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**One and One-Half Friends:  
A Laingian Approach to Katherine Paterson's *Bridge to Terabithia***

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**Abstract**

Katherine Paterson's beloved children's story, *Bridge to Terabithia* (1977), explores the relationship of a young boy named Jess to his family, to his best friend Leslie, and to the nature of tragedy. Paterson demonstrates that learning to cope with senseless accidents is a part of growing up, but that learning to cope does not mean changing or losing our sense of identity. This paper, using a psychoanalytic Laingian approach to Katherine Paterson's *Bridge to Terabithia*, reveals Jess' relationships to himself and to others and how his interactions and perceptions influence the development of these relationships. Laing's theory demonstrates that Jess' character development parallels that of an infant. The distinction of self and other leads to the formation of multiple personalities at various stages of development, and, in the case of lack of affirmation from others and/or from the self, these personalities may never develop to maturity- whether through abandonment, suppression, or abrupt changes in how one perceives and/or relates to others. Jess' self-protection tactics, such as dehumanization, prevent him from forming positive and lasting relationships, which in turn perpetuates his ontological insecurity. It is only Leslie's interventional friendship and mother-bond that gives him a foundation on which to build his identity. When the foundation is ripped away, his identity collapses, but Jess now has the tools he needs to rebuild himself without her.

**Keywords:** Friendship, Laingian Analysis, Identity, Self, Other.