

THE AWARENESS OF EVIL IN THE WORKS  
OF J. D. SALINGER

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THE AWARENESS OF EVIL IN THE WORKS  
OF J. D. SALINGER

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

In his perceptive Democracy in America (1840), Alexis De Tocqueville observes, with surprisingly clear application to the present, that isolation, self-dependence and incommunicability are a part of the American experience:

As social conditions become more equal, the number of persons increases who . . . have . . . acquired or retained sufficient education and fortune to satisfy their own wants. They owe nothing to any man, they expect nothing from any man; they acquire the habit of always considering themselves as standing alone, and they are apt to imagine that their whole destiny is in their own hands.

Thus not only does democracy make every man forget his ancestors, but it hides his descendents and separates his contemporaries from him; it throws him back forever upon himself alone and threatens in the end to confine him entirely within the solitude of his own heart.<sup>1</sup>

Such effects observed by De Tocqueville then, J. D. Salinger feels to be even more true now of the individual's experience in contemporary America. Projecting into his fiction his own observations and deep reflections, (Salinger explores as major themes the isolation, loneliness and incommunicability which seem, paradoxically, to lie at the core of modern life.)

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<sup>1</sup>Alexis De Tocqueville, Democracy in America, translated by Henry Reeve (New York, 1900), II, 105-106.

J. D. Salinger, like his protagonists, is basically a loner, though unlike them he is able to accept his isolation, live with it, and, seemingly, enjoy it. He was in the Army for three years during World War II, hating every minute of it. Never did he, could he, "look at home in a uniform," nor did he ever "acquire a military bearing." He stood alone, continually offended by his vulgar, crass companions; but unlike the sensitive Sergeant X of "For Esmé--With Love and Squalor," he suffered no mental breakdown. Instead, he became a staff sergeant, fought in the Normandy invasion and was awarded five battle stars.<sup>2</sup> ~~3~~ 3

Salinger suffered during the war and earlier, during adolescence. "His war stories are great because every sensitive person suffered in the war, or expects to suffer in the next one."<sup>3</sup> Salinger had private prep school training, and like Holden Caulfield, the sixteen year old misfit hero of The Catcher in the Rye, he suffered for it; and "it is the suffering that makes Catcher so agonizingly identifiable to young people of all ages."<sup>4</sup> )

(In his mid-forties, Salinger is "the most influential man of letters in the U. S. today,"<sup>5</sup> despite the fact that he has published the meager total of one relatively short

<sup>2</sup>"The Recluse in the Rye," Life, LI (November 3, 1961), 138.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 138, 141.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 138.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 130.

novel and thirteen short stories which could be called important literary contributions.<sup>6)</sup> He lives in isolation in Cornish, New Hampshire, with his wife, the former Claire<sup>A</sup> Douglas, and two small children. He answers no letters, signs no autographs, gives no lectures. He will not allow his biography to be in Who's Who, and he has an unlisted phone number. "He emerges from his house only to pick up the mail, buy groceries and make an occasional business trip. Few people have seen him; fewer have spoken to him, and almost none have had the privilege of hearing him answer back."<sup>7)</sup>

(Money does not seem at all important to him. He will accept offers neither from book clubs nor from television and movies.<sup>8</sup> Yet to the young people of today, Salinger is a magnificent combination of Hemingway, Faulkner, Twain and Whitman. Since the publication of Catcher (the one novel) in 1951, there have been more than one and a half million copies sold in the United States alone, with the book continuing each year to sell approximately 250,000 copies.)<sup>9)</sup>

(Salinger is obviously popular with the public, but the reverse is not, of course, true. As the Life article, "The Recluse in the Rye," points out, Salinger's purposeful isolation may have some neurotic overtones, but the primary

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 142.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 130.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 137.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 130.

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reason for the seclusion is an "almost slavish devotion to his work: he cannot stand to have it interrupted."<sup>10</sup>) Therefore, one might surmise--and when speaking of Salinger personally, that is all it is possible to do--that he is different from his isolated, sensitive heroes in that their isolation is forced upon them by their psychological and intellectual makeup and, thus, their natural reaction to society; whereas Salinger purposefully isolates himself. He is a perfectionist, a patient, devoted "word weaver" who insists, through writing, rewriting and editing, that every word be exactly right.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, one might further conjecture, perhaps logically, that Salinger must isolate himself in order to produce.)

Allen Tate has said that "'the end of social man is communion in time through love, which is beyond time,'"<sup>12</sup> but Salinger--through his gifted, acutely aware heroes and heroines--has simultaneously pointed out "the sad reality of human failure" in attempting to achieve this end.<sup>13</sup> What

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 142.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Ihab Hassan, "The Rare Quixotic Gesture," Salinger: A Critical and Personal Portrait, introduced and edited by Henry A. Grunwald (New York, 1962), p. 160.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

prevents this "communion through love" is the "evil"<sup>14</sup> which Salinger's perceptive protagonists are acutely aware of and--unlike ordinary, "normal" individuals--bother to care about. Salinger's "evil" is not at all the usual, overt wickedness, vice or crime committed by purposeful transgressors. Rather, it is the subtle type of evil that enters an individual's inner-self and slowly forces spiritual capitulation. The "evil" that Seymour Glass, Holden Caulfield, Franny Glass and all of Salinger's other hypersensitive misfits are concerned with is the everyday mendacity, vulgarity, insincerity, indifference and egomania of common hypocrites and bores, for whom the heroes' favorite term is "phony." According to Salinger, this evildoer is the rule, not the exception. The exception is, rather, the sensitively intelligent protagonist who is tragically isolated from society because of the spiritual corruption he sees in it.

The hero's situation is a pitiable one because he needs to communicate with the "phonies," though he cannot even so much as tolerate them. Their values are incompatible with his highly idealized religious and moral values. The following indictment of boys' prep schools by Holden Caulfield illustrates the sensitivity, concern and desire for communication which contribute to the misfit's isolation:

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<sup>14</sup>Quotation marks surround the word evil because of the ambiguous meanings applied to it by both Salinger and his protagonists.



"You ought to go to a boys' school sometime. Try it sometime," I said. "It's full of phonies, and all you do is study so that you can learn enough to be smart enough to be able to buy a goddam Cadillac some day, and you have to keep making believe you give a damn if the football team loses, and all you do is talk about girls and liquor and sex all day, and everybody sticks together in these dirty little goddam cliques. The guys that are on the basketball team stick together, the Catholics stick together, the goddam intellectuals stick together, the guys that play bridge stick together. Even the guys that belong to the goddam Book-of-the-Month Club stick together. If you try to have a little intelligent--"15

Holden is representative of Seymour, Franny and all the rest of Salinger's misfits, who, if they are to come to a reconciliation with the world, must be the compromisers, simply because they are in the minority.

The question of "evil" is two-sided, however. As Ihab Hassan recognizes, Salinger has placed in juxtaposition two contradictory elements--revulsion and holiness. The first is to be aware of a world "dominated by sham and spiritual vulgarity." The other is to know, "as Seymour [who is the oldest of Salinger's Glass children and who committed suicide] did, that Christ ordered us to call no man a Fool."16 Seymour realizes that Christ-like love is an all-encompassing love; he displays his awareness of the fact through his concept of the Fat Lady, a symbol of all mankind, including Christ. Seymour recommends this Christ-like, "Fat Lady"

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<sup>15</sup>J. D. Salinger, The Catcher in the Rye (New York, 1963), p. 119.

<sup>16</sup>Hassan, "The Rare Quixotic Gesture," p. 162.

love to his siblings; ironically, however, he cannot practice the philosophy himself; and he eventually takes his own life. The Fat Lady has no positive, redeeming effect until Zooey (the Glasses' youngest son) uses her to bring Franny (the youngest child) out of a mental breakdown into an all-embracing love and acceptance of her fellow man. Holden also understands indiscriminating love:

I like Jesus and all, but I don't care too much for most of the other stuff in the Bible. Take the Disciples, for instance. They annoy the hell out of me, if you want to know the truth. They were all right after Jesus was dead and all, but while He was alive, they were about as much use to Him as a hole in the head. All they did was keep letting Him down. . . . I remember I asked old Childs [a schoolmate] if he thought Judas, the one that betrayed Jesus and all, went to Hell after he committed suicide. Childs said certainly. That's exactly where I disagreed with him. I said I'd bet a thousand bucks that Jesus never sent old Judas to Hell. . . . I think any one of the Disciples would've sent him to Hell and all--and fast, too--but I'll bet anything Jesus didn't do it.<sup>17</sup>

(Salinger, then, has created for his characters a complicated, paradoxical situation. His misfits are generally repulsed by society, while at the same time they realize that Christ, whom they admire, loved and accepted the masses to the point of dying for them.) Salinger's heroes further realize that they are "freaks," as Zooey says, and "crazy," as Holden describes himself. But they cannot help themselves; some kind of invisible wall prevents mature

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<sup>17</sup>Salinger, The Catcher in the Rye, pp. 91-92.

communication, compassion and love. Therefore, despite the fact that they are aware of a pitiful human disease which could be called "soul sickness" and have somewhat of a right to be repulsed, they are guilty of an anti-Christian "evil" themselves: they reject human nature. And it is their awareness of the necessity to communicate, combined with their inability to do so, which leads to Seymour's, Holden's and Franny's mental breakdowns. Seymour finds communication and reconciliation impossible and totally rejects further contact through suicide. Holden spends some time in a psychiatric ward and indicates, at the end, at least, a toleration and a willingness to accept, if he can. Franny completes the evolution by reaching a mature, reasonable level of acceptance, compassion and love through Seymour's "Fat Lady." Thus, despite their extraordinary self-knowledge, Seymour, Holden and Franny, until they reach their respective solutions, are isolated--separated from a society which clashes with their idealistic standards.)

Many critics share with Salinger a deep concern for the spiritual degeneration of society. "Salinger," says Dan Wakefield, "is the only new writer to emerge in America since the Second World War who is writing on what has been the grandest theme of literature: the relationship of man to God, or the lack of God."<sup>18</sup> Wakefield believes that today God is

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<sup>18</sup>Dan Wakefield, "The Search for Love," Salinger: A Critical and Personal Portrait, introduced and edited by Henry A. Grunwald (New York, 1962), p. 186.

no longer considered the world's automatic answer-giver.

Therefore,

conduct, the question of how men act with morality and love if there is no idol which prescribes the rules, is a central and vital question. It is a question which stands, as the last three Salinger stories ["Seymour: An Introduction" (1959), "Zooney" (1957) and "Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters" (1955)] stand, "between miracle and suicide, and before one reaches resignation. . . ."19

The question is especially vital for those who are not resigned and is usually encountered most violently in adolescence (Holden Caulfield) and near the conclusion of formal education (Franny Glass), when individuals are asked the indispensable question: What will you do with your life? The possibilities are "resignation, suicide, miracle, and search,"20 possibilities and conclusions which Seymour, Holden and Franny must consider.

A London drama critic, Kenneth Tynan--one of England's "Angry Young Men," who are vehement about the moral illness of their nation and who seem to be quite empathetic with Salinger--asks:

"Do I speak for you when I ask for a society where people care more for what you have learned than for where you have learned it; where people who think and people who work can share the common idiom; where art connects itself instead of separating people; where people feel, as in the new Salinger story ["Zooney"], that every fat woman on earth is Jesus Christ?"21

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 187.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 178.

Wakefield believes that Salinger is the spokesman "for all who have not lost hope--or even if they have lost hope, have not lost interest--in the search for love and morality in the present-day world."<sup>22</sup> The need for a search like Salinger's is necessary in any time, but especially in ours, says Wakefield. The young writers of the "Lost Generation" thought the people of their era had witnessed the ultimate in wars, disillusionment and dead gods; but since then there have been more wars, increasingly depersonalized, and no new gods. A next war would likely be the epitome of depersonalization, and the old gods are sinking "continually deeper in their graves."<sup>23</sup> The "best" and "silent" attitudes in literature, represented by Jack Kerouac, have only produced variations on the "lost" theme, actually sinking deeper and losing even the possibility of a search. Their search ends with heroin, not with love, as Salinger's does. As Wakefield says,

. . . the physiological experience of heroin is one of negation (it is the ultimate tranquilizer), releasing the user during the duration of his "high" from the drive for sex, for love and for answers. Fortunately for the rest of us, the characters in Salinger's fiction have found no such simple formula as a "fix" for relief from their troubles.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., pp. 178-179.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., pp. 179-180.

(A person's attempt to find his proper place in the world is not enhanced or limited by his age, but by his mental attitude.) Wakefield believes that to perceive that "'age is moral--not chronological'" is to understand the "nature of the 'youthful' appeal of Salinger's work."<sup>25</sup> In 1924, Marcel Arland, writing for the Nouvelle Revue Francaise, essentially described what became Salinger's purpose: "'Morality will be our first concern. I cannot conceive of literature without an ethic. No doctrine can satisfy us, but the total absence of doctrine is a torment to us. . . .'"<sup>26</sup>

Salinger's use of children as symbols of moral innocence, in contrast to adult corruption, has called forth some critically perceptive comments. According to Martin Green, Salinger is one of many Americans--including such seemingly unhomogeneous individuals as Marlon Brando, James Dean, Mark Twain, Henry James and F. Scott Fitzgerald--who present an "image of innocence," who "are mourning over the moment of adjustment to the adult world of compromise and insincerity. . . . It is the moment cynicism becomes comfortable and unconscious they are all weeping over, fighting off, protesting against."<sup>27</sup> Leslie Fiedler, despite his objections

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 179.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

<sup>27</sup>Martin Green, A Mirror for Anglo-Saxons (New York, 1960), pp. 81-82.

to Salinger's "childism," concedes that though the child is not spiritually innocent, though he is involved through aggression and sexuality, he is, nevertheless, innocently perceptive of the world, and is, therefore, eligible to be used in contrast to adult guilt and corruption in an "age which aspires not to 'salvation' but to 'maturity.'"<sup>28</sup>

Arthur Mizener sees Salinger as a poet--"a man with his own special insight into the meaning of experience."<sup>29</sup>

He continues:

An inescapable, intense awareness of this "poetry that flows through things, all things," marks every one of Salinger's significant characters. As Vincent Caulfield in "This Sandwich Has No Mayonnaise" (1945) remarks of his brother Holden, such people cannot "do anything but listen hectically to the maladjusted little apparatus [they wear] for a heart."<sup>30</sup>

Salinger's misfits are hypersensitive, highly intelligent, aware and concerned. Holden, a sixteen year old boy, wonders what happens to the Central Park ducks in the winter and why Jane Gallagher--a girl he admires--keeps her kings in the back row during a checker game.<sup>31</sup> He is compelled to spend a weekend running wild in New York (his home), ending up in a

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<sup>28</sup>Leslie Fiedler, No! In Thunder (Boston, 1960), pp. 274-275.

<sup>29</sup>Arthur Mizener, "The Love Song of J. D. Salinger," Salinger: A Critical and Personal Portrait, introduced and edited by Henry A. Grunwald (New York, 1962), p. 24.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

California sanitarium recovering from a mental breakdown. Sergeant X of "Esmé," a World War II soldier sickened by war and in the throes of a mental breakdown, falls peacefully asleep because of a letter from a little English girl. Another soldier sickened by war overcomes despair through a letter from his little sister. Franny Glass, a pretty college girl on a weekend visit with her boy friend, loses control of herself, faints and lies silently repeating, "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me."<sup>32</sup> And Seymour, Salinger's most remarkable, most inscrutable, character kills himself after coming in contact with the beauty and sensitivity of a little child. Salinger, according to Donald Barr, "is preoccupied with collapses of nerve, with the cracking laugh of the outraged, with terrifying feelings of loneliness and alienation."<sup>33</sup> J. D. Salinger is neither a social critic nor a delineator of social life, but rather an explorer of the inner life, of the human spiritual condition--the soul.<sup>34</sup>

A major reason for Salinger's popularity is the inscrutable quality his works have; each reader has his own

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<sup>32</sup>Donald Barr, "Saints, Pilgrims and Artists," Salinger: A Critical and Personal Portrait, introduced and edited by Henry A. Grunwald (New York, 1962), p. 170.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

<sup>34</sup>Henry A. Grunwald, "Introduction," Salinger: A Critical and Personal Portrait, introduced and edited by Henry A. Grunwald (New York, 1962), p. xiii.



interpretation or impression. Like the Sphinx and the Mona Lisa, he cannot be categorized.<sup>35</sup> David Dempsey says that

. . . a good part of the Glass family's appeal to the critical profession, if not always to the reader, is that there is no simple cure for their illness, nor any common agreement as to what the ailment is. To this extent, the Glasses enjoy a two-dimensional plausibility that the well-adjusted often lack. Moreover, Salinger's stories are just opaque enough to set up alternative theories of interpretation; hence the elaborate exegesis that critics have been able to construct on so small and limited a body of work.<sup>36</sup>

The present study is unique because it will discuss J. D. Salinger's alienated misfits in direct relation to the psychology of the gifted, creative individual. His protagonists display many of the characteristics which psychologists say are typical of intellectually superior, creative people. Salinger understands why his heroes react as they do to the outside world. He knows that their intense, crippling awareness of society's "evils," as well as their own, results from their misdirected, highly sensitized gifts. To many people who are unfamiliar with the characteristics and needs of the gifted, Salinger's strange, quixotic misfits seem unreal, though they may be identified with because they suffer, as all human beings must. However, by analyzing Seymour, Holden and Franny as representatives of a specific

<sup>35</sup>"The Recluse in the Rye," p. 141.

<sup>36</sup>David Dempsey, "Secret of Seymour and Esmé," Saturday Review, XLV (June 30, 1962), 19.

intellectual type, this study will provide the reader with a fresh insight into J. D. Salinger's fictional world. Chapter II, entitled "Awareness: Separation of the Gifted from the Ordinary," will discuss the separation that often occurs between gifted people and ordinary people. It will show that the Glass and Caulfield family situations are hardly conducive to a mature, healthy adjustment to society. Then, an analytical study of Salinger's protagonists in the light of current views of child psychologists on the characteristic traits of the gifted will offer evidence supporting the view of Salinger as unusually perceptive of human nature, especially of children and the highly intelligent.

Seymour, Holden and Franny possess all the characteristics necessary to search for the truly "big" answers in life--the order of the universe and one's own place in it. They want to fit into society on their own terms, which means that they must retain their individuality while accepting those who have become regimented. Their intelligence, sensitivity, awareness and concern create the desire and action necessary for the hunt, which must eventually end with a "find," even if what is found is a negation, like Seymour's. Each of the three characters will be treated in an individual chapter, entitled respectively: "Seymour: Awareness and Suicide"; "Holden: Awareness and Toleration"; and "Franny: Awareness and Love." Each character's

giftedness and sensitivity will be established as the primary contributors to his awareness of "evil." After the specific "evils" are shown, the chapter will conclude with a demonstration and analysis of the final result of the character's awareness and search. The chapter order is based on a logical developmental and chronological progression; for between Seymour's suicide in 1948 and Franny's reconciliation through love in 1957, Salinger seems to undergo a gradual peacemaking with the world.

By discussing the solutions of the three characters, the final chapter will examine the gradually evolving truce. It will speculate as to Salinger's present attitudes and his subjects for the future, which most certainly concern the Glass family, and particularly Seymour. Finally, the chapter will give evidence that Salinger and his protagonists belong, with Thoreau, Henry Adams, Huck Finn, Ishmael, Gatsby and Ike McCaslin, to a major tradition of American literature.

The primary sources used in this thesis are the ones published in book form, particularly the works concerned with Seymour, Holden and Franny. They include: Nine Stories, especially "A Perfect Day for Bananafish"; The Catcher in the Rye; Franny and Zooey; Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour: An Introduction.

The unusual style and subject matter of Salinger's fiction, his strange personal life and his tremendous popularity over the last ten years have prompted considerable professional interest, productive of much critical material. Martin Green's A Mirror for Anglo-Saxons, Edwin T. Bowden's The Dungeon of the Heart and Nathan A. Scott's Modern Literature and the Religious Frontier contain excellent treatments of The Catcher in the Rye. Henry A. Grunwald's collection, Salinger: A Critical and Personal Portrait, includes several articles that are particularly helpful as general background on thematic treatment, the misfit hero and his legacy, and Glass family history. They are: Dan Wakefield's "The Search for Love"; Ihab Hassan's "The Rare Quixotic Gesture"; Arthur Mizener's "The Love Song of J. D. Salinger"; and Grunwald's own "Introduction." Paul Levine's "J. D. Salinger: The Development of the Misfit Hero" in Twentieth Century Literature is an excellent article which traces Salinger's heroes and related themes from the beginnings through "Zooey." J. D. Salinger and the Critics, a collection of critical essays edited by William F. Belcher and James W. Lee, is especially useful as a convenient orientation to a Salinger study. The best information on Salinger's personal life, and such material is limited, is found in Life's "The Recluse in the Rye" and the Time essay "Sonny: An Introduction." The Gifted Child, edited by

Paul Witty, is a valuable collection of articles by and about such specialists as Leta S. Hollingworth, Ruth Strang, Lewis M. Terman, Melita H. Oden and Paul Witty. E. Paul Torrance's Guiding Creative Talent is another informative work on talented, creative individuals of particular value and use in the present study.

## CHAPTER II

### AWARENESS: SEPARATION OF THE GIFTED FROM THE ORDINARY

If one discusses J. D. Salinger's protagonists, particularly Holden Caulfield and the seven Glass children, he discusses abnormal individuals overly endowed with intellectual power, creative ability and sensitivity. Their extraordinary talents breed in them a special kind of awareness and concern which separate them from ordinary individuals, who, in general, are either unaware of or indifferent to people and situations not directly affecting their own lives. But Salinger's heroes and heroines--especially Seymour, Holden and Franny, who suffer mental breakdowns--care far too much. When Arthur Heiserman and James E. Miller, Jr., say that "Holden loves the world more than the world can bear,"<sup>1</sup> they are speaking just as aptly of Seymour and Franny Glass. Salinger's misfits need the masses; they need to relate to them; they need to love them, but their requirements for communication are too stringent for the vast

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<sup>1</sup>Arthur Heiserman and James E. Miller, Jr., "J. D. Salinger: Some Crazy Cliff," The Western Humanities Review, X (Spring, 1956), 131.

majority to meet, even if the majority cared to meet them, which is quite doubtful.

Salinger's heroes are very much aware that the American mass mind is an egocentric, materialistic, conforming one. They are abnormally hostile to any force which promotes what is for them the real evil in the world--the dehumanization of human beings. Therefore, a very pathetic, if not tragic, situation is created: the misfit hero hates what he needs, is aware of his misfitness and is driven into isolation--a situation highly unnatural and frustrating to him. David L. Stevenson lucidly sums up the predicament when he says that

. . . Salinger's fiction convicts us, as readers, of being deeply aware of a haunting inconclusiveness in our own, and in contemporary, emotional relationships--members all of the lonely crowd. His characters exist outside the charmed circle of the well-adjusted, and their thin cries for love and understanding go unheard. They are men, women and adolescents, not trapped by outside fate, but by their own frightened, and sometimes tragi-comic, awareness<sup>2</sup> of the uncrossable gulf between their need for love and the futility of trying to achieve it on any foreseeable terms.<sup>3</sup>

Individual adjustment or maladjustment is usually derived from the family, western society's fundamental social unit. Family influence (or lack of influence) through heredity and environment is conceded by almost all to be the most important factor in a child's physical, mental and moral

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<sup>2</sup>The italics are mine.

<sup>3</sup>David L. Stevenson, "J. D. Salinger: The Mirror of Crisis," The Nation, CLXXXIV (March 9, 1957), 216.

growth. In Salinger's works, the family plays a very important and decisive role. Michael Walzer captures the essence of Salinger's fictional family in saying:

They [Salinger's characters] are members, almost, of a Victorian clan--the patriarch vague or missing, the clan more of a fraternal coterie--and it is familial feeling which provides the background for the affection, honesty, and love which he seeks to describe. The gang would not do, for the gang exists in the jungle, its energy is already worldly. Salinger's family is an alternative to worldliness, a place of dependence and protection, a safe foundation for fantasy. Out in the world, Holden is a delightful and an inventive liar; he resembles at moments the characters in some recent English comic novels. Like them, he has nothing to tell the truth about. But to his ten year old sister, he can explain--at length and with sincerity--how he really feels. Holden, that is, has someone to tell the truth to; in this sense, at least, Salinger may well be a prophet. The English have not yet advanced so far that they can recognize the family as a retreat.<sup>4</sup>

Walzer's key observation is that the father of the family is either vague or missing, but the mother can also be included among the undefined and lost. The parents are the foundation of a family, the ones who provide, or fail to provide, security, maturity, counsel and example. But in Salinger's fictional families,<sup>5</sup> the siblings assume these duties, save one, perhaps--providing monetary security--which is of little importance to Salinger's misfits. The real relationships, the real communication in a Salinger

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<sup>4</sup>Michael Walzer, "In Place of a Hero," Dissent, VII (Spring, 1960), 157.

<sup>5</sup>The Tannenbaum family in "Down at the Dinghy" is an exception.



family, is not between parent and child, but between child and child; therefore, the real retreat cannot be said to be the family, as Walzer says, but a part of the family, and that not usually thought the most important part.

Salinger's children seem to have been deprived of the proper guidance and attention that all children--and especially gifted children--require. The parents are shadows, outlines; the children (particularly Seymour, Holden, Franny and Zooey) are well-defined characters with carefully constructed relationships. Thus, it can be assumed that Salinger is purposely creating such a situation. In Salinger's fictional world, the family, though it does provide security and somewhat of a retreat, is the primary cause of the hero's maladjustment; he is a product of mis-directed--or undirected--hypersensitivity.

Holden Caulfield's parents are especially shadowy, the father never appearing and the mother only once for a brief scene with Phoebe while Holden hides in a closet. They are at least fairly wealthy and are seemingly happily married people. The father is a prominent corporation lawyer, whose work has probably taken a great deal of time that should have been devoted to establishing a compatible father-son relationship with Holden. The fact that Holden was sent "off" to school indicates that perhaps his parents were unable to cope with him and decided to let the rigid standards

of prep schools substitute for the discipline that should have been instilled by them. Salinger implies parental neglect when Holden sneaks into the family apartment to see his little sister Phoebe, only to find her alone and his parents at a party in Connecticut. Though Holden makes no indication that he dislikes or resents his parents, it is obvious that to him they are not nearly so "nice" as Phoebe and Allie, his younger brother who had died of leukemia three years before. Holden had had tremendous admiration for his older brother D.B. when he was writing short stories, but the idolatry quickly waned when D.B. went to Hollywood and "prostituted" his talent to the movies. The communication--thus, the love--in the family is between Holden and the innocents, Phoebe and Allie. But Allie is dead, and Phoebe is at home, where Holden probably should have been during all the years he has been flunking out of one private school after another. In the end, Holden--isolated from parental security, counsel and example--suffers a mental breakdown and winds up in the psychiatric ward of a California hospital.

The Glass family is strikingly similar to, and yet quite unlike, the Caulfield family. The parents--Les and Bessie--are again vague and shadowy. Les Glass, like the senior Caulfield, never appears; whereas Salinger uses Bessie's sparse appearances primarily to reveal her son Zooey's

character and to illustrate again the fact that real communication in the family exists among the seven children, not between the parents and children. Zooey is the one who saves Franny from a serious mental breakdown; she will not even accept a bowl of soup from her mother. And Seymour, the oldest son and the "Glass saint," is recognized by the other children as the titular head of the family, the person who has most influenced their lives.

Walzer reveals the basic differences between the two families when he says:

Love is the bond which holds the seven children together--and love, along with a touch of friendly condescension, is what binds them even to their parents.<sup>6</sup> The family here is a mythical gang, truly fraternal, truly affectionate; it is as if, remembering Holden's loneliness, Salinger is determined never again to permit one of his characters to be alone.<sup>7</sup>

Les and Bessie Glass, Jewish and Irish respectively, were successful vaudevillian performers during the twenties. By the forties Les was working as a talent scout for a Los Angeles movie studio; and during the fifties (their story does not continue past 1959) the parents are living with Franny and Zooey, the two youngest children, in a fashionable Upper East Side apartment in New York.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>The italics are mine.

<sup>7</sup>Walzer, p. 159.

<sup>8</sup>Mizener, p. 27.

The oldest child, Seymour, was born in February, 1917; at fifteen he started to Columbia and eventually received a Ph. D. in English. In 1948, he committed suicide. Buddy, born in 1919, the same year as Salinger, is his creator's fictional prototype. A writer, he did not finish college but went into the service in 1942. When he got out, he became a creative writing instructor. In 1955 he was teaching at a junior college for girls in northern New York and living alone in a small, unelectrified house near a popular ski resort.<sup>9</sup> Boo Boo Tannenbaum, who is probably the Glasses's best adjusted child, came next. During World War II, while she was a Wave, she met her husband. By 1955 they had three children, including Lionel, the main character in "Down at the Dinghy."<sup>10</sup>

The twins, Walt and Waker, followed Boo Boo. The latter, after spending the war in a conscientious objector's camp, became a Catholic priest. Walt survived the entire war in the Pacific, only to be killed in Japan in the fall of 1945 by a Japanese stove that exploded as he was packing it for his commanding officer.<sup>11</sup>

Zachary, known in the family as Zooey, was born in 1929. He is described as having "'a wholly beautiful face."<sup>12</sup> After he graduated from college, Bessie wanted

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., pp. 27-28.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

him to earn a Ph. D. in Mathematics or Greek; instead he became a television actor and, by 1952, was playing leads. Frances, or Franny, the seventh and youngest child, is five years younger than Zooey. As beautiful as Zooey, she is also interested in acting, having played summer stock in the summer of 1954 before her senior year in college.<sup>13</sup>

Beginning with Seymour in 1927, and extending over eighteen years, all of the Glass prodigies, using the name Black, appeared on a national radio quiz show called "It's a Wise Child," the money they derived being used to pay for their educations.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, like their parents, the children have been professional performers. In a Time story, "Sonny: An Introduction," they are described as:

. . . brave, clean, reverent and overwhelmingly lovable. Yet they never become the seven deadly siblings (at least they are never all deadly at the same time). The Irish strain makes them formidably talkative and occasionally fey. The Jewish strain lends family warmth as well as a talent for Talmudic brooding. The vaudeville heritage provides theatricality.<sup>15</sup>

Michael Walzer, speaking of Salinger's children in general, says:

The precocity of Salinger's children takes many forms: they learn foreign languages with amazing ease and write poetry in Japanese. But the most important form is an extraordinary religious and mystical insight. I think it fair to say that love

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., pp. 28-29.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>15</sup>[John Skow], "Sonny: An Introduction," Time, LXXVIII (September 15, 1961), 86.

for Salinger is either familial or Christlike; it is the love of brothers and sisters--or of brethren. The last of these is obviously the more difficult, and Salinger sensibly recommends but does not describe it. He writes of erotic love not at all, and it is worth at least entertaining the idea--though it contradicts many of the operative assumptions of our culture--that his young readers are really not interested in it, that they are entirely satisfied with the love of Holden and his sister or of Zooey and Franny.<sup>16</sup>

As Henry Grunwald suggests, many critics object to an exclusive, "clubby" air about the Glasses which ostracizes the rest of the world and makes the Glasses seem to love only themselves and each other. Grunwald believes this to be true himself, but he feels also that the family is aware of the situation. Alfred Kazin accuses them of loving only certain people, but Bessie Glass surely realizes the same fact when she harangues Zooey for being able to talk only to people he loves. And Salinger and Zooey certainly are serious when the young actor calls both Franny and himself freaks. Mizener claims that their "clever, cute sensitivity" makes them remarkable, while placing a heavy burden on them and irritating them at the same time. Grunwald points to and contradicts another Kazin claim: that the Glasses are too sensitive to live in society. Grunwald suggests instead that:

Perhaps the opposite is true; perhaps they are too sensitive to ignore it, to look the other way, to withdraw, as well-adjusted, busy, adult people

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<sup>16</sup>Walzer, pp. 159-160.

withdraw into their protective shells when faced with society's terrors. Like Holden, the Glasses simply cannot accept the injustices, the ugliness, the lovelessness and the egomania that surround them.<sup>17</sup>

According to Ihab Hassan,

. . . in their separateness and cunning identity the Glasses tell us far more about the darkness of love and self-hate than about the conditions of an urban Jewish family in mid-century America. Wise, talented, and quixotic as they all seem--their common background is defined not so much by a Jewish father and Irish mother as by the radio program . . . called "It's a Wise Child". . . .<sup>18</sup>

Identification by nationality would be far too worldly for these Glass prodigies. Hassan believes further that "they all deny themselves sexual preoccupations to lose themselves into [sic] an imaginative or altruistic ideal--Boo Boo is a Tuckahoe homemaker, Buddy a writer, Zooey an actor, Waker a monk, Seymour and Franny are 'mystics' of a kind."<sup>19</sup>

✓ J. D. Salinger's protagonists could hardly be called ordinary, average or typical. On the contrary, they are radically opposed to and usually estranged from the mass of America's population. The word normal is commonly associated with the average person and adjustment. Salinger's heroes are normal neither in intelligence and imagination nor in adjustment. It is quite doubtful that they could be

<sup>17</sup> Grunwald, p. xx.

<sup>18</sup> Hassan, "The Rare Quixotic Gesture," p. 154.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

considered even normally maladjusted. They are gifted and creative; that is--they are abnormally intelligent, imaginative and sensitive--therefore, aware and concerned. They are in the minority, and in a country where the majority rules, a kind of mutual misunderstanding and lack of communication occurs. This is not to say that all gifted people are maladjusted or in conflict with society; it simply means that many are, and in particular is this true of Salinger's gifted.

Hassan says that Salinger's stories focus on the conflict between the "Assertive Vulgarian" and the "Responsive Outsider." The former represents squalor. He "stands for all that is crude, venal, self-absorbed and sequacious in our culture. He has no access to knowledge or feeling or beauty, which makes him all the more invulnerable. . . ."20 In "A Perfect Day for Bananafish" Seymour calls his wife Muriel a spiritual tramp, though, as Hassan believes, the description probably fits her mother better. Other Vulgarians are "Sandra and Mrs. Snell in 'Down at the Dinghy,' Joanie in 'Pretty Mouth and Green My Eyes,' the Matron of Honor in 'Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters,' Maurice, Stradlater, or any number of others in The Catcher in the Rye."21 Muriel gossips, thinks constantly about clothes and reads

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid., pp. 139-140.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 140.



magazine articles like "Sex Is Fun--or Hell." Her mother is quite impressed with psychiatry, probably as a status symbol, and insists that Seymour be psychoanalyzed, going so far as to invite her psychiatrist to dinner to question Seymour. Sandra and Mrs. Snell, who work for the Tannenbaums, gossip about their employers and are overheard by Lionel, the sensitive son, causing him to run away, to escape the "evil" he has come in contact with. Joanie is an adulteress; the Matron of Honor assumes Seymour to be homosexual because he does not come to his own wedding; Maurice is a pimp and a liar; and Stradlater, Holden's roommate at Pency, is the "All-American boy" type, superficially impressive, but shallow and habitually filthy. Lane Coutell, Franny's egocentric boy friend, may also be included in this list.

Whereas the Vulgarian's burden is squalor, the Outsider's is love. As Hassan states:

The burden makes of him sometimes a victim, and sometimes a scapegoat saint. His life is like "a great inverted forest/with all foliage underground." It is a quick, generous, and responsive life, somehow preserved against hardness and corruption, and always attempting to reach out from its isolation. . . . Often there is something in the situation of the Outsider to isolate him, to set him off, however slightly, from the rest of mankind. . . . His ultimate defense, as Rilke, to whom Salinger refers, put it, is defenselessness. Raymond Ford, Boo Boo Tannenbaum (Glass) and Lionel, Seymour, other members of the Glass family, Holden and Phoebe, . . . are examples of that type.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

The outsider is maladjusted, unsuited to the world as it is and aware of and concerned with his own brand of "evil." He is also gifted and creative, a fact which plays an important part in his misfitness. The gifted, creative<sup>23</sup> person has characteristics, maladjustments and needs which the ordinary individual lacks.

If he has had ample opportunity to develop his gifts, and if his physical, social and emotional appetites have been satisfied, the gifted child has a pleasing personality, an extensive interest range, and outstanding physical development. "The queerness, snobbishness or antisocial behavior sometimes associated with superior intelligence is not a hallmark of giftedness but rather a sign of the antagonism aroused by social rejection or ridicule."<sup>24</sup> A characteristic quite common in the gifted child is his ability to conceive and cultivate activities quite advanced for his age,<sup>25</sup> such as Seymour's avid interest in religious philosophy, particularly Zen Buddhism.

The gifted child has a high proficiency for abstract thinking and generalization; he is alert and has superior

<sup>23</sup>Gifted and creative will be used interchangeably in this thesis since Salinger's characters fit in the connotations of both words.

<sup>24</sup>William H. Bristow and others, "Identifying Gifted Children," The Gifted Child, edited by Paul Witty (Boston, 1951), p.13.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

insight into problems.<sup>26</sup> During a visit with Spencer, a history teacher, Holden's speech is typically abstract and generalized. However, his sweeping statements concerning humanity, including himself, often reveal an indisputable insight into human nature:

And yet I still act sometimes like I was only about twelve. Everybody says that, especially my father. It's partly true, too, but it isn't all true. People always think something's all true. I don't give a damn, except that I get bored sometimes when people tell me to act my age. Sometimes I act a lot older than I am--I really do--but people never notice it. People never notice anything.<sup>27</sup>

In addition, the gifted child has an insatiable curiosity, high retention capabilities and a large vocabulary.<sup>28</sup>

Learning to read is no problem for him, and the amount and quality of his reading is decidedly above average. Likewise, he is less likely to boast or exaggerate his capabilities.<sup>29</sup> Holden's reading habits and his modesty are revealed in the following passage: "They gave me Out of Africa by Isak Dinesen. I thought it was going to stink, but it didn't. . . . I'm quite illiterate, but I read a lot."<sup>30</sup> During the course of the novel, Holden discusses

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>27</sup>Salinger, The Catcher in the Rye, p. 12.

<sup>28</sup>Bristow and others, p. 15.

<sup>29</sup>Lewis M. Terman and Melita H. Oden, "The Stanford Studies of the Gifted," The Gifted Child, edited by Paul Witty (Boston, 1951), p. 24.

<sup>30</sup>Salinger, The Catcher in the Rye, p. 20.

or mentions such writers as Thomas Hardy, Ring Lardner (his favorite author next to his brother D. B.), Hemingway, Scott Fitzgerald and such works as Hamlet, Julius Caesar and Romeo and Juliet. D. B. once asked Allie, the precocious ten year old brother who later died, to choose between Rupert Brooke and Emily Dickinson as war poets. Allie chose the latter.

In spite of his intellectual gifts, Holden is expelled from one school after another for failure to make passing grades. He is among the very few gifted people who have such a problem. Lewis M. Terman and Melita H. Oden found in their thirty year Stanford study of gifted children that one of the primary reasons for such a paradoxical situation is disillusionment with dogmatic, opinionated instructors.<sup>31</sup> Frustration through boredom often creates poor study habits and a generally apathetic attitude toward school work,<sup>32</sup> which also would seem to be the case with Holden and Franny. Holden, for example, expresses his attitude toward teachers in the following way:

I'm lucky, though. I mean I could shoot the old bull to old Spencer and think about those ducks at the same time. It's funny. You don't have to think too hard when you talk to a teacher. All of a sudden, though, he interrupted me while I was shooting the bull. He was always interrupting you.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>Terman and Oden, pp. 30-31.

<sup>32</sup>Bristow and others, p. 16.

<sup>33</sup>Salinger, The Catcher in the Rye, p. 15.

And Franny expresses herself on the same subject: "'If it weren't so late and everything,' she said, 'and if I hadn't decided like a fool to go out for honors, I think I'd drop English. I don't know.' . . . 'I'm just so sick of pedants and conceited little tearer-downers I could scream.'"<sup>34</sup>

Terman and Oden believe that association in play activities with children their own age is of the utmost importance to gifted children. A child preoccupied with books has no time or desire for such association, making him seem "queer" and unacceptable. Terman and Oden further believe that the gifted person who finds it impossible to accept people on equal terms is likely to be unhappy. "The child who is deprived of the opportunity to play is not only being robbed of his childhood; he is also being deprived of his chance to become a normal adult."<sup>35</sup> An appropriate example is, of course, the "clubby," exclusive Glass family with the parents' theatrical background and the children's longevity on the radio show, producing, in all likelihood, isolation, an abnormal or "unreal" home environment, parental exploitation of children and at least partial deprivation of childhood. It is Ruth Strang's opinion that parental exploitation

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<sup>34</sup>J. D. Salinger, Franny and Zooey (New York, 1964), p. 17.

<sup>35</sup>Terman and Oden, p. 41.

of a child's cleverness can cause serious emotional problems.<sup>36</sup>

"The goals of mental health," says Strang, "are wholesome and satisfying human relations and realistic and socially acceptable attitudes toward oneself, other persons and the world. Mental health is an ideal toward which individuals make varying degrees of progress."<sup>37</sup> Mental health depends primarily upon emotional maturity. Emotionally mature, gifted individuals are cognizant of their emotions and accept them; their goals are realistic and worth-while; they enjoy both close and casual relationships with others, even to the point of accepting and respecting individuals with less ability and divergent interests. These gifted are also able to contribute to a group without compromising their ideals and convictions and can usually face hardship and frustration with composure.<sup>38</sup> Strang qualifies the last few statements by saying that the gifted, if they fail, are most likely to do so in social relations and constructive adaptation to frustration.<sup>39</sup> Emotional immaturity, with all of its manifestations, explains quite adequately the Salinger misfits' difficulties. Social incommunication is, of course, one of

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<sup>36</sup>Ruth Strang, "Mental Hygiene of Gifted Children" The Gifted Child, edited by Paul Witty (Boston, 1951), pp. 134-135.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., pp. 131-132.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 132.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., pp. 133-134.

the primary "evils"; and suicide and mental breakdowns hardly indicate any adaptative abilities. He can accept neither the world nor himself, though he is well aware of the inadequacies of both. He is idealistic and cripplingly particular about whom he accepts and loves, making him, in the end, uncompromising and ineffective.

The gifted, according to Strang, have a superior capacity for self-analysis, which indicates in all probability, superior intelligence, if not adjustment or movement toward adjustment.<sup>40</sup> Holden, Seymour, Franny and Zooey are obviously gifted and obviously aware of their maladjustment, but probably out of emotional immaturity stemming from their childhood, they cannot adjust and accept, though they want and need to.

Professor Leta S. Hollingworth--like Terman, a pioneer in the study of mentally superior children--recognizes one of the major adjustment problems of the gifted child as his "precocious concern . . . with matters of origins and of destiny and with the problem of evil<sup>41</sup> in the abstract."<sup>42</sup> Despite his concern, however, he cannot secure answers because of his youth. He has adolescent intellectual needs,

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 134.

<sup>41</sup>The italics are mine.

<sup>42</sup>Miriam C. Pritchard, "The Contribution of Leta S. Hollingworth to the Study of Gifted Children," The Gifted Child, edited by Paul Witty (Boston, 1951), p. 75.

but the self-control and physical puissance of a child. And as Professor Hollingworth says, "Lifelong problems of mental hygiene may be thus engendered by parents who cannot understand why a child is "so unnatural" as to weep over questions of birth and death at six or seven years of age."<sup>43</sup> The bitterness and guilt which Holden felt when his little brother Allie died is a good example of this problem.

Speaking in the same vein, Strang says that gifted children begin to worry about religion and a philosophy of life at an extraordinarily early age,<sup>44</sup> and for their religious questions to remain unanswered or for them to experience religious conflicts is highly conducive to serious emotional problems.<sup>45</sup> Seymour's precocious interest in religions and his tremendous effect on his younger brothers and sisters, including Franny, are highly illustrative of these points.

Immaturity was recognized by Hollingworth as another basic cause of maladjustment, believing that any child combining adult mentality with childhood emotions will have adjustment difficulty. However, each adolescent year normally lessens the problem, with physical maturity automatically eliminating much of it. One of the most common maladjustment symptoms of the child which is likely to be retained in the adult is negativism, often conspicuous, and

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<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

<sup>44</sup>Strang, p. 136.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., pp. 151-152.



resulting from the child's fight for adjustment against obtuse, insensitive adults. However, the gifted typically have an acute sense of humor, and most "are apparently able to mature beyond cynicism,"<sup>46</sup> as Holden and, especially, Franny show indication of doing. Seymour's inability to do so, however, results in his suicide. Cynicism combined with a lack of friends, says Hollingworth, produces isolation or solitude, which, if habitual, explains the social timidity displayed by many gifted adults. Thus, along with failure to cultivate abilities and opportunities, they often are victims of unhappiness, anxiety and insecurity.<sup>47</sup>

Terman and Hollingworth conclude that the higher the intelligence of the gifted child, the more difficulty he has in adapting himself to ordinary people and their activities. He tends to tire of them and retire into himself and his own interests. Highly gifted and/or creative children require distinct environments conducive to the ultimate development of their talents. "Some of them also require expert educational and social guidance if they are not to become neurotic or mentally ill."<sup>48</sup>

According to E. Paul Torrance, creative children need a purpose worthy of the enthusiasm and devotion they are able

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<sup>46</sup>Pritchard, p. 76.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid.

<sup>48</sup>Strang, p. 141.

to give it. "It has been said that most outstanding creative achievers seem to be possessed by a purpose and to be 'men of destiny,'"<sup>49</sup> which is remindful of the prophetic advice that Mr. Antolini, the only teacher Holden indicates respect for, gives to his disturbed former student:

"All right. Listen to me a minute now. . . . I may not word this as memorably as I'd like to, but I'll write you a letter about it in a day or two. Then you can get it all straight. But listen now, anyway." He started concentrating again. Then he said, "This fall I think you're riding for--it's a special kind of fall, a horrible kind. The man falling isn't permitted to feel or hear himself hit bottom. He just keeps falling and falling. The whole arrangement's designed for men who, at some time or another in their lives, were looking for something their own environment couldn't supply them with. Or they thought their own environment couldn't supply them with. So they gave up looking. They gave it up before they ever really even got started. You follow me?"

"Yes, sir."

"Sure?"

"Yes."

He got up and poured some more booze in his glass. Then he sat down again. He didn't say anything for quite a long time.

"I don't want to scare you," he said, "but I can very clearly see you dying nobly, one way or another, for some highly unworthy cause." He gave me a funny look. "If I write something down for you, will you read it carefully? And keep it?"

"Yes, sure," I said. I did, too. I still have the paper he gave me.

He went over to his desk on the other side of the room, and without sitting down wrote something on a piece of paper. Then he came back and sat down with the paper in his hand. "Oddly enough, this wasn't written by a practicing poet. It was written by a psychoanalyst named Wilhelm Stekel. Here's what he--Are you still with me?"

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<sup>49</sup>E. Paul Torrance, Guiding Creative Talent (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1962), p.117.

"Yes, sure I am."

"Here's what he said: 'The mark of the immature man is that he wants to die nobly for a cause, while the mark of the mature man is that he wants to live humbly for one.'"<sup>50</sup>

Antolini had previously speculated on Holden's projected fall, and Holden had seemed to understand:

"It may be the kind where, at the age of thirty [almost Seymour's age when he killed himself], you sit in some bar hating everybody who comes in looking as if he might have played football in college. Then again, you may pick up just enough education to hate people who say, 'It's a secret between he and I.' Or you may end up in some business office, throwing paper clips at the nearest stenographer. I just don't know. But do you know what I'm driving at, at all?"

"Yes. Sure," I said. I did too.<sup>51</sup>

Torrance speaks of J. W. Getzels and P. W. Jackson and their 1959 study, "The Highly Intelligent and the Highly Creative Adolescent: A Summary of Some Research Findings," which contains the conclusions that creative adolescents typically have a mocking attitude toward the "All-American Boy" type, that they have little use for personal characteristics which they associate with adult success, and that they have little or no desire to be like their teachers and peers. These facts should be recognized by both teachers and counselors so that the highly creatives can be helped to preserve their creativity without being obnoxious.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup>Salinger, The Catcher in the Rye, pp. 169-170.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 168.

<sup>52</sup>Torrance, pp. 118-119.

Torrance himself concludes that it would be atypical for creative people to desire some of the ordinary rewards of life, such as power, because creating, to them, is a reward, and the most important one.<sup>53</sup> Torrance mentions an article, "The Psychology of Imagination" by F. Barron of the University of California, who believes that

. . . creative individuals reject the demands of their society to surrender their individuality because "they want to own themselves totally and because they perceive a shortsightedness in the claim of society that all its members should adapt themselves to a norm for a given time and place."<sup>54</sup>

Certainly Salinger and his highly individualistic heroes cannot adapt themselves to the norms generally accepted by the masses. Richard Rees contends that through children, J. D. Salinger is able to be himself, unspoiled by the pseudo-sophistication and vulgarity which surround him. And Salinger is conceded by Rees to have "an almost uncanny power of understanding adolescents and children."<sup>55</sup> Many critics discount Salinger's importance because of the emphasis he places on children; but, as Henry Grunwald points out, the child, like the fool, throughout civilization has been given a prophet's or seer's role, not out of superstition, but because he can often see simple truth which adults, who lack

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., p. 120.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., pp. 120-121.

<sup>55</sup>Richard Rees, Brave Men (London, 1958), p. 180.

innocence and purity, are blind to. Grunwald believes that it surely will not be long before someone proves that Sybil, the little girl whom Seymour communicates with in "A Perfect Day for Bananafish," is actually a sybil.<sup>56</sup>

Salinger's protagonists, particularly Seymour, Holden and Franny, have many of the characteristics attributed by Ihab Hassan to what he calls the "hero-victim" and the "scapegoat king." These prototypes contribute to the masses by questioning their practices, debunking their ceremony, belittling the wealthy and mocking the exalted. They are the ones who look and question, though their faces get slapped. "They are, in short, the Outsiders, the Carriers Away of Death, the Meek who shall inherit the earth, the inspired No-Men."<sup>57</sup>

Of course, Salinger himself is one of the outsiders who question, debunk, belittle and mock--in other words, one who is aware. Arthur Mizener suspects that Salinger has a difficult time writing. He not only bases this supposition on Salinger's relatively small quantity of work, but also on the frequency that emotional collapse, violent death and even desperate wit appear in his works, strong implications that intelligent, aware "people have difficulty

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<sup>56</sup>Grunwald, p. xvii.

<sup>57</sup>Ihab H. Hassan, "The Victim: Images of Evil in Recent American Fiction," College English, XXI (December, 1959), 146.

remaining operative, or even surviving, in our world."<sup>58</sup>  
 Some are cut off; and they view society safely from afar,  
 knowing that it has nothing to offer them.<sup>59</sup>

Leslie Fiedler criticizes Salinger's Glass family because their maladjustments and isolation stem primarily from their immaturity,<sup>60</sup> which is admittedly a basic reason for their failure to come to a reconciliation with the world. But what Fiedler ignores is that there are credible psychological reasons for such a situation, as has already been shown. Fiedler also criticizes what he sees as a persistent theme in Salinger's works: the "presentation of madness as the chief temptation of modern life, especially for the intelligent young; and his [Salinger's] conviction that, consequently, the chief heroism possible to us now is the rejection of madness, the decision to be sane."<sup>61</sup> Perhaps this is one of Salinger's convictions, perhaps not. Nevertheless, a certain nobility could possibly be found in the theme of a sensitive, intelligent--aware--individual's struggle to keep his sanity or even to remain adjusted in

<sup>58</sup>Mizener, p. 23.

<sup>59</sup>David Leitch, "The Salinger Myth," Salinger: A Critical and Personal Portrait, introduced and edited by Henry A. Grunwald (New York, 1962), p. 77.

<sup>60</sup>Leslie Fiedler, "Up From Adolescence," Salinger: A Critical and Personal Portrait, introduced and edited by Henry A. Grunwald (New York, 1962), pp. 61-62.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., pp. 59-60.

a bomb-centered, race-centered, hate-centered world composed primarily of the unaware, apathetic masses, who, through their lack of love, compassion and reason, hardly seem capable of preventing either a rapid physical obliteration of the world by the bomb or a subtle, gradual decay of moral and spiritual values. In fact, they would seem to enhance such tragic possibilities.

Fiedler also disagrees with Salinger's use of the nervous breakdown as a possible result of maladjustment in favor of more "noble"<sup>62</sup> ends--suicide and running away from home.<sup>63</sup> Such statements make one wonder if the critic has forgotten about Seymour Glass who did actually take one of the more "noble" ways out--suicide. This he did at the age of thirty-one and despite the fact that he was probably no more emotionally mature than an adolescent. It seems, in actuality, that suicide results from the same disturbances, only in a much more exaggerated form, that create nervous breakdowns and the desire to leave home. Self-inflicted death is simply the ultimate solution for the mentally tormented--the final escape.

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<sup>62</sup>The quotation marks are mine.

<sup>63</sup>Fiedler, "Up From Adolescence," p. 60.

## CHAPTER III

### SEYMOUR: AWARENESS AND SUICIDE

Seymour, the oldest and the most fragile of the seven Glass figurines, chose for himself the ultimate solution, the final escape--suicide. His isolation and collapse, like Holden's, Franny's and all the other Salinger misfits', result from a hypersensitive awareness of an "evil" unrecognized by ordinary humanity. Intelligent, sensitive people need not be alienated from and defeated by society, but Seymour is. An individual must necessarily be highly aware of and concerned with what he thinks is evil in his fellow man to have it affect him as the world affects Seymour.

Seymour's presence is felt in every major primary source used in this thesis save The Catcher in the Rye; but he materializes in only one, "A Perfect Day for Bananafish," the story which reveals him at the peak of his emotional breakdown and which concludes with his suicide. In the other words, he is only a very effective ghost, a shadow that appears to be growing larger and larger as the years pass. He is vividly implanted in all of the Glass children's minds, for over the years he had a far greater effect on them than their parents. Their oldest brother had been a combination



teacher, philosopher, adviser, playmate--a person who they knew loved them very much. Buddy, the narrator of the later Glass stories and Salinger's prototype, was very close to Seymour. He cannot be an objective narrator: he is obviously emotionally involved, for at times during the writing of "Seymour: An Introduction" (Salinger's latest work), his emotional anxiety becomes so intense that he cannot continue, sometimes for weeks.

What appears in Buddy's stories are remembered instances of what Seymour had done and said, not a living man. "Seymour" is, of course, primarily concerned with him; and one could probably guess quite safely that he still occupies the center of Salinger's stage. At the present, he is an enigma, for the reader, and, in all likelihood, for his creator. Seymour seems to have moved over the years progressively further out of the realm of reality. For this reason, he is difficult to deal with. Salinger has not settled with him; and until he does, neither can anyone else. Any treatment of Seymour now must necessarily be incomplete, because as a living person, he commits only one major act--suicide. Otherwise, he is a very subjectively, though vividly, recalled ghost.

Seymour Glass is perhaps the strangest fictional hero in literary history. When he was twelve, he hit a neighbor girl in the face with a rock because she looked so nice. At

twenty-five, the year he got married, he had wrist scars, probably from a suicide attempt, and was seriously considering psychiatric treatment. Despite his genius, he married Muriel Fedder, who lacked both intelligence and sensitivity. However, he did not show up for his wedding because he was too happy: he and Muriel eloped later. After he had been married six years and after some psychiatry, he shot himself in a Florida hotel room while his wife slept on one of the nearby twin beds.<sup>1</sup>

Seymour and his brothers and sisters are understandably strange because of their unique family heritage, consisting primarily of a long line of professional entertainers. A great-grandfather--a Polish-Jewish clown billed as Zozo--dived from extraordinary heights into small containers of water. Another great-grandfather, this one Irish, danced on the sides of whiskey bottles wherever a paying crowd would gather to watch him. Buddy Glass, speaking of his family, says: "So, surely you'll take my word, we have, among other things, a few nuts on the family tree."<sup>2</sup> Of course, Les and Bessie Glass were successful vaudevillians. Buddy firmly believes that all seven children, including Seymour, were extremely affected by their "curious footlight-and-three-ring

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<sup>1</sup>"The Recluse in the Rye," p. 141.

<sup>2</sup>J. D. Salinger, Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour: An Introduction (Boston, 1959), p. 168.

heritage."<sup>3</sup> Such influence would help explain the Glasses' unconventionality, their isolation from the masses and their relatively immature, unrealistic outlook on life.

Seymour had an overwhelming effect on the members of his family, with results both beneficial and harmful. To them, he was a combination genius and saint, but one who forced his brothers and sisters

. . . to swallow an indigestible mass of Eastern mysticism and Western philosophy so that now they somehow give the impression of having collected quotations from Epictetus rather than baseball cards, of having played catch with some West Side reincarnation of Buddha.<sup>4</sup>

Ihab Hassan describes Seymour, as Buddy does, as the indisputable spiritual center of the Glasses.<sup>5</sup> Buddy sums up Seymour's role in the family by saying:

Surely he was all real things to us: our blue-striped unicorn, our double-lensed burning glass, our consultant genius, our portable conscience, our supercargo, and our one full poet, and, inevitably, I think, since not only was reticence never his strongest suit but he spent nearly seven years of his childhood as star turn on a children's coast-to-coast radio quiz program, so there wasn't much that didn't eventually get aired, one way or another--inevitably, I think, he was also our rather notorious "mystic" and "unbalanced type."  
 . . . I'll further enunciate . . . that, with or without a suicide plot in his head, he was the only person I've ever habitually consorted with . . . who more frequently than not tallied with the

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 170.

<sup>4</sup>[Skow], p. 8.

<sup>5</sup>Hassan, "The Rare Quixotic Gesture," p. 160.

classical conception, as I saw it, of a mukta, a ringding enlightened man, a God-knower.<sup>6</sup>

At least partially because of their unusual upbringing, the Glasses are incapable of seeing beyond the family perimeters except through their dead brother's eyes. Seymour is their constant mediator between their own world and the outer world which they have difficulty enduring. The Glass children are Seymour's brothers and sisters; therefore, they are brothers and sisters to everyone. They submit themselves totally to his imagination and in turn are subjected to the dictates of his imagination. He carries the burden of love for them.<sup>7</sup> Buddy illustrates this in his attitude toward his English students:

I have an impulse . . . to say something mildly caustic about the twenty-four young ladies, just back from big weekends at Cambridge or Hanover or New Haven, who will be waiting for me in Room 307, but I can't finish writing a description of Seymour . . . without being conscious of the good, the real. This is too grand to be said (so I'm just the man to say it), but I can't be my brother's brother for nothing, and I know--not always, but I know--there is no single thing I do that is more important than going into that awful Room 307. There isn't one girl in there, including the Terrible Miss Zabel, who is not as much my sister as Boo Boo or Franny.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Salinger, Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour: An Introduction, pp. 123-124.

<sup>7</sup>Hassan, "The Rare Quixotic Gesture," p. 160.

<sup>8</sup>Salinger, Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour: An Introduction, pp. 247-248.

Nevertheless, the saintly Seymour--alive or dead--has his faults. His sanctity may even be questioned. Zooey realizes that Seymour has warped the family, though with love, and has brought all peace to an end by committing suicide. There is even talk of having to forgive the older brother. In "Seymour" there are hints that Seymour had always been difficult to live with, and that "the Glass club may be paying stiff dues for that cozy withdrawal from the world which earlier had seemed so enviable, and, to some, so cute."<sup>9</sup> Buddy's exhausting crack-up while writing about his dead brother and Franny's mental breakdown provide excellent examples of those "stiff dues."

Buddy says that he "can't sort out, can't clerk with this man."<sup>10</sup> Seymour is truly an enigma, many-sided and contradictory. He seems saintly, yet he is not a saint. He advises acceptance, but cannot, in the end, do so himself. Buddy relates that understatements just will not adhere to Seymour; they turn into lies. Buddy continues:

I'm writing about the only person I've ever known whom, on my own terms, I considered really large, and the only person of any considerable dimensions I've ever known who never gave me a moment's suspicion that he kept, on the sly, a whole closetful of naughty, tiresome little vanities.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Grunwald, pp. xxii-xxiv.

<sup>10</sup>Salinger, Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour: An Introduction, p. 189.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 195.

Buddy and Seymour were homely children. However, Seymour was apparently above worrying about such trivia, at least for his own sake; when he was concerned about his appearance, he was thinking of the other person. For example, one afternoon on his way to get a haircut with Buddy, Seymour suddenly realized that his neck was not clean; and he wanted to "spare Victor, the barber, the offense of looking at his dirty neck."<sup>12</sup> Buddy makes it clear that Seymour reconciled him to his own appearance, claiming that anyone who overlooked Buddy's charms and abilities was tasteless.

Seymour always loved horseplay from the younger children. He enjoyed their pulling his long hair and his long nose, the boys', especially Walt's, fascination with his wrists and hands, and even tactless remarks like the four year old Franny's: "'Seymour, your teeth are so nice and yellow."<sup>13</sup> When he played cards with the younger children, he would inevitably drop hints as to his hand or "accidentally" expose it. At poker, Seymour was similarly intolerable, according to Buddy:

I went through a short period in my late teens when I played a semi-private, strenuous, losing game of turning into a good mixer, a regular guy, and I had people in frequently to play poker. Seymour often sat in. . . . It took some effort not to know when he was loaded with aces, because he'd sit there

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 215.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 193.

grinning . . . like an Easter Bunny with a whole basketful of eggs. Worse still, he had a habit of holding a straight or a full house, or better, and then not raising, or even calling, somebody he liked across the table who was playing along with a pair of tens.<sup>14</sup>

Seymour loved sports and games, being, in most cases, either spectacularly good or bad. At most outdoor sports, he was a loser, again because of his over-developed aversion to defeating or disappointing anyone. For example, in hockey, after charging down the playing field brilliantly, he would, more often than not, hesitate and allow the opposing goalie to set himself. In football he was an asset as a ball carrier if "he didn't suddenly elect to give his heart to an oncoming tackler."<sup>15</sup> At some games, however, especially stoopball, curb marbles and pocket pool, Seymour was unbearably proficient. And to make matters even more intolerable, his proficiency was based on an uncanny, but typical, formlessness: he did not aim.

Seymour, says Buddy, "had a Heinzlike variety of personal characteristics that threatened, at different chronological levels of sensitivity or thin-skinnedness, to drive every minor in the family to the bottle."<sup>16</sup> For instance, like most people who seek out God in strange places, he often behaved like a fool or an imbecile. He

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., pp. 228-229.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 230.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 126.

. . . had a distracting habit, most of his adult life, of investigating loaded ashtrays with his index finger, clearing all the cigarette ends to the sides--smiling from ear to ear as he did it--as if he expected to see Christ himself curled up cherubically in the middle, and he never looked disappointed.<sup>17</sup>

Seymour Glass's multi-faceted strangeness was not only capable of inducing alcoholism in his family, but also of isolating him and producing a hypersensitive awareness of "evil" and of his own misfitness in this "evil" world. Buddy believes that Seymour and Zooey have "the two 'best' pairs of eyes in the family."<sup>18</sup> During a conversation with Sybil, his four year old friend in "Bananafish," Seymour sees himself as one of the tragically fated fish that swim into the banana hole (the world), eat too much and die because they are too fat to get out.

"That's understandable. Their [the bananafish] habits are very peculiar. Very peculiar." . . . "They lead a very tragic life," he said. "You know what they do, Sybil?"

She shook her head.

"Well, they swim into a hole where there's a lot of bananas. They're very ordinary-looking fish when they swim in. But once they get in, they behave like pigs. Why, I've known some bananafish to swim into a banana hole and eat as many as seventy-eight bananas." . . . "Naturally, after that they're so fat they can't get out of the hole again. Can't fit through the door."<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., pp. 126-127.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 204.

<sup>19</sup>J. D. Salinger, "A Perfect Day for Bananafish," Nine Stories (New York, 1962), p. 16.



Seymour's rare gifts--his intelligence, sensitivity, poetic talent and his interest in religions, Eastern and Western--could have combined to make him a wonderfully effective and inspiring person for all of humanity. But because he could not surmount that invisible wall which agonizingly separated him from his fellow man, his gifts only served to heighten his awareness of the "evils"--which actually had built the wall. The indiscriminate love and compassion needed to activate Seymour's gifts into an effective force for all men never came; and he remained behind the Glass walls, concentrating on the people he could love--his family. However, he was too much for them; and they were not enough for him. In the end, all of the Glasses suffer for their exclusiveness.

It is Ihab Hassan's opinion that Seymour is the most intelligent of Salinger's characters.<sup>20</sup> He was almost a full professor of English and had been teaching for two years by the time he was twenty-one. He was proficient in a variety of languages, including Japanese. The afternoon he killed himself he wrote a classical haiku in Japanese on the desk blotter in the hotel room.<sup>21</sup> He had, like Zooey and Buddy, extraordinary memory and recall power.<sup>22</sup> As an

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<sup>20</sup>Hassan, "The Rare Quixotic Gesture," p. 155.

<sup>21</sup>Salinger, Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour: An Introduction, pp. 155-156.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 198.

example of his prodigious powers of perception, Seymour, at eight years of age, from a three hour observation of about sixty of his parents' party guests, but without having seen them enter the apartment, brought nearly all of them their coats and all of the men's hats. He did have trouble with the ladies' hats.<sup>23</sup>

Seymour and Buddy, as children, rarely went to sleep before two or three in the morning. Buddy relates that he never saw his brother yawn. When Seymour was intensely interested in something, he frequently skipped sleep altogether for two and three nights in a row and never looked the worse for it.<sup>24</sup> This practice illustrates a typical characteristic of the gifted child--that of displaying extreme interest in and concentration on something which fascinates him.<sup>25</sup>

Other reasons for Seymour's extraordinarily good "eyes" are his hypersensitivity and his own awareness of this quality. Before his wedding, Seymour wrote: "'Oh, God, if I'm anything by a clinical name, I'm a kind of paranoiac in reverse. I suspect people of plotting to make me happy.'"<sup>26</sup>

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., pp. 139-140.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., pp. 222-223.

<sup>25</sup>Bristow and others, p. 13. See Chapter II, page 31 of this thesis.

<sup>26</sup>Salinger, Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour: An Introduction, p. 88.

Other forms of joy are also stigmatized:

"I have scars on my hands from touching certain people. Once, in the park, when Franny was still in the carriage, I put my hand on the downy pate of her head and left it there too long. Another time . . . with Zooey during a spooky movie. He was about six or seven, and he went under the seat to avoid watching a scary scene. I put my hand on his head. Certain heads, certain colors and textures of human hair leave permanent marks on me."<sup>27</sup>

Seymour is also highly sensitive to the lack of real communication between people. Hassan calls this absence "the tragic unavailability of the self."<sup>28</sup> Buddy places his brother in direct contrast to all the unavailable people when he says that Seymour "had about the last unguarded adult face in the Greater New York Area."<sup>29</sup> Seymour purposely missed his gaudy wedding because it was completely incompatible to his sensitive, selfless nature. The world was torn by war; people were being killed everywhere; and he was being forced into a fancy wedding attended by an "inhuman collocation of human beings," around which pressed "the organized forms of sentiment, cant and even hate."<sup>30</sup>

Only holy, indiscriminate love can bring communication.<sup>31</sup> Seymour says in his diary:

"I'll champion indiscrimination till doomsday, on the ground that it leads to health and a kind of

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Hassan, "The Rare Quixotic Gesture," p. 156.

<sup>29</sup>Salinger, Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour: An Introduction, p. 202.

<sup>30</sup>Hassan, "The Rare Quixotic Gesture," pp. 155-156.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 156.

very real, enviable happiness. Followed purely it's the way of the Tao, and undoubtedly the highest way. But for a discriminating man to achieve this, it would mean that he would have to dispossess himself of poetry, go beyond poetry. That is, he couldn't possibly learn or drive himself to like bad poetry in the abstract, let alone equate it with good poetry. He would have to drop poetry altogether. I said it would be no easy thing to do. Dr. Sims [a psychiatrist] said I was putting it too stringently--putting it, he said, as only a perfectionist would. Can I deny that?"<sup>32</sup>

But Seymour cannot force himself out of his idealistic perfectionism. He cannot "like" bad poetry, nor can he like "bad" people. Marrying Muriel, his last, desperate attempt to reach the "Fat Lady"--the woman who sits on her porch in a rocking chair swatting flies and who represents for Seymour ordinary humanity--fails. His hopeless situation culminates in suicide.

Apparently, Seymour's hypersensitivity and feelings of alienation developed quite early. When he was eleven, he wrote his first Oriental poem, a pathetic revelation of a lonely boy's intense need to communicate and love. The poem concerns a little rich boy who, while reeling in a lafayette fish, feels extreme pain in his own lower lip. He puts the experience out of his mind, takes the live fish home and puts him in the bathtub, then discovers that the fish is wearing an identical school cap--with insignia--to the boy's: even the boy's name tape is sewn inside.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>Salinger, Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour: An Introduction, pp. 86-87.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., pp. 142-144.

When Seymour was twenty-two, Buddy suggested that he submit a substantial number of his poems for publication. However, Seymour, divulging his awareness of his misfitness, refused:

No, he didn't think he could do that. Not yet; maybe never. They were too un-Western, too lotusy. He said he felt that they were faintly affronting. He hadn't quite made up his mind where the affronting came in, but he felt at times that the poems read as though they'd been written by an ingrate, of sorts, someone who was turning his back--in effect, at least--on his own environment and the people in it who were close to him. He said he ate his food out of our big refrigerators, drove our eight-cylinder American cars, unhesitatingly used our medicines when he was sick, and relied on the U. S. Army to protect his parents and sisters from Hitler's Germany, and nothing, not one single thing in all his poems, reflected these realities. Something was terribly wrong.<sup>34</sup>

Buddy says that

. . . each of the poems is as unsonorous, as quiet, as he believed a poem should be, but there are intermittent short blasts of euphony . . . which have the effect . . . of someone . . . opening my door, blowing three or four or five unquestionably sweet and expert notes on a cornet into the room, then disappearing.<sup>35</sup>

Most of the poems are "high-hearted," as Buddy calls them; but he says that he "wouldn't unreservedly recommend the last thirty or thirty-five poems to any living soul who hasn't died at least twice in his lifetime, preferably slowly."<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid., pp. 144-146.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., pp. 148-149.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 149.

To Seymour, a person who is really alive. is really human, understands and has a taste for "the main current of poetry that flows through things, all things."<sup>37</sup> To him, the antithesis of this living person is his mother-in-law, who unnerves him. He is amazed by her courage to go on living. All she does is flit around from place to place being trivial when "she might as well be dead. . . ."<sup>38</sup> Poetry, to Seymour, was a way of life. Buddy says that "not one God-damn person, of all the patronizing, fourth-rate critics and column writers, had ever seen him for what he really was. A poet, for God's sake. And I mean a poet."<sup>39</sup>

The general public has believed for a long time that "Art and Sickness" harmoniously co-exist.<sup>40</sup> Buddy explains this coalition:

It seems to me indisputably true that a good many people, the wide world over, . . . respond with a special impetus . . . to artists and poets who as well as having a reputation for producing great or fine art have something garishly Wrong with them as persons: a spectacular flaw in character or citizenship, a construably romantic affliction or addiction--- extreme self-centeredness, marital infidelity, stone-deafness, stone-blindness, a terrible thirst, a mortally bad cough, a soft spot for prostitutes, a partiality for grand-scale adultery or incest, a certified or uncertified weakness for opium or sodomy, and so on, God have mercy on the lonely bastards.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 84.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 69.

<sup>40</sup>Hassan, "The Rare Quixotic Gesture," p. 159.

<sup>41</sup>Salinger, Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour: An Introduction, p. 164.

However, "the Sick Poet, as Buddy argues, is also a Seer, and the Seer, like Seymour (See-More), is a man who in penetrating the substance of life suffers through his eyes."<sup>42</sup> Holiness is a requirement for true vision; artifice is not enough.<sup>43</sup> Buddy reasons thus: "I say that the true artist-seer, the heavenly fool who can and does produce beauty, is mainly dazzled to death by his own scruples, the blinding shapes and colors of his own sacred human conscience."<sup>44</sup> By assuming the burden of holiness, the artist likewise becomes indifferent to his audience.<sup>45</sup> Again, Seymour is aware of his alienation, but he is powerless to do anything about it.

Religions also played an enormous part in Seymour's life. However, they gave him no real peace and contentment; ironically, they only enhanced his sensitivity and, therefore, his awareness of the "evils" in people. Seymour's God is a highly idealized, all loving God. Such a concept would seem to be very close to Christianity in its most simple, pure form, and at extreme odds with Puritan-influenced, organized Christian religions or denominations. In a letter criticizing some of Buddy's stories, Seymour reveals one aspect of his unusual concept of God:

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<sup>42</sup>Hassan, "The Rare Quixotic Gesture," p. 159.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

<sup>44</sup>Salinger, Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour: An Introduction, p. 123.

<sup>45</sup>Hassan, "The Rare Quixotic Gesture," p. 159.

It should have been a religious story, but it's puritanical. I feel your censure on all his God-damns. That seems off to me. What is it but a low form of prayer when he or Les or anybody else Goddamns everything? I can't believe God recognizes any form of blasphemy. It's a prissy word invented by the clergy.<sup>46</sup>

Seymour's view of man is revealed through the "Fat Lady" and in his reasoning on why Christ said that no man should be called a fool. "Christ had said it . . . because there are no fools. Dopes, yes--fools, no."<sup>47</sup>

Like that of most gifted children, Seymour's early interest in developing a philosophy of life led to his study of Zen Buddhism. According to Frederick Gwynn and Joseph Blotner, Zen is not a religion, philosophy, ethic or psychology, but "a Way, an attitude with intuitive spiritual enlightenment as its goal."<sup>48</sup> Allan Watts says that

"Zen is above all an experience, nonverbal in character, . . . which is simply inaccessible to the purely literary and scholarly approach. To know what Zen is, and especially what it is not, there is no alternative but to practice it. . . ."<sup>49</sup>

Professor Daisetz Suzuki of Columbia, who is the most famous authority on Zen in the West, makes the following two comments:

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<sup>46</sup>Salinger, Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour: An Introduction, pp. 178-179.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 158.

<sup>48</sup>Frederick L. Gwynn and Joseph L. Blotner, "One Hand Clapping," Salinger: A Critical and Personal Portrait, introduced and edited by Henry A. Grunwald (New York, 1962), p. 110.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid.



(1) "The basic idea of Zen is to come in touch with the inner workings of our being, and to do this in the most direct way possible, without resorting to anything external or superadded." (2) "As I conceive it, Zen is the ultimate fact of all philosophy and religion. . . . Therefore Zen is not necessarily the fountain of Buddhist thought and life alone; it is very much alive also in Christianity, Mohammedanism, in Taoism, and even in positivistic Confucianism. . . ."50

Through Zen one retains his identity while at the same time uniting totally with the universe. It necessitates, like haiku poetry, a harmonious reaction between one's imagination and soul. Such concepts readily explain Salinger's deep interest in Zen and his use of the "Way" in criticizing contemporary society's failures.<sup>51</sup>

[Seymour, Franny and Zooey want "'to come in touch with the inner workings' of their beings, to achieve non-intellectual enlightenment--what Zen Buddhists call satori, 'to be in a state of pure consciousness' . . . that 'is to be with God before he [sic] said, Let there be light.'"52

Satori is also defined as:

. . . a sort of mystical revelation in which the converts to Zen suddenly come to realize that everything in the universe is inseparable and divine; that there is no difference between good and evil, life and death, sleep and awakening, mind and matter, man and beast, that everything is part of the divine pattern and the divine cycle.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., pp. 110-111.

<sup>51</sup>Hassan, "The Rare Quixotic Gesture," p. 153.

<sup>52</sup>Gwynn and Blotner, "One Hand Clapping," p. 111.

<sup>53</sup>"The Recluse in the Rye," p. 142.

Examples of Salinger satori are Seymour's "Fat Lady" principle and the God and milk episode in "Teddy," in which the six year old genius, Teddy (Salinger's only real mystic), realizes that his sister is God and the milk she is drinking is God and that she is simply "pouring God into God."<sup>54</sup>

Of the Glasses, Seymour comes closer to true mysticism than any of them; but his seemingly mystical experiences are actually what Salinger distinguishes as "transcendent." Seymour's throwing a rock at the beautiful little girl and his scars from touching certain people are both examples of his transcendental experiences.<sup>55</sup> During a broadcast when he was sixteen, Seymour shocked the radio audience with what amounted to a "Zen critique of the Gettysburg Address."<sup>56</sup> For his honesty, he was dismissed from the show. Seymour explains:

"He'd [a psychiatrist] actually heard the Lincoln broadcast, but he had the impression that I'd said over the air that the Gettysburg Address was 'bad for children.' Not true. I told him I'd said I thought it was a bad speech for children to have to memorize in school. He also had the impression I'd said it was a dishonest speech. I told him I'd said that 51,112 men were casualties at Gettysburg, and that if someone had to speak at the anniversary of the event, he should simply have come forward and shaken his fist at his audience and then walked off-- that is, if the speaker was an absolutely honest man.

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<sup>54</sup>J. D. Salinger, "Teddy," Nine Stories (New York, 1962), p. 138.

<sup>55</sup>Wakefield, pp. 188-189.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., p. 185.

He didn't disagree with me, but he seemed to feel that I have a perfection complex of some kind."<sup>57</sup>

Dan Wakefield correctly suggests that Seymour's inability to perfect his mysticism, as Teddy did, was a very important factor in his destruction. "He was close enough to be unable to find perfection in the Western world of 'things,' and yet not close enough to achieve perfection through the mystic fulfillment of Teddy."<sup>58</sup> Seymour championed indiscrimination, but he could not practice it. He could not free himself from poetry, nor could he make himself like, in an abstract way, poor poetry. His indiscriminate religious beliefs idealized God and man, but he could not follow through with them because of his hypersensitive awareness of the "evils" existing in the real world. He could not reconcile the purity of his vision with the world's contamination. He suffered, thus, from extreme frustration. His religion only served to heighten his awareness. "Seymour was beyond the possibility of resignation to imperfection, but short of the possibility of a miracle; he ends in suicide,"<sup>59</sup> which is a type of death in direct contrast to Teddy's, as foreseen by the boy and actually welcomed because he was to be reunited with God.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup>Salinger, Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour: An Introduction, pp. 85-86.

<sup>58</sup>Wakefield, p. 189.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., p. 185.

A poem that Henry Grunwald wrote about Teddy can be applied to the Zen-indoctrinated Seymour, particularly the moral.

Teddy McArdle, who had Strange Powers and  
Was cut down to Size by his Sister. . . .  
And then (oh jealous Little Fool!)  
His Sister pushed him in the Pool,  
Succeeding with the first Attempt. He  
Was not surprised to find it Empty.

Moral

Bright Little Boys who play with Zen  
May not grow up to be Big Men.<sup>61</sup>

Seymour grew to manhood, but he could not be called mature. He retained a childish idealism throughout his life, wanting more out of his fellow man than was humanly possible, at least for the vast majority. Seymour, in his mid-twenties, indicated recognition of his immaturity one evening when Les stopped by to see Buddy and him at their apartment. Les asked Seymour if he remembered when Joe Jackson, a vaudevillian who performed on a nickel-plated trick bicycle, had given him a ride on the stage. "He [Seymour] said he wasn't sure he had ever got off Joe Jackson's beautiful bicycle."<sup>62</sup>

Seymour's love, vision, morality and purity marked him as a freak and isolated him from adult society. His suicide was the consummation of a disturbed young man's struggle to find healthy, satisfying relationships with his fellow man, his answer to the futility of trying to communicate with a

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<sup>61</sup>Grunwald, p. xviii.

<sup>62</sup>Salinger, Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour: An Introduction, p. 173.

pragmatic, insensitive and largely indifferent society. In "Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters" Seymour says: "'The human voice conspires to desecrate everything on earth.'"<sup>63</sup> The futility of speech communication is illustrated by the telephone calls in "Bananafish" and "Carpenters." Seymour's diary records early attempts at such intercourse with his fiancée, Muriel Fedder: "'I phoned Muriel to tell her. It was very strange. She answered the phone and kept saying hello. My voice wouldn't work.'"<sup>64</sup> "'How terrible it is when you say I love you and the person at the other end shouts back "What?"'"<sup>65</sup>

Seymour marries Muriel, who--with her indiscriminating mind--represents his compromise with the ordinary. In actuality, however, he "marries in what seems to have been a burst of purely private ecstasy and mystic condescension."<sup>66</sup> Seymour's desperate need for a successful marriage with Muriel, accompanied by an underlying realization that the attempt is futile, is revealed in the following passage:

"Oh, God, I'm so happy with her. If only she could be happier with me. I amuse her at times, and she seems to like my face and hands and the back of my head, and she gets a vast satisfaction out of telling her friends that she's engaged to the Billy Black who was on 'It's a Wise Child' for years. And I think she feels a mixed maternal and sexual drive in my general direction. But on the whole I don't make her

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<sup>63</sup>Ibid., p. 78.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., p. 105.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., p. 106.

<sup>66</sup>Walzer, p. 160.

really happy. Oh, God, help me. My one terrible consolation is that my beloved has an undying, basically undeviating love for the institution of marriage itself. She has a primal urge to play house permanently."<sup>67</sup>

Seymour's diary discloses that during their courtship no real bond of communication ever really existed between them: "She sat stirring her drink and feeling unclosed to me"<sup>68</sup>; and ". . . I could sense that she felt the usual estrangement from me when I don't automatically love what she loves."<sup>69</sup>

Muriel's mother, like her daughter, is mundane, insensitive and neurotic. She is the one who might as well be dead. She and Muriel are too comfortable in the phoniness of society, too shallow and superficial, to be a part of Seymour's world. The Fedder woman believed Seymour to be schizoid, but this did not worry her nearly so much as several of his other unusual traits. His explanation of her objections clearly divulges the incompatibility of Seymour's values with those of Muriel and her mother.

"One, I withdraw from and fail to relate to people. Two, apparently there is something 'wrong' with me because I haven't seduced Muriel. Three, evidently Mrs. Fedder has been haunted for days by my remark at dinner one night that I'd like to be a dead cat. She asked me at dinner last week what I intended to

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<sup>67</sup>Salinger, Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour: An Introduction, p. 83.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., p. 78.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid.

do after I got out of the Army. Did I intend to resume teaching at the same college? Would I go back on the radio, possibly as a 'commentator' of some kind? I answered that it seemed to me that the war might go on forever, and that I was only certain that if peace ever came again I would like to be a dead cat. Mrs. Fedder thought I was cracking a joke of some kind. A sophisticated joke. She thinks I'm very sophisticated, according to Muriel. She thought my deadly-serious comment was the sort of joke one ought to acknowledge with a light, musical laugh. When she laughed, I suppose it distracted me a little, and I forgot to explain to her. I told Muriel tonight that in Zen Buddhism a master was once asked what was the most valuable thing in the world, and the master answered that a dead cat was, because no one could put a price on it. M. was relieved, but I could see she could hardly wait to get home to assure her mother of the harmlessness of my remark."<sup>70</sup>

Seymour's growing awareness of the hopelessness of the situation is indicated when he later writes that "M. loves me, but she'll never feel really close to me, familiar with me, frivolous with me, till I'm slightly overhauled."<sup>71</sup>

Seymour was dismissed from an Army hospital after the war, where he had been (as he had promised Muriel and Mrs. Fedder) psychoanalyzed. Soon afterward, possibly as a result, he crashed the Fedders' car into a tree, and it was decided that he should take Muriel on a vacation to the fashionable Florida ocean-front hotel where they had honeymooned six years before.

In Florida Seymour's consciousness of his own misfit-ness and isolation was intensified. He sat alone and played

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<sup>70</sup>Ibid., pp. 82-83.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., p. 87.

the piano in a hotel lounge while Muriel wandered about the club rooms and chatted with vacationing psychoanalysts. Insensitive and unresponsive to poetry, Muriel pursued her interests of stylish clothes and "tabloid-magazine sex"<sup>72</sup> or carried on lengthy and trivial telephone conversations with her mother back in New York, while Seymour went to the beach--alone.

On the beach, he discovered that he could communicate quite freely with a four year old girl named Sybil. Hyper-sensitive Seymour had come to expect to be misunderstood outside the Glass family and hence found it much more natural to converse with an immature child than with his own wife.<sup>73</sup> As they talked, Sybil concerned herself with the six tigers in Little Black Sambo, whose vanity and gluttony had brought about their destruction. When Seymour told the child a delightful tale about bananafish, "ordinary-looking" fish that swim into holes and fatally gorge themselves with bananas, Sybil "prophetically sees not only a bananafish but a doomed one with six bananas in his mouth. . . . In the water [Seymour] kisses the arch of her foot, which she has recently stuck 'in a soggy, collapsed castle' of sand."<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup>Frederick L. Gwynn and Joseph L. Blotner, The Fiction of J. D. Salinger (Pittsburgh, 1958), p.19.

<sup>73</sup>Alfred Kazin, "J. D. Salinger: 'Everybody's Favorite,'" The Atlantic, CCVIII (August, 1961), 30.

<sup>74</sup>Gwynn and Blotner, The Fiction of J. D. Salinger, p.20.



Thus forced to weigh Sybil's warm, intuitive sympathy against his wife's insensitivity and indifference, Seymour recognized the impossibility of his situation and the inevitability of his destruction.<sup>75</sup> His condescension to the ordinary, his try for the Zen ideal had failed--miserably. For Seymour, the riddle of how a moral person lives in an amoral society could only be resolved in despair and suicide.<sup>76</sup>

In summation, Seymour, the most fragile of all the Glasses, cracks. He is a mystic type who is not mystic enough. He is a lover of humanity, but only in an abstract form. His overbearing awareness of the "evils" in man prevents a real, consuming love, resulting in total frustration which brings about meaninglessness, nothingness and finally, suicide.

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<sup>75</sup>Stevenson, p. 216.

<sup>76</sup>Paul Levine, "J. D. Salinger: The Development of the Misfit Hero," Twentieth Century Literature, IV (October, 1958), 98.

## CHAPTER IV

### HOLDEN: AWARENESS AND TOLERATION

Holden Caulfield, Salinger's sixteen year old hero of The Catcher in the Rye, represents the author's middle step between the totally negated, suicidal Seymour and the all-accepting, reconciled Franny. Holden's story ends in a mood which might best be described as toleration--a mood perhaps surprising for one who was formerly accused by his perceptive and loving little sister, Phoebe, of not liking anything. Holden, like Seymour and his Glass brethren, sees a special kind of evil in society, particularly in the masses who comprise ordinary humanity. As Nathan A. Scott says, Holden's romantic idealism throws him into opposition to the world, with his depression and repulsion resulting from the stark contrast he continually finds between reality and his dream. He best conveys the "evil" he is so aware of through the word phony, which characterizes someone as being emotionally withered and insensitive. Such qualities naturally lead to verbal dishonesty and, even worse, render humanity incommunicable,

. . . for human beings can encounter one another only when they are honest and willing to run the risks of speaking the truth. But nowhere can Holden find such

integrity, and it is his fierce consciousness of its absence that constitutes the real dramatic center of the book. His mind is . . . a mind that is fully "awake" to the casual bad faith by which human relations are so generally corrupted.<sup>1</sup>

He (like Seymour and Franny) is unbalanced by an overwhelming need for love and communication, but what he generally finds is the "evil." And because there appears to be no way of escaping isolation, he tries to compensate through his dead brother Allie, who could never get angry at anyone, and Phoebe, who is sincerely interested in communicating with him. To her, he can reveal all, and when she asks him what he would like to be, he remembers hearing a little boy singing "If a body catch a body coming through the rye" as he walked down the street; he wants to be the catcher in the rye. Scott further believes that

. . . he wants to break out of his loneliness; he wants to be able to reach across the gulfs that separate us from one another and to catch people before they run off into their little shells. And he wants this because he wants others besides Phoebe to whom he can talk about his life; he wants others with whom there need be no reservations, before whom he can be vulnerable, and to whom he can be really present.<sup>2</sup>

But, of course, Holden does not get what he wants; and, as Edwin T. Bowden says, it is no surprise that Holden suffers a mental breakdown. He is trapped by the emotional complexities of wanting to escape the society around him--

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<sup>1</sup>Nathan A. Scott, Modern Literature and the Religious Frontier (New York, 1958), p. 92.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 93.

reality--and wishing to enter his imaginary utopia filled with honest and decent people, a society which he is acutely aware does not exist. Thus, facing two impossibilities, he reverts to adolescent rage and scorn.<sup>3</sup>

All he knows at the moment is that as he looks about him he sees only a world of "phonies," of sham and pretense or a world so devoted to selfish exclusiveness or shallow pleasures or degrading self-contentment, if not to more active cruelty, that a boy with self-respect and common decency and some feeling for the potentialities of the human being cannot be a part of it. His fellow students, like Shadlater and Ackley, are self-contented "slobs." Most of his teachers are "phonies," like the headmaster who ignored the unfashionable parents for those who wore the right clothes; and the few that are not "phonies," like old Spencer, the history teacher, never really understood him and are likely to be bores anyway. New York is full of pimping and crooked bellboys, tourists looking for celebrities, conceited intellectuals, Ivy League types, brainless girls who only want to say and do the proper, fashionable things. Even looking ahead to the standard professional life that he fears is before him, he sees nothing there to attract: "'All you do is make a lot of dough and play golf and play bridge and buy cars and drink Martinis and look like a hot-shot.'"<sup>4</sup>

Holden, like the Glass children, is a misfit; he is different and superior, and he is cognizant of his own superiority over the masses. He judges and condemns humanity, neither liking nor accepting what he sees. Therefore, he isolates himself through rebellion, which results only in torment and frustration; and he is cut off by society's

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<sup>3</sup>Edwin T. Bowden, The Dungeon of the Heart (New York, 1961), p. 56.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., pp. 56-57.

reaction to him. As Donald Heiney says, the superior individual's stature isolates him. He is misunderstood and persecuted by his fellow men, the persecution resulting from their unconscious and unadmitted sense of his superiority.<sup>5</sup> Most people tend to judge others by external accomplishments, and Holden hardly ever distinguishes himself in school, primarily because he is repelled and bored by all the phonies he comes in contact with. And his teachers think of him as a troublemaker. Therefore, he is helplessly vulnerable to misunderstanding and persecution. He is "murdered," according to Heiney, a victim of unfeeling society.<sup>6</sup>

At first Holden is in revolt against his fellow adolescents. He is painfully aware of their shallowness, but his precocity ruins his objectivity. He does not realize that typical adolescents are supposed to be that way. Holden reacts to this supposedly tragic situation by remaining essentially a pure and chaste idealist. He does not really try to get along with any of the "morons" and "phonies." Later he runs away from school to New York, not knowing what he is going to do when he gets there.

Holden is equally unsuccessful with adults. Heiney believes that Salinger depicts children, including Holden,

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<sup>5</sup>Donald Heiney, Recent American Literature (Great Neck, New York, 1958), p. 166.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

"who are unusually mature for their age, who speak, or attempt to speak, like adults, and who wish to be accepted by adults on an adult basis."<sup>7</sup> But Holden is not accepted as an adult; instead, he is the constant target of adult darts. Because his heart is basically good, these darts succeed in breaking his cynical outer shell and wounding his delicate pride.

Thus, finding the adult world as superficial and spiritually bankrupt as his own adolescent world, he reverts to the innocent children's world, a move equally futile. For Holden is in the limbo of life, adolescence, which allows membership neither in the world of children nor in the world of adults. And difficult stage that it is, most adolescents manage to come through it without great difficulty. However, Holden is hardly typical; and it is dangerous not to be typical (average), especially during adolescence. Holden's precocity, sensitivity and idealism are not accepted or understood by other teen-agers; and he finds offensive all the "phony morons" with whom he has to go to school; so he chooses the children's world because there he can come closer to finding the innocence and love he seeks and because there he is less likely to get hurt. However, his children's world is an imaginary one, a fantasy which he dreams up, and in which he is the protector, the

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 281.

guardian of all the beautiful, innocent children. He is the catcher in the rye. But only children can live in a dream world. While he keeps those he guards from falling over that cliff, he comes dangerously close to falling over himself. Holden eventually does "fall over," and he lands in a hospital suffering from a mental breakdown.

Like Seymour and the other Glasses, Holden is superior to ordinary humanity in many ways, all of which contribute to his isolation and hypersensitive awareness of "evil." As Martin Green points out, Salinger pictures Holden as being taller, more handsome, lovable, loving, intelligent and honest than the ordinary person:

At the very beginning, Holden is looking at his school, "trying to feel some kind of a good-by. I mean I've left schools and places I didn't even know I was leaving them. I hate that. I don't care if it's a sad good-by or a bad good-by, but when I leave a place I like to know I'm leaving it. If you don't, you feel even worse." The reader must feel that such glimmerings as he had at sixteen of the value of experience as such were never so exactly defined, so unpretentiously phrased, so socially amenable, so completely assimilated into his private language. Next comes the interview with the Spencers, where Holden is so easily aware of all they are thinking and feeling, while they are quite unaware of him, and he so charitably makes the interview easy for them. Again the reader must feel that such social dexterity as he had at sixteen was never so unself-conscious, so unpatronizing, so allied with humor and gaiety and kindness. And so on through the book; Holden's skill at golf, at dancing, at writing, his generosity with money, his enterprise with women, his ability to talk to children--one of the major dimensions by which all these are measured is his superiority in them.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Green, pp. 86-87.

Holden is admirable because what he does he does as himself, without any phony Bohemian or Ivy League front. Because he is sincere, he cannot compromise his cause, which is actually justified; and he remains unspoiled by self-worship. Contradicting those who accuse Holden of not liking anything, Christopher Parker says that Holden differs from most in that he likes what is really worthy of such attention. Yet, in spite of his superiority, Holden (like Seymour and Franny) cannot escape phoniness or being partially phony himself. He needs people, but he cannot accept them. Parker believes that

. . . Caulfield's real problem is that he was trying to be sincere in an insincere world, with FUCK YOU signs on the walls of children's corridors, wheezing bald caddy-driving alumni who want to find their initials carved in the door of the can, Antolinis who have the answers but don't use them, and Mr. Vinsons who yell "Digression!" at you every time you become excited enough in an idea you have to forget about the classroom exercise and start talking about the idea. Caulfield was outside of himself looking for others. He wasn't a critical smart-aleck--far, far from it. I'm not trying to say that Caulfield's way is right and society's is wrong--but I do think that Caulfield, the individual, is far more human and right than those of us on the outside asking him if he's going to apply himself or not.<sup>9</sup>

When Holden is forced into a choice between sincerity and phoniness, he chooses the former; and he is punished for his decision. Stradlater, his roommate, asks Holden to write a

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<sup>9</sup>Christopher Parker, "'Why the Hell Not Smash All the Windows?'" Salinger: A Critical and Personal Portrait, introduced and edited by Henry A. Grunwald (New York, 1962), p. 257.



descriptive theme for him, suggesting that Holden describe a room or a house. Instead, Holden, who is disgusted by the idea of describing something so cold as a room, describes Allie's baseball mitt which has poetry written on it.<sup>10</sup> His efforts are unappreciated and not understood by the shallow Stradlater, resulting in another blow to Holden's sensitivity and an intensification of his awareness of the "evil" in man.

Holden is expelled from school because he refuses to do such unimaginative tasks as describing rooms. And, as Parker believes, if he were not intelligent, there would be no problem.<sup>11</sup> But Holden is both highly intelligent and creative.<sup>12</sup> As stated previously, creative children need a purpose worthy of the enthusiasm and devotion they are able to give it. The room, to Holden, is not a worthy subject, but Allie's glove is. He, like most creatives, mocks the "All-American boy" type, represented by Stradlater; he has little use for the personal characteristics of those whom he associates with the stereotyped idea of adult success, such as Ossenburger, the phony alumnus, and even his own father; and obviously, he has no desire to be like his teachers and peers. Holden's talents for generalization and abstract thinking, qualities of the gifted person, are revealed in

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., pp. 257-258.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 258.

<sup>12</sup>For more complete evidence of Holden's giftedness, see Chapter II, pages 32-34, 36-40.

his answer to Phoebe's accusation that he does not like anything:

"Anyway, I like it now," I said. "I mean right now. Sitting here with you and just chewing the fat and horsing--"

"That isn't anything really!"

"It is so something really! Certainly it is! Why the hell isn't it? People never think anything is anything really. I'm getting goddam sick of it."<sup>13</sup>

The preceding quotations also demonstrate Holden's over-developed sensitivity, which, along with his intelligence, is a major contributor to his awareness of the "evils" around him. His sensitivity contributes to his rebellion and breakdown and compels him to erase the dirty slogans off the school walls. It also induces compassion for Sunny, the prostitute, a representative of the very ugliness he is rebelling against:

I took her dress over to the closet and hung it up for her. It was funny. It made me feel sort of sad when I hung it up. I thought of her going in a store and buying it, and nobody in the store knowing she was a prostitute and all. The salesman probably just thought she was a regular girl when she bought it. It made me feel sad as hell--I don't know why exactly.<sup>14</sup>

Holden, according to Granville Hicks,

. . . is torn, and nearly destroyed, by the conflict between integrity and love. He is driven by the need not to be less than himself, not to accept what he knows to be base. On the other hand, he is

<sup>13</sup>Salinger, The Catcher in the Rye, p. 155.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 88.

capable of understanding and loving the persons to whom his integrity places him in opposition.<sup>15</sup>

Even Stradlater and Ackley, the nasty, pimply boy with mossy teeth, who lives next door to Holden at Pencey, can arouse sympathy in him. The former, despite all his faults, is generous: "'Look. Suppose, for instance, Stradlater was wearing a tie or something that you liked. . . . You know what he'd do? He'd probably take it off and give it to you."<sup>16</sup> And Holden resents Ackley's being blackballed from a secret fraternity that he

" . . . was too yellow not to join. There was this one pimply, boring guy, Robert Ackley, that wanted to get in. He kept trying to join, and they wouldn't let him. Just because he was boring and pimply. . . . It was a stinking school. Take my word."<sup>17</sup>

As Donald Barr points out, even Holden's anger is a kind of compassion,<sup>18</sup> which is revealed in his retort to Maurice, the bellboy-pimp who beats him up:

"You're a stupid chiseling moron, and in about two years you'll be one of those scraggy guys that come up to you on the street and ask for a dime for coffee. You'll have snot all over your dirty, filthy overcoat, and you'll be--"<sup>19</sup>

<sup>15</sup>Granville Hicks, "The Search for Wisdom," Salinger: A Critical and Personal Portrait, introduced and edited by Henry A. Grunwald (New York, 1962), p. 193.

<sup>16</sup>Salinger, The Catcher in the Rye, p. 25.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 151.

<sup>18</sup>Barr, p. 172.

<sup>19</sup>Salinger, The Catcher in the Rye, p. 95.

Holden can feel compassion and sympathy for such spiritual cadavers because of his loneliness and isolation, and because of his intense need for affection and communication. Paradoxically, and somewhat pathetically, however, he is sometimes depressed by affection, a consequence of his being so unfamiliar with it and his feeling that he has disappointed the other person. For instance, the skates his mother sends him sadden him, even though they are the wrong kind. He feels that he has let her down by being expelled, and the present makes the situation worse. Of Holden's destiny, Bowden says:

With such a nature and such a need, and with his ability to suspect, if not to find, something likable in any person, he cannot be depressed by the state of mankind and the pain of isolation for the rest of his life. He only needs someone to point the way out, to show him how to escape from the shell of his isolation without escaping from humanity itself.<sup>20</sup>

But until Holden finds at least a partial answer at the end, his reaching out to the phonies and bores always concludes negatively, a result of his own revulsion or their indifference.

Throughout most of the novel, the phonies and their opposites, whom Holden admires, only serve to remind him of the "evils" ingrained in a world that he has little use for. Henry Grunwald recognizes Holden as one of those who cannot accept the ordinary advice to grow up, accept the world and

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<sup>20</sup>Bowden, pp. 60-61.

live in it, which most people take and give. Such advice, if universally embraced, would destroy both romanticism and tragedy. Holden, like Ivan Karamazov, cannot believe the usual religious argument that suffering is part of the divine scheme of things. If Holden is less than a tragic hero, it is because he is an adolescent; and an adolescent or child cannot assume such a role. His immaturity makes his downfall less terrible than the defeat of a person at the height of mature success. Nevertheless, Holden, because he flees mediocrity and refuses to accept blindly the world as it is, "deserves his small share of nobility."<sup>21</sup>

Holden is repelled by materialism, the way people love objects instead of each other. This feeling is revealed in a conversation with superficial Sally Hayes:

"Take most people, they're crazy about cars. They worry if they get a little scratch on them, . . . and if they get a brand-new car already they start thinking about trading it in for one that's even newer. I don't even like old cars. . . . I'd rather have a goddam horse. A horse is at least human, for God's sake. A horse you can at least--"

"I don't know what you're even talking about," Old Sally said. "You jump from one--"<sup>22</sup>

Holden is also abnormally aware of and repulsed by conventional speech habits, empty words and trite phrases.

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<sup>21</sup>Grunwald, pp. xiv-xvi. Grunwald quotes Ivan Karamazov, who says: "If the suffering of children serves to complete the sum of suffering necessary for the acquisition of truth, I affirm from now onward that truth is not worth such a price."

<sup>22</sup>Salinger, The Catcher in the Rye, p. 119.

During Holden's visit with Mr. and Mrs. Spencer before the boy's departure from Pencey, Spencer tells his former student what "grand" people his parents are. To Holden, words like grand, marvelous and swell and phrases such as "Good luck" and "Glad to've met you" are phony; and when he hears them, he becomes nauseated and "depressed" because they represent "the insincerity, the evasiveness and the bad faith revealed in our common speech."<sup>23</sup>

Of course, many people repel Holden, one of them being a former headmaster who discriminated between parents by being especially attentive to the wealthiest and most stylish while more or less ignoring the others. Holden is especially disgusted by Ossenburger, the rich undertaker and alumnus of Pencey who makes a talk to the student body.

He started off with about fifty corny jokes, just to show us what a regular guy he was. Very big deal. Then he started telling us how he was never ashamed, when he was in some kind of trouble or something, to get right down on his knees and pray to God. He told us we should always pray to God--talk to him and all--wherever we were. He told us we ought to think of Jesus as our buddy and all. He said he talked to Jesus all the time. Even when he was driving his car. That killed me. I can just see the big phony bastard shifting into first gear and asking Jesus to send him a few more stiffs.<sup>24</sup>

Holden's farewell to his Pencey schoolmates, including Stradlater and Ackley, indicates his general attitude toward them: "'Sleep tight, ya morons!'"<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Scott, p. 92.

<sup>24</sup>Salinger, The Catcher in the Rye, pp. 18-19.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 50.

In New York, soon after he arrives, Holden tries to make friends with three female tourists; but they rarely hear a word he says because they are constantly looking for celebrities. "They hardly talked--even to each other."<sup>26</sup> In another club the same night, Holden is revolted by a piano player who is showing off for a typical audience that always applauds the wrong things.<sup>27</sup> A "Joe-Yale looking guy" and his "terrific looking" date sitting near Holden are particularly offensive. They are drunk, and he is "giving her a feel under the table" while he tells her about a boy in his dorm who tried to commit suicide. Holden, repelled by the grotesque tastelessness of their actions, says: "They killed me."<sup>28</sup>

Maurice, the bellhop pimp, does kill Holden--figuratively. He arranges for a prostitute to visit Holden, supposedly for five dollars. When she leaves--having done no work for her money--she tells Holden it costs ten, not five. Holden refuses to pay her, and later the pimp and the prostitute come back for the other five. Holden still refuses, and Maurice beats him up, taking the extra five dollars. Maurice is the only spiritual degenerate in the novel who flagrantly abuses Holden, and the boy reacts by pretending that Maurice has shot him: he staggers down the stairs, blood dripping,

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 69.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 78.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 79.

to shoot the pimp. However, as he says, "What I really felt like, though, was committing suicide. . . . I probably would've done it, too, if I'd been sure somebody'd cover me up as soon as I landed. I didn't want a bunch of stupid rubbernecks looking at me when I was all gory."<sup>29</sup> His sensibility thus sustains, for a while, another blow.

Holden's meeting with the very pretty, but superficial, Sally Hayes proves equally distasteful. She does not understand at all his talk about phony people and phony schools and his inviting her to run off with him to the New England woods because she is too caught up in the mainstream of the ordinary herself. After she refuses his invitation, Holden realizes that he actually was sincere when he asked her. Then he calls himself a "madman," realizing that he is terribly confused and unbalanced.

Holden proceeds to Radio City, where he is particularly disgusted by the annual Christmas show, a spectacle that would make "old Jesus" ill "if He could see it."<sup>30</sup> Holden is sure that the very pious looking actors carrying crucifixes and singing "Come All Ye Faithful" can hardly wait to get through so they can smoke a cigarette. Sitting next to him during the movie that follows is a lady whose crying increases in direct proportion to the increasing phony

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 96.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 125.



sentimentality of the movie. However, she is hardly compassionate, as Holden discovers; for she refuses to take her child to the bathroom and scolds him for disturbing her.<sup>31</sup>

Holden strikes out against intellectuals in the form of Carl Luce, a former schoolmate who is now attending Columbia:

These intellectual guys don't like to have an intellectual conversation with you unless they're running the whole thing. They always want you to shut up when they shut up, and go back to your room when they go back to their room. . . . The thing he was afraid of, he was afraid somebody'd say something smarter than he had.<sup>32</sup>

Nevertheless, Holden tries to communicate with Carl, but he further alienates Holden--making the boy more aware of his isolated state--with his cruel, insensitive retort: "I couldn't care less, frankly."<sup>33</sup>

There are some who do care, however; and it is these whom Holden likes and loves, with the feeling being generally reciprocated. He likes most children, the museum dummies, the Central Park ducks, the nuns he meets in a cafe, Thomas Hardy, the kettle drummer at Radio City, Jane Gallagher, Allie, James Castle, Antolini and Phoebe. Therefore, Phoebe is essentially wrong when she accuses Holden of not liking anything; but she is still partially right. Her comment, "'That isn't anything really,'"<sup>34</sup> concerning Holden's liking

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., pp. 126-127.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 133.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 134.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 155.

to just sit and "chew the fat" with her, can be expanded to include most of the people and things that Holden does like. For, though they do exist, they are not really integrated parts of the adult world that Holden is on the threshold of entering, the world that he must try to at least tolerate if he is ever to reach emotional maturity, and with it, peace and contentment.<sup>35</sup> Until the last page of Catcher, these likables only serve, through stark contrast, to intensify his awareness of the ugliness, the "evils," in ordinary humanity, rather than being pleasing, natural components of a world where satisfying relationships can be had on every level of mankind.

Holden is especially fond of simple, sincere innocent children. The little boy walking down the street with his parents, minding his own business and singing "'If a body catch a body coming through the rye'"<sup>36</sup> pleases him tremendously--makes him feel better and not so depressed. In the park a while later, a little girl raises his spirits when she allows him to tighten her skate. "God, I love it when a kid's nice and polite when you tighten their skate for them or something. Most kids are. They really are."<sup>37</sup> These children and more like them are the ones who would inhabit Holden's dream world.

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<sup>35</sup>For a complete discussion of the goals of mental health in relationship to the gifted person, see Chapter II, page 35.

<sup>36</sup>Salinger, The Catcher in the Rye, p. 105.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 109.

He likes the dummies in the Museum of Natural History because they are stable and can be trusted.

The best thing . . . in that museum was that everything always stayed right where it was. . . . You could go there a hundred thousand times, and that Eskimo would still be just finished catching those two fish, the birds would still be on their way south.<sup>38</sup>

Holden is particularly concerned with what the Central Park ducks do in the winter; but he soon discovers, in a conversation with a cab driver, that he frets alone, as always:

"Hey, Horwitz," I said. "You ever pass by the lagoon in Central Park? Down by Central Park South?"

"The what?"

"The lagoon. That little lake, like, there. Where the ducks are. You know."

"Yeah, what about it?"

"Well, you know the ducks that swim around in it? In the springtime and all? Do you happen to know where they go in the wintertime, by any chance?"

"Where who goes?"

"The ducks. Do you know, by any chance? I mean does somebody come around in a truck or something and take them away, or do they fly away by themselves--go south or something?"

Old Horwitz turned all the way around and looked at me. He was a very impatient-type guy. He wasn't a bad guy, though. "How the hell should I know?" he said. "How the hell should I know a stupid thing like that?"<sup>39</sup>

Holden likes the nuns he meets because they possess a child's basic goodness and purity. They are especially nice when he compares them to some other people he knows:

I kept thinking about that beat-up old straw basket they went around collecting money with when they weren't teaching school. I kept trying to picture

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid., pp. 110-111.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., pp. 75-76.

my mother or somebody, or my aunt, or Sally Hayes's crazy mother, standing outside some department store and collecting dough for poor people. . . . It was hard to picture. Not so much my mother, but those other two. My aunt's pretty charitable . . . but she's very well-dressed and all, and when she does anything charitable she's always very well-dressed and has lipstick on and all that crap. . . . And old Sally Hayes's mother. Jesus Christ. The only way she could go around with a basket collecting dough would be if everybody kissed her ass for her when they made a contribution. If they just dropped their dough in her basket, then walked away without saying anything to her, . . . she'd quit in about an hour. She'd get bored. She'd hand in her basket and then go some place swanky for lunch.<sup>40</sup>

Thomas Hardy is one of those authors he would like to talk to on the telephone, who are true to their profession and will not prostitute themselves, as his brother D.B. used to be. The only thing Holden approves of in the Radio City music pageant is the kettle drummer in the orchestra.

The thing Jesus really would've liked would be the guy that plays the kettle drums in the orchestra. . . . He only gets a chance to bang them a couple of times during a whole piece, but he never looks bored when he isn't doing it. Then when he does bang them, he does it so nice and sweet, with this nervous expression on his face.<sup>41</sup>

Jane Gallagher is a girl Holden had become good friends with two summers before. He thinks of her as being sexually pure, another example of the ideal, like the children. He likes "her human eccentricities and her real quality--her 'muckle-mouthed' way of talking, her curious way of playing checkers and her love of poetry."<sup>42</sup> When she plays checkers,

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 104.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 125.

<sup>42</sup>Edgar Branch, "Mark Twain and J. D. Salinger: A Study in Literary Continuity," American Quarterly, IX (Summer, 1957), 151.

she keeps her kings in the back row, a symbol of her constant line of defense against adult corruption, represented by her step-father, who drinks heavily, constantly listens to radio mystery programs, and goes around the house naked in front of her. With such an environment, it is no wonder that Holden identifies so heavily with her.

There are four people whom Holden particularly likes, all having been involved with him in at least one extremely profound and important experience during the molding of his attitudes toward and reactions to humanity and the world. They are Allie, his younger brother who died of leukemia, James Castle, a schoolmate who committed suicide, Mr. Antolini, the only teacher he ever really admired, and his little sister Phoebe, whom he loves and who eventually proves to be his savior. Three of the four are children, and the other disillusioned him, proving once again Holden's inability to identify with the real world of adults.

To Holden, Allie is his guardian angel, probably the closest person to being a saint that Holden knows of. He was the most intelligent and the nicest member of the Caulfield family. "He never got mad at anybody."<sup>43</sup> Allie is constantly at the back of Holden's mind, if he is not thinking of him specifically. After the ordeal with the prostitute, Holden, in his depression, begins talking out

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<sup>43</sup>Salinger, The Catcher in the Rye, p. 37.

loud to his dead brother, something he often does when he is depressed. Holden harbors a guilt feeling because he once did not let Allie go bicycle riding with him and a friend, and now, as he often does, Holden says to him: "'Okay. Go home and get your bike and meet me in front of Bobby's house. Hurry up.'"<sup>44</sup> Later, in Central Park, Holden remembers it was raining on two of his family's trips to the cemetery.

It was awful. It rained on his lousy tombstone, and it rained on the grass on his stomach. . . . All the visitors that were visiting the cemetery started running like hell over to their cars. That's what nearly drove me crazy. All the visitors could get in their cars and turn on their radios and all and then go someplace nice for dinner--everybody except Allie.<sup>45</sup>

After his traumatic experience with Antolini, Holden walks up Fifth Avenue, when suddenly, at the end of each block, he senses that he will not get to the other side of the street, that he will sink into the ground and never be heard from again. Beginning to sweat heavily, he calls on his guardian angel:

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. Then it would start all over again as soon as I got to the next corner. But I kept going and all.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 91.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 141.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 178.

Allie's death was probably the most important experience Holden had in connection with his younger brother, for it can be considered his introduction to reality, to evil, as Holden sees it. His reaction to the death was an angry and bitter one: "I slept in the garage the night he died, and I broke all the goddam windows with my fist, just for the hell of it. I even tried to break all the windows on the station wagon we had that summer."<sup>47</sup> He could not, and still cannot, understand why someone so nice as Allie had to die when all the phonies and morons are still living.

Another death which contributed greatly to Holden's awakening consciousness of "evil" was James Castle's. A schoolmate of Holden's at Elkton Hills, Holden especially admired his meekness since that quality is seldom found in phonies. Castle's strength of character prevented him from taking back calling Phil Stabile conceited. Stabile and six of his friends went to Castle's room, locked the door and tried to make him rescind his insult. He refused, and they began to work him over--repulsively, according to Holden. Rather than apologize or take their abuse, he jumped out the window, to his death. Holden is appalled that the boys were only expelled from school and did not go to jail.

The person who picked up James Castle was Mr. Antolini, "about the best teacher I ever had. He was a pretty young

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<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 38.

guy, not much older than my brother D.B., and you could kid around with him without losing your respect for him."<sup>48</sup>

Holden was especially impressed with his teacher because he felt Castle's pulse, put his coat over the boy's body, not caring whether it got bloody or not, and carried him to the infirmary.

Antolini is a special someone whom Holden admires and trusts, one of the few people he feels he can turn to. Antolini even agrees with Holden about D.B.'s going to Hollywood and prostituting himself. Toward the end of the novel, after his secret visit with Phoebe at home, Holden goes to spend a few days with the Antolinis, who are happy to have him. Holden is well on his way toward his mental breakdown when he arrives. The teacher is one of the few people capable of saving Holden, if such a salvation is at all possible; and during their conversation he gives Holden some very sane advice, which Holden appears to understand and accept.<sup>49</sup> But all of the advice is negated when Holden awakes during the night to find Antolini patting him on the head. Holden immediately interprets his advisor's action as a perverted pass and hurriedly leaves, more confused and skidding even faster toward that mental ward in California.

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<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 157.

<sup>49</sup>See Chapter II, pages 39-40.



It is not the purpose of this thesis to prove either Antolini's sexual normalcy or abnormalcy. He is obviously unstable, in many ways like Seymour. Seymour desperately needed affection and needed to bestow affection, and it was his habit to pat the heads of his younger brothers and sisters, whom he loved very much. Viewed in this light, it could be that Holden has experienced his ultimate irony. If Antolini's action is not a perverted pass, it is the love and communication that Holden wants, and with someone in the adult world. But Holden's mind by now is trained to expect the worst, and the experience seems most tragic if Holden has been so repelled by "evil" that he cannot recognize love and communication from one whom he most admires.

With Antolini's seeming betrayal, there is no one left to Holden but his beloved little sister, Phoebe. Earlier, when he had sneaked into his parents' apartment, he found, for the first time, spontaneous warmth, love, and understanding. She is willing to really listen to him. When he is ready to leave, she insists that he take her Christmas money, and, according to Bowden, "the gesture of love and generosity is too much for him. (For the first time in the novel he cries, and the tears are the beginning of the loss of the stoic pride and bitterness that have been sustaining his isolation."<sup>50</sup> Bowden continues:

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<sup>50</sup>Bowden, p. 63.

The end of the novel, when Phoebe tries to insist on going west with Holden, is almost a continuation of the same scene. She meets him at the Museum, that one spot of stability in a changing world, although even that dirtied by man's writing on the wall, dragging along an old suitcase to accompany him wherever he wants to go. . . . The gesture of love is too much for him, and the novel ends with Holden sitting in the rain--the traditional suggestion of rebirth--watching her go around on the carrousel: "I felt so damn happy all of a sudden, the way old Phoebe kept going around and around. I was damn near bawling, I felt so damn happy, if you want to know the truth. I don't know why." But the reader knows why. Holden has begun to break out of the shell of his isolation; or, perhaps better, the shell has been cracked by Phoebe, aided by his almost unconscious efforts from within.<sup>51</sup>

Another interpretation is that Holden is unconsciously relinquishing his dependence on childhood. His fantasies--for instance, the "catcher" fantasy and the "deaf-mute" fantasy--have only served to keep him imprisoned in an unnatural state, in the idealistic, unreal play world of children. Perhaps his refusal to ride the carrousel with Phoebe and his assumption of a more natural, mature and protective attitude toward her (a vivid contrast to his desire to have her as a companion) indicate an unrecognized movement toward emotional maturity and stability.

Of course, there is no profound, instantaneous change in Holden.<sup>52</sup> As far as he is concerned at the end of the novel, there is no way to escape his plight. His dilemma still involves escaping the bondage of civilization while

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<sup>51</sup>Ibid.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

being morally committed to the human society which imprisons him.<sup>53</sup> Even Phoebe cannot save him from the mental breakdown that has been building in him for years, and he falls over that cliff into the California hospital's psychiatric ward.

The concluding page of the novel substantiates concretely the previous speculation concerning Holden's moving toward emotional maturity, when he admits: "About all I know is, I sort of miss everybody I told about. Even old Stradlater and Ackley, for instance. I think I even miss that goddam Maurice. It's funny. Don't ever tell anybody anything. If you do, you start missing everybody."<sup>54</sup> Holden is willing to try, to tolerate, perhaps to love. No doubt, as Bowden says, he will remain isolated in an overflowing world. He will relinquish his dream of escape and gradually feel affection for human beings at least potentially decent and communicable.<sup>55</sup> He does not know whether he will go back to school and "apply himself," but he does know that he wants to see again some of his previous acquaintances, who might even be human, and possibly, friends. His hatred seems to be gone. His present isolation is not induced by objectionable people, but by a separation

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<sup>53</sup>Ibid., pp. 54-55.

<sup>54</sup>Salinger, The Catcher in the Rye, p. 192.

<sup>55</sup>Bowden, p. 59.

from friends.<sup>56</sup> Holden, as Bowden so perceptively concludes,

. . . must live with his own isolation and defeat it on its own terms. The victory that he finally wins, the answer that he discovers for himself through the love of old Phoebe, is the answer that [Governor William] Bradford on his frontier had given Americans three hundred years before: a man cannot live within himself in contempt of the world; he must be a part of that human race to which he is by nature morally committed; a decent regard, even a potential love for others, is the unavoidable requirement for life in America--or anywhere else--if a man is to avoid the torture of isolation that American life can bring.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup>Ibid., pp. 63-64.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., p. 65.

## CHAPTER V

### FRANNY: AWARENESS AND LOVE

With Franny Glass, the youngest of the seven Irish-Jewish prodigies, J. D. Salinger seems to complete his search; he finds an answer which his overly sensitive, highly intelligent rebels against society can accept. With Franny's solution, they can build profitable relationships and become emotionally mature. The answer is love. Salinger indicates this in "Zooney" when Buddy, the narrator, says: "I say that my current offering isn't a mystical story, or a religiously mystifying story, at all. I say it's a compound, or multiple, love story, pure and complicated."<sup>1</sup>

Franny's story is carried through two works--"Franny" (1955) and "Zooney" (1957)--and at the end of the latter, she reaches, seemingly, total reconciliation with the world, avoiding, at last, the painful isolation of American life that Governor Bradford had spoken of three hundred years earlier. Zooney, her youngest brother, is her Phoebe--her savior. However, Seymour, the suicidal brother, ironically assumes an important role in her salvation; for it is his

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<sup>1</sup>Salinger, Franny and Zooney, p. 49.

"Fat Lady" concept that actually reconciles the twenty-year-old Franny to the world. Thus, she ends at opposite ends of the Glass scales to Seymour not only in age, but in resolution. And she ironically adopts the Zen concept which he could not practice: ". . . that all legitimate religious study must lead to unlearning the differences, the illusory differences, between boys and girls, animals and stones, day and night, heat and cold."<sup>2</sup>

Franny's answer comes at home in New York after a college football weekend during which the climax to her rapidly growing rebellion against existing society occurs. This crisis prompts a general renunciation of her collegiate friends and acquaintances, whom she considers phony, conforming, and shallow. She feels estranged from her Ivy League boy friend, Lane Coutelli, and everything he stands for. Aided by a mystical book (The Way of a Pilgrim) concerned with a Russian peasant who, through repeating the "Jesus Prayer" ("Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.") incessantly, achieved constant communion with God, she shuns Lane and his world and accepts the peasant's. Levine says: "Suffering from psychosomatic cramps induced by an environment she can no longer stomach, Franny rejects the comfort of a public restaurant for the awkward privacy of a lavatory, where, in a curiously fetal position, she can pray."<sup>3</sup> Like

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 67-68.

<sup>3</sup>Levine, p. 95.

Holden and Seymour, she seeks a utopia of innocence and sincerity.

At home in "Zooney," Franny (like Seymour and Holden) is trapped: she needs to escape her environment but realizes the impossibility of doing so. Zooney, Franny's flesh-and-blood savior, tells his sister that she must make a choice between becoming a nun or an actress, to be the latter having been formerly her great desire. Hers is a spiritual choice, both alternatives being redemptive.<sup>4</sup>

Franny is a misfit, but a different kind of misfit from Seymour and Holden. Her alienation seems to be completely self-imposed. Outwardly, she had appeared to most as a beautiful, talented and well-adjusted college girl, though, as Lane appreciates, "not too categorically cashmere sweater and flannel skirt."<sup>5</sup> She even uses such expressions as "marvellous" and "darling" and "lovely," words which Holden would automatically denounce as "phony." Nevertheless, inwardly, Franny is a Glass--therefore, extraordinary. She is gifted, talented, hypersensitive; and she has been greatly affected, like Zooney, by Seymour and Buddy, all of which contribute to her abnormal awareness of the "evils" in her fellow man and her consequent breakdown.

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 97.

<sup>5</sup>Salinger, Franny and Zooney, p. 11.

Franny had been, of course, the last of the seven children to appear on the "It's a Wise Child" radio program.

Buddy, speaking for Salinger, relates that

. . . all seven of the children had managed to answer . . . a prodigious number of alternately deadly-bookish and deadly-cute questions--sent in by listeners--with a freshness, an aplomb, that was considered unique in commercial radio. Public response to the children was often hot and never tepid. In general, listeners were divided into two, curiously restive camps: those who held that the Glasses were a bunch of insufferably "superior" little bastards that should have been drowned or gassed at birth, and those who held that they were bona-fide underage wits and savants, of an uncommon, if unenviable, order.<sup>6</sup>

Franny, like Zoey, had followed up her "show business" experience with an avid interest in acting, a creative field. She has performed in college and in summer stock productions, accumulating excellent reviews. It has been said that highly creative types diligently protect their individuality, that they have little use for interests accepted by the masses.<sup>7</sup> Zoey indicates his deep understanding of and empathy with his sister in this matter during an harangue to Mrs. Glass, who is considering calling in a psychiatrist for Franny:

"All right. I'm very serious now. . . . If you can't, or won't, think of Seymour, then you go right ahead and call in some ignorant psychoanalyst. . . . You just call in some analyst who's experienced in adjusting people to the joys of television, and Life magazine every Wednesday, and European travel, and the H-Bomb, and Presidential elections, and the front page of the Times, and the responsibilities of the

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., pp. 53-54.

<sup>7</sup>See Chapter II, pages 40-41.



Westport and Oyster Bay Parent-Teacher Association, and God knows what else that's gloriously normal-- you just do that, and I swear to you, in not more than a year Franny'll either be in a nut ward or she'll be wandering off into some goddam desert with a burning cross in her hands."<sup>8</sup>

Another characteristic showing Franny's giftedness is her photographic memory. The reader becomes aware of this faculty when Franny tells Zooey of her going very early one morning--after a sleepless night--to her French Literature class and, out of nothing else to do, filling the blackboard with quotations from Epictetus. And she demonstrates her extreme concern, not only for her own feelings, but also for others', by her attitude toward the writing of the quotations on the blackboard: "'But it was a childish thing to do anyway--Epictetus would have absolutely hated me for doing it--but . . .'" Franny hesitated. 'I don't know. I think I just wanted to see the name of somebody nice up on a blackboard.'<sup>9</sup> Then with Lane in the restaurant, despite her terribly disturbed condition and despite her mounting distaste for him, she continues to be concerned that she is ruining his big weekend and tries to keep herself from spoiling it. For instance, after she becomes nauseated and goes to the rest room--where she cries convulsively in a fetal position for five minutes, lovingly pressing her "pea-green clothbound

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<sup>8</sup>Salinger, Franny and Zooey, p. 108.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 145.

book" to her chest--she emerges with her hair combed and fresh makeup, approaching him in an almost flippant manner and saying she feels "marvellous."

Franny's sensitivity to the pure, the ideal and the sincere is vividly implied by Zooey to his mother in a continuation of the conversation concerning the analyst:

"For a psychoanalyst to be any good with Franny at all, he'd have to be a pretty peculiar type. . . . He'd have to believe that it was through the grace of God that he'd been inspired to study psychoanalysis in the first place. He'd have to believe that it was through the grace of God that he wasn't run over by a goddam truck before he ever even got his license to practice. He'd have to believe that it's through the grace of God that he has the native intelligence to be able to help his goddam patients at all."<sup>10</sup>

Franny wants to find humility and sincerity; but she realizes, like Holden and Seymour, that such a desire is unattainable, saying to Lane: "'I think I'm going crazy. Maybe I'm already crazy.'"<sup>11</sup> In actuality, she, like the other two, needs communication with the world; she needs those she rebels against:

"All right, Zooey. Just stop, please. Enough's enough. You're not funny. . . . In case you're interested, I'm feeling absolutely lousy. So if there's anything special you have to say to me, please hurry up and say it and leave me alone." This last, emphasized word was oddly veered away from, as if the stress on it hadn't been fully intended.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 109.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., pp. 193-194.

Nevertheless, she cannot bring herself to compromise; and she appears to be headed for some type of destruction, perhaps even one similar to her oldest brother's.

Seymour and Buddy have had a profound effect on Franny and Zoey, both favorably and unfavorably. They loved and taught their two youngest siblings, but they also tragically intensified their sensibility, their awareness of the "evils" in humanity, and, thus, had a profound bearing on their subsequent isolation and misfitness. Zoey realizes this and strikes out bitterly against his two brothers:

"I'm so sick of their names I could cut my throat."  
 . . . "This whole goddam house stinks of ghosts. I don't mind so much being haunted by a dead ghost, but I resent like hell being haunted by a half-dead one. I wish to God Buddy'd make up his mind. He does everything else Seymour ever did--or tries to. Why the hell doesn't he kill himself and be done with it?"

Mrs. Glass blinked her eyes, just once, and Zoey instantly looked away from her face. . . . "We're freaks, the two of us, Franny and I," he announced. . . . "I'm a twenty-five-year-old freak and she's a twenty-year-old freak, and both those bastards are responsible." . . . "The symptoms are a little more delayed in Franny's case than mine, but she's a freak, too, and don't you forget it. I swear to you, I could murder them both without even batting an eyelash. The great teachers. The great emancipators. My God. I can't even sit down to lunch with a man any more and hold up my end of a decent conversation. I either get so bored or so goddam preachy that if the son of a bitch had any sense, he'd break his chair over my head."<sup>13</sup>

Zoey closes his tirade with a denunciation of the Four Great Vows which the brothers had taught him and Franny. He

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., pp. 103-104.

sarcastically recites for his mother the four monkishly idealistic pledges:

"'However innumerable beings are, I vow to save them; however inexhaustible the passions are, I vow to extinguish them; however immeasurable the Dharmas are, I vow to master them; however incomparable the Buddha-truth is, I vow to attain it.'  
Yay, team. I know I can do it. Just put me in, coach."<sup>14</sup>

With such a background of idealistic, self-sacrificing religious ideology, Franny's turning to and acceptance of the meek Russian peasant in The Way of a Pilgrim during her climactic rebellion against the world seems only natural. Through him and his Jesus Prayer, she can escape both society's "evils" and her own; for she knows that she has been equally blameworthy of selfishness and smallness and feels quite guilty about her personal lapses into the mainstream of the ordinary. The peasant offers her a chance to escape self-concern and devote herself to an ideal good which could lead ultimately to undisturbed contact with God. The peasant to her is a reincarnation of her beloved St. Francis of Assisi, the meek and gentle saint who would not discriminate between man and beast. In a letter to Lane, Franny confesses that she is "constitutionally against strong, silent men."<sup>15</sup> Such an attitude, as Zooey later points out to her, ironically places her in opposition to

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., pp. 104-105.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 5.

Jesus, the savior to whom she directs her prayer. In fact, the peasant's having a withered arm heightens her association with him and removes her even further from Jesus Christ, a strong man who fought his battles boldly and openly among his fellow men.

But Franny, in her search for the ideal, is looking for a sure cure, a pat answer and thinks she may have found it in her little book, which she admits is fanatical and, therefore, useless in helping her live in the real world which she needs but cannot accept. Even explaining the prayer process to Lane, who most vividly represents to her the morally degenerate world, activates the escape mechanism; for "she was still looking abstractedly ahead of her, past his shoulder, and seemed scarcely aware of his presence."<sup>16</sup> She explains to him in revealing terms the "easy out" the prayer, which can coordinate with any of her accepted religious faiths, offers her:

"But the thing is, the marvellous thing is, when you first start doing it, you don't even have to have faith in what you're doing. I mean even if you're terribly embarrassed about the whole thing, it's perfectly all right. I mean you're not insulting anybody or anything. In other words, nobody asks you to believe a single thing when you first start out. You don't even have to think about what you're saying. . . . All you have to have in the beginning is quantity. Then, later on, it becomes quality by itself. On its own power or something. He says that any name of God--any name

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 37.

at all--has this peculiar, self-active power of its own, and it starts working after you've sort of started it up."<sup>17</sup>

What drives Franny into such an escape route is her awareness of an inherent "evil" in humanity, and to a lesser extent, in herself. She is a terribly confused, unhappy girl who thinks she needs to get away. She has a difficult time deciding whether she wants another martini: "'No. Yes. I don't know.'"<sup>18</sup> Then after further conversation with Lane, she becomes more and more frustrated and unhappy, breaking into a cold sweat immediately preceding her first trip to the rest room. She says to Lane: "'Maybe there's a trapdoor under my chair, and I'll just disappear.'"<sup>19</sup>

Franny is tired of only liking people; she wants to respect them too. And, as Maxwell Geismar says, she, in effect, ends up indicting all of Western society.<sup>20</sup> Almost in agony, she says:

"It's everybody, I mean. Everything everybody does is so--I don't know--not wrong, or even mean, or even stupid necessarily. But just so tiny and meaningless and--sad-making. And the worst part is, if you go bohemian or something crazy like that, you're conforming just as much as everybody else, only in a different way."<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., pp. 37-38.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>20</sup>Maxwell Geismar, "The Wise Child and the New Yorker School of Fiction," Salinger: A Critical and Personal Portrait, introduced and edited by Henry A. Grunwald (New York, 1962), p. 95.

<sup>21</sup>Salinger, Franny and Zooey, p. 26.

She continues: "'All I know is I'm losing my mind,' . . . 'I'm just sick of ego, ego, ego. My own and everybody else's. I'm sick of everybody that wants to get somewhere, do something distinguished and all, be somebody interesting.'"<sup>22</sup> In other words, she is sick of the trivia, the ordinary-- seemingly, the normal of everyday life.

Franny's life is, of course, centered in a college atmosphere; and naturally her collegiate associations bear the brunt of her attacks. College, in general, becomes a threat to her idealism: "'What happened was, I got the idea in my head . . . that college was just one more dopey, inane place in the world dedicated to piling up treasure on earth and everything.'"<sup>23</sup> To her, stockpiling knowledge for its own sake is worse than doing the same with money, property or culture. She is most distressed by the fact that knowledge does not lead to wisdom, that she hardly ever hears the word mentioned.

What she is familiar with are conforming, stereotyped college students who look, talk, dress and act like everybody else. Franny says:

"I know when they're going to be charming, I know when they're going to start telling you some really nasty gossip about some girl that lives in your dorm, I know when they're going to ask me what I did over the summer, I know when they're going to pull

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., pp. 29-30.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 146.

up a chair and straddle it backward and start bragging in a terribly, terribly quiet voice--or name-dropping in a terribly quiet, casual voice. There's an unwritten law that people in a certain social or financial bracket can name-drop as much as they like just as long as they say something terribly disparaging about the person as soon as they've dropped his name--that he's a bastard or a nymphomaniac or takes dope all the time, or something horrible."<sup>24</sup>

Of course, boys who meet trains looking like they have three cigarettes in each hand are in the same category.

Primarily, for Franny, this "type" means Lane Coutell, with whom she has been intimately involved for some time. For Franny, Lane becomes the chief dispenser and representative of the "evils" in man. He is selfish and egotistic; and, like the majority of mankind, he refuses to be open and sincere about his feelings: he will not be vulnerable. When he meets Franny's train, "he tried to empty his face of all expression that might quite simply, perhaps even beautifully, reveal how he felt about the arriving person."<sup>25</sup> In contrast, Buddy tells the reader that Franny does not practice such affected deceptions.

At the restaurant, Lane, being the pseudo-intellectual that he is, tells Franny about a paper on Flaubert that he had written. He received an "A" on it and is actually quite proud of it, but to affect an air of false modesty, he "admits" to Franny that he did not deserve it, and brags

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 7.



that he really "put one over" on the teacher. She sees through him and is becoming more and more repelled; but because she does not want to spoil the weekend, she unselfishly lets him go on and on about his paper, trying very hard to be interested.

Franny, however, soon becomes unrestrainable and accuses Lane of sounding like a section man--a categorically "button-down collar and striped tie" graduate student who substitutes for a regular teacher. After he criticizes an author for a while, completely ruining him for the student, he begins talking about the person he wrote his master's thesis on. In disgust, Franny says, "'I'm just so sick of pedants and conceited little tearer-downers I could scream.'"<sup>26</sup> Lane mentions Manlius and Esposito, two men on the English faculty at Franny's school, whom he admires tremendously, primarily because they are known poets. However, Franny says they are not real poets because nothing they write is beautiful.<sup>27</sup> She detests Professor Tupper, a religion teacher from Oxford who lacks enthusiasm for his subject, but is hardly short on ego. She further accuses him of going to the rest room and messing up his long white hair before coming to class, thus giving him that relaxed English look. Lane is puzzled by

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>27</sup>See Chapter III, page 58-60.

her agitation and her attitude, which appears to contradict the romantic letter he had received earlier in the week. She admits that she had to force herself to write it.

Lane's reaction is not concern for Franny, who is obviously quite upset, but a selfish hope that she will not "bitch up the whole weekend."<sup>28</sup> He feels mistreated. Franny, realizing that she is ruining his weekend, smiles pleasantly at Lane; but he, feeling hurt, is "busy affecting a brand of detachment of his own."<sup>29</sup>

Franny tries to explain to Lane what the little book means to her; but he hardly tries to hide his indifference, interrupting her with such remarks as: "'I hate to mention it, but I'm going to reek of garlic"<sup>30</sup> (a statement ironically indicative of her final reaction to him) and "'I hope to God we get time over the weekend so that you can take a quick look at this goddam paper I told you about' . . ."<sup>31</sup> When she finishes, his insensitive, sickeningly phony answer is all she can bear:

. . . "Well, it's interesting, anyway. All that stuff . . . I don't think you leave any margin for the most elementary psychology. I mean I think all those religious experiences have a very obvious psychological background--you know what I mean. . . . It's interesting, though. I mean you can't deny that." He looked over at Franny and smiled at her.

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<sup>28</sup>Salinger, Franny and Zooey, p. 16.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 35.

"Anyway. Just in case I forget to mention it. I love you. Did I get around to mentioning that?"<sup>32</sup>

At these last words, Franny immediately becomes ill again. Starting toward the restroom, she faints. When she awakens, she worries that Lane has missed the game and cocktail party. He feigns indifference but suggests a substitute: after she has rested, he will sneak up the back staircase, and they can go to bed together, which they have not done in over a month. In his crude words, it has been "'too goddam long between drinks.'"<sup>33</sup> He goes to get a cab; and Franny, lying still, begins silently repeating her Jesus Prayer. Lane, in effect, pushes Franny over Holden's cliff, falling toward a mental breakdown.

However, the "evil" in others is not the only reason for Franny's crackup. Like Seymour and Holden, she is caught in the dilemma of being aware not only of society's evils but also of her own. She realizes that her sweeping condemnations are wrong, that they repudiate the ideal Christian and Zen concepts of love, that they are, in reality, evil. But, in spite of herself, she can do nothing to change, except through an impossible attempt to escape altogether. Franny is too enmeshed in the world to take a mystical route out. Therefore, she, like the other two, is trapped in an

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 43.

agonizing, frustrating snare: she does not like the world, nor does she like herself; and she cannot escape either.

Lane is shocked when Franny tells him that she has quit the theater, which was supposedly her greatest passion. Her answer explains her tragically discriminating attitude toward both her cohorts and herself:

"It started embarrassing me. I began to feel like such a nasty little egomaniac." . . . "I don't know. It seemed like such poor taste, sort of, to want to act in the first place. I mean all the ego. And I used to hate myself so, when I was in a play, to be backstage after the play was over. All those egos running around feeling terribly charitable and warm. Kissing everybody and wearing their makeup all over the place, and then trying to be horribly natural and friendly when your friends came backstage to see you. I just hated myself. . . . And the worst part was I was usually sort of ashamed to be in the plays I was in. Especially in summer stock." She looked at Lane. "And I had good parts, so don't look at me that way. . . . It was just that I would've been ashamed if, say, anybody I respected--my brothers, for example--came and heard me deliver some of the lines I had to say."<sup>34</sup>

Franny also dislikes herself because of the constant stream of criticism erupting from her lips. She admits to Zooey that she once said out loud to herself that "If I hear just one more picky, cavilling, unconstructive word out of you, Franny Glass, you and I are finished--but finished."<sup>35</sup> She further reviles herself to Zooey for spoiling Lane's "nice," "normal," "happy" weekend because she could not suppress an opinion.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 144.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 138.

Zooney, Franny's eventual savior, is similar to his sister in many ways. He, like Franny, is quite physically attractive, his face having been "just barely saved from too-handsomeness."<sup>37</sup> And probably to an even greater extent than with Franny, with Zooney, according to Buddy, "we are dealing with the complex, the overlapping, the cloven . . ."<sup>38</sup> He is a highly successful television actor and a mathematics and Greek scholar. At the age of twelve, after a series of tests given to highly precocious children, he was found to have a vocabulary equal to Mary Baker Eddy's. He, like his brothers and sisters, is highly sensitive. Buddy says of him:

I think it just remains to be said that any one of a hundred everyday menaces--a car accident, a head cold, a lie before breakfast--could have disfigured or coarsened his bounteous good looks in a day or a second. But what was undiminishable, and, as already so flatly suggested, a joy of a kind forever, was an authentic esprit superimposed over his entire face--especially at the eyes . . .<sup>39</sup>

He is constantly faced with the same problems, dilemmas, traps that his sister is faced with. He must also continuously battle to keep himself anchored in the society around him. They have both been too much affected by the idealism and perfectionism of their older brothers to easily live in such a world. He demands and expects too much from the

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 51.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 51-52.

ordinary, comparatively well-adjusted people around him; and he is repeatedly disappointed and frustrated. His mother accuses him along with Buddy of not being able to talk to anyone he does not like. She perceptively tells him:

"'You can't live in the world with such strong likes and dislikes' . . ."40 Earlier Mrs. Glass had accused him of being unable to see beauty in anything. Zooey's retort explains not only his, but all of the misfits' difficulty in seeing beauty in real people:

"Listen, I don't care what you say about my race, creed, or religion, Fatty, but don't tell me I'm not sensitive to beauty. That's my Achilles' heel, and don't you forget it. To me, everything is beautiful. Show me a pink sunset and I'm limp, by God. Anything. 'Peter Pan.' Even before the curtain goes up at 'Peter Pan,' I'm a goddam puddle of tears."41

But such beauties are not just "anything": they are natural beauty and fantasy, truly part of God's creation, but, in actuality, separate from God's most important creation--man.

Zooey realizes that his discrimination against his fellow man is wrong, and he does not like himself for it. During his efforts at trying to cajole Franny out of her breakdown, he says to her:

"In the first place, you're way off when you start railing at things and people instead of at yourself. We both are. I do the same goddam things

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 99.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 82.

about television--I'm aware of that. But it's wrong. It's us. I keep telling you that. Why are you so damned dense about it?"<sup>42</sup>

And later, in three short words--"'Nobody's perfect, buddy.'"<sup>43</sup>--he indicates that he is winning his battle; and he is fighting with all his might to help his sister win hers. As Ihab Hassan says, he is the mediator between Franny and the teachers, Seymour and Buddy. He questions Bessie's practical wisdom, Franny's flagrant idealism and even Seymour's saintliness. He is best qualified to understand and question his sister because he is also repelled by collegiate phoniness, because he too sets himself up as a judge of man.<sup>44</sup> Thus, Zooey is equal to the task of supplying his sister with an answer, if there is one.

Zooey begins by discounting her wish to hoard spirituality, calling it just as selfish as a person's desire to accumulate material or intellectual treasure. The argument proves futile, however. Franny realizes that she is upsetting the household and that her motives for saying the prayer are just as selfish and egotistical as any materialist's, but she cannot help herself. Zooey's arguments that the world does have nice things and that no one is perfect fail her also, as does his religious anecdote concerning Walt and Waker, the twins:

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 139.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 158.

<sup>44</sup>Hassan, "The Rare Quixotic Gesture," pp. 157.

"Walt once told Waker that everybody in the family must have piled up one helluva lot of bad karma in his past incarnations. He had a theory, Walt, that the religious life, and all the agony that goes with it, is just something God sicks on people who have the gall to accuse Him of having created an ugly world."<sup>45</sup>

Zoey then becomes stern, an equally futile move. He tells her that he does not like her withdrawal at all, even though he knows that she is not acting and that she is not after sympathy. Her hysteria is unattractive; it is difficult for their parents; and she is quickly gaining an air of piety, which no prayer excuses. Then he tells her that he primarily agrees with her attack on higher education. However, he objects--and as he says, probably Buddy and Seymour would also--to her loathing not only what the pedants and phonies represent, but them personally. He advises her, uselessly: "'If you're going to go to work against the System, just do your shooting like a nice, intelligent girl--because the enemy's there, and not because you don't like his hairdo or his goddam necktie.'"<sup>46</sup>

In spite of the preceding failures, Zoey begins to dwell on the religious question, which is, of course, the focal point of Franny's collapse. He accuses her of being "constitutionally unable to love or understand any son of God who says a human being, any human being--even a Professor

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<sup>45</sup>Salinger, Franny and Zoey, p. 154.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., pp. 162-163.



Tupper--is more valuable to God than any soft, helpless Easter chick.'"47 He says she is trying to convert Jesus into a more lovable St. Francis type, which is one of the reasons for her breakdown; and it is particularly why she chose to have it at home.

"This place is made to order for you. The service is good, and there's plenty of hot and cold running ghosts. What could be more convenient? You can say your prayer here and roll Jesus and St. Francis and Seymour and Heidi's grandfather all in one."48

He then calls her thinking "tenth-rate," her prayer "tenth-rate religion," and even her breakdown "tenth-rate."49

He argues that it is Christ's duty, not hers, to judge what is ego and what is not. Besides, what is really ego keeps people doing what they are meant to do. He says that "'half the nastiness in the world is stirred up by people who aren't using their true egos.'"50 Zooey believes that Franny is substituting the prayer for her real duty in life, and he cannot comprehend how she can pray to someone she does not understand. Nor can he see why anyone would not want Jesus just as he is. Jesus is the only one who realized that separation from God is impossible, that all of us are "'carrying the Kingdom of Heaven around with us, inside, where we're all too goddam stupid and sentimental and

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<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 165.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 166.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., pp. 167-168.

unimaginative to look."<sup>51</sup> Zoey's closing oration in defense of Christ and reconciliation with the world He saved is a logical, powerful one; but Franny remains seemingly untouched.

"If God had wanted somebody with St. Francis's consistently winning personality for the job in the New Testament, he'd've picked him. . . . As it was, he picked the best, the smartest, the most loving, the least sentimental, the most unimitative master he could possibly have picked. And when you miss seeing that, I swear to you, you're missing the whole point of the Jesus Prayer. The Jesus Prayer has one aim, and one aim only. To endow the person who says it with Christ-Consciousness. Not to set up some little cozy, holier-than-thou trysting place with some sticky, adorable divine personage who'll take you in his arms and relieve you of all your duties and make all your nasty Weltschmerzen and Professor Tuppers go away and never come back. And by God, if you have intelligence enough to see that--and you do--and yet you refuse to see it, then you're misusing the prayer, you're using it to ask for a world full of dolls and saints and no Professor Tuppers."<sup>52</sup>

Zoey relents, for his anguished sister is now sobbing. Realizing that he has so far failed, he apologizes to her and leaves the room. However, refusing to give up, Zoey goes into Seymour's and Buddy's old room and, as if divinely inspired, decides to call Franny and impersonate Buddy. For a while, she is fooled; and during this time she is allowed to expurgate herself of the hostility she feels toward Zoey. But then he gives himself away with a typical Zoey statement.

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<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 171.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., pp. 171-172.

Nevertheless, she does not hang up. She has been purged of her animosity, and it is as if she wants him to try again. She admits to him, and probably to herself, that she does not want to be alone any longer.<sup>53</sup> So she listens, and this time the results are rewarding.

Zooney explains to her that she has failed to recognize the religious action going on around her in the house. If she cannot even recognize Bessie's chicken soup, which Franny has repeatedly turned down, as "consecrated," she cannot possibly identify a true holy man who can teach her to say the prayer properly.

He tells her that she is an actress and, therefore, supposed to act.

"You can't just walk out on the results of your own hankering. Cause and effect, buddy, cause and effect. The only thing you can do now, the only religious thing you can do, is act. Act for God, if you want to--be God's actress, if you want to. What could be prettier? You can at least try to, if you want to--there's nothing wrong in trying."<sup>54</sup>

Her job, Zooney says, is to try to reach perfection of some kind on her own terms. She has no right to concern herself with audience stupidity, no matter how depressing it may be.

Franny is becoming increasingly aware of and receptive to the message her brother is trying to communicate to her. The clinching argument comes with Zooney's explanation of

<sup>53</sup>See this chapter, page 103.

<sup>54</sup>Salinger, Franny and Zooney, p. 189.

Seymour's Fat Lady. One day, as Zoocy was about to leave for the radio studio, his oldest brother told him to shine his shoes. Zoocy refused, saying he was not going to shine his shoes for morons like the audience, the announcer and the sponsors. Seymour told him to shine them for the Fat Lady. He did, and continued to do so from then on, in spite of his not knowing who she was. Nevertheless, he did formulate in his mind a very clear picture of her:

"I had her sitting on this porch all day, swatting flies, with her radio going full-blast from morning till night. I figured the heat was terrible, and she probably had cancer, and--I don't know. Anyway, it seemed goddam clear why Seymour wanted me to shine my shoes when I went on the air. It made sense."<sup>55</sup>

Franny is standing now, extremely excited; for she remembers that Seymour once told her to be funny for the Fat Lady and that her mental picture of the Lady was almost exactly like Zoocy's. He senses victory now and swiftly applies the clincher:

"But I'll tell you a terrible secret--Are you listening to me? There isn't anyone out there who isn't Seymour's Fat Lady. That includes your Professor Tupper, buddy. And all his goddam cousins by the dozens. There isn't anyone anywhere that isn't Seymour's Fat Lady. Don't you know that? Don't you know that goddam secret yet? And don't you know--listen to me, now--don't you know who that Fat Lady really is? . . . Ah, buddy. Ah, buddy. It's Christ Himself. Christ Himself, buddy."<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup>Ibid., pp. 200-201.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., pp. 201-202.

An enveloping sense of peace and wisdom comes over Franny, and she crawls into bed and smiles at the ceiling for several minutes before falling into a "deep, dreamless sleep."<sup>57</sup>

"Zooney" must be considered J. D. Salinger's ultimate message, the conclusion to his search. The message is an all-accepting, indiscriminate love, a love and a lesson which Jesus gave to the world when He sacrificed His life for all mankind. Franny finally realizes that to love Christ she must necessarily love and accept all of His human brothers and sisters. Thus, it might be said that Seymour and Buddy are, in the end, victorious. Zooney borrows the advice given to him by Buddy--"Act, Zachary Martin Glass, when and where you want to, since you feel you must, but do it with all your might."<sup>58</sup>--and gives it to Franny; then Zooney takes Seymour's Fat Lady, who could not save Seymour despite his belief in her truth, and secures Franny's salvation, essentially a familial--a Glass club--effort.

"Zooney," according to Ihab Hassan,

. . . is high praise of life. It is the sound of humility, calling us to this world. The vulgarian and the outsider are reconciled, not in the momentary flash of a quixotic gesture, nor even in the constancy of love. . . . We cannot but feel that in this novelette Salinger has come close to realizing the full contradictions of his vision.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup>Ibid., p. 202.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., p. 68.

<sup>59</sup>Hassan, "The Rare Quixotic Gesture," p. 158.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION

As has been shown in the preceding chapters, J. D. Salinger's protagonists--Seymour, Holden, Franny, Zooey--are highly gifted, overly sensitive beings. Their intelligence and sensitivity place them above the masses both in intellect and in moral awareness, but these qualities also distort their vision. They become idealistic and expect too much from their fellow man. As a result they are continually disappointed and offended.) They become deeply conscious of what they consider to be an ingrained "evil" in ordinary humanity; and they are finally separated altogether from the masses, thus, from the real world. (Their frustration is intensified by an equal awareness of their own wrongs, for they know they should not judge and condemn their fellow man. But they cannot help themselves. The result is that these highly talented people who could contribute a great deal to mankind are rendered ineffective through emotional immaturity.)

Emotionally mature, gifted individuals are capable of satisfactory relationships with persons on all intellectual

levels.<sup>1</sup> However, at least before the conclusions to their searches, Salinger's gifted characters are not. They are extremely aware of man's shortcomings, and they care enough to put themselves through agony and turmoil to find an answer. Such concern further separates them, for most people are either indifferent to or unaware of human failure. The masses are too deeply involved in the "evils" to care about or recognize the shallowness of their lives and their attitudes about life. All of Salinger's heroes in some way escape or try to escape this real world they are so appalled by. Ihab Hassan believes that such attempts are justified criticisms of American reality, which needs to be remolded. A retreat to a child's world or an ideal world, he feels, is "an affirmation of values which, for better or worse, we still cherish."<sup>2</sup> However, Salinger's characters care too much; they are unbalanced; their effectiveness and happiness are destroyed by discrimination.

The misfits' beginnings are more or less the same. They have comparable intellectual equipment. All are aware of the "evils" in man, and they become isolated, resulting in mental breakdowns. (Only through their respective conclusions do the differences become obvious; and these resolutions indicate that J. D. Salinger has gone through

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<sup>1</sup>See Chapter II, page 35.

<sup>2</sup>Hassan, "The Rare Quixotic Gesture," p. 139.

a maturation process between 1948 ("A Perfect Day for Bananafish") and 1959 ("Seymour: An Introduction"). "Bananafish," the story containing Seymour's suicide, seems to have been written by a person much like its hero, a young, rebellious, uncompromising idealist. The works since then-- The Catcher in the Rye, "Franny," "Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters," "Zooney" and "Seymour: An Introduction"-- indicate that a compromise, a reconciliation with the world, gradually has taken place. The emotionally immature, suicidal personality of 1948 (Seymour) evolved by degrees into the reconciled, loving individual of 1957 (Franny).

However, even Seymour, though he is dead, has not stopped evolving. In 1955 "Carpenters" did nothing to change the dead brother's image as an emotionally unbalanced, hypersensitive individual who could not reconcile his idealism with the world's shortcomings. But in 1959 ("Seymour: An Introduction"), the dead brother is pictured as saintly, if not as a saint. Buddy, Salinger's spokesman, refuses to say whether his brother is a saint or not, which suggests that Salinger cannot make up his mind. Such indecision surely indicates that J. D. Salinger's major literary concern at the present is Seymour; and the length of time since the author's last published work could mean that he is in a dreadful quandary, a constant debate with himself over Seymour's sainthood and suicide.



The answer would seem to be that Seymour is not a saint, but an admirable, good person. He was a product of an extraordinary environment and a vast array of highly developed and overly sensitized personal characteristics, a combination which produced an individual wholly unsuited to living in such an imperfect world. He was aware not only of the ordinary individual's shortcomings, but of his own. The answer he proposed--a general acceptance of humanity through his "Fat Lady" concept--did not work for him. And after numerous, failing attempts to communicate with his fellow man, especially one last, actually desperate, attempt (his marriage to the very ordinary Muriel Fedder), he realized the futility of prolonging the inevitable.

It seems incongruous that a saint could kill himself, for such an action indicates a rejection not only of self, but of mankind in general. A man who is canonized is so rewarded for his good works performed as a dedicated, loving servant to his fellow man. A saint's love should not be a totally abstract love; he should also be able to communicate such devotion, and Seymour could not. Therefore, it would appear that Salinger, to preserve the reality of the Glasses and to resolve his problem as an author, must remove some of Seymour's holiness by giving him some new flesh. As Martin Green says, the problem with Seymour now is that he demands too much undeserved reverence.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Green, p. 87.

Holden Caulfield, who elicits admiration, but no reverence, represents what might be called the middle step in Salinger's maturation process. When Holden admits at the conclusion of the novel that he misses such former spiritual degenerates as Stradlater, Ackley and even Maurice, he indicates a willingness to try to accept the ordinary person's faults. There is hope for him in that he can at least tolerate his fellow man.

Then, in 1957, the cycle was completed. Franny finds her answer through Zooey's interpretation of Seymour's Fat Lady, and the bonds of an exclusive, familial love are broken. The answer is a Christ-like, sweeping acceptance and love of mankind. Franny is satisfied. She is now aware of the good, not just the "evil." She can enter the real world and be effective. As Michael Walzer believes, she can accept worldliness without being worldly herself,<sup>4</sup> which is a sign of emotional maturity.<sup>5</sup> She knows that Jesus Christ died to save all men, all the "Fat Ladies" rocking on the porch swatting flies. St. Francis and nuns, children and Central Park ducks and Easter chicks--the misfits' representatives of that holy innocence and sincerity they are seeking--are viewed, through Franny's resolution, in the proper perspective. As Hassan says, Salinger finally realizes that

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<sup>4</sup>Walzer, p. 156.

<sup>5</sup>See Chapter II, page 35.

"no man can give an object more tenderness than God accords to it."<sup>6</sup>

Salinger goes beyond those writers who take the easy way out and do nothing but hate and ridicule the "Fat Lady." Salinger penetrates the barriers which prevent communication--the ones so often raged against--and explicitly defines the Fat Lady for his readers. "That is what his search has given us already, and, as Mr. Antolini explained the possibilities of such a search to Holden Caulfield, 'it isn't education. It's history. It's poetry.' It is the history of human trouble and the poetry of love."<sup>7</sup>

Salinger's story is the story of an evolution by his extraordinarily aware characters of a "pure and complicated" power to love, which can best be realized through complex personal relations. Because of his final awareness, Salinger unconsciously involves himself in one of the primary traditions of American literature--"the effort to define The Good American."<sup>8</sup>

Outwardly, this tradition seems contradictory, for it demands a search for individuality while also demanding a conformity to the attitudes and social mores of the majority. However, the demands, in actuality, are compatible. The

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<sup>6</sup>Hassan, "The Rare Quixotic Gesture," p. 163.

<sup>7</sup>Wakefield, p. 191.

<sup>8</sup>Mizener, pp. 30-31.

highly perceptive "Good American" is well aware of the importance of personal experience, yet he knows that an isolated man is lost and that the only people he has to love are the American people, to whom he is irrevocably committed through an extended involvement.<sup>9</sup> Zooey reveals himself as "The Good American" when he explains to Franny his attitude toward going to France and making a movie:

"It is not exciting. That's exactly the point. I'd enjoy doing it, yes. God, yes. But I'd hate like hell to leave New York. If you must know, I hate any kind of so-called creative type who gets on any kind of ship. I don't give a goddam what his reasons are. I was born here. I went to school here, I've been run over here--twice, and on the same damn street. I have no business acting in Europe, for God's sake."<sup>10</sup>

"The Good American" meanders back and forth between the ordinary world and his own extraordinary world, happy with and accepting both. Thus, the Glasses stand, in the end, with their creator, with many Americans, in the middle of the dilemma just spoken of. "Like Thoreau and Henry Adams, Huck Finn and Ike McCaslin, Ishmael and Jay Gatsby, the Glass children are well aware of where they stand-- committed, involved, torn."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>10</sup>Salinger, Franny and Zooey, p. 137.

<sup>11</sup>Mizener, p. 31.

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