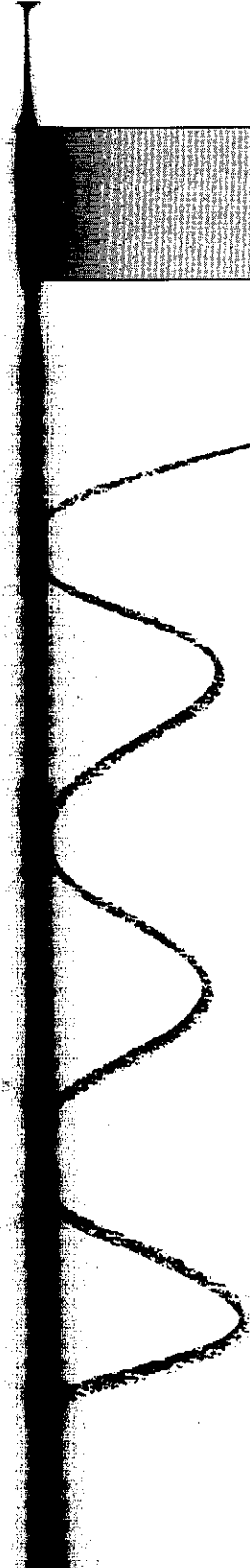


Story Characters



Properly speaking, a man has as many social selves as there are individuals who recognize him and carry an image of him in their mind. To wound any one of his images is to wound him. But as the individuals who carry the images fall naturally into classes, we may practically say that he has as many different social selves as there are distinct groups of persons about whose opinions he cares. He generally shows a different side of himself to each of these different groups. Many a youth who is demure enough before his parents and teachers, swears and swaggers like a pirate among his "tough" young friends. We do not show ourselves to our children as to our club-companions, to our customers as to the laborers we employ, to our own masters and employers as to our intimate friends. From this there results what practically is a division of the man into several selves; and this may be a discordant splitting, as where one is afraid to let one set of his acquaintances know him as he is elsewhere; or it may be a perfectly harmonious division of labor, as where one tender to his children is stern to the soldiers or prisoners under his command.

—William James

Characters are the masks worn by moral philosophies.
—Alasdair MacIntyre

Character and Imago

Sandy is married, has two children in elementary school, and works as a middle-level manager at a major accounting firm. She aims to spend as much time as possible with her children, and to provide them with consistent care and discipline. With her husband, she wants to be a good friend and a passionate lover. With her colleagues at work, she feels the need to assert herself confidently, to justify her behavior in terms of clear goals and rational plans, and never to let her personal feelings get in the way of sound business practice. When she visits her parents in the summer, by contrast, this same woman is playful and childlike. She defers to her father's authority in arguments, she knits and plays Scrabble with her sisters, and she never thinks about balance sheets, lovemaking, or what time her children are going to bed. Among a multitude of other things, she is a daughter, worker, wife, and mother. The roles are wildly different. But is there something in Sandy's life that ties the roles together? Is there something that integrates her different social selves into a coherent and dynamic whole?

If the answer is yes, then that something is identity. And if identity takes the form of story, then the different selves in Sandy's life, embodied in the multiple roles she assumes in daily life, may be seen as potential characters in the story. Among other things, stories are

about characters who act, interact, desire, think, and feel. As we move through early and middle adulthood, identity challenges us to construct a personal myth in which a sufficient number of different kinds of characters may emerge, develop, and thrive. The problem of many roles and one identity is therefore resolved through the distinction between character and story. The many are the main characters; the one is the story within which the characters are given form, function, and voice.

Do I contradict myself?
Very well then I contradict myself,
(I am large, I contain multitudes.)¹

When Walt Whitman proclaimed that he contained multitudes, he was celebrating the boundless possibilities of the adventurous American self. I can be many things, said Whitman. I may be a lover and a hater, a warrior and a peacemaker, a parent and a child. Like God, I can give life, and I can take it away. Whitman's "Song of Myself" may seem like boasting to some, but his romantic verse reminds us that being an adult in our society typically means being many things. Modern life demands that each of us act and think in a multitude of different, sometimes contradictory ways.

The Split Between Family and Work

Adults move psychosocially through their twenties and thirties by first making provisional commitments and then consolidating social roles. Commitments are made and roles are consolidated within the two very different social realms of family and work. In 1990, the average age at which American adults entered their first marriage was 26.1 years for men and 23.9 years for women.² While Americans are having fewer children and are starting families at later ages than in past years, most married couples have still begun to raise children by the time the woman has reached the age of thirty. By the time the woman has reached age forty, at least one child is probably well into elementary school or of high-school age, and the family system is adjusting, or will soon adjust, to accommodate the growing indepen-

dence of teenage children. In the realm of work, men in their twenties and thirties are often driven by an ethic of upward mobility and accelerating advance. The masculine ideal in occupational development is to move up fast.³ The imagery of continuous ascendancy in the realm of work proves especially problematic, however, for many women (and indeed some men) in their thirties, should they desire to have a satisfying family life. A major lesson of young adulthood, it seems, is that the public world of work and the more private world of family life offer very different challenges. If the adult is to negotiate his or her way through both worlds with any felicity, he or she must develop at least two very different ways of being.

Social historians tell us that this has not always been the case. In the small towns of traditional Colonial America, adults worked at home, for the most part, and family life was a matter of public consideration.⁴ The farmers, craftsmen, educators, pastors, doctors, and other citizens of eighteenth-century America raised their families and carried on their occupations in the same place—at home. The home was a microcosm of the society at large, reflecting and affirming the puritanical and patriarchal values of American life during the century and a half before national independence. The Colonial household was a business, a school, a vocational institute, a church, and a welfare institution. Adults functioned as workers, parents, lovers, teachers, neighbors, and worshipers in a social context that blurred distinctions between an individual adult's roles and affirmed the unitary nature of one's being. Public life and private life were pretty much one and the same, so much so that private infidelities were subject to public censure. Remember Hester Prynne, the heroine of *The Scarlet Letter*. The community enforced a public shaming as punishment for sexual relations outside of marriage. What we today would probably consider a private moral issue was perceived as a public affront in a puritanical New England town three hundred years ago.

The public and private worlds of adulthood began to separate during the nineteenth century, partly as a result of the Industrial Revolution and the urbanization of America. As men (and some women) began to leave home everyday to work in factories and other distant places, the household evolved to become the exclusive domain for private family life. According to one historian, the occupa-

tional world became dominated by a masculine ethic of efficiency, automatization, and the aggressive pursuit of profit.⁵ Work became what men did, away from home. By contrast, the family realm was romantically portrayed as an ideal and feminized world of intimate relationships. For men, the home became a regular refuge from work, a domain inhabited mostly by women and children during the "workday." For individual men and women, the separation of public and private—work and home—produced a great expansion in personal consciousness. The integrated Colonial community ceased to exist. Private life was no longer under public surveillance. Adults were challenged to fashion separate selves for separate domains. Today the challenge is probably greater than ever, as modern men and women find it increasingly necessary to segment their identities into many different roles in order to accommodate the many different life spheres in which they operate.

The separation of public and private in the nineteenth century became almost an obsession for many educated adults. The conflict between the inner and outer worlds of human experience culminated in Freud's turn-of-the-century argument that much of what lies within the human mind is unconscious and split off from the external world of public observation.⁶ Leading up to Freud, the nineteenth-century philosophies of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche celebrated aspects of human functioning that are outside of consciousness, typically emotional and irrational urges from within. These urges were believed to be antagonistic to human reason. The nineteenth-century Romantic poets placed the person's heroic and creative powers in an unconscious, inner realm. Hypnotism was used to gain access to the unconscious mind as early as 1784, and one of Freud's teachers, Jean-Martin Charcot, employed the method with legendary effectiveness. Charcot was able to impel adults to behave publicly in bizarre ways that they could not consciously understand, by appealing to a private world of thought and feeling that was split off from everyday consciousness.

Middle-class adults in nineteenth-century Europe believed in the existence of an inner world unknowable to the conscious self.⁷ Many men and women of the Victorian age were preoccupied with the involuntary revelation of this inner self to others, as can be seen in biographies of prominent nineteenth-century figures. While you

might not be able to attain conscious insight into the deep secrets of your own mind, the Victorians believed, there was always the danger of inadvertently disclosing the nature of your hidden self to others, as objective observers might come to know you better than you know yourself. The social message warned of the multiplicity of self: Beware! The hidden self may explode at any moment, revealing the bestial reality behind even the most upright public persona. It is no accident that the story of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde was such a tremendous popular success at this time. A Victorian life of rectitude and responsibility required vigilance, lest the demons from within erupt violently or lustfully onto the public scene.

The three most influential intellectuals of the late nineteenth century, Freud, Marx, and Darwin, maintained respectively that human lives, human societies, and biological organisms are governed by deep and hidden forces beyond control. Whether it be the unconscious (Freud), the dialectic of history (Marx), or natural selection (Darwin), the life forces that are ultimately responsible for what happens in the world are rather secret, subtle, split off. There is a manifest level of experience that is public and generally knowable. And there is a level that remains private or hidden. What you see at one level is not the same as what you find at another.

Modern life in middle-class America derives from this nineteenth-century legacy. The public and the private realms of adulthood remain divorced, and adults recognize the existence of their several selves. The multiplicity of the self is a result of economic, technological, social, and philosophical changes that have occurred in our world during the past two hundred years. Like many aspects of modern life, multiplicity in the self is an uneven privilege. On the one hand, modern men and women would appear to have a great many more opportunities, compared to adults living two hundred years ago, for living productive, happy, and full lives. To middle-class Americans, the late-twentieth century offers a rich assortment of alternative occupational roles and life-style choices. On the other hand, wide-open choices are sometimes frightening, and adults are bound to realize, typically in their thirties if not before, that choices bring with them eventual limitations and inescapable sacrifices. Furthermore, as we seek to become many different things, we appear to be pulled in the opposite direction as well, to become one thing upon

which, as William James once put it, "we can stake our salvation."⁸

Modern life invites us to be many things. Our life stories welcome the debut and development of a wide cast of characters. But ultimately we seek unity as much as diversity. We seek to be one thing, for the story, no matter how complex, must still be the single story for a single life. As a modern adult, one must find meaning at home, at work, and in all the other domains of life; one cannot and must not be everything to everybody at every place and time. But an individual *can* be some important things for important people, at particular times and in particular places. Furthermore, he or she can be these things in a way that is unique, self-consistent, coherent, meaningful, purposeful, and gratifying. Creating a personal myth that contains a rich but finite source of characterization—a suitable cast of imagoes—enables an individual to resolve the problem of simultaneously being the many and the one.

Creating the Main Characters

I call the characters that dominate our life stories imagoes.⁹ Imagoes provide a narrative mechanism for accommodating the diversity of modern life. In seeking pattern and organization for identity, the person in the early adult years psychologically pulls together social roles and other divergent aspects of the self to form integrative imagoes. Central conflicts or dynamics in one's life may be represented and played out as conflicting and interacting imagoes, as main characters in any story interact to push forward the plot. The chaotic multitudes of which Whitman speaks are reduced to a manageable cast of characters.

An imago is a personified and idealized concept of the self. Each of us consciously and unconsciously fashions main characters for our life stories. These characters function in our myths as if they were persons; hence, they are "personified." And each has a somewhat exaggerated and one-dimensional form; hence, they are "idealized." Our life stories may have one dominant imago or many. The appearance of two central and conflicting imagoes in personal myth seems to be relatively common.

During early and middle adulthood, most of the psychological "energy" we expend in creating our identities goes into the develop-

ment, articulation, and refinement of our imagoes. Each imago is like a stock character in our story. Each is larger and more encompassing than the specific roles we play in daily life. Indeed, each imago may serve to bring together different roles under a single narrative category. Imagoes are each unique in some way, personalized to fit a particular identity story. Various imagoes I've seen in my research include the sophisticated professor, the rough boy from the wrong side of town, the steady caregiver, the corporate executive, the worldly traveler, the athlete, the sage, the soldier, the teacher, the clown, the peacemaker, and the martyr.

Imagoes exist as carefully crafted aspects of the self, and they may appear as the heroes or villains of certain chapters of the life story. They are often embodied in external role models and other significant persons in the adult's life. As our personal myths mature, we cast and recast our central imagoes in more specific and expansive roles. We come to understand ourselves better by a comprehensive understanding of the main characters that dominate the plot of our story, and push the narrative forward. With maturity, we work to create harmony, balance, and reconciliation between the often conflicting imagoes in our myth.

In Figure 1, I have illustrated my own scheme for classifying imagoes in life stories. The taxonomy is derived primarily from research into identity configurations of men and women between the ages of about thirty and fifty years. I organize imago types according to the properties of agency and communion, which I consider to be the two central themes in stories.¹⁰ Some imago types are highly powerful, suggesting personified idealizations of the self as an assertive, dominant, and individuated agent. Others are highly loving, personified idealizations of the self as a provider of care, compassion, and friendship within a community of other selves. Some imago types blend power and love, and others appear to emphasize neither.

Examples of some of these imago types may be found in certain world mythologies, including the well-known mythologies of ancient Greece. In their idealized exploits and adventures, the gods and goddesses of the ancient Greek pantheon personify basic human needs and propensities that are still exemplified and played out today in personal myths and human lives. Other world mythologies offer equally useful taxonomies that one might follow. Although

Greek myths are habitually used by psychological researchers, there is nothing special or universal about them. Some people whom I have interviewed present personal myths whose main characters do not fit neatly into the scheme presented in Figure 1. The scheme is no more than a rough guide. I use the Greek names simply because they will be familiar to many readers.

Four points about imagoes need to be emphasized.

Imagoes are not people. Imagoes are archetypal patterns for human thought and conduct that compose idealized personifications in personal myth. They exist as characters in life stories, not as real people in life. You are not your imagoes. Rather, your identity is a story concerning certain imagoes.

Imagoes are not "the whole story." There is more to your personal myth than the main characters. A central message of this book is that personal myths can be understood on different levels and from different perspectives. A story may be viewed, for instance, from the perspectives of theme, setting, image, tone, and plot, as well as character.

Figure 1
Imago Types: Some Common Characters in Personal Myth

Agentic and Communal

- The Healer
- The Teacher
- The Counselor
- The Humanist
- The Arbiter

Agency

- The Warrior (Ares)
- The Traveler (Hermes)
- The Sage (Zeus)
- The Maker (Hephaestus)

Communion

- The Lover (Aphrodite)
- The Caregiver (Demeter)
- The Friend (Hera)
- The Ritualist (Hestia)

Low in Agency, Low in Communion

- The Escapist
- The Survivor

Imagoes may be positive or negative. My taxonomy in Figure 1 deals only with positive imagoes. These are personified idealizations of the self that contain many good and desirable attributes. However, many adults develop negative personifications as well. Sometimes these negative imagoes are opposites or mirror images of the positive ones I have listed, and in many other cases they are not.

Imagoes, like personal myths, are both common and unique. Figure 1 is merely a guide for exploring certain common imagoes. Within this framework, there exists a good deal of individuality. One person's Warrior imago may be very different from another's. Some imago types do not fit into the scheme in Figure 1. Like personal myths more generally, imagoes come in many different forms.

The Nature of the Imago

A recent advertisement for *Cosmopolitan* describes it as the perfect women's magazine for today's "juggler." From what I can tell, the juggler is a middle-class American woman in her twenties or thirties who raises her children, holds down a well-paying job, carries on a happy relationship with her husband or lover, keeps abreast with what is going on in the world, and manages to look beautiful at the same time. She juggles many different and seemingly conflicting roles at once. She keeps her roles up in the air and moving, and works furiously to assure that none ever hits the ground.

The juggler is especially skilled at what sociologist Erving Goffman called "the presentation of self in everyday life."¹¹ According to Goffman, the modern man or woman is like a performer enacting roles in order to manipulate the impressions of others. We provide scripted performances for each social situation, he believes. Even social situations that seem to be "natural" and "spontaneous" are typically ritualized performances designed to create a desired effect on the many different "audiences" we confront. The most successful and well-adjusted people, in Goffman's view, are those who are most adroit in selecting and enacting the appropriate performance for a given situation. For Goffman, we are the roles we juggle, and nothing more.

Psychiatrist Robert Jay Lifton employs a very different metaphor for essentially the same social phenomenon.¹² For Lifton, the juggler

is like the Greek god Proteus, who was capable of assuming any guise he chose. If he needed to be a dog, he could become a dog. If a situation called for a doctor, he could become a doctor. The protean man or woman is the modern adult who tries to be everything to everybody. Such a person may appear on the surface to be well-rounded and adjusted. He or she may be actively involved in a host of interests and avocations. But the protean person suffers from a profound inner emptiness. There is no coherence in his or her life. No unifying narrative binds together his or her disparate interests and activities. The self is split, and each part is alienated from the others.

Goffman's view of social life is deeply unsatisfying because he fails to discern an integrative sense of self—an identity—behind the many different roles we play. For Goffman, nothing transcends the particular behavioral performances we enact. We are here to play our roles, and that is all. What each of us thinks and feels about the roles we play would appear to be irrelevant. By contrast, Lifton is deeply troubled by the incessant role-playing of modern adult life. The juggler may be socially effective and admired by some, but when it comes to making our lives meaningful, we each must do more than merely juggle roles. We must find a way to subsume the roles within a larger and meaningfully patterned self, Lifton argues. We must find a way to bring the roles under the partial control of an organizing identity.

The mythic challenge of our twenties and thirties is to move beyond juggling roles into creating and refining imagoes. Imagoes are larger and more internalized than social roles. The general features of a given role are defined by the society within which the role is operational. With respect to social roles, a mother is a woman who bears and raises children, providing care and counsel and endeavoring to promote her children's development in accord with her own values and society's demands. A federal judge is a man or woman who presides over a courtroom trial, hears legal arguments, renders judgments in accord with law, and so on. These roles are elaborately scripted by societal norms and expectations, and we are all very familiar with them.

If a role is to become an imago, however, the role must be broadened to function as an aspect of the self that is applicable to a wide

range of life activities. A person whose life story contains a strong imago of the mother acts, thinks, and feels as does a mother in a variety of ways that go well beyond caring for biological or adopted children. He or she magnifies and personalizes the social role and situates it in a self-defining life story. Similarly, someone who develops an imago of the judge may be concerned, as a judge would be, about issues of justice and fairness in many different realms of life. The person might act and think as if he or she were a judge in situations in which even a real judge isn't one, as when with family and friends.

Imagoes may personify aspects of who you believe you are now, who you were, who you might be in the future, who you wish you were, or who you fear you might become. Any or all of these aspects of the self—the perceived self, the past self, the future self, the desired self, the undesired self—can be incorporated into the main characters of personal myths.¹³ Any or all of them can become an imago that dominates a particular chapter or personifies a particular theme, or idea in the story.

In the next chapter, I will illustrate different kinds of imagoes by describing selected cases from the many life-story interviews I and my associates have done. You will probably recognize parts of yourself in these descriptions, as well as particular characters that appear to play important roles in the life stories of friends, spouses, children, parents, and other people you know. The next chapter aims to flesh out an initial classification of imago types—a standard cast of characters for contemporary identity making. To provide additional background for that description, let me conclude this chapter by laying out six basic principles of imagoes. Each principle pertains to a particular way in which any imago may express itself as a central character in a personal myth.

Imagoes express our most cherished desires and goals. What we most want in life is often expressed in our identities as an idealized personification of the self. We are able to give voice to our basic desires by constructing characters in our stories who clearly personify what we want. Consider a thirty-five-year-old nurse with a strong power motive who wants to travel to exotic lands, loves to meet new people and experience new ways of life, and strives to explore her own potential by undertaking various kinds of therapy and by regu-

larly attending human-growth seminars. She fears getting stale or bored. Physically and psychologically, she wants to keep moving. A main character in her personal myth is the traveler, modeled after the Greek god Hermes, the messenger god who was always on the move. The woman's love of adventure and exploration, however, runs up against a competing desire to help others, to promote their health and welfare. This second and equally powerful set of desires is personified in a second main character, who might be called the healer. The woman's personal myth is a story about a traveler and a healer. The two imagoes became established as central characters in identity during her late twenties and early thirties, and their alternating passages of conflict, dominance, or harmony have determined her actions throughout her life.

Social psychologist Hazel Markus argues that our specific wants and fears are typically captured in what she calls "possible selves."¹⁴ According to Markus, a possible self is a well-articulated image a person has of what he or she might be, wants to be, or fears becoming. In her imagination, a struggling twenty-six-year-old writer may have envisioned a possible self as a Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist, living among the New York literati, regularly contributing erudite articles to *The New York Review of Books*, getting big advances from publishers, traveling to Europe to gather material for books, and so on. She may also have envisioned a possible self as a writer who never makes it. In this contrary scenario, she is never able to publish an article, short story, or book. She receives no recognition for her talents. She takes on a series of dead-end jobs, gets further into debt, and finally slumps forever into frustration and mediocrity. Markus's possible selves appear to be potential imagoes. They are characters who may or may not make their way onto the stage, depending on how life develops and how the story comes to be told.

Like characters in stories, imagoes enter myths in specific opening scenes. In stories, characters are born, they live, and they sometimes die. They do not gradually come or cease to be. A birth is as discontinuous an experience as a death. A person springs forth on to the scene. Similarly, a character enters a narrative all at once, as does, for instance, Prince Hamlet in act 1, scene 2 of Shakespeare's play, or Moses in chapter 2, verse 2 of Exodus. So it is in personal myth. As we reconstruct the past to create a narrative that makes sense to us,

we give birth to characters who personify key aspects of the self. In so doing, we often specify particular scenes in the story wherein characters "are born" or "come onto the stage." It is often at a high, low, or turning point that an imago finds a narrative mechanism for coming to be (see Appendix 2).

Imagoes personify our traits and recurrent behaviors. A trait is a linear dimension of behavior upon which persons can be said to differ.¹⁵ For example, people differ markedly in the trait of "friendliness." Some people are consistently more friendly than are others. Even though each of us is likely to be friendly in some particular situations and unfriendly in others, we would still agree that people can be rated or ranked on this dimension, from those who appear to be "very friendly" to those who appear to be "very unfriendly." A great deal of research shows that people can be reliably assessed in terms of a number of simple trait dimensions and that these ratings are relatively stable over time. People rate themselves reliably as well—a person's self-ratings tend to correlate with ratings others give to the person. People are generally aware of their own traits.

Whereas a person's "motives" or "desires" refer to what a person wants in life, traits are more concerned with consistent styles of behavior. Each of us has spent a lifetime observing our own behavior and implicitly comparing it to the behavior of others. Therefore, most of us have a pretty good sense of how we stack up to others on such trait dimensions as "friendliness," "dominance," "impulsiveness," "conscientiousness," and so on.¹⁶ Our self-attributed traits are likely to make their way into our personal myths. A man who sees himself as extremely "spontaneous" may create an imago that is fun-loving, impulsive, and playful, thereby translating this trait into a narrative character. Imagoes provide a narrative vehicle whereby a person can embody self-ascribed traits.

Imagoes give voice to individual and cultural values. All societies generate stock characters that personify those beliefs and standards that society as a whole (or a significant segment of society) holds in greatest esteem. The character furnishes people at a given time and in a given place with a cultural and moral ideal, legitimating a particular mode of social existence. For example, Robert Bellah suggests that "the independent citizen" served as a representative moral character type for early-nineteenth-century Americans.¹⁷

Reaching its culmination in the life of Abraham Lincoln, the independent citizen was the self-made, self-sufficient farmer or craftsman of small-town America who held strongly to biblical teachings and was fiercely devoted to the values of freedom and autonomy. The independent citizen captured the ideological spirit of the times; he was the moral exemplar of a young and idealistic nation.

The moral character types of which Bellah speaks are general models around which adults can pattern their own lives and articulate their own more personalized characterizations of self. Like moral character types at the societal level, imagoes often reflect personal values and beliefs. Significant aspects of an adult's ideological setting may be clearly expressed in imagoes. A fundamentalist Christian may develop an imago of the evangelist, a character devoted to spreading the Christian gospel to all who have yet to accept it. A Christian with a slightly different perspective may create an imago of "the loyal friend," seeing in Saint Paul's teachings on love and charity the ideological inspiration for his or her own life. Outside the realm of religion, imagoes may personify ethical, political, and aesthetic values. A prime function of imagoes in some personal myths is to be a mouthpiece or an exemplar for what a person holds to be right, true, and beautiful.

Imagoes are often built around significant others. Beyond the character types offered by society at large, adults fashion their imagoes on models provided by parents, teachers, siblings, friends, and many other significant people they have known. Ultimately, imagoes are forged from interpersonal relationships. A significant person in one's life may serve as a flesh-and-blood incarnation of what a particular imago represents. One's own mother may serve as a model for the imago of the caregiver. A beloved teacher who helps clear up some academic and personal confusions may prove to be the prototype for an imago of the healer.

There exists today a strong movement in clinical psychology and psychotherapy suggesting that we all "internalize" important people in our lives and structure our personalities around these internalizations. According to the "object relations" approach to personality, people for whom we feel strong emotions ultimately become represented in our unconscious minds as personified structures.¹⁸ The infant will build up an unconscious representation of mother as a

result of early experience, and this enduring representation will come to exert substantial influence on the course of interpersonal relationships many years down the road. Over time, many different objects (representations of persons) are formed within, each carving out its own territory in the unconscious. Neurosis may result from excessive conflict among different internalized objects, or from "splitting," through which certain objects seem to leave the confederation of the self and become inner mischiefmakers. Healthy development involves the integration of different objects, and the healing of splits through relationships of love and caring.

Imagoes would appear to be life-story derivatives of early object relations. In other words, certain main characters in personal myth may spring from the intrapsychic sources of internalized objects. In some cases, we write our main characters according to guidelines of which we are not consciously aware. The guidelines are embodied in those unconscious representations we have accrued as a result of a lifetime of loving, hating, and being with other people.

Psychotherapist Mary Watkins likens internalized objects to inner voices engaged in dialogue.¹⁹ The hallmark of healthy psychological development, from Watkins's point of view, is the progressive elaboration of different characters within, and the continuous enhancement of imaginal dialogues among those characters. In therapy, Watkins encourages her clients to explore the many different personified "presences" in their minds—the lovers, warriors, sages, children, teachers, friends, and others who populate the psyche. As each presence comes to be known, its voice becomes clearer and more distinctive, and it is able to engage other internal presences in meaningful dialogue.

Watkins strongly values openness and diversity in intrapsychic structure. She deemphasizes the modern problem of the multiplicity of the adult self, for she seems to believe that being many different things is, by and large, a good thing. Her approach appears to be less concerned with unity and purpose than is the viewpoint I have been advocating. Still, Watkins's way of thinking about imaginal dialogues is useful when applied to imagoes. A personal myth may be seen as a complex set of imaginal dialogues involving different imagoes developing over narrative time.

Imagoes may signal a fundamental life conflict. Most good stories are

predicated upon some sort of conflict between competing interests, goals, and characters. At the story's end, the conflict is resolved. So it is in personal myth. Conflicting imagoes are as much the norm as the exception in identity, and many life stories are organized around starkly polarized characters. For some adults in their twenties and thirties, the split between work and home selves gives rise to a parallel dichotomy in their personal myths as they try to satisfy opposing goals of agency and communion. Consider a thirty-year-old female attorney who constructs a life story in which an agentic imago of the successful and aggressive lawyer must share the stage with a nurturing caregiver. There does not seem to be room for both. Conflicts may also occur within the general thematic domains of power and love. The caregiver may conflict with the friend. The sage and the warrior may work at cross purposes. Personal myths do not always produce the most congenial imaginal dialogues.

Personal myths are frequently dominated by central conflicts through which imagoes act, interact, converse, argue, develop, do combat, and make peace. Within the context of the single story, different characters want a multitude of things. Many voices want to be heard. Between the ages of about twenty and forty, it would appear that the adult is psychologically engaged in creating a personal myth that allows various characters to establish their roles and find their voices. It is likely that the roles will eventually conflict and the voices will clash. A certain degree of narrative confusion should result, and this would appear to be good. We should not expect as adults to reconcile and fully resolve the central conflicts of identity during the third and fourth decades of our lives. During this time, characters are still seeking their unique roles within the self-defining story. And the story is still seeking its unique form to accommodate faithfully all the different characters and their different developmental paths.

Agentic and Communal Characters

Since at least the nineteenth century, adult citizens of Western democracies have crafted their identities to accommodate the dualism of modern life. To be powerful in work and loving at home—ideally, this is what most of us want, even if we find it extraordinarily difficult to attain. But we do not all want power and love to the same extent or in the same way. Some personal myths are dominated by agentic imagoes whose forceful efforts push the plot forward. Other life stories present a more communal cast of characters who act in the primary service of love and intimacy. Some characters are agentic and communal at once. Still others seem to avoid both power and love.

Each character is a personalized representation of a particular mode of being adult. Therefore, each life story contains unique main characters. But certain common character forms may be identified across different personal myths. Under the rubric of agency are the standard characters of the warrior, the traveler, the sage, and the maker, among others. Communion's imagoes include the lover, the caregiver, the friend, and the ritualist, as well as others. Each of these imago types represents a recognizable social form in human life.

There is nothing mystical or mysteriously biological about the imago types. While I am not averse to Jungian analyses, I find