover. A review of the way this image develops throughout the text helps to illuminate the narrator's intermingling of past and present and the narrator's conclusions about herself resulting from this intermingling. The bottle first appears in the text after it has been broken and the narrator has cut her feet on the glass: "We sat by the water's edge—salt stinging the glass cuts beneath my toes, and I wondered if you broke the half-full 7-up bottle" (64). On its first appearance, the 7-up bottle seems almost a random memory that the narrator calls up. However, once she recalls the facts surrounding the 7-up bottle, the reader, like an

individual reinterpreting memories to better understand the self, begins to recognize the significance of the image:

I find a straw pressed between the pages of my Bible. Ninth grade when you took me to The Parlor for hamburgers. You had a coke, I had 7-up. I held the bottle to my eye and you kaleidoscoped into so many eyes and mouths. Your teeth marks still on the straw. Do your other lovers notice the habit? (67)

The narrator relays the memory in a factual tone, devoid of emotion. The new information about the significance of the experience involving the 7-up bottle (an experience that was meaningful enough to the narrator that she keeps a memento for twenty years as a reminder) allows the reader to reinterpret the initial appearance of the image. The “half-full” bottle and the image of the young lovers in the hamburger parlor indicate an optimism about the new love (64). If the bottle is optimism or hope, then the broken bottle that causes physical pain to the narrator foreshadows the emotional pain that she will suffer in the relationship. Her suspicion that her lover broke the bottle eventually develops into her adult suspicion that her lover will never fulfill her hope for him to rescue her from her longing.

The 7-up bottle reappears two more times in the story, each time adding to the importance of the memory. In the climactic scene of the story, the lover has returned for a short stay and the reunited family goes for an outing to fly a kite. The narrator’s emotional response to her lover’s revelation that he has another family in France indicates the significance of the 7-up bottle and illustrates how that experience in the past informs her sense of self in the present:

You hold the string as I struggle to steady the paper diamond into the wind.

Eleanor lies on the hill's hip, tickling dandelions and watching our Mary Poppins moment. Your arms around my waist. The woman in the slides, you say. Your partner in France. Five years now. The kite unleashes from my fingers. You say I must understand. Eleanor chases after it. The red diamond catches in the trees below. Branches rip the flimsy architecture. Eleanor does not jump or try to reach the flapping string. I would have at her age. I am tempted even now to tear down the hill after her, sucking so much air into my body so that maybe I'll fly free too. But how to stop this when so long ago in a crowded diner, I held a green bottle and saw your face shattered into so many that I couldn't find the original. (71)

This scene highlights the loaded importance of the bottle, while the caught kite imagery reflects the narrator's revelation about her current situation. It is significant that the narrator remembers the bottle in this climactic scene, as it reveals the moment in the narrator's history that she now interprets as being the beginning of her life as caught or suspended like "the red diamond" of the kite "in the trees below" (71).

The image of the 7-up bottle becomes more loaded with meaning as the story progresses. The situation surrounding the bottle loses its factual qualities as it is enhanced with mythic significance by the narrator. The ninth grade trip to the hamburger parlor becomes a primary narrative in the narrator's life that informs her understanding of herself, and the 7-up bottle operates as a kind of emblem of her existence. It is a memory made symbolic of her suspended state by mythic interpretations of the event with which the bottle is associated. The 7-up bottle makes a final appearance in the text when Eleanor leaves her mother to stay with her father for the summer: "She tells me not to

worry, and I warn her of 7-up bottles and she nods blindly” (72). The narrator associates 7-up bottles with becoming trapped in love and losing time and life waiting for the return of that lost love.

Again, Frye’s observations of the character Violet Clay resonate with our understanding Pringle’s narrator:

As she moves backward in time through her memories, she is exhuming her past selves and seeking areas of congruity between past and present; but as she is attempting to identify who she was in the past and who she is in the narrative present, she is also seeking the crevices in those apparently fixed self-definitions in order that she may simultaneously hold on to a continuous selfhood and understand the process by which she has broken free of those falsely constrained selves. (70)

Like Violet Clay, the narrator of “Losing, I Think” attempts to understand her present self through a review of the memories that shape her identity. However, she does not attempt to “hold on to a continuous selfhood” (Frye 70), but rather recognizes how very different her current understanding of self is to that when she “held a green bottle” to her eye twenty years ago and simultaneously lost herself in admiration of her lover (Pringle 71). While her memories serve as a unifying force for the story, Pringle’s narrator reconstructs her identity in the process of reinterpreting her memories. She is aware of the futility of hoping for her lover’s return, and consequently, the memory of the 7up bottle no longer represents hope for her as it once did, but instead symbolizes her trapped state. She hardly remembers living before falling in love, and cannot imagine a life without waiting for her lover’s return. She is lost in a pattern of behavior that no longer reflects her true

identity. Her present is one that she associates with “the Red Light district in Amsterdam;” she identifies herself thus: “I stand in the window nightly. Waiting for the car door slam and footsteps that don’t come” (66).

The reader’s growing awareness of the significance of the 7-up bottle mirrors an individual’s reinterpretation and development of a memory throughout time. The narrative developed from the single image of the bottle becomes a truth of the narrator’s existence. In “Losing, I Think” we see how memory and identity operate in a symbiotic relationship. The symbol of the bottle holds mythic significance for the narrator. The circumstances surrounding the bottle become a narrative with which she develops a sense of identity throughout the text. In addition, her reinterpretation of that memory throughout time reveals the way in which memories develop mythic qualities over time through the reinterpretation of their importance to the present identity of an individual.

Through subjective history, we submit to an ever-changing understanding of self. We continually reshape our identity through new interpretations of our memories. Our life is like one long fragmented narrative in which each experience affords the opportunity for multiple interpretations. We thus find ourselves in a constant state of identity revision, reinterpreting our memories and reconstructing ourselves anew through our own mythic narratives.

CHAPTER 3

ACTING SELF: THE SELF-CONSCIOUS STRUCTURING OF IDENTITY

“A large mirror,—so first it seemed to me in my confusion—now stood where none had been perceptible before, and, as I stepped up to it in extremity of terror, mine own image, but with features all pale and dabbled in blood, advanced to meet me with a feeble and tottering gait. Thus it appeared, I say, but was not. It was my antagonist [. . .] Not a thread in all his raiment—not a line in all the marked and singular lineaments of his face which was not, even in the most absolute identity, *mine own*!”

Edgar Allan Poe, “William Wilson”

Fundamental to the concept of identity is the existence of a unified consciousness that “requires a persisting psychological subject” (Korsgaard 173). Christine M. Korsgaard applies a practical approach to understanding this aspect of identity in “Personal Identity and the Unity of Agency: A Kantian Response to Parfit,” claiming that “the unity of consciousness consists in one’s ability to coordinate and integrate conscious activities” (175). This essay operates as Korsgaard’s contribution to solving the philosophical problem of identity over time, including a practical explanation for the continuity of identity. According to Korsgaard, “the faculty that originates motion must be regarded as a single thing, because we do act” (168). Thus, it is for practical reasons that we consider ourselves unified agents, ultimately resolving conflicting desires because of the necessity to do so in order to act. This theory of “unity of agency” (Korsgaard 168) is necessary for understanding the relationship between action and the

construction of identity. Thus, in this chapter I discuss her theory in depth, and apply it to Erin Pringle's characters in "Raw as Hands" to illustrate that "our relationship to our actions and choices is essentially *authorial*" (Korsgaard 177).

Korsgaard seeks to establish that "your conception of yourself as a unified agent is not based on a metaphysical theory, nor on a unity of which you are conscious" (169). Rather, she suggests that we conceive of ourselves as unified agents for the practical reason of negotiating conflicting desires, and from the perspective that we are the agents of that negotiation. In Korsgaard's words:

You are a unified agent at any given time because you must act. [...] The idea that you choose among your conflicting desires, rather than just waiting to see which one wins, suggests that you have reasons for or against acting on them. [...] This means that there is some principle or way of choosing that you regard as expressive of *yourself*, and that provides reasons that regulate your choices among your desires. To identify with such a principle or way of choosing is to be 'a law to yourself,' and unified as such. This does not require that your agency be located in a separately existing entity or involve a deep metaphysical fact. Instead, it is a practical necessity imposed upon you by the nature of the deliberative standpoint. (169-70)

From this perspective, we can see that action, or "choosing among your conflicting desires," is identity applied in the sense that these actions or choices are "expressive of *yourself*" (Korsgaard 169). It is necessary for us "to make deliberative choices" (Korsgaard 171), and thus "it is practical reason that requires [us] to construct an identity for [ourselves]" through action (170). Also, because "the choice of any action, no matter

how trivial, takes you some way into the future” (Korsgaard 171), action serves as a means by which we impress our current identity on our future identity. In other words, “in choosing our careers, and pursuing our friendships and family lives, we both presuppose and construct a continuity of identity and of agency” (Korsgaard 170). Thus, through acting identity, we negotiate our place in relation to the world through the self-conscious construction of our future self. Korsgaard’s notion of the unity of agency reveals that action is both an expression of personal identity and a mechanism for identity construction.

In Pringle’s “Raw as Hands” we find an example of a character whose conscious actions operate toward the construction of an identity that distinguishes herself from her sister. However, because the narrator constructs her identity by denying the existence of behaviors that reveal the sisters’ similarities, the narrator’s identity construct ultimately proves unsuccessful. Korsgaard’s theory of the unity of agency requires that our actions are expressive of ourselves (169), implying the necessity of the authenticity of action. Thus, when the narrator encounters resistance to her inauthentic identity construct, she is forced to acknowledge her similarity to her sister and reconstruct an identity that more accurately represents her inner nature.

“I’d Shoot First and Watch Her Fall”: Identity in Action

The narrator of “Raw as Hands” begins her story by identifying her twin sister according to the various manifestations that her obsessive-compulsive disorder has taken over the years. The narrator informs us that her “twin sister washes her hands until they bleed. Until her skin is an eroding rock, like Georgia O’Keefe’s alizarin crimson rocks”

(Pringle, "Raw as Hands" 39). The narrator declares: "My twin sister washes her hair, sudsing, rinsing, and resoaping. She steps from the shower and turban-towels her head. Shaves her legs from the bathtub's edge. Then she gets back in the shower to replay" (40). From silent screaming to snapping "accusingly yellow" number two pencils (40), the narrator catalogs her sister's battle with the "stalker" in her mind (43). But what appears at first as a story of her twin's disorder evolves into a story about the narrator's attempt to construct an identity that distinguishes herself from her sister.

The narrator changes her appearance, hoping that her "Clairol-red hair" and "caking eyeliner" will prove their difference (42). She takes actions to support "everyone else [keeping them] separate" in their minds as well, noting that "relatives said her [twin's] name like Ignorance says 'homosexual' or 'illegitimate' " (42). She joins in with other students in making fun of her twin. The narrator attempts to prove her twin's difference from, and her own likeness to, their peers with her "shaking shoulders, thrown-back laugh" at a cheerleader's suggestion that, for Halloween, she will "go as Invisible" (42)—the students' nickname for the narrator's twin sister. The narrator admits: "My sister sat in the back row; I sat in the front row. [...] I tried my damndest to avoid association" (42). Thus, the narrator's actions are a self-conscious attempt to be recognized as opposite to her twin sister and her uncontrollable, psychologically-driven behavior. Comparing the characterization of the narrator and her twin, we find an illustration of Korsgaard's assertion that "it is only from the practical point of view that actions and choices can be distinguished from mere 'behavior' determined by biological and psychological laws" (176-77). Thus, the narrator is the agent of her oppositional

stance, while her twin sister is the “hollow-haunted” object of her psychological disorder (Pringle 41).

It is not only in her actions but also in her failure to take actions expected of her in her role in the family that the reader finds evidence of the narrator’s self-conscious construction of identity. The narrator moves “four states away” to go to university and does not visit her family for four years, “refusing *back there*” (42, 44). Her mother’s “polka-dotty” letters do not allow her to ignore her sister’s disorder, as they require her to connect the dots: “A lot of showers. The bathroom never seems vacant, the exorbitant water bills, the three laundry loads of towels. A new counselor, hopefully better this time” (42). Ultimately, the narrator stops opening her mother’s letters with news from home “because one paragraph would be dedicated to [her] twin” (42).

In the narrator’s actions and inaction, we find a perversion of the notion of personal identity as the “categorization of the self as a unique entity, distinct from other individuals” (Stets and Burke 228). As an individual who acts solely according to her own “goals and desires rather than as a member of a group” (Stets and Burke 228), the narrator fails to integrate internal and external realities in order to obtain her desired sense of self. Indeed, the narrator rejects any connection to her twin to maintain a sense of control over her identity construction because, as Korsgaard suggests, “as agents, we view ourselves [...] as the authors of our actions and the *leaders* of our lives” (176). In order for her to construct an identity as separate from her sister, the narrator dismisses her sister’s existence through aggressive inaction.

However, the narrator’s inaction instigates a shift in agency in the narrative, as her twin confronts her with evidence of the narrator’s false identity construct. While her

sister has been the recipient of the narrator's oppositional actions up until this point in their lives, the twin decides to visit and "maybe propose a duel for past wrongs" (45). Her visit operates as the denouement of the story, revealing the twins' similarities and deconstructing the narrator's inauthentic identity. From the moment the narrator's twin steps down from the train, we begin to recognize the extent of the sisters' similarities:

I met her at the train station and watched me jump off the train, not reaching for the train guy's hand to help me down the portable stairs. Jean skirt, red sweater, strappy sandals. I grimaced at our identical unconsciousness. (44)

While the narrator tries to "convince [herself] it was a coincidence" that the sisters dress the same, her experience of the event uncovers what the narrator perceives as a fundamental similarity between the sisters: an "identical unconsciousness" (44). In fact, the event suggests the narrator's view that their psychological similarities are so significant that, in her description of the event, the narrator describes *herself* as exiting the train, not her sister.

"Our Shadows Count as We Stride Out Opposite Directions":

Conflicts in Identity Construction

Spurred by the twin's offensive maneuvers, the revelation of the narrator's true self occurs in the text simultaneously with an imaginary stand-off between the twins. In between her sister's trips to the bathroom, the narrator notices her twin's hand "swaying a cigarette to the background jazz. The clear puss-cracking skin" (47). She begins to imagine the setting of their stand-off in anticipation of their "duel for past wrongs:"

Imagining a ghost town. Sun-shocking sky. Our shadows count as we stride out opposite directions. Would I turn and crouch, then shoot? Or would I shoot while throwing my body out of the way? (47)

Similar statements punctuate the scene at points when the narrator's twin uncovers her sister's own self-destructive tendencies. For example, when her twin reveals the narrator's habit of masturbating to fall asleep even though she is "more awake after orgasm" (Pringle 46), the narrator imagines: "I'd shoot first. It wouldn't even matter how I turned. I'd shoot first and watch her fall" (46). In the same format of extraction of a secret behavior, matched with the narrator's meditations on how she will murder her sister, the twin forces the narrator to recognize their similarities, and thus "admit [she has] a problem" too (46). This methodic identity deconstruction reveals that instead of cracked and bleeding hands like her sister, the narrator pastes "on false nails to avoid biting [hers] until they bleed" (46). And instead of an obsessive fear of "disease, contamination, disease," the narrator seeks out lovers who lose themselves in their abusive lovemaking until she is "as raw as [her sister's] hands" (46).

This juxtaposition reveals an important aspect of "Raw as Hands:" the notion of the double. Her twin represents for the narrator those aspects of herself that she does not want to acknowledge or include in her identity construct. But as is customary in the doppelganger motif, the narrator is eventually confronted by those very aspects of herself that she wishes to dismiss. The narrator's double is not a mere "mental projection," as Patrick F. Quinn suggests of Poe's William Wilson (qtd. in Ware 43). Rather, her twin's psychological instability reflects her own "self-divided psyche" (Coskren qtd. in Ware 43). As a result of the final stand-off between the twins, Pringle's narrator no longer sees

her self-destructive behaviors as manifestations of her desire “to be punished for [her] nightmares and thoughts” (46). Instead, she begins to realize that “it was [her] sister who [she] was trying to punish, to purge” (47). In an attempt to rid herself psychologically and emotionally of those aspects of herself that she identifies with her sister, the narrator asserts: “My sister washes her hands, and I’d shoot twice. Head and heart” (47).

As a consequence of the twins’ confrontation, we become aware that the narrator’s actions are not a reflection of an actual difference between her and her twin. Instead, they are the narrator’s attempt at constructing an identity that disregards their similarities. The imaginary stand-off reveals that the twins not only share a physical likeness, telepathic connection, and “photocopied nightmares” (43), but are also both objects of their own self-destructive behaviors. The narrator’s attempt to deny those aspects of herself that she has in common with her twin through the construction of a false identity proves unsuccessful. Thus, when her secret behaviors are uncovered and her true self is revealed, like Poe’s William Wilson who “would submit no longer to be enslaved” (Poe 224), Pringle’s narrator kills her double in her imagination to regain sole authorship of her actions. “Rather than waiting to see which one wins” (Korsgaard 169), the narrator chooses “to purge” (Pringle 47) those aspects of herself that are similar to her sister, and attempts to prove that she is “still the fastest shot” (Pringle 47), the agent of her own identity construction.

This stand-off between the twins ultimately reveals the initial failure of the narrator’s attempt to negotiate her position in relation to the world, as she receives social resistance to her identity construct. The narrator has constructed an identity through actions that are not expressive of her true self. Thus, it is not until she kills her twin in her

imagination, and presumably that aspect of herself that drives her self-destructive behaviors, that she is able to realize an identity as separate from her twin. This imaginary action reveals the narrator's recognition that her sister is not invisible, though she nails "herself to the walls, eyes closed, eventually disappearing to an unused room" when in the company of others (42). Instead, the narrator realizes that her twin maintains a rather significant presence in her mind, despite her attempts to dismiss her existence. The imaginary act of killing her sister and those aspects of herself that she associates with her sister enables her to reconstruct an identity that more accurately reflects herself. Thus, the narrator's imaginary act of "lifting her pale body from the dust, wiping the blood from her mouth" and seeing her sister's "eyes glazed, her hands limp on the ground" (47), and thus powerless, symbolizes the narrator's internal shift that enables the construction of her future identity as separate from her sister.

The Position of Self in "Raw as Hands"

Pringle's story presents an example of an individual who constructs an identity through her actions on the basis of her desire not to be identified as similar to her twin sister. However, because "being and doing are both central features of one's identity" (Stets and Burke 234), the story also reveals that by denying a fundamental aspect of her character, the narrator's identity construct proves to be unsuccessful. The story illustrates that "you need to identify with your future in order to be *what you are even now*" (Korsgaard 171). And similarly, in order to construct an identity that will successfully take one into the future, an individual must construct an identity based on what one is in

the present. Thus, a successful identity construct necessitates the honest expression of the self: one cannot be what one is not.

While “our relationship to our actions and choices is essentially *authorial*” (Korsgaard 177), we are limited to constructing an identity based on what we actually are. I can no more construct an identity of myself as a ballerina than Pringle’s narrator can construct an identity of herself as a person who does not engage in self-destructive behaviors. This aspect of her character cannot be ignored in her construction of her identity, as it is a fundamental aspect of who she is. If we take to be true that “there is some principle or way of choosing that you regard as expressive of *yourself*” (Korsgaard 169), then the narrator’s identity construction is unsuccessful because her choices for action do not acknowledge, but suppress, the aspect of herself that drives her self-destructive behaviors. We can conclude from this evidence that the successful negotiation of internal and external realities requires an individual to construct an identity that reveals a coordination and integration of conscious activities that are consistent with the self (Korsgaard 175).

As an expression of identity and a positioning of self in the world, action serves as both an internal and external contribution to identity. Indeed, “identity is the pivotal concept linking social structure with individual action” (Hogg, Terry, and White 257). Through action, we assert our identity in the social world, opening ourselves up to social feedback that ultimately serves the unceasing process of identity construction.

CHAPTER 4

UNARTICULATED VOICE AND ESSENTIAL PRESENCE: EXTERIOR CONSTRUCTIONS OF IDENTITY

“No one would take seriously the proposal that the human organism learns through experience to have arms rather than wings [] Rather, it is taken for granted that the physical structure of the organism is genetically determined [] The development of personality, behavior patterns, and cognitive structures in higher organisms has often been approached in a very different way It is generally assumed that in these domains, social environment is the dominant factor. [. .] There is no ‘human nature’ apart from what develops as a specific historical product ”

Noam Chomsky

Pringle’s “Remember Ella” is a narrative that operates as a kind of memorial, loosely constructing the identity of its absent subject through the unidentified voices of people from her past. Old schoolmates, ex-lovers, and parents sound disparate notes in answer to the unasked question: remember Ella? The reader is given the project of composing her identity with incongruous comments like “tramp” (53), “who didn’t love her?” (55), and “extraordinary mind” (55). It is as if Pringle requires us to play the role of self in constructing Ella Prince’s identity: we are forced to disregard observations from external sources that do not support our developing understanding of the character. The project of constructing Ella’s identity using exterior assertions about her character reflects the significant role that social forces play in the construction of identity.

Upon first reading the story, the text assaults us with a cacophony of contradictory images. While one narrator observes that Ella is “such a plain thing. No backbone” (54), another wistfully recalls:

I did not have to ask if she was an artist to know. The color of her sweater, the cut of her eyes. Expressive hands that flow with her subconscious. [...] She would look at a pop can and see aluminum sculptures suspended from four-poster beds. (54)

In addition to the conflicts presented between the observations of different narrators, we also have to contend with unreliable narrators. For example, in the following passage, the narrator’s language and shallow comments call into question the verity of her statement:

I was like more intelligent than Ella Prince, but like she came from a wealthier family than I did, so like of course she made it. I mean, she wasn’t all roses are red and violets are blue. But like she thought she was. (57)

In fact, by the time the narrator begins to say, “honestly, I don’t see how she could have gotten into a school like that without doing a few favors, if you know what I mean” (57), we have all but dismissed this narrator as an unreliable source of information about Ella.

With so many narrators each claiming the truth about Ella, we must sift through the various images and identify their sources in an attempt to link them into coherent narratives. Margaret Somers asserts in her insightful article, “The Narrative Constitution of Identity: A Relational and Network Approach,” that “it is through narrativity that we come to know, understand, and make sense of the social world, and it is through narrativity that we constitute our social identities” (606). Thus, the process of piecing together the fragments of Ella’s identity not only provides a deeper understanding of her

character, but enhances our understanding of the role that exterior forces play in identity construction. As in life we consider the source of social inputs to our identity construction, so too in this chapter I begin with a systematic analysis of “Remember Ella,” identifying the source of each observation as it pertains to a particular social category, and revealing the narrative that develops from those observations.

An Anatomy of Ella: Uncovering the Pattern amongst the Disparate Voices

A marked characteristic of “Remember Ella” is that the story involves a primary character that does not have a voice in her own identity construction. This voiceless character is essential for understanding the story; however, her identity can only be understood through the subjective lens of her narrators. Pringle’s literary interpretation of the necessity of an individual’s connection to the outside world for self-awareness indicates a divergence from what Gilligan recognizes as a “long history in the Western tradition” for “the representation of the self as separate and bounded” (237). Instead, the story reveals the significance of the role that external forces play as a source for identity inputs with which the individual arrives at self-understanding. Pringle’s story suggests that the process of identity construction is not merely an individual process, but involves relationships to other, external entities.

Identity operates in dialogue with social norms by means of the construction of what sociologists call role-identities. A role-identity is an identifying aspect of an individual “defined in part by the social structure and in part by the individual,” which is a “particular social object [...] that represents a dimension of the self” (Callero 203-04). For example woman, daughter, and artist are role-identities in the sense that they are

individually and socially defined roles that “must necessarily be shared, socially recognized, and defined by action” (Callero 204). A role-identity is a construction involving both the expectations of a social group and the individual’s understanding of the social expectations of that role-identity. A recognition of the significance of social inputs to the definition of one’s role-identities facilitates an understanding of the role of external contributions in the construction of identity.

Applying role-identity theory to fiction, Manfred Putz notes the significance of the theory in terms of providing structure in contemporary novels:

The theoretical concepts of role identity and identity-formation refer exclusively to the sphere of social and psychological reality, serving as heuristic models for a tentative understanding of actual phenomenon. [...] Their abstract, theoretical framework, detached from the concrete subject matter, functions as the model for what constitutes syntagmatic formations of elements in a purely fictional world.

(15)

Similarly, James Clifford makes a poignant observation about the role of external forces in an identity construct using Stephen Greenblatt’s notion of “selfhood conceived as a fiction:”

The fashioned, fictional, self is always located with reference to its *culture* and coded modes of expression, its *language* [...]. The subjectivity he finds is ‘not an epiphany of identity freely chosen’ (Greenblatt), for the self maneuvers within constraints and possibilities given by an institutionalized set of collective practices and codes. (142)

Through an analysis of language and content, then, readers of “Remember Ella” can identify the narrators according to their relationship to Ella Prince. Given the “collective practices and codes” of these social relationships, we can thus locate Ella’s identity “with reference to [her] culture” (Clifford 142). An understanding of these social inputs provides a structural basis for determining the protagonist’s identity.

Thus, in my anatomy of Ella, I have identified five social groups to which the narrators of “Remember Ella” belong: parents, peers/acquaintances, friends, lovers, and spouse. I also include a category for comments whose narrators cannot be assigned to any other category, and I do so because many of these observations prove to illuminate Ella’s character (see Figure 3).⁵ In the following, I explore the common themes among the varied observations within a social role category, and identify the narratives that evolve from that analysis. In reading “Remember Ella,” we submit to a similar (though inner) process of organizing and compiling the information imparted by the various narrators to construct an understanding of Ella’s identity.

Through the observations of her parents, we discover a sketch of Ella’s early development. Ella’s mother “practiced yoga until the ninth month” (55), which she claims is the reason for Ella’s calm demeanor. Ella was exposed to *Last Exit to Brooklyn* and *Naked Lunch* by her father, who “would grade [his] students’ essays by reading them aloud while rocking her” (56). While their comments provide insight into Ella’s upbringing, her parents describe Ella in terms of their own roles in their relationship to her as parents. In fact, we find little evidence directly leading us to an understanding of Ella’s identity, unless we are willing to fall into stereotypes as one unidentifiable narrator

Figure 3. Anatomy of Ella: A Diagram of Social Inputs to the Construction of Ella's Identity

Social Category	Parents	Peers/acquaintances	Friends	Lovers	Husband	Unidentified
Observations	<p>It was a wonderful pregnancy. I remember sipping at a glass of red wine when I told John that we were pregnant. (53)</p> <p>I practiced yoga until the ninth month. It was relaxing. I think that was why she was so calm. (55)</p> <p>I read <i>Exit to Brooklyn</i> to her when she was six-month's old. <i>Naked Lunch</i> when she was one...I would grade my students' essays by reading them aloud while rocking her. (56)</p> <p>We painted her nursery yellow with white trim because I read somewhere that those were good colors for babies. (60)</p>	<p>She was a cool chick. (53)</p> <p>Tramp. (53)</p> <p>I sat behind her at a conference once...Everyone had to wear those white name tags with the blue border. 'Hello, my name is...' and she wrote, 'Motionless.' I never would have learned her name, but soon realized I was the only one there who didn't know who she was. (54-55)</p> <p>A pretentious bit of nothing in sandals and polyester dresses. The elitist who only watches independent films and reads only obscure writers. (55)</p> <p>I was like more intelligent than Ella Prince, but like she came from a wealthier family than I did, so like of course she made it. I mean, she wasn't all roses are red and violets are blue. But like she thought she was. (57)</p>	<p>Ella had this thing—I can't describe what it was, hell, I don't know what it was. But everyone stopped talking and listened when Ella spoke. (53)</p> <p>Understanding Ella and knowing Ella are two unrelated concepts. (55)</p> <p>I was twenty-five, broke, and trying to write the Great American Novel...She says to me, "Olivia, there is no Great American Novel." I was about to get up and leave her right there. How wrong of her to betray me: to tell me that everything I am working for doesn't exist. But she keeps talking. "And there is no such thing as god, philosophy, physics, or Santa Claus." Then I understood. It was about faith...After coffee I went home and typed for six hours straight. (56-57)</p>	<p>The back of her skull delicate beneath the soft brown fuzz... When she turned to talk to the person behind her I would watch the slope of her collar bones. The indentations that could hold glass marbles or rose petals. (53)</p> <p>I did not have to ask if she was an artist to know. The color of her sweater, the cut of her eyes. Expressive hands that flow with her subconscious... She would look at a pop can and see aluminum sculptures suspended from four-poster beds. (54)</p> <p>The last image I want just before I die is her crossing her legs. The arc of her kneecap, the remarkable plane of her thigh. (55)</p> <p>... making love with Ella was like discovering. (58)</p> <p>A distant lover who reveled in the distance. (60)</p>	<p>Ella wanted to be a mother. She had a box full of baby clothes she had already sewn before conception. (55)</p> <p>My first wife. No kids. The divorce was a divorce. I was, of course shattered. Maybe more shattered that she didn't want the house or anything we had shared. Just her work. Just her work. (56)</p> <p>We eloped. (57)</p> <p>Ella wouldn't let me take the box of baby clothes to the attic after the miscarriage. It was a slow process, something I never want to go through again. Something split inside of her, and the crack could never be refilled. Though it seems impossible, she was more distant after that... Perhaps it was inevitable. I suppose I never <i>had</i> to lose her in the first place. (59-60)</p>	<p>Her favorite colour was opaque. (57)</p> <p>Most people decide where they want to eat based on food. Ella based dinner on her mood. Often, it didn't matter where as long as there was a table in a dark corner and a glass ashtray. (59)</p> <p>Nothing surprises me after Ella. I don't know what made her so special. Maybe it's because everyone else isn't. (59)</p> <p>At twenty she was incredible, at thirty—astonishing. (59)</p> <p>There is a painting that reminds me of her: <i>Le Trajet</i> by Romaine Brooks. (60)</p> <p>The stranger running down a sidewalk in the rain without an umbrella. A red umbrella. (60)</p>
Valuation	Neutral in terms of Ella, but positive in terms of the parents' roles	Superficial comments tend to be more negative, while comments from peers who interacted with Ella seem to be more positive.	Positive? Narrators seem somewhat wistful when they speak about Ella.	Positive	Regretful.	Positive.
What do we learn about Ella?	Ella is not described. Her parents focus on their roles as her parents as possible contributions to her development, not on her development as a human being separate from them.	No information on Ella as self, although some comments apparently attempt to reveal something about her character. Ella is not a person, but a stereotype, whose character can be described in a few generic terms.	Ella as participant. We see how her actions affect others. The descriptions of Ella offered by her friends give us more insight into the inner nature of her character.	Ella as body or role, subject of fantasy. No insight into the essence of Ella. Again, we see Ella through the effects she has on her lovers.	Ella as distant. Information about her creative nature.	Not seen through roles but as Ella. It is not surprising that we find more description about Ella as a person in comments for which it is difficult to identify a source.
Narrative Summary	Ella is viewed by her parents as a product of her parents.	Ella is the subject of jealousy, wet dreams, and confusion about who she really is.	Ella is a complex person who escapes concrete description by her friends.	Ella is magnetic. Perceived by her lovers as a physical work of art...a sculpture.	Ella is a distant wife who becomes even more distant after a miscarriage. Her work is more important to her than memories.	Ella is special, unforgettable, but a stranger, unknowable, enigmatic.

does: “Her parents were liberals, and everybody on God’s green earth knows what kind of child grows out of that kind of politics” (56).

However, from her parents’ observations about their experiences raising Ella, a sketch of Ella in the social role of daughter begins to emerge. Although we find little insight into Ella’s self, this narrative describing Ella’s early history as seen through the lens of parental role-identities provides a foundation upon which to construct Ella’s identity. As Somers asserts:

Narrativity demands that we discern the meaning of any single event only in temporal and spatial relationship to other events. Indeed, the chief characteristic of narrative is that it renders understanding only by *connecting* (however unstably) *parts* to a constructed *configuration* or a *social network* of relationships. (616)

Through the juxtaposition of the parental sketch with others, we may ultimately find the connection between Ella’s childhood narrative and the observation that “at twenty she was incredible, at thirty—astonishing” (59).

In the narratives that result from the social groups of her acquaintances and friends, we find several common themes, among which Ella’s complexity, magnetism, and indescribability are most prominent. Suggesting the complexity of the protagonist, one narrator asserts that “understanding Ella and knowing Ella are two unrelated concepts” (55). While another friend reveals Ella’s complexity through the unique way that Ella shocks her out of her writer’s block:

I was twenty-five, broke, and trying to write the Great American Novel. [...] She says to me, ‘Olivia, there is no Great American Novel.’ I was about to get up and

leave her right there. How wrong of her to betray me: to tell me that everything I am working for doesn't exist. But she keeps talking. 'And there is no such thing as god, philosophy, physics, or Santa Claus.' Then I understood. It was about faith. I was lacking faith. After coffee I went home and typed for six hours straight. (56-57)

From this statement, the observant reader may note the possible connection between Ella's philosophy and her "liberal" upbringing. But more importantly, this observation reveals how Ella's actions directly influence other people, and describes Ella in the position of participant. Additionally, Ella's post-modern solution to her friend's conflict suggests that Ella is an intellectual, as one narrator confirms in the following stereotypical characterization: "A pretentious bit of nothing in sandals and polyester dresses. The elitist who only watches independent films and reads only obscure writers" (55).

Ella's complexity renders her indescribable to some, as one narrator illustrates, alluding also to her magnetism: "Ella had this thing—I can't describe what it was, hell, I don't know what it was. But everyone stopped talking and listened when Ella spoke" (53). With a similar stroke, one acquaintance simultaneously reveals Ella's magnetism and apparent delight in her ability to draw attention to herself in the following sketch:

I sat behind her at a conference once...Everyone had to wear those white name tags with the blue border. 'Hello, my name is...' and she wrote, 'Motionless.' I never would have learned her name, but soon realized I was the only one there who didn't know who she was. (54-55)

Ella is not only complex, magnetic, and indescribable, but also aware that she is considered such, as she contributes to that construction of her identity with abstract answers to friends' problems and by requiring others to call her "Motionless." The image of Ella that emerges from the friend and acquaintance narratives illustrates Somers's observation that "all of us come to *be* who we *are* (however ephemeral, multiple, and changing) by being located or locating ourselves (usually unconsciously) in social narratives *rarely of our own making*" (606). Whether or not she is the original author of the narratives she finds herself in, Ella contributes to these narratives by maintaining the image of herself as enigmatic.

By developing identity narratives from the observations of characters who play different social roles in Ella's life, we illustrate the process of social identity construction through our reading of the story. In the position of self, we must take into account all observations, but will undoubtedly omit observations that do not support our developing understanding of Ella. As in life, individuals determine the perspective and reliability of social inputs to their own identity construction, so too in constructing Ella's social identity, we maintain a discriminating position when considering the validity and importance of the narrators' observations.

As Figure 3 shows, Ella's lovers primarily describe her physical presence; the narrative that develops from the observations of her lovers is a narrative of the body. From comments like "the back of her skull delicate beneath the soft brown fuzz" (53), to "when she turned to talk to the person behind her I would watch the slope of her collar bones. The indentations that could hold glass marbles or rose petals" (53), the image of Ella that emerges is one of Ella as a physical work of art, a sculpture. Ella's physical

presence impacts her lovers in significant ways, as one narrator observes: “Making love with Ella was like discovering” (58). She is the subject of wet-dreams (55) and fantasies involving the shape of her body: “The last image I want just before I die is her crossing her legs. The arc of her kneecap, the remarkable plane of her thigh” (55). While the narrative of her lovers is one that brings us closer to an understanding of Ella’s body and her sexual impact on her lovers, the only insight it offers into Ella’s personality is that Ella “is a distant lover who reveled in the distance” (60). Ella’s emotional inaccessibility described by her lovers adds a new dimension to our understanding of the seeming paradox of Ella’s magnetic personality and distancing complexity. In the lover narrative, we find a social construction of Ella as physically desirable but emotional unobtainable. Ella’s husband further illuminates this aspect of Ella’s identity.

Her husband’s observations, when linked in chronological order, offer perhaps the most complete narrative of any of the social groups (see Figure 3), and the most insight into the complexity of Ella. Thus, it is helpful to read these observations as a single narrative, constructed in the following way:

We eloped (57). Ella wanted to be a mother. She had a box full of baby clothes she had already sewn before conception (55). Ella wouldn’t let me take the box of baby clothes to the attic after the miscarriage. It was a slow process, something I never want to go through again. Something split inside of her, and the crack could never be refilled. Though it seems impossible, she was more distant after that.

[...] Perhaps it was inevitable. I suppose I never *had* to lose her in the first place (59-60). My first wife. No kids. The divorce was a divorce. I was, of course

shattered. Maybe more shattered that she didn't want the house or anything we had shared. Just her work. Just her work. (56)

Thus, the spouse narrative emphasizes what the friend narrative introduces and lover narrative elaborates: Ella's emotional distance in relationships. Indeed, her husband "never *had* to lose her in the first place" (60).

In addition, we find evidence of Ella's creative passions through her husband's narrative. Her desire for the creative potential of motherhood is replaced after the loss of an unborn child with a return to her creative work as an artist, illustrating Somers's observation that "the self and purposes of self are constructed and reconstructed in the context of internal and external relations of *time* and *place* and *power* that are constantly in flux" (621). The self that drives Ella toward motherhood suffers an irrecoverable "split" (Pringle 59), and thus, Ella reconstructs her self by abandoning everything that reminds her of this loss of power in her life, and attempts to refill the crack (59) by immersing herself in "just her work" (56).

By layering the various social narratives in "Remember Ella" and finding the common themes among them, a portrait of Ella begins to emerge. Using a similar metaphor, Niklas Luhmann discusses the sociological observations of Georg Simmel thus:

Simmel sees the identity of an individual as a collage, glued together by the viewpoints and expectations of other individuals. The fragmented self of one's own self-impressions becomes continuous and reliable only in and through social situations. (313)

To this sketch, or collage as Simmel would have it, we can apply observations made by unidentifiable sources to provide the light and shade, or depth, to the portrait of Ella.

Whereas the narratives of each identified social group typically portray Ella in relationship, the unidentifiable voices are significant in that they offer more descriptive representations of her character. Thus, these unidentified observations provide depth to our construction of Ella. For

example, one narrator notes:

“There is a painting that reminds me of her: *Le Trajet* by Romaine Brooks” (60). (See Figure 4.) Not only does this observation provide the reader with a physical image of Ella’s



Figure 4. Romaine Brooks, *Le trajet* (ca. 1911), Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington DC.

body, a primary theme in the lover narrative discussed above, it also reinforces our understanding of the protagonist as essentially unknowable in her relationships. The title of the painting is usually translated as *The Crossing* in English, hinting at the morbidity of its subject matter. An image of an emaciated nude woman as a white figure drifting across a black void, the painting conveys a sense of isolation or inaccessibility. Whitney Chadwick notes that the painting “alludes to the point at which identity gives fully over to the invisible, in the passage from life to death” (84). Emphasizing a common theme among the narratives established regarding Ella’s character, the painting reinforces the narrators’ notions that Ella’s body, like the figure in the painting “simultaneously assert[s] its visible presence and reaffirm[s] its inaccessibility or distance” (Chadwick

84). The most poignant visual image of Ella then is of a painting that “links death and eroticism” (Chadwick 26), accentuating the distant and creative aspects of Ella’s character as a woman who “reveled in the distance” (Pringle 60) of her relationships.

Similarly, the observation that Ella is “the stranger running down the sidewalk in the rain without an umbrella. A red umbrella” (60) reveals the paradoxical magnetic draw and distancing push that is characteristic of Ella in her relationships. Considering the narrative portrait as a whole, we can interpret Ella’s distant presence as reflective of a somber temperament, as one unidentifiable narrator suggests: “Most people decide where they want to eat based on food. Ella based dinner on her mood. Often, it didn’t matter where as long as there was a table in a dark corner and a glass ashtray” (59).

The reader’s role of determining Ella’s identity from the social narratives developed in the text is complicated by the fact that the reader views Ella through the double lens of Ella’s identity construct and the social interpretation of and response to that identity construct. As inaccessible as Ella is in her relationships, she is even more inaccessible to the reader of her story. In order to gain an understanding of Ella’s essential nature, the reader must rely on the social construction of her identity from the various narratives that develop from observations of Ella’s role-identities. In essence, the reader’s process of understanding Ella’s identity is not unlike the social process of understanding individuals through the mask of their identity.

The Essential Presence of the Individual in Identity Construction

The construction of Ella’s identity reveals the significance of social inputs to identity construction through the descriptive portrait of Ella that emerges from social

narratives. However, because the process of identity construction is not entirely social but requires the significant input of the self, at least from the deliberative standpoint that Korsgaard discusses (see Chapter 3), the portrait that emerges of Ella's identity remains just a sketch or collage of various social viewpoints of Ella's identity. While "the self both exists within society, and is influenced by society, because socially defined and shared meanings are included in one's prototype or identity standard" (Stets and Burke 232), Pringle's experiment in identity construction reveals the essential presence of the self for the negotiation of social inputs. In the construction of Ella's identity, the reader plays the role of self, compiling, editing, and assimilating social narratives to incorporate into an understanding of Ella's character.

Our identity construction is most certainly affected by the models of us that our social relations create, which are the "multi-layered narratives" (Somers 621) of our social relationships. But it would be incorrect to assume from this that we are, as Mead suggests, merely "a structure of roles" (qtd. in Callero 203). There is an undeniable sense of uniqueness that extends much further than what the infinite number of possible organizations of our different roles can account for.

CHAPTER 5

PATTERNING SELF: NARRATIVE STYLE AS A REFLECTION OF THE PROCESS OF IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

“There is no statement that does not presuppose others; there is no statement that is not surrounded by a field of coexistences, effects of series and succession, a distribution of functions and roles ”

Michel Foucault

In my review of three aspects of identity construction, I have explored the identity system in terms of its inner workings (creating personal myths of memory), outputs (translating one’s sense of self into action), and inputs (assimilating social narratives in one’s identity construction). In this chapter, I describe how an identity system works, exploring the development of significant images in Pringle’s story “Looker.” While this story also incorporates the three aspects of identity construction previously discussed, in this chapter I focus primarily on the narrative style of “Looker” as a pattern that reflects the process of identity construction. The story illustrates that individuals do not discover their identity through a quest for self, but rather operate as the author of their own identity construct, selecting various images to discover the links between subjective facts, and assembling an identifying narrative that involves the incorporation of internal and external realities.

The Internal-External Continuum: Eastern Contributions to a Western Understanding of Identity Construction

As discussed in Chapter 1, internal and external contributions to identity operate on a continuum, with each development of identity involving a negotiation between varying degrees of internal and external factors. The symbiotic relationship of memory and identity operates primarily as an internal negotiation but also presupposes the existence of social factors in our mythic interpretations of our memories. For example, the symbol of the 7up bottle in “Losing, I Think” ultimately becomes a significant emblem for the narrator’s identity construction as she develops a new understanding of her relationship to her estranged lover. The narrator’s actions in “Raw as Hands” are an expression of her desire to construct an identity as separate from her sister, indicating an internal aspect of identity construction. However, when she receives social resistance to her construction, she is forced to reconstruct her identity to more accurately represent her essential self. This story indicates the relative equivalence of interior and exterior influences in individual action. Pringle’s story “Remember Ella” reveals the significance of social inputs to an individual’s identity construction. Yet, at the same time, through the process of constructing Ella’s identity using the social narratives developed within the text, we discover the necessity of the role of self in the negotiation of those external realities. In other words, while the reader can develop a portrait of Ella based on social observations of her character, Ella’s voice is required to give life to that portrait. Thus, no contribution to our construction of identity is exclusively internal or external. Rather, our construction of an identity is both the means and a product of our negotiation of internal and external realities.

As the internal-external continuum of identity construction is aligned with the Eastern concept of yin and yang, a review of the Confucian theory of identity will help to illuminate the process of identity construction as discussed in this chapter. The Confucian understanding of the self is one that incorporates internal and external realities to the extent that social influences are simply another aspect of one's inner being. In "Self-Construction and Identity: The Confucian Self in Relation to some Western Perceptions," Xinzhong Yao describes the Confucian self thus:

‘I’ in the Confucian context is to be seen in the ‘active’ activities of thinking, perceiving, talking, choosing and acting, as well as in the ‘passive’ activities of being cultivated, being known, being obtained, and being preserved, expressing and realising itself in one's private life as well as in one's public engagements.
(180)

Thus, the Confucian sense of self incorporates the external world to such an extent that internal and external realities comprise the self.

In Confucian thought, individuals also include the present, past, and future in their understanding of self. In Yao's words:

The Confucian consideration of one's identity is extended from the present to the past and to the future. The question ‘Who am I?’ is essentially related to the question ‘Where am I from?’ and the question ‘Who will I be?’ (186)

We see the necessity of incorporating our past and future selves in the construction of our present identity in Pringle's "Raw as Hands" through the narrator's failure to do so and the consequences that failure incites (see Chapter 3). The Confucian idea of the complete incorporation of internal and external realities within an individual, and the simultaneous

consideration of the present, past, and future for an understanding of the self, provide a way of understanding identity that differs from traditional Western thought. In this chapter, I explore the integration of these elements in Pringle's "Looker," analyzing the way in which Pringle's narrative style reflects the process of identity construction.

Narrating Conception: An Aesthetic Model of Identity Construction

As a story of the events surrounding an individual's conception, "Looker" offers a metaphorical meditation on the inner make-up of the individual. Through a layered narrative addressed to his child, the narrator reveals the internal and external aspects (specifically the biological, psychological, social, and historical elements) that contribute to the making of the child's individual identity. As the narrator reminds his child to understand throughout the narrative, so too he illustrates that one arrives at self-understanding by incorporating the various elements that contribute to the identity of an individual.

Reflecting the process of identity construction, the narrator links images of internal and external significance, fusing connections between the elements of identity that impregnate each image with greater meaning. For example, the narrator's evolving description of the people who live above the young couple before the child is conceived becomes a layered narrative of increasing importance in describing the events surrounding the conception of the child. When first introduced, the role of the neighbors in the narrative is almost completely social:

The neighbors sat on the balcony above us and drank wine and then bickered.

Maybe their names were Cheryl and Dick. They invited us to tea when we moved

in. Your mother thought why not and we brought a bottle of wine because that's what you do. Understand your mother knew what was what. (Pringle, "Looker")⁶

A social narrative develops as the narrator describes their interaction with the neighbors. Cheryl and Dick operate as a symbol of the social aspect of an individual, as the narrator contrasts their relationship to his own. He describes the neighbors' "weekends to the mountains. Cheryl watercolored sunsets and Dick collected leaves and pasted and labeled them into a scrapbook," and his wife's reaction to their meeting: "[...] your mother said Cheryl and Dick weren't happy. Far from in fact. She made us promise to never just have paintings and leaves." As the story progresses, the narrator connects the social narrative of the neighbors with a psychological narrative and its biological explanation when he reveals the reason for the neighbors' unhappiness:

The night before the concert we couldn't sleep because Cheryl and Dick's voices rattling on the screen: baby and never and you promised and why so badly and we're already forty.

In the concluding scene of the story, the narrator finally reveals the historical significance of the neighbors' psycho-social-bio-historical narrative in describing the events surrounding the conception of the child:

Cheryl and Dick didn't have children because there were complications and if they'd known about the complications before they kissed for the first time the chances are we never would have had a problem sleeping with our windows open and then we would've been well rested and not sleep deprived. If we weren't sleep deprived we might not have run into the trees with the mosquitoes and heard only fingernails and breathing. It wasn't until your mother was outside getting the

mail in her green bathing suit and obviously pregnant with you that Cheryl walked down the stairs [with a suitcase of watercolors] but it didn't matter by then because we could afford AC again and our windows were always closed.

In the process of linking images and layering these linked images with narrative significance, the father constructs the story behind the child's conception. The event of conception, of creating a new identity, is one that contains within it biological, psychological, social, and historical narratives, indicating the integration of internal and external realities fundamental to the individual's construction of identity.

The overlapping of narratives in "Looker" is particularly poignant on the theme of mortality. The narrator juxtaposes symbols of death (condoms) and life (wife/mother), linking his own process of achieving greater self-understanding with the conception of the child. The parallel narratives of the father's self-understanding and the construction of the child's identity suggest the similarity between the processes of self-understanding and identity construction. A brief analysis of the narrator's mortality symbols is necessary before exploring the parallel narratives that evolve from these symbols.

Condoms first enter into the narrative at the point when the narrator describes the concert grounds, also the place where the child is conceived. The narrator observes:

Outside the concert was a woman on a horse with a whistle around her neck—the woman not the—All these people and a pond with moss floating not like here where there's condoms. I counted ten yesterday on a smoke break. Think if I'd stood there for half an hour an hour. If I were still there how many condoms.

A common characteristic of Pringle's introduction of new images into a story, the narrator's reflection on the number of condoms he counts floating in a pond seems little

more than a random thought, with no association to “all these people” at the concert.

However, as the narrative continues, the connection between condoms and the people at the concert begins to develop:

That many people always makes me think about death. All I can think is all these people are going to grow old and die. [...] All these people are going to be thirty then forty then fifty and going to a concert of the same band they’re at right now just to relive the experience but they won’t be able to and then they’ll go home to bed and feel their age.

The narrator associates the people in the crowd with death. At first the connection between condoms, mortality, and the people of the crowd can only be inferred from the similar way in which the narrator describes these symbols (compare “all these people and a pond with moss floating” and “all those condoms [...] and me ashing my cigarette into the same river”). However, as the story progresses, the narrator establishes links between these symbols, until they eventually merge into a single symbol of mortality:

Ten thousand blank faces was all I could see. [...] Mortality is what those condoms were. The same as moss lurking in a stagnant pond. [...] I didn’t hear the mossy voices in the parking lots or crossing the bridges.

The narrator links mortality with condoms, condoms with moss, and eventually moss with the people in the crowd, developing a complex symbol of mortality that he juxtaposes with the symbol of life that he develops from images of his wife.

The narratives that develop the life symbol of wife/mother are numerous, illustrating a fundamental theme of the story. While an extensive review of this complex symbol would provide interesting insight into how the theme operates in the story, my

review of the symbolism operates as a means to illustrate the significance of the juxtaposition of the narratives of self-understanding and identity construction.

Consequently, I focus only on those narratives that best facilitate my exploration of the way in which identity is constructed in the story.

The narrator's memory of his wife's physical presence develops into a narrative in which she operates as a symbol of life that differentiates her from the faces in the crowd, and thus, mortality. At first, focusing only on her physical presence, the narrator tells his child:

Understand your mother wore vanilla perfume on her wrists the bends of knees.
Understand she was a looker. You've seen pictures of when she was. The one of her standing at the kitchen sink in a green bathing suit. Doris Day your grandmother called her. In her prime that is. That night I want you to understand definitely she wore a yellow tube top. Believe me it was tight and you could tell no bra especially that night because she was excited why wouldn't she be.

Her physical attractiveness to the narrator establishes a biological narrative, while the description of her personality reveals the narrator's emotional or psychological connection to his wife. Her energy separates her from the crowd at the concert. While everyone else stands quietly on their blankets, the narrator's wife experiences the music:

I held her belt loops during the slow songs. She moved too much during the fast ones. Pounding her feet with the drummer. Her hipbones cutting the air with the singer. Everyone else stoic. Ten thousand stoics. It made me think.

The narrator refines the image of his wife as "Janis Joplin without freckles" in an attempt to describe the singular energy that made her bump "against me when her body

couldn't control the music." But eventually, Doris Day and Janis Joplin both fail to capture her essence, as he begins to recognize that her energy operates as a distraction from his meditations on mortality. He connects the images thus:

No your mother wasn't a Doris Day or a Janis Joplin. She was like someone I'd never heard of who was famous in a foreign country. Her hips like the singer's voice and if I closed my eyes there weren't 10,000 people dying of cancer in hospital beds with the mini blinds slicing their last nights and there was only her arm brushing mine and vanilla.

As the narrator juxtaposes symbols of death and life, he arrives at a greater understanding in his meditation on mortality. After the concert, the narrator and his wife do not shuffle "behind someone else shuffling behind someone else" in the crowd on their way back to the car. Instead, the narrator claims "your mother pulled my hand and I followed of course and we snuck between trees," while "everyone else shuffled and died next week or in eight years." As if leading him away from the mortality the crowd represents in his mind, the narrator's wife not only makes her own path through the trees, but also becomes for the narrator "a knot of yellow music on the earth behind the trees." The narrator forgets his thoughts of mortality as he loses himself in experiencing his wife's energy:

I didn't hear the mossy voices in the parking lots or crossing the bridges only her inhaling and her fingernails grating my jeans. [...] Just like the concert where all she could do was take and give was how she felt behind the trees. And we didn't think about drinking tea on balconies or condoms or how we could have AC when

we got home it was only vanilla and skin for me and for her I don't know but probably my liquid mouth and my back where her ankles crossed.

In this scene describing the history of the child's conception, we see the integration of the internal and external narratives of identity construction developed throughout the story. We also find the layered result of the juxtaposed images of life and death, and the narrator's silent recognition that through his partner he finds a release from his thoughts about his own mortality. Indeed, through mythic memory he reinterprets the experience with his wife behind the trees, arriving at a new understanding that this experience is a means by which he transcends his own mortality. Because the narrative of his own self-understanding is also the narrative constructing the identity of his child, "Looker" suggests the similarity between the processes of understanding the self and identity construction. This process involves linking images and constructing narratives that inform an individual's understanding of self.

Understanding Identity: Concluding Remarks on Narration

Throughout "Looker," images that initially represent a single narrative component are eventually linked with other narratives, and thereby gain significance. This process of connecting images to others reflects the internal process of identity construction. The pattern that evolves from the process of integrating various internal and external elements of the self is an individual's identity construct. As Lewis Wurgaft notes:

Although the self changes over time, the continuous experience of self serves an evolutionary and psychological function. The self as multiple and discontinuous refers to the patterned variability of multiple configurations of self in different

relational contexts. The self as integral and continuous describes the subjective experience of forming patterns over time and across different organizational frameworks (82).

The narrative style of “Looker” suggests that we develop an understanding of the self and the world through the process of constructing links, “forming patterns over time” (Wurgaft 82), between the internal and external elements of existence. It is through this process that individuals negotiate internal and external realities, and thus construct an identity with which they exist in the world. In a similar way, every image presented in this complex story is linked by the narrator’s association to contribute to the unified biological, psychological, social, and historical story of the conception of the child.

Thus, the process of identity construction, like the process of self-understanding, is one that involves a marriage of internal and external realities, as these narratives operate in an unceasing dialogue within the individual. Yao asserts:

Since the combination of the internal and external is where the self is grounded and where personal identity comes to be known, the Confucian answer to the question of personal identity comes not only from one’s image perceived by oneself but also from one’s image perceived by others. (184)

The negotiation of self in the world requires us to construct an identity from the network of symbols that emerges from our understanding of the inter-connectedness of internal and external realities. This suggests that we do not undergo a quest for self. Rather, self-understanding and identity construction involve discovering connections, constructing a web of symbols, and developing a single identifying narrative that incorporates the internal and external elements of the self. There is not an end to the process of identity

construction as the quest motif suggests. Rather, it is like the process of acquiring greater self-knowledge because it is a process of developing greater understanding. The successful negotiation of self in the world requires persons to construct and reconstruct their identity unceasingly to adapt to new discoveries and developments in their web of understanding.

The way in which the father narrates the story of his child's conception in "Looker" offers an aesthetic model of the process of identity construction. The layering of internal and external aspects of reality and the interpretation of the patterns that emerge as a result of the juxtaposition of all the forces that contribute to self understanding, reflect the process of identity construction. In other words, every thought and action is a result of the perpetual and simultaneous influence of the internal and external narratives that make up our reality. Similarly, we adapt these narratives as our understanding of ourselves develops. Further illuminating the intimate link between the various elements of the self, Yao asserts:

In general, the self is considered not constant nor substantial but relative and changeable. [...] The identity of each person is not in his or her independent existence, but in his or her relations to the cosmic principles, to other people, to social communities, and to his or her own moral cultivation by which the self is brought into maturity. In this sense, the Confucian self is essentially a concept of moral relationships, emphasising that what comprises individual identity is constituted in a social context, and should be revealed and examined in its public dimensions. Without others and without social relations, the self has no ground to be based on, and self-cultivation can no longer be carried out. (183)

Thus, Confucian theory suggests that society (that is social and historical principles) provides the ground or foundation of the self (or psychological principles), which is interrelated with cosmic (or biological) principles. Each of these principles of existence holds equal influence over the individual's expression of self in the world. However, much of their power results from the orchestration of these narratives within the mind of the individual. They do not sound singular notes in succession, but rather offer a full arrangement of information that the individual interprets and uses as a unique expression of self through the construction of identity. This simultaneous operation of orchestrated narratives reveals itself in the narration of "Looker" through the narrator's layering of such narratives within the text to describe the events surrounding his child's conception. That the story is directed to the narrator's child is significant, since this information provides basic biological, social, and historical narratives with which the individual's own psychological narrative will combine to construct the child's identity.

AFTERWORD

A FINAL THOUGHT ON THE BEGINNING OF UNDERSTANDING

During the time that I was still trying to figure out what I would write my graduate thesis on, I fell in love with an Englishman. One consequence of this strange event (strange because love is in the very least a strange occurrence in the reality of an individual) was a peculiar shift in my understanding of myself. Early in our relationship we were obligated to spend a significant amount of time apart, as he was finishing up his doctoral research in Reading while I was fumbling around with thesis topics in Austin. During these long stretches of separation, I became preoccupied with calendars (at one point I consulted five different calendars, each charting their own particular countdown to various special dates in the future of our courtship) and the postal schedule and the time of day here and there and if I were to call now, would he still be awake?, and so on. It seemed that at any single point in time, I existed in at least three different points in time in my mind: the real present that required my presence for survival, six hours ahead in time along with him, and days or weeks or months ago in my memories of our interactions. The consequence of this internal existence in at least three different time periods at once was that I never felt entirely present in the present. That is to say that so much of my thought energy was devoted to an imaginary existence at a time other than the one in which I physically inhabited that I quite often seemed to myself not quite myself.

My impaired ability to negotiate successfully in the world raised in my mind serious questions about my identity. Could I only be myself completely when we were together? Could I ever have full access to myself while we were apart? For the first time in my life, it became very obvious to me that that thing which I identified as self was in some fundamental way determined by my experience with another person. On a more mundane level, I became very aware that Kristin wasn't quite Kristin if she wasn't selecting tomatoes with James, waking up to the sound of James cheering at the England-Jamaica cricket match, and falling asleep with James's breath on her shoulder. Our partnership had a distinct physical reality such that when the physical aspect of our closeness was lacking, so too was that aspect of myself that I identified as James's partner, which could not easily be divorced from my entire conception of self. I was in a sense detached from reality, moving about without full access to myself in my daily activities because the necessary element of my connection with the aspect of myself that performed those functions when we were together was in England working on his PhD dissertation.

Somehow, the strange event of falling in love and assuming the role of James's partner meant that my identity had entirely shifted to include an understanding of who I was when we were together. And necessarily, when we were apart, my self was lacking an essential aspect that was a requirement for my understanding of my identity. In other words, I required the presence (or at least a promise of the presence) of my lover in order for my understanding of my identity to be valid. And without his presence, I could hardly identify myself as myself.

Aside from instigating a significant shift in my personal philosophy (one previously centered on the autonomous self as the primary unit of importance in the universe), my “identity crisis” also provided me with a much needed topic of exploration for my thesis. But as I was researching my topic and finding the literature that most accurately reflected my standpoint, another strange event occurred. My lover and I became engaged to be married in May of this year. This introduced an entirely new dimension into my developing philosophy of self as intimately related to the social world, not only for existence, but also for self-understanding.

In becoming acquainted with his family and friends, and the history and culture of his people, with the idea in mind that these too would be my family and friends, history, and culture to some extent, I found myself rearranging my interior self to adjust to my new circumstances. Indeed, I was reconstructing my identity to more accurately reflect the self that was emerging from my new understanding of the world. It occurred to me then that it is this process of constructing an identity that is required for the successful negotiation of internal and external realities. I felt as if I had stumbled upon the essence of what so many of the ancient Chinese philosophers I was reading had been saying. It seemed to me that my old self-centered philosophy was a rather adolescent construction, an attempt at understanding the universe from the only thing about which I felt I could be an authority. However, in the process of reconstructing my identity to adjust to my new circumstances, I began to realize that internal and external aspects of existence are so intimately connected that one cannot possibly arrive at self-understanding without understanding the seemingly external aspects that contribute to the make-up of the self.

Thus, the process of self-understanding is equivalent to that of understanding the world. It is, in fact, the same process. Identity construction is the negotiation of self in the world: an identity is simultaneously the mechanism and product of that negotiation. It seems to me that one arrives at an understanding of self and world only by recognizing the inherent connection between the internal and external aspects of existence. In my reading in preparation for writing this thesis, I discovered, of course, that this was not a new idea, but in fact one that philosophers, psychologists, and even sociologists (to some extent) had been attempting to describe for the last fifty years. However, perhaps because of the limited scope of each of these fields of study, and the unique linguistic systems with which they describe their studies, theorists have done little to integrate the various aspects of existence in their understanding of self and identity. It is only within the last fifteen years that theorists have begun taking an inter-disciplinary approach to the study of self.⁷ And while these studies have taken great strides toward integrating the biological, psychological, social, and historical aspects of identity, much work remains to be done for a full recognition of the extent to which these elements of existence are integrated.

I, of course, believe that a key to understanding the interconnectedness of these elements is the concept of narrative.⁸ As I illustrate in Chapter 5, each aspect of identity, whether an internal or external element of existence, operates as a narrative with which an individual develops an understanding of self. Through creating myths of memory, acting identity in dialogue with the social world, and assimilating external inputs into a coherent narrative, an individual constructs an identity that is an integrated web of internal and external narratives. In the unceasing process of establishing the connections

between these narratives, the individual arrives at a greater understanding of the self. It is with this layered narrative, her identity construct, that an individual negotiates her place in relation to the rest of the world.

APPENDIX

“LOSING, I THINK” BY ERIN PRINGLE

The delivery goes well. A scar across abdomen and stretch marks treading flesh. Mother crosses herself and dangles a rosary—pink and white swirled glass—above my head. It reminds me of when we were kids, and you pushed me into the pond to prove you could save me. Ice ripping and numbing. Breathing out without an in. The punch and paralysis. I whisper your name to our baby—her name is Eleanor because I remember how much you like The Beatles. Or maybe it’s me.

Water is my cure for your constant vacation. I can choose the heat and length of its touch. A pool or waterfall. Sometimes, I can barely pull myself from its grasp.

We sat by the water’s edge—salt stinging the glass cuts beneath my toes, and I wondered if you broke the half-full 7-up bottle. Green glass like my eyes through the doorknob’s pupil.

When you told me how you played in your father’s semi-truck as a child, curling in the cab’s mix of apple cider and cherry cavendish tobacco, I listened as intently as you stared at the power lines.

You say it is possible to float in the Dead Sea without thinking. The salt still clinging to your jaw as I sucked its sting into my lips, chapped in a world of four seasons.

The calluses were still fresh from raking maple and oak into separate piles. You did not notice my Band-Aids, even though they pressed your palms. I agreed that the tan lines on your feet from the plastic flip flops were suave. We stuck to the first layer of epidermis.

Your mouth at my breast too close beneath the comforter. Pushing you away with raw hands, I winced, but you didn't notice, busy feeling betrayed.

We danced in the bar, your hand rubbing a wound in my polyester shoulder, my eyes closed to the torpid touch. You did not have to ask me if the stake was ready to be consumed.

Lighthouses are pathetic collector's items. You laughed, tapping my refrigerator magnets, and left your roll of Nova Scotia scenes on the coffee table while I washed dishes. I drove you to the airport. Again.

You accidentally rubbed thighs with the passenger next to you, and I sucked marshmallows from the fire. My fingers disappearing in the ivory goo without sensation.

The postcards were late again. I was too.

I pasted the store-bought disregard in the scrapbook. It doubled for first steps and words. An aerial view of Prague next to "Sleeping through the night."

I took a ceramics class in Lawrence. Hoping to lose myself in the pottery-wheel vortex. Earth tones and wet clay between fingers, filling in life lines, hope lines. Since you've been to Greece and Italy you will be disappointed by my hands.

The sound of you stumbling up my steps with jet-lagged feet. Door left unlatched year round for these rare occasions. I only had leftover liver. Your hands skied my belly-slope. You never used the flash when I insisted on a picture. I knew it wouldn't develop or wrinkle in your wallet. We ordered-in lasagna, and you complained of the obvious differences from when you held the pasta on a silver fork in Venice. Over my generic red wine, I told you that I was craving. You didn't ask what and left me with aluminum-foil containers clotted with burned cheese.

There was a news report today on the Red Light district in Amsterdam. I stand in the window nightly. Waiting for the car door slam and footsteps that don't come. Please don't bring me a souvenir.

It's a week before you secede this time. I mourn over iced tea. Sit in the wicker couch on the porch that pokes the soft flesh of the backs of my arms and thighs. More affectionate than your toes in my ears. Chimes. Gladiolas and bachelor's buttons planted in the garden. I am letting the weeds grow. The bird cage you gave me—found in a basement years when puberty was foreshadowed—has rusted open. The robins and sparrows you captured between infrequent visits do not visit anymore. I go to buy birdseed to keep them around, but the price has risen, and I do not have a coupon.

Vacuuming and dusting. I become the local cleaning lady. Servant to them, an easy label. Swabbing inlaid wooden decks, watering flowers never touched, never seen. The carpet fringe will never lay flat and straight no matter how many times straightened.

You do not come home for Christmas, and I don't spread myself in the snow. The angel you tried to freeze is decaying. Diapers and curdled breast milk.

Her first word is Da-da. An artist, perhaps.

The dreams come in force. London's arms wrapping my face in a saxophone rag, women whispering Hail Marys at tea. I tear off pieces of the scones you airmail and stick them between Eleanor's wet gums. Crumbs stuck on the tiny hairs of her cheeks.

I pretend you amble with me as I push her stroller through town and gossips' sneers. Mother says she has your eyes. I fear the day she'll see the sun and wonder how it glares in another city. I nail a compass rose to the crib's headboard.

The movie theatre across from your old house is torn down today. Front-page story. Eleanor helps me drag one of the seats from the auction. Hammering it into the living-room floor.

She is learning to tap dance. Wants to be Ginger Rogers or Fred Astaire. Ribbons in her braids.

The steel mill is hiring third shift. Mother will watch Eleanor through the night.

I step on a forgotten nail on my way to the mailbox, its point sticking through the other side, an inch below my big toe. Blood blooms through bandages. Mother says it is a sign. She does not say what of.

I find a straw pressed between the pages of my Bible. Ninth grade when you took me to The Parlor for hamburgers. You had coke, I had 7-up. I held the bottle to my eye and you kaleidoscoped into so many eyes and mouths. Your teeth marks still on the straw. Do your other lovers notice the habit? No one uses straws these days, at least no world traveler.

My horoscope says seven will be my lucky number today. Seven stitches in my palm from a slip while slicing onions. Crying and bleeding—hand above heart. The blood drips into the cutting board's grain. The black thread is train tracks my life line. We are losing, I think.

I cannot drive again. I refuse. A caterpillar and three butterflies dead in a sixty-second mile.

The woman next door locks the windows and takes a nap in her oven. Her name was Judith. She isn't found for weeks because the smell is trapped. Eleanor and I aren't able to cook dinner.

I sculpt your eyelids and forehead. A bust. Cut a slit in the slippery clay for the change slot. I keep my pennies in your head after you are fired. Eleanor uses you as a jewelry box, hanging necklaces and ribbons over the porcelain. I set you on the kitchen counter next to the Humpty Dumpty cookie jar.

Please come home. I am trying to teach Eleanor how to make persimmon pudding—your favorite—but she hates persimmons and ovens. A good Gretel.

We are losing, I think.

Eleanor and I watch the Travel Channel in hope. She likes sitting in the chair from the theatre.

Bicycling now. Pawnshop throwaway. It came with a child's seat, but Eleanor is too heavy and we can't make it up hills. We take turns running beside each other. Soon, we'll buy another. A first-aid kit in the handlebar basket to repair the wild animals caught between wheels. There are so many undone.

I receive your package today.

Eleanor and I roast hot dogs over the stove. Glad gas is included in rent.

A globe in the library. I point out the places you have been to Eleanor. She runs her fingers over the texture of geography, blowing off dust. To gauge the distance between where we are and you are, I touch one side while Eleanor touches the other. You are further than our hands can span.

The gifts are. . .

Eleanor shakes her castanets every chance she can get, through breakfast and television commercials. Wants to know if there's a castanet-er position in the school band. I suggest a petition and pour more orange juice.

The concrete cracks in the porch stairs are widening. I dream of spindles and sleeping one hundred years, or as many it takes until I can't blame you for not kissing, for not hacking away thorns. Eleanor wants bedtime stories, but all I have are post cards and stamps.

A gray hair in my cereal. At first, I didn't know whose it was.

A bonfire of your ink. I add leaves, branches, and Eleanor's 2T and 6X clothing to make it last longer. My feet pounding a rhythm you hear in the voice of a Vietnamese waiter or train-track shove. Tell me that at least you hear it. At least you drum your fingers once in absent frustration.

Mother brings blueberry muffins and Prozac. Places self-help books around the house as if following the crumbs will lead to anywhere but here.

Eleanor stops dancing. Her toes and heels are softening; the blisters I Mercurochromed and bandaged, break. Pus wet in my apron.

Of course, you arrive in a taxi. Neighbors leaning over balconies to watch the spectacle. I don't run into the street, arms wide. I turn up the radio and light a cigarette. Wicker biting. You tip your hat to the driver but leave it on as you cross the sidewalk— foot grinding my barren bed of earthworms. Suitcases evolved from sticker-clad vinyl to expensive leather. Eleanor is in bed with breasts and cramps, heating pad pressed against belly button. She can hear your voice but cannot yet detect what it is laced with. You drop glass figurines and pearls into my lap. I turn my head to your kiss, but your smell is new this time. The dusky scent of a middle-aged man.

She knows who you are before introduction. Whispers how handsome, a Cary Grant. I remind her that he's an actor. That *Brigadoon* plants itself somewhere else for reasons.

I close my eyes to your climax. You roll to the other side of the bed. I want to tear down the framed postcards on the wall, build another bonfire. You light a cigarette. How many cigarettes did you light while I helped Eleanor with her lessons or laughed at her knock-knock jokes two thousand clocks away? We used to share this cigarette, fingers grazing as we passed it back and forth. But tonight, you don't even ask if I care for a drag. If you did, I'd tell you how Eleanor came home from school crying one day because there was a lecture on cancer complete with slides of charred lungs, faces void of noses, lips. Holes in throats where words fester.

I try to smile between popcorn kernels. Eleanor sits at my feet while you struggle with the screen and projector. A twelve-year slide show: proof of your productivity. Mine is blinding at yours right now. At number thirty, I stop counting the recurring smiling woman dressed like a magazine ad for beautiful. We all reach into the popcorn bowl. Our hands touch, and we pull away and rearrange the throw pillows—decoration an easier issue. Eleanor runs to the bathroom to floss her teeth. A brief glance and your fingers are at the nape of my neck. Those amnesiac fingers. Moment of passion and insane neurons. In this second hand's tick, I want to forget the white space between slides and fall into memory, immune to possible suffocation. Eleanor returns, laughing. Butter and cheese smears on our faces and chests. Let's use the flash this one time. Please.

We argue over a trip into the city. I see the rabbit before you can brake. Eleanor screams in the back seat. You whistle Barry Manilow. The rabbit shakes, drags itself across the road to drop into the ditch. By the time we get to the shopping mall I am crying, wishing I had made you stop, pull over. I could have rescued it, cradled it to me, pressed my lips to the patches of lost hair as we rushed to the vet. Eleanor insists on walking the thirty miles back rather than taking the car. You are ruffled, shoving fingers through your hair as always. You stare into the rearview mirror and accuse her of taking after her mother.

As if I'm not here, perhaps asleep in a thorned up castle. I cross myself, giggling deep in relief. Eleanor and I rent bicycles. You drive behind us, blinkers flashing.

After dinner, I unfold the baby bonnets, blankets, and my scrapbooks of Eleanor. Of you. Head in hands, you crumple in the sofa. She watches from the crack of her bedroom door. I let you drown my apron with your self pity. The apologies do not kiss my lips tenderly but rip at their tender flesh. A castanet hits the wall and shatters. The beads inside: bullets without a hammer.

A week passes. Let's fly a kite, you say. Eleanor drags behind us on the way to the park. The hill is much smaller than I remember from when we'd climb up there and hold hands and you'd plan our future. Even then I kept my hands fisted because you said hope was hands unfolded. Always the great thinker. You hold the string as I struggle to steady the paper diamond into the wind. Eleanor lies on the hill's hip, tickling dandelions and watching our Mary Poppins moment. Your arms around my waist. The woman in the slides, you say. Your a partner in France. Five years now. The kite unleashes from my fingers. You say I must understand. Eleanor chases after it. The red diamond catches in the trees below. Branches rip the flimsy architecture. Eleanor does not jump or try to reach the flapping string. I would have at her age. I am tempted even now to tear down the hill after her, sucking so much air into my body so that maybe I'll fly free too. But how to stop this when so long ago in a crowded diner, I held a green bottle and saw your face shattered into so many that I couldn't find the original.

Eleanor sits between us as you show her pictures of her French siblings. Two boys. Love to fish and play sports. How nice, I remark. When I was much younger, my mother would clean the house when she was angry with Father. Spring Cleaning happened twenty times a year. I'd sit in the middle of the living room as she roared around me, dust shrapnelling air, trinkets lifted and replaced. I'd laugh, her face so comically serious. Really, it was despair. I leave the room, you picture-persuading Eleanor. Already, she seems to understand you better than I ever will. Of course, she has never been taught to expect you. But maybe neither have I. In the kitchen, I retrieve the

Comet and rubber gloves. Scrub counters, mop floors, flush toilets clean. Because my own washer twirls without water, I walk to the Laundromat. The electric groan and women in curlers are comforting beneath fluorescent bulbs and for one spin cycle, you and Eleanor don't exist and all the postcards curl-burn from memory and I'm seven again sitting on the counter as Mother folds sheets and you haven't moved to the neighborhood yet and haven't moved away and all is mountain rain detergent.

Twilight before I begin my trek back. An hour of dryer lint makes me crave home. Twenty years of tourists and strange beds and you still don't.

A turtle in the middle of the road. I drop the laundry basket—socks curling into the air, polka-dotted underwear creasing on curb—and run. A car would never see it and its head would turn to slow to even register that it should move. Smashed shell of age by color. I hold it to my chest, coo motherese as it pees down my blouse. I place it in the grass on the side of the road to where it was headed. I wait until the legs unfold, scales rippling orange, and the shell sways safe. We used to race turtles in our backyards, balloons taped to shells in case we might lose track.

We hug good-bye. Taking Eleanor for the summer. Promises of postcards and pictures. She tells me not to worry, and I warn her of 7-up bottles and she nods blindly. I wave from the porch and when I'm back in the house I go into her room where the crib still stands under piles of folded clothes that are out of season, or outgrown, or still need to be put away. Nail holes left in the headboard.

NOTES

1 As we have seen, fundamental themes in literature throughout time have been the exploration of self, what it means to be human, how we exist in the world in a social context, etc. These themes reflect the human project of negotiation of internal and external realities.

2 This analogy is not intended to reveal the ways in which self and identity *interact* with one another, as that is the subject of exploration in the rest of this thesis. Rather, I suggest the egg analogy as a visual representation of the relationship between self and identity within a person.

3 John Perry uses transplant cases and various other types of puzzle cases extensively in his book *Identity, Personal Identity, and the Self*. For an example of a time travel scenario, see Derek Parfit's "Why Our Identity Is Not What Matters." Also, Marya Schechtman provides an interesting discussion of this issue in terms of personal identity and survival in "Empathic Access: The Missing Ingredient in Personal Identity."

4 I have provided the text of Erin Pringle's "Losing, I Think" as an appendix of this thesis. Because the story has not yet been published, I offer a relatively large amount of plot summary in this chapter. I have cited page numbers of quotations according to the pagination printed in this document.

5 I developed the diagram in Figure 3 to assist me in my analysis of the story, and consider it to be a reflection of the internal process of sorting that a reader must do in

order to understand the character Ella. In this diagram, I have not listed all the observations made in “Remember Ella,” but instead have listed those that seem to provide more information about Ella’s personality. I recognize that several comments in Pringle’s narrative would best fit in an “authority figures” category; however, these comments tend to be stock phrases, such as “pretentious youth” and “a person of such potential,” and consequently, contribute little to the construction of Ella’s identity.

6 Pringle’s “Looker” was originally published in an online journal, with the text comprising a single electronic page, and presented without line breaks or indentations. Consequently, I do not cite page numbers when referencing the text in this thesis.

7 For examples of early inter-disciplinary approaches to understanding the self, see “The Past, Present, and Future of an Identity Theory” by Sheldon Stryker and Peter J. Burke; “A Tale of Two Theories: A Critical Comparison of Identity Theory with Social Identity Theory” by Michael A. Hogg, Deborah J. Terry, and Katherine M. White; and “Identity Theory and Social Identity Theory” by Jan E. Stets and Peter J. Burke. In each of these articles, the writers attempt to develop a new understanding of identity by integrating approaches from the fields of psychology and sociology.

8 I am not alone in this belief. For example, see Margaret Somer’s brilliant article, “The Narrative Constitution of Identity: A Relational and Network Approach,” calling for a narrativity perspective in sociological enquiry. Also, the research of Peggy J. Miller, Heidi Fung, and Judith Mintz, presented in “Self-Construction through Narrative Practices: A Chinese and American Comparison of Early Socialization,” explores socialization in terms of narrative practices.

WORKS CITED

- Abrams, M. H. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 7th edition. Fort Worth: Harcourt, 1999.
- Burton, Stacy. "Bakhtin, Temporality, and Modern Narrative: Writing 'the Whole Triumphant Murderous Unstoppable Chute'." *Comparative Literature* 48.1 (1996): 39-64.
- Callero, Peter L. "Role-Identity Salience." *Social Psychology Quarterly* 48.3 (1985): 203-15.
- Chadwick, Whitney. *Amazons in the Drawing Room. The Art of Romaine Brooks*. Berkeley: Chameleon, 2000.
- Clifford, James. "On Ethnographic Self-Fashioning: Conrad and Malinowski." *Reconstructing Individualism*. Ed. Thomas C. Heller, Morton Sosna, and David E. Wellbery. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1986. 140-62.
- Draaisma, Douwe. *Metaphors of Memory A History of Ideas About the Mind*. Trans. Paul Vincent. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000.
- Engel, Susan. *Context is Everything: The Nature of Memory*. New York: Freeman, 1999.
- Frye, Joanne S. "Narrating the Self: The Autonomous Heroine in Gail Godwin's *Violet Clay*." *Contemporary Literature* 24.1 (1983): 66-85.
- Gilligan, Carol. "Remapping the Moral Domain: New Images of the Self in Relationship." *Reconstructing Individualism*. Ed. Thomas C. Heller, Morton Sosna, and David E. Wellbery. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1986. 237-52.

- Hamacher, Werner. “‘Disregation of the Will:’ Nietzsche on the Individual and Individuality.” *Reconstructing Individualism*. Ed. Thomas C. Heller, Morton Sosna, and David E. Wellbery. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1986. 106-39.
- Hogg, Michael A., Deborah J. Terry, and Katherine M. White. “A Tale of Two Theories: A Critical Comparison of Identity Theory with Social Identity Theory.” *Social Psychology Quarterly* 58.4 (1995): 255-69.
- Korsgaard, Christine M. “Personal Identity and the Unity of Agency: A Kantian Response to Parfit.” *Personal Identity*. Ed. Raymond Martin and John Barresi. Malden: Blackwell, 2003. 168-83.
- Luhmann, Niklas. “The Individuality of the Individual: Historical Meanings and Contemporary Problems.” *Reconstructing Individualism*. Ed. Thomas C. Heller, Morton Sosna, and David E. Wellbery. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1986. 313-25.
- Martin, Raymond and John Barresi. “Personal Identity and What Matters in Survival: An Historical Overview.” Introduction. *Personal Identity*. Ed. Raymond Martin and John Barresi. Malden: Blackwell, 2003. 1-74.
- Miller, Peggy J., Heidi Fung, and Judith Mintz. “Self-Construction Through Narrative Practices: A Chinese and American Comparison of Early Socialization.” *Ethos* 24.2 (1996): 237-80.
- Oxford English Dictionary Online*. “Self.” Oxford University Press. 2005. 21 March 2005 <<http://www.oed.com/>>.
- Parfit, Derek. “Why Our Identity Is Not What Matters.” *Personal Identity*. Ed. Raymond Martin and John Barresi. Malden: Blackwell, 2003. 115-43.
- Perry, John. *Identity, Personal Identity, and the Self*. Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002.

- Poe, Edgar Allan. "William Wilson." *Works of Edgar Allan Poe*. New Jersey: Gramercy, 1990. 212-25.
- Pringle, Erin. "Looker." *Adirondack Review*. Black Lawrence Press. 2005. 23 March 2005 <<http://www.adirondackreview.homestead.com/pringle.html>>.
- . "Losing, I Think." Unpublished short story, 2004.
- . "Raw as Hands." *Pagitica* 2.4 (2004): 39-47.
- . "Remember Ella." *Quarter After Eight* 9 (2002): 53-60.
- Putz, Manfred. *The Story of Identity: American Fiction of the Sixties*. Amerikastudien, Bd. 54. Stuttgart, Ger.: Metzlersche, 1979.
- Rosenfield, Israel. "Memory and Identity." *New Literary History* 26.1 (1995): 197-203.
- Schechtman, Marya. "Empathic Access: The Missing Ingredient in Personal Identity." *Personal Identity*. Ed. Raymond Martin and John Barresi. Malden: Blackwell, 2003. 238-59.
- . "Personhood and Personal Identity." *The Journal of Philosophy* 87.2 (1990): 71-92.
- Somers, Margaret R. "The Narrative Constitution of Identity: A Relational and Network Approach." *Theory and Society* 23.5 (1994): 605-49.
- Scott, Nathan A., Jr. "History, Hope, and Literature." *boundary 2* 1.3 (1973): 577-604.
- Stets, Jan E. and Peter J. Burke. "Identity Theory and Social Identity Theory." *Social Psychology Quarterly* 63.3 (2000): 224-37.
- Stryker, Sheldon and Peter J. Burke. "The Past, Present, and Future of and Identity Theory." *Social Psychology Quarterly* 63.4 Special Millennium Issue (2000): 284-97.

- Ware, Tracy. "The Two Stories of 'William Wilson.'" *Studies in Short Fiction* 26.1 (1989): 43-48.
- Wurgaft, Lewis D. "Identity in World History: A Postmodern Perspective." *History and Theory* 34.2 (1995): 67-85.
- Yao, Xinzhong. "Self-Construction and Identity: The Confucian Self in Relation to some Western Perceptions." *Asian Philosophy* 6.3 (1996): 179-95.

VITA

Kristin Joyce Noack was born in Houston, Texas, on March 16, 1978. After living in Austin until 1997, she moved to San Francisco, California, to complete her undergraduate education. In 2001, she received a Bachelor of Arts degree in literature from San Francisco State University. Returning to Austin, Kristin began work as an editor at the Academy of Oriental Medicine at Austin, a position she maintained while completing the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in literature at Texas State University-San Marcos. Kristin will be married to James R. Stevenson in Austin, Texas, in May of 2005, and will then move to the United Kingdom to make Bristol, England, her new home.

Address:	Top Flat
	15 Chertsey Road
	Redland
	Bristol
	BS6 6NB
	UK

This thesis was typed by Kristin Joyce Noack.

