LOVE AND DEATH IN THE FICTION OF J. D. SALINGER

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LOVE AND DEATH IN THE FICTION OF J. D. SALINGER

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of the
North Texas State University in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

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Denton, Texas

August, 1962

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In Love and Death in the American Novel, Leslie Fiedler makes this critical comment on the propensities of American writers:

> . . . . Our great novelists, though experts on indignity and assault, on loneliness and terror, tend to avoid treating the passionate encounter of a man and a woman, which we expect at the center of a novel. Indeed, they rather shy away from permitting in their fictions the presence of any full-fledged, mature women, giving us instead monsters of virtue or bitchery, symbols of the rejection or fear of sexuality.[1]

Fiedler goes on to say that the American novelist, because of his "rejection or fear of sexuality," fails to develop and that "in a compulsive way he returns to a limited world of experience, usually associated with his childhood, writing the same book over and over again until he lapses into silence or self-parody."

This criterion for the evaluation of artistic accomplishment is applied specifically to J. D. Salinger in a later portion of Fiedler's book. According to Fiedler, Holden Caulfield, hero of The Catcher in the Rye, is, like Huck Finn, one of the "Good Bad Boys" of American

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[1]Leslie Fiedler, Love and Death in the American Novel (New York, 1960), p. xix.

literature; he is the fictional embodiment of the American novelist's naive and juvenile desire to return to an earlier state of innocence, to retreat from a world that requires an acceptance of human weaknesses and a compromise of individual moral values if one is to be mature and socially adjusted. This retreat-from-the-world theme is prevalent in most of Salinger's fiction, and it is, Fiedler says, a sign of weakness and immaturity.[2]

And Fiedler is not alone in his critical estimate of Salinger. In American Moderns Maxwell Geismar decries Salinger's limited scope of subject matter.[3] Alfred Kazin says that Salinger's characters are "tied round and round with veils of self-love in a culture which they--and Salinger--just despise."[4] Critics, George Steiner writes, should not regard the Glass children as "the house of Atreus reborn" because these intelligent youths are, at best, maladjusted and lacking maturity.[5] Equivalent comments are offered by Michael Walzer in his less-than-favorable judgments on the lack of adult outlook in

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[2] Ibid., p. 270.

[3] Maxwell Geismar, "J. D. Salinger: The Wise Child and The New Yorker School of Fiction," American Moderns (New York, 1958), pp. 195-209.

[4] Alfred Kazin, "J. D. Salinger: Everybody's Favorite," Atlantic, CCVIII (August, 1961), 30.

[5] George Steiner, "The Salinger Industry," Nation, CLXXXIX (November 14, 1959), 363.

Salinger's work.[6] These men, and a few others less prominent, represent a conspicuous minority among the critics of Salinger, but it is their patronizing attitudes which have in part prompted the counter-direction of the present study toward developing a cogent statement of the more popular opposing view.

It is not the purpose of this thesis, however, to deprecate the opinions of such prominent critics as Steiner, Kazin, and Fiedler, nor would it be pertinent here to argue the dubious validity of Fiedler's assertion that the passionate encounter of a man with a woman is what is expected at the center of any novel that aspires to greatness. In aligning itself with the general consensus of favorable critical opinion, this thesis proposes an alternate and a more accurate interpretation of Salinger's work.

It is difficult to present a thoroughly considered interpretation of an author's work without relating his life to his fiction, but information concerning the personal life of Jerome David Salinger is, in the strictest sense, minimal. Yet since he did not spring fully-developed from the forehead of Mark Twain, the Zeus of American literature and doubtless a great influence on

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[6]Michael Walzer, "In Place of a Hero," Dissent, VII (Spring, 1960), 156-162.

Salinger, an adumbrated sketch of what is known about him may suggest certain environmental forces which shaped his personality and literary development and provided sources for some of his fictional characters.

Salinger was born in 1919 in New York City to a Jewish father and a Scotch-Irish Christian mother. In Salinger's stories of the Glass family (often considered autobiographical) Les Glass, the father of the seven Glass children, is Jewish, and his wife, Bessie, is Irish-Catholic. Both are ex-vaudevillians and live in New York City. Salinger's father is a prosperous importer of hams and cheeses, and there is no evidence that he or his wife was ever connected with show business. Salinger was a solemn, polite child who liked to take long walks by himself. He has only one sister, Doris, and no brothers.[7] Thus the Glass family, which he has made famous, is pretty largely a product of his imagination.

In public school Salinger was a tall, skinny boy of average intelligence who made mostly B's and was voted "the most popular actor of 1930." In Salinger's fiction, both Franny and Zooey have exceptional histrionic ability. Like Holden Caulfield, Salinger flunked out of preparatory school (McBurney) when he was thirteen. When he was

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[7]"Sonny: An Introduction" (author not given), Time, LXXVIII (September 15, 1961), 84-90. All the following biographical information is from this source.

fifteen, he was sent to Valley Forge Military Academy, probably a model for the Pencey Prep of Catcher in the Rye. Here he practiced only accepted forms of nonconformity and was awarded a diploma in 1936. It was here, too, that Salinger, who was literary editor of the school yearbook, began to write short stories.

In 1937, after he had spent some unproductive weeks at New York University, his father tried unsuccessfully to apprentice him to the Polish ham business in Vienna. Salinger returned to the states and tried college again for half a semester, but quit, as he himself said, "like a quitter." Later he made one last attempt to become institutionally educated at Columbia, where he signed up for a short-story course given by Whit Burnett, whose Story magazine was responsible for Salinger's first published short story, "The Young Folks." In 1942 Salinger was drafted into the Army.

By 1944 he was stationed in Tiverton, Devonshire, training with a small counterintelligence detachment of the Army's Fourth Infantry Division--a situation paralleling that of Sergeant X, the tormented hero of "For Esme--with Love and Squalor." Salinger, like Sergeant X, passed the time by listening to choir practice at a Methodist church in Tiverton. He continued to write whenever he had the opportunity. On June sixth he landed with

the Fourth in Normandy and stayed with the division through the Battle of the Bulge. He was an aloof, solitary soldier whose job was to discover Gestapo agents by interviewing French civilians and captured Germans--again similar to Sergeant X. In France Salinger had an interview with Ernest Hemingway, who was then a war correspondent. Hemingway read Salinger's work and remarked, "Jesus, he has a helluva talent";[8] then, possibly as a gesture of appreciation for Salinger's art, he took out his Luger and shot the head off a chicken. Corporal Clay, in "For Esme--with Love and Squalor," performs a comparable action when he shoots an innocuous cat off the hood of his jeep.

When Salinger was discharged in 1946 and returned to New York, he was finished not only with soldiering but also with a brief, unsuccessful marriage to a European woman physician. In several of his stories, unsuccessful marriages play a prominent role (e.g., "Elaine," "Both Parties Concerned," "The Inverted Forest," "A Perfect Day for Bananafish," "Uncle Wiggily in Connecticut," and "Pretty Mouth and Green My Eyes"). Salinger then went through a period of gregariousness in Greenwich Village, where he studied Zen Buddhism and was considered by his friends a gentle and humorous character. He became

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[8] Ibid., p. 88.

absorbed in his writing and moved to Tarrytown and then to Westport; but, weary of Bohemians and "arty" atmosphere, he retreated to a secluded cottage in the hills of Cornish, New Hampshire. Here, in 1955, he brought his new bride, Claire Douglas, an English-born Radcliffe student. She and Salinger now have a son, Matthew, one and a half, and a daughter, Peggy, a precociously bright five-year-old. Apparently Salinger's social needs are met by his family, because he concerns himself now wholly with them and his writing; he is seen away from home only when he picks up supplies or occasionally takes his family out for dinner at a nearby restaurant. This is essentially all the biographical information available on Salinger, and, beyond the few parallels already cited, any attempt to find autobiographical elements in his fiction is pure guesswork.

Over a period of some twenty-two years, Salinger has written a nonprolific total of one novel (The Catcher in the Rye), two short novels (Franny and Zooey), and thirty-one short stories (nine of which were collected in one volume entitled Nine Stories). His style is certainly reminiscent of Mark Twain's style, and there are in his fiction vague likenesses to the work of other writers, notably F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ring Lardner, and James Thurber; but he has a unique quality that clearly

distinguishes him from any particular literary model, and his originality has evoked generally favorable response from his readers.

His stories, like many modern short stories, seem almost plotless. He is mainly interested in character revelation, and he reveals his people through the conventional devices of narrative, dramatic action, and dialogue. Echoing the voices of the people with whom Salinger himself grew up, his characters speak with stunning exactness the sophisticated patois of the urban New Yorker, in what Frank Kermode calls "the Homeric-Runyon tradition."[9] Salinger is motivated by an idealistic spirit of nationalism and brotherly love to expose his country's inadequacies--shortcomings which are especially unfortunate in the light of the nation's infinite potentialities; and he intends, through his art, to show the rectifying power of love in the individual's relation to his world. The individual, the world, and love are the three central elements in almost all of Salinger's fiction, and it is with explaining his concept of love that this study is concerned.

Chapter II will present the general situation as Salinger sees it: a shallow society lacking genuine

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[9]Frank Kermode, "Fit Audience," The Spectator, CC (May 30, 1958), 705.

concern for edifying human relationships and missing meaningful direction toward happiness in its workaday world and its cultural activities--all a direct or indirect result of an absence of love. Chapter III will examine what effect the absence of love has on the sensitive, reflective individual, and how he is to reconcile himself, through love, to an imperfect universe. Chapter IV will discuss death and its relation to the functioning of love. The concluding chapter will attempt to evaluate the literary position of Salinger at the present time with regard to the ideas advanced in this thesis and will speculate upon the direction his work may take in the future.

CHAPTER II

A SOCIETY LACKING LOVE

In Sickler's, an esoteric restaurant catering to snail eaters, the emotionally disturbed Franny Glass tries to explain to Lane Coutell, her egotistical, intellectually smug companion, the reasons for her distraught condition:

> It's <u>everybody</u>, I mean. Everything everybody does is so--I don't know--not <u>wrong</u>, or even mean, or even stupid necessarily. But just so tiny and meaningless and--sad-making.[1]

This passage is a general statement of what Salinger feels about the condition of society--especially American society--and he offers extensive documentation of the triviality, the vacuity, the nondirection (or misdirection) of the various aspects of American culture. Education, entertainment, religion, sexual attitudes, the arts, and social intercourse in general--all are scrutinized by Salinger's discerning eye, and all are found to be lacking love--that is, lacking human warmth, sincerity, genuine joy, morality, and soul-edifying design. And though Salinger's quest for love has had some disappointing

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[1] J. D. Salinger, <u>Franny and Zooey</u> (Boston, 1955), p. 26.

results, it is a necessary search, as Dan Wakefield has ably pointed out:

> . . . [Salinger] speaks, surely, 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. There is the need for such a search in any time, and certainly in our time. The need has not changed--and, if anything, has become more acute--since the young writers of the twenties discovered that they were "lost" in a time when, as Fitzgerald put it, all wars were fought, all gods were dead. More wars have been fought, but they have become increasingly depersonalized wars, and the next one that threatens offers the ultimate depersonalization. There have been no new gods, and the old ones have sunk continually deeper in their graves. The inheritors of the "lost" tradition have only produced variations on the theme of being lost, and in attitudes described by the adjectives "beat" and "silent" they have sunk deeper into that state, losing interest even in the possibilities of a search to be "found."[2]

Salinger's fiction is a search to be "found," and he begins the search by ascertaining wherein society is "lost." This chapter reports Salinger's findings on the "lost" condition of the modern world.

Since many of Salinger's stories involve academic situations, education is quite obviously one of his major concerns. Seymour Glass, before he committed suicide, held a Doctor of Philosophy degree and was a university English professor. Buddy Glass, Seymour's brother, is a writer and teaches creative writing in a girls' junior

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[2]Dan Wakefield, "Salinger and the Search for Love," New World Writing, XIV (December, 1958), 71.

college. DeDaumier-Smith was first a student in France and then an instructor in a correspondence art school in Canada. Franny Glass is a university student greatly disappointed over the incompetence she encounters at that level of learning. At the preparatory school level is Holden Caulfield, and at the elementary age is Teddy McArdle, the precocious philosopher of ten. All of these characters furnish some comment upon the educational problems of today.

Teddy McArdle, the hero of the story which bears his name, gives some indication of a basic weakness in education when he is asked by a professional educator what he would do to improve the education of young children:

> . . . I think I'd first just assemble all the children together and . . . try to show them how to find out who they <u>are</u>, not just what their names are and things like that. . . . If their parents just told them an elephant's big, I'd make them empty <u>that</u> out. An elephant's only big when it's next to something else--a dog or a lady, for example. . . . I wouldn't even tell them grass is green. Colors are only names. I mean if you tell them grass is green, it makes them start expecting the grass to look a certain way--your way--instead of some other way that may be just as good, and maybe much better. . . .
> . . . . Besides, if they wanted to learn all that other stuff--names and colors and things--they could do it, if they felt like it, later on when they were older.[3]

Teddy is a young mystic, and his attitude is, of course, an extreme one; but there is an implied truth in his

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[3]J. D. Salinger, "Teddy," <u>Nine Stories</u> (New York, 1948), pp. 142-143.

advice that cannot be ignored. The education of today has as its goal not the acquisition of wisdom, but the accumulation of inert facts, the retention of static knowledge without consideration for its application outside the restricted world of the textbook and the periodic test. Educational emphasis is placed on turning out "good citizens," whose mediocrity and conformity will be nourished by the spicy, mendacious hogwash of avaricious advertisers flushing their produce through the video tube. Salinger presents the most deplorable aspects of education through the experiences of Holden Caulfield and Franny Glass.

Early in The Catcher in the Rye Holden tells the reader about Pencey Prep, the boys' preparatory school out of which he has just flunked:

> Pencey Prep is this school that's in Agerstown, Pennsylvania. You probably heard of it. You've probably seen the ads, anyway. They advertise in about a thousand magazines, always showing some hot-shot guy on a horse jumping over a fence. Like as if all you ever did at Pencey was play polo all the time. I never even once saw a horse anywhere near the place. And underneath the guy on the horse's picture, it always says: "Since 1888 we have been molding boys into splendid, clear-thinking young men." Strictly for the birds. They don't do any damn more molding at Pencey than they do at any other school. And I didn't know anybody there that was splendid and clear-thinking and all. Maybe two guys. If that many. And they probably came to Pencey that way.[4]

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[4]J. D. Salinger, The Catcher in the Rye (New York, 1951), p. 6.

Holden did not encounter any "clear-thinking" students at Pencey Prep, and the only "splendid" boy he had met in his schooling was James Castle, a bashful, skinny boy at the Elkton Hills school, who had chosen to kill himself rather than abandon his convictions in the face of his fellow-students' animosities. Holden's roommate at Pencey was Ward Stradlater, a narcissistic Don Juan, who boasted of seducing Jane Gallagher, the one girl whom Holden felt a strong affinity for, and in the defense of whose honor Holden received a bloody nose. Robert Ackley, Holden's suitemate, was an unhygienic boor, and Holden was repulsed by his personal habits and social antagonism. After Holden left Pencey, he poured forth his impressions of a boys' school in a flood of disgust to Sally Hayes during his date with her at the Radio City skating rink:

> "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 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. . . ."[5]

This general lack of sympathy and consideration among students is not the only barrier to education: teachers

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[5] Ibid., p. 119.

have failed to establish and maintain the respect of students; consequently, the teaching of youthful scholars by example, a method vital to the inspiring of young minds, has become almost nonexistent. Holden relates an incident of such academic incompetence to his history teacher, Mr. Spencer, one of the sincerely interested teachers:

> . . . . One of the biggest reasons I left Elkton Hills was because I was surrounded by phonies. That's all. They were coming in the goddam window. For instance, they had this headmaster, Mr. Haas, that was the phoniest bastard I ever met in my life. Ten times worse than old Thurmer. On Sundays, for instance, old Haas went around shaking hands with everybody's parents when they drove up to school. He'd be charming as hell and all. Except if some boy had little old funny-looking parents. You should've seen the way he did with my room-mate's parents. I mean if a boy's mother was sort of fat or corny-looking or something, and if somebody's father was one of those guys that wear those suits with very big shoulders and corny black-and-white shoes, then old Haas would just shake hands with them and give them a phony smile and he'd go talk, for maybe a half an hour with somebody else's parents. I can't stand that stuff. It drives me crazy. . . . I hated that goddam Elkton Hills.[6]

The occasion for this outburst of emotion is Holden's farewell visit to Mr. Spencer's home. Mr. Spencer genuinely wants to help Holden, but Holden is distracted by the old man's debility and is somewhat alienated by his well intended admonitions. Perhaps student and teacher are too far removed from each other in time and position,

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[6] Ibid., p. 16.

but whatever the cause, communication between them fails, and Mr. Spencer is unable to help Holden.

Mr. Antolini, who had been Holden's English teacher at the Elkton Hills school, also fails to help Holden adjust, but the cause of his failure is much different from the cause of Mr. Spencer's failure. Mr. Antolini knows, as does Salinger, that the world is not all black and white; there is a great deal of gray. He wisely advises Holden of this condition, quoting the psychoanalyst Wilhelm Stekel: "'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.'"[7] But the wisdom in the words of Mr. Antolini is lost on Holden because he interprets his teacher's later gesture of love (a patting on the head) as a homosexual advance. Whether Mr. Antolini's patting Holden on the head is homosexual or not, it is still an act of love and does not invalidate the wisdom of his advice. But Holden considers it perversion, and being suspicious of perversion, is unable to accept human weakness along with human virtue. This inability marks his adolescence and is at the core of his problem. The uncompromising idealism of Holden's adolescence is what Salinger uses to emphasize his case against the "lost" condition of popular culture. The

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[7] Ibid., p. 170.

views of Holden are the views of Salinger, but exaggerated and writ large, as it were, to provide the reader with clear vision for a careful analysis of the illnesses which afflict society.

Beyond preparatory school, the university level of education is the object of some scorn by Franny Glass. She is made furious by what she calls "section men," specialized graduate students who are "so brilliant they can hardly open their mouths" and "if you get into an argument with them, all they do is get this terribly benign expression on their [faces]."[8] These are the holier-than-thou intellects who are not interested in teaching, but only in parading their egos in front of the--they hope--awe-stricken students. Franny is also irritated by Professor Tupper, a visiting professor from Oxford who conducts a religious seminar that Franny is taking. She describes him as "a terribly sad old self-satisfied phony with wild and woolly hair," which Franny suspects him of mussing up deliberately in the men's room before coming to class. He is a man with no enthusiasm for his subject and whose only thrill is pedantically correcting students "when they say something's Sanskrit when it's really Pali."[9]

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[8]Salinger, Franny and Zooey, p. 15.

[9]Ibid., p. 127.

The reasons for the existence of such lamentable conditions in the educational system can be reduced to the absence of love in its broadest sense. The students lack genuine love for one another and inquisitive love for knowledge. The teachers lack love for their subjects, for their students, and for their professions. There are, of course, admirable exceptions, and Salinger is by no means blind to them, but he feels that the general quality of education can undergo considerable improvement.

Salinger sees a great deal of room for improvement, also, in the quality of mass-media entertainment, typified in The Catcher in the Rye and Franny and Zooey by movies, radio, and television. "Thematically," Bernard Oldsey says of The Catcher in the Rye, "the novel is intent on exposing the phoniness of life in these United States, the tawdriness of a Barnum-and-Bailey world remade by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer."[10] Early in the novel Holden Caulfield indicates his disapproval of the California film industry by his great concern over what is happening to his older brother, D. B., in Hollywood. As a creative writer who had written what Holden termed a "terrific book of short stories," D. B. was Holden's idol. But he had belittled himself in Holden's sight by becoming a Hollywood writer,

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[10]Bernard S. Oldsey, "The Movies in the Rye," College English, XXIII (December, 1961), 210.

a man concerned with composing sentimental or sensational untruths for public consumption. Holden says bluntly of him: "'Now he's out in Hollywood, D. B., being a prostitute.'"[11]

Lillian Simmons and Sunny, the young whore, are two other victims of Hollywood's attraction. Lillian, one of D. B.'s old girl friends, becomes almost ecstatic when Holden informs her that D. B. is a Hollywood writer. She reacts as though D. B. had achieved the supreme human accomplishment, and Holden is disgusted by her sense of values. In an abortive rendezvous in a New York hotel room, Sunny informs Holden that all she does (with the exception of the activities demanded by her profession) is go to the movies. This information, of course, depresses Holden.

Foreign films receive Holden's approval, but he thinks that American movies are the epitome of phoniness. He goes to a Hollywood production only to kill time. On the afternoon before he is to meet Carl Luce for a drink, Holden passes the time watching a maudlin movie at Radio City. His review of what was obviously meant to be a typical American picture is worth reproducing in full.

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[11]Salinger, The Catcher in the Rye, p. 5.

The movie has been identified as the one based on James Hilton's Random Harvest.[12]

> After the Christmas thing was over, the goddam picture started. It was so putrid I couldn't take my eyes off it. It was about this English guy, Alec something, that was in the war and loses his memory in the hospital and all. He comes out of the hospital carrying a cane and limping all over the place, all over London, not knowing who the hell he is. He's really a duke, but he doesn't know it. Then he meets this nice, homey, sincere girl getting on a bus. Her goddam hat blows off and he catches it, and then they go upstairs and sit down and start talking about Charles Dickens. He's both their favorite author and all. He's carrying this copy of Oliver Twist and so's she. I could've puked. Anyway, they fall in love right away, on account of they're both so nuts about Charles Dickens and all, and he helps her run her publishing business. She's a publisher, the girl. Only she's not doing so hot, because her brother's a drunkard and he spends all their dough. He's a very bitter guy, the brother, because he was a doctor in the war and now he can't operate any more because his nerves are shot, so he boozes all the time, but he's pretty witty and all. Anyway, old Alec writes a book, and this girl publishes it, and they both make a hatful of dough on it. They're all set to get married when this other girl, old Marcia, shows up. Marcia was Alec's fiancee before he lost his memory, and she recognizes him when he's in this store autographing books. She tells old Alec he's really a duke and all, but he doesn't believe her and doesn't want to go with her to visit his mother and all. His mother's blind as a bat. But the other girl, the homey one, makes him go. She's very noble and all. So he goes. But he still doesn't get his memory back, even when his great Dane jumps all over him and his mother sticks her fingers all over his face and brings him this teddy bear he used to slobber around with when he was a kid. But then, one day, some kids are playing cricket on the lawn and he gets smacked in the head with a cricket ball. Then right away he gets his goddam memory back and he goes

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[12]Joseph L. Blotner and Frederick L. Gwynn, The Fiction of J. D. Salinger (Pittsburgh, 1958), p. 29.

> and kisses his mother on the forehead and all. Then he starts being a regular duke again, and he forgets all about the homey babe that has the publishing business. I'd tell you the rest of the story, but I might puke if I did. It isn't that I'd spoil it for you or anything. There isn't anything to spoil, for Chrissake. Anyway, it ends up with Alec and the homey babe getting married, and the brother that's a drunkard gets his nerves back and operates on Alec's mother so she can see again, and then the drunken brother and old Marcia go for each other. It ends up with everybody at this long dinner table laughing their asses off because the great Dane comes in with a bunch of puppies. Everybody thought it was a male, I suppose, or some goddam thing. All I can say is, don't see it if you don't want to puke all over yourself.[13]

The bathos of this fantastically improbable sentimentality is supplemented for Holden by a woman who sits next to him during the performance. She cries all through the movie, but she refuses to allow her suffering child to go to the toilet. "You take somebody that cries their eyes out over phony stuff in the movies," Holden concludes, "and nine times out of ten they're mean bastards at heart."[14] A non sequitur such as this one is understandable in the mouth of a perceptive adolescent who finds no valuable relation between the real world and the world of fancy presented on Hollywood's silver screen. But there is a grain of truth in Holden's assertion, for if people become so involved in phoniness that they lose their real identities, the real world will have no meaning

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[13]Salinger, The Catcher in the Rye, pp. 125-126.

[14]Ibid., p. 127.

for them. It is quite possible, then, that a woman who has achieved a cinematic nirvana would feel no responsibility to a suffering child in the realm of reality.

The movies are, in Holden's overworked word, "phony"; they offer no solutions to the problems of adjustment which the individual faces every day; they merely provide a dream world of escape for rather simple minds. This is why Holden says:

> I can understand somebody going to the movies because there's nothing else to do, but when somebody really wants to go, and even walks fast so as to get there quicker, then it depresses hell out of me. Especially if I see millions of people standing in one of those long, terrible lines. . . .[15]

The "long, terrible line" is society's mass pursuit of phoniness as a substitute for real love, and to a truth-seeker such as Salinger, this is not a pretty sight.

The counterparts of the movies, radio and television, are equally meaningless as media for truth or entertainment of a high quality. Zooey states the matter tersely when he recalls for Franny some remarks he made to Seymour one night before an "It's a Wise Child" broadcast:

> . . . I started bitching one night before the broadcast. Seymour'd told me to shine my shoes just as I was going out the door with Waker. I was furious. The studio audience were all morons, the announcer was a moron, the sponsors were morons, and I just

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[15] Ibid., p. 106.

> damn well wasn't going to shine my shoes for them. . . .[16]

Zooey is just as blunt and sententious in characterizing for Franny the abominable condition of television programs when he dramatizes the hypothetical sales pitch of Dick Hess, a television playwright, to Mr. LeSage, a television producer:

> It [Hess's play] can't miss, sir! It's down-to-earth, it's simple, it's untrue, and it's familiar enough and trivial enough to be understood and loved by our greedy, nervous, illiterate sponsors.[17]

But sham and shallowness are not limited to movies, radio, and television. Holden dislikes the snobbish piano player in Greenwich Village because, even though he is skillful, he lacks humility, and "he sounds like the kind of a guy that won't talk to you unless you're a big shot."[18] And Franny finds the theater full of egotistical pretension. She tells Lane Coutell:

> . . . 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. . . .[19]

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[16] Salinger, Franny and Zooey, pp. 198-199.

[17] Ibid., p. 134.

[18] Salinger, The Catcher in the Rye, p. 75.

[19] Salinger, Franny and Zooey, p. 28.

Franny is depressed, also, with modern poets who have replaced beauty in poetry with mere cleverness or an affected Weltschmerz. She tries to explain her depression to Lane:

> . . . . If you're a poet, you do something beautiful. I mean you're supposed to leave something beautiful after you get off the page and everything. The ones you're talking about don't leave a single, solitary thing beautiful. All that maybe the slightly better ones do is sort of get inside your head and leave something there, but just because they do, just because they know how to leave something, it doesn't have to be a poem, for heaven's sake. It may just be some kind of terribly fascinating, syntaxy droppings--excuse the expression. . . .[20]

A society which demands mediocrity from its entertainment and its arts will reflect a like indiscrimination in other areas of its culture, and Salinger's examination of these other areas discloses some unhappy results. Salinger finds that the everyday social intercourse is inane, indifferent, and hypocritical; that sexual relationships are divorced from genuine feeling and fail to provide a significant added dimension to human existence; and that religion has become insincere and unedifying to man's soul.

As a comment on the most simple of social relationships Salinger depicts Franny's violent aversion to stereotyped people whose actions and conversations conform

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[20] Ibid., p. 19.

to set patterns of banality, invidiousness, and pretension. When Lane asks Franny if she would like to stop for an after-game drink at Wally Campbell's apartment, she says that she does not remember Wally Campbell because he talks, acts, and thinks like "everybody else." She goes on to explain exactly why Wally and his type disgust her:

> . . . I don't mean there's anything horrible about him or anything like that. It's just that for four solid years I've kept seeing Wally Campbells wherever I go. 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 up a chair and straddle it backward and start bragging 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.[21]

Men such as Wally Campbell are sustained by individual ego; they have a glaring absence of love for their fellowman, and it is this absence of love which offends Franny so deeply.

Holden Caulfield also finds pettiness and lovelessness in the people around him, and he is, like Franny, disgustingly repulsed by their patterns of behavior. As Holden waits for Sally Hayes in the lobby of the Biltmore Hotel, he muses upon the probable fates of the many girls

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[21] Ibid., p. 25.

who are awaiting the arrival of their escorts for the evening:

> . . . . There were about a million girls sitting and standing around waiting for their dates to show up. Girls with legs crossed, girls with their legs not crossed, girls with terrific legs, girls with lousy legs, girls that looked like swell girls, girls that looked like they'd be bitches if you knew them. . . . In a way, it was sort of depressing, too, because you kept wondering what the hell would happen to all of them. When they got out of school and college, I mean. You figured most of them would probably marry dopey guys. Guys that always talk about how many miles they get to a gallon in their goddam cars. Guys that get sore and childish as hell if you beat them at golf, or even just some stupid game like pingpong. Guys that are very mean. Guys that never read books. Guys that are very boring. . . .[22]

Holden recognizes a sad instance of misplaced values in the people who seem interested only in their cars and how many miles they can get to a gallon of gasoline. Holden's observation to Sally is meaningful:

> . . . . Take most people, they're crazy about cars. They worry if they get a little scratch on them, and they're always talking about how many miles they get to a gallon, and if they get a brand-new car already they start thinking about trading it for one that's even newer. I don't even like old cars. I mean they don't even interest me. I'd rather have a goddam horse. A horse is at least human, for God's sake.[23]

What Holden perceives here is a misdirection of love: materialistic things have replaced human beings as the objects of love. But anyone who directs his desires

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[22]Salinger, The Catcher in the Rye, p. 112.

[23]Ibid., p. 119.

toward materialistic objects does not receive the genuine joy and spiritual gratification that he would receive if the objects of his love were human, and it is the contemplation of these misplaced desires and of the unsatisfying achievement of them that depresses Holden.

Nowhere is the separation of real love from human affairs more distressingly evident than it is in sexual relationships, and Salinger's fiction shows that love and sex are seldom bedfellows in the materialistic brothel of twentieth-century existence. The results of the bifurcation of love and sex are tragic or pathetic, and though Salinger does not dwell extensively on this state of affairs, he does contemn loveless sex or mere "sexiness" as a symptom of society's grave sickness.

The content of the short stories submitted to Buddy Glass in his creative writing class exemplifies the all-too-prevalent interest today in sexual abnormality. A part of Buddy's letter to Zooey describes his students' subject matter:

> . . . . Advanced Writing 24-A loaded me up with thirty-eight short stories to drag tearfully home for the weekend. Thirty-seven of them will be about a shy, reclusive Pennsylvania Dutch lesbian who Wants To Write, told first-person by a lecherous hired hand. In dialect.[24]

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[24]Salinger, Franny and Zooey, p. 58.

Holden Caulfield also encounters tales of perversion in the talks of Carl Luce:

> Old Luce. What a guy. He was supposed to be my Student Adviser when I was at Whooten. The only thing he ever did, though, was give these sex talks and all, late at night when there was a bunch of guys in his room. He knew quite a bit about sex, especially perverts and all. He was always telling us about a lot of creepy guys that go around having affairs with sheep, and guys that go around with girls' pants sewed in the lining of their hats and all. And flits and Lesbians. Old Luce knew who every flit and Lesbian in the United States was.[25]

And DeDaumier-Smith, the young correspondence art instructor in "DeDaumier-Smith's Blue Period," is confronted with such people as R. Howard Ridgefield, who painted a picture showing "the familiar, everyday tragedy of a chaste young girl, with below-shoulder-length blond hair and udder-sized breasts, being criminally assaulted in church, in the very shadow of the altar, by her minister," and a man from Bangor, Maine, who paints trees like "a forest of phallic symbols."[26]

These overt and implied sexual aberrations can be attributed to the failure of normal heterosexual relations to enable individuals to merge, physically and spiritually, as one being. And the failure of normal relations can be directly attributed to the removal of

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[25]Salinger, The Catcher in the Rye, p. 129.

[26]J. D. Salinger, "DeDaumier-Smith's Blue Period," Nine Stories (New York, 1948), pp. 108-117.

love from sex. The separation of love and sex causes Holden to say,

> . . . . You know what the trouble with me is? I can never get really sexy--I mean <u>really</u> sexy--with a girl I don't like a lot. I mean I have to <u>like</u> her a lot. If I don't, I sort of lose my goddam desire for her and all. Boy, it really screws up my sex life something awful. My sex life stinks.[27]

The removal of love from sex causes Arthur, the cuckold in "Pretty Mouth and Green My Eyes," to call his own wife, Joan, "an animal" when he talks to his unfaithful friend, Lee, on the telephone. Lee, who talks to Arthur while lying in bed with Joan, tries weakly to reassure him of his adulterous wife's normality by saying, "Basically, we're all animals."[28] But Arthur and Salinger do not believe that everyone is basically an animal. Many may have become animals by separating love from sex, but animalism is not necessarily an innate condition.

The absence of love also manifests itself in the quality of the individual's spiritual striving toward God. When genuine love for a more powerful being is replaced by the pretense of love, the result is a hypocritical Babbitt like Ossenburger, an alumnus of Pencey Prep and a highly successful mortician. The false piety in his

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[27]Salinger, <u>The Catcher in the Rye</u>, p. 89.

[28]J. D. Salinger, "Pretty Mouth and Green My Eyes," <u>Nine Stories</u> (New York, 1948), p. 89.

speech to the students at Pencey is immediately obvious to Holden:

> . . . . 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.[29]

And when Holden goes to the Christmas pageant at the Radio City Music Hall, he finds there, as he has found in so many other areas, that religious pretension has become organized and emotion paralyzed. This is Holden's account of the Christmas program:

> . . . . All these angels start coming out of the boxes and everywhere, guys carrying crucifixes and stuff all over the place, and the whole bunch of them--thousands of them--singing "Come All Ye Faithful!" like mad. Big deal. It's supposed to be religious as hell, I know, and very pretty and all, but I can't see anything religious or pretty, for God's sake, about a bunch of actors carrying crucifixes all over the stage. When they were all finished and started going out the boxes again, you could tell they could hardly wait to get a cigarette or something. I saw it with old Sally Hayes the year before, and she kept saying how beautiful it was, the costumes and all. I said old Jesus probably would've puked if he could see it. . . .[30]

Old Jesus--he is a man, as Holden (and Salinger) conceives of him--would, quite likely, have a definite emetic

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[29]Salinger, The Catcher in the Rye, p. 19.

[30]Ibid., p. 125.

response if he could see the insincerity and lack of love which characterize much of modern worship.

Paul Levine has said that "the basic predicament in Salinger's stories is that of a moral hero forced to compromise his integrity with a pragmatic society."[31] Society is pragmatic largely because it has ceased to place emphasis on love and beauty, and Salinger's typical hero in his classic indictment of society is Holden Caulfield in The Catcher in the Rye. Holden, the sensitive individual in a false world that he does not understand, fails to find any direction in his life. When Phoebe asks him what he would like to be, he is unable to picture himself in any occupation in the indifferent world around him; so he creates for himself a job in his imagination:

> . . . I keep picturing all these little kids playing some game in this big field of rye and all. Thousands of little kids, and nobody's around--nobody big, I mean--except me. And I'm standing on the edge of some crazy cliff. What I have to do, I have to catch everybody if they start to go over the cliff--I mean if they're running and don't look where they're going I have to come out from somewhere and catch them. That's all I'd do all day. I'd just be the catcher in the rye and all. I know it's crazy, but that's the only thing I'd really like to be. I know it's crazy.[32]

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[31]Paul Levine, "J. D. Salinger: The Development of the Misfit Hero," Twentieth Century Literature, IV (October, 1958), 92-99.

[32]Salinger, The Catcher in the Rye, p. 156.

Holden's strongest desire as "the catcher in the rye" is to save the innocence of childhood from a sick adult society where love has been replaced by insincerity and a symbolic obscenity, which Holden imagines is scrawled all over the world. But Holden knows, too, that he can never rub out all the obscene words in the world, and he admits that there is no place where he can totally retreat from contact with other human beings. His quandary results in a nervous breakdown.

If Holden is to survive, he must first learn to love other human beings as well as he loves Phoebe, Allie, the two nuns, and the little boy singing "Coming Through the Rye." He must acquire a balanced sense of proportion and a saving sense of humor. He must learn compassion for the weak, the pompous, the phony, the perverse; such people are the fellow inhabitants of his world, and behind their pitiful masks are the faces of the children in the rye. As Mr. Antolini told him he must learn to live humbly for a cause.[33]

Salinger sees in American life an extraordinary tension between the individual with a passion to understand and evaluate experience for himself, and the mass mind of the group which is unusually energetic in imposing its

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[33]Peter J. Seng, "The Fallen Idol," College English, XXIII (December, 1961), 209.

understanding and values on its individual members.[34] Each reflective individual must reconcile himself to a society which will not meet his standards of excellence in any area of activity, and it is this reconciliation, through love, with which the next chapter is concerned.

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[34]Arthur Mizener, "The Love Song of J. D. Salinger," Harpers, CCXVIII (February, 1959), 90.

CHAPTER III

THE SENSITIVE INDIVIDUAL AND LOVE

In "For Esme--with Love and Squalor," Sergeant X, an American suffering from combat fatigue, painfully reads an inscription on the flyleaf of a German book that he has found. The book is entitled Die Zeit Ohne Beispiel, by the arch-misanthrope Joseph Goebbels; the inscription was written by a young woman who was a low official in the Nazi Party. She had written, "in a small, hopelessly sincere handwriting," the words "Dear God, life is hell."[1] The words appear to Sergeant X "to have the stature of an uncontestable, even classic indictment," and he is impelled to place under her inscription a quotation from Dostoyevski's The Brothers Karamazov: "Fathers and teachers, I ponder 'What is hell?' I maintain that it is the suffering of being unable to love."[2] This passage states concisely the central problem in Salinger's fiction, the difficulty of finding genuine love in a world of pretension, cruelty, and unconcern.

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[1] J. D. Salinger, "For Esme--with Love and Squalor," Nine Stories (New York, 1948), p. 79.

[2] Ibid.

America, as viewed by Salinger, is composed mainly of people who are unimaginative, nonreflective, and apathetic to significant values and relationships. And these people have formed a society which is as intellectually quiescent and as emotionally stagnant as they themselves. Numerous examples of Salinger's extensive documentation of society's weaknesses have already been alluded to. The kind of world Salinger sees is one lacking love, and the majority of people who inhabit this world are unaware that anything is amiss. They are content to follow the conditioned responses dictated to them by an undiscriminating mass-mind. For these people it might be said that ignorance--or unawareness--is, perhaps, a shabby form of bliss.

But there are within this society a few individuals who are intensely interested in understanding and evaluating experience for themselves, who feel acutely the lack of warmth and sincerity in human relationships, and who are greatly concerned about identifying themselves with their fellowman and establishing some form of moral and aesthetic order in a chaotic environment. These are the people with whom the fiction of Salinger is involved. His characters exist outside the charmed circle of popular and conventional adjustment, and their desperate cries for love and understanding go largely unheard. They are men,

women, and adolescents, trapped not by fate, but by their own frightened, and sometimes tragicomic, awareness of the chasm between their need for love and the apparent futility of trying to achieve it on any foreseeable terms.[3] Salinger seems somehow, perhaps mainly by implication, to want to reassure the desperate ones that although the achievement of love is difficult, it is not futile; it is even necessary if the contemplative man is to reconcile himself to the weaknesses of human nature and to find for himself sanity and stability in a mad, inconstant world.

Salinger's concept of love, what Buddy Glass calls "compound, or multiple . . . pure and complicated,"[4] requires explanation. One of the most noteworthy characteristics of Salinger's love generally is its nonerotic nature. Henry Grunwald has observed this particular quality:

> . . . . The accepted formula for success on the best-seller lists is of course an abundance of sex, but it is entirely possible that a point of surfeit has been reached. "Mature love" between men and women has not always been at the center of the story-telling art. The great epics dealt more with the themes of war, nature, and the gods. The novel has made the love story so much a part of our very atmosphere that we can scarcely imagine it otherwise; but "mature love" alone has rarely been sufficient to sustain fiction, and it has always needed the admixture of the other,

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[3]David L. Stevenson, "J. D. Salinger: The Mirror of Crisis," The Nation, CLXXXIV (March 9, 1957), 216.

[4]Salinger, Franny and Zooey, p. 49.

> older themes. It is just possible that Salinger's sexless story comes as something of a relief.[5]

Salinger de-emphasizes sex or eroticism in a culture which panders to such a motif in most of its art forms, and perhaps he does so deliberately as a corrective as well as a relief.

But he does not fail to treat of this aspect of human existence. Several instances of perversion and sex without love have been remarked in Chapter II. Salinger treats these matters sketchily because obviously he does not choose to dwell on purely erotic love.[6] But his failure to emphasize sexual love is not, as Fiedler believes,[7] an indication of immaturity; it is, rather, a reflection of his concept of love, a concept which transcends the

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[5]Henry A. Grunwald, "He Touches Something Deep in Us," Horizons, IV (May, 1962), 103.

[6]His aversion in this area has been noted by a number of critics besides Grunwald. William Wiegand remarks of Salinger's work that "where the object of delight is found in women, these women are often little girls or nuns, and what is admired is sexless in essence, some capacity for charity or candor, sensitivity or simplicity" (William Wiegand, "J. D. Salinger: Seventy-Eight Bananas," Chicago Review, XI [Winter, 1958], 17). Paul Levine feels that Salinger presents significant and complex moral problems with humor and compassion, "without bowing to the public opiates of sex, violence, and depravity" (Levine, op. cit., p. 99). "Salinger," comments Leslie Fiedler, "is reconciled with everything but sex" (Leslie Fiedler, "Up from Adolescence," Partisan Review, XXIX [Winter, 1962], 131).

[7]Fiedler, Love and Death in the American Novel, p. xix.

physical. Love, as Salinger desires it or writes about it, encompasses all men and all women in a nonphysical bond of human affection, and thus is asexual in nature.

Salinger's conception of love may be compared profitably with that of Socrates in The Symposium. Socrates relates the following thoughts on love (actually Diotima's) for Agathon's dinner guests:

> . . . I am persuaded that all men do all things, and the better they are the more they do them, in hope of the glorious fame of immortal virtue; for they desire the immortal.
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> Those who are pregnant in the body only, betake themselves to women and beget children--this is the character of their love; their offspring, as they hope, will preserve their memory and give them the blessedness and immortality which they desire in the future. But souls which are pregnant--for there certainly are men who are more creative in their souls than in their bodies--conceive that which is proper for the soul to conceive or contain. And what are these conceptions?--wisdom and virtue in general.[8]

There are no direct references in Salinger's work to this Platonic philosophy, yet it can be truly said that Salinger is a man with a pregnant soul, striving through his fiction to give birth to wisdom, virtue, and an all-enveloping human compassion.

Salinger's solution to the problem of the sensitive soul in an insensate world is presented most notably in semi-Socratic dialogues in Franny and Zooey. On the verge of a nervous breakdown because she cannot adjust herself

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[8]J. D. Kaplan, editor, Dialogues of Plato, Jowett translation (New York, 1961), pp. 214-215.

to human phoniness, lack of love in the world, and widespread emphasis of ego, Franny gives up her ambition to be an actress and withdraws from everything except the Jesus Prayer,[9] which she hopes will, by some transforming, mystic miracle, reveal to her a "new conception of what everything's about."[10] But neither a mystic miracle nor a withdrawal gives her an answer; she finally sees and accepts a human conception of love wrought in the struggle of her brother Zooey to bring her out of her self-imposed isolation.

Early in the novel, Franny explodes her disgust with the world:

> . . . 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. It's disgusting--it is, it is. . . .[11]

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[9]"The continuous interior Prayer of Jesus is a constant uninterrupted calling upon the divine Name of Jesus with the lips, in the spirit, in the heart; while forming a mental picture of His constant presence, and imploring His grace, during every occupation, at all times, in all places, even during sleep. The appeal is couched in these terms, 'Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.' One who accustoms himself to this appeal experiences as a result so deep a consolation and so great a need to offer the prayer always, that he can no longer live without it, and it will continue to voice itself within him of its own accord. . ." (The Way of a Pilgrim [author not given], translated by R. M. French [London, 1960], pp. 8-9).

[10]Salinger, Franny and Zooey, p. 37.

[11]Ibid., p. 29.

It is important to note here that Franny does not exclude her own ego from her disgust. A common criticism of the Glass children is that they display an insufferably egotistical arrogance; they glory in their smug superiority. But this estimate is not quite correct. It is a misreading of Salinger to predicate the complete superciliousness of the Glasses when they strive so diligently to overcome their natural--and very human--tendency to self-elevation. Franny and Zooey, for example, are both irritated by their own overly critical opinions toward their associates, and Zooey refuses to admire the beauty of his face in a mirror. He considers this his private war against narcissism. These conscious efforts toward personal humility counteract most of the objectionable haughtiness in the attitude of the Glass children.

Franny Glass, repulsed by herself and by her environment, abandons her promising career as an actress and retreats into the religious mysticism of the Jesus Prayer. But Zooey is quick to point out to her the fallacy in that direction:

> Oh, you irritate me, Franny! I'm sorry, you do. You've made the great <u>startl</u>ing goddam discovery that the acting profession's loaded with mercenaries and butchers. As I remember, you even looked like somebody who'd just been <u>shat</u>tered because all the ushers hadn't been geniuses. What's the <u>mat</u>ter with you, buddy? Where are your brains? If you've had a freakish education, at least <u>use</u> it, <u>use</u> it. You can say the Jesus Prayer from now till doomsday, but

> if you don't realize that the only thing that counts in the religious life is detachment, I don't see how you'll ever even move an inch.[12]

Zooey knows that the detachment which Franny seeks in the Jesus Prayer will not work for her because she is, like every decent person, unavoidably committed to humanity. Man is by nature a gregarious creature; and, although some of his fellowman's weaknesses may be repugnant to him, he must feel an urge to love and understand those whose hopes and desires are subject to the same vitiating forces as his own. Because all men share a common origin and destiny, an unavoidable human link is formed; and a conscious withdrawal, physical or mental, from this human bond is a rejection of one's own kind, a cessation of the kind of love which Salinger envisions. Zooey knows that Franny cannot find happiness by exchanging human contact for religious incantation.

Zooey explains further to Franny that she has, in her desire to find a modicum of mental peace, misconstrued the purpose 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 coy, 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.[13]

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[12] Ibid., p. 196.

[13] Ibid., pp. 170-171.

"Christ-Consciousness" is, to Zooey, the awareness that Jesus was "the most intelligent man in the Bible," the man who "realized there is no separation from God," and the man who "knew--knew--that we're carrying the Kingdom of Heaven around with us, inside, where we're all too goddam stupid and sentimental and unimaginative to look. . . ."[14] Zooey tries to enable Franny to see that if God is love, then Christ, as a man who most perfectly manifested pure love on earth, was the human embodiment of the divine spirit of love, and thus the son of God. The mission of Christ was to bring the message of the saving power of love to suffering humanity--thus saving man from the hell of being unable to love. Christ's intent was not, Zooey strongly implies, to offer to confused coeds a buffer of religious mysticism to the world's imperfections. The explicit terms in which Zooey presents his argument are a beguiling mixture of profanity, faked cynicism, and studied theatricality--all of which Franny may or may not see through; but her "Christ-Consciousness" is slow in coming.

Thus Zooey endeavors to get Franny to enter into the stream of human life through what is essentially a Greco-Christian concept of love, a concept involving a vague

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[14] Ibid., pp. 169-170.

acknowledgment of the divinity of Christ and a nebulous identification of God. The emphasis in this argument is placed on the divine spirit of love inherent in man and its power to draw individuals closer together. In Plato's Symposium, Socrates quotes Diotima on the nature of this kind of love:

> . . . . Love is neither mortal nor immortal, but is a mean between the two. . . . He is a great spirit, and . . . is intermediate between the divine and the mortal. . . . Through Love all the intercourse and converse of God with man, whether awake or asleep, is carried on.[15]

Love, then, for Salinger as for Plato, is the bridge which spans the emotional gulf between man and man and between man and divinity, so that to the degree that man achieves love, to that same degree he approaches the Divine. "We may say," writes C. S. Lewis, "quite truly and in an intelligible sense, that those who love greatly are 'near' to God";[16] for as St. John said, ". . . God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him."[17]

Franny's obstacle to accepting this concept of love is her failure to recognize the innate "Godness" (that is, the potential for love) in even the meanest of her fellow

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[15] J. D. Kaplan, op. cit., pp. 206-207.

[16] C. S. Lewis, The Four Loves (New York, 1960), p. 119.

[17] I John iv.16.

creatures. Zooey explains to her that it is her duty to become an actress because she has chosen the theater as her life's work, and it is acting that she loves. Rejection of an acting career would be tantamount to a rejection of love, a most serious apostasy:

> Somewhere along the line--in one damn incarnation or another, if you like--you not only had a hankering to be an . . . actress but to be a good one. You're stuck with it now. You can't just walk out on the results of your own hankerings. 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?[18]

But Franny cannot reconcile herself to "the stupidity of audiences" and "unskilled laughter coming from the fifth row."[19] Zooey relates to her that he too has encountered such annoyances. He met them as a child when he took his place with the older children in the family on the "It's a Wise Child" radio program and did not want to shine his shoes before going to the studio. He told his older brother Seymour that all the people connected with the show were morons, and he did not see why he had to shine his shoes for them. But Seymour told him to shine them anyway:

> He said to shine them for the Fat Lady. I didn't know what the hell he was talking about, but he had a very Seymour look on his face, and so I did it.

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[18] Salinger, Franny and Zooey, p. 197.

[19] Ibid., p. 198.

> He never did tell me who the Fat Lady was, but I shined my shoes for the Fat Lady every time I ever went on the air again--all the years you and I were on the program together, if you remember. I don't think I missed more than just a couple of times. This terribly clear, clear picture of the Fat Lady formed in my mind. 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.[20]

It makes sense to Franny, also, when Zooey identifies the Fat Lady for her:

> I don't care where an actor acts. It can be in summer stock, it can be over a radio, it can be over television, it can be in a goddam Broadway theatre, complete with the most fashionable, most well-fed, most sunburned-looking audience you can imagine. 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.[21]

In one bright epiphany, Franny receives her "Christ-Consciousness," and for the first time in a long time, she is able to drop off into an untroubled sleep.

What Zooey has done is to state his view of the human condition in simple syllogistic terms: the Fat Lady is everyone; the Fat Lady is Jesus Christ; everyone is Jesus

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[20] Ibid., p. 199. [21] Ibid., p. 200.

Christ. In other words, the suffering of man, his non-objective discontent, in a cold and callous world is like in kind to the suffering of Christ, the human embodiment of the spirit of love, who was persecuted and destroyed in the absence of love's sustaining power in man. Like Christ, every man, divested of his pretensions and social facades, is, in varying degrees of cognizance, suffering from a lack of love. When Zooey made Franny realize this, she could feel an urge to love and understand all her fellowmen, regardless of their shortcomings. And from a new basis of understanding she could strive for some form of perfection and happiness on her own terms.

This idea of the dynamic nature of love can be clarified by again turning to Plato. According to Socrates, one who would increase his capacity to love must proceed from the love of one form to the love of many. Diotima speaks:

> . . . . For he who would proceed aright in this matter should begin in youth to visit beautiful forms; and first . . . to love one such form only--out of that he should create fair thoughts; and soon he will of himself perceive that the beauty of one form is akin to the beauty of another; and then if beauty of form in general is his pursuit, how foolish would he be not to recognize that the beauty in every form is one and the same![22]

Thus the beauty of Christ, his capacity for love, is the same in the Fat Lady and in all men, though they possess

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[22]Kaplan, op. cit., p. 216.

it to a lesser degree than Christ; and Franny must expand her love for Christ to the inclusion of all men. When Franny accepts this formula, she is able to re-enter the world of human affairs, where, as Seymour Glass once said, "all we do our whole lives is go from one little piece of Holy Ground to the next."[23]

Franny has an excellent basis for the extension of love in the beautiful form of the affection which exists among the members of the Glass family, a familial love which, though often obversely expressed, is one of the most moving aspects of Salinger's fiction. She has just witnessed a touching and tender example of it in the concern of Zooey for her happiness. It may even be inferred that Salinger's broad concept of love is a logical extension of the feeling of acceptance, understanding, and affection developed in a closely knit, harmonious family relationship such as the kind often found in Jewish families, who through the centuries have had to stand united against a hostile world.

Salinger's solution, then, to the adjustment problems of the sensitive individual in an imperfect universe inhabited by weak and seemingly indifferent people is the age-old concept of brotherly love and compassion. As

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[23]J. D. Salinger, "Seymour: An Introduction," New Yorker, XXXV (June 6, 1959), 111.

earnestly as he can express himself, Salinger is saying with Jesus and Plato, respectively: ". . . love thy neighbor as thyself"[24] because "he whom love touches not walks in darkness."[25] The way he says it is new.

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[24]St. Mark xii.31.

[25]Kaplan, op. cit., p. 198.

CHAPTER IV

DEATH AND LOVE

Death enters Salinger's fiction like a Banquo's ghost, gliding elusively in and out of the narrative scene, lending the pregnant significance of the dead but unburied past to the living characters' responses and attitudes. Salinger is not preoccupied with death as a theme in his stories, but it does affect his concept of love and the relationships among his major characters. For Salinger's people, death is never the simple cessation of life. In the case of Teddy McArdle, who subscribes to the Vedantic theory of reincarnation, death is merely a transitional state from one life to the next. For those who survived the deceased Walt Glass, Allie Caulfield, and Seymour Glass, death causes a sublimation of love, a rather mythical perpetuation of the dead one's virtues. These two differing attitudes are the most significant ones in the work of Salinger, and five of his early stories involving death must be mentioned briefly here because they point the way to the dominant pattern of response to death evident in his later fiction.

In "The Varioni Brothers" Sonny Varioni, a writer of popular songs, uses his brother, Joe Varioni, as a lyricist. Joe, who is a gifted author, allows his talent to be wasted on popular songs because he loves his brother; and Sonny is selfish enough to take advantage of both Joe's talent and his good nature. Sonny is blind to the potential greatness of Joe's unfinished novel until Joe is killed by a gangster's bullet meant for Sonny. After Joe's death, Sonny realizes how he was responsible for the stifling of Joe's talent, and, out of a newly awakened appreciation for Joe and his work, he devotes himself to finishing Joe's novel. Joe's death jolts Sonny into an awareness of love and a sense of beauty.

Three of the early stories involve war deaths. "A Girl I Knew" involves an eighteen-year-old American who has a pleasant vacation romance with a beautiful Jewish girl in Vienna. When he returns to Europe during World War II, he is shocked to learn that she has been burned in Hitler's incinerators. The story is not developed beyond that point. In "The Stranger" Babe Gladwaller and his younger sister, Mattie, tell Helen Polk how her old flame, Vincent Caulfield, was killed in the war. Helen is grateful to Vincent's war-buddy for his trouble, and she sheds some tears over Vincent's death, but she is happily married, and her grief is temporary. The memory

of Vincent is obviously dearer to Mattie and Babe than to Helen; for this reason, perhaps, the story loses some of its poignancy. "The Soft-Boiled Sergeant" is the story of Sergeant Burke, who befriended the narrator, Burns, when he was a rookie. Burns recalls for his wife how Burke died courageously at Pearl Harbor while saving the lives of three buck privates. The memory of a man who died alone after performing an act of love is forever impressed in Burns's mind.

"Blue Melody," a story based on the tragic end of Bessie Smith, concerns a sad instance of lovelessness in American society. Lida Jones, a Negro blues singer, dies from appendicitis because the Southern hospitals to which she is taken will not admit her. Peggy Moore and Rudford, two young Caucasians who have loved Lida since they were children, are with her when she dies, and in their memories the beauty of Lida's life and the absurdity of her death are painfully juxtaposed.

The incipient pattern in these early stories is one in which death implacably deprives the living of a person whose life in one way or another is more beautiful than other lives and whose death assumes a special significance in the lives of those who survive him. The pattern becomes clearer and is developed further in Salinger's later work.

Also in Salinger's later fiction, notably "Teddy," there is an entirely different attitude toward death, and for the sake of thoroughness, some attention must be given it. Teddy McArdle is the ten-year-old child prodigy of an indulgent but intellectually simple mother and a father who acts on the radio. Teddy is a genuine mystic who had his first mystical experience at the age of six; he recalls it for a teacher of education, Bob Nicholson:

> I was six when I saw that everything was God, and my hair stood up and all that. . . . It was on a Sunday, I remember. My sister was only a tiny child then, and she was drinking her milk, and all of a sudden I saw that she was God and the milk was God. I mean all she was doing was pouring God into God, if you know what I mean.[1]

Teddy is the object of intense examination by teachers, psychologists, and psychiatrists all over the world. He understands and accepts his lot as an object of curiosity to people less enlightened than he, and he has many friends among the ranks of famous intellectuals.

But Teddy often becomes exasperated with the tendency of people to show more emotion and sorrow than a particular occasion demands. He remarks to Nicholson that "[Poets are] . . . always sticking their emotions in things that have no emotions."[2] Teddy has illustrated this point with a short parable earlier in the story:

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[1]Salinger, "Teddy," p. 138.

[2]Ibid., p. 135.

> . . . . A man walks along the beach and unfortunately gets hit in the head by a cocoanut. His head unfortunately cracks open in two halves. Then his wife comes along the beach singing a song and sees the two halves and recognizes them and picks them up. She gets very sad of course and cries heartbreakingly. That is exactly where I am tired of poetry. Supposing the lady just picks up the two halves and shouts into them angrily "Stop that!"[3]

Teddy regards death as an integral part of life, not as an occasion for mourning. He cannot agree with the attitude which holds sadness to be an ineluctable concomitant of death.

Teddy believes that in his previous life he was a man in India "making very nice spiritual advancement,"[4] but he fell from grace when he met a lady and had to be reincarnated in an American body. He feels, however, that his present reincarnation is to be a short one, and with his Oriental religious vision he foresees his death. Teddy gives some indication of his coming death by quoting for Nicholson two cryptic but unsentimental Japanese poems: "Nothing in the voice of the cicada intimates how soon it will die," and "Along this road goes no one, this autumn eve."[5] To Nicholson, Teddy even speculates upon the manner in which he may die:

> . . . I have a swimming lesson in about five minutes. I could go downstairs to the pool, and there might

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[3] Ibid., pp. 131-132.

[4] Ibid., p. 137.

[5] Ibid., p. 135.

> not be any water in it. This might be the day they change the water or something. What might happen, though, I might walk up to the edge of it, just to have a look at the bottom, for instance, and my sister might come up and sort of push me in. I could fracture my skull and die instantaneously.[6]

Contrary to Western logic, Teddy regards his death not as the end of his life, but, rather, as the final fulfillment and reunion with life. The story ends with that fulfillment, exactly the way Teddy foresaw it.[7]

But Teddy's reconciliation with death is not typical in Salinger's fiction. Salinger's people cling to life and the kindred spirits which make life worth living. Their tenacity is much like that described by Edna St. Vincent Millay in "A Dirge without Music":

> I am not resigned to the shutting away of loving
> hearts in the hard ground.
> So it is, and so it will be, for so it has been,
> time out of mind:
> Into the darkness they go, the wise and the lovely.
> Crowned
> With lilies and with laurel they go; but I am not
> resigned.
>
> Lovers and thinkers, into the earth with you.
> Be one with the dull, the indiscriminate dust.
> A fragment of what you felt, of what you knew,
> A formula, a phrase remains,--but the best is lost.
>
> The answers quick and keen, the honest look, the
> laughter, the love,--
> They are gone. They are gone to feed the roses.
> Elegant and curled

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[6] Ibid., p. 141.

[7] Wakefield, op. cit., p. 77.

> Is the blossom. Fragrant is the blossom. I know.
> But I do not approve.
> More precious was the light in your eyes than all the
> roses in the world.
>
> Down, down, down, into the darkness of the grave
> Gently they go, the beautiful, the tender, the kind;
> Quietly they go, the intelligent, the witty, the
> brave,
> I know. But I do not approve. And I am not
> resigned.[8]

This same attitude is evident in those who loved Walt Glass, Allie Caulfield, and Seymour Glass; and in these three cases, death responses assume a pronounced design.

When Eloise Wengler reminisces with Mary Jane over a bottle of Scotch, Eloise's undying love for the dead Walt Glass becomes apparent. Eloise recalls that Walt was sweet and gentle and "the only boy I ever knew that could make me laugh. I mean <u>really</u> laugh."[9]

But Walt was killed in Japan in the autumn of 1945, as Eloise tearfully remembers:

> It was between battles or something, this friend of his said that wrote me. Walt and some other boy were putting this little Japanese stove in a package. Some colonel wanted to send it home. Or they were taking it <u>out</u> of the package to rewrap it--I don't know exactly. Anyway, it was all full of gasoline and junk and it exploded in their faces. The other boy just lost an eye.[10]

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[8] Edna St. Vincent Millay, "Dirge Without Music," <u>Collected Poems</u>, edited by Norma Millay (New York, 1949), pp. 240-241.

[9] J. D. Salinger, "Uncle Wiggily in Connecticut," <u>Nine Stories</u> (New York, 1948), p. 25.

[10] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 28.

Walt's love was such a pure and joyous thing to Eloise that she cannot adjust herself to his death. By his death, then, Walt becomes permanently transformed in Eloise's psyche into a love-image of such power that Eloise cannot redirect her love toward any other object, neither to her myopic child nor to her husband, who is the exact opposite of Walt. For this reason, Eloise's grief is out of all proportion to her loss.

Eloise's reaction to Walt's death is almost identical to Holden Caulfield's reaction to the death of his younger brother, Allie, except that Holden finds some emotional sustenance in his relationship with his little sister, Phoebe. Holden loved Allie very much, as is evident from his description of him early in The Catcher in the Rye:

> He [Allie] is dead now. He got leukemia and died when we were up in Maine, on July 18, 1946. You'd have liked him. He was two years younger than I was, but he was about fifty times as intelligent. . . . His teachers were always writing letters to my mother, telling her what a pleasure it was having a boy like Allie in their class. And they weren't just shooting the crap. They really meant it. But it wasn't just that he was the most intelligent member in the family. He was also the nicest, in lots of ways. He never got mad at anybody. People with red hair are supposed to get mad very easily, but Allie never did, and he had very red hair. I'll tell you what kind of red hair he had. I started playing golf when I was only ten years old. I remember once, the summer I was around twelve, teeing off and all, and having a hunch that if I turned around all of a sudden, I'd see Allie. So I did, and sure enough, he was sitting on his bike outside the fence--there was this fence that went all around the course--and he was sitting there, about a hundred and fifty yards

> behind me, watching me tee off. That's the kind of red hair he had. God, he was a nice kid, though.[11]

Allie had many traits which particularly endeared him to Holden. "He used to laugh so hard at something he thought of at the dinner table," Holden fondly remembers, "that he just about fell off his chair."[12] And Allie wrote poems in green ink on his left-handed fielder's glove so that he would have something to read when there was no activity in his outfield position. Allie shared Holden's admiration for the tympanist at Radio City; in fact, Holden recalls, "One time when we went to Washington with my father, Allie sent him a postcard, but I'll bet he never got it. We weren't too sure how to address it."[13]

The rapport between Holden and Allie, like the love between Walt and Eloise, was a tender and beautiful feeling, and when Holden lost Allie, he reacted with violent sorrow:

> . . . 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, but my hand was broken and everything by that time, and I couldn't do it. It was a very stupid thing to do, I'll admit, but I hardly didn't even know I was doing it, and you didn't know Allie.[14]

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[11] Salinger, The Catcher in the Rye, p. 37.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid., p. 125.

[14] Ibid., p. 38.

Allie's death left a terrible void in Holden's life, one that Holden is unable--or unwilling--to fill with anyone else. For although Allie's absence gives Holden pain, Allie, like Housman's young athlete, does not have to cope with the vicissitudes and compromises of adult life. He does not have to witness the ubiquitously scrawled obscenities of the world. For this reason, Allie becomes for Holden, like Walt for Eloise, an idealized image of happiness in a confused world. To Holden, Allie is the symbol of childhood innocence preserved by death, and in moments of great depression, Holden actually talks to Allie and receives some alleviation of his emotional discomfort.

The reaction of Holden and Eloise to the respective deaths of Allie and Walt is similar to the reaction of the Glass family to the death of Seymour. Franny, at the lowest point of her spiritual depression, tells Zooey that she would like to speak to Seymour, although at this time Seymour has been dead for several years; and Buddy seems determined to elevate Seymour to the stature of a saint. Seymour had an immeasurable influence on all the Glass children, as Ihab Hassan notes:

> . . . . The piece ["Seymour: An Introduction"], however, does show Seymour to be not only a <u>muktatma</u>, a God-knower and ring-ding enlightened man, but also the infallible spiritual center of the Glass clan. Inbred in a common history of Fancies, the Glasses

> seem capable of looking outward beyond their bright familial circle only through the eyes of their dead brother, who constantly mediates between their inner world and a world they find hard to endure. Because they are his brothers . . . they are brothers to everyone. And because they give themselves wholly to his imagination, they become part of all that his imagination commands. Intricately attuned and calibrated, they communicate with one another, past death itself, by letters, diaries, phone conversations and a dialogue of deceptive simplicity.[15]

Seymour's suicide was a stunning blow to the Glass family, but the physical absence of Seymour does not cancel his influence on them; his spirit looms almost omnipresent behind their every thought and action. Seymour's suicide is probably the most important--and most mysterious--single event in Salinger's fiction.

Since Seymour was not killed by a caprice of fate, as was Walt, or by the impersonal pestilence of disease, as was Allie, the real causes of Seymour's death are problematical. He apparently embraces death because he is unable to live by the philosophy that he himself advocates. An understanding of his perplexing suicide requires an investigation of his special individuality.

Seymour was born in February, 1917. He entered Columbia at the age of fifteen and earned the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English. In 1940 he and his

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[15]Ihab Hassan, "The Rare Quixotic Gesture," Salinger: A Critical and Personal Portrait, edited by Henry A. Grunwald (New York, 1962), p. 160.

brother Buddy, with whom he had shared a room in the Glass house since 1929, moved into their own apartment near Seventy-Ninth and Madison in New York. Seymour taught English for a couple of years before entering the service. While he was a soldier stationed at Fort Monmouth, he met a girl named Muriel Fedder, whom he married on June 4, 1942. When he returned from the service, he was--as he had promised Muriel and her mother he would be--psychoanalyzed, presumably by what Buddy calls one of those "summa-cum-laude Thinker[s] and intellectual men's room attendant[s],"[16] so greatly admired by Muriel's mother. Perhaps as a result, Seymour one day deliberately drove the Fedders' car into a tree, and it was decided that he and Muriel should take a vacation in Florida, at the place where they had spent their honeymoon. It was there that Seymour committed suicide.[17]

Seymour's unique sensitivity is the kind that allowed him to criticize the Gettysburg address for an American audience on the "It's a Wise Child" radio program by saying:

> . . . 51, 112 men were casualties at Gettysburg, and . . . if someone had to speak at the anniversary of the event, he should simply have come

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[16]Salinger, "Seymour: An Introduction," p. 102.

[17]Mizener, op. cit., p. 85.

> forward and shaken his fist at the audience and then walked off. . . .[18]

Other facets of Seymour's sensitivity border on the mystical, for instance, this entry in his diary:

> I have scars on my hands from touching certain people. Once, in the park, when Franny was still in the carriage, I put my hand on the downy pate of her head and left it there too long. Another time, at Loew's Seventy-second Street, with 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 colors and textures of human hair, leave permanent marks on me. . . .[19]

Seymour was too close to being a mystic for his own good. He was close enough to mystical revelation of ultimate truth to be unsatisfied with anything less than perfection. He was close enough to be unable to find perfection in the world around him yet not close enough to achieve the mystical fulfillment of Teddy.[20] This is made clear by another entry in his diary:

> I'll champion indiscrimination till doomsday, on the ground that it leads to health and a 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 to like bad poetry in the abstract, let alone equate

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[18]Salinger, "Seymour: An Introduction," p. 104.

[19]Ibid., p. 105.

[20]Wakefield, op. cit., pp. 81-82.

> it with good poetry. He would have to drop poetry altogether.[21]

Seymour is a supreme idealist and perfectionist who is unable to resign himself to imperfection. He cannot drive himself to like bad poetry as well as good poetry, just as he cannot make himself--no matter how hard he tries--love bad men as well as good men.

The marriage of Seymour to Muriel Fedder is a conscious effort on his part to bridge the gap between himself and the people whose love he needs but whose capabilities to love fall far below the measure of perfection which he requires. The attempt is a miserable failure. Not only is he unable to find--and give--love on his own stringent terms, but he must also witness the lovelessness and insidious loneliness of the comparatively insensate people around him. His soul becomes as a man's body without a protective epidermis: the slightest resisting touch brings interminable waves of pain. Seymour is unable to bear the emotional suffering, and he can find no method of relief; so he terminates his life.

Seymour's suicide was not the act of a supercilious holy man deliberately leaving an unworthy world. Seymour was too sympathetic to the injustices and weaknesses of humanity, too sensitive to the imperfections of the

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[21]Salinger, "Seymour: An Introduction," p. 104.

universe, too conscious of his inability to rectify conditions or adjust himself to them, too concerned about his own inadequacies to be called supercilious. Seymour's suicide was merely the desperate panacea for an unbearable pain caused by a life which had become to him hopelessly futile. In this light Seymour's self-imposed death becomes to the Glasses a kind of modern martyrdom, and Seymour becomes the family saint, perpetuated in their memories as a benign soul who died for love. Some of the questions which Seymour's death has raised will be discussed in the last chapter.

The cases of Walt Glass, Allie Caulfield, and Seymour Glass seem to establish a definite pattern in Salinger's fiction, a pattern in which death functions as an agent of apotheosis. The one who has died is elevated in the memories of those who survive him to some degree of deification, and his spiritual image acts for them as a kind of mediator between their real world and some imaginary elysium to which their devoted hearts have assigned his departed soul.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Although the fiction of Salinger has received generally favorable critical response, it has by no means been accorded unanimous approval; and those who have a negative reaction seem to object most vehemently to what they consider his flaunting of technical skill to cover the triviality of his subject matter. Such an objection indicates that Salinger has been misinterpreted. This study has tried to show that his main subjects are love and death--hardly trivial matters--and his urbane presentation of these subjects is designed to communicate his message most effectively to the modern reader. A number of the objectors to his work are so perturbed by the manner in which he speaks that they are unable to understand what he says. Fortunately, however, most critics do understand that Salinger is writing seriously about people and the loves and deaths that inevitably enter into their lives. An examination of both approving and disapproving criticism is necessary to determine Salinger's literary position at the present time and possibly his future as an American author.

"The Catcher in the Rye," writes Maxwell Geismar, "protests, to be sure, against both the academic and social conformity of its period. But what does it argue for?"[1] Geismar sees Holden Caulfield's blanket rejection of society and a conventional future as "the differential revolt of the lonesome rich child, the conspicuous display of leisure-class emotions."[2] Geismar charges, moreover, that the real achievement of The Catcher in the Rye is that it manages to evade answering the central questions which it raises and hides its ambiguities in the brilliance of Salinger's prose. This criticism is rendered suspect, however, in the light of Geismar's obvious personal bias. He abhors what he calls the "New Yorker school of entertainment,"[3] and he feels that Salinger aspires to be the top man in this school. Geismar links Salinger to the New Yorker throughout his review, so that clearly Salinger becomes for Geismar another stone for grinding an anti-New Yorker ax. The assertion that Salinger offers no solutions to the problems he poses places Geismar in a conspicuous group of misreaders.

Dispassionately and with much more objectivity than Geismar, Seymour Krim offers this criticism concerning Salinger's surface brilliance:

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[1]Geismar, op. cit., p. 198.

[2]Ibid., p. 199.

[3]Ibid., p. 208.

> . . . I believe that Salinger is not quite clear about the meaning of his material; he is extremely deft, sometimes oversophisticated in his surface technique, and for the most part it is a pleasure to follow his artistic strokes. But underneath, where it is a question of values and finally of the iron moral grasp of meaning, one suspects a dodging of issues.[4]

Although this opinion is not applicable to the important portion of Salinger's fiction through the publication of "Franny" (1955), it is a partially valid criticism of his later works, especially of his last published story, "Seymour: An Introduction." While acknowledging Salinger's technical skill, Krim's evaluation is that Salinger is a romantic purveyor of insignificant but nostalgic themes, and that he has a definite appeal to snobs which a "healthy, democratic soul will reject."[5] A goodly number of readers, however, have placed J. D. Salinger consistently on the best-seller lists since the publication of The Catcher in the Rye in 1951. His current best seller, Franny and Zooey, sells 250,000 copies a year. Either a great number of snobs are buying books, or many healthy, democratic souls are not rejecting Salinger.

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[4]Seymour Krim, "Surface and Substance in a Major Talent," Salinger, edited by Henry Grunwald (New York, 1962), p. 66.

[5]Ibid., p. 69.

David Leitch expresses discontent over Salinger's solution of salvation by love, which was set forth in Franny and Zooey:

> Although some readers may feel less content than Franny with Zooey's answer, many, among them those who regard Salinger as a spokesman, have greeted it with delight. Although it is offered as a great step forward, this "blanket" love shows no progression beyond the conclusion of The Catcher; it is simply another variation on Salinger's perpetual theme of withdrawal and escape. To love everybody indiscriminately, simply because they are human, is as efficient a way of avoiding any commitment to them as hitchhiking out west to masquerade as a deaf mute.[6]

This passage misinterprets Salinger's intent. The formula of salvation which Franny accepts from Zooey, and which Salinger clearly advocates, is one which will enable her to enter wholly into contact with humanity, absorbing in her newly acquired spirit of love all incompatibilities between herself and her fellowman. The love acts as a buffer to inharmonious human relations, not as a benign cloud of noncommitment to man. Salinger's salvation by love is certainly not a variation on the theme of withdrawal and escape.

Very pretentiously, George Steiner directs some unusual invective toward Salinger's fiction:

> Salinger's virtues [his technical skill] account for part of his vast appeal. But only for part. The

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[6]David Leitch, "The Salinger Myth," Salinger, edited by Henry Grunwald (New York, 1962), p. 75.

> rest is less exalted. The young like to read about the young. Salinger writes briefly (no need to lug home a big book of something. Lord help us, not available in paperback). He demands of his readers nothing in the way of literacy or political interest (in my time, college bull sessions raged over Doctor Faustus; but that meant having heard of Hitler or Nietzche or being dimly aware of a past writer called Goethe). Salinger flatters the very ignorance and moral shallowness of his young readers.[7]

The implied accusation here is that Salinger is a commercial writer, a man who writes for the sake of profit what the public wants to read. But if Salinger is writing for money, why is he not writing more prolifically? And why does he refuse to sell the movie rights to his work? This charge of commercialism is inane. And, aside from the irrelevant fact that Steiner's remark about college bull sessions in his time reeks of the worst kind of mendacious bragging, why should extensive erudition or political interest be necessary criteria for judging the value of a work of art? That Salinger's literary artifacts can stand alone is an indication of their merit, not a mark against them.

Isa Kapp sanctimoniously objects to Salinger's attitude toward Christ and traditional moral concepts and, like Steiner, deplores Salinger's reluctance--or inability--to utilize to a large degree the works of other writers:

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[7]Steiner, op. cit., p. 83.

> I don't know what an orthodox Christian would make of this democratization of the Spirit, but I resent the liberties Salinger takes with the word [Christ]. The unappetizing image of the Fat Lady is only one rude plank in his program for educating us by adopting a recklessly chummy attitude toward ideas and moral concepts ("Who besides Jesus really knew which end was up?"). Salinger gives a fast great-books course, but in name only. He seems to be deathly embarrassed by any token of erudition, and must bolster a mention of Epictetus or Zen Buddhism by a frank, virile burst of swear words, or an apologetic phrase like "as Kafka, no less, has told us."[8]

Salinger does have a literary heritage, regardless of the language in which it is disguised; and, although his work does not lend itself to footnoting as does the work of Ezra Pound or T. S. Eliot, a failure to recognize his indebtedness to other authors is an indication of a critical blindness. This thesis has shown the Platonic and Christian elements in Salinger's work, and numerous commentators have noted Salinger echoes of Dostoyevski, Mark Twain, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ring Lardner, Franz Kafka, and Soren Kierkegaard. It is within the realm of possibility that Steiner's college crowd could find ample bull-session material here, and that Isa Kapp may not have been reading Salinger with a view toward comprehending.

The authors quoted above represent a dissenting minority in the criticism of Salinger; and, although some of their minor points of disapproval are justifiable,

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[8]Isa Kapp, "Easy Victory," Salinger, edited by Henry Grunwald (New York, 1962), p. 80.

their major objections are more than adequately dispelled by the large number of critics writing in favor of Salinger's fiction.

Arthur Mizener has some enlightening observations on the artistic intent and the literary scope of Salinger:

> . . . . The essential reality for him subsists in personal relations, when people, however agonizingly, love one another. . . .
>
> This is true of all Salinger's mature stories. Their subject is the power to love, pure and--in children and the childlike--simple, but in aware people, pure and complicated. Salinger's constant allusions to the Bhagavad-Gita, Sri-Ramakrishna, Chuang-tzu, and the rest are only efforts to find alternate ways of expressing what his stories are about.[9]

Maxwell Geismar could learn from this that Holden Caulfield and J. D. Salinger are not against everything; they are for love. And Steiner could add to his list of Salinger's reading the titles of three prominent Eastern religious texts previously overlooked.

A comment on the kind of love that Salinger advocates comes from Arthur Heiserman and James Miller:

> . . . . The Love must be spelled with a capital; for it is not the alienated, romantic love of the courtly romances and "Dover Beach"--a love which is tragic because it is founded upon Eros; but rather it is the expansive, yea-saying love of all Creation which we find in the saints and which is never tragic because it is founded upon Agape. This love is the dominant trait of all Salinger's heroes, and when it is thwarted the hero either shoots himself, as does the

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[9]Arthur Mizener, "The Love Song of J. D. Salinger," Harper's, CCXVIII (February, 1959), 87.

> veteran with "battle fatigue" in "A Perfect Day for Bananafish," or goes berserk or melancholic as do the heroes of The Catcher in the Rye and "Uncle Wiggily in Connecticut."[10]

Apparently the "surface brilliance" of Salinger's prose which blinded Seymour Krim to Salinger's meaning does not so dazzle Heiserman and Miller that they are unable to see the message which the light conveys.

Contrary to the opinion of George Steiner, Granville Hicks perceives a propitious sign in Salinger's popularity with young people:

> When we were discussing The Catcher in the Rye in class, there was one dissenting voice, one student who felt that Holden Caulfield's rebellion was too immature and ineffectual to be worth serious consideration. Most of the students loudly disagreed, and I went along with the majority. Holden is not rejecting maturity but is looking for a better model than his elders by and large present. Like the Glasses, though in a less ostentatious way, he is a seeker after wisdom. That Salinger can make the search for wisdom seem important to large numbers of young people is not exactly cause for alarm.[11]

This is a far cry, indeed, from Steiner's statement that Salinger flatters the ignorance and moral shallowness of his young readers.

Martin Green seems to summarize the whole of criticism favorable to Salinger in this passage:

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[10]Arthur Heiserman and James E. Miller, Jr., "Some Crazy Cliff," Salinger, edited by Henry Grunwald (New York, 1962), pp. 199-200.

[11]Granville Hicks, "The Search for Wisdom," Salinger, edited by Henry Grunwald (New York, 1962), p. 194.

> . . . . This is not the place to demonstrate Salinger's purely literary merits. I can only assert that he passes every test the reader's mind imposes, and enters it deeply enough to act upon the faculties of self-creation. The more you read him, the more original you find his meanings; the more he points out to you what you had not seen in your daily life, the finer and more vital his taste and tact are, the more exciting his intelligence and his complex tension of values. With each reading one salutes more perceptions and organizations of perceptions, more penetration; and these salutes act as surrenders of the sensitive mind, the end of resistances and measurings, an opening of those secret areas where one's undirected eagerness and responsiveness lie undefended and indefensible.[12]

Such soaring terms of approbation are not uncommon among those to whom Salinger speaks with meaning and clarity, and their resounding tones of approval drown out the dissonance of the scattered dissenters.

Their high opinion of Salinger's talents, however, does not blind them to this faults; and his faults have been unfortunately magnified in his latest story, "Seymour: An Introduction."

Ihab Hassan comments on "Seymour":

> . . . . What starts as an effort on the part of Buddy Glass to appease once again the impossible ghost of his brother in a labor of love and art turns out to be a monstrous amalgam of parenthetical remarks, a sermon in the form of description, a polemic autobiographical tract.[13]

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[12]Martin Green, "The Image-Maker," Salinger, edited by Henry Grunwald (New York, 1962), pp. 250-251.

[13]Hassan, op. cit., p. 158.

In addition to its stylistic and contextual weaknesses, "Seymour" appears to contain a serious ideological flaw. An anonymous writer for Time points this out:

> . . . "Seymour: An Introduction" is one of the masterly serio-comic performances of recent literature. But in it, Seymour's suicide no longer makes sense. Saints may be martyred but they do not shoot themselves. If the suicide in the hotel room was the act of a man weakened to insanity, then the whole legend is meaningless; Seymour supposedly was the sanest and strongest of men. If it was the departure of a holy man from an unworthy world, it was out of character; Seymour taught his six disciples not only to love and forgive the world but also, one judges from Zooey, to play their parts in the world wholeheartedly. The suicide was wrong, and, as Buddy now explains him, Seymour was not capable of a wrong act.[14]

An intrepid and rare attempt to justify and explain the convoluted nature of "Seymour" is made by Henry Grunwald, who believes that the story is intended to reveal the character of Buddy Glass. He feels that "Salinger is letting us see and guess the personality of a weirdly, fantastically self-conscious and mannered writer on the point of breaking down under the strain of living with Seymour's ghost."[15] Grunwald's effort here is admirable, but it fails to mitigate the fact that "Seymour" is too long and too tedious for even the most patient, devoted reader of Salinger.

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[14] Time (author not given), op. cit., p. 90.

[15] Henry A. Grunwald, editor, Salinger (New York, 1962), p. xxiv.

The consensus of critical opinion, then, seems to agree with the conclusion reached by Gwynn and Blotner, who state that the development of Salinger's art progressed from second-rate magazine items early in his career to his masterworks between 1948 and 1955, and thence downward, most recently, to ambitious failures.[16]

The greatest problems Salinger faces at present are the justification of Seymour's suicide and the overcoming of his own stylistic propensity to artistic self-indulgence and verbosity. How he will develop the character of Seymour is anybody's guess. He may resort to Zen Buddhism or the other mystical religions of which he is very fond, or he may introduce new explanatory circumstances leading up to or away from Seymour's death. Difficult as the problem of Seymour may seem, there is great likelihood that Salinger will solve it.

Stylistically, Salinger will probably do one of two things. Either he will exercise some artistic restraint and regain control of his prose, or he will abandon the disclosure of character through dramatic action and dialogue and slip into the stream-of-consciousness technique. "Seymour," with its endless digressions and asides to the reader, is almost stream-of-consciousness as it is. If Salinger adopts this method, his fiction will become

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[16]Gwynn and Blotner, op. cit., p. 3.

even more introverted than it is now, and the conflict of man with man will give way entirely to the conflict of man with himself.

The content of Salinger's future stories will undoubtedly concern the Glass family. Much more needs to be said about Seymour and Buddy, and Walt and Waker, the twins, have scarcely been treated at all. Boo Boo and her young son Lionel will, quite likely, appear again; and there are endless possibilities in the characters of Franny and Zooey. Loving these people as he does, Salinger is bound to look deeper into their complex lives.

Salinger is forty-three years old now, and, in spite of his recent slump, he may be still developing his talent. Whatever direction his fiction may take in the future, this much is certain: any work bearing the name of Jerome David Salinger will be greeted as a literary event of the first rank, for here is a man whose intense involvement with the problems of mankind in a confusing world has led many readers to a re-evaluation of the standards by which modern society lives.

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