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Boyhood in Penrod, Tom Sawyer, Huckleberry Finn, and The Catcher in the Rye

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BOYHOOD IN PENROD, TOM SAWYER, HUCKLEBERRY FINN
AND THE CATCHER IN THE RYE

by

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requirements for the degree of Master of Arts
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INTRODUCTION

In a novel the reader is asked to believe in people who are not real, to become interested in lives which exist only in the imagination. Since good fiction has no single "standard operating procedure," the final test of its success must lie in the degree to which the imaginary characters transfer real emotion and thought from the author to the reader.

"If for some moments the reader will think hard of his circle of friends and acquaintances," Booth Tarkington once wrote, "he'll perceive that his thoughts are really roving among strangers."¹ If the people whom one thinks he actually knows are strangers, how formidable is the task of creating literary characters with whom the reader feels kinship or recognition! Yet much of a literary work's final success is measured by the author's ability to create just this sense of recognition. It is a rare miracle when a human being is created from ink, paper, and imagination.

It is an even rarer miracle when an author is able to recapture the reality of boyhood or adolescence. To create boys who have reality requires acute and accurate observation, a retentive memory, and, especially, skillful artistry. This is the miraculous combination which makes boys whose reality we apprehend with delight and whom we know better than many of our "friends and acquaintances."

¹"Introduction," The Show Piece (Garden City, N.Y: Doubleday and Co., 1947), p. viii.

In discussing American youth, I realize I am entering a field already over-populated. Multitudes of experts have studied the boy and adolescent, measured his bones, his I. Q., his motivations, and the money in his pocket. Since the Tom and Huck of Tom Sawyer walked ridge-poles, since Penrod Schofield and Sam Williams played in the alley, such young people have become an American caste and a national market, catered to by million-dollar industries, publications, and beleaguered parents. (A hula hoop in every garage.) As a member of the latter group, I note with regret that growing up seems to have become more of a public nuisance than a private experience. I speak, however, as a disenchanting grownup who has lived through a hot war, is shivering through a cold one, who has little to give the young in the way of faith and who, in moments of exhaustion, occasionally agrees with Ko-Ko's sentiments. "They'll none of them be missed--They'll none of them be missed."

This thesis will study Booth Tarkington's Penrod, Mark Twain's Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn, and J. D. Salinger's Holden Caulfield and will analyze the elements which have made their heroes "classics" of boyhood. These authors would never have thought of Ko-Ko's line. They have created boys well worth knowing and studying both from literary and artistic standpoints and from a human one as well. Unlike the aforementioned experts, Tarkington, Twain, and Salinger treat boys as people, not statistics. Their text is always human nature, and, through their heroes, they look thoughtfully, humorously, and imaginatively at the human condition. Very much aware that boyhood is a private experience, they have conceived characters so intensely as to make their voices the voice of a national experience.

In Chapter I, I shall discuss some general characteristics of boy-

hood as seen in Tom and Penrod, and of adolescence as shown in Huck and Holden. In spite of the difference in the authors' treatment of the hero, each knows that the inner life of a boy, his motives, attitudes, rebellions, and behavior have much in common. So I shall consider what these authors believe is universal in all of boyhood, whether one is visiting cemeteries, floating down the Mississippi, playing in a stable, or having a lost weekend in New York. Because humor is such an important element in the creation of these four boys and because it underlines their universality, it will receive special attention in this chapter.

Chapter II will discuss the particular view of human experience in each book, including the way in which the setting and dialogue capture the several attitudes toward boyhood, whether the author fuses these elements to make a serious comment on the human condition or merely to present a facet of youth.

I shall conclude with a discussion of the individual conflicts of the heroes--the problems which they face that awaken a sense of recognition--so as to suggest how deeply these authors involve or "commit" the reader. It is exactly in this area that the magic which brings a character to life can be most forcibly projected. A literary character becomes a person only if his personal feelings and conflicts strike a responsive chord in the reader. If Twain, Tarkington, and Salinger make us understand, really understand, their heroes' conflicts and if their characters retain their originality and individuality, as they transmit that "shock of recognition," their stories will continue to delight and move succeeding generations.

CHAPTER I

I

COMPARISON OF TOM SAWYER AND PENROD SCHOFIELD

Perhaps the most predominant element in the artistry of Tom Sawyer and Penrod is the authors' delightful portrayal of those characteristics of boyhood which are universal. According to William Dean Howells, "Tom Sawyer is a wonderful study of the boy mind which inhabits a world quite distinct from that in which he is bodily present with his elders and in this lies its great charm and universality, for boy nature, however human nature varies, is the same everywhere."¹ The same could be said of Penrod. Twain and Tarkington understand how a boy feels and with masterly craft penetrate into his inner life, the Walter-Mitty type world in which he lives, a world where morality is based upon what one can get away with and where imagination is more important than facts.

Tom and Penrod are the Human Equation of Boyhood, itself, larcenously experimental when out of range of adult observation, intensely human, sympathetically disobedient, and constantly misunderstood. The ambition which they share with each other, and with all boys, and which underlies their peculiar ideas and activities is their unceasing wish to be omnipotent in the boyhood world they so briefly inhabit. A few of the manifestations of this youthful hubris are their clashes with authority, their imaginations, their lies, and the things they value.

¹My Mark Twain (New York: Harper and Bros., 1910), p. 126.

The key word in Howells' remark may be "elders." The things which are anathema to Tom and Penrod are invariably perpetrated by grownups. The impracticability of creating the world one wants to live in does not seem to occur to most of the young. It is characteristic of all boys of Tom's and Penrod's age to attempt to live in a world of their own and to guard it jealously, by whatever means, fair or foul, that comes to hand. There is almost nothing that these boys will not do to avoid adults. Why?

"Grownups are the natural enemies of kids, because we knew that what they wanted us to do was to be like them. And that was for the birds... 'Hey, mother, you know what? Ted Fenster's kid brother eats dirt.' 'Well, don' let me catch you doing it,' said your mother. 'Go-wan,' a kid would say. 'Eats dirt? You mean really eats dirt? Yer full of it.' 'He'll do it for a penny,' you said, and you went off to find Ted Fenster's kid brother, and by God he ate dirt, lots of it, spoonfuls of it for a penny."²

One of the major elements, then, that make Tom and Penrod such genuine boys is their struggle that can be labelled, "Boy versus Adult." It is an inseparable corollary to their attempts to keep their own world inviolate.

In their attempts to live their own lives Tom and Penrod combine the subtlety of a Richelieu with the energy of a P. T. Barnum. Both boys live in a world characterized by Promethean ambitions. Tom can't rest until he realizes his grandiloquent fancies and Twain, more generous to him than Tarkington is to Penrod, makes melodramatic things happen to him, yet the portrait of the boy, himself, is none the less true for the unreal background against which it is seen. In fact, the fantastic events in Tom Sawyer seem almost built out of the dreams in

²Robert Paul Smith, Where Did You Go? Out. What Did You Do? Nothing. (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., Inc., 1957), p. 40-41.

the mind of a boy. Penrod must make do with the empty stable, inspired ingenuity, and a very active imagination. Tom has the graveyard and Injun Joe, the cave, and buried treasure.

Though both boys seem to be the incarnation of passionate extremes and violent emotions, Tom has a chance to work off his steam so his collisions with adults are not quite as cataclysmic as Penrod's. Because he has some place to go, Tom has a way of escaping adult demands. Penrod has not, but he fights intrusion with enterprise and imagination and results that are devastating, as when dressed as Launcelot, he puts on the janitor's overalls or runs amok with a tub of tar. Tarkington, always interested in Penrod's reactions, shows his true knowledge of boy psychology. "The more closely volcanoes, Western rivers, nitroglycerin and boys are pent, the deadlier is their reaction at the point of outbreak."³

Both authors give charming and complete descriptions of boy imaginings with such conviction that the reader inevitably lapses into autobiographical reminiscences. All will find the spirit of their own mental voyaging in that of Tom, though few have had such prolific imaginations.

"What if he turned his back now, and disappeared mysteriously? What if he went away - ever so far away, into unknown countries... and never came back any more...No...he would join the Indians... and away in the future come back a great chief...hideous with paint, and prance into Sunday-school, some drowsy summer morning, with a blood-curdling war-whoop and sear the eye-balls of all his

³Booth Tarkington, Penrod, His Complete Story (Garden City, N.Y: Doubleday, Doran and Co., Inc., 1931), p. 283. All quotations from Penrod will be taken from this text.

companions with unappeasable envy...He would be a pirate! That was it! Now his future lay plain before him and glowing with unimaginable splendor." (p. 71)⁴

The dreams being temporarily unattainable, Tom immediately becomes Robin Hood, and, with Joe Harper, acts out the outlaw's adventures to the complete satisfaction of both parties. It is, they decide, much more fun than being President.

As for the Tarkington juveniles, Walter Mitty might envy them their imaginative powers. Penrod's reveries are one of Tarkington's most effective devices for delineating the "other world" of a boy and through them he obtains some of the most hilarious scenes in Penrod. Desperately bored by the schoolroom, Penrod imagines that he can float.

"He found, in this curious series of imaginings, during the lesson in arithmetic, that the atmosphere may be navigated as by a swimmer under water, but with infinitely greater ease and...in his mind he extended his arms gracefully, at a level with his shoulders, and delicately paddled the air with his hands, which at once caused him to be drawn up out of his seat and elevated gently to a position...where he came to an equilibrium and floated; a sensation not the less exquisite because of the screams of his fellow pupils, appalled at the miracle. Miss Spence herself was frightened; but he only smiled down carelessly upon her..." (p. 48)

The descriptions of these imaginings are the quintessence of childhood. It was ever thus. Tom is Robin Hood, Penrod flies over the schoolroom, and boys in 1962 go into orbit on a couple of boards tied together with string, a game undoubtedly played on both sides of the Iron Curtain with only a change of name to differentiate the "orbiteers." The artistry with which Mark Twain and Tarkington evoke the changelessness of boyhood is possibly the greatest charm of these books. They describe their own

⁴Samuel L. Clemens, The Adventures of Tom Sawyer (New York: The Saalfield Publishing Co., 1931). All quotations from The Adventures of Tom Sawyer will be taken from this text.

heroes and the reader supplies the rest, either from almost-forgotten aspects of his own childhood or from watching his own children.

I once read that lying is a child's main defense against adults. It is a protective measure against the incalculable ways of the grown-up world which demands that which most bores the child--explanations. Tom and Penrod seem to prove the truth of this statement. The lying which these boys do is almost as inspired as their imaginings, and they seem to do it principally to protect those imaginings, or, at least, to protect their own world from adult intrusion.

They would really rather lie than not, and their embroiderings on the truth are shameless and hilarious. Tom lies about going to school, about giving "pain-killer" to the cat, about dreaming of Aunt Polly mourning for him, and, of course, he lies to save his skin. When Penrod, to avert Miss Spence's wrath after he has told her to "shutup," narrates the drunken downfall of his Uncle John, he tells such a whopper to his teacher that it takes a chapter to record it.

"In detail he was nothing short of plethoric; and incident followed incident...His eloquence increased with what it fed on...The surprising thing about a structure such as Penrod was erecting is that the taller it becomes the more ornamentation it will stand. Gifted boys have this faculty of building magnificence upon cobwebs - and Penrod was gifted." (p. 60-61)

No more so than Tom, though, who hesitantly and sweetly tells his aunt his dream about her evening with Mrs. Harper when he and Joe had been given up as dead, but Tom was hiding under the bed listening.

Things! Either things were invented for boys or boys for things. And, in this area "boy nature" is as unvarying as the stars in their courses. I have known grown men who might be hard put to tell you what grade one of their children was in, speak in loving and specific detail

of a jackknife owned at the age of twelve--including the number of attachments that pulled out and the illegal and deadly uses for each. This aspect of boy life separates boys from adults as effectively as an Iron Curtain and Twain never forgets it. To a boy, things are better than treasury bonds. Let any adult who doubts this empty a boy's pockets.

After the whitewashing scene, Tom has done much more than con his friends into working. He's collected a huge pile of loot.

"And when the middle of the afternoon came, from being a poor poverty-stricken boy in the morning, Tom was literally rolling in wealth. He had beside the things before mentioned, twelve marbles, part of a jews'-harp, a piece of blue bottle-glass to look through, a spool cannon, a key that wouldn't unlock anything, a fragment of chalk, a glass stopper of a decanter, a tin soldier, a couple of tadpoles, six fire-crackers, a kitten with only one eye, a brass door-knob, a dog-collar - but no dog - the handle of a knife, four pieces of orange peel and a dilapidated old window-sash." (p. 25)

Tom and Penrod lived nearly half a century apart in time and engaged in activities that have little in common, but Twain and Tarkington emphasize the unchanging aspects of boyhood in a way that is very nearly parallel and create boys that we can see in our own children, and, if for a moment, we can forget the "earthly freight" of adult life, we may catch a long ago glimpse of ourselves.

The struggles, activities, and dreams of these boys never go beyond the childish level. Piracy, outlaws, and floating in the air are the stuff of their world, and the grownup conventions against which they rail and connive are really bulwarks for them. Neither of them has any visions of growing up. It is the last thing they want, and if we stop to think, it is the last thing we want for them. It is pleasant to think of them safely in the world of boyhood, static characters, but with a reality which makes their stories absorbing and timeless.

Twain and Tarkington are, without question, masters at evoking the special world of a boy. This world is special because it is one of the very few places left where imagination is more important than facts. Tom and Penrod would agree emphatically with Robert Paul Smith as he describes a treehouse he had as a boy.

"We were so high up in the empyrean we were on a level with the bedroom windows. You may think this was only one story up in the air. How, then, do you account for the fact that the air was thin, and we were continually surrounded by eagles?"⁵

There are not many adults who would literally like to relive childhood, but there must be very few who do not enjoy going back to the halcyon and rigorous youth of Tom and Penrod.

II

HUMOR IN TOM SAWYER AND PENROD

In the world which our children have inherited, innocence and exuberant gayety are too often will-o'-the-wisps. Not only do they not have an island or even an empty stable, but our own anxieties seem to have been projected onto the children, and their problems, in turn, have been discussed and written about ad nauseam. It is therapeutic. No, it is more than that. It is balm in Gilead to read about boys who are lighthearted, uncomplicated, and, best of all, just plain funny.

The kind of humor that is used to describe them is one of the reasons that reading about Tom and Penrod is such a pleasant experience. It is a compound of nostalgia, geniality, and, above all, an appreciation of the inborn comedy of youth. Less complicated and penetrating

⁵ Where Did You Go? Out. What Did You Do? Nothing, p. 72.

than the more complex humor which describes the adolescent boy, it none the less has a very special charm. Tarkington described this kind of comedy when he said, "The best humor finds little pleasure in any pain at all and seems to be a delighted observation of incongruities and peculiarities."⁶ There is no one less funny to himself than a twelve- or thirteen-year-old boy and it is precisely the deadly seriousness with which Tom and Penrod go about their concerns that creates a golden opportunity for comedy.

If treated by an artist, these incongruities of boy nature have great humorous possibilities and Twain and Tarkington never miss an opportunity to capitalize on this truth with a lightly satiric touch. Much of the humor, of course, is implicit in the "Boy versus Adult" struggles of Tom and Penrod. Everything they do to protect their own has hilarious elements. Both authors, though, heighten the comic aspects by the contrast of a supple and fluid style which, when it describes what a boy is doing or imagining, is classically economical, almost photographic, with the use of the over-elaborate word to describe events that to adults are trivia incarnate. The arrival of Ben Rogers during the whitewashing scene in Tom Sawyer is a literary distillation of boy imagination.

"As he drew nearer, he slackened speed, took the middle of the street, leaned far over to starboard and rounded to ponderously and with laborious pomp and circumstance - for he was personating the Big Missouri, and considered himself to be drawing nine feet of water. He was boat and captain and engine-bells combined, so he had to imagine himself standing on his own hurricane-deck giving orders and executing them." (p. 22)

And, in the same chapter, Twain, using straightfaced hyperbole,

⁶"A Guess at George Ade," American Spectator (January, 1933), p. 3.

says, "And while the late steamer Big Missouri worked and sweated in the sun, the retired artist sat on a barrel in the shade...and planned the slaughter of more innocents. There was no lack of material..." (p. 24)

Both Twain and Tarkington, who was his great admirer, show their adult readers truths that boys, themselves, don't understand. At the end of the same day, Tom, Twain says, "had discovered a great law of human action--without knowing it--namely, that in order to make a man or a boy covet a thing, it is only necessary to make the thing difficult to attain." (p. 25)

The result of both authors' use of the facetiously exaggerated word is to render a situation on two levels, the reader's and the boy's, with, of course, reactions that are poles apart. The reader is amused, the hero often desperate.

"He [Tom] got home pretty late that night, and when he climbed cautiously in at the window, he uncovered an ambuscade, in the person of his aunt...her resolution to turn his Saturday holiday into captivity at hard labor became adamant in its firmness." (p. 19)

Tarkington remarked about Penrod, "'All I do is try to make the reader think how funny boys really are'"⁷ His touch is as true and sure as Twain's and also very similar. Penrod's school reverie, quoted earlier, is comparable to the approach of the Big Missouri. But when something is happening to Penrod, or more exactly, when Penrod is making something happen, Tarkington subtly interweaves his own comments, indicating without saying so that the funniest thing about this boy is the contrast between an action which seems completely natural to him, but insupportable to an adult. It is a transparent type of description which, like Twain's,

⁷Albert D. Van Nostrand, "The Novels & Plays of Booth Tarkington: A Critical Appraisal." Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard, 1951, p. 304.

simultaneously shows two points of view, the adult's and Penrod's, the boy usually being totally unaware of his own motivations.

When the worlds of the boy and the adult collide, as they do when Penrod plays Sir Launcelot in the school pageant, comedy is made. In this episode, Penrod has been dressed as the Child Sir Launcelot by his female relatives. Just before his entrance onto the stage, he realizes with anguish that Launcelot's tights are his father's red underwear. "Gazing upon the ghastly trunks, the stricken Penrod felt that he was a degree worse than nude; and a great horror of himself filled his soul." (p. 28)

Penrod is called to go on stage. He is paralyzed, but only temporarily. "...The dilating eye of the outlaw fell upon the blue overalls that the janitor had left hanging upon a peg. Inspiration and action were almost simultaneous." (p. 28) He appears in the auditorium in the oceanic overalls. The legs are so long that they have "a distinctly elephantine effect," (p. 33) but satisfied that his disgrace is covered, he happily begins to declaim,

"Sweet child-friends of the Tabul Round
In brotherly love and kindness abound." (p. 33)

The reason for the ensuing pandemonium in the audience escapes him. Grown women are reduced to helpless hysteria until someone thoughtfully draws the curtain. Tarkington enjoys exaggerating the commonplace incident even more than Twain does, and this incident in Penrod is taken from the author's own childhood.

That evening the late Child Sir Launcelot awaits his father's arrival.

"Shortly after, there was put into practice an old patriarchal custom. It is a custom of inconceivable antiquity,

probably primordial...but still in vogue in some remaining citadels of the ancient simplicities of the Republic." (p. 36)

Later, Penrod leans against the back fence. He sighs. "'Well, hasn't this been a day!...'...It was a sigh of pure ennui." (p. 37) And, with this ending, Tarkington "turns the literal transcript of boy life into humorous art."⁸

Of the two authors, Tarkington's presence is the more evident. Although in some books the author's intrusion detracts, Tarkington's remarks put the exclamation point on the comedy which occurs when Penrod's zeal over-extends itself; as when Penrod and Sam, his alter ego, give a sideshow in the stable. In order to be a participant, Roderick Bitts, a boy in the neighborhood, is forced to acknowledge kinship with a murderess of the same last name whose trial is making newspaper headlines. Roderick becomes Exhibit A of the show and a poster announcing his close relationship to the female criminal is prominently displayed on the main street. When Roderick's mother, a self-important woman who takes her family connections very seriously, discovers her son's part in the show, she appears in the stable loft breathing fire. The terrified Penrod even thinks he sees lightnings playing around her head. Tarkington reduces the scene into two hilarious sentences. "There ensued a period when only a shrill keening marked the passing of Roderick as he was borne to the tumbril. Then all was silence." (p. 124)

Tarkington once remarked that there were not many ameliorating factors in life and of the few he ranked comedy high.⁹ The comedy of Tom

⁸James Woodress, Booth Tarkington, Gentleman from Indiana (New York: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1955), p. 177.

⁹"Nipskillions," Looking Forward and Others (Garden City, N.Y: Doubleday, Page and Co., 1926), p. 36.

Sawyer and Penrod help one realize why laughter is worth treasuring.

The humor in these books never seems to strive for effect, but consistently remains true to the innate truth of the boys, themselves, illuminating a facet of boyhood that is too often overlooked.

The light touch is in short supply in our brave new world, and, if one takes a backward look, one realizes that the people one remembers most joyfully and with the most gratitude are the gay ones, the people who make us laugh. And, improbable as it seems, we might even find our own children funnier because Twain and Tarkington show us how.

III

COMPARISON OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN AND HOLDEN CAULFIELD

With the exception of certain parts of Tom Sawyer which deal with the beginning of Tom's growing up, and which will be discussed in Chapter III, Tom's and Penrod's attitude towards the world might be described as follows:

"I wrote on the flyleaf of my schoolbooks, and apparently every kid in the world did, including James Joyce and Abe Lincoln and I am sure Tito and Fats Waller and Michelangelo, in descending order my name, my street, my town, my county, my state, my country, my continent, my hemisphere, my planet, my solar system. And let nobody dissemble; it started out with me. The universe was the outer circle of a number of concentric rings, and the center point was me, me, me, sixty-two pounds wringing wet with heavy shoes on."¹⁰

These wonderful boys have an invaluable trick which they use when something threatens their world, a phenomenon familiar to all parents. In our house, it is called "tuning out." If you don't want to hear what

¹⁰ Robert Paul Smith, p. 22-23.

a grownup says, just don't listen. This can cause strained vocal chords or fury on the parent's part, but the smart child lets the storm blow over and then goes on about his business, the center of which now is and always will be, "me, me, me."

Huckleberry Finn and Holden Caulfield are not completely out of this magic world, but, like all adolescents, they have most certainly passed the stage of being able to "tune out" on adult interference. The self-centered activities pursued so enthusiastically by the younger boys are almost impossible for Huck and Holden because of their awareness of adult behavior which they cannot ignore. Tom and Penrod think they live among certainties. Huck and Holden are discovering that they do not.

If, as Howells said, "boy nature...is the same everywhere," is it safe to assume that adolescent nature, too, has many points of similarity? A close study of Huckleberry Finn and Holden Caulfield, two boys who could not be more dissimilar, gives the answer. Because they are created by artists who write with penetration and understanding of an adolescent boy's nature, the vagabond on the Mississippi and the boy who feels snobbish about friends with cheap suitcases emerge as brothers under the skin, sharing emotions and behavior common to all adolescents from the Old Testament to the Beat Generation.

They share with Tom and Penrod their acute awareness of adults, their rebellions, their need to assume different roles in their imaginations, and their propensity for lying; but in these immature characteristics, one sees much greater dimensions and implications than in those of the younger boys. And, unlike the younger boys, Huck and Holden have the beginnings of maturity in judging others and adolescent uncertainties about themselves.

Whereas the boyhood traits of Tom and Penrod consistently reveal how similar the boys, themselves, are, in the older boys, the very attitudes they hold in common are a springboard from which their differences emerge, creating boys who show much more than Tom and Penrod the complexities of the human personality. There is much more to know of Huck and Holden than we are told--possibly more than their authors know. Once more, ink, paper, and imagination combine magically to create real boys, but in this case, very complex human beings.

Huck and Holden, because of their age, are more vulnerable, more liable to inner disquietude than the younger boys, and they feel that they have much to be disquieted about. Huck's comment, "Human beings can be awful cruel to one another,"¹¹ is paralleled by Holden's "People are always ruining things for you."¹² Both boys are instinctively self-protective and they try to escape what seems menacing to them. At the same time, however, they are mature enough to notice themselves in relation to other people. (It is only a step from their awareness of adults to their own reactions to the hypocrisy, stupidity, and evil they feel are inherent in the adult world, but since this is a fairly complicated and important portion of this thesis, it will be discussed in Chapter III.)

In Howells' remark about the universality of boy nature, he included the phrase, "However human nature varies," and Huck and Holden, no longer insulated by the gigantic self-interest of Tom and Penrod, are just far

¹¹ Samuel L. Clemens, Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, ed. by Henry Nash Smith, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1958), p. 194. All quotations from Adventures of Huckleberry Finn will be taken from this text.

¹² J. D. Salinger, The Catcher in the Rye (New York: The Modern Library, 1951), p. 114. All quotations from The Catcher in the Rye will be taken from this text.

enough out of the world of boyhood for us to see what this nature will be. Their authors, too, have given the older boys very complex environments. There is no security in the adult world for Huck and Holden. Huck becomes involved with adults that Tom and Penrod would never have met, and Holden meets a few who might make even Huck's hair stand on end.

Huck, two or three years younger than Holden, is the more mature of the two. In fact it seems that he has never been young, that he was very likely born with his shrewd ability to judge people and his strange combination of disillusionment and innocence. Where the adult world is concerned Huck is from Missouri, metaphorically as well as literally. He looks it over, keeps his own counsel, and tries to stay clear of its complications. He is a realist, though, and does not, like Tom or Penrod, try to keep his own world safe without quite being aware of what he is doing. He is better off on the raft and he knows it! The task of the adolescent has been called one of self-identification.¹³ Huck is more aware of who he is and where he is going than many adults. His basic attitude toward adults, however, is an extension of Tom's and Penrod's--and he speaks for all youth in his longing to escape restrictions.

Tom and Penrod seem to see the adult world as a kind of confused and distant mass, which if aroused, may circumvent their projects, while Huck and Holden are acutely aware of individual adult behavior. But the older boys have very different attitudes. Huck is an optimist despite the way he sees adults behave.

He seldom expects the worst. When it happens, he can be fairly

¹³ Edgar Z. Friedenberg, The Vanishing Adolescent, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1960), p. 2.

stoical about it. And here the two boys are poles apart. Holden always expects the worst. He is sure that all grownups will be "mean guys," "phonies," or "slobs," and he is usually right. But Holden unconsciously sets it up so they will be. Immature and inadequate, he constantly puts himself in situations in which he will be hurt. He has no Jim, no river, just a depressing hotel room and a world where he is confronted by the problems of sex, goes from bar to bar for illegal drinks, is beaten up by a pimp and constantly exposed to lust, vulgarity, lies, and cynicism. Holden, trapped in a world in which he cannot find love, is unable to find out from adults where he belongs. Neither can Huck, but Huck finds out for himself.

Parts of the process of adolescence are rejection and revolt, recklessness and sensitivity, bravado and lack of confidence. The adolescent can run away from what threatens him, play the "ham," tell a pack of lies, and then speak the truth when even a stupid adult would have better sense. Since the days of Cain and Abel, young people have been rebelling against adults, seeing themselves alone in the world and suffering from feelings of inadequacy. Their reaction is to blame the grownup world for the grim discovery that, as Frank Ward O'Malley once said, "Life is just one damn thing after another."¹⁴ Any teacher, parent, or adolescent can verify this. So can a study of Huck and Holden. Twain and Salinger extend adolescent idiosyncracies until they become vehicles for portraying their own opinions. Feeling, of course, that Huck and Holden have overwhelming cause to condemn the adult world, they

¹⁴Quoted by Earl Schenck Miers, In Behalf of Parents (Newark: Curtis Paper Co., 1959), Private printing of selections of letters and speeches of famous Americans for friends of Curtis Paper Co., p. 5-6.

make the boys rebels in a very serious sense. "Both boys are running away from the imprisonment of their civilized world to seek the life of uncommitted freedom..."¹⁵ But their rebellions take very different forms.

From the time he leaves the Widow's until his escape to the territory, Huck's story is one of rebellions that he can carry out. He lives by his wits, "has an easy way with watermelons and chickens as well as a marked propensity for lying."¹⁶ He can go naked, live on Jackson's Island like a happy savage, and the river is always there--the most marvelous escape route in literature.

Holden, lonely, always ineffective, plays the rebel by leaving a school from which he has already been expelled. And in running away he gets into more trouble than he had at school. New York is worse than Pencey Prep. Holden's rebellion is more serious than Huck's, symbolic of the greater menace and pessimism that Salinger sees in our world. Huck's escape is temporary. Holden has no escape at all. Since he cannot really run away, his rebellion takes the form of playing the ham, lying, and railing against the way things are--his "craziness," as he calls it. And this "craziness" is one of the reasons why the young people of America like to read about Holden. Not only does he speak their language, but they feel a sense of identity with his rebellions, a recognition which, I believe, they do not feel with Huck.

¹⁵ Edwin T. Bowden, The Dungeon of the Heart, Human Isolation and the American Novel (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1961), p. 55.

¹⁶ Henry Nash Smith, Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1958), p. vi.

As the father in Jessamyn West's Cress Delahanty remarks about the difficulties of adolescence, "My God, what a dark world!...You've got to make your mark without knowing what your mark is. How do you know you're alive even at that age if you aren't noticed."¹⁷ Whereas Tom and Penrod play-act, lie, and imagine glorious things partly for fun and partly to protect their boyhood world from adult intrusion, the adolescent, as in the case of Holden, seems compelled to assume an extravagant role because play-acting helps him preserve his identity.

Feeling uncertain, he has to make sure that he is noticed, and unconsciously picks a role which flaunts his confusion. Salinger, with an unerring sense of the appropriate detail, never lets the reader forget that Holden, pitiful, unattractive, and raging, is still a sixteen-year-old boy. On the train he defiantly puts his hunting cap on backwards and proceeds to tell the mother of a classmate a pack of lies about her son, who according to Holden, is "the biggest bastard that ever went to Pencey, in the whole crummy history of the school." (p. 71)

Like Tom and Penrod, Holden also has the boyhood propensity to play-act for himself as well as other people. After he has been beaten up by Maurice, he pictures himself, his hand over a wound in the stomach, bleeding slightly from the mouth, walking down the stairs, killing Maurice, and then calling Jane, the girl he likes, to come and bandage him.

Huck would much rather not be noticed, but then Huck is travelling with a runaway slave, and, being much more mature than Holden, he has less need to play the ham. But when Huck is in a tight spot, he becomes

¹⁷Cress Delahanty (New York: Harcourt Brace and Co., 1945), p. 88.

one of literature's most accomplished and delightful liars. He invents on-the-spot autobiographies to fit any situation and elaborates on his lies, apparently for the fun of it. Henry Nash Smith believes that because the lies are always about disaster, they "reveal the gloomy substratum of his personality...His memory is stored with images of violence and calamity...especially of boys left alone in the world by the death of parents."¹⁸ I am not in any position to refute this opinion, but Huck has been alone by inclination as much as circumstance. Then, too, one has the feeling that he could not raise lying to such a fine art unless he thoroughly enjoyed his own fabrications. If Huck's personality has a "gloomy substratum," so does nearly everyone else's. Most people, young and old, and certainly including Tom Sawyer and Penrod, secretly relish tales of blood, gore, and disaster. It is interesting that Huck and Holden, both rebels and liars, never fall into the trap that many adults do--they never lie to themselves.

In their emphasis on those attitudes of adolescence which are more complex than those of boyhood, Twain and Salinger give their heroes more reality than Tom and Penrod possess. For example, it is a mark of approaching maturity when an adolescent is willing to grant someone his good points even if he doesn't like him. This trait in Huck and Holden separates them from the younger boys and gives them a uniqueness and individuality. To Tom and Penrod black is black, white is white, and that's all there is to it, but Huck, knowing that the king and the duke are frauds and longing to be rid of them, nevertheless admires their talents. "Well, next they got out a couple of long swords...and begun to practice the sword-fight...and the way they laid on, and pranced around the raft

¹⁸ Op. cit., p. xx.

was grand to see." (p. 114) Holden, hating Stradlater because he is a "secret slob," and is interested in the girl Holden likes, notes reluctantly that he would give you the tie from his neck. And he says of a former roommate, Harris Macklin, "He never stopped talking, and what was awful was, he never said anything you wanted to hear in the first place. But he could do one thing. The sonuvabitch could whistle better than anybody I ever heard." (p. 161) Most of Holden's criticisms of others have similar qualifications. And it is this recognition of what is praiseworthy even in those people he dislikes, if it is only whistling, that will help to save him. "After all there is affection in life...and the world may well be full of secret whistlers."¹⁹

Both boys are self-critical and show a lack of confidence which is a trademark of adolescence. Huck is much less uncertain about himself than is Holden, but he knows that he can take care of himself while Holden's story is one of a boy who cannot. Even though he is not much given to self-examination, Huck thinks of himself as "so ignorant and so kind of low-down and ornery," (p. 14) because he cannot understand the Widow's religious teachings. And he is simply astonished when Mary Jane tells him that she is going to pray for him. "Pray for me! I reckoned if she knowed me she'd take a job that was more nearer her size... She had the grit to pray for Judus if she took the notion...and if ever I'd a thought it would do any good for me to pray for her, blamed if I wouldn't a done it or bust." (p. 161)

Holden's appraisal of himself is relentless. "I'm one of those very yellow guys," (p. 115) brave only when "I watch myself getting tough in the mirror." (p. 117) Tom or Penrod might posture in front of a mirror,

¹⁹ Bowden, p. 64.

but they have no inkling of what lack of confidence means, their most obvious trait being an egoism which is seemingly unassailable.

Most adults, their perceptions dulled by custom, hurrying, and responsibility, remember the feelings of youth only with prompting and even then through a glass darkly. If, because of this, we think the youth of today is so different from that of other eras, Twain and Salinger have the artistry to remind us, and vividly, that young people of any generation have much in common and are, like our own children, beset by uncertainty, bravado, and emotional giddiness. No matter where or when he lives, a boy is still a boy.

But despite the youthful idiosyncracies which Huck and Holden share, these two presentations of youth differ so radically that there does seem to be a distance of light years rather than decades between them. Huckleberry Finn is one of the first full portraits of adolescence in American literature, in line with the traditional view of American innocence, but with an emphasis on initiation into the adult world. By the time The Catcher in the Rye was written, the adolescent vigor of innocence typical of Huck had been translated into something more private and vulnerable, with an emphasis on disenchantment and sensitivity. Our song of innocence, it seems, has been replaced by the burden of experience, and this is as true in life as in literature. Penrod's stable is now a parking lot. Tomorrow, a bomb shelter?

But it is a mark of Twain's and Salinger's virtuosity that their heroes, poles apart in nearly every way, have youthful characteristics in common which are solidly based in fact, which make the boys "come alive" for the reader. It is the warm reality of Huck that has made him for more than half a century a member of every American household

where there is any reading, just as it is the authenticity of Holden that (whether the Sunday School mothers like it or not) makes him a boy so meaningful to the American youth of today.

Paradoxically, these boys have so much reality that seemingly their feelings, thoughts, and actions are their own. The reader knows their appearance and their behavior under certain conditions, but they do not conform to expectations any more accommodatingly than do actual people, and they inspire as diverse opinions of themselves as all human beings do. All of which is to say that Huck and Holden are so very real that they are not easier to know than those among our own friends and acquaintances who Tarkington believes are "strangers."

IV

HUMOR IN HUCKLEBERRY FINN AND THE CATCHER IN THE RYE

Since it is the reality of Tom and Penrod which is the stimulus of the adult reader's laughter, the reality of the boys and the humor in Tom Sawyer and Penrod are inseparable. The humor in those books does not pretend to comment on the human condition. It comments on boys, and shrewdly and entertainingly enough to be its own excuse for being. In Huckleberry Finn and The Catcher in the Rye, however, the intent of the authors is not simply to show how funny boys are. Although part of the humor does arise from the humorlessness of Huck and Holden, themselves, and the incongruity between their reactions and the adult's, here is no gentle condescension or benevolence of one who has outgrown youthful confusions. The authors are deeply concerned about their heroes' problems, and since these are fundamentally serious books which condemn society, the humor has deeper impli-

cations than it does in the stories of the younger boys. Hence, as it rounds out the characters, it also comments upon the human condition.

As indicated earlier, unlike the books about the younger boys in which the author is very much in evidence, the point of view in Huckleberry Finn and The Catcher in the Rye is restricted to that of the boys, themselves. Since Huck and Holden tell their own stories, Twain and Salinger cannot express directly any ideas beyond the heroes' own vocabulary or range of perception. But the result is an expansion rather than a limitation of the humor. By contrast, Tom and Penrod seem to be two-dimensional, treated with conventional comedy, which, though it is very funny, does not make the boys so alive as Huck and Holden.

According to Booth Tarkington, works of art which last usually owe their survival either to our appreciation of their artistic significance or to a belief in their historic value as illuminating the manners and morals of their own time.²⁰ Huckleberry Finn is preserved not only for both these reasons, but for others as well, the main one being our laughter. Its humor is as original, wry, and relevant as it ever was. Much of the comedy comes from the fact that the reader sees every incident on two levels, Huck's and Mark Twain's, and the result can range from simple comedy to bitter irony, creating a depth of character and humor unobtainable in any other way.

Huck, himself, is one of the most humorless boys in literature, and this combined with his naiveté and ignorance, of course, makes for much of the comic in the book. After he and Jim find one wooden leg in the deserted house on the river, Huck says, "...We couldn't find the other

²⁰ "Introduction," The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (New York: The Limited Editions Club, 1933), p. 7.

one, though we hunted all around." (p. 44) And in the celebrated description of the Grangerford parlor, Huck genuinely admires the execrable taste of his hosts.

"It was beautiful to hear that clock tick; and sometimes when one of these pedlars...got her in good shape, she would start in and strike a hundred and fifty before she got tuckered out. They wouldn't a took any money for her." (p. 85)

Knowing how ignorant he is, Huck is very humble about the Grangerfords' books. He comments on his difficulty with Pilgrim's Progress, which he says is "about a man that left his family it didn't say why. I read considerable in it now and then. The statements was interesting, but tough." (p. 85-86)

Mark Twain raises the vernacular to great artistry. When combined with Huck's deadpan logic, this artistry in turn raises the comic in this boy to a high level. In any creative endeavor, from cooking to playing the piano, the person doing it is a master if he makes it look easy. The greatest compliment I can pay to the ability of Twain is to say that Huckleberry Finn seems to have written itself. After Huck dives under the circus tent so he won't have to pay admission, one feels that he makes the following remark, not that Twain causes him to make it. "I ain't opposed to spending money on circuses when there ain't no other way, but there ain't no sense wasting it on them." (p. 124)

Besides exhibiting his reactions to the adult world, Huck's various autobiographies are a large element of his humor---partly because he can so spontaneously raise lying to an enviable art, and partly because he is so good at fooling the public, the public being almost without exception adult.

Twain uses humor to underline his point of view when he introduces the king and the duke who think they can dupe Huck, use him, and turn Jim

in for the reward. Huck is not deceived and his comment is a nice comic touch which shows the native shrewdness of this naive realist who can spot sham intuitively.

"It didn't take me long to make up my own mind that these liars warn't no kings nor dukes, at all, but just low-down humbugs and frauds. But I never said nothing, never let on; kept it to myself; it's the best way..." (p. 106)

Twain must have felt at home inside of Huck. Through him he elevates the humor in the book far beyond conventional comedy. For example, Huck's reaction to Mary Jane's offering to pray for him is much more than funny. It has elements of both innocence and surprise, making him exist for the reader as for Twain, inside him, not on the printed page. Beginning with his modest entrance in Tom Sawyer, Huck must have amused and bewitched Twain and seduced him into writing more about him. Not only is Huck indisputably the great national figure of his own period, but he lives vividly today, a triumph of humor and warm reality.

Tarkington's remark, "The best humor finds little pleasure in any pain at all," cannot apply to The Catcher in the Rye. Even a desperate adolescent like Holden says things that amuse, but the book is not genuinely comic like the other three. The "funny" things that Holden says seem to be jerked out of him. Salinger illuminates his character and emotional problems by a staccato misuse of words which makes one smile and wince at the same time, as in a half-humorous, half-despairing way he points out truths not seen or at least not often voiced.

"Take most people. They're crazy about cars. They worry if they get a little scratch on them, and they're always talking about how many miles they get to a gallon...I don't even like old cars. I mean they don't even interest me. I'd rather have a goddam horse. A horse is at least human, for God's sake." (p. 169)

Holden's self-communings may border on the tragic, yet his contacts with the world are often funny. The incidents in which he is involved are much like a Charlie Chaplin movie, hovering between comedy and desperation, the audience roaring with laughter while the hero becomes simply frantic. Like the Chaplin hero, Holden approaches despair and anger by the comic route.²¹ His scene with the prostitute is both woe-fully pathetic, and brilliantly funny at the same time. Registered in a cheap hotel and trying to play the "man about town," he has agreed to have a girl sent to his room. When she takes her dress off he is simply horrified. To relieve his nervousness, he tries to begin a conversation with her, but the only thing he can think of to say is "Do you work every night?" (p. 125) And, as he hangs her dress in the closet, being Holden, he begins to feel sorry for her.

"I thought of her going in a store and buying it, and nobody in the store knowing she was a prostitute and all... It made me feel sad as hell - I don't know why exactly...I felt more depressed than sexy if you want to know the truth." (p. 125)

And to avoid making love to her, he tells her that he has had an operation recently, "on my clavichord...which is quite a ways down in the spinal canal." (p. 126)

After the girl leaves, he tries to pray, but every time he thinks about Jesus he gets furious at the apostles because they kept letting Him down. "While He was alive," according to Holden, "they were about as much use to Him as a hole in the head." (p. 130) Such abrupt changes of mood are characteristic of Holden and his comments have a slangy,

²¹S. N. Behrman, Review of "The Catcher in the Rye," The New Yorker (August 11, 1951), p. 103.

bittersweet idealism of which pain is as large a part as humor.

Salinger's "humor" is a bitter one. He is too involved with Holden's problems to ask the reader to laugh with him at the incongruities of youth, and Holden's "humorous" comments are like flashes of lightning illuminating a world that is everywhere menacing. The humor in The Catcher in the Rye is, of course, only part of the artistic achievement. It exists as part of a greater whole, but possibly more than any other single element, its bitterness points up Holden's isolation and underlines Salinger's dark view of existence.

It is for Huckleberry Finn's humor that the accolade must be reserved. Not only does Mark Twain comment through it on the "damned human race," but the humor of Huck, himself, is as fresh as spring and time will not diminish it. He irresistibly becomes so much a part of the reader's consciousness that the more serious elements in his story may for some readers become secondary to the timeless humor and reality of Huck, himself.

"...as we go deeper into the twentieth century and move toward the twenty-first and beyond, what multitudes shall see is a sunshiny village dusty street of long ago and the brown flood of the greatest of all rivers and the figure of a ragged boy, familiar spirit of the village and of the river, and shall cry to him, 'Hello, Huckleberry Finn! Hail, and live forever!'"²²

²² Parkington, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, p. ii.

CHAPTER II

I

AUTHORS' VIEWS OF LIFE IN TOM SAWYER

PENROD, HUCKLEBERRY FINN, AND

THE CATCHER IN THE RYE

William Dean Howells' sentiment that novelists should present only the smiling aspects of life seems to our generation as archaic as the bustle. The "smiling aspects" have become passé both in life and literature. Life is not only real and earnest, it is also presented as grim, and with some reason. Despite the hectic assertions of Madison Avenue and Hollywood that we are the people who always live happily ever after, the sanguine outlook once so dominant in American life does not extend much beyond the magazine counters and the Vista-vision screens. If for no other reason than this, and it is a purely personal one, Mark Twain's view of life as presented in Tom Sawyer is a compelling one--as Bernard De Voto has described it, "maturity's nostalgia for what it once was,"¹ or possibly what it wishes it had been.

Twain, with an artistic economy, pares away non-essentials and is consistently attentive to our memories of the longings and exuberance of boyhood. De Voto has remarked of Tom Sawyer that the "emotions of boyhood swing through half a dozen ages...but this makes no difference... Throughout the book time curves back on itself and boyhood is something

¹Mark Twain at Work (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1942), p. 20.

more than realism, it is a distillation, a generalization, a myth."²

Although Tom, himself, is possibly a sentimental abstraction, Twain's approach to him catches the universality of boy dreams that are undoubtedly much the same on the fields of Little League as they are on Jackson's Island. There is no question that he has a feeling for the high places of boyhood, its dreams, adventures, and idiocies. He knows very well that

"Kids don't want facts, they want magic. They don't want hypotheses, they want immutable truth. They want to be, they should be, in a clearing in the jungle painting themselves blue, dancing around the fire and making it rain by patting snakes and shaking rattles...Time enough to find out that nothing is so. Not even close to so."³

Tom is just that sort of boy. In fact, he might be called the matrix from which such later heroes as Andy Hardy, Henry Aldrich, and Penrod Schofield were stamped.⁴ Like all boys they hate soap and school, tease animals, and are hard pressed by adults. But, Penrod and Tom, even as they challenge the grownup world, are still part of the family. Their mutinies are essentially lighthearted and innocent and their creators evoke the sunshine and bright adventures of youth.

Tarkington said that any man, unless he lived on the east side of New York or went yachting out of Newport, could get back his boyhood from Penrod.⁵ This is not quite true, but for anyone who grew up in the midland small town, it was almost true until the empty stable be-

²Ibid., p. 19.

³Robert Paul Smith, p. 23.

⁴Dwight Mac Donald, "Mark Twain: An Unsentimental Journey," The New Yorker (April 9, 1960), p. 173.

⁵Woodress, p. 178.

hind the Schofields' house had a car put in it. His thought echoes Twain's remark that he tried in Tom Sawyer "to pleasantly remind adults of what they once were themselves."⁶ Anyone who has read As I Seem To Me, the story of Tarkington's own childhood, is well aware that he knew that growing up involves a good deal of pain, but he prefers to dwell delightedly on its humorous side, evoking with a light touch and without regret, "the hour" of William Wordsworth.⁷ Tarkington and his public put a premium on entertainment, at which the author's success was emphatic! He received fifty-five hundred dollars for each chapter of Penrod.

Although in both these books the authors view boyhood in much the same way, with nostalgia, benevolence, and some sentimentality, their busy heroes engage in very different pursuits. Twain gives his hero the daily routine of small town existence, enlivened by such incidents as Tom's triumph in the whitewashing episode, stealing the superintendent's wig, or running away from home because he isn't appreciated. But in addition, Tom has the good fortune to be at the center of events which are pure Perils of Pauline melodrama. The change of key in Tom is relatively unimportant because Twain reminds us all of our desire for daring and adventure, and that "kids don't want facts, they want magic." As Tarkington has remarked, "Twain gave 'em what boys don't get when it comes to plot. All that the boy, Sam, had wished to happen, he made happen."⁸

Tarkington, in Penrod, is primarily interested in the material of daily life rather than the exceptional event. Penrod and Sam would have

⁶ Preface, 1876 edition, The Adventures of Tom Sawyer (New York: Grosset and Dunlap). Page not numbered.

⁷ Quoted by Woodress, p. 231.

⁸ Quoted by Woodress, p. 177.

loved digging for treasure with Tom, but their creator gives them the stable and only dreams of glory. Penrod and his friends are ordinary boys, who, by behaving in what seems to them a logical way, provoke the most extraordinary reactions from adults. The emphasis is upon Penrod's machinations--his seeming genius for creating pandemonium and chaos in any situation in which he finds himself.

Although these books are somewhat limited in scope and implication, they will continue to be living books because with gayety and skill they present the exuberance of boys, reminding us that the small town boyhood is part of our literary and physical heritage.

Entertainment without "message" is possibly more welcome in our post-atomic world than it was when Tom Sawyer and Penrod were written. There is a place in fiction for "the smiling aspects of life."

With Huckleberry Finn, however, we see the feckless, conscienceless, gay genre figure that is the Huck Finn of Tom Sawyer finding out, as Smith says, that "nothing is so, not even close to so." The vision of a boy and a slave in an idyll of happiness on a raft is shattered by the knowledge of evil. In this novel Mark Twain takes a long and sobering look at human nature through the eyes of a boy whose observations are shrewd, humorous, and relentless. Speaking through Huck with complete artistic freedom and crackling satire, Twain rejects conformity to the civilized codes and has his hero follow the decisions of his own heart. And through the unconscious reactions of the gentle, foxy Huck, Twain's ideas are given a depth and vigor which make this book part of the literary history of America.

Huckleberry Finn does much more than present a facet of boyhood. Although, like the younger boys, he is, as Arthur Mizener has remarked,

"perennially fascinating as the almost nearly perfect American lament for our lost youth,"⁹ he has, unlike Tom, produced no stereotypes. Huck is just Huck. It is interesting to note, though, that there are later heroes who have characteristics in common with him, such as Ike McCaslin's moral integrity, Nick Adams' suffering, and Holden Caulfield's attempts to escape. These are all boys whose creators, like Twain, are very much disquieted about the relation between the individual and society.

Strictly speaking, Huckleberry Finn is the story of a boy facing the stupidities and evils of man that know no time or place even though they are set in mid-nineteenth century river towns. Huck sees men who douse dogs with turpentine and set fire to them, engage in feuds and lynchings, and frequently indulge in revolting excesses of morbid curiosity. Even so, in spite of Twain's rather depressing view of life, what some readers may remember longest will be Huck and Jim on the raft, hearing voices in the fog, watching the stars, not talking aloud in the immensity of the night, "and it warn't often that we laughed, only a little kind of a low chuckle." (p. 55) This journey has become a national dream. Faced with problems, Huck can slip away and "there are no figures to show how many daydreaming victims of respectability have climbed aboard the raft with him."¹⁰

Huckleberry Finn is a particularly satisfying book for the mid-twentieth century. In our world "togetherness" has taken the place of

⁹Quoted in "The Limits of the Possible. Accepting the Reality of the Human Situation," The London Times Literary Supplement (Nov. 6, 1959), p. xvi.

¹⁰Philip Young, Ernest Hemingway (New York: Rinehart and Co., 1952), p. 185.

privacy, water, and space, and it is a poor substitute. Huck's camp-fire has become the backyard grill. Sitting behind the picture window in suburbia seems to have been substituted for adventure, and getting through school and getting on the payroll has become the new American Dream.

Critics may endlessly discuss the change of characterization at the end of the book. I am sorry that Huck falls for a bad practical joke and that Jim's stature is reduced to that of the end man in a minstrel show, but this section in no way diminishes the memory of Huck's and Jim's days and nights on the river or the magical charm of Huck himself. One can forgive a writer almost anything if he creates characters who are unforgettable, and in the face of this truth, one need not worry about Tom's tricks to free Jim any more than De Voto in the face of the "voltage" of Huck in Tom Sawyer worries about "any mundane doubt of his ability to live forever on handouts and in hogheads."¹¹ Of course he can! And it is precisely because of this "voltage" of Huck that Twain can emphasize his view of life so emphatically in Huckleberry Finn. Huck is conceived with such lyric intensity that his emotions become our own and his voice the voice of a national experience.

There is an almost incredible distance between the attitude of the authors of Tom Sawyer and Penrod and that of Salinger in The Catcher in the Rye, for Salinger implies that the sensitive person may not be able to survive in the dreadfulness of our world. Here is no sunshine of nostalgia presenting boyhood's phases as literary entertainment. Instead, Salinger, through the eyes of Holden Caulfield, underlines the malaise of the modern world in such a way that the reader is not per-

¹¹Mark Twain at Work, p. 19.

mitted to escape his implications. Holden lives in an America where there is no innocence except in young children and in which he must find love to be saved from emotional collapse or violent death. The book is a gradual revelation of his complex feelings as he makes a twentieth-century odyssey in search of love, but Salinger leaves one doubting whether the individual can ever escape the double trap of society and self.¹²

Holden is typical of the literary presentation of youth after the second World War, lonely, delicate, and conceived with a peculiar intensity. The vigor and innocence of Huck have been translated into something more private and vulnerable. Unlike Huck, Holden is as much a victim of his own spiritual illness as of society. Although both Twain and Salinger take a terrifying look at the human condition, Huck, one feels, will be successful, whereas Holden may always be one of the walking wounded. His story is much more subjective than Huckleberry Finn's and his sensitivity is presented as both a moral virtue and a cross.

Faced with the realization of evil, he must struggle for love and wisdom guided only by instinct. Unable to communicate, frozen out, he has no Jim, no raft, no "territory." He is imprisoned in "sivilization" and from it there is no escape. Huck will find that human beings are as cruel in the "territory" as anywhere else, but at least he has some place to go and, more important, he is tough, wily, and a dogged realist. Holden is desperate, raging, so sensitive that he is almost skinless, and

¹²Edgar Branch, "Mark Twain and J. D. Salinger, A Study in Literary Continuity," The American Quarterly, Vol. IX, No. 2, Part 1 (Summer, 1957), p. 155.

emotionally ill, but his illness in no way detracts from the validity of his observations. Holden speaks with the vehemence of the passionate adolescent who may expect too much from people and from life, but Salinger's message is loud and clear. Pencey Prep is not an isolated fictional school any more than Bricksville is an isolated frontier town; it is the world, and the terrible thing they have in common is contempt for people. The "phoniness" that Holden despises is, in every instance, an absence of love.

Even though Twain's appraisal of human nature in Huckleberry Finn is as sobering as Salinger's, because it is interwoven with other elements, it is somehow softened for the modern reader. As I have said, Huck's journey is still a national dream, and Huck has somehow more than human stature. His story sings with myth, idyll, humor, and with dialogue that is almost poetry. And, too, it is relatively easy to be shocked at Twain's revelations of man's cruelty to man without identifying oneself very closely with men who lynch or feud. Salinger, on the other hand, refuses to allow one to read The Catcher in the Rye at arm's length. By the absence of the aforementioned elements, and by his respect for the worth of a boy whose problems do make him unattractive, he throws the reader back, unwillingly, upon a realization of his own possible "phoniness." Whose fault is it that the Holdens feel as they do? Whose unspoken or disguised pleas for help have we ignored? It is this boy's intense vulnerability, I believe, that evokes this sense of shame. Salinger, like Twain, emphasizes a morality of love and humanity, sharply reminding us that unless we have a decent regard for other people we shall be responsible for the Holdens or become Holdens ourselves.

However different the methods of Twain and Salinger may be, or even

the boys they create, one must agree with Edgar Branch, who says, "The Catcher in the Rye has the same awesome relevance to our collective civilized fate that more subtly pervades Mark Twain's masterpiece."¹³ And it is in its devastating examination of our society that The Catcher in the Rye is a descendant of Huckleberry Finn.

"Fundamentally these books are brothers under the skin because they reflect a slowly developing, but always recognizable pattern of moral and social meaning that is part of the active experience of young Americans let loose in the world, in this century and the last."¹⁴

II

SETTING IN PENROD, TOM SAWYER, HUCKLEBERRY FINN, AND THE CATCHER IN THE RYE

Mark Twain, Tarkington, and Salinger all give less attention to where their heroes are than to what they are doing and thinking and to establishing their individual characters, but some mention of setting is pertinent because treatment of the time and place in which the boys live is another revealing facet of the authors' intent and artistry. In each book the environment is consistently in key with the author's view of experience, dovetailing with the other artistic devices used to make a satisfying and artistic whole, and helping to make the reader

¹³Ibid., p. 157.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 158.

interested in a life which exists only in the imagination.

Penrod is firmly established in a world where life is to be enjoyed. It is almost a "God's-in-His-Heaven-All's-Right-With-the-World" kind of early-twentieth-century setting, a town in the green midlands where pleasures are simple, but none the less pleasurable, an environment which underlines Tarkington's desire to use the routine of everyday existence as the background for his hero's activities. It is a world which seems to be one golden fragility, untouched by violence, made of fun, trivia, and sunshine. Homemade ice cream for Sunday dinner! If the good earth of Penrod is gone or never was quite real, Tarkington reminds us that it is pleasant, indeed, to remember it.

The setting of Tom Sawyer, too, portrays some of the same qualities. Like Tom, himself, "St. Petersburg is an idyll of what we once were."¹⁵ It is, like Penrod's town, a place of sun and shade, almost pastoral in atmosphere. Twain, however, includes graphic descriptions in keeping with the dramatic events in which Tom is involved. Through these realistic touches he makes it easy to believe that fearful and actual events did happen in the deserted house or the cave. One can almost hear the splintering of the rotten boards as Injun Joe starts up the stairs or feel the grubby kite string, Tom and Becky's lifeline. As De Voto says, these are the lasting symbols of boyhood terrors.¹⁶

Although Twain, unlike Tarkington, evokes childhood fears with these descriptions, the setting of Tom Sawyer still resembles Penrod's world--the small town, where life is simple, to be enjoyed, rather than

¹⁵ De Voto, p. 24.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 23.

analyzed, criticized, or pitied; a world rather like the boys themselves, naive and ebullient, where the clanging of the dinner bell will always be echoed by the tagline from Henry Aldrich, "Coming, Mother."

Whereas the background of these two books evokes a kind of misty nostalgia for what might be called "the dear, dead days beyond recall," the world of Huckleberry Finn, though sharing this aspect in the idyll of the river, adds a deeper and more menacing element. In Tom's St. Petersburg violent things happen, to be sure, but the village seems withdrawn from the hypocrisy and evil to which Huck is exposed. As he drifts down the Mississippi in the mid-America of the 1840's or 50's, his landings at grubby little towns peopled with riffraff provide a startling contrast to the magic and freedom of the river. In the wide river and the towns along the bank, Twain finds a setting perfectly suited to showing the opposition between the uncommitted life and either the restrictions of society as shown in the Widow's and Aunt Sally's attempts to "sivilize" Huck, or its cruelties and blindness as seen in the feud, or in the events in Bricksville. The river, of course, means escape, while the shore towns represent the jungle world that is the dark side of human nature. It is a mixed-up world, at times a dirty one, but on the river at least there is beauty, and for a time Huck can enjoy lonely but happy independence. "We said there warn't no home like a raft after all...You feel mighty free and easy and comfortable on a raft." (p. 99) The raft, like Huck, himself, may have become a national symbol, but it is a tribute to Twain's consummate artistry that it is at the same time even more real than the scaffold of The Scarlet Letter or Captain Ahab's artificial leg.

The setting of The Catcher in the Rye shows the sordidness of the world, but without the security of the river for contrast. If Huck enters a jungle world when he goes ashore, Holden Caulfield lives in one that seems to be disintegrating, and from which there is no escape, a wasteland of emotional starvation and brittleness. Using for his setting an exterior world that is familiar to most of his readers, Salinger makes the reader see it in a more subjective or "interior" way than he sees Huck's. Holden knows his way around New York, but everything he sees alienates him and increases his desperation, as when he sees the filthy word written on the wall of his little sister's school or is repelled by the institutionalized hypocrisy of the Christmas show at Radio City.

"It's supposed to be religious as hell, I know and very pretty, and all, but I can't see anything religious or pretty... about a bunch of actors carrying crucifixes all over the stage... you could tell they could hardly wait to get a cigarette or something." (p. 178)

Here again is Salinger refusing to let one read about Holden at arm's length. Holden's world, or rather the way in which Holden sees the world, gives one a feeling of claustrophobia--the same feeling that Holden, himself, must have. Whereas Huck can find solace in America's heartland, despite its cruelties, this boy is close to all that is most strident in American life and he can find no place of refuge. "You can't even find a place that's nice and peaceful because there isn't any." (p. 264)

III

DIALOGUE IN PENROD, TOM SAWYER,
HUCKLEBERRY FINN, AND THE CATCHER IN THE RYE

One of the gifts possessed in common by Twain, Tarkington, and Salinger is the ability to create unforgettable boys and to do it, partly, if not wholly, through the spoken voice of the boy, himself. Good dialogue may have no formulas, but without it characters are not brought to life. The way in which they speak, then, is in a very real sense the life-giving ingredient that makes Tom, Penrod, Huck, and Holden masterpieces of fictional creation.

The stories of Tom and Penrod, told in the third person, reveal that their creators have a great feel for boyhood jargon. Both catch what Walter Blair describes as "the liveliness, the irresponsibility, the innocence, the comic illogic of children,"¹⁷ and in those qualities lies much of their charm. Twain and Tarkington render with unpretentious artistry those elements common to all boys' conversations--jerky rhythms, irrepressibility, and limited vocabulary--the speech of boys at that age when even their own mothers are hard put to find anything attractive about them, boys who are much more interested in action than talking, speaking in a way that they have spoken since time began and will probably speak when our descendants set up housekeeping on the moon.

Both authors prepare the way for dialogue with observations of their own which are used in contrapuntal arrangement with the boys' speech.

"There comes a time in every rightly constructed boy's life when he has a raging desire to go somewhere and dig

¹⁷ Mark Twain and Huck Finn (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960), p. 204-5.

for hidden treasure. This desire suddenly came upon Tom one day." (p. 176)

Or in Penrod:

"The nervous monotony of the schoolroom inspires a sometimes unbearable longing for something to happen, and, as every boy's fundamental desire is to do something astonishing himself, so as to be the centre of all human interest and awe, it was natural that Penrod should discover in fancy the delightful secret of self-levitation." (p. 480)

Expressions may change, but the tone, phraseology, and content of these boys' conversations are surprisingly similar. Tom says to the dressed-up boy who has shoes and a necktie on, "I can lick you," (p. 16) and launches into much acrimonious bickering and jeering which includes:

"I ain't afraid."
 "You are."
 "I ain't."
 "You are."
 "...I'll tell my big brother on you, and he can thrash you with his little finger." (p. 17)

Penrod's verbal encounter with Rupe Collins might be interchanged with Tom's. Twain and Tarkington well remember that boasting and self-dramatization are two of the neverchanging attributes of boyhood.

"I got 'em all scared in that school."
 "What of...?"
 "What of? I guess you'd soon see what of, if you ever was in that school about one day. You'd be lucky if you got out alive." (p. 156-57)

The boys' language is thoroughly conventional, often belligerent and somewhat unexciting, but it is also a completely satisfying vehicle for presenting the truths of childhood that Tarkington and Twain wish to convey. It is, I imagine, very similar to that of two youngsters arguing in front of their caves in The Stone Age. To boys even then, "Your mother won't let you" (Penrod, p. 167) was undoubtedly an insult

while, "My father won't let me." (Penrod, p. 167) was a dignified reply and could not be hooted at.

While the dialogue of Penrod and Tom underscores their reality by emphasizing the changeless aspects of boy communication, the speech of Huckleberry Finn reveals Twain's matchless skill as it not only communicates Huck's thoughts directly to the reader, but also causes the reader to have what might be called an "artistic experience." Huck's speech is bland, understated, and deadpan, but Twain shapes his language, using that twist of stylistic intensification that marks truly great dialogue.

Nearly every page contains vivid figures and concrete images which cause pure verbal delight.

"...it looked late and smelt late." (p. 30)

"There was freckled places on the ground where the light sifted down through the leaves, and the freckled places swapped about a little showing there was a little breeze up there." (p. 32)

Thunder "rumbling, grumbling tumbling down the sky towards the under side of the world, like rolling empty barrels down stairs, where it's long stairs and they bounce a good deal, you know." (p. 42)

"...looking happy and eased-up like a person that's had a tooth pulled out." (p.156)

"Grass patches...like an old hat with the nap rubbed off." (p. 183)

Huck's figures of speech show that he feels and thinks in images, and Twain subtly indicates the interplay of the boy's own feelings and the scene he describes.

"When I got there it was all still and Sunday-like, and hot and sunshiny...and there was them kind of faint drownings of bugs and flies in the air that makes it seem so lonesome and like everybody's dead and gone." (p. 183)

His use of verbs when he describes the people of Bricksville crowd-
ing up to Bogg's death builds up an impression of animality, but every
word is within Huck's vocabulary.¹⁸ "Well, pretty soon the whole town
was there...squirming...scrouging...pushing...shoving...jawing...telling...
stretching...listening." (p. 121)

The rarity of his outbursts of lyricism makes a stunning contrast
to the deadpan manner in which he usually speaks.

"Not a sound, anywheres - perfectly still - just like the
whole world was asleep...The first thing to see, looking
away over the water, was a kind of dull line - that was the
woods on t'other side - you couldn't make nothing else out;
then a pale place in the sky; then more paleness, spreading
around, then the river softened up, away off, and warn't
black any more but gray...and by and by you could see a
streak on the water which you know by the look of the streak
that there's a snag there in a swift current...and you see
the mist curl up off of the water..." (p. 99-100)

Possibly because he has Jim, Huck does not have as many inner com-
munings as Holden does. Instead they commune together. Their conver-
sation about the stars as they float down the dark river is made of
magic--two drowsy people, at ease with each other, making desultory
conversation about the immensity of the universe.

"We had the sky, up there, all speckled with stars; and we
used to lay on our backs and look up at them, and discuss
about whether they was made or only just happened - Jim he
allowed they was made, but I allowed they happened...Jim
said the moon could a laid them; well, that looked kind of
reasonable, so I didn't say nothing against it, because
I've seen a frog lay most as many, so of course it could
be done. We used to watch the stars that fell, too, and
see them streak down. Jim allowed they'd got spoiled and
was hove out of the nest." (p. 101)

As Lionel Trilling has said, "The prose of Huckleberry Finn estab-

¹⁸Sherwood Cummings, "What's in Huckleberry Finn?" The English Journal, Vol. L, No. 1 (Jan. 1961), p. 6.

lishes for written prose the virtues of American colloquial speech... He [Twain] is the master of the style that escapes the fixity of the printed page, that sounds in our ears with the immediacy of the heard voice, the very voice of unpretentious truth."¹⁹

No wonder this boy gets inside the reader! His language, like great poetry, hooks onto the memory and stays there. The way in which he speaks is both an exciting artistic experience for the reader and also, as will be shown in Chapter III, is the medium, this "very voice of unpretentious truth," through which Twain evokes a sense of recognition and identification with Huck's conflicts, recapitulating truths about ourselves and all of human nature.

Recently one critic wrote, "Mr. Jerome David Salinger is neither Moliere nor Chekhov. He is not yet Mark Twain (and by a long shot)."²⁰ One both sympathizes with and is inclined to agree with the irritated gentleman, a college professor. The fact remains, however, that there are thousands of young people who feel closer to Salinger than any other writer. And whether we, or the professor, like it or not, it is because Holden Caulfield speaks their language. His idiom, thoroughly profane, punctuated by clichés and very limited in range, establishes him as a person whom they instantly recognize. He is not a boy our children would necessarily like--few of his own contemporaries did. But he is one whom they understand and who is significant to them.

Why is The Catcher in the Rye "the one book that every undergraduate

¹⁹ "Huckleberry Finn," The Liberal Imagination (New York: The Viking Press, 1950), p. 116-17.

²⁰ Quoted by Robert Gutwillig, "Everybody's Caught 'The Catcher in the Rye.'" New York Times Book Review (Jan. 15, 1961), p. 37.

has read?"²¹ It has captured the young people because they read about Holden with a sense of involvement that, I believe, they do not feel with Huck. And it has done so, largely because Salinger, with an ear for the idiosyncrasies of modern adolescent diction, uses an idiom that corresponds to the psychological aura of our times, a language that the "teen-agers" instantly realize is absolutely right. This recognition is, I think, set up with Holden's first words:

"If you really want to hear about it, the first thing you'll probably want to know is where I was born, and what my lousy childhood was like...and all that David Copperfield kind of crap, but I don't feel like going into it, if you want to know the truth...I'll just tell you about this madman stuff that happened to me around last Christmas." (p. 3)

His vocabulary, trite and banal, seems an unlikely medium for enhancing his reality, but there is a peculiar insight in Holden's thoughts that pushes him close to the reader. The way Salinger, like Twain, fuses the facts of the scene described by his hero with his own feelings about it creates the illusion that Holden is completely present. His description of New York from a taxi is reminiscent of Huck's arrival at the Phelps' farm.

"What made it worse it was so quiet and lonesome out... Now and then you saw a man and a girl crossing a street... or a bunch of hoodlumpy-looking guys and their dates, all of them laughing like hyenas at something you could bet wasn't funny. New York's terrible when somebody laughs on the street very late at night...It makes you feel so lonesome and depressed." (p. 106)

Holden is a very lonely boy. When he is at his lowest he thinks

²¹Granville Hicks, "J. D. Salinger, Search for Wisdom," Salinger, A Critical and Personal Portrait, edited by Henry Anatole Grunwald (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1962), p. 192.

about his little brother Allie, who has died.

"So once in a while, now, when I get very depressed, I keep saying to him, 'Okay, Go home and get your bike and meet me in front of Bobby's house.'" (p. 129)

Holden says wistfully, "You'd have liked him," (p. 49) voicing the human and futile desire to restore that which is gone forever, to make someone understand how it used to be. With this kind of direct appeal to the reader's emotions, Holden connects his own experiences to those of the reader, and this is true, I believe, of the adult as well as the reader who is near Holden's own age.

Another means by which Salinger links Holden's thoughts to his reader's is the way in which Holden mentions whatever occurs to him, matters which are not necessarily pertinent to his story, but to a revelation of how he feels. "Holden is a master of the ludicrous irrelevancy."²² He dreams of Jane, the girl he likes, and the summer they spent together, and he wonders why, when they played checkers, "Old Jane would never get her kings out of the back row." (p. 101) And he muses about where the Central Park ducks go in the winter. Such recall of small insignificant incidents that hover on the periphery of the mind is a universal experience, and makes Holden exist as vividly as Huck does. Huck can talk to Jim about the stars. Holden just wonders about the ducks.

Huck's speech shows a clear and solid world, while Holden's indicates a kind of whirlpool of modern life. Huck understates; Holden exaggerates, reiterates, rails, and condemns. His staccato sentences contain a feverish modern dissonance, but "by the

²² Arthur Heiserman and James E. Miller, Jr., "Some Crazy Cliff," Salinger, A Critical and Personal Portrait, p. 204.

end of the book even Holden's adjectives, 'pretty,' 'crummy,' 'terrific,' 'lousy,' 'old,' have taken on a vivid and exact significance."²³

His use of the extra phrase at the end of a sentence, etches him more deeply than an analysis of his character could. For example, the clause, "If you want to know the truth," in Holden's first sentence raises the possibility that Holden thinks that nobody does want to know it. Or, his often-repeated, "I really did," suggests that he may not know whether he is telling the exact truth, or possibly that he is afraid that someone might think that he is a "phony."

The dialogue in Huckleberry Finn and The Catcher in the Rye has, of course, much greater importance than that of Penrod and Tom Sawyer. And, of the books about the older boys, Huck's language is the greater artistic achievement. As the exasperated professor said, Salinger "is not yet Mark Twain." The idiom of The Catcher in the Rye is a tour de force and a brilliant one, while Huck's language is a masterpiece.

All three authors, however, respond with virtuosity and sensitivity to the times they describe, choosing their heroes' environments and shaping their language to match their points of view. And these aspects are an integral part of the reasons why these books remain classics.

What Donald Costello has said of The Catcher in the Rye and Huckleberry Finn is also applicable to Tom Sawyer and Penrod:

"The language, it must be remembered that exists in The Catcher in the Rye is only one part of an artistic achievement. The language was not written for itself; but as a part of a greater whole. Like the great Twain work with which it is often compared, a study of The Catcher in the Rye repays both the linguist and the literary critic; for

²³David Leitch, "The Salinger Myth," Salinger, A Critical and Personal Portrait, p. 73.

as one critic has said, 'In them 1884 and 1951 speak to us in the idiom and accent of two youthful travelers who have earned their passports to literary immortality.'" ²⁴

None of the elements previously examined in these books exists for itself alone. For example, it is a long way from a raft in the Mississippi to mid-twentieth century New York City, but both are backgrounds for flight. The way in which Huck and Holden exist in reference to these surroundings, as well as the way Tom and Penrod react to their special golden world, is used as a springboard from which the authors involve us with their heroes' conflicts, causing just that "shock of recognition" which is the sine qua non if a work of fiction is to be a living book.

²⁴ Donald Costello, "The Language of 'The Catcher in the Rye.'" Salinger, A Critical and Personal Portrait, p. 276.

CHAPTER III

I

CONFLICT IN PENROD

Among the various means by which Twain, Tarkington, and Salinger create boys whose stories are classics, one final point remains to be considered. Are the books human history? Do the authors create boys whose feelings and conflicts cause the emotion of recognition in the reader? Does conflict cause any change in the hero? A command of words is not enough to make a character live. To complete a fictional image which answers the above questions requires that the author be able to create a spark which will bridge the gap between the printed page and the reader's own sensibilities. This spark is, I believe, created by the way in which the author handles the feelings and conflicts of his hero, as well as the way the hero, himself, is affected by them. This is the common, inescapable human lot--conflicts which spark the emotions that know no boundaries of time, age, or place--recognizable across every barrier.

The problems of Penrod and Tom are relatively simple, but their longings and struggles are, nevertheless, human history in that they speak to our memories. Even though the reader may not be profoundly moved, there is a connecting power of identification in their stories which makes them living books.

Just as Tarkington's own attitude towards boyhood is that of nostalgia, this is the primary emotion that he evokes in the reader. Penrod's

conflicts are so wonderfully those of uncomplicated childhood--hatred of neighborhood enemies, of dressing up, and of anything and everything organized by adults. Penrod is not put into situations that call for maturity, but rather for indefatigable energy and inspired ingenuity. And at this he has few equals.

He has the same problems that harrass children any time anywhere. All boys feel at some time that the adult world is in conspiracy against them. Penrod differs only in feeling this way all of the time. The conflicts of childhood are this simple and humorous, however, only in the world of literary entertainment. The atmosphere of Tarkington's Penrod books is that of ineffable brightness and sunshine without shadows, but as indicated earlier, Tarkington's declared purpose is to show how funny boys are. There is neither pretentiousness nor any attempt to be profound. He simply, and with a light touch, reminds us that, though environments may change, much of the inner life and many of the problems of a boy do not.

Penrod's conflicts do not effect any changes in him. One may project Huck or Holden into the future, wondering what happens to Huck in the "territory" or to Holden after he leaves the hospital, but Penrod remains in Tarkington's world of boyhood where conflicts are solved without torment and life is a succession of todays--a portrait of a boy which is presented with ebullient idealism and which keeps its verity--a boy whose story would not have been translated into ten languages unless it perpetually evoked the memories and truth of boyhood.

CONFLICT IN TOM SAWYER

To the humorous and idyllic presentation of boyhood problems similar to Penrod's, Tom Sawyer adds a special appeal for the youthful reader in the kind of adventures Twain allows Tom to have. Where plot is concerned, Tom is one of the most fortunate boys in literature. As Tarkington said, "All that the boy, Sam, had wished to happen he made happen."

For example, for the young reader there must be a sense of fulfillment in the realization that no adult action succeeds. In every conflict, from the whitewashing incident to the loss of Tom and Becky in the cave, adult planning goes astray. Adult methods do not even succeed in dealing with the evil embodied in Injun Joe. Twain certainly is generous to Tom! He lets him save the life of his lady fair, find hidden treasure, make a ritual of rebellions (which is as juvenile as the basic gesture itself), and always Tom gets away with them. In addition to this, his thirst for showing off and for heroic grandeur--in short, for following his own desires, must cause the heart of a boy to do more than beat with recognition. With very little effort the youthful reader can become Tom, himself.

Our so-called "privileged" children spend a great deal more time than Tom did being supervised by adults. They are not, I hope, so stifled by this junior version Grey Flannel Trap that they do not have a feeling of pleasure at Tom's adroitness at outwitting those who have authority over children. Tom is really much the more "privileged." He does exactly what he wants to do and he always has the last word, as when he scores over the Sunday-school superintendent or his teacher, or steals the wig on Examination Day.

For the adult reader such incidents are remembrances of things past, and Tom's successes as well as pleasing the boy reader, also confirm an adult's own childhood wishes. It seems unlikely that anyone can read Tom Sawyer without substituting his own teacher, minister, school superintendent, or any other member of the "Enemy" who has authority over children. And to this nostalgia is added an appreciation of Twain's satire of institutions and the pomposity and hypocrisy of those in charge of them.

The extravagant way in which Tom manages to solve his conflicts with authority is evidence for the adult of the accuracy of Twain's knowledge of human nature. He not only reminds adults of "what they once were," but of what they occasionally still are--or at least what others still are. One needs only to observe a group of acquaintances to find the Tom Sawyers--merry and inventive braggarts, full of grandiose schemes and love of mystification. Most of them, unfortunately, are not given the opportunities that Tom is.

Unlike Penrod's world which is untouched by violence, under the small town idyll of St. Petersburg there is evil, evil that is characterized by high melodrama, and through it Twain evokes an adult's recollection of childish terrors. For example, although most adults are not able actually to re-enter the world of a child outdoors at night, Twain certainly makes one remember what it was like. As Tom and Huck hide in the graveyard, there is a fusion of external facts with the feeling of terror, a crystallization of all of the fear of the mysterious which is part of childhood. Most children do not see murder committed, but the emotions of the boys as they crouch under the elms, afraid to breathe, cause a start of recognition, making one remember that special kind of fear known only to childhood, when one was afraid to look back because

something nameless might be waiting to pounce, afraid to run, because then one would surely be caught by "it."

Incidents like the graveyard scene trigger adult memories and excite youthful imaginations, and they certainly frighten Tom at the time they occur, but Tom's conflicts with evil have no lasting effect upon him. The fact that he breaks his oath and frees Muff Potter or shows courage when he and Becky are lost in the cave gives him a maturity on paper, but these experiences do not change him.

He is not, to be sure, as static a character as Penrod is. The four main episodes in the book do begin childishly and end with actions that show at least the possibilities of maturing, but at the close of the story Tom is still a boy, egotistical, fame-loving, unaffected by any of his adult-like actions, and untormented by his conflicts with evil. His story is one of victories over the grownup world, but when the chips are down, he is still amenable to adult control. And this, I think, is the way he wants it. Compared to those of Huck and Holden, his own rebellions are phony. In the end he insists that Huck must be respectable if he is going to be one of the gang. "He has, it appears, gone over to the side of the enemy."¹

Just as the evil which is embodied in Injun Joe does not deeply affect Tom, the reader, too, is unmoved by it except as it is a reminder of childhood's fears. The harshness of grave-robbing, murder, and fear is somehow softened in Tom Sawyer, seen through an unrealistic haze, like magnified shadows on a wall at night--fearful, not falsified, but somehow unreal--shadows that will vanish with the daylight. One feels

¹Walter Blair, "On the Structure of Tom Sawyer," Modern Philology, Vol. 37 (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1939-40), p. 88.

that in St. Petersburg life will continue to move serenely, uninvaded by real evil, and that everything will continue to happen for the best in this best of all possible worlds.

Twain's treatment of these elements is very different from the economy and deceptive simplicity which gives the very feel or core of experience as he perpetuates the truths of boyhood, itself, as in the arrival of Ben Rogers as the Big Missouri, the whitewashing episode, or Tom's kaleidoscopic dreams of glory quoted in Chapter II. And here Tom is the kind of a boy adults like to think they once were with a childhood they wish they had had, like St. Petersburg, itself, part of our dreams and our heritage. Despite Twain's reminders of child terrors, the main area in which one feels a sense of recognition is in Twain's presentation of a boyhood which is similar to Penrod's but which is, of course, more exciting. What counts the most in Tom's story as in Penrod is, it seems to me, a reader's pleasure in finding that boyhood conflicts are portrayed with enough reality to be absorbing, but not enough reality to disturb. And this is, I believe, why Tom Sawyer is, as De Voto has remarked, "among the common possessions of even unliterary readers everywhere."² There has always been a place and a need for this kind of writing. One hopes that there always will be.

III

CONFLICT IN HUCKLEBERRY FINN

In Huckleberry Finn and The Catcher in the Rye there are conflicts of the heart which involve us deeply with the heroes because through them

²Mark Twain at Work, p. 18.

the authors take such a sobering look at the problems of the individual in society. In these books, unlike Tom Sawyer, the evil in human nature is refracted through all levels of society, deeply affecting the boys themselves, and through them the reader.

One of the qualities which makes us become more involved with the older boys than with Tom and Penrod is related to the seriousness with which Twain and Salinger view society. And, too, Huck and Holden tell their own stories, showing the reader directly how they feel about what they see. Because the adolescent has heightened sensitivity and receptivity, "he can make startlingly adult comments on moral or ethical situations."³

Among all the excellences that make Huckleberry Finn a classic and its hero a marvelous and likable boy, perhaps the chief is Clemens' treatment of Huck's conflicts. Both his observations of the dark side of human nature and his struggles with it are common denominators in all of life. And it is through our recognition of these common denominators that Huck leaves the printed page to become a part of our own experience.

Through the clear eyes of youth one sees the eternal stupidities and cruelties of the world. Twain in Huckleberry Finn, like Salinger in The Catcher in the Rye, does much more than give one a sense of recognition with his hero--with boy nature; rather, he lays human nature, itself, bare. These boys report adult behavior whose implications are very difficult to ignore. These implications become even more forceful because Huck, due to his age, is unable to see the factors that make culprits of most adults. His remarks are the more compelling because he reports ef-

³ Arnold Gesell, Frances Ilg, Louise Ames, Youth, The Years from Ten to Sixteen (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1956), p. 254.

fects, not causes. "Human beings can be awful cruel..." With detached, almost casual comments like this one, he reveals the adult, not as the adult fondly sees himself, but as he appears to others.

Huck's own conflict stems from the fact that though he does not make ethical or moral judgments, he possesses a strong sense of ethics which is hidden from the world and from himself. Huck, the runaway, is in a different moral world from most of the other characters in the book, though he would be as surprised to know it as he is when Mary Jane thinks that her prayers will help him. His membership in this world, unknowing, and later, unwilling, is made clear as he floats down the river. Using all his wits to stay away from trouble, he is nonetheless constantly "in a sweat" over the problems of other people.

As he starts his voyage, however, Huck is as he wants to be, uncommitted. He has escaped from the widow and Pap and above everything else he desires freedom from entangling alliances. The trip begins idyllically. Life is happy and Huck is at his most lyrical when talking about the river and the delights of the raft. His escape via river and raft, however, is only temporary; freedom soon becomes menaced as the world crowds in from both shores.

Huckleberry Finn is remembered, according to Bowden, as "part of a marvelous nostalgic dream that haunts the American mind,"⁴ but it is at the same time the story of a boy meeting evil head on and making observations about human nature which involve us all. Philip Young says that the book is so full of humor and idyll that it is easy to overlook the violence. There are thirteen corpses in the book and except for the

⁴The Dungeon of the Heart, p. 42.

episodes with Tom Sawyer at the beginning and the end, every major incident ends in brutality.⁵ Twain, then, does much more than give us a "nostalgic dream." Through Huck's observations he exposes the grimier parts of our own selves, the toads in the well that one hopes to keep hidden. The reader enjoys identifying with Huck's dream of freedom. But, if he is honest with himself, he will also see that Colonel Grangerford and the duke are much more than flamboyant nineteenth-century characters. I doubt if the person exists who has not desired revenge or been tempted to manipulate another person.

Huck has the toughness to accept evil realistically. He has been able to deal with the brutish Pap and escape unscathed. But this does not mean that he is insensitive. Buck Grangerford's death wounds him more than anything that happens to him. The violence of the feud makes him so sick he almost falls out of the tree in which he is hiding, and he says:

"I ain't a-going to tell all that happened - it would make me sick again if I was to do that. I wished I hadn't ever come ashore that night, to see such things. I ain't ever going to get shut of them - lots of times I dream about them."
(p. 97-8)

This for Huck is an impassioned cry against the evils of the world. His unwillingness "to tell all that happened" shows that it is too terrible to think about. It is getting more and more difficult to stay emotionally uninvolved with life on the shore, which is to say, with the real world of cruelty and stupidity.

After this experience, Jim and the river provide refuge and therapy

⁵ Ernest Hemingway, p. 194.

as nothing else could. And, in addition, Huck has a resilience, an ability to adjust. In this area he is more mature than many adults. He sees a world full of evil, but his "profoundest relation to life is an animal faith, an acceptance of reality that assimilates the irrational and cruel even while it condemns them through exposure."⁶

Jim does much more than provide companionship for Huck. Even before the feud, Huck, the uncommitted, the product of a slaveholding society, has begun to learn honor from a slave. After the ridiculous trick Huck tries to play on Jim in Chapter 15, Jim's gentle dignity and reproof shame him into taking a giant step toward real maturity.

"En all you wuz think 'bout wuz how you could make a fool uv old Jim wid a lie. Dat truck dah is trash; en trash is what people is dat puts dirt on de head er dey fren's en makes em ashamed." (p. 73)

Huck shows his membership in the world of morality and affirms his innate goodness. This is one of the most brilliantly realistic touches in the book. It is a fact of human nature that we take advantage of undemanding love. Huck is no exception, but Jim's hurt feelings break him up as nothing else could.

"It was fifteen minutes before I could work myself up to go and humble myself to a nigger, but I done it, and I warn't ever sorry for it afterwards, neither." (p. 73-4)

This is the incident in which Huck first really becomes a three-dimensional character and the reader feels a quiet sense of elation as his concern for Jim triumphs over unthinking cruelty.

Humility, it seems, after the first hurdle, is a fairly cheerful virtue. Huck and Jim continue to be happy on the raft although Jim

⁶Branch, p. 147.

horrifies Huck by "coming right out flat-footed and saying he would steal his children--children that belonged to a man I didn't even know; a man that hadn't ever done me no harm." (p. 75) Huck, like everyone else, then matures spasmodically and despite his compassion for Jim he is never mature enough to say that slavery is bad. "The depth and strength of his character lie in integrity of emotion, not in intellectual acuteness."⁷

During the middle section of the book, Huck remains detached, seeing the sorry human lot framed in the dreary river towns. The emphasis is on the opposition between society's restrictions and stupidities and the relative freedom of life on the river.⁸ Huck does not even commit himself to being against things, but is the naive reporter telling us what Twain thinks about human nature. One might think twice before dismissing "The greed for sensation" and the "tendency to luxuriate in emotion for its own sake"⁹ as generic only to frontier towns. The naked expression of the sensation-seeker can be seen around every automobile accident and heard in the rear of the crowd at every prize fight. Huck's description of the action of the crowd "squirming" and "shoving" to catch a glimpse of Boggs' corpse, as mentioned in Chapter II, is all too applicable. The episodes arising out of the Supreme Court's 1952 decision concerning integration also hover in the air.

Huck always responds to decency, and he tries to help the Wilks girls. The implications, however, in most of the shore incidents is

⁷Henry Nash Smith, p. xxii.

⁸Ibid., p. xiii.

⁹Ibid., p. xiv.

that Huck can remain aloof from the pressures that enslave the shore people,¹⁰ Huck's real problem, as Twain has hinted, is going to be with Jim. Although Jim, to the end, remains a "nigger" to Huck, he has also become in Huck's eyes a man of decency and kindness who loves him with undisguised affection and who relies on him. Without being aware of it, Huck has become committed to another person through ties of love and responsibility. And these are the kind of ties that demand maturity. Unwittingly Huck has taken on an obligation to help Jim escape from slavery. His conflict shows that Twain, like Faulkner, has the "conflict of the human heart" as his main concern.

Huck, living outside society, nevertheless has a conscience which has been formed with society's values, so his inner freedom is threatened by that which he has in common with the shore society, the idea of "the awful sacredness of slave property."¹¹ His conflict over Jim is an agonizingly familiar one to anyone who has struggled to make a right decision. The battle between wanting approval and acting with integrity can pit two of human nature's strongest instincts against each other. We seem at such time to value others' opinions of us more than our own. "And then think of me! It would get all around, that Huck Finn helped a nigger to get his freedom." (p. 178)

Huck, like many people, wonders if a shabby trick is all right as long as no one knows about it. "A person does a low-down thing," he says, "and then he don't want to take no consequences of it. Thinks as long as he can hide it, it ain't no disgrace. That was my fix exactly." (p. 178)

¹⁰Ibid., p. xv.

¹¹Ibid., p. xxii.

Huck's shore conscience wins the battle. He writes Miss Watson about Jim and feels much better--until he begins to remember Jim and their trip.

"...and I see Jim before me, all the time, in the day, in the night-time...somehow I couldn't seem to strike no places to harden me against him, but only the other kind...and how good he always was; and at last I struck the time I saved him by telling the men we had smallpox aboard, and he was so grateful, and said I was the best friend old Jim every had in the world, and the only one he's got now; and then I happened to look around, and see that paper." (p. 179)

"It was a close place," (p. 179) says the boy who is finding out how expensive and painful fidelity can be. And as he defiantly tears up the letter with the desperate decision, "All right, then I'll go to hell," (p. 180) Huck is repaying Jim's sacrificial love in kind.

Conflict can be creative. The more difficult it is, the finer soul it can make. Huck has run away as a rebel, but now he confronts reality in a way that few are able to do, rising against his inner compulsions and risking a hell which seems very real to him to perform an act of love. And here Huck, though he would fall off the raft in astonishment, if anyone told him, becomes one of our truly great symbols of brotherly love and the innate dignity of all men. As a result of his decision we are faced, if we stop to realize it, with one of life's deepest mysteries--genuine goodness.

Considered from the point of view of conflict and maturation, the rest of the book is an anticlimax. Huck, approaching maturity, is once more relegated to childhood by the nonsense at the Phelps' farm. The book comes full circle in the end, with Huck escaping from the annoyances and restrictions of "sivilization" and retaining the freshness and spontaneity which make him perennially appealing.

Huck may prefer to melt into the anonymity of the "territory," but he cannot escape any more than the rest of us can. He, too, is involved in life, and responsibility has become a part of his character which cannot be shed any more easily than civilization. One need not worry about him. The ability to accept maturity has always been there, evidenced by his quick sympathy, his basic honesty, and his capacity for tenderness.

Huckleberry Finn is much more than a classic fictional representation of boyhood; Huck's charm has not only made him a member of many American families, but also, as Frank Baldanza has said:

"By his...decisions in which he is torn between the conflicting codes of social and religious conventions and the inherent truth that wells up from within, this essentially primitive and pragmatic child reduplicates the struggle of each one of us in a world that was not expressly founded for our own comfort."¹²

IV

CONFLICT IN THE CATCHER IN THE RYE

One critic has recently written that "Most men know how to ignore, suppress or outwit the occasional suspicion that the world is really not to be borne...but Holden Caulfield has not learned the trick."¹³ One wonders whether he will ever learn it. Salinger communicates Holden's problems with a sense of urgency not felt in the other books discussed. This boy has "an astonishing degree of life, a stunning and detailed air

¹² Mark Twain, An Introduction and Interpretation (New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1961), p. 120.

¹³ Quoted in "Sonny, An Introduction," Time, LXXVIII, No. 11 (Sept. 15, 1961), p. 87.

of presence."¹⁴ His voice is one that we, as well as our adolescent children, instantly recognize. But the adult's reaction is different in that we feel something akin to a sense of shame, as if we are eavesdropping on Holden, listening in on desperation. Underneath the over-emphatic, repetitive, and thoroughly adolescent outpourings, the adult detects the vulnerability, the naive and anxious questioning, the hope that things may not be as bad as they seem.

Huck floats through a sordid world, uncertain of his destination, but sustained by reserves of self-confidence and the knowledge that he can meet emergencies. Holden, unable to accept evil realistically, hunts ineffectually for a better model for maturity than his elders offer him. Like Huck, he dreams, but the dream is more hopeless now. He wants to escape the world he knows for one he imagines.

"I'd build me a little cabin somewhere with the dough I made and live there for the rest of my life. I'd build it right near the woods, but not right in them, because I'd want it to be sunny as hell all the time." (p. 258)

Holden's problem, like Huck's, stems from the fact that he, too, is in a different moral world from most of the characters in the book. His is the fate of being able to recognize intuitively the substitution of pretense for love, and his despair comes from the fact that he is terrified by what people do to each other. His sensitivity, which may in time become a strength, is now a cross. Since he cannot handle these things in the world which repel him, he rejects and is rejected by almost everyone in the book.

America's young people, as I have mentioned, moved by Holden's

¹⁴Ibid., p. 87.

problems, "craziness," and compassion, see in this book their manifesto. Since he articulates their own conflicts and uncertainties, they feel a kinship not felt with Huck. The adult's reaction to Holden is also more complex than it is towards Huck. In the first place Huck is more likeable. He is uncomplaining, funny, and courageous. It is a sad fact of life that constant repetition of grievances, however justified, becomes wearisome--sad, because a person usually needs the most love when he is being the least lovable. It is more than possible that many adults might react to Holden in the same way that those in the book do. Also Huck is able to work his way through a serious problem causing the reader to respond with elation as this boy emerges victorious on the side of responsibility and maturity - a victory which Holden never achieves. I am not implying that all adults are mature but that Huck's struggle reiterates conflicts that seem an inescapable part of being an adult, whereas Holden's problems are in some degree at least those which beset all adolescents.

Nevertheless, one feels great compassion for this boy whose unhappiness shows the fate of the too-perceptive individual in our society and whose personal anguish illustrates Salinger's own view of experience. Holden's conflict causes a feeling of disquietude in an adult. Whether we like him or not, when he suffers it is impossible to remain uncommitted and unengaged. There is a twofold commitment here. We are convicted because in Holden the sins of the fathers are visited upon the children, and there is no escaping the fact that we are the fathers. At the same time, Holden's longings speak to our own needs. Everyone understands loneliness. Everyone needs love. Holden, like Huck, is an adolescent prophet dealing with the problems that know no boundaries.

Holden is constantly confronted by people who disappoint him. The boys at school are insensitive and egocentric, but theirs is partly the cruelty of youth. It is for adults that Salinger reserves his most scathing denunciations--the hypocrites, the apathetic, the emotionally starved, the "phonies." If, with some effort, we deny the traits we have in common with the duke or Colonel Grangerford, it is more difficult to miss the implications in characters like "old Hass," the snobbish headmaster, the rich undertaker who speaks to the boys with repelling hypocrisy, or the people who like cars better than people. Salinger extends the environs of Pencey Prep and New York City to include our streets, our world, and our hearts. He refuses to permit the reader the comparatively easy "out" of thinking that Holden's problems occur in a world where materialism can be blamed on some abstract social evil for which no one is really to blame, or that they arise simply because he is a neurotic problem child.

Holden runs away from school, wanting to escape the world he lives in for one he really knows does not exist. "That's the whole trouble. You can't ever find a place that's nice and peaceful, because there isn't any." (p. 264) Unlike Huck, he has no inner resources, only the memory of his dead brother Allie and Jane, the girl he likes. These two, who never enter the book, are always in his thoughts. For reasons he doesn't explain, he never calls Jane in New York. "You have to be in the mood for that sort of stuff." (p. 151) I suspect that he is afraid that she too may have changed, turned into a "phony." So he contents himself with memories. Allie and Jane are, in a real sense, Holden's emotional frame of reference, but his memories of them underscore his present misery. For Huck memories are companionable, but Holden is so miserable that memories of happier times can hardly be borne.

Everything he does and sees in New York makes him feel more alienated, and, despite his perceptive ability, he is too young to realize that what may appear to him as pretense or hypocrisy may, in reality, be preoccupation with worries or distress as great as his own. The adolescent, often intuitive, is rarely mature enough to look below the surface. Thinking almost exclusively about his own feelings, he sees and reacts upon only that which is revealed to him. In defense of adults, Holden just may discover when he has grown up that "phoniness" may be a disguise worn by grownups to cover their own private agonies. But neither Twain nor Salinger have their heroes comment upon any extenuating circumstances in the behavior of other people.

Holden, to be saved, "needs someone to show him how to escape from the shell of his isolation without escaping from humanity itself."¹⁵ And that person is his little sister Phoebe. She is an exquisite child, born both loving and wise, knowing, without knowing that she knows, that the answer to life is love. He sneaks home late at night to see her.

"She put her arms around my neck and all. She's very affectionate. I mean she's quite affectionate, for a child...I sort of gave her a kiss...She was glad as hell to see me. You could tell." (p. 209)

Somewhat incoherently he tries to justify himself for having flunked out of school, but she is simply not having any. For the first time in the book someone lays it on the line with Holden. When he tells her that he didn't like anything that was happening at Pencey, she answers, "You don't like anything that's happening." (p. 220) He says he likes Allie, but Phoebe is not impressed because it's easy to like people who are dead.

¹⁵ Bowden, p. 61.

He reveals himself completely because she knows how to listen and because he knows that she loves him. Passionately wanting the world to be black or white, and afraid of what his own motives may become, he is afraid to grow up. "How would you know you weren't being a phony? The trouble is you wouldn't." (p. 224) He tells her what he would like to do with his life, but he has invented a dream world. The unconscious symbolism helps to explain the conflicts in Holden that make him lonely and isolated, but also capable of salvation.¹⁶ He wants to shield innocent children from injury.

Anyway I keep picturing all these little kids playing some game in this big field of rye and all. Thousands of little kids, and nobody's around - nobody big I mean - except me. And I'm standing on the edge of some crazy cliff. What I have to do, I have to catch everybody if they start to go over the cliff - I mean if they're running and they don't look where they're going I have to come out from somewhere and catch them...I'd just be the catcher in the rye and all." (p. 224-25)

Phoebe knows better. She is one of the most gloriously practical children in modern literature. The first line of the song, she informs him, is not "If a body catch a body coming through the rye." "It's 'If a body meet a body coming through the rye!'" (p. 224) No one can catch anyone. This truth needs no elaboration. Salinger is restating the human problem.

Here a parent is reminded of things he would rather forget. Holden is not the only one who would like to be a "catcher in the rye," but no one can protect children from unhappiness or from the spectre of evil. It will touch them. It will probably harm them. And there is very little we can do to prevent it.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 62.

"The thing with kids is, if they want to grab for the gold ring, you have to let them do it, and not say anything. If they fall off, they fall off, but it's bad if you say anything to them." (p. 273-74)

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Before Holden sneaks out, Phoebe gives him her Christmas money, and for the only time in the book, Holden cries. Her affection is beginning to cause the breakup of his bitterness and isolation. Like Twain, and, like the writers of the New Testament, too, Salinger believes that love and goodness are the most explosive of ethical forces, having power to change a person as nothing else can. In the last analysis, they are the only way that we can "meet a body."

Holden gives Phoebe his precious hunting cap and goes to see Mr. Antolini, a former teacher, and the only adult he really seems to admire. He tells Holden about the possibilities and the excitement of the search for love.

"Among other things, you'll find that you're not the first person who was ever confused and frightened and even sickened by human behavior. You're by no means alone on that score... Many, many men have been just as troubled morally and spiritually as you are right now. Happily some of them have kept records of their troubles. You'll learn from them--if you want to. Just as someday, if you have something to offer, someone will learn something from you. It's a beautiful reciprocal arrangement. And it isn't education. It's history. It's poetry." (p. 246)

170-171
But after Holden decides to spend the night in his apartment, Mr. Antolini makes homosexual advances towards him. Holden is now almost frantic because he feels betrayed by the one adult whom he deeply respects. Salinger uses perversion to etch the modern malaise more deeply, but the problem is the age-old tragedy of being disappointed by those we have trusted.

Holden is now on the verge of complete collapse. During his three

days in New York his symptoms have gradually increased and his emotional and physical condition reaches its crisis during a walk up Fifth Avenue. He is so ill that he is convinced he cannot cross the streets.

"Everytime I'd get to the end of a block I'd make believe I was talking to my brother Allie. I'd say to him. 'Allie, don't let me disappear. Allie, don't let me disappear. Please Allie.' And then when I'd reach the other side of the street without disappearing, I'd thank him." (p. 252)

The answer for those who feel lost and abandoned in the materialistic world of "phoniness" is emerging more and more clearly.

Holden decides to run away, but first meets Phoebe at the zoo to say good-bye. She arrives, wearing the red cap and dragging her suitcase because she has decided to go with him. To make up for leaving her behind, he takes her to the carrousel for a ride. This scene is the most brilliant and touching in the book. It starts to rain as Holden watches her. She gets off her horse and puts the red cap on his head.

"My hunting hat really gave me quite a lot of protection, in a way, but I got soaked anyway. I didn't care, though, I felt so damn happy all of a sudden, the way old Phoebe kept going around and around. I don't know why. It was just that she looked so damn nice, the way she kept going around and around, in her blue coat and all. God, I wish you could've been there." (p. 275)

As Robert Gutvillig says, "We are there."¹⁷

Love has greater healing powers than anything else. It is not in anyone's power to "catch a body," but Phoebe has come as close as one person can get to another. Symbolically she has met him in his field of rye, and by so doing has saved him. She cannot provide a resolution for

¹⁷"Everybody's Caught 'The Catcher in the Rye,'" p. 38.

his problems, but he had to have her miracle to start on the road back. He still faces hospitalization and psychiatric care and Salinger refuses to oversimplify his difficulties. To get well, he will have to face the fact that a part of what he has been searching for has never existed. Like the rest of us, he will have to face the "phoniness" and the evils where they are found. There are no cabins in the woods for any of us. He will have to compromise, if he can, and learn that the human position is a middle ground between good and evil and that he must come to terms with his attitude towards people to whom his integrity places him in opposition.

In the conclusion of the book, he admits that he even misses the people he thought he hated. Fear and loneliness are being replaced by the possibilities, at least, of affection. His natural response to his predicament has been a repudiation of society as a whole. Now the search for love is mingling with a search for wisdom. Axel Heyst, in Joseph Conrad's Victory, would say that there is hope for Holden, as there has always been for Huck, because he is learning young what it takes some men a lifetime. "Woe to the man whose heart hasn't learned while young to hope, to love--and to put its trust in life."¹⁸

There can be no question about the importance of Holden's conflict and our own involvement with it. Salinger's concern with the individual, lonely and estranged, is now, more than at any other time in history, a relevant one. "Togetherness" may be one of our catchwords, but the feeling of isolation and apartness has never been more prevalent. For our own survival we must do two things. We must learn to think and

¹⁸Victory (Garden City, N.Y: Doubleday, Page and Co., 1915), p. 383.

respond beyond our own wants, that is, to love, and we must realize that we cannot survive in a world for which we have only contempt.

Huckleberry Finn and Holden Caulfield will continue to be living characters who have a special meaning for us because through their conflicts they recapitulate a deep and abiding human experience. These boys are well aware of where they stand--both committed and torn--committed to a society which is unperceptive at best, torn by the knowledge that they cannot survive in isolation. Their innocence will be destroyed because it is part of the nature of society to destroy innocence. Their stories, however, vibrate with the hope and courage of the young, and their innocence may well be replaced by strength and wisdom.

And meanwhile John Donne speaks again: "No man is an island, intire of it selfe...And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; It tolls for thee."

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