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**The Journey Within: Voices of Spiritual Conflict**

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**The Journey Within: Voices of Spiritual Conflict**

Jack Kerouac, J.D. Salinger, John Knowles, and F. Scott Fitzgerald are all American writers attempting to unravel the complexities regarding an emotional war, one that takes place inside an individual in need of a more satisfying life. Each writer similarly evokes the challenges faced by characters in search of spiritual fulfillment. From the death of a brother, to the crumbling of a marriage, to the death of a friend, and finally to the life of an abandoned son, a loner in the world, each character portrays the difficulty of the pursuit of spiritual happiness. These authors create young men who are fighting for themselves and their place in the world. They are faced with the predicament of finding a way to survive in an environment where they fight to overcome loss and rise above the very social conventions pushing them down. Salinger's Holden Caulfield, Kerouac's Sal Paradise, Knowles' Gene Forrester, and Fitzgerald's Amory Blaine are all struggling to attain spiritual freedom. In a fight against social norms, each character is faced with a unique fate. The very glue that holds these characters together is the determining factor in whether or not

they become spiritually fulfilled. In other words, each character is highly influenced by his interaction with a spiritual guide. The guide's effectiveness is conveyed by the state of each main character at the end of each novel.

### **The Journey of the Spirit**

From romance to religion, both Jack Kerouac and J.D. Salinger have been discussed in terms of their similar subject matter. Critics have chosen to focus their studies of these two authors on their most notable works, Kerouac's *On the Road*, the voice of the Beat Generation, and Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*, the voice of high school students and college freshman across America. These two novels are brought together by critic Robert A. Hipkiss because the heroes share the same fear, "that to move into adulthood in American society is to destroy oneself spiritually" (Hipkiss 96). My theory that a spiritual journey takes place in both of these novels is closely related to this idea of avoiding the spiritual destruction brought on by social constraints.

Kerouac's *On the Road* is often interpreted as a study of the meaning emanating from the new highways of post-World War II America. As Roger N. Casey puts it:

[With] *On the Road* Kerouac caught a novel feeling, putting his finger on the pulse of a new post-war

American heartbeat of restlessness, discontent, juvenility, and most importantly, movement. While the Beats did not look to the future with utopian vision, they nonetheless agreed on the road as the site for transformation. (108)

With more emphasis on the road than on the relationship between Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty, some critics choose to bypass the quintessential meaning of the text, or the spiritual connection magically created by *On the Road*. However, as criticism continues to search for new points of discussion regarding *On the Road*, the American automobile and the American highway remain at the forefront. Quite often critics focus on the religious base of Kerouac's text with an analysis of the Buddhism in the novel. However, my theory remains most closely related to an observation written by Ann Charters in her Introduction to *On the Road*:

[Kerouac's friend] Holmes understood that the characters in *On the Road* were actually on a quest, and that the specific object of their quest was spiritual. Though they rushed back and forth across the country on the slightest pretext, gathering kicks along the way, their real journey was inward; and if they seemed to trespass most boundaries, legal and

moral, it was only in hope of finding a belief on the other side. (xxx)

As much as I agree with Charters and Holmes, my theory turns this idea of an individual quest into an adventure produced by the significant relationship between two people. In other words, my theory of a spiritual journey is based on the interaction between a spiritual guide and its disciple.

Like Kerouac's book, Salinger's work is often discussed in terms of the Zen Buddhism inspiring his character's actions. Also found in accounts made by several of Salinger's critics is the common response of idealizing Holden Caulfield. However, there are others who go against the grain on this issue. For example, Duane Edwards states:

Holden shares in the phoniness he loathes; that he lives by his unconscious needs and not the values he espouses; that he withdraws from rather than faces the challenge of personal relationships...It's not difficult to understand why readers have ignored, or have failed to perceive, Holden's grave deficiencies as a person.

After all he is very appealing on the surface.. (1)

However, while Edwards chooses to fault critics for not seeing Holden for what he really is, Edwin Haviland Miller attacks critics for not stopping to take a closer look at why Holden is so unsettled. Miller states, "Most critics have tended to

accept Holden's evaluation of the world as phony, when in fact his attitudes are symptomatic of a serious psychological problem" (132). Rather than view Holden as a victim of an "insensitive world" (132), Miller chooses to read Holden's rebellious behavior as his way of dealing with his brother's death. However, as much as Miller declares that what Holden really needs to do is let Allie "rest in peace" (143), there is much more to Holden's discomfort. John Seelye writes, "whether you style it a "quest" or a "flight," Holden's trip has no final destination, being a passage without a rite" (27). Between Miller and Seelye it can be concluded that Allie's death causes problems and Holden is sent on a journey to resolve those very problems. From my perspective, Holden is indeed on a journey. However, Holden is on a quest with a definite purpose, to rid himself of the pain caused by the loss of Allie, but also to come to terms with the fact that Allie's goodness and unselfishness is a rarity in the adult world. Holden insists that his brother must show him that something genuine is associated with the adult world. Holden refuses to let go of his dead brother Allie until he finds that some sense of purity exists within the adult world.

Numerous critical studies exist on Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* and J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*. Whether it be a critical discussion on the structure of their writing styles,

an analysis of their thoughts on love, their inability to accept hypocrisy, the fact remains that these two authors are tied together by their interest in life as a spiritual experience.

Themes of loss, movement, and imagination resonate throughout Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* and J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*. Kerouac's Sal Paradise and Salinger's Holden Caulfield are both seeking a solution to their dissatisfaction with the world around them. Haunted by troubling memories, both Sal and Holden try to find their way to a place that liberates them from their past mistakes and sadness. Through the use of spiritual guides and ideas of recreation and renewal of the self, both look to achieve happiness. Holden may confine himself to the narrow streets of New York City, while Sal opens himself to the vast highways across America, but the fact remains that both of these archetypal heroes are on a similar journey. They are on a spiritual quest to rid themselves of the pain of the past. In order to reach their goals, both Sal and Holden rely on movement and imagination to free and renew their wounded spirits.

Revealed in the opening lines of Kerouac's *On the Road* is Sal Paradise's longing to escape the sadness brought on him by his past:



I first met Dean not long after my wife and I split up. I had just gotten over a serious illness that I won't bother to talk about, except that it had something to do with the miserable weary split-up and my feeling that everything was dead. With the coming of Dean Moriarty began the part of my life you could call my life on the road. (Kerouac 3)

Sal's life "on the road" initially serves as an escape from the heartbreak he describes in this beginning passage. He longs to close this difficult chapter of his life; with the "coming of Dean" he sees a chance for renewal. With the help of Dean, Sal is able to enter into a new stage of his life.

Just as Kerouac's novel begins with the haunting memory of a damaged past, Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* also introduces its main character with a description of some of his most recent failures. When the reader first encounters Holden Caulfield, he is standing on a hill at Pencey School. Holden informs the reader that he wasn't applying himself to his academics, so he was kicked out of school. He states:

What I was really hanging around for, I was trying to feel some kind of good-by. I mean I've left schools and places I didn't even know I was leaving them. I hate that. I don't care if it's a sad good-by or a bad good-by, but when I leave a place I like to know

I'm leaving it. If you don't, you feel even worse.

(Salinger 4)

Holden, like Sal Paradise, is in the process of closing a chapter of his life. In his attempt to find some sort of closure, whether it be "sad" or "bad," he is also trying to leave the "Pencey" stage of his life behind.

Unlike Sal, who has already entered a new stage, known as his "life on the road," Holden is seen here trying to find his next stage. The fact remains, however, that both Sal and Holden are challenged by their own failures and devastated by loss. They are left with the struggle involved in moving on.

As a direct result of the disappointments in their past experiences, they both undertake a spiritual journey. Both want to heal their emotional wounds by finding a way to a world without all of the imperfections of the cruel world in which they live. Sal describes the difficulty of this journey when he states:

Isn't it true that you start your life a sweet child believing in everything under your father's roof? Then comes the day of the Laodiceans, when you know you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked, and with the visage of a grieving ghost you go shuddering through nightmare life. (Kerouac 105)

In their strong desire to distance themselves from the spiritually corrupt civilization revealed in these lines, both Sal and Holden realize that they cannot face such an arduous journey against the world alone. Therefore, both rely on a specific person to serve as a spiritual guide. These chosen individuals are spiritual guides in that they serve not only as catalysts for the quests taken on by Sal and Holden, but also as companions throughout their travels toward a perfect world.

In the case of Sal Paradise, Dean Moriarty is the inspiration for his adventure on the road. Dean gets Sal to take action and travel to the West. Most importantly, Dean serves as a metaphor for the life beyond reality, the life that Sal so badly wants to achieve. Sal explains why he wants to know Dean after meeting him:

And his criminality was not something that sulked and sheered; it was a wild yea-saying outburst of American joy; it was Western, the west wind, an ode from the Plains, something new, long prophesied, long a-coming (he only stole cars for joy rides). Besides, all my New York friends were in the negative, nightmare position of putting down society and giving their tired bookish or political or psychoanalytical reasons, but Dean just raced in society, eager for bread and love; he didn't care one way or the

other...A western kinsman of the sun, Dean...I could hear a new call and see a new horizon...somewhere along the line I knew there'd be girls, visions, everything; somewhere along the line the pearl would be handed to me. (Kerouac 10-11)

Sal wants to know more about Dean because he is such a refreshing change from all that Sal had previously known. Dean is inherently different from those who sit around and dissect and analyze. Dean lives completely in the moment and Sal wants to lead a similarly carefree existence. Dean means new experience and a life that Sal has never yet lived. Even though Sal is aware in the back of his mind that this life without responsibility cannot last forever, he still wants to live it as long as he can. For a brief period of time, Dean's guidance allows Sal to liberate himself from the weariness of his enervating memories. Dean is Sal's spiritual guide, as he helps Sal to liberate his soul from the guilt and regret of his past.

Even though Dean's free lifestyle does not last forever, its impact on Sal remains positive. Dean teaches Sal how to get the most out of the moment. Unfortunately, however, Holden Caulfield's spiritual guide is much more problematic. Holden's brother, Allie, serves as his guide throughout the text. Holden's spiritual quest for a perfect world lies within the

devastation he is facing from the death of Allie Caulfield. Holden cannot come to terms with this loss and is therefore left in the world of the living, trying to understand why his loved one has been taken from him. Faced with regret, guilt, and loneliness, Holden struggles to find a way to escape into a society without the phoniness of modern day culture. He also attempts to close up the void within himself created by Allie's death. However, his search is unsuccessful because he does not look for positive fulfillment. Instead, he tries to heal himself by denouncing all that the modern world stands for. He states, "Anyway, I'm sort of glad they've got the atomic bomb invented. If there's ever another war, I'm going to sit right the hell on top of it. I'll volunteer for it, I swear I will" (Salinger 141). Holden's desire to be at the top of the world's destruction not only shows his disgust for what society stands for, but also the emotional turmoil brought on by his brother's death. He blames the world and its falsehoods for taking something so good from his life. As a result, he is left tortured and empty inside.

Allie can be construed as Holden's spiritual guide, because he is one of the only things Holden feels he can rely on. This is ironic because, even though Allie is dead, Holden still chooses to confide in him. Holden insists that he can still

have a relationship with Allie. This misconception shows Holden's refusal to believe that Allie is gone from his life.

Holden's rather insightful younger sister, Phoebe, questions Holden about whether or not there is anything in the world that he likes. Holden responds by saying, "I like Allie" (Salinger 171). Phoebe attacks Holden for this statement. As she begins to explain that if someone is dead they should no longer be considered friends or companions, Holden stops her before she can finish. He does not want to hear about how he needs to adjust to Allie's death. He immediately reacts defensively and states:

I know he's dead! Don't you think I know that? I can still like him, though, can't I? Just because somebody's dead, you don't just stop liking them, for God's sake--especially if they were about a thousand times nicer than the people you know that're alive and all. (Salinger 171)

Holden's justification for relying on Allie is that the rest of society is overflowing with people who are not morally good enough to believe in. Holden uses Allie as his guide toward a perfect world because he views Allie as an image of goodness. Holden longs to be surrounded by a world full of people as good as Allie.

Although Holden begins his account of his life and loss with a description of his failures in the academic arena, his most severe confrontation with loss is Allie's death. It takes Holden a good portion of the text to inform the reader of the root of his problems. Holden states:

When the weather's nice, my parents go out quite frequently and stick a bunch of flowers on old Allie's grave. I went with them a couple of times, but I cut it out. In the first place, I certainly don't enjoy seeing him in that crazy cemetery surrounded by dead guys and tombstones and all. It wasn't too bad when the sun was out, but twice-twice-we were there when it started to rain. It was awful. It rained on his lousy tombstone, and it rained on the grass on his stomach. It rained all over the place...All the visitors could get in their cars...and go someplace everybody except Allie. I couldn't stand it. I know it's only his body and all that's in the cemetery...I just wish he wasn't there. You didn't know him. If you'd known him, you'd know what I mean. It's not too bad when the sun's out, but the sun only comes out when it feels like coming out. (Salinger 155-156)

This passage reveals the traumatic effects of Allie's death on Holden. He not only has a difficult time dealing with the fact

that Allie is gone, he also attacks the natural world for not respecting Allie in death. Holden is horrified by rain falling on Allie's grave and by the sun's inconstancy in shining upon his grave plot. Holden rejects human acceptance of nature as a higher order, beyond human control. Instead, he is angered by its unpredictable ways. As a result, Holden not only attacks those who can get in their cars and turn away from the death looming over the graveyard, but also the natural world for not showing "respect" for those who left the world as he knows it. Undoubtedly, Holden is disturbed by this loss and in some strange way he expects his dead brother to get him through his devastation.

Throughout the narrative, Holden is overwhelmed by many fears. Near the end of the novel, he begins to fear that at any given moment, he may disappear. As Holden walks from block to block, he fears that he will not make it to the other side of the street. In order to overcome his fear of disappearing in the middle of the street, he calls upon his brother Allie to save him. Holden states, "Everytime I'd get to the end of a block I'd make believe I was talking to my brother Allie. I'd say to him, "Allie, don't let me disappear. Please, Allie." And then when I'd reach the other side of the street without disappearing, I'd thank him" (Salinger 198). This passage is paradoxical in that even though Holden's fear of suddenly



leaving the physical world is brought on by his brother's death, he also calls upon his dead brother to save him from vanishing. It is obvious that Allie could not fight his own "disappearance" from the world of the living, so it is ironic that Holden expects Allie to help him get through life.

Holden tries to find his way in life through someone who is no longer alive. Therefore, through death Holden hopes to reawaken himself in life. It is obvious that as a result of this belief Holden will face many problems in completing his journey toward fulfillment. Sal Paradise is also unable to achieve a perfect world. However, he at least tries to gain fulfillment through a figure that he deems to be full of life and energy.

It has been established that both Sal and Holden are on a spiritual journey toward a perfect world. They both want to live in a place where they feel free of the loss that they have faced in their lives. Therefore, since they are on a journey, they are indeed attracted to movement. They keep moving through places in their lives in order to reach their final destination of a pressureless world.

*On the Road* documents Sal's spiritual and physical journey between the East and the West and eventually the South (Mexico). Initially, he feels that the West will free him. Sal's description of his encounter with a Nebraska farmer serves as a

metaphor for his definition of the West. According to Sal, the West is the embodiment of joyousness and encompasses all that is free and kind:

I heard a great laugh, the greatest laugh in the world, and here came this rawhide old-timer Nebraska farmer with a bunch of other boys into the diner...Everybody else laughed with him. He didn't have a care in the world and had the hugest regard for everybody. I said to myself, Wham, listen to that man laugh. That's the West, here I am in the West...It was the spirit of the West sitting right next to me. I wished I knew his whole raw life and what the hell he'd been doing all these years besides laughing and yelling like that. (Kerouac 21)

Sal's vision of the West supports his belief that it is possible he will one day find a place where he can live free of concerns, among others who will never cause him pain. His desire for the "spirit of the West" conveys his need to escape the suffering of his past. Sal wants to be reborn in the West, liberated from the sad truths he mentions in the opening lines of the novel.

As stated earlier, Sal's travels are inspired by Dean Moriarty. He sees Dean as a sort of prophet who will help him find his free world. Sal describes his spiritual guide as:

the ghost on the sidewalk. I looked out the window. He was alone in the doorway, digging the street. Bitterness, recriminations, advice, morality, sadness, everything was behind him, and ahead of him was the ragged and ecstatic joy of pure being. (Kerouac 195)

Through this description, it is obvious that Sal draws strong parallels between the freedom that Dean represents and the spirit of the West. Sal relies on Dean as a spiritual guide toward self-fulfillment and Dean acts out his role as spiritual guide when he asks Sal, "What's your road, man?-holy boy road, madman road, rainbow road, guppy road, any road. It's an anywhere road for anybody anyhow. Where body how?" (Kerouac 251). These lines reveal the great emphasis placed on the road as a means for Sal's attainment of his dream world. In order to complete his spiritual quest, he must decide which type of road he wants to take. The only way he's going to find his way is if he keeps on moving toward his goal. His spiritual guide serves as a reminder that the road is the avenue to the renewed spirit. Through his travels, Sal will finally be able to reinvent himself and start anew.

Similar to Sal, Holden continues to physically move around in order to reach the positive world he hopes to find at the end of his spiritual journey. Holden moves from school to school and throughout New York City during the course of the novel.

Through his attendance at several private schools and his travelling to various places in New York City, it is obvious that Holden is unsettled. He moves from place to place in an attempt to find somewhere that he feels comfortable with himself and the surroundings. Unfortunately for Holden, he cannot find such a place.

A strong correlation lies between Holden and Sal, since they both have a desire for the West. Just as Sal desires to be reborn in the West, Holden also has a powerful longing to reinvent himself in the West. In two sections of the narrative, Holden clearly states that he is going to head out West. In the first section, after Phoebe figures out that he was kicked out of Pencey, he describes his future plans:

Nobody's gonna kill me. Use your head. In the first place, I'm going away. What I may do, I may get a job on a ranch or something for awhile. I know this guy whose grandfather's got a ranch in Colorado. I may get a job out there. (Salinger 165)

In the second section, Holden explains:

I'd start hitchhiking my way out West...in a few days I'd be somewhere out West where it was very pretty and sunny and where nobody'd know me and I'd get a job...I didn't care what kind of job it was, though. Just so

people didn't know me and I didn't know anybody.

(Salinger 198)

Holden's answer to his failure is not to correct it by enrolling in another school and applying himself. Instead, he plans to run away from his problems. He believes that because he thinks of the West as defined by freedom, it will in turn free him. He fails to face up to the fact that wherever he goes his problems will follow. Holden does not face his problems head-on. He would rather just keep on moving from place to place, trying to leave his problems at each location. In addition, he believes that Allie can guide him to a place free from the social demands of contemporary society. Upon finding this morally uncorrupt civilization, he plans to reinvent himself into a person free from inner conflict.

Haunted by loss, both Sal and Holden embark upon spiritual journeys. They have similar expectations of someday finding a new and better world where they can live without the falsehoods of contemporary society. They both feel beaten down by the superficial ways of the modern world. In one passage, Sal describes his idea of "Paper America," his view of the tortured soul in modern living:

Suddenly I found myself on Times Square...and right in the middle of a rush hour, too, seeing with my innocent road-eyes the absolute madness and fantastic

hoorair of New York with its millions and millions hustling forever for a buck among themselves, the mad dream-grabbing, taking, giving, sighing, dying, just so they could be buried in those awful cemetery cities beyond Long Island City. (Kerouac 106)

Here, Sal is pictured trying to reach for what he wants and instead of getting it, he is overcome by the unkind crowd. The selfish world pays him no mind and offers no assistance.

Holden's numerous descriptions of the "phoniness" he continually sees around him are analogous to Sal's description of "Paper America." Holden's account of a woman he observed in the movie theater displays his anger at this phoniness:

The part that got me was, there was a lady sitting next to me that cried all through the goddam picture. The phonier it got, the more she cried. You'd have thought she did it because she was kind hearted as hell, but I was sitting right next to her, and she wasn't. She had this little kid with her that was bored as hell and had to go to the bathroom, but she wouldn't take him. She was about as kind hearted as a goddam wolf. You take somebody that cries their goddam eyes out over phony stuff in the movies, and

nine times out of ten they're mean bastards at heart.

(Salinger 140)

According to Holden's harsh account of this event, adults have a humane facade, but evil is always lurking underneath. Like Sal, Holden feels overwhelmed by the cruelty he witnesses. His rather bleak view of the adult world manifests itself in his description of the woman as a "goddam wolf," whereby, she is depicted as sneaky and evil. To Holden, adults are the root of social corruption because they only care about bettering themselves. Holden is not only disturbed by their selfishness, but also by their poor treatment of children. He is deeply concerned by how children are treated because he believes them to be the only people worth anything in the cruel world.

Sal and Holden search for an escape from the poor treatment displayed by many adults. For both Sal and Holden, imagination is all that they can turn to for relief. They are guided by fantasy, their creation of a better place. Sal follows Dean because he views him as a prophet who has come to guide him to "IT," Sal's dreamworld away from all the burdens of his environment. In reality this "IT" does not exist, but in the imaginary world which Sal and Dean co-exist in and co-create, "IT" becomes a place that is just within reach.

Holden also relies on fantasy to help him cope with his troubles with the world. Although similar to Sal's, Holden's

fantasy is taken to another level. He not only wants to live in a perfect world, but he also wants to be the hero of it. His explanation of the "catcher in the rye" describes his ideal world:

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

The absence of adults in a world full of children is a dream to Holden. He longs to live in a place where the innocence of children is preserved and safeguarded for eternity. He has a desire to keep children from entering adulthood because he wants to maintain pure goodness. Holden feels that once a child becomes an adult, he is tainted for life. His fantasy of being the "catcher in the rye" is his way of coping with what he sees to be a very troubled society.

Sal and Holden are tied together by their belief that they will find a way to transcend reality. They both desire to be



reborn in a more positive and fulfilling environment than contemporary America. Sal looks to the West throughout the novel and, ironically, gets as close as he will ever get to his spiritual haven when he travels South into Mexico. He is let down by his fantasy of the West, because his expectations are left unfulfilled. He also loses faith in his spiritual guide. Dean Moriarty is eventually consumed by his own family responsibilities and is no longer the embodiment of freedom, life, and energy. He reveals, "When I got better I realized what a rat he was, but then I had to understand the impossible complexity of his life, how he had to leave me...to get on with his wives and woes" (Kerouac 303). Sal realizes that Dean is no longer the adventurer that he once was, and he is therefore left alone to come to terms with the loss of his spiritual guide.

Fortunately, despite his various disappointments, Sal takes comfort in his memories of his adventures with Dean. In the last lines of *On the Road*, Sal states, "I think of Dean Moriarty, I even think of Old Dean Moriarty, the father we never found, I think of Dean Moriarty" (Kerouac 310). It is obvious that Dean has a positive impact on Sal. At the conclusion of the narrative, Sal is no longer mourning past loss, but pondering over an image of lively spirited energy, the image of the Dean he knew during his "life on the road."

Much like Sal, Holden is left unable to transcend reality into the imaginary world he has created for himself. As he moves through New York City he looks toward a better life in the West, a life far removed from his troubles in New York. Unfortunately, Holden expects his dead brother, Allie, to help him through his rough time. He fails to recognize that his dead brother is no longer connected to the physical world and therefore cannot assist him in his quest for spiritual happiness. Holden's refusal to come to terms with Allie's separation from the physical world only results in a more painful search for a better life.

Unfortunately for Holden, at the conclusion of the novel he remains emotionally unsettled. Holden would like to escape the adult world and the confines of education. However, he is institutionalized to learn how to better deal with both of these elements. It is ironic that he is being rehabilitated to become a more fit member of a society he so desperately wants to get away from.

Through Holden's final words, it is obvious that he continues to feel much of the emotional anguish he had conveyed in the beginning of the narrative. He states, "Don't ever tell anybody anything. If you do, you start missing everybody" (Salinger 214). The psychoanalysts are forcing Holden to share the events of his life in order to bring his emotional problems

to the forefront. Evidently, Holden does not appreciate having to suffer through the process of facing his demons.

At the end of the *Catcher in the Rye*, Holden continues to struggle with the rules of contemporary society, while at the conclusion of *On the Road*, Sal Paradise has found his own sense of inner peace. Despite their opposing situations, at the end of each novel, in the mind of the reader, they both remain affected by loss, movement, and imagination. They both are unsuccessful in their search for spiritual fulfillment. Instead, let down by fantasy, they are left in reality, trying once again to survive in the depths of a troubled society.

#### **Quest for Peace**

John Knowles' *A Separate Peace* is undoubtedly an emotional portrayal of spiritual growth. Robert A. Hipkiss claims that with this novel Knowles shows his "concern with the movement of youth into a hypocritical and competitive adult world" (97). Knowles himself has even reported that *A Separate Peace* "is a story of growth through tragedy" (Bryant 11). Although it has been discussed in terms of its Adamic imagery and Christian symbolism, or unjustifiably attacked for its lack of character development, the fact remains that *A Separate Peace* focuses on one character's emotional journey towards spiritual fulfillment. Hipkiss argues that:

Gene, at the end, feels "Phineas-filled," having learned by Phineas's example to love forgivingly and to live for what one can be unto oneself without the compulsion to win out over others at the cost of unkindness and injury. (113)

Hallman Bryant shares Hipkiss's idea that Finny's death has a positive impact on Gene. In a similar fashion, Bryant describes his theory regarding the conclusion of *A Separate Peace*:

Those qualities in Finny that were most vital and life-giving are assumed by Gene, while the negative traits are exorcised by Finny's death. Gene's psyche is integrated and harmonized by the forgiveness and love that Finny extended to his friend. (109)

Both Hipkiss and Bryant point out that at the end of the novel Gene has learned from his friend Phineas and therefore has overcome his loss and guilt, while assuming a positive attitude toward life. My theory draws strong parallels to the ideas of Hipkiss and Bryant. It also further develops the role of Phineas, from teacher to the strongest influence upon Gene's life.

Personal growth and the quest for a more peaceful state of being are the main focus of John Knowles' *A Separate Peace*. Much like Sal Paradise and Holden Caulfield, Gene Forrester, is

also searching for spiritual fulfillment. Gene interacts with a spiritual guide and relies on his memory of his past in order to achieve his spiritual goals. Throughout the entire novel Gene fights to come to terms with his past choices and relations.

In the opening of *A Separate Peace*, Gene is taking a walk through his former school. He observes both old and new details of the grounds that he had lived on fifteen years before. As he wanders through he makes note of both his memories of the school's physical atmosphere and the emotional memories of his days passed. He describes his impression of this visit:

Now here it was after all, preserved by some considerate hand with varnish and wax. Preserved along with it, like stale air in an unopened room, was the well known fear which had surrounded and filled those days, so much of it that I hadn't even known it was there. Because, unfamiliar with the absence of fear and what that was like, I had not been able to identify its presence. Looking back now across fifteen years, I could see with great clarity the fear I had lived in, which must mean that I had succeeded in a very important undertaking: I must have made my escape from it. (Knowles 1)

Gene mentions the idea of escaping the fear that consumed his life during his "Devon" days. He suggests that now that he is

capable of looking back upon this fear with "clarity," he has in essence liberated himself from this damaging emotional state.

Although Gene finds himself freed from the darkness of his school days, he has a few specific instances that he still needs to come to terms with while visiting the Devon School. Gene is depicted as an adult reentering the darkness of his past in order to find more than an escape from his former fears.

Instead, Gene wants to gain an understanding of why he made certain choices during his adolescence. He also wants to find a way to expel the guilt and horror that surround his former days. Gene describes the reason for his journey back to Devon:

I felt fear's echo, and along with that I felt the unhinged, uncontrollable joy which had been its accompaniment and opposite face, joy which had broken out sometimes in those days like Northern Lights across black sky. There were a couple of places now which I wanted to see. Both were fearful sites, and that was why I wanted to see them. So after lunch at the Devon Inn I walked back toward the school.

(Knowles 1)

On Gene's walk through Devon, he speaks of achieving "growth" and "harmony" (Knowles 4). Evidently, his visit has a definite purpose: to leave old ghosts behind him and gain an inner peace about his past experiences.

In the beginning of his journey through Devon, Gene goes directly to the location where one of the most tragic incidents of his "Devon" life took place--the tree where his friend Phineas tragically fell. As he describes his view of the tree as an adult, fifteen years removed from the horrors of the past, it becomes evident that this walk through Devon is not only a hike through an old school, but also a spiritual journey toward a new perspective on a time far gone:

This was the tree, and it seemed to me standing there to resemble those men, the giants of your childhood, whom you encounter years later and find that they are not merely smaller in relation to your growth, but that they are absolutely smaller, shrunken by age. In this double demotion the old giants have become pigmies while you were looking the other way.

The tree was not only stripped by the cold season, it seemed weary from age, enfeebled, dry. I was thankful, very thankful that I had seen it. So the more things remain the same, the more they change after all... Nothing endures, not a tree, not love, not even a death by violence.

Changed. I headed back through the mud. I was drenched; anybody could see it was time to come in out of the rain. (Knowles 6)

Gene faces his spiritual journey with faith that he will be able to heal his emotional wounds. There is great significance in his observation that the old tree is no longer as tremendous as he once thought it to be. He realizes that with the shrinking of the tree in his mind, the magnitude of his tragic memories has also decreased. He claims that "nothing endures" and, therefore, he will at some point be capable of eliminating the terror of his past from his mind. At the sight of the old tree, or the root of his suffering, Gene finds that no problem is too large to solve. This is a very symbolic passage in his journey, as it is here that he decides he can return from the rain. It is a major step in the renewal of his wounded spirit. The rain pours over him as a form of baptism. Once his old self is fully cleansed he can enter into a new stage, free of past unhappiness. At this moment, he chooses to see things in a new light. Here, he begins to find a clear view on the cruel instances of his past life at Devon.

Gene is on a spiritual quest to close a horrible chapter of his life. Throughout this spiritual journey, he uses his memories of his relationship with his friend Phineas to guide him through their past days at Devon School. As he tells the story of their life at Devon, Gene remembers the details necessary to define Finny's character. Through both their adolescent days spent together at Devon and Gene's time spent at



Devon as an adult looking to heal old wounds, Phineas serves as guide to Gene. Gene admires Phineas, but it is this very admiration that leads to the tragic incident that changes both of them forever.

As a young man at Devon, Gene is trying to grasp the complexity of the adult world. He admires how Phineas rolls with life so easily. Finny is able to simply take things as they come, while Gene tends to get much more disturbed by the many pressures of his teenage years. According to Gene, "Phineas just walked serenely on, or rather flowed on, rolling forward in his white sneakers with such unthinking unity of movement that "walk" didn't describe it" (Knowles 10). Gene believes Finny to be of a non-human nature. He *walks serenely, flows on, with unthinking unity*. In Gene's eyes Phineas is unreal; he has a perfect balance as he harmoniously goes through life.

Gene is attracted to qualities in Phineas that he is unable to find within himself. He describes the lack of conflict within Phineas:

With him [Phineas] there was no conflict except between athletes, something Greek-inspired and Olympian in which victory would go to whoever was the strongest in body and heart. This was the only conflict he had ever believed in. (Knowles 144)

Unlike Phineas, Gene struggles a great deal with his inner self. While Finny lives in a world where issues are in black and white, Gene endures a much more unsettling world. Unfortunately, Gene finds himself consumed by his feelings of hopelessness, hatred, and torment. He vividly describes his harsh attitude about things that he cares for:

But I was used to finding something deadly in things that attracted me; there was always something deadly lurking in anything I wanted, anything I loved. And if it wasn't there, as for example with Phineas, then I put it there myself. (Knowles 92)

Gene admits that he brings a darkness to all with whom he interacts. As much as Phineas showed Gene that there could be life without darkness and conflict, Gene could not keep himself from crushing the brightness emanating from Finny's peaceful sense of self.

Gene and Phineas represent two opposing elements. Gene's dark and confused character serves as a metaphor for the war, while Finny's calm and gentle approach to life allows him to serve as a representative of peacefulness. Gene describes how Finny's tragic fall took place:

Holding firmly to the trunk, I took a step toward him, and then my knees bent and I jounced the limb. Finny, his balance gone, swung his head around to look at me

for an instant with extreme interest, and then he tumbled sideways, broke through the little branches below and hit the bank with a sickening, unnatural thud. It was the first clumsy physical action I had ever seen him make. With unthinking sureness I moved out on a limb and jumped into the river, every trace of my fear of this forgotten. (Knowles 52)

During this event, Gene becomes a symbol of human cruelty. Therefore, when he shakes the tree limb causing Phineas to fall unexpectedly, it is really war that shakes the foundation of peace. Phineas, the symbol of peacefulness, is knocked down and eventually crumbles as a result of war's brutality.

The darkness of human cruelty overcomes human kindness in this incident and Gene cannot endure the fact that he is at the root of the evil overpowering Phineas at this moment. He later tries to confess, only hurting Finny even more. Gene reveals, "It struck me then that I was injuring him again. It occurred to me that this could be an even deeper injury than what I had done before. I would have to disown it" (Knowles 62). After Gene tries to confess, Finny is not only physically wounded, but begins carrying emotional scars too. After the tragic incident at the tree, Phineas is slowly destroyed.

Gene feels such fear during his Devon days that as a result he is unable to see situations clearly. He fails to see Finny

in a positive light and, therefore, instead of accepting what Finny has to offer him, tries to ruin Finny's positive approach at life. Gene recognizes that he is responsible for injuring Finny's once remarkable sense of balance. He describes this drastic change in Finny's movement after his fall from the tree:

And now I remembered what I had never taken any special note of before: how Phineas used to walk. Around Devon we had gaits of every description; gangling shuffles from boys who had suddenly grown a foot taller, swinging cowboy lopes from those thinking how wide their shoulders had become, ambles, waddles, light trippings, gigantic Bunyan strides. But Phineas had moved in continuing flowing balance, so that he had seemed to drift along with no effort at all, relaxation on the move. He hobbled now on patches of ice. There was the one certainty that Dr. Stanpole had given—Phineas would walk again. But the thought was there before me that he would never walk like that again. (Knowles 103)

By shaking the tree limb, Gene crushes Finny's vitality, leaving him jilted, no longer able to flow smoothly through life. Rather than confiding in his spiritual guide and looking toward a life where there is less confusion, Gene destroys his most

positive influence and sends himself further down into the depths of his despair.

Phineas serves as Gene's spiritual guide. His mere presence offers Gene a pathway out of his conflict. Phineas makes his attempt to help Gene through his darkness while they are still in adolescence. Unfortunately, for the two of them, Gene does not allow Phineas to guide him until adulthood. This is a tragic choice as Phineas is already dead and their days of boyhood are long gone. Gene cannot ever go back in time to correct his mistakes, but he does make the most of his journey through Devon as an adult. While Gene is visiting Devon he faces each horrific detail of his past. As he progresses through his spiritual quest, he remembers the war and describes the "America" that consumed him, causing him to view the world in a negative manner:

People in America cry often...All pleasurable things, all travel and sports and entertainment and good food and fine clothes, are in the very shortest supply, always were and always will be. There are just tiny fragments of pleasure and luxury in the world...The prevailing color in life in America is a dull, dark green called olive drab. (Knowles 33)

Gene finds himself in an environment full of limitations, lacking in both pleasure and brightness. The war even dominates

the color in which he perceives the world around him. Unable to view life in a positive manner, Gene chooses to destroy whatever element might add color to his dreary perspective. Therefore, when Phineas tries to brighten Gene's world, Gene reacts by trying to obliterate his only guide to a positive and vital environment.

As both adolescent and adult, Gene is pursuing the same goal. He is looking to gain a sense of inner peace. He describes a day when he reached this blissful state for a brief moment. On this special afternoon, Gene and his friends play with one another without any of their usual self-consciousness. During this pleasurable experience, Gene feels liberated, strong, and full of life:

...it wasn't cider which made me in this moment champion of everything he ordered, to run as though I were the abstraction of speed, to walk the half-circle of statues on my hands, to balance on my head on top of the icebox on top of the Prize Table, to jump if he had asked it across the Naguamsett and land crashing in the middle of Quackenbush's boathouse, ...for on this day even the schoolboy egotism of Devon was conjured away...It wasn't the cider which made me surpass myself, it was this liberation we had torn from the gray encroachments of 1943, the escape we had

concocted, this afternoon of momentary, illusory,  
special and separate peace. (Knowles 128)

Just as Gene's movement through Devon is a key factor in his spiritual journey toward a life dominated by the peacefulness he remembers from this one afternoon at Devon, imagination also holds a significant role in his quest. However, while Gene's walk through Devon has a positive impact on his journey toward inner peace, his imagination affects him in a negative manner. Kerouac's Sal Paradise and Salinger's Holden Caulfield use fantasy as a coping mechanism, while Gene's imagination only furthers the conflict within him. Gene's ability to fantasize only blocks his path toward spiritual fulfillment. It causes his confusion and frustration to follow him well into adulthood before he is able to come to terms with his past.

As spiritual guide to Gene, Phineas tries to enlighten him about a much happier and more settled way of dealing with life. However, the more good Gene sees in Phineas, the more actively his imagination works to negate the good infiltrating his life. He thinks he has figured out that Phineas is really conspiring against him:

Then a second realization broke as clearly and bleakly as dawn at the beach. Finny had deliberately set out to wreck my studies. That explained blitzball, that explained the nightly meetings of the Super Suicide

Society, that explained his insistence that I share all his diversions. The way I believed that you're-my-best-friend blabber! The shadow falling across his face if I didn't want to do something with him! His instinct for sharing everything with me? Sure, he wanted to share everything with me, especially his procession of D's in every subject. That way he, the great athlete, would be way ahead of me. It was all cold trickery, it was all calculated, it was all enmity. (Knowles 45)

Gene allows his imagination to get the better of him. He runs with crazy ideas that the one person trying to guide him to a better way of life is really trying to compete with him, with the intent of beating him down. On the contrary, Phineas really shows Gene nothing but fairness and kind treatment. However, since Gene is out to destroy, he develops this twisted way of looking at Finny's kind acts. Therefore, rather than assisting Gene through his turmoil, his imagination only serves as a catalyst for the pain consuming his life.

Gene takes his spiritual journey through the Devon campus in hopes of gaining a new and positive perspective on his adolescent days. He sets out to eliminate the haunting memories of his past by facing them head-on. He walks through Devon and with each step he forces himself to make sense of the choices he



made while he was a student there. The death of his friend Phineas lies at the root of his troubles. Gene delves deeply into his inner being in order to find out why he felt enough hatred to intentionally cause his friend so much pain. As Gene travels through the campus, he remembers the evil surrounding him during his younger days. He also describes several instances where he felt confusion, sadness, and chaos within himself. He struggles throughout the text to understand why he felt the way he did as a teenager. He also goes through a series of steps to find this understanding within himself. First, he visits the old site of Finny's initial fall. Then he slowly unravels the list of events surrounding his most difficult year spent at Devon. At the end of the text, Gene recognizes what he learned from his visit to his old life and his past mistakes. He explains that Phineas was different from the other students. He had a special perspective of the world, where he remained confident and at peace with his surroundings. While the other boys were damaged by the violent presence of the war going on, Phineas was unchanged. Gene reveals Phineas' unique qualities, "He possessed an extra vigor, a heightened confidence in himself, a serene capacity for affection which saved him" (Knowles 194-95). As spiritual guide, Phineas shows Gene a positive way of looking at the world around him. Gene notes that Phineas did not react with anger or hatred to the

hostility surrounding him. Instead, he approached life with such confidence and strength that they allowed him to embrace life rather than to destroy it. Gene recognizes that Phineas possessed a healthy outlook and makes a conscious effort to apply Phineas' views to his own life.

Gene admits that Phineas remains different than anyone he has ever met in his life. Gene also reveals that since the tragic death of Phineas, he has learned from Phineas' kind ways. In fact, Gene claims to live his adult life with the same positive approach that Phineas tried so hard to show him. Gene cannot undo his mistakes. With that harsh reality in mind, he still goes forward in his own life, accepting what he cannot change and bringing with him all of the positive things that he can. He accepts responsibility for breaking Phineas down and eventually destroying his existence. He admits to his ruthless attack on Phineas, "Nothing as he was growing up at home, nothing at Devon, nothing even about the war had broken his harmonious and natural unity. So at last I had" (Knowles 195). Although he will never forget the tragic events of his adolescent days, he seems to make sense of his choices. He now knows why he acted in such a destructive manner and he goes forward in life thankful that he is spiritually changed because he no longer feels absorbed by a chaotic and evil world. Instead, he is transformed into a better person for having

learned from the spiritual guidance given to him by his friend Phineas.

### **A Spiritual Understanding**

F. Scott Fitzgerald's *This Side of Paradise* is the subject of varied criticisms. Many critics choose to discuss this novel in terms of the Jazz Age. Charles E. Shain states, "Its publication is always considered to be the event that ushered in the Jazz Age...One of the responsibilities it assumes, especially in its first half, is to make the hero, Amory Blaine, report like a cultural spy from inside his generation" (77). While many agree with Shain that this novel defines the most prominent qualities of the Jazz Age, other critics attack the novel's lack of symbolic value and overall meaning. James E. Miller, Jr. claims that "there is no single plot-line to unify the novel" (86). However, as much as critics spend their time reducing the novel to a mere colorful blend of ideas lacking in depth (Kazin 175), others have arrived at a more positive way of reading it. Andrew Hook observes, "There is another reason why *This Side of Paradise* matters. When it is read less as a self-contained, autonomous work than as an opening statement in Fitzgerald's career as a writer, then it reveals further levels of meaning" (28). Hook's ideas run parallel to my own theory about the novel. Rather than viewing the novel in

autobiographical terms, the life of Amory Blaine can be read as a struggle towards spiritual fulfillment. In addition, Dan Seitters writes that "the novel deals with Amory's struggle to escape the eccentricity taught him by his mother" (15). My critical theory places great emphasis on this "struggle." Amory fights throughout the entire text to fill the void created by his mother. Fortunately for Amory, he is granted the powerful insights of Monsignor Darcy to help him achieve his goal.

The issue of spiritual guidance is addressed in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *This Side of Paradise*. Even though Amory Blaine does not speak of his spiritual guide in every chapter of the text, as the novel progresses it becomes apparent that at Amory's most pivotal moments in his life Monsignor Darcy influences him in some way. Just like Kerouac's *Sal Paradise*, Salinger's *Holden Caulfield*, and Knowles' *Gene Forrester*, Amory Blaine is set on a journey toward spiritual fulfillment. Spurred on by loss, he trudges forward in life working to achieve personal growth and inner peace. He too keeps on moving, trying to find his niche, and is affected by his active imagination. Throughout his many trials, Amory relies on Monsignor Darcy to show him the way.

Amory begins his entanglement with loss at a young age. He is left alone to face the world when his parents fail to provide

him with proper parental guidance. His father is described as "an unassertive figure" (Fitzgerald 1), while his mother, his major influence, is destroyed by her own instability. The narrator describes Amory's difficult situation:

Beatrice [Amory's mother] had a nervous breakdown that bore a suspicious resemblance to delirium tremens, and Amory was left in Minneapolis, destined to spend the ensuing two years with his aunt and uncle. There, the crude, vulgar air of western civilization first catches him. (Fitzgerald 16)

Forced to leave Europe and join a less-refined society in Minneapolis, Amory is left to figure things out for himself. Meanwhile, his mother, once the only consistent aspect of Amory's upbringing, proves to be anything but.

Carrying the burdens of this troubled time, Amory advances through his life trying to maintain social status while attempting to achieve personal growth. During his adolescence, he is faced with another tragic loss, the death of his friend, Dick Humbird:

Under the full light of a roadside arclight lay a form, face downward in a widening circle of blood...The doctor had arrived, and Amory went over to the couch, where someone handed him a sheet to put over the body. With a sudden hardness, he raised one of the hands and

let it fall back inertly. The brow was cold but the face was not expressionless. He looked at the shoe--laces--Dick had tied them that morning. He had tied them--and now he was this leary white mass. All that remained of the charm and personality of the Dick Humbird he had known--oh, it was all so horrible and unaristocratic and close to the earth. All tragedy has that strain of the grotesque and squalid--souseless, futile...the way animals die...Amory was reminded of a cat that had lain horribly mangled in some alley of his childhood. (Fitzgerald 90-92)

The sheer horror of this moment in Amory's life provides him with one more event he would like to escape from. He cannot endure the painfulness of witnessing Dick's death and he is, therefore, unable to face his pain head-on. Instead, he uses great effort in his attempt to keep it out of his head, or, as Fitzgerald describes it, "[to] shut it coldly away from his mind" (Fitzgerald 93). Through several love relationships and his own egocentric ways, Amory tries to glide on the surface of life in order to save himself from the depths of his despair. However, as superficial as Amory may want to be, he never succeeds, because his relationship with his spiritual guide keeps him moving toward a stronger, more pure sense of being.

Amory's first luncheon with Monsignor Darcy marks the beginning of their strong spiritual relationship. Fitzgerald states, "They slipped into an intimacy from which they never recovered" (33). With Monsignor Darcy, Amory finds two very important elements that have been missing from his life: parental guidance and true companionship. Monsignor Darcy offers Amory a pathway toward both spiritual growth and fulfillment.

From the beginning of their special relationship, both Amory and Monsignor Darcy bring out the best in one another. As the narrator describes their first luncheon, the magic of their relationship is revealed:

Their first luncheon was one of the memorable events of Amory's early life. He was quite radiant and gave off a peculiar brightness and charm. Monsignor called out the best that he had thought by question and suggestion, and Amory talked with an ingenious brilliance of a thousand impulses and desires and repulsions and faiths and fears...Monsignor gave the effect of sunlight to many people; Amory gave it in his youth and, to some extent, when he was very much older, but never again was it quite so mutually spontaneous. (Fitzgerald 34)

Here it is evident that Amory and Monsignor Darcy inspire one another. Amory marks this day as one of his most "memorable" because it is the day that he gains a sense of guidance. Amory has found someone who reacts with very positive energy to his own personal beliefs and feelings.

As spiritual guide, Monsignor Darcy helps Amory to view himself as less of a superficial being and more of a productive, socially developed person. In response to Amory's ideas that he is losing his personality, Monsignor Darcy explains:

I'm not worried about you; you seem to be progressing perfectly naturally...You've lost a great amount of vanity and that's all...you're developing. This has given you time to think and you're casting off a lot of your old luggage about success and the superman and all." (Fitzgerald 107-108)

As a result of Monsignor Darcy's advice, Amory is given a more genuine perspective on what is truly important in life. The Monsignor explains that as Amory lets go of his vanity he becomes a more developed person. Throughout their visits and through their written correspondence, Monsignor Darcy continues to influence Amory with more of his sound advice.

Monsignor Darcy's positive role as spiritual guide is evident in his letters to Amory. In one such letter he offers



Amory advice regarding self-confidence and the dangers of becoming too caught up in social status:

Don't let yourself feel worthless; often through life you will really be at your worst when you seem to think best of yourself...If you write me letters, please let them be natural ones. Your last, that dissertation on architecture, was perfectly awful--so "highbrow" that I picture you living in an intellectual and emotional vacuum; and beware of trying to classify people too definitely into types: you will find that all through their youth they will persist annoyingly in jumping from class to class, and by pasting a supercilious label on every one you meet you are merely packing a Jack-in-the-box that will spring up and leer at you when you begin to come into really antagonistic contact with the world.

You are bound to go up and down, just as I did in my youth, but do keep your clarity of mind, and if fools or sages dare to criticise don't blame yourself too much. (Fitzgerald 110)

In this rather insightful letter, Monsignor Darcy tells Amory to keep up his confidence, while maintaining spiritual truth. He does not want Amory to get lost in intellectual snobbery. He also warns Amory about labelling others and encourages him to

keep his moral and ethical standards in check. He notes that Amory will face hardships, but it is at these times that he must maintain a clear view on the world around him. Monsignor Darcy offers Amory both support and encouragement during his quest toward spiritual fulfillment.

No matter the physical distance between Monsignor Darcy and Amory, the two of them remain spiritually connected. As Amory's spiritual guide, the Monsignor can sense in just a few words of a letter from Amory that the latter is destined for emotional disaster:

Your last letter was quite enough to make me worry about you. It was not a bit like yourself. Reading between the lines I should imagine that your engagement to this girl is making you rather unhappy, ...I should call your last few letters rather shrivelled. Beware of losing yourself in another being, man or woman...if I judge you by the means I usually choose, I should say that there will be something of an emotional crisis within the next year.

(Fitzgerald 223)

Monsignor Darcy writes this letter as a warning to Amory because he fears that Amory is losing his sense of being, and he sees that emotional hardships lie ahead. Monsignor Darcy gives Amory a chance to step outside of himself and take a look at the

situation at hand. Even though Monsignor Darcy cannot keep Amory from escaping the pain in his life, he does offer Amory an emotional insight regarding himself and the choices facing him as he grows older. However, even though Monsignor Darcy offers Amory guidance, it takes some time before Amory completely embraces all of Monsignor Darcy's sound advice.

Throughout the entire novel, Amory Blaine is surrounded by images of rebirth. In many of his moments of contemplation and introspection, he is found in the rain, where the mist falls, or where the dampness runs through his hair. These images of water are suggestive of a sort of baptism, or renewal of the self. As Amory wanders through life he tries to attain spiritual fulfillment. The narrator perfectly describes Amory's fascination with rebirth when he states, "It was always the becoming he dreamed of, never the being" (25). Amory continuously looks to reinvent himself into a new state of being. As he searches for ways to transform himself, Monsignor Darcy tries to encourage Amory to work toward becoming a man with a harmonious balance between his intellect, emotions, and spirituality.

While Amory continues his quest toward spiritual fulfillment, he often struggles with his imagination. At first Amory uses his imagination as a means of escape. He often drifts off into creative daydreams of poetry in the midst of his

distress. However, Amory's imagination quickly takes a turn from the therapeutic to a place where his greatest fears come alive.

After Dick Humbird's death, Amory loses control over his thoughts and his imagination begins to run wild. The narrator describes Amory's horror, detailing the moment in which his perception of his surroundings becomes strange and nightmarish:

There was a minute while temptation crept over him like a warm wind, and his imagination turned to fire, and he took the glass...That was all: for at the second that his decision came, he looked up and saw, ten yards from him, the man who had been in the café and with a jump of astonishment the glass fell from his uplifted hand...Then, suddenly, Amory perceived the [man's] feet, and with a rush of blood to the head he realized he was afraid. The feet were all wrong...It was like weakness in a good woman, or blood on satin; one of those terrible incongruities that shake little things in the back of the brain. (117)

As Amory allows his evil thoughts to creep up on him, his friends begin to poke fun at his fantastic visions. This only causes Amory's situation to worsen. When he leaves his friends in order to escape their taunting, he senses that the man is

following him down the lonely, moonlit streets. Fitzgerald describes his spiral downward:

He was far beyond horror. He had sunk through the thin surface of that, now moved in a region where the feet and the fear of white walls were real, living things, things he must accept. Only far inside his soul a little fire leaped and cried that something was pulling him down, trying to get him inside a door and slam it behind him. (119-120)

Amory is consumed by his idea that something evil is after him. The horrors of his past are now coming to him in the form of a demon chasing him down his once safe and familiar streets. Amory claims that what he is seeing is The Devil himself and he fears that he has truly lost his mind. Through this madness it becomes clear that he is haunted by his imagination because he cannot impose control upon it. One of Amory's lovers, Clara, brings this idea to the forefront when she states, "You're a slave, a bound helpless slave to one thing in the world, your imagination" (Fitzgerald 146). Amory does not have the power enough to keep his imagination from running wild. This lack of control not only lends itself to horrific visions, but also to disillusionment about himself. Fortunately, Amory is brought back to reality by the wisdom of Monsignor Darcy, who teaches Amory how to look at himself without vanity and obscurity.

Monsignor Darcy influences Amory throughout his growth toward manhood and his quest for a spiritually fulfilling existence. Therefore, it is only fitting that the Monsignor's death marks Amory's birth into a spiritually fulfilled man with a purpose. The death of Monsignor Darcy is symbolic in that Amory's spiritual guide does not leave him until he is ready to take on the world with a spiritually enlightened attitude.

Amory realizes that at the very same moment of Monsignor Darcy's death, he was making his first major sacrifice for someone else, taking the blame for something he had not done in order to help out his friend Alec. When Amory realizes that this unselfish act is tied into the death of Monsignor Darcy, he suddenly sees the influence of the Monsignor on his actions. He also finally realizes his own purpose in life at the funeral, which is:

not to be admired, as he had feared; not to be loved, as he had made himself believe; but to be necessary to people, to be indispensable...

Life opened up in one of its amazing bursts of radiance and Amory suddenly and permanently rejected an old epigram that had been playing listlessly in his mind: "Very few things matter and nothing matters very much."

On the contrary, Amory felt an immense desire to give people a sense of security. (Fitzgerald 269)

Monsignor Darcy helps Amory to break through the barriers created by his disillusionment about himself. Through the Monsignor's death, Amory finally absorbs all that the Monsignor has taught him about how to live a spiritually fulfilled life.

As Amory reinvents himself from a boy to a man with a purpose, Monsignor Darcy imposes a spiritual code to which Amory adheres. Unlike Sal Paradise, Holden Caulfield, and Gene Forrester, Amory is given advice about how to deal with the world surrounding him. He is offered no escape and, therefore, in the end, Amory is much better off than the aforementioned characters. His spiritual guide teaches him how to live realistically in the present; once Amory accepts his teachings, he is able to find peace within himself. He is also able to gain a comfortable place in the world. The narrator explains that Amory finds happiness because of his newfound understanding within himself:

...his ideas were still in riot; there was ever the pain of memory; the regret for his lost youth-yet the waters of disillusion had left a deposit on his soul, responsibility and a love of life, the faint stirring of old ambitions and unrealized dreams...And he could not tell why the struggle was worth while...

He stretched out his arms to the crystalline,  
radiant sky.

"I know myself," he cried, "but that is all."

(Fitzgerald 285)

Monsignor Darcy's guidance helps Amory to look deeply into himself. At the end of this novel, it is evident that Amory has found fulfillment in his clear understanding of his own complexity. He has successfully completed his most difficult task, that of finding his sense of self. Therefore, as a result of this great accomplishment, he faces the future with strength and confidence. At the end of the novel, Amory stretches his arms out toward the sky, welcoming the world as it is and offering himself just as he is.

Wounded by past experience, Sal Paradise, Holden Caulfield, Gene Forrester, and Amory Blaine all attempt to move forward in their lives. They each undergo a spiritual journey to fight the wars of their past. In search of a way to fill their emotional emptiness, they each look to spiritual guides to show them the way to fulfillment.

While Sal, Holden, Gene, and Amory are all uniquely developed, they are all faced with a similar challenge. They all fight for the realization that the past no longer need hold them captive. Rather than holding onto the past and allowing it



to continually hurt them, they need to find a way to let it go. Each spiritual guide makes a valiant attempt in trying to show his follower a new way of life. However, each character chooses to what degree he will release himself from the pain of the past.

At the end of each novel, it is evident that a spiritual journey has taken place. Each character is in a more improved emotional state than that described at the beginning of his story. The spiritual guide makes a positive impact on some aspect of each character's life. Although Holden Caulfield may leave his reader with less hope than the others, at the close of each text, each of the four characters (Sal, Holden, Gene, and Amory) is granted a new perspective on the conflict that once consumed his life.

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