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Angelica Bega-Hart
Virginia Commonwealth University

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Shaken and Stirred: Tactile Imagery and Narrative Immediacy in J.D. Salinger's "Blue Melody,"
"A Girl I Knew," and "Just Before the War with the Eskimos"

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of
Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

Angelica Elizabeth Bega-Hart
A.S. Richard Bland College, May 1998
B.A. Virginia Commonwealth University, May 2001
M.A. Virginia Commonwealth University, December 2011

Director: A. Bryant Mangum, Ph.D.
Professor, Department of English

Virginia Commonwealth University
Richmond, Virginia
December, 2011

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Abstract

SHAKEN AND STIRRED: TACTILE IMAGERY AND NARRATIVE IMMEDIACY IN J.D. SALINGER'S "BLUE MELODY," "A GIRL I KNEW," AND "JUST BEFORE THE WAR WITH THE ESKIMOS"

By Angelica E. Bega-Hart, M.A.

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

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Major Director: A. Bryant Mangum, Ph.D.

J.D. Salinger's 'A Girl I Knew,' 'Just Before the War with the Eskimos,' and 'Blue Melody,' contain key thematic and narratological elements that contribute to the development of character through repeated reference to tactile imagery and through each character's reaction to the sensations associated with tactile images. Salinger's descriptions of tactile interaction allow readers to see his characters connected in ways that were increasingly difficult in the 1950's, where widespread cultural changes contributed to increasing physical and emotional distancing.

Critics have argued that "vision" is at the heart of many of Salinger's characters' struggles, since they "seek" a level of human connectedness not found in other narratives. However, Salinger's stories do not provide a mere record of observed physical characteristics as some claim; instead, they present concrete physical details that take both the character and the reader beyond sight to touch, in an effort to create the intimate space necessary for redemption.

Using theoretical work by critics who focus on tactile imagery pinpoints how Salinger's characters situate themselves in relation to the world around them and how setting and other narrative mechanics influence character. Salinger's attention to tactile imagery influences character in a profound way creating a "narrative of immediacy" where closeness is further reinforced through tactile physical descriptions, attention to gesture, and use of conversational popular vernacular.

Introduction

J. D. Salinger has long been recognized as an author with a unique vision, and an unmatched way of making that vision tangible for his readers. Salinger's emphasis on the fragility of the human psyche and the sometimes confounding ability of human beings for both kindness and ill will, inspires the need for a world in which the present is not only visible, but also tangible, audible, and ultimately, available to all the senses. In his essay, "J.D. Salinger: The Sound of One Hand Clapping," Tom Davis notes Salinger's "uncanny power of observation, which is one of the clearest marks of his talent" (44). "Observation" is a term often ascribed to a visual understanding of the world. Yet Salinger's observation is not only, or perhaps not even primarily, visual in its effects. That is to say, his works do not call on the reader to "see" but instead to "feel" as he observes the characters in close proximity and touching one another or themselves, it is their tactile experiences with the world that are most significant. Salinger's short stories, in addition to drawing attention to the visual nuances of character interaction, often concentrate on moments when characters touch one another or express themselves through touch.

Critics have tended to vacillate between assigning Salinger too many and too few literary precursors. While Salinger's style (especially in his later fiction) is distinctive to say the least, there are some clear literary allusions. For example there are obvious nods to Eliot and Fitzgerald, as well as more tenuous links to Flaubert, Tolstoy, Kafka, Blake, James, Coleridge and Proust among others. Many of these writers also engage tactile imagery in their own works, although often with different approaches and obviously with different aesthetic outcomes.

As defined by the *Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, imagery encompasses the "uses of language in a literary work that evoke 'sense impressions' by literal or figurative reference to

perceptible or concrete objects, scenes, actions, or states, as distinct from the language of abstract argument or exposition” (164). Tactile imagery then refers to Salinger’s uses of language that engage in the reader, and often in the character, the sense of touch. Tactile imagery plays a much more important role in Salinger’s fiction than critics have previously noted. Through tactile imagery, Salinger’s characters interact with one another and with their environment and are subsequently changed by these interactions.

Perhaps the most obvious expression of touch evoking a change in character occurs in “A Perfect Day for Bananafish,” when a thirty-one year old Seymour Glass astounds the reader by spontaneously kissing the arch of Sybil Carpenter’s foot¹ before returning to his hotel room to commit suicide. The act of kissing Sybil’s foot represents one last expression of pure love, and is nearly unforgettable. Because of it, the reader notes a marked difference between Seymour and the woman in the elevator who simply stares at his feet as he is returning to his hotel room. Seymour’s truth, and his magic, are inherent in his ability to make a spiritual connection with the world, as opposed to gazing longingly at it in the way that the woman in the elevator does. Critic Seymour Krim notes that “Bananafish” is “a ‘sad’ story, but what saves it from being depressing is the author’s feeling for textures and situations” which he argues cannot be communicated in a summary of the story (Grunwald 71). The same can be said for much of Salinger’s fiction.

From the appearance of his first story, “The Young Folks,” in mentor Whit Burnett’s *Story* magazine in the March/April issue of 1940, to the publication of his last, the provocative “Hapworth 16, 1924,” in the June 19, 1965 issue of *The New Yorker*, Salinger’s short stories nearly always portray alienated characters struggling to connect in some way with their fellow human beings. As William Purcell notes:

The questions that come through most clearly in [Salinger's] early stories are those concerning the qualities that define a good and moral person, the nature of human relationships, and the need for feeling and sympathetic concern between people. In turn, among the problems that continually crop up are the difficulties of open and honest interpersonal communication, and the gradual deepening of the sense of disillusionment, alienation and loss that the war situation precipitated. (90)

Purcell is certainly not the only critic to note the attention to alienated characters and the struggle of Salinger's characters, especially his protagonists, in communicating effectively in post-World War II America. Many critics have written about the alienation so prominent in Salinger's works. James E. Miller, Jr. concurs with Purcell's observation about Salinger's characters, adding that the "dominant theme which recurs is alienation" (Wenke 136). Miller further describes this alienation in the following way:

an alienation which may conclude in some kind of reconciliation or accommodation, but which may also result in distortion of the soul, bitterness, nausea, and the ultimate withdrawal into death. The causes of the alienation are frequently obscure but always complex. Sometimes society seems at fault, in the horrors of racial prejudice or the horrors of war. But sometimes the fault seems to lie in a failure of personal relationships—the filament (of Whitman's spider) is launched, but does not catch; or caught, does not hold. (Wenke 136)

What should be noted as most significant about Salinger's works is the way in which his frequent use of tactile imagery leads to the development of character, specifically the development of a "good and moral character" (Purcell 90). That is to say that through the act of touching, Salinger's characters become more aware of themselves and their surroundings and more

integrated into the world, which often leads to the growth necessary for character change and development. Sometimes, characters are aware of their development; but more often, they are not. Through an exploration of Salinger's less thoroughly examined stories from 1948, the year which marks the pinnacle of his short-fiction career, this study will investigate the way that tactile imagery collapses narrative space and shapes character. Salinger's stories are not only peppered, but flooded, with tactile images. And when one looks closely, it is difficult, if not impossible to ignore them. Salinger's stories, especially those from this intensely productive period, appear most useful for evaluating the impact of tactile images because they are matured representations of his style, yet, they predate his later, more spiritually-focused efforts. Instead, these three stories focus on the psychological, indicating that change is possible through interaction with the physical world. Tactile interactions, whether merely observed, or actually participated in by Salinger's characters, propel character change and make that change concrete for the reader. However, because these interactions occur in a layer of the narrative that appears invisible or insignificant, they often go unnoticed, particularly in Salinger's short stories. Tactile imagery, though it may not always be the focus, is a vital part of Salinger's work that leads to character change through the collapse of narrative space, which leads to narrative immediacy for the reader.

Because Salinger's short stories so often deal with alienated urbanites struggling to find salvation in a world indifferent to their struggles, the possibility for change that leads to salvation can only be found in physical connection. Salinger displayed an interest in this connection throughout his writing career. Few writers with such a small body of published work have been as influential. His only novel, *The Catcher in the Rye*, led to a lifetime of rebuffed popular success and critical attention. For several years, *Catcher* remained the most-read novel among

young college readers, making Salinger a household name, much to his chagrin (Blotner 100). Perhaps because of the success of *Catcher*, what is less well-known, and less critically discussed then, are his short stories. The quarter-century of stories Salinger wrote are surprisingly wide-ranging; there are stories of young urbanites, failed marriages, soldier-life during wartime, suburban ennui, and spiritual exploration. The one thread that links nearly all of Salinger's work, was revealed in his admission in a biographical sketch for *Harper's* in 1949 that he "almost always write[s] about very young people" (Grunwald 23). The other guiding tenet of his work is a thematic preoccupation with humanity and with the human experience specifically devoted to the ideas of love, forgiveness, revelation, and salvation as not achievable through objective forms of knowledge alone.² Thus, Salinger's alienated characters reach for something deceptively simple but seemingly unattainable: human connection.

As Salinger's isolated characters seek connectedness in a world predisposed to indifference, tactility becomes an increasingly important component of their lives. Moreover, the concentration on tactile imagery becomes one of the clearest hallmarks of Salinger's writing, especially in the years following the war. During this period of rapid growth, as the World War II generation moved to the suburbs and began returning to work and school and having children, Salinger developed characters who struggled with the same complexities he saw his friends and neighbors struggle against. Kenneth Slawenski notes in his recent biography,

[w]hen Salinger moved to the suburbs he encountered the newly emerging suburban middle-class, a segment of society whose growth was explosive in 1948, and among whom he found endless fodder for his writing. When Salinger lived in Connecticut, unabashed Americanism and materialism were unquestioned values. His neighbors pursued these values religiously and weighed each other against a standard of conformity

that often suffocated individuality. Salinger found such material irresistible. Having long exposed the phoniness of society, he now found himself living in a culture that not only esteemed this quality he so despised, but also sought to infect all of its members. (162)

While the alienation that results from the pursuit of conformity is clearly explored in *Catcher*, it is more carefully examined in the stories that Salinger published immediately after the war. However, the uncollected stories have rarely been the primary focus of literary scholarship.

Salinger's tendency for developing characters who connect tactilely begins in his early stories, and by the time *Nine Stories* was published, this skill had been finely honed. Additionally, Salinger's uncollected stories have received scant attention from critics. Therefore, this study seeks to examine two of the earlier uncollected stories, "Blue Melody" and "A Girl I Knew," as well as a third story collected in Salinger's *Nine Stories*, "Just Before the War with the Eskimos," to expose the layer of the narrative that deals with tactile imagery. Beginning with a brief analysis of each story, and leading into a cursory review of the critical approaches, then moving into a close reading to elucidate major themes, reveals that by focusing the reader on tactile interactions, Salinger collapses narrative space, and in so doing gives the reader more immediate identification with the characters. Therefore, as characters experience revelations about the world, readers can more readily accept the characters' revelations as truths. A close reading of each story leads one to an understanding of the commonalities and differences in Salinger's various uses of tactile imagery. Before working through the stories and the images themselves, it is necessary first to deal with the larger question of why tactile imagery has remained an unexplored layer of not only Salinger's works, but many others as well.

Tactile Imagery

Defining tactility and then exploring the difficulties inherent in describing and analyzing it, and finally, explaining how Salinger's concentration on tactility combines with his thematic concerns to create "narrative immediacy," will allow the reader a clearer understanding of the readings of the three stories that will be examined. First, the reader must have a clear definition of tactile imagery, and what comprises tactile imagery in Salinger's fiction. Tactile imagery, for the purpose of this investigation, describes either direct participatory actions where one character touches another person or thing, or instances where a character clearly observes such an action. In choosing not to distinguish between direct and observed action, poetry critic Susan Stewart notes the importance of both in the conception of touch:

Touching by means of the skin is often mediated by an appendage.... The skin itself is in fact a three dimensional object. What can this object register in contact with other objects? As color is only visible, temperature is only tangible. Qualities of roughness and smoothness; sticky things that remain in contact with the skin and slippery things that move readily across it; qualities of wetness and dampness and dryness in relation to each other; heaviness and lightness; hardness and softness; clues as to position and state of motion. When we list such qualities, they come to mind as the names of sensations particular to tactility. But just as we saw the synaesthesia linking sound and color, so can these tactile qualities be taken up in forms of presentation that we often think of as dominantly visual (164).

Thus, touch is being conceived of in its broadest sense. Having defined this conception of tactility, it is valuable to explain some of the difficulties associated with both describing and commenting on the tactile imagery in Salinger's fiction.

Tactile imagery is especially important in Salinger's short stories because it is through touch that characters are forced into closer proximity with one another. Shared space leads to a spatial unity that gives the reader a sense of personal closeness to the narrative as well, as if instead of observing from the outside, the reader is actually linked to the characters. Therefore, both character and reader share the experience of being crammed inside an overstuffed limousine on a hot summer day during a traffic jam in midtown Manhattan, or cowering in a foxhole while wind and rain arrest battle-weary soldiers outside. Often, the tactile images are related to moments of pain, discomfort, or loneliness; however, this is not always the case. Salinger's use of tactile images presents his characters with an opportunity to make contact with the physical world in an effort to express their emotional isolation or to break free from it. Tactility often becomes the primary mode through which characters interact and provides a level of authenticity in Salinger's fiction that is identifiable to many readers, thus the experience of suffering and the need to be free from it communicate the spiritual difficulties that the characters face.

Despite its importance, tactile imagery has largely gone uninvestigated not only in Salinger's fiction, but in many works of prose, where a careful examination of its use could prove helpful in providing a deeper understanding of the work. There are several reasons why tactile imagery has been overlooked in fiction, including the following: the lack of available critical terminology, the concentration on tactility as more vital to poetry than prose, the inability of language to adequately convey tactile sensation, the diffusion of the sense of touch throughout the body, the fact that touch is naturally reciprocal, the naturalization of gesture, and the fact that sight often usurps the role of touch. Thus, in order to adequately investigate the influence of the tactile images in Salinger's fiction, it is necessary to conceive of tactility more broadly, as expressed above.

A lack of critical terminology to explore the influence of tactile images in prose has posed significant difficulty in diagnosing its effects on works of fiction. As John Kester Bonnell noted in 1922, “our language is weak in critical terms just here; it has no single word at once clear and harmonious to stand for the sense of touch. Criticism, consequently, tends to the assumption that all the world may be apprehended by sight and hearing” (577). The field of literary criticism has come far in the ninety years since Bonnell’s article appeared and more work has been pursued since that time; however, it appears that even contemporary critics struggle with language to define the tactile imagery that they are seeing and to adequately describe its effects.³ Certainly, this is an area where the artist has advantage over the critic. One reason for the lack of critical terms and for the overall lack of attention to the importance of tactile images in fiction is the concentration on the tactile as a poetic, not prosaic device. On the one hand, there is much critical literature that focuses on the importance of tactile imagery in poetry. Emerging work is also being done on the impact of tactile sensation and images in cinema (Barker; Marks), and in new media technologies, such as hypertext (Marks), but these have yet to be applied with precision to the critical interpretation of prose.

Another reason for the oversight of tactile imagery’s importance across genres is the inability of language to adequately convey tactile sensation. Since the printed word cannot reproduce the tactile world, critics tend to concentrate instead on more formalist aspects of language as in poetry where sibilant sounds denote softness while gutturals, plosives, and other harsh sounds represent the opposite. Moreover, since language itself is symbolic, representative of meaning separate from the printed word on the page, to link the printed word with the tactile sensation it represents creates another level of abstraction that some scholars may be reluctant to move toward. When, as in “Uncle Wiggily in Connecticut,” Salinger describes a character

feeling in the dark for her shoes, the reader can sense a connection between the physical act of searching in the darkness, and connect this act to the symbolic idea of Eloise's spiritual aimlessness. However, the reader cannot actually feel the carpet or hardwood floor of the closet, the texture of the leather or the rubber of the shoe's sole. Therefore, using language to discern meaning becomes an abstraction, an act of connecting physical action to metaphoric consequence.

Perhaps one of the main reasons why critics have largely ignored the impact of tactile images is that tactile images are often used as a way of naturalizing action and therefore they become nearly invisible. Tactile interactions in fiction exist on a continuum, from actions which are simply in furtherance of plot and deserve little critical investigation, to those which invite critical attention because they go beyond representing the natural way that human beings deal with the world. John Russell notes the importance of establishing a clear differentiation between the symbolic and the "natural" in his article on Salinger's feet, differentiating episodes that deserve comment because they "cannot be accounted for as offhand naturalism" (300).⁴ After all, why focus on the tactile aspects of scratching or reaching when these are routine bodily interactions? Are these not natural and normal processes in which real human beings engage every day? And if so, why do they deserve critical attention when they are observed within the confines of a story or novel? These questions are all valid and there are certainly many examples in fiction where a character absent-mindedly touches something and there is little or no meaning to be found there. As with Russell's evaluation of feet, "unusualness or unusual repetitiveness" becomes the criteria for distinguishing between "naturalized" actions and symbolic ones (300). For example, in "Bananafish," naturalized action occurs when Seymour takes his room key from his robe pocket and opens the door to his hotel suite; this action is simply necessary for getting

him into the room where the next element of symbolic touch will occur. When he removes the Ortgies calibre 7.65 automatic from his suitcase and fires “a bullet through his right temple” the action moves to the symbolic (*Nine Stories* 26). However, events do not have to be as strongly contrasted as these two examples suggest and each instance of tactile interaction must be evaluated on an *ad hoc* basis to discern whether the action is simply naturalistic or whether it is symbolic. What is worth noting is that, in some cases, and certainly with Salinger, there is a preoccupation with touch that becomes repetitive and persistent enough to warrant attention, as well as instances of touch that are unusual enough to suggest that their inclusion is not merely “offhand naturalism.”

Critics have noted that in addition to naturalized action, the crudeness of the gesture and its connection with the pre-verbal world constrain our efforts to investigate tactility. As Susan Stewart points out, “[o]f all the senses, touch is most linked to emotion and feeling. To be “touched” or “moved” by words or things implies the process of identification and separation by which we apprehend the world aesthetically” (Stewart 162). Bonnell also notes this, saying, “it has been darkly intimated by certain critics that images of touch are somehow cruder than those of vision; that coming more directly through the flesh, they partake of the peculiar frailty of the flesh” (580). Such a distinction is particularly relevant to a writer such as Salinger, coming as he does after the period of high Modernism has concluded. Though clearly not post-modern, Salinger’s work anticipates this shift through considerations of the world that are neither purely visual, nor claims objectivity. A potent example of the crudeness that Bonnell refers to occurs in Salinger’s “A Boy in France.” This war story, which appeared in *The Saturday Evening Post*, serves as a powerful example of a story not merely including, but abounding in, tactile imagery. From the first line in which a “boy laid his head back on the rain-sogged ground, [and] hurtfully

wrenched his head out of his helmet” the reader sees the importance of the tactile qualities present in the story (*Post Stories*, 314). This importance is further reinforced by Salinger’s mentioning (more than once) that the main character, whom we come to understand is Babe Gladwaller,⁵ has closed his eyes, thus divorcing himself from the more objective visual interaction with the world in favor of the more immediate and primal sensation afforded by touch. The tactile images come into play everywhere, from the “cold, wet, French sky” and “rain-sogged ground” to the red ant, which “bit him nastily, uncompromisingly, on the leg” (*Post Stories* 314, 316). The tactile images are part of the poetry of the story, but they also comprise a story that cannot be told through the verbal/visual paradigm alone. Simply describing the sights and sounds of battle does not present the full story of the pain of war, and would make less clear Babe’s desire to be at home, which he mentions later, when he begins what Slawenski labels a “poetic chant” that transports him back home and allows him to block out these horrors of the flesh (110). At the end of every wish he expresses, Babe follows with “I’ll bolt the door” (*Post Stories* 316-317). The repetition of this action is both physical/tactile and metaphorical/emotional. Slawenski notes, “a mere notch away from pure poetry, this incantation is among Salinger’s most melodious literary moments and imbues this story with a charm paradoxical to its setting” (110-111). Salinger clearly demonstrated a hatred for glorifying war; therefore, the images present in “A Boy in France” serve only to manifest its horrors.

Another difficulty Stewart and others cite is the diffusion of the tactile sense throughout (and even within) the body. Stewart says “feelings of heat, cold, warmth, and other tactile properties are partly internal and partly dependent on contact with external forms; proprioception arises from internal properties of the body in orientation to external space” (17). As John Kester Bonnell notes,

the tactual sense is diffused all over the body's surface, as well as partly within the body, whereas sight and hearing have the advantage of special, highly differentiated, and beautiful organs. The finger-tips often serve to represent the sense of touch, but obviously they bear no such perfect relation to it as the ears to hearing, or the eyes to sight. (579)

Bonnell's observation reinforces the difficulties inherent in dealing with the role of touching and being touched, but it also allows for a broader conception of touch, one that is necessary to fully investigate the impact of the tactile imagery in Salinger's fiction. So when, in "Raise High the Roof Beam Carpenters," Muriel's Matron of Honor Edie Burwick says that Seymour's actions make her "blood boil," the reader is treated to a turn of phrase that describes both mental and physical anguish. The extension throughout the body suggests the importance of not limiting inquiry to tactile imagery which focuses on the hands alone.

Investigation of the broader conception of tactile imagery leads to another important consideration often overlooked in discussions of tactile images. Reciprocity, or lack thereof, plays a crucial part in making it difficult to discuss the role of tactility in fiction. As Stewart asserts, it is "[t]hrough work, play, sex, grooming and other activities, [that] we use our bodies to address the natural world with an ongoing mutuality" (18). If touch is a reciprocal action as Stewart suggests, this creates difficulty in describing both agency and effect: Does the critic, for example, engage with the one who does the touching or the one who is being touched? Are characters making contact with other humans or with the natural world, or are these elements making contact with them? Reciprocity then, obscures the role of touch as it creates an ambiguity of agency. The notion of reciprocity of touch does allow, however, for characters to communicate through touch with one another and the larger external world. Such a delineation implies a clearly Western concept of dualism between self and other, but for Salinger, whose

interest in Zen was piqued after the war (Slawenski 148), this may imply an extension of the self, of knowing oneself through the things in the external world which are part of the self. And, this, it can be argued, is the function of nearly all touch in Salinger, to elevate the alienated individual by putting him into contact with the outside world. Douglas Picht is aware of this treatment and deftly describes it in his analysis of Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*. What Picht argues about Anderson's use of hands is similar to what John Russell later argues with regard to Salinger's use of feet. Picht writes, when characters "imprisoned by their frustrations born of abortive attempts to communicate with their fellow human beings, make a final attempt to express their love or helplessness, it is done through the hands" (177). It can be reasonably argued that given a broader concept of touch (as not only centered on the hands) Salinger's work is exemplary of such usage; and that Salinger's characters, like Anderson's, express themselves through touch because other methods often fail them. Characters clearly connect with one another more meaningfully through touch than they do through conversation, or even visual observation. Russell similarly notes how "deliberate" Salinger is in his bodily interaction with crossed feet representing conscious composition and even smug self-assuredness, while more spontaneous movements and interactions denote openness and availability. These examples illustrate how the reciprocity of touch can be viewed with respect to character interaction.

A more detailed example occurs in "Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters." The story provides a different, less poetic usage of tactile imagery than "A Boy in France," but one that is important nonetheless for its quality of using confined spatial relationships as a way of bringing characters into shared space. "Raise High" also presents tactile imagery that supports a non-visual verification of lived experience and concentrates heavily on the idea of reciprocity inherent in tactile interactions. In one example from the story, the youngest Glass sibling

“Franny” says that when she was little she used to fly around the family’s Manhattan apartment, and that she knew she had done so because when she came down she had dust on her fingertips from touching the light bulbs (“Raise High” 10). Here, Salinger’s use of touch (despite the reference to flying) is grounding, in that, it helps substantiate her claim. Although Franny’s assertion is obviously untrue, the reader “sees” that not all verification must come from the objective visual presentation of experience. Here also, it is as if Franny is verifying her own imagined experiences through touch. Readers may also identify with Franny’s young imagination and with those imagined experiences which require only our own sense of verification. Another example from Seymour’s diary reads as follows:

I have scars on my hands from touching certain people. Once, in the park, when Franny was still in the carriage, I put my hand on the downy pate of her head and left it there too long. Another time, at Loew’s Seventy-second Street, with Zoey during a spooky movie. He was about six or seven, and he went under the seat to avoid watching a scary scene. I put my hand on his head. Certain heads, certain colors and textures of human hair leave permanent marks on me. Other things too. Charlotte once ran away from me, outside the studio, and I grabbed her dress to stop her, to keep her near me. A yellow cotton dress I loved because it was too long for her. I still have a lemon-yellow mark on the palm of my right hand. (“Raise High” 88)

In her essay, “Beatific Signals,” Josephine Jacobsen, continuing her analysis of religion in Salinger’s work, suggests that Seymour exhibits a “stigmata of joy” (Grunwald 183). But what is most interesting and important here is how Seymour acknowledges the reciprocity of touch. Salinger is using these powerful images of human beings interacting with one another through touch and showing how in so doing they change other individuals. In Seymour’s case, these

changes are internalized as well as externally manifested and perhaps even more importantly, they are permanent.

A final difficulty to be noted in discussing the implications of tactile imagery often present in Salinger's stories is that sight often usurps the role of touch. As John Berger states in "Ways of Seeing," we are "always looking at the relation between things and ourselves"; therefore, "to touch something is to situate oneself in relation to it" (8-9). Berger's analysis is helpful in bridging the gap between the senses of sight and touch, but may also minimize the role that tactility as its own element plays in Salinger's stories. As previously mentioned, Stewart also sees the connection between sight and touch. Such a notion also leads into one important way that touch functions in Salinger's works, by collapsing the spatial dynamic of the narrative to bring characters in closer connection with one another.

In Salinger, touch, whether expressed through language or as literal or symbolic elements, provides some of the most striking images in his fiction. A young woman in Vienna stands on a balcony "holding the universe together" ("A Girl I Knew" 191). A young girl from Tennessee balls a fist that she will use to wake a sleeping Blues musician ("Blue Melody" 170). A teenager in New York City pulls a chicken sandwich from her coat pocket and spontaneously decides against throwing it away (*Nine Stories* 82). Each of these events demonstrates a keen awareness on the writer's part, of the importance of tactile interaction. Few writers have directed attention to such tactile images as deliberately and as often as J.D. Salinger. Through his narrators, Salinger collapses the spatial element of his narratives and allows characters the intimate space necessary for them to communicate ideas such as love, salvation, and forgiveness. In doing so, Salinger creates "narrative immediacy." Each of Salinger's other *New Yorker* stories from 1948 ("A Perfect Day for Bananafish" and "Uncle Wiggily in Connecticut") could fall into

this category as well, since they are texts whose narrative intimacy reflects specific changes in character. In other words, they are texts in which visual and verbal closeness is established and sustained in such a way that it limits the actions/reactions of characters in response. Narrative immediacy results from closeness that is further reinforced by gesture, by images of touch that connect one character with another in an immediate, and perhaps, unmediated way. Salinger's work is often considered "cinematic" in its effects, but the effects in these stories are not primarily visual, and are instead mainly tactile. Furthermore, tactile images invite the narrative intimacy necessary for salvation, revelation, or redemption.

Salinger's use of tactile imagery necessarily creates a smaller scale of space within the narrative between both characters in their interaction and between character and reader. Again, the increase in proximity and the resulting tactile imagery seem connected to Salinger's setting (New York). The reduced spatial scale contributes to narrative immediacy. Unlike visual, auditory, or even olfactory imagery, which can occur when characters are at a greater distance, touch requires a degree of closeness that these other sensory images do not. In fact, only gustatory imagery, which invokes the sense of taste, requires a closer connection with the body. Thus, collapsing of space is a direct result of touch; and in describing tactile sensations, Salinger collapses the spatial component of his narratives, inviting a closer relationship among characters and reducing the distance between character and reader. Here again, little critical work has dealt with narrative immediacy, especially as it is enhanced by spatial closeness in the narrative. Because touch collapses narrative distance, the presence of tactile imagery is critical to allowing Salinger's characters to connect spiritually. Amy F. Sandefur uses the term "immediate narration" to "identify situations in which little gap exists (or is communicated to the reader) between the protagonist and the narrator," but her concentration on narrative distance is

primarily temporal, while it is the spatial aspect that is equally relevant and perhaps even more so in the case of Salinger's work as an investigation of Salinger's stories will demonstrate (Sandefur 1).

What loosely connects the use of tactile imagery in "Blue Melody," "A Girl I Knew," and "Just Before the War with the Eskimos" is Salinger's concentration on creating revelatory moments for characters that clarify the need for human connection through, love, compassion and understanding. Characters cannot seem to come to this realization when physical distance separates them; it is as if the physical space is a mirror for their emotional distance from one another. In "Blue Melody" an example of emotionally distanced character failing to make such a connection occurs when a "Yale man" asks Lida Louise to play a song for him. However, unlike the locals who "adore" and "deify" her, he seems indifferent to her obvious distress when he asks her to play "Slow Train to Jacksonville," while the dialogue alludes to the source of Lida Louise's anxiety as the very man who has performed this song for the "Yale man" to begin with ("Blue Melody" 174). Thus, the tendency of Salinger's characters to embrace revelatory moments is often enhanced when characters are in closer proximity to one another and further fore grounded by their tactile interactions.

In all three stories the protagonist comes to recognize the need for love or basic human kindness to sustain human relationships. As Ihab Hassan explains "[Salinger's] idea of love—a paramount concern—is entirely spiritual, and his celebrations of life are very nearly sacramental" (6). The recognition that overarching love and kindness must sustain relationships among characters often stems from a heartfelt offering by one of the other characters. Notably, all three stories involve an offering of food. In "Blue Melody" the offering comes in the form of a farewell picnic of "cold spare ribs" and "fried chicken" arranged by Black Charles and his

family as a going away present for Rudford ("Blue Melody" 175). In "A Girl I Knew" the offering is continual, usually some "kuchen or torte, wrapped rather inefficiently—perhaps surreptitiously—in waxed paper" that Leah would bring on the evenings that she shared with John ("Girl" 191). In "Just Before the War with the Eskimos," the offering consists of half of a chicken sandwich which Franklin gives to Ginnie after purchasing it the night before in a "goddam delicatessen" ("Eskimos" 74). These physical gifts of food carry with them spiritual nourishment for each of the protagonists and can be seen as among the most important tactile images in each story.

Conversely then, both "Blue Melody" and "A Girl I Knew" reveal that the opposite is also true. If kindness can sustain relationships, intolerance, or even indifference can destroy them. In "Blue Melody," the indifference of the attendants at the two "whites only" hospitals to which Rudford and Peggy take Lida Louise for treatment is the source of both reject outright refusal in favor of passive aggressiveness. Furthermore, the early description of the town's general reaction to Black Charles' establishment shows a similarly veiled refusal. The narrator reports that,

Black Charles's café was a hole-in-the-wall hamburger joint, a major eyesore on a street that was regularly torn down, on paper, whenever Civic Council convened. It was, perhaps, the paragon of all restaurants classified by parents—usually through the side window of the family car—as unsanitary-looking. ("Blue Melody" 168)

A similar predilection for indifference also figures prominently in "A Girl I Knew." Contrary to the vast numbers of Germans and others worldwide whose indifference allowed Hitler to perpetuate his crimes against humanity, and contrary to the soldier who refuses him entrance to the officers' quarters, John wants to see himself as a man of action. But even he notes that at

about “the same hour Hitler's troops were marching into Vienna,” he “was on reconnaissance for geology 1-b, searching perfunctorily, in New Jersey, for a limestone deposit” (“Girl” 194). A short time later his inaction is turned into action by his memories of Leah; as John says,

...during the weeks and months that followed the German takeover of Vienna, I often thought of Leah. Sometimes just thinking of her wasn't enough. When, for example, I had examined the most recent newspaper photographs of Viennese Jewesses on their hands and knees scrubbing sidewalks, I quickly stepped across my dormitory room, opened a desk drawer, slipped an automatic into my pocket, then dropped noiselessly from my window to the street, where a long-range monoplane, equipped with a silent engine, awaited my gallant, foolhardy, hawklike whim. I'm not the type that just sits around.
 (“Girl” 194)

The presence of indifference is not entirely absent from “Eskimos,” however. Franklin laments the “patriotism” which causes men to flock to the draft board for the next war, which he insists will be fought against the Eskimos. When Ginnie asks him why, he responds, “I don't know why. How the hell should I know why? This time all the old guys're gonna go. Guys around sixty. Just give 'em shorter hours is all. ... Big deal” (“Eskimos” 72). Therefore, the reader can see that Franklin believes that as long as people remain indifferent to human suffering, it will continue.

Both “Eskimos” and “Blue Melody” share a concern about the ability of materialism to corrode human relationships. In “Eskimos,” as the story opens the narrator notes that, “at dinner one night, for the edification of the entire Manno family, Ginnie had conjured up a vision of dinner over at the Graff's; it involved a perfect servant coming around to everyone's left with, instead of a glass of tomato juice, a can of tennis balls” (“Eskimos” 57). Ginnie's illusion of

Selena's perfect world shifts when she sits down in the Graff's living room, which she finds "altogether hideous" and "expensive, but cheesy" ("Eskimos" 62). Ginnie expresses her displeasure tactilely, with her mental rearrangement of the furniture, "throwing out table lamps, [and] removing artificial flowers" ("Eskimos" 62). Her opinion is further altered by Eric's attention to her polo coat which he says is, "the first really good camel's hair ... since the war" ("Eskimos" 77). In "Blue Melody" the emphasis on materialism is subtler and does not creep into the story until the very end when Peggy's mention of Iva Hubbel living at the old house where she and Rudford once played on Miss Packer's Street shows her to have succumbed to the expected adult judgments about material wealth. There is almost no indication of the ability of materialism to corrode relationships in "A Girl I Knew," with the possible exception of John's assertion that after getting his affairs in order in Vienna, he was "in a position to cut [his] letter home down to the bone" ("Girl" 186). Thus, having satisfied the material demands on him his need for connection with his family was of less importance than before.

Despite the fact that material prosperity may hinder personal or spiritual growth, Salinger is clear that such growth cannot be achieved by an alienated individual. Therefore, each story shows attempts by characters to connect to one another, most often through tactile interactions that attempt to collapse space. Examples of this include Peggy's assertion that she likes the way Rudford stands at the blackboard, (an observation that is arguably as tactile as it is visual since the blackboard calls to mind the smooth surface and the chalky substance used on it and allows Peggy to confront the space between Rudford and herself) while he notices her initially for her tendency to hide her gum in the crevice of her neck. Similarly, John and Leah share a connection that defies their inability to speak one another's language. John, cut off from family, friends, and country, makes a spiritual connection with Leah through their shared coffee and pastries and by

drawing her a map of New York. In “Eskimos” the connection is established is between Ginnie and Selena, whom Ginnie promises to revisit instead of going to the movies. Franklin seems merely a proxy for this connection, but it is his offer of kindness, his criticism of Ginnie’s “snobbish” sister, and his pitiable situation which brings about the change in Ginnie.

Salvation for these characters, if it does come, comes in the form of basic gestures of human kindness. Salvation for Salinger implies a need for tactile interactions that reinforce the ability of characters to connect meaningfully, without intermediaries. In the cases where human kindness fails to be given (as in “Blue Melody”) or where it is given only reluctantly (as in “A Girl I Knew”) the results are disastrous. But, when in “Eskimos” kindness is given, and willingly, by a clearly suffering soul; it is redemptive. In “Eskimos” salvation is not attained by Franklin, but instead by Ginnie, who recognizes her own tendencies toward pettiness and materialism through her interactions with Franklin and Eric, nearly all of which involve touch. While John in “A Girl I Knew” fails to attain salvation from suffering following Leah’s death, he does manage some measure of closure, though clearly the indifference of the Staff Sergeant suggests that he will continue to be alienated by his loss and suffering. Therefore, “Blue Melody” is the least hopeful of the three stories as it suggests that salvation is not possible for Rudford, who has witnessed the death of a talented and beautiful woman and an estrangement from the one person who may have understood it.

“Blue Melody”

Among the three stories that make use of tactile imagery to reveal truths to its young protagonist, “Blue Melody” is perhaps the bleakest, and as with most of the uncollected stories, little critical attention has been paid to it. The story was likely inspired by the short stint Salinger spent stationed in Tennessee and was originally titled “Needle on a Scratchy Phonograph Record” (Slawenski 157). John Wenke recognizes its dramatic qualities, which he says inhabit much of Salinger’s early fiction, simply noting that it was not solid enough for Salinger to include in *Nine Stories* (31). Eberhard Alsen finds the story noteworthy for its presentation of an outsider (27). In fact, all of the characters seem to be outsiders of one sort or another, and this “apartness” is central to how they interact tactilely. The narrative itself centers on a bookish young Southern boy named Rudford, and his tomboyish friend Peggy (more often called “Margaret”) and the children’s friendship with a local drunkard and blues piano player named Charles. Since Rudford and Peggy have few friends and, as white children under a segregated system are discouraged from interacting with their black neighbors, there is the suggestion of rebellion or even recklessness from the outset of the story.

Alsen also notes a recurring theme of death that occurs in nine of Salinger's twenty-two early stories (21). In "Blue Melody" the death occurs at the end of a picnic held to celebrate Rudford's last day in Agersburg before being sent to boarding school. As the picnic is concluding, Charles’ niece Lida Louise starts writhing in pain; and Rudford, using his elementary knowledge of anatomy and medicine, realizes that her appendix may be about to rupture. The friends take her to two local (white) hospitals, which refuse her treatment because she is black. The group begins to drive to Memphis to seek medical attention there but Lida Louise dies in Rudford’s arms before they arrive. As Alsen notes the bleak outlook in “Blue Melody” and some of Salinger’s other early stories stand in contrast to the later works. Alsen

suggests that “this difference is due primarily to a more pessimistic vision of life which is expressed in the recurring themes of unhappy male-female relationships and premature death (36). Alsen’s assertion is supported by the fact that Salinger concludes the story on such a sour note. As the story ends, Rudford and Peggy see one another again in New York, and she rather superficially asks Rudford if he still remembers Lida Louise and still listens to her records. He tells her that he does, and says that Peggy can call him to arrange to come listen to them, but the two of them never listen to the records and both go their separate ways.

In terms of both spatial and tactile considerations, “Blue Melody” offers an interesting entry into Salinger’s work, given its multiple points of view. Alsen notes that “Blue Melody” represents an “ambitious experiment” with point of view (18). The narrative purports to be the story of Lida Louise, an aspiring young jazz songstress from the Deep South. However, Gwynn and Blotner criticize the story’s “triple case of schizophrenia” since:

[p]lainly the story wants to be about Lida [Louise] Jones, a Negro blues singer who (in a situation based on accounts of the tragic end of Bessie Smith) dies from appendicitis because the Southern white hospitals to which she is taken will not admit her.⁶ But Lida’s story is witnessed and told by a white boy named Rudford, who appreciated blues when he was nine years old, and who taught Peggy Moore to love jazz and him when they were kids, even though she gets married and materialistic a dozen years later. But this is not all. The narrator of the story is not Rudford but *another* person, a man who hears the tale of Rudford and Lida in an Army truck in Germany in World War II, who inserts a note of admiration for Lida’s records, and who then promptly disappears from the reader’s ken (14).

The narrative structure of "Blue Melody" leads to what Gwynn and Blotner label its "schizophrenic" tendencies and also distinguishes it from the other two stories to be examined. The story's ultra-removed frame, through which a removed narrator tells the reader that he has heard this story during the war, provides temporal and spatial distance. However, the story quickly shifts its focalization to actual teller, who we understand to be the adult Rudford. Certainly, this multiple focus is one difficulty with the story. However, as Warren French observes, on a more positive note, and in comparison with "A Young Girl in 1941 with No Waist at All," "Salinger is more successful in handling a much more complicated tale-within-a-tale in 'Blue Melody,' which relates in flashback the story of a black singer, Lida Louise Jones" (*Salinger, Revisited* 26). Nevertheless, as French concludes, the focus of the story is on Rudford, as he is the character that links Lida Louise and the events in Agersburg, Tennessee to the narrator and the other men on the truck during the war in Germany.⁷

As with many of Salinger's works the primary themes occurring in "Blue Melody" involve the need for human understanding and compassion and the failure of such compassion to prevent an untimely death, a theme Salinger would also explore in "A Girl I Knew" and several other early stories.⁸ Human understanding is present in both Rudford and Peggy, because of their position as children, revered innocents in Salinger's world. However, this understanding is not present in the attendants at the white hospital who fail to care for the ailing Lida Louise, whose premature end reminds the reader that the world has been denied her talents. Because of this, Rudford says at the end of the story, "he almost never played the record for anybody in 1942. It was terribly scratchy now. It didn't even sound like Lida Louise any more" ("Blue Melody" 179). The need for humanity to embrace acceptance, or at least tolerance, can also be viewed as a secondary theme since Rudford and Peggy call for it at several points throughout the story. For

example, at one point, a frustrated Peggy can no longer accept the intolerance and addresses "everybody in the reception lobby: 'Damn you! Damn you all!'" ("Blue Melody" 177). The need for tolerance is also directly tied to the central theme of a need for human compassion. The story's main thematic concern is that love can overcome difference, in this case, that love can overcome racial prejudice. In clarifying these themes, it is useful to look at the way that Salinger uses language symbolically, relaying tactile sensations through his use of slang and connecting characters through gesture. Finally, though the story seems to want to attain salvation for its characters, it concludes without doing so.

Like all of Salinger's works, "Blue Melody" makes deft use of a slang that is both temporal and highly evocative of the tactile sensation. Even the title informs the reader that Salinger is engaging with senses other than sight, and the first line takes the reader into the story filled with tactile imagery. Salinger writes, "[i]n mid-winter of 1944 I was given a *lift* in the back of an *overcrowded* GI truck, going from Luxembourg City to the front at Halzhoffen, Germany—a distance of four *flat* tires, three (reported) cases of *frozen* feet, and at least one case of incipient *pneumonia*" ("Blue Melody" 167 [emphasis mine]). The use of "lift" is entirely appropriate as it suggests both a ride and a physical escalation of spirit, and though the "four flat tires, three (reported) cases of frozen feet, and at least one case of incipient pneumonia" and the cramped vehicle itself suggest anything but an elevation of spirit, the story which follows can be seen as much-needed entertainment, or at least distraction, for the weary GIs who occupy the truck. There are a number of other tactile images that appear in this opening section, including the onomatopoeic reference to taking a "crack" at the enemy ("Blue Melody" 167). These tactile images demonstrate the soldiers' reliance on one another to get through the day-to-day horrors of the war.

Each of these early references preserves the intensely connected nature of the soldiers in the truck, who are dependent on one another; a theme explored more closely in “A Boy in France.” “Blue Melody” does exhibit a tendency to move from a closely focalized narrative (cramped spaces and intimate interactions) to a very loosely focalized one spatially. In fact, at one point, the frame narrator, whose identity is not known, reminds the audience that the story he is retelling should not be interpreted as a “slam” against the section of the country where the story takes place (the South) indicating a much wider spatial focus (“Blue Melody” 167). But the wider focus is reigned in by an identification with American values as the narrator somewhat ironically insists, “[i]t isn’t a slam against anybody or anything. It’s just a simple little story of Mom’s apple pie, ice-cold beer, the Brooklyn Dodgers, and the Lux Theater of the Air—the things we fought for, in short” (“Blue Melody” 167). In “Blue Melody” the first and most prominent focal shift is introduced by a tactile image. As Rudford notices Peggy “insert her chewing gum into the hollow of her neck” the removed third person narrator slips into a more intimate dialog between Rudford and Peggy. Therefore, while “Blue Melody” shares with “A Girl I Knew” and “Just Before the War with the Eskimos” an attempt to collapse narrative space at times, it is also among the most sprawling of Salinger’s stories. While this derives mostly from the schizophrenic tendencies that Gwynn and Blotner mention in their analysis, key aspects of the spatial relationships provide insight into the kind of physical connection that characters seek, and the futility of trying to achieve such connection through verbal communication alone.

“Blue Melody” presents a story in which the tactile imagery functions much in the same way that critic Donald Picht argues that it functions in *Winesburg, Ohio*. Essentially, through tactility characters seek an enhanced level of connectedness to each other that cannot be achieved

through verbalization alone. The most poignant example of this need involves the way in which the children must awake Black Charles from his "dead man" slumber:

Rudford watched her a trifle smugly. "Naa. You can't just *shove him around* and get anywhere. You've seen me," he said. "You gotta *really haul off*. Get him right under the kidneys. You've seen me."

"Here?" said Peggy. She had her finger on the *little island of nerves* set off by the dorsal fork of Charles's lavender suspenders.

"Go ahead."

Peggy *wound up and delivered*. ("Blue Melody" 169, [emphasis mine])

Here, the reader sees that both children become closer through their association with each other and shared reliance on Black Charles. Salinger uses tactile imagery to convey the exact way that the children must rouse Charles from his sleep, but also the development of their relationship with one another. Rudford, in addition to becoming an object of Peggy's affection, also serves as a mentor to her. As noted above, this reliance makes the ending even sadder in that it shows how far apart the two have grown over the fifteen years that pass between the events in Agersburg and those in New York. As the children continue to work together to wake up the sleeping entertainer, the reader envisions just how difficult the situation is:

Black Charles *stirred slightly*, but slept on without even seriously changing his position.

"You missed. You gotta *hit him harder* than that anyway."

The aspirant tried to make a more *formidable weapon* of her right hand. She sandwiched her thumb between her fist and second fingers, held it away from her and looked at it admiringly.

"You'll break your thumb that way. Get your thumb out of—"

"Oh, be quiet," said Peggy, and *let go with a haymaker*.

It worked. Black Charles *let out an awful yell*, and *went all of two feet up in the stale, café air....*

Charles *scratched his head*, swung his immense, stockinged feet to the cigarette-butt-specked floor, and *squinted*. "That you, Margar-reet?" ("Blue Melody" 169-170, [emphasis mine])

As the passage demonstrates, the children not only have to touch Black Charles, a simple nudge will not suffice; instead, they must "haul off" with a wallop to make an impact on the sleeping piano player. This instance of touch demonstrates how the physical connection reinforces the spiritual connection that the two children have with Charles who "was kind and interested when young people came up to the piano to ask him to play something, or just to talk to him" ("Blue Melody" 169). Indeed, what the children value most in Black Charles and in each other is a connection that is highly spiritual, but mostly evoked through touch.

In another example, when Peggy falls from the rafter during their spitting contest, her plea to Rudford that he kiss her cheek is the opening that she needs to further connect with him. Peggy's request that Rudford come down from his perch on the rafters suggests that the two friends become more equal during this interaction, but Rudford still serves as guide and mentor and in the context of this example, even physician:

He pushed back a hank or two of the patient's lovely black-Irish hair.

"Where's it hurt?" he demanded.

"All over..."

"Well, I don't see anything. There isn't any abrasion at all."

"Isn't any what?"

"Abrasion. Blood or anything. There isn't even any swelling." The examiner drew back suspiciously. ("Blue Melody" 171)

Rudford and Peggy are constantly reinforcing their connection through tactile interactions. These are not instances of long conversations or prolonged gazes. Virtually all knowledge that the two children have of one another comes through touch (or observed touch). When Peggy presses Rudford, she seeks not only an entry point for her "sneaky announcement," but also a closer connection with Rudford. Here, Rudford's "philanthropy" allows for a very close physical connection to be formed:

"I don't even think you fell on your head."

"Well, I did. Keep looking...There. Right where your hand---"

"I don't see a thing. I am going back up."

"Wait!" said Peggy. "Kiss it first. Here. Right here."

"I'm not gonna kiss your old head. Wuddaya think I am?"

"Please! Just right here." Peggy pointed to her cheek.

Bored and enormously philanthropic, Rudford got it over with.

A rather sneaky announcement followed: "Now we're engaged." ("Blue Melody" 171)

Rudford later dismisses her as an adult as shallow and materialistic based on his "adult world" interaction with her, which is non-tactile, with the exception of Salinger's description of Peggy's "Navy flier" husband who "listened with an iron smile" ("Blue Melody" 178). All of Rudford's interactions with Peggy prior to this point have been couched in tactile terms, as when he notices her putting her gum into the hollow of her neck or "now and then kicking at a stone or a tin can,

or reflectively cutting a cigar butt in two with her heel” (“Blue Melody” 169). The difference in the interactions indicates the emotional distance that has developed between the two.

“A Girl I Knew”

The frustrated attempts among characters to connect with other human beings and the notion of indifference to human suffering link “Blue Melody” to “A Girl I Knew,” but while “Blue Melody” deals with racial prejudice, “A Girl I Knew” deals with anti-Semitism. The two stories also share an autobiographical connection, since “A Girl I Knew” follows the journey of a young man named John, who (like Salinger) “flunks out” of college and whose father sends him instead to Vienna to learn about the family’s import/export business. Though Ian Hamilton, in his biography, cautions against reading the story autobiographically,⁹ Eberhard Alsen labels “A Girl I Knew” “the most autobiographical” of Salinger’s early short stories (Alsen 3).¹⁰ Gwynn and Blotner in their assessment also stress the biographical connections (18). The story was originally titled “Wien, Wien” and Slawenski notes that when the story appeared in *Good Housekeeping* with an altered title, Salinger was so angered by the change that he abandoned publication in “the slicks” entirely (162).¹¹

The scholarly criticism of “A Girl I Knew” is even slimmer than that devoted to “Blue Melody.” John Wenke, in his study of Salinger’s short fiction notes only that although “A Girl I Knew” was published after “A Perfect Day for Bananafish,” Salinger’s failure to include it in *Nine Stories* suggests that it was not one of the stories “he wished [for his reputation] to stand on” (31). Eberhard Alsen addresses the story in his discussion of the women in Salinger’s fiction saying that he finds Leah to be among the most positive of Salinger’s female characters.¹² The protagonist, John, first notices Leah, who lives just downstairs from him, and the two share many evenings, drinking coffee and practicing speaking in each others’ native languages. Though the story contains seemingly few tactile images, the ones that do exist are central to understanding John and Leah’s connection, and the climax of the story depends on it. John and Leah never

develop any kind of serious romantic relationship as she is engaged to a young man from Poland and he is scheduled to travel next to Paris to learn French; however, they do develop a close bond with one another and she writes to him about a year after his return to New York. As Alsen notes, she is not duplicitous or shallow like so many of the women in Salinger's early stories. By writing him after her marriage and his return Leah shows affection born not of lust or the hope for personal gain, but out of a kindness and love that she has for all humanity.

Alsen also notes of this story, as with many of Salinger's early stories, a greater variety of settings and social environments than in Salinger's later works (32). For instance, while many of the later stories take place in and around New York,¹³ the young narrator of "A Girl I Knew" confuses Vienna with Venice, as he expects to see gondolas, and he is disappointed when, on the train from Naples to Vienna, he realizes his mistake. Still, he continues on to Vienna, and takes an apartment there. Gwynn and Blotner provide an almost wholly negative assessment of the "rambling picturesque tale apparently based on the writer's own abortive career as a trainee in a family meat-packing business in Europe in 1937" (18). They go on to conclude

The comic aspect of an 18-year-old American Werther psychoanalyzed in Vienna is delightful, but it hardly jibes with the climax—the narrator's return during World War II to find that his beautiful innocent Leah has been burned up in a Hitler incinerator. Even if Salinger is deliberately contrasting the two periods of his story, the second is simply too deep for tears, let alone for the parody style in which the first is presented (Gwynn and Blotner 18).

Despite this less than positive estimation of the story, Gwynn and Blotner's assessment does lead into some of the central themes present in the somewhat roughly-constructed tale.

As in “Blue Melody,” there is a premature death brought about by human indifference, and it is this quality (even more than the evil of Hitler’s regime) that Salinger’s narrator is critiquing. Here again, the reader recognizes the need for pure love to sustain human relationships. It may seem odd that as John advocates for *caritas* over a *cupiditas* that he chooses to emphasize the tactile interactions among characters; however, this is because only through the increased level of physical closeness that touch offers can characters achieve the emotional closeness necessary for real love to exist between them. A possible secondary theme of “A Girl I Knew” involves the need for forgiveness and the inability of surviving loss without closure. John must physically recreate at least a moment of his interaction with Leah in order to accept her death.

Tactile imagery in “A Girl I Knew” acts in service to these themes through its use of slang and by creating identification with the narrator. Here again, in his use of slang, Salinger is using tactile imagery that functions both literally and figuratively. John’s assertion that he was “breaking off anyway with a certain girl on Seventy-Fourth Street,” gives the reader a tactile indication of a broken emotional bond (“Girl” 186). In another example, when the narrator says of his father’s business partners, “I happened to give both his partners the willies on sight,” he is using a tactile metaphor (however ambiguous) to describe the sensation his alienation produces for his father’s business associates. John is also acknowledging in a small way his own alienation from the adult world of materialism and commerce. Incidentally, at the end of the story, he tells the staff sergeant that he does not know the proper way to store champagne, indicating to the reader that even an older, wiser John, tested by war and loss, is relatively unconcerned with materialism.

Another significant aspect of tactile imagery at work in “A Girl I Knew” involves a process of identification between the narrator and the reader; though, as the critics note, this identification fails to sustain the narrative, in part because the narrative turns to the absurd at times. Still, this is a case where Salinger’s narrator finds it necessary to go beyond the visual description. John says “my passport photograph, it might be worth mentioning, looked exactly like me” (“Girl” 186). But John does not limit his description to a mere visual aside, instead, in an effort to make his revulsion at the staff sergeant’s indifference more powerful, he continues to describe physical details to create further identification with the reader. John adds “at eighteen I was six feet two, weighed 119 pounds with my clothes on, and was a chain smoker” (“Girl” 186). This more detailed description invites the reader to visualize John, and also to slip into his clothes and even smell his cigarette. Slang also reinforces this property, as when John notes that “the soupy twilight made [him] feel a little drunk,” and that after meeting Leah, a “few seconds throbbed by” before he said hello. The reader can identify well with these tactile sensations, with the anguish of disorientation and expectation.

Physical descriptions are obviously important to the story. Other than the description of John, the physical description which takes on most importance in the story is the description of Leah:

She was sixteen, and beautiful in an immediate yet perfectly slow way. She had very dark hair that fell away from the most exquisite pair of ears I have ever seen. She had immense eyes that always seemed in danger of capsizing in their own innocence. Her hands were very pale brown, with slender, actionless fingers. When she sat down, she did the only sensible thing with her beautiful hands there was to be done: she placed them on her lap

and left them there. In brief, she was probably the first appreciable thing of beauty I had seen that struck me as wholly legitimate (“Girl” 188).

Thus, in addition to having “eyes that seemed in danger of capsizing,” the narrator pays particular attention to Leah’s hands. Described as “slender” and “actionless,” the hands add to Leah’s beauty and suggest a lack of action, despite the fact that the narrator later describes her knock and her “offering” of food in detail. The placement of Leah’s hands arguably indicates an attempt to suggest the Buddhist *dhyana mudra*, wherein one places the hands in the lap as a gesture of meditation (Beer 227). Later, John describes Leah’s knock as “poetry” saying

Leah’s knock on my door was always poetry—high, beautifully wavering, absolutely perpendicular poetry. Her knock started out speaking of her own innocence and beauty, and accidentally ended speaking of the innocence and beauty of all very young girls. I always was half-eaten away by respect and happiness when I opened the door for Leah (“Girl” 191).

In this passage John communicates symbolic meaning through a naturalized action. It is odd that the narrator describes even the literary form (poetry) in a way that suggests both tactility and orientation (perpendicular). Here, the physical act becomes an art form and the art form becomes a physical act. A tactile concept such as knocking is treated as poetry and even this simple act can communicate Leah’s innocence.

In “A Girl I Knew,” Salinger also employs tactile imagery to collapse the narrative space, and in the process determines, in part, the story’s narrative style. First, the narrator tells the reader that

... for every man there is at least one city that sooner or later turns into a girl. How well or how badly the man actually knew the girl doesn't necessarily affect the transformation.

She was there, and she was the whole city, and that's that. ("Girl" 188)

The implication that one person can replace everything, a thriving metropolis even, suggests a sort of intimacy that is so all-encompassing that it nearly eclipses everything else. Salinger follows this suggestion with another effort to compress the narrative temporally. Almost immediately after calling attention to spatial collapse through his mention of a city becoming a girl, the narrator describes Leah as "beautiful in an immediate yet perfectly slow way" ("Girl" 188). John recognizes Leah's beauty as stemming from both her physical appearance and her warm personality. The temporal element of the narrative is compressed by his suggestion that her beauty is both "slow" but also "immediate," indicating that many of Leah's best qualities are readily apparent. Both the spatial and temporal collapse bring Leah and John closer together physically to reinforce the emotional bond that the two make during their brief relationship. Later, John reverses this quality by telling the reader that Leah's "beauty seemed too great for the size of the room" at which point seeks to break the tension by telling Leah in German that she is very beautiful and asking if she is aware of this fact. The remark leads to the corrosion of their intimacy, and is nearly the last sentence that John speaks to Leah. The question is then followed by another example of tactile imagery where the tension between John and Leah reaches its climax, as John tells the reader:

[t]hat evening, for the first and last time, something more physical than a handshake happened to our relationship. About nine-thirty, Leah jumped up from the window seat, saying it was becoming very late, and rushed to get downstairs. At the same time, I rushed to escort her out of the apartment to the staircase, and we squeezed together

through the narrow doorway of my sitting room—facing each other. It nearly killed us.
 (“Girl” 193)

Since John and Leah do not spend any more evenings together before he departs for Paris, this last interaction leaves an indelible imprint on his memory, one which he later feels compelled to revisit.

The story also contains a fair amount of more puzzling tactile images. In one instance, John tells the reader,

I spent a little more than five months in Vienna. I *danced*. I went *ice skating* and *skiing*. For *strenuous exercise*, I argued with young Englishmen. I watched operations at two hospitals and had myself psychoanalyzed by a young Hungarian woman who smoked cigars. (“Girl” 188 [emphasis mine])

In this instance, the tactile images are obvious, but their meanings are unclear. Only when contrasted later with his “meaningless” conversations with Leah does their meaning become apparent. The narrator implies that although he participated in all of these things, what he remembers about Vienna is not the activities, such as dancing, skiing, or ice skating, but instead, the simple human connection he shared with Leah. John reinforces this lack of “action” in his relationship with Leah as he tells the reader: “[f]or four months I saw her two or three evenings a week, for an hour or so at a time. But never outside the apartment house in which we lived. *We never went dancing; we never went to a concert; we never even went for a walk*” (“Girl” 188 [emphasis mine]).

Another instance, which involves a metonymic connection that is made between physical items (records) and people (the women singing on the records) emphasizes the human component over the material. John says,

I had a phonograph and two American phonograph records in my room. The two American records were a gift from my landlady—one of those rare, drop-it-and-run gifts that leave the recipient *dizzy with gratitude*. On one of the records, Dorothy Lamour sang *Moonlight and Shadows*, and on the other Connee Boswell sang *Where Are You? Both girls got pretty scratched up* hanging around my room, as they had to go to work whenever I heard my landlady's step outside my door. ("Girl" 188 [emphasis mine])

Here the importance is placed on Connee Boswell and Dorothy Lamour as opposed to the physical gift, for even though the gift (or the act of giving) leaves John "dizzy with gratitude," it is the records that "go to work" whenever he hears his landlady. The records are collapsed metonymically to "both girls got pretty scratched up" ("Girl" 188). The spatial compression is reinforced in the physical description of Leah as well. Leah is described as having "eyes that seemed in danger of capsizing," indicating not only the physical qualities of her large eyes, but a certain frailty and innocence as well ("Girl" 188). Another instance where the narrator invokes tactile imagery occurs when John says, "a man can't go around carrying a key in his pocket that doesn't fit anything" ("Girl" 188). Discarding the obviously sexual inference that a psychoanalytic critic might be tempted to make, John's linkage of his feelings for Leah to a physical object suggest that it is something that he thinks he can discard without repercussions, although he later discovers this to not be the case.

“Just Before the War with the Eskimos”

In “Just Before the War with the Eskimos,” one of the stories Salinger did decide to include in *Nine Stories*, the reader sees a more mature “fleshing out” of Salinger’s attention to tactile imagery since Salinger does a better job of collapsing narrative space to create connection between characters than he does in his earlier stories. Like “A Girl I Knew,” and “Blue Melody,” “Eskimos” traces attainment of revelation by a young protagonist. On its surface, the ambiguous story presents a seemingly simple tale of a young woman named Ginnie Mannon, who accompanies her tennis partner Selena Graff to her home to retrieve several weeks of unpaid shared cab fares. There is more critical work on “Eskimos,” than on either “Blue Melody” or “A Girl I Knew,” but the critical work to date still falls short of the criticism of “A Perfect Day for Bananafish” or “For Esmé with Love and Squalor,” perhaps because “Eskimos” presents a more subtle narrative with less severe implications for its protagonist. Ginnie’s development is far less emotionally powerful than Seymour’s suicide or Sergeant X’s war experiences, but the story retains the attention to tactile images present in both of these more critically renowned stories.

Critical approaches to the story have varied widely. James Lundquist’s interpretation is both bleak and secular. Lundquist suggests that the story shows positive change for Ginnie’s character, but that the absurdity of society and the hopelessness envisioned by Selena’s brother Franklin suggest a much more pessimistic outlook (92). James Bryan has argued that Franklin serves as a Christ figure, noting numerous parallels in their appearance and behavior. Bryan makes a strong case, with the following assertion:

Franklin Graff may, in banal disguise, be Salinger's bleeding Christ-in the same metaphorical aspect as the Fat Lady of "Zooney," and as an application of Jesus' averment, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it

unto me." Franklin's appearance ("a long man ... no slippers ... sparse blond beard ... mouth ajar") may be a caricature of an El Greco-type crucified Christ. He has an abnormal heart condition (perhaps signifying his heretical ability to love in a loveless world) and he served the war effort in an airplane factory. His time of service, thirty-seven months, recalls the Christ ministry; and airplane-making may be a startling metaphor for the Christ mission—the implementation of spiritual levitation (227-228).

Bryan's analysis concentrates primarily on tactile descriptions of Franklin as revealed through Ginnie's focalization. However, while Bryan's analysis makes a strong case for this religious interpretation, it seems more important for arguing the role of Eric in Ginnie's epiphany, suggesting that Eric is the non-mystical explanation for Ginnie's acceptance of Franklin's offering. Bryan adds,

Eric, who patronizes Franklin, is Christ's antithesis and a catalyst therefore in enabling Ginnie to recognize Franklin's gift of love. Eric considers himself "the original Good Samaritan" (p. 41) while, in fact, the support he offers is mechanical and meaningless. Ginnie sees her "righteous indignation" over the cab fares mirrored in true perspective in Eric's recital of the impositions he suffers. She forgives Selena's debt, promises to visit again, and keeps the chicken sandwich (Bryan 228).

But while Bryan argues for an overwhelmingly religious interpretation, Eberhard Alsen claims that Ginnie develops romantic feelings for Franklin, which leads to the softening of her personality (93). However, it should be noted here that Ginnie's fondness for Franklin is not an affection born of physical attraction as Alsen suggests. In fact, several physical details noted in the story suggest that she feels revulsion and not attraction. For example, Ginnie's observation that Franklin "was the funniest-looking boy, or man—it was hard to tell which he was—she had

ever seen” does not imply physical attraction (*Nine Stories* 63). Thus, the story suggests that her feelings arguably lean more toward pity than attraction. Clearly, Ginnie’s realization is prompted partly by the sympathy she feels for Franklin—and his damaged body and soul—and partly through her interaction with Eric, during which she sees an exaggerated version of her own tendencies toward materialism, pettiness and judgementalism.

Despite these varied readings, it is clear that Salinger is primarily exploring themes involving revelation and salvation. The primary theme at work in “Eskimos” maintains that personal growth cannot be achieved by an alienated individual. As with the two previous stories, there is a concern about a premature death, but the concern in this story is focused on Ginnie and the death is a spiritual one and not a physical one. Salvation for Ginnie will only occur when she makes a real connection with another human being. Through Eric she achieves revelation of her own misguided materialism and through Franklin salvation brought about by the kindness of his offering. Thus, Ginnie’s revelation is that materialism corrodes human relationships and that only through simple human kindness can one be redeemed.

As Gwynn and Blotner note, “Just Before the War with the Eskimos” is a story that “dramatizes the growth of an adolescent’s human sympathy” (23). However, such a conclusion only emerges through a close reading that takes into account the tactile images so prevalent in the story. It remains unclear whether Salinger concentrates on touch in the story because he tends to pursue plots involving young people, or if, perhaps, the use of young characters creates a space for more tactile responses to the world. The use of young characters allows for increased tactile interactions since children usually have not yet learned to distinguish between the acceptable and unacceptable ways to respond to the world tactilely.

Tactile imagery in “Eskimos” can be roughly classified into four categories. The first, and most obvious of these, can be found in Salinger’s use of slang. Slang expressions in the story often contain tactile elements that suggest multiple meanings. The second has also been identified in both “Blue Melody” and “A Girl I Knew,” and involves the way that the narrator uses tactile images to collapse narrative space. The third is the search motif; characters in the story spend much of their time groping for things, this attention to a particularly non-visual search suggests the primacy of the tactile sense and also the characters’ need to “feel out” the world around them. The fourth and final category has already been noted by critics like Prigozy and Gwynn and Blotner, and involves an attention to (often unattractive) physical details and characteristics to note how they go beyond the visual description invoking tactility and mobility. These unattractive details allow the reader to identify with the characters, in effect extending the use of character identification present in both “A Girl I Knew” and “Blue Melody.” By identifying these four categories, the reader becomes aware that “Eskimos” presents a more mature version of Salinger’s attention to tactile imagery in his writing.

Salinger’s use of tactile imagery contributes to a tightened narrative structure which is one reason for the story’s success. In addition, “Eskimos” shares with *The Catcher in the Rye* and Salinger’s earliest stories, such as “The Young Folks,” a focus on youth and an attention to slang. While Salinger has been widely and often praised for his use of the popular vernacular, what is striking about its use in “Eskimos” is the appropriation of slang that references the tactile sense. The narrator, Ginnie, refers to her tennis partner Selena as a “drip,” and complains about getting “stuck” with the cab fare (*Nine Stories* 58). These uncomfortable terms, which are referred to on the first page of the narrative, reflect Ginnie’s dissatisfaction not only with Selena, but with herself and her situation. Ginnie’s dissatisfaction acts as a catalyst in her conversation

with Selena's brother Franklin, prompting her interest in his perspective, much to her own surprise. Other examples of slang words and phrases also call to mind the tactile world. For example, when Ginnie asks Selena to pay her share of the cab fare, saying, "I don't want to be ratty..." the reader understands that she means that she does not want to be seen as petty or cheap (*Nine Stories* 59). However, the tactile reference to something "ratty" as that which is worn suggests that the concern has been something nagging Ginnie for some time—"wearing on her mind," so to speak.

There is also an attempt by the narrator to collapse the spatial element of the narrative, though it is noticeably less pronounced than Salinger's efforts in the previous two stories. Despite the fact that "Eskimos" takes place in New York City, "a city laid out and developed according to rational designs grid patterns and numbered streets—but criss-crossed by the irrational movements of an unusually assertive populace, which, combined, creates a massive gridlock calculated to force people into unexpected collisions" the action in "Eskimos" occurs in within very confined spaces (Grant 35). The entirety of the story's events take place in either the backseat of a taxicab, or in the Graff's living room. By placing characters in these confined spaces, the narrator focuses the reader's attention on increasing identification with the characters and their development.

Ginnie, for one, does develop real compassion during the story. Still, Warren French notes, that "Ginnie's compassion has not developed to the point of extending to Eric, for she leaves without saying goodbye; but she has changed her attitude toward her 'drippy' classmate [Selena]" (72). Not until the end of the story however, does Ginnie realize that she is dissatisfied and searching for revelation. As the story concludes, she reaches into her coat pocket to find the

chicken sandwich that Franklin has given her out of genuine concern and empathy. She decides that she cannot throw it away because she too has changed.¹⁴ Donald Greiner notes,

The religious details—three days, Easter—frame Franklin’s quixotic gesture, and Ginny senses that the chicken sandwich is a gift, a holy offering in the midst of the phony. His gawky decency breaks through her facile hardness, if only momentarily, and the reader understands that all humans are hurt in one way or another. A gift must be recognized when the world offers it (Greiner 127).

The ending is notable in that it is the first time in the story that Ginnie physically searches for something. She is searching, just as Selena is searching in the beginning of the story, fumbling around the floorboard of the cab in search of her racket cover. Ginnie’s veneer of self-assuredness when she indifferently reminds Selena that her racket cover resides in the pocket of her topcoat has vanished. Franklin too has been searching, first for something in the wastebasket, then for something to stop his bleeding, so his search has left him injured, cut “right down to the bone and all” (*Nine Stories* 62). The effect of this search has been genuine human connection for both and an epiphany and redemption for Ginnie.

Ginnie’s search for salvation stems from her realization that life is not as perfect for Selena’s family as it might appear at first glance. As Ginnie watches Selena exit the cab and step onto the curb in front of her apartment building, she notes that Selena walked “briskly and obliviously, like visiting Hollywood royalty, into the building” (*Nine Stories* 60). Compared with the narrator’s description of Ginnie’s own “rubber-soled awkwardness,” Selena seems poised to remain the object of Ginnie’s ire (*Nine Stories* 61). However, after learning of Selena’s mother’s illness and meeting her gawky brother Franklin, whose 4-F status and unattractive physical qualities combine to make him an object of pity, Ginnie “softens” in her rush to judgment. The

actions of Franklin's insensitive friend, Eric, also help to bring Ginnie's prior assumptions into high relief, but their importance has often been overlooked. Eric's detachment and shallow materialism are grossly exaggerated versions of similar properties in Ginnie and in them she recognizes the dangers of pettiness and materialism to corrode human relationships and exacerbate detachment with the world.

With respect to the tactile, there are few stories more concerned with the body and with physical sensation than "Eskimos." From the first indication that Ginnie's face is "burning" with the flush of anger, we are treated to a narrative which spends a great deal of time describing tactile qualities and sensations. Most critics have pointed to the descriptions of Franklin, whose near-constant pain and torment are evinced through scratching, stinging, shock, and ache. These numerous references to suffering, combined with the Communion image at the end, offer strong evidence for viewing Franklin as a Christ figure; but more importantly, they provide striking examples of how witnessing these events creates in Ginnie a sympathy that comes from having an immediate knowledge of pain. These images of discomfort echo the unease the soldier's experience at the onset of "Blue Melody," and evince for characters and readers an increased awareness of physical presence and the affective quality of physical proximity. Ginnie experiences Franklin not only visually then, but palpably as well.

Conclusion

This study has endeavored to foreground the tactile images in Salinger's writing in an attempt to demonstrate Salinger's tendency to incorporate tactile images into his fiction in order to bring about character connection. Shared touch among characters relays to the reader their emotions and beliefs, reinforcing dialogue or eliminating the need for it altogether. A shared touch can convey feelings of love, isolation and dissolution. "Blue Melody," "A Girl I Knew," and "Just Before the War with the Eskimos" Salinger incorporates tactile images into slang, uses tactile imagery to create character identification and connection, as well as to condense the narrative space. The cumulative effect of these uses creates narrative immediacy for the reader that helps elucidate Salinger's main themes.

Often through slang, the reader perceives tactile aspects of language operating both literally and figuratively. It is his use of slang for which Salinger is most often noted, as Heiserman and Miller remark, "Mark Twain himself would probably be startled not at the frankness of Holden's language but at the daring of J. D. Salinger in copying it so faithfully" (Laser and Fruman 28). All three stories make use of slang, and all incorporate references to tactility in this usage. Slang usage is significant because the tactile references reinforce the thematic concerns stemming from revelation. The significance of Salinger's use of tactile imagery in the slang spoken by his characters is that these instances are near constant and reinforce both the character's and reader's attention to the tactile qualities inherent in making connection with the world.

Continual reference to the body and to incidents of touch also reinforces the collapsed spatial motifs in "A Girl I Knew" and "Just Before the War with the Eskimos" and enhances the instances of spatial compression in "Blue Melody." Because most of the action in "A Girl I

Knew” takes place during stilted conversations between Leah and the narrator in his bedroom, the reader understands why the room becomes so significant to John that he returns to it after Leah’s death. The room also presents a confined space in which Leah and John can interact without interference from the outside world, which is important because it separates their interaction and elevates these moments of closeness. It also focalizes the reader on this space, which takes on a sacred quality. In “Just Before the War with the Eskimos” a similar property is at work. “Eskimos” is among the most spatially compressed of all of Salinger’s stories.¹⁵ The confined spaces in “Eskimos” contribute to the removal of the outside world; though, of course they do not erase this world completely, as Franklin looks out the window and sees the men going to the draft board across the street. Still, the intimate space allows Ginnie and Franklin to interact meaningfully. Only in such a space can Ginnie clearly recognize Eric’s materialism through his description of her coat. In “Blue Melody,” the spatial element of the narrative varies widely from the removed voice in the cramped back of the GI truck in which the narrator tells the story, to the third-person limited narrator’s perspective, which is so closely focalized that it almost mimics first-person narration. Here, it would appear that the spatial element of the narrative is functioning in the exact opposite way, as the removed teller is in a confined space, while Rudford ambles around Agersburg, Tennessee. Still, the time Rudford and Peggy share in the barn or the two children’s communications with Black Charles all take place in relatively confined space, and it is through their tactile interactions with him in these confined spaces that they develop an emotional connection.

Tactile efforts to create identification with the characters and show connections among them are also important considerations for Salinger. The alienated individual cannot achieve either revelation or salvation on their own. Thus, tactile imagery plays a valuable role in

connecting characters. One can see Salinger's tendency to connect characters through touch especially in the self-descriptions of his narrators, which center on exacting physical details of the body, from Ginnie's "rubber-soled awkwardness" in her "9-B shoes," to John's description of his resemblance to his passport photo, and in the frame narrator of "Blue Melody" who eschews regional differences in favor of recognizing "the things we fought for" ("Eskimos" 60; "Blue Melody" 167).

The evaluation of tactile imagery in these three stories is only a starting point for future investigations of the function of tactile imagery in the larger body of Salinger's fiction generally. It is unsurprising that the title of Salinger's most famous work, *The Catcher in the Rye* makes use of tactile imagery, as do many of his most famous characters notably "Holden" (Caulfield) and the "Glass" family. Many of Salinger's minor characters, including those in his uncollected stories, have names that reflect tactile images as well; these include Philly "Burns" of "Soft-Boiled Sergeant," Hanson Carpenter, Phil Stone, and the Masons of "Go See Eddie" and many more. Thus, a systematic investigation into these works will likely prove fruitful grounds for a larger study of the tactile imagery in Salinger. Another line of investigation could focus on Zen motifs of touch and Salinger's attempts to merge elements of Zen with tactile images to create his own koans, an element that is likely at work in "Just Before the War with the Eskimos." Finally, an evaluation that focuses specifically on the epistolary qualities, as a specific tactile (as opposed to verbal response) to alienation might also prove useful, though obviously all of these considerations are outside of the scope of this study.

For the reader who would seek to find a blueprint in Salinger's use of tactile images, there may seem at first no discernable pattern. What does become obvious is the fierce concentration on tactile images that lies just below the surface of the narrative and that is

entwined with the narrative structure. Tactile images reveal character interconnectivity for the reader and provide for character identification, be that with a specific character (often the narrator or the subject of narrative focalization), or with the character's situation more broadly as in "Blue Melody," where the narrator alludes to "the things we fought for" (Blue Melody 167). Furthermore, tactile images give the reader a sense of enhanced realism that would otherwise only be available to those who had experienced the event. Hence, the use of tactile images in Salinger's work contributes to Salinger's creation of an ordinary world, inhabited by extraordinary human beings.

¹ The narrator of “Bananafish” remarks “[t]he young man suddenly picked up one of Sybil’s wet feet, which were drooping over the end of the float, and kissed the arch” (*Nine Stories* 24). The kiss is, of course, not the only reference to feet in the story, or in Salinger’s oeuvre. When Seymour kills himself with an Ortgies calibre 7.65 automatic, recollection of this kiss and the other mentions of feet (including Sybil’s sinking her foot into a collapsed sandcastle) become even more confounding. Critic John Russell has stated, “[i]t would not be wrong to say that feet appear in his one novel and fourteen relevant stories so prominently as to become signatures, almost like the red in a Reubens painting” (299). However, it is not simply Salinger’s attention to feet that permeate “Bananafish,” numerous tactile images emerge and these can be seen as making concrete the internal changes undergone by the story’s protagonist.

² These themes have been previously viewed by some scholars as part of Salinger’s Zen aesthetic. For example, Bernice and Sanford Goldstein make a powerful argument for the role of Zen for its attention to the “importance of the present moment; the long search and struggle in which reason, logic, cleverness, and intellect prove ineffectual” and “the inadequacy of judgment and criticism which reinforce and stimulate the artificial boundary between self and other” (313). Eberhard Alsen also makes a powerful argument for the role of Zen in Salinger’s works. However, one could argue, it is unclear whether these preoccupations with a world unable to be understood by pure reason and the need for another path are Zen’s influence on Salinger, or if they simply represent the applicable elements of Zen that Salinger himself sought in post-World War II America.

³ A search of the MLA International Bibliography found only eleven articles that deal directly with tactile imagery when using the search terms “tactility” or “tactile imagery” and limiting

search results to articles written in English. Some of the search results generated dealt with tactility in the visual arts and in music. A broader search that included only the search term “tactile” yielded a larger number of results, most of which appeared to be connected with the visual and performing arts or with new technologies and conceptions of the “haptic.”

⁴ Here, “naturalism” is being used in the structuralist sense, that is in referring not to the literary period, but rather to the convention of using action that is conventional or routine.

⁵ Babe Gladwaller is a character that Salinger wrote about in multiple stories, perhaps most notably, “Last Day of the Last Furlough.” Babe and Vincent Caulfield appeared in a number of Salinger’s earliest short stories. However, Paul Alexander notes the tonal shift of “A Boy in France,” in comparison with the earlier stories, saying, “[g]one is the cute, ironic tone of ‘The Hang of It’ and ‘Personal Notes on an Infantryman’” (104).

⁶ Many readers may see a striking parallel to the story in Lida Louise’s “real life” counterpart, Bessie Smith. Shortly after Smith’s death in an automobile accident, a similar story was touted as the explanation for her death. However, Smith’s most recent biography reveals the story to be an exaggeration, if not an outright fallacy (Albertson 196).

⁷ French notes “Lida Louise’s death, however, is not the central subject of Salinger’s story. The events connected with it are related in flashback by a young man named Rudford from Agersburg, Tennessee who tells the story of *what can certainly be described as the last minutes of his boyhood* to an unidentified narrator as they are riding in an Army truck from Luxembourg to the warfront in Germany” (French 26-27 [emphasis mine]).

⁸ Alsen identifies the theme of premature death as the second most important recurring theme in Salinger’s early stories and notes that it occurs in nine of the twenty stories that he identifies as

early stories (20). However, the same can be applied to Salinger's later stories, where the untimely death devolves from physical loss of life to a spiritual death.

⁹ Hamilton says of "A Girl I Knew" that initially he "read this story with particular attention, not because it was especially good (it wasn't), but because of what [he] took to be its documentary, real-life feel." He eventually concludes that the story is "admissible," but that reliance on its details would leave one on "shaky ground." (Hamilton 39) However, Eberhard Alsen says "[e]choes of Salinger's decision not to finish college sound through several of his stories." He then details the parallels between Salinger's visit to Vienna and the events of "A Girl I Knew." (Alsen 3)

¹⁰ According to Slawenski, Salinger did ask for a transfer to Vienna after the war concluded. Slawenski further speculates that Salinger wished to revisit the daughter of the family he had stayed with while in Vienna in 1937. Slawenski finally concludes that "A Girl I Knew" likely recounts factual events since, "Salinger's intense feelings for this family make it inconceivable that he imposed such a fate upon them through fabrication" (135).

¹¹ Slawenski notes, "recalling similar experiences in 1944 with *The Saturday Evening Post*, Salinger was incensed. Once again, a magazine had changed a title without consulting him. The editor, Herbert Mayes, though did not understand why Salinger was offended: "I don't know what upset Salinger," Mayes wrote, "but he protested vehemently, and ordered his agent, Dorothy Olding, never again to show me any of his manuscripts," Alterations without author consultation were common practice among such magazines in *The New Yorker*, Salinger had found a solution to his problems. His enforced tolerance for the slicks was at an end."

Slawenski's argument makes crystal-clear the importance Salinger placed on absolute deference to his artistic choices, and helps explain (perhaps) why he so admired Gus Lobrano, who seems

to have allowed and in fact, encouraged artistic freedom during his term as fiction editor at *The New Yorker*. This may also explain Salinger's dedication of *Nine Stories* to Lobrano and Olding.

¹² Alsen says that the "manipulative woman" is a recurring character type in Salinger's early short stories. But, he also notes four exceptions, these are "Ruthie in "Both Parties Concerned," Juanita in "Soft-Boiled Sergeant," Barbara in "A Young Girl in 1941 with No Waist at All," and Leah in "A Girl I Knew," but adds that the "negative female characters outnumber the positive ones" (Alsen 27).

¹³ Likely, Salinger's concentration on inhabitants of New York City was as much aimed at getting his fiction published in *The New Yorker* as it was about writing what he knew. As William Maxwell explained "[t]he [*New Yorker*] editors have in their minds an imaginary map of Manhattan which includes, strangely, all of Connecticut and Long Island, Florida, New Jersey, Hollywood, and wherever New Yorkers go. Since naturally a great many New Yorkers go into the army, the army is a wide open subject" (Yagoda, 220).

¹⁴ Here, there is a significant suggestion that Ginnie is creating her own kind of Zen koan. In retaining the chicken sandwich she is determining value separate from the prescribed cultural or material value of the leftover chicken sandwich.

¹⁵ "Just Before the War with the Eskimos" is not regarded as Salinger's best-crafted story. This distinction, Gwynn and Blotner and some other critics accord to "For Esmé with Love and Squalor," but "Eskimos" does make use of the Aristotelian unities of time and space.

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