

IN SEARCH OF AN ECHO:
THE SOPHISTRY OF J. D. SALINGER

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PREFACE

Though the fiction of J. D. Salinger certainly cannot claim to suffer from a deficiency of constructive criticism, it would seem that the critical industry, as George Steiner refers to it, which so rapidly canopied his work during the decade of the Nineteen-sixties, failed to perceive a rather basic philosophic weakness of his literature. It is my hope that the following consideration of Salinger's fiction will, when measured against a recognized world-view of human nature, provide a much needed answer to the ultimate tenability of the author's entire canon.

I wish to thank Dr. Green D. Wyrick for his contextual suggestions and Dr. Charles E. Walton for his stylistic remarks. I should like to also thank both Dr. Walton and Dr. Wyrick for the kindness and forbearance which they have shown towards me during the course of my academic career.

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CHAPTER I

THE WORLD OF PENCEY PREP

In 1940, J. D. Salinger's first published story, "The Young Folks," appeared in Whit Burnett's Story. By June, 1959, Salinger's canon consisted of one novel and twenty-nine short stories.¹ The ensuing decade, in characteristic Salinger fashion, has come and withdrawn, leaving not one addition to a canon surely considered meager by even the most lenient standards. But Salinger's self-imposed silence has not influenced the critical community. Quite the contrary, for they have admirably filled the void left by Salinger's absence. For better or worse, they have offered explanations of every facet of Salinger's canon. They have disassembled and reassembled, probed and poked, torn and sewn, with various results.

The object of their affections has generally been the only full length study entrusted to their keeping--The Catcher in the Rye. Its scenes and subways, characters and contortions, have been the

¹Warren French, J. D. Salinger, pp. 15-17.

subjects of much academic ardor. Indeed, it has been suggested that the decade of the 1960's may go down in literary history as "'the age of Holden Caulfield.'"² Such a critical landslide is not, however, without cause. Critics and literary historians are even yet attempting to discover whether Salinger's The Catcher in the Rye is "'a tale told by an idiot . . . signifying nothing,'"³ or "a case history of us all."⁴

The Catcher in the Rye, thematically, is an attempt by Salinger to expose, through the quest of Holden Caulfield, the idealist, what he feels is the phoniness and hypocrisy of life in the United States. The plot of The Catcher, involving a three-day odyssey, concerns the protagonist, Holden Caulfield, after his expulsion from Pencey Prep "for bad grades and general irresponsibility."⁵ If, as George Steiner suggests, critics have elevated a mediocre Salinger to the

²Ibid., p. 36.

³The Christian Science Monitor, July 19, 1951, p. 7.

⁴Harrison Smith, "Manhattan Ulysses, Junior," The Saturday Review of Literature, XXXIV (July 1951), 12-13.

⁵Peter J. Seng, "The Fallen Idol: The Immature World of Holden Caulfield," CE, XXIII (December 1961), 204.

rank of master poet,⁶ one should find evidences of such mutation through an examination of Holden Caulfield and The Catcher in the Rye. If, on the other hand, "it is not Holden who should be examined for a sickness of the mind, but the world in which he sojourned and found himself an alien,"⁷ an examination of Salinger's portrayal of his worlds and the nature of Holden Caulfield should suggest such a conclusion. Prior to such a consideration, however, it is both necessary and appropriate for one to consider briefly and define three views of human nature and Holden's relationship to them.

The idealist, such as Holden Caulfield, is a person able to see, or unable not to see, some difference between a prevailing situation and a desired one.⁸ Of necessity, such a situation involves a choice. Concerning this choice, Canon Streeter has said:

The kind of things I do and think make me the kind of man I am. And the kind

⁶George Steiner, "The Salinger Industry," in Salinger, ed. by Henry Anatole Grunwald, pp. 84-85.

⁷Arthur Heiserman and James E. Miller, Jr., "J. D. Salinger: Some Crazy Cliff," Western Humanities Review, X (Spring 1956), 137.

⁸Clinton W. Trowbridge, "The Symbolic Structure of The Catcher in the Rye," SR, LXXIV (Summer 1966), 683.

of man I am determines the friends and enemies I make, the opportunities I see or miss, the things which I succeed or fail in. For better and for worse, "character is destiny." No one who has watched the actual working out of the Reign of Law in individual character or in the external consequences of actions in social life--regenerating or devastating as the case may be--can miss the glory or the tragedy which follows the right or wrong in moral choice.⁹

Choice is dictated by one's particular nature. Human nature, then, becomes the scapegoat upon which the shortcomings and failures of the world have been placed. Crime, jealousy, prejudice, selfishness, war, poverty, slavery, etc., have all, at one time or another, been thought to be the result of human nature.¹⁰ Such a serious charge requires a close look at the three major views of human nature, for the approach that any given individual, including Holden Caulfield, takes to moral problems hinges upon his view.

The view that human nature is essentially evil has received support, according to Harold H. Titus, from three main sources. First, the Christian religion, as reflected in the doctrine of sin set forth by Augustine (354-430) gave support. Next,

⁹Harold H. Titus, Ethics for Today, p. 81.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 70.

classical economists, by popularizing the view that man as an economic creature is basically selfish, also gave support. Lastly, nineteenth-century biological science, which popularized the theory that civilization is largely a veneer covering a bestial nature, gave support to a doctrine of an evil human nature.¹¹

The view that nature is good and that man, as a part of nature, is also good, was popularized in Western thought by Rousseau (1712-1778). Man, said Rousseau, was good until the advance of civilization brought vice and corruption. Man, he continued, could reclaim this state of goodness, simply by returning to Nature.¹² Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) later supported this view by his interpretation of evolution as an inevitable progress. "The natural laws, without man's aid, will gradually bring about a harmonious adjustment of man's nature to the environment in which he lives."¹³

A third view of human nature takes the position that man is neither good nor bad, but has possibilities for both. Reinhold Niebuhr, an advocate of this

¹¹Loc. cit.

¹²Jean Jacques Rousseau, The Social Contract, pp. 5-6.

¹³Quoted in Titus, op. cit., p. 71.

school, sees man as a blend of "nature" and "spirit."¹⁴

To the essential nature of man belong, on the one hand, all his natural endowments and determinations, his physical and social impulses, his sexual and racial differentiations, in short his character as a creature imbedded in the natural order. On the other hand, his essential nature also includes the freedom of his spirit, his transcendence over natural process and finally his self-transcendence.¹⁵

Human nature, it is argued, is neither all good nor all bad, but a combination of those two extremes and therefore "plastic."

Traditionally, both critics and readers of Salinger's Catcher have considered it an extension of the Rousseau school of thought. This study will instead assume as a basis for discussion of the novel, and indeed, Salinger's entire canon, the view that human nature has great potentials for both good and evil and is, therefore, plastic.

The world of Pencey Prep is, for the reader, the first world of Holden Caulfield. Holden describes it in these words:

Pencey Prep is this school that's in Agerstown, Pennsylvania. You probably heard of it. You've probably seen the

¹⁴Reinhold Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, I, 270.

¹⁵Loc. cit.

ads, anyway. They advertise in about a thousand magazines, always showing some hotshot 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.¹⁶

Holden's complaint, of course, is simply that Pencey Prep has advertised false claims "in about a thousand magazines." He does not claim that school officials are overbearing or that his individuality is suffering,¹⁷ complaints that one would certainly expect to hear, but only that Pencey claims to "mold" young men and does not achieve its claim. In order clearly to evaluate such an attitude, the character of its originator must certainly be considered.

"It was Saturday," Holden tells us, and a "football game with Saxon Hall"(4) was in progress. The game, which . . . "was supposed to be a very big deal around Pencey," was the last one of the season and "practically the whole school was there except

¹⁶J. D. Salinger, The Catcher in the Rye, p. 4. All quotations are from the Little, Brown and Company edition.

¹⁷French, op. cit., p. 108.

me"(5). His reasons for not attending the event were twofold: (1) He had returned from a fencing team engagement in New York City late, because he had left the foils and other equipment on the subway; and (2) he was on his way to say good-bye to Spencer, his history instructor. Holden, one finds, was not supposed to return to Pencey after the Christmas break. He was being expelled for failure to pass four of his five courses. Perhaps, as Holden has pointed out, Pencey does not mold boys into clear-thinking young men. It has certainly failed in his case. On the other hand, Whooton School and Elkton Hill, schools which one can assume were much like Pencey, came to similiar conclusions concerning his drive and ability. The fact is that Pencey is not the first or second, but the fourth private school from which Holden has been ejected for failure to produce results.¹⁸

Holden, however, can offer up reasons for his failures. "One of the biggest reasons I left Elkton Hills was because I was surrounded by phonies. . . . They were coming in the goddam window"(19). The headmaster of Elkton, Holden later explains, was one of the biggest hypocrites he had ever had the

¹⁸Charles Child Walcutt, Man's Changing Mask, p. 13.

displeasure of meeting. One cannot escape, even at this very early stage of the novel, the feeling that Holden Caulfield's powers of rationalization, if nothing else about him, are indeed above average. Before, however, passing on to other areas of Holden's prep school world, one should consider a rather important aspect of Spencer's conversation, the much discussed Central Park duck scene.

While Caulfield is being advised and, to some extent, bullied by Spencer, his thoughts turn to the lagoon at Central Park and the ducks that frequent it. Although perhaps beside the point, though certainly inseparable from it, Holden explains, . . . "you don't have to think too hard when you talk to a teacher" (18). With the opportunity presented, Holden begins to daydream.

I was wondering if it would be frozen over when I got home, and if it was, where did the ducks go. I was wondering where the ducks went when the lagoon got all icy and frozen over. I wondered if some guy came in a truck and took them away to a zoo or something"(18).

Here, of course, the reader is presented with a symbolic microcosm of Caulfield's plight as he sees it in The Catcher. The ducks, like Holden, are innocents. Ice, winter, and the possibility of death are the obvious threats to the ducks, just as Holden's

world at Pencey, and later in New York City, presents threats to his security. The man in the truck represents salvation in whatever form it should happen to take.¹⁹ Rescue or flight are the obvious alternatives to life in the pond for the ducks and also for life at Pencey for Holden. There is, however, a third alternative. Although Holden does not consider it, ducks in winter occasionally take flight and sometimes they are rescued by man and taken to zoos, but they can stay where they are by keeping a small part of the pond free from ice.²⁰ Holden, it would seem, has placed himself in a world he does not approve of, not because it of necessity alienates the sensitive, but because he is unable to define for himself an adult role in that world.²¹ Unable or unwilling to move his feet in an attempt to keep his section of the pond free of ice, he can only find fault with those who have mastered the rather subtle act. Those people who are able to keep afloat during the winter are simply negated as "phonies" by Holden.

¹⁹J. D. O'Hara, "No Catcher in the Rye," MFS, IX (Winter 1963-64), 371.

²⁰Loc. cit.

²¹Arvin R. Wells, "Huck Finn and Holden Caulfield: The Situation of the Hero," OUR, II (1960), 40.

It is interesting to note, as has Robert O. Bowen, that the criterion for "phoniness" or for being a "phony" in The Catcher is very vague. No one, including the protagonist, is presented as "un-phony." This mechanism, says Bowen, "allows the reader to remain on the approved side only if he is not phony enough to be taken in by parents, teachers, and others who make constructive or pleasant remarks."²² This technique cannot help but have a rather obvious appeal to the immature reader.²³

Holden, who feels somehow obligated to continue his conversation with Mr. Spencer, at last resolves his discussion with him by suggesting that his failure at Pencey Prep is merely a "phase" which he is going through. Holden admits at this point in his quest that the natural completion of his "phase," or movement from innocence to experience, was not to be found at Pencey. Then, as he calls himself, "the most terrific liar you ever say in your life"(22), leaving on the excuse that he has to go to the gym, returns to Ossenburger Memorial Wing. Holden's compulsion to lie and his Pencey address are two

²²Robert O. Bowen, "The Salinger Syndrome: Charity Against Whom?," Ramparts, I (May 1962), 53.

²³Loc. cit.

important, if dissimilar, parts of his prep school world.

"Where I lived at Pencey, I lived in Ossenburger Memorial Wing of the new dorms"(22). According to John M. Howell, who manages rather skillfully to prop up The Catcher with "Waste Land" parallels, Ossenburger, who himself went to Pencey Prep as a young man, is a "wealthy and hypocritical alum."²⁴ It would be difficult to deny Mr. Ossenburger's wealth. He has evidently given over a rather large sum of money to Pencey for the building of the dorm. It is also very possible that Mr. Ossenburger is a difficult man to respect and admire. Successful religious zealots, and he did say that he "talked to Jesus all the time"(23), are difficult people to love, especially wealthy religious zealots who happen to be undertakers. However, one cannot help feeling that Mr. Ossenburger is not as hypocritical as Howell has suggested. It is perhaps possible that Ossenburger did not build the dorm for Pencey only with tax deductible reasons in mind.

Lying, as a facet of Holden's prep school world, is not quite so easily dismissed. The actual

²⁴John M. Howell, "Salinger in the Waste Land," MFS, XII (Autumn 1966), 370.

number of times that Holden lies, within the framework of his novel, is difficult to determine. The unimportance of a numerical citation is undoubtedly reflected by the fact that critics have failed to note such a matter. However, the important aspect of Holden's lies, which appear not only in the world of Pencey Prep, but throughout the entire novel, can at least be briefly considered. Charles H. Kegel suggests that throughout the novel Holden asks but one thing of those with whom he comes in contact. He simply asks that people and institutions mean what they say.²⁵ As earlier cited, Holden finds that Pencey Prep, as an institution, is "phony," because it fails to "mold" boys into young men. Later, in his New York world, when Maurice, the elevator operator, tells Holden that the price of a prostitute is five-dollars, he expects to pay only the advertised price of five-dollars.²⁶ Kegel draws what one cannot help but feel is an erroneous solution to this problem by suggesting that the honesty and sincerity which Holden is unable to find in the people and institutions around him,

²⁵Charles H. Kegel, "Incommunicability in Salinger's The Catcher in the Rye," WHR, XI (Spring 1957), 188.

²⁶Loc. cit.

he attempts to maintain himself.²⁷ This conclusion is based on Holden's "repeated assertions that something he has said is 'really' so" ²⁸ These assertions, Kegel feels, are Caulfield's attempt "to keep faith with the Word."²⁹ Such an approach to the problem of Holden's lying seems very misdirected. Incessant liars keep little faith with the "Word," and falsehoods, no matter why they are perpetuated, have little to do with sincerity.

While it is difficult to draw simple solutions to complex problems, it may well be that Charles Childs Walcutt came as close to such a solution as anyone when he concluded that Caulfield used lying as a base from which to launch his defiance and distain, not to mention his humor.³⁰ Holden Caulfield, as wildly "phony" as a caricature, makes the Pencey Prep school world as well as the world at large just as absurd as his own private world by lying.³¹

Holden's schoolmates, Ackley and Stradlater, are also important aspects of his prep school world.

²⁷Loc. cit.

²⁸Loc. cit.

²⁹Loc. cit.

³⁰Walcutt, op. cit., p. 318.

³¹Loc. cit.

An evaluation of them and their relationship to Holden should go far towards establishing the protagonist's attitude toward adolescence.

If Ackley is anything, he is a boy of disgusting personal habits. Plagued with pimples, halitosis, ugly fingernails, sinus, and poor teeth, it is easy to understand why this ungainly fellow, who lived in the room next to Holden at Ossenburger, "had a terrible personality"(26) in addition to his less than desirable personal habits. Ackley, simply put, was a "slob," not a secret slob, but an overt one. "He was exactly the kind of a guy that wouldn't get out of your light when you asked him to"(28).

In addition to his unsavory personal habits, Ackley frequently called Holden a "kid," because, at eighteen, he was two years Holden's senior. It is needless to conjecture how very sensitive any sixteen-year-old boy is to the criticism, "kid." These, then, were Holden's primary objections to Ackley: (1) he was unclean in his personal habits; and (2) he referred to Holden as a "kid," thereby flaunting his chronological superiority.

Ackley, however, is a sincere character. He does not claim to be something which he is not. His personality and his physical nature were surly and, as is evidenced by the fact that "he hardly

ever went anywhere"(26), he undoubtedly was aware of his shortcomings. If Holden is an innocent character cut off and alienated from a world of "phonies," Ackley has not contributed to that world. He is what he pretends to be--a slob. Stradlater, on the other hand, is felt by Holden to be a secret "slob."

Something less than twenty pages of Chapters IV and VI provide the entire Stradlater episode.³² Stradlater, as has been mentioned, is a clandestine slob. Like Ackley, his personal habits reflect his indifference. "You should've seen the razor he shaved himself with. It was always rusty as hell and full of lather and hairs and crap. He never cleaned it or anything"(35-36). But "he always looked good when he was finished fixing himself up . . ."(36). Stradlater, however, could not be considered "phony" on such hazy grounds, and Holden did not actually dislike him because of untidy personal habits. It is, instead, Stradlater's sexual prowess and his relationship with Jane Gallagher that stirs Holden's distain.

Jane Gallagher is represented as a purity image.³³ In Chapter IV of The Catcher, when Holden

³²Carl F. Strauch, "Kings in the Back Row: Meaning Through Structure--A Reading of Salinger's The Catcher in the Rye," Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature, II (Winter 1961), 12.

³³Wells, op. cit., p. 41.

finds that Stradlater is to have a date with her, "he nearly dropped dead"(40). Holden can only make an attempt, if feeble, to explain to Stradlater why Jane ". . . wouldn't move any of her kings"(41). The symbolism of this imagery perhaps provides the central motif of the episode. Carl F. Strauch suggests that Jane, by keeping her kings in reserve, defends herself against sexual attack.³⁴ If Jane is exhibiting a symbolic sexual defense, there is a rather simple explanation of the entire episode. For example, Holden remembers Jane as the girl next door. As earlier stated, she represents, for Holden at least, purity and innocence. She is untainted. She is not a "phony" character. Stradlater, although he does not realize it, violates Holden's memory of Jane. Eugene McNamara has suggested this violation is simply a failure of charity on Stradlater's part.³⁵ Stradlater's interest in Jane is certainly a selfish one. She is for him an object, not an individual. He is even unable to remember whether her name is Jean or Jane. Holden, however, is also motivated by a selfish

³⁴ Strauch, op. cit., p. 104.

³⁵ Eugene McNamara, "Holden as Novelist," EJ, LIV (March 1965), 169.

interest. He wants to keep intact his memory of Jane. He wants to keep her from entering what he considers to be the world of self, which is Stradlater.³⁶ Holden would have Jane remain fixed and rigid in a plastic world. His static memory of her, should she perhaps transcend her own self and become interested in Stradlater, would be seriously jeopardized. Such a turn of events could force an alteration of Holden's entire world view.

In Chapter VI, when Stradlater returns from his date with Jane, Holden feels compelled to find out whose world Jane now belongs to. He must find out whether Stradlater has had intercourse with her. But because Stradlater will not indicate whether or not he "give her the time . . ." (56), a fight ensues. Holden, who had "only been in about two fights" (59) in his entire life, loses. This fight, one feels, only serves to point up the growing list of Holden's losses. He is fighting against entering the pragmatic and sometimes cruel adult phase of his life and, although perhaps not consciously, finding great difficulty in separating himself from the growing responsibilities of adolescence.

³⁶Loc. cit.

Later, nursing a bloody nose as the price of his scene with Stradlater, Holden goes into Ackley's room. ". . . just to see what the hell he was doing" (59). He is unable to find any solace in a room which stinks of dirty socks or in a conversation with a fellow who is ". . . even more stupid than Stradlater" (61). He is sincerely lonely and desperate. "I felt so lonesome, all of a sudden. I almost wished I was dead"(62). He packs, counts his money, ("I have this grandmother that's quite lavish with her dough" [67]), and says goodbye to his Pencey Prep School world:³⁷

When I was all set to go, when I had my bags and all, I stood for a while next to the stairs and took a last look down the goddam corridor. I was sort of crying. I don't know why. I put my red hunting hat on, and turned the peak around to the back, the way I like it, and then yelled at the top of my goddam voice, "Sleep tight, ya morons!" I'll bet I woke up every bastard on the whole floor. Then I got the hell out. Some stupid guy had thrown peanut shells all over the stairs, and I damn near broke my crazy neck.(68)

It must certainly be said, by way of conclusion to Holden's prep school world, that Salinger has presented the mediocrity of the typical American

³⁷Maxwell Geismar, American Moderns: From Rebellion to Conformity, p. 197.

private school in quotable, readable prose.³⁸ Holden, an adolescent in revolt, has attempted to reform the hypocrisy of the academic establishment. He feels that those he leaves behind are morons, because they are so very absorbed in their pimples and good looks that they fail to try to understand him and his troubles.³⁹ Holden, of course, is unconcerned with their problems. His problems, he feels, are more urgent than theirs, more important. The inconsistencies he has found in those around him may well be only the reflection of a badly fragmented self on the walls of a very fragile house. Like Jane Gallagher's kings, it would appear to be Holden who is caught in the "back row" of life.⁴⁰

Salinger has, thus far, presented a tale that is not only about innocence, but is actively for innocence, as if retaining childhood were an actual possibility.⁴¹ Holden, as an adolescent in a world of adolescents, has been unable to transcend innocence. It is at this point in the novel that Holden, on the run, approaches his New York City world, his lost weekend. The quest begins.

³⁸Ibid., pp. 197-198.

³⁹French, op. cit., p. 111.

⁴⁰Howell, op. cit., p. 371.

⁴¹Jonathan Baumbach, The Landscape of Nightmare: Studies in the Contemporary American Novel, p. 56.

CHAPTER II

LOST WEEKEND: N.Y.C.

Imagine yourself at sixteen, preparing to run away from old Pencey Prep. To heighten the effect, light up a sixteen-year-old's clandestine cigarette; drag deeply, feel the nicotine and tar scorching your virginal lungs, then plan your adventures. Where will you go? New York! The only glamorous setting for your fantasy! The bright lights, the anonymity, the golden opportunities for women, and liquor, and--the possibilities are staggering!⁴²

Although perhaps not in the correct frame of mind to enjoy fully the typical prep school boy's dream, a weekend in New York City, Holden moves headlong into it and, significantly, finds his first encounter, the Mrs. Morrow scene, to be one of his most successful.⁴³ By utilizing the same dual codes for which he in past episodes criticized members of his prep school world for using, Holden attempts to become a part of the adult world simply by claiming

⁴²Edward M. Keating, "Salinger. The Murky Mirror," Ramparts (Menlo Park, California), I (May 1962), 63.

⁴³Trowbridge, op. cit., p. 683.

adult status. Holden, the play-actor, proclaims himself an adult in his relationships with Mrs. Morrow. He will continue his man-of-the-world ploy, with various degrees of success, until the Maurice episode.⁴⁴

Identified by the Pencey Prep sticker on one of his suitcases, Holden becomes involved in a conversation with Mrs. Morrow, the mother of one of his school classmates, Ernest Morrow. In order to be accepted by this rather attractive woman of forty or forty-five Rudolf Schmidt, alias Holden Caulfield, slides quickly into his adult role.

Though Rudolf, by way of a comic aside, pictures Ernest to his reading audience as a boy whose sensitivities closely resemble those of a toilet seat, he tells Mrs. Morrow that her son is "pretty conscientious" and "a very sensitive boy"(72). Continuing his act, Rudolf casually offers a cigarette to his guest, which she accepts. Later, young Mr. Schmidt suggests cocktails, but Mrs. Morrow, sanguine almost to a fault, hints that, because of the lateness of the hour, the club car would probably be closed. It is at this point in the Morrow episode that Holden's

⁴⁴Loc. cit.

act almost fails him. ". . . she looked at me and asked me what I was afraid she was going to ask" (75). My son Ernest, she tells Holden, is not coming home until Wednesday. "I hope," she cautiously continues, "you weren't called home suddenly because of illness in the family"(75). Not at all, replies Rudolf Holden Schmidt. "I have to have this operation. . . . I have this tiny little tumor on the brain"(75). And so the episode ends. ("She got off at Newark. She wished me a lot of luck with the operation and all" [76] .)

It has been suggested that the character qualities which Holden presents in his conversation with Mrs. Morrow make him an attractive character. Because his lies about Ernest get Mrs. Morrow into a state of appreciation, it is argued, lying should be condoned in this instance.⁴⁵ However, such an explanation is most superficial. Holden, through his act, has simply managed to side-step the complete absurdity of his own situation and, by lying, has been able to force Mrs. Morrow into his false and "phony" circumstance. Mrs. Morrow's agreeable nature is, perhaps, in a large measure responsible for his

⁴⁵Walcutt, op. cit., pp. 318-319.

success.

Immediately upon reaching New York City, Holden decides to call some friends and, perhaps, find some "action." E. M. Keating sees this episode as "the classic vignette" of Holden's voluntary impotency.⁴⁶ In a given situation, an adult must make a decision and then act upon it, accepting the responsibility of the action. Holden's tremendous powers of rationalization make such a commitment unnecessary.⁴⁷ "My brother D. B. was in Hollywood" (77). He could call his younger sister Phoebe, but his parents might answer the telephone. Jane Gallagher's name comes to mind, but "I [Holden] didn't feel like it"(77). Sally Hayes would be fun, but her mother might answer the telephone. "Then I thought of calling up . . . Carl Luce, but I didn't like him very much"(78). Holden easily evades these potentials for action, because, sensing his own inability to truly transcend his adolescent self, he can not accept the responsibility for such a potential or its inevitable conclusion.

Leaving Penn Station, Holden takes a short

⁴⁶Keating, op. cit., p. 63.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 64.

cab ride to the Edmont Hotel. After checking in, ("I didn't know then that the goddam hotel was full of perverts and morons" [79].) he goes to his room. While sitting on the window ledge, he notices a male transvestite on the other side of the hotel in the act of dressing himself in his female garb. Also, "in a window almost right over his [the transvestite's], " he sees "a man and a woman squirting water [highballs] out of their mouths at each other"(80). Holden admits that he is fascinated by the unusual displays, even though he doesn't want to be. While he has dismissed the people he sees as abnormal and, therefore, perverted, he ". . . can even see how it [participation in such acts] might be quite a lot of fun, in a crummy way . . ."(81). Disregarding the morality involved, Holden provides an answer to his own problem. "Sex," he tells us, "is something I just don't understand"(82). His affair with Faith Cavendish certainly substantiates such a statement.

Holden, somewhat excited by the events that he had so recently observed, decides to call Miss Cavendish. While not a whore, Faith is described as a girl who "didn't mind doing it [participating in pre-marital intercourse] once in a while"(83). Holden Caulfield, man-of-the-world, dials her number,

which a casual acquaintance from Princeton had once given him, and attempts to give wings to his fantasy.

Introductions completed, Holden suggests that Miss Cavendish meet him for a cocktail. She refuses him on two counts: (1) It is very late, and (2) her roommate is ill. It is, of course, not late. Furthermore, Faith's roommate's supposed illness could be interpreted in a number of ways if, indeed, she has a roommate. For whatever reason, Faith is unable to join Holden for cocktails or to invite him to her home for drinks. Faith, however, suggests Sunday night as an alternative. The opportunity which Holden insists that he desires is presented. Characteristically, he refuses to act. "I can't make it tomorrow"(85), he tells Faith, and so he once again avoids a clear potential for action.⁴⁸

Chapter X finds Holden still outwardly eager for some adult "action." Having failed to arrange a suitable rendezvous with the promiscuous Faith Cavendish, he resorts to the Lavender Room, a night club located on the ground floor of the Edmont. Once seated "I [Holden] ordered a Scotch and soda"(90), but without verification of age he is forced to settle

⁴⁸Trowbridge, op. cit., p. 684.

for coke. "I [Holden] didn't hold it against him [the waiter], though. They lose their jobs if they get caught selling to a minor. I'm a goddam minor" (91). Holden's man-of-the-world act is beginning to wear thin.

Seated next to Holden in the Lavender Room are the "Seattle triplets."⁴⁹ "At the table right next to me, there were these three girls around thirty or so. The whole three of them were pretty ugly, and they all had on the kind of hats that you knew they didn't really live in New York . . ." (90). Holden feels, however, that one of the girls, the blonde, is rather cute. Later, having danced with this obviously uninterested but smooth-dancing blonde, he sits at a table with her and her two companions, naively believing that they are actually from Seattle.⁵⁰

As the bar begins to close, the girls leave, after quickly excusing themselves on the grounds that they want to get to bed early in order to be well rested for the morning show at Radio City Music Hall. Holden, "too youthfully obtuse"⁵¹ to understand fully

⁴⁹Keating, op. cit., p. 64.

⁵⁰Robert P. Moore, "The World of Holden," EJ, LIV (March 1965), 163.

⁵¹Loc. cit.

what the charming group actually represent or even what their opinion of him was, is left only with their almost \$13.00 drink tab.⁵²

Holden, through his abnormal powers of rationalization, is able privately to dismiss the episode by a snobbish rejection of the entire ordeal. A suave sophisticate such as himself would have little actual desire to become involved with anyone so crude and uncultured as to order a Tom Collins in mid-December or go to Radio City Music Hall (where he himself will subsequently go).⁵³ Again, nothing happens, and, again, Holden, through artful circumlocution, avoids the real issue, his inability to transcend innocence.

Holden, some dollars lighter and none the wiser, leaves the Hotel bar for his room. As he walks, he reflects upon his first encounter with Jane Gallagher. Ultimately, no real pleasure can be gained from such musings, however, because Stradlater may have been involved in sexual relations with her. "The destruction of innocence is an act of irreparable evil in Holden's world."⁵⁴ Though Holden

⁵²Loc. cit.

⁵³French, op. cit., p. 111.

⁵⁴Baumbach, op. cit., p. 61.

contemplates telephoning Jane several times during the course of his New York weekend, and twice dials her number, he is never able to reach her. As Jonathan Baumbach has suggested, Holden's inability actually to reach Jane is undoubtedly symbolic ". . . of his loss of her innocence."⁵⁵ Stradlater, who may or may not have actually destroyed Jane's physical innocence, has certainly destroyed, and irreparably so, Holden's notion of her.⁵⁶

Following his non-productive thoughts of Jane, Holden, still unconvinced of his lack of place in an adult world, decides to go to Ernie's, a night club in Greenwich village which his brother, D. B., once frequented. His decision brings about the much discussed taxi-cab scene involving Horwitz, the driver of the vehicle.

As the taxi-cab rolls through New York City on its way to Ernie's, Holden strikes up a conversation with Horwitz. An obvious extension of his daydream at Mr. Spencer's home, he asks the driver where the ducks in the Lagoon at Central Park go in the winter. Badly in need of saving, Holden is desperate for

⁵⁵Loc. cit.

⁵⁶Loc. cit.

answers.⁵⁷ Horwitz, however, is evidently ignorant of water fowl behavior and so switches the topic of conversation from ducks to fish, a reasonable substitute. Fish, he explains, live in the ice during the winter. "It's their nature, for chrissake. They get frozen right in one position for the whole winter"(108). Attempting to bring the point closer to home, he makes a connection between Holden and the fish. "If you Holden was a fish, Mother Nature'd take care of you, wouldn't she? Right? You don't think them fish just die when it gets to be winter, do ya"(109)?

Fish, of course, do occasionally die during the winter months, just as ducks occasionally fall victim to ice, and innocents who are unable to transcend their state "succumb to the dangers of life."⁵⁸ Horwitz, by failing to make the man with a truck or savior image a part of his interpretation, suggests that such an occurrence would not be likely. Holden, prior to getting out of the cab in front of Ernie's, describes Horwitz as a "touchy guy" and adds that "it wasn't any pleasure discussing anything with

⁵⁷O'Hara, op. cit., p. 371.

⁵⁸Loc. cit.

him"(108). Mother Nature has so far not taken care of Holden Caulfield. He needs a savior, someone who will present a viable life style exclusive of transcendence, and Horwitz is unable to offer him one.

Holden, still intent, though increasingly less so, on his suave sophisticate act, is temporarily indulged at Ernie's. ". . . you could get liquor at Ernie's . . . nobody cared how old you were. You could even be a dope fiend and nobody'd care"(111). Ernie's, capitalizing on the youth market, is obviously in the business to make money, Holden's included. Needless to say, once seated, Holden feels surrounded by "jerks," "phonies," and "Ivy League bastards"(111-112). These young people, approximately his own age, are merely acting out adult parts, though not in the desperate sense that he himself is. Rather than feeling completely at ease among such like-minded members of his own age group, Holden feels completely above the crowd. "All of a sudden"(112), however, his act is threatened by Lillian Simmons, one time girl friend of D. B. Caulfield.

Having recognized Holden, Lillian moves to his table and begins pumping him for information concerning his brother, whom she is obviously still interested in. Much to Holden's chagrin, Lillian

treats him like the younger brother she knows him to be.⁵⁹ "Are you all alone, baby? Don't you have a date, baby. . . . Well you little so-and-so"(113). Later, as Holden leaves Ernie's, he explains that ". . . people are always ruining things for you"(114). He has been unsuccessful as an adult even in the pseudo-adult atmosphere of Ernie's. Walking back to his hotel, Holden approaches the scene that will completely destroy his man-of-the-world act.⁶⁰

Entering the lobby of his hotel Holden is accosted by Maurice, the elevator operator. Maurice's question, "Innarested in a little tail t'night?"(118), clearly challenges Holden's adult image of himself and, consequently, must be answered affirmatively.⁶¹ Although "it was against my [Holden] principles and all"(118), he allows Maurice to send Sunny, the teenage prostitute, to his room.⁶²

If Jane Gallagher represents love profaned, Sunny must certainly be symbolic of "profane love unprofaned."⁶³ Once Sunny reaches his room, Holden

⁵⁹Trowbridge, op. cit., p. 684.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 685.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 684.

⁶²French, op. cit., pp. 111-112.

⁶³Baumbach, op. cit., p. 63.

simply refuses to make love, though he is more than willing to pay the agreed price of five dollars for her services. Holden only wants to talk. While there have been close to as many interpretations of this situation as there are Salinger critics, it would seem that Holden's inability to act simply reinforces early situations in which he always was forced to remain static. Until he is able to transcend self, he will have no potential for participation in good or evil. As long as he is unable to transcend self, he must remain static.

In order to avoid action, Holden, as usual, lies. "I've had a rough night"(125), he tells Sunny. Certainly that statement cannot be denied. Unfortunately Sunny, still not understanding the point which Holden is attempting to make, forces him to continue. Due to a "clavichord operation"(126), Holden suggests, he is unable to participate in intercourse. In an attempt finally to resolve the situation, Holden gives her the agreed upon five-dollars, which she now claims to be ten-dollars, and gets her dress from its hanger in the closet. As Clinton Trowbridge has suggested, it is significant that, just as Holden rejected the adolescent world of Pencey Prep with a parting shout, so Sunny dismisses his pretensions

of being an adult with the wonderfully casual,⁶⁴ and totally devastating, "So long, crumb-bum"(128).

Later, though Holden has paid Sunny without using her, Maurice enters his room and demands an extra five-dollars. Because Holden insists that the agreed price was five, not ten-dollars, Maurice is forced to beat him in order to extract what he obviously knows is not his. This episode recapitulates the Stradlater scene, for in both instances the world punishes Holden for his innocence.⁶⁵ Spencer, Holden's prep school History instructor, once suggested that life is a game. Holden, an inflexible character because of a basic lack of self-transcendence, finds himself unprepared for the fluid game of life and, hence, must pay heavily for unwarranted attempts at such play.

Sunday morning, with his vision of himself as a man-of-the-world now altered to that of young man-of-the-world, Holden calls his old girl friend, Sally Hayes, the American Dream girl,⁶⁶ and arranges to take her to a matinee.⁶⁷ Although she will prove

⁶⁴Trowbridge, op. cit., p. 685.

⁶⁵Baumbach, op. cit., p. 63.

⁶⁶McNamara, op. cit., p. 169.

⁶⁷Trowbridge, op. cit., p. 685.

to be no more understanding than Sunny,⁶⁸ after a quick breakfast with two very naive nuns, Holden slowly makes his way to the Biltmore, scene of the matinee. As an afterthought he decides to stop in Central Park on the way, just in case his sister Phoebe might be skating there. As it is Sunday, Phoebe is nowhere in sight, and, after briefly considering but rejecting a nostalgic tour of the Museum of Natural History, he arrives at the Biltmore.

Sally Hayes must be interpreted symbolically as the dual nature of world as it is, with good and evil together. Holden may justly find her to be false and superficial, but she is also physically attractive.⁶⁹ She was so attractive that "I [Holden] felt like marrying her the minute I saw her. I'm crazy. I didn't even like her much and yet . . . I was in love with her and wanted to marry her"(162). Holden senses that Sally has somehow managed to break out of her shell of innocence and enter, though cautiously at first, the adult world. If there is such a thing as salvation by association, Holden intends to get it:

⁶⁸French, op. cit., p. 112.

⁶⁹Trowbridge, op. cit., p. 685.

"Look," I said. "Here's my idea. How would you like to get the hell out of here? Here's my idea. . . . we could drive up to Massachusetts and Vermont, and all around there, see. It's beautiful as hell up there. . . . I could get a job somewhere and we could live somewhere with a brook and all and, later on, we could get married or something. I could chop all our wood in the wintertime and all . . . Wuddaya say?"(171)

Sally, of course, is far too precariously perched to be of any help to Holden in his quest for a viable world. Rejected by Sally, Holden reciprocates, rejects her, and continues his quest for an ideal world over a drink with Carl Luce. Carl will provide a major turning point in the novel.

Carl Luce, Holden tells us, "graduated from the Whooton School after I left. He was about three years older than I was . . . [and] . . . he had the highest I.Q. of any boy at Whooton."(177). In many ways, Holden sees him as the ideal sophisticate that he may still faintly want to become.⁷⁰ He may also suggest to Holden, if indirectly, the man in the truck, the savior, since his father is a psychiatrist. Luce himself, however, represents the lunacy of such a symbol. His father has obviously been unable to help his own son.⁷¹ Holden, as a logical extension

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 686.

⁷¹O'Hara, op. cit., p. 372.

of previous episodes, draws a blank with this more mature ex-schoolmate who now attends Columbia.⁷² For those questions that most disturb Holden, Carl can only retort, "Your mind is immature"(192). Luce calmly concludes that, in order to make some sense of his obviously disordered life, in order to discover the "patterns of his mind," Holden will have to consult a psychiatrist.⁷³ An unmistakable prototype of Lane Coutell in "Franny,"⁷⁴ Holden describes Luce as one who will not ". . . have an intellectual conversation with you unless they're running the whole thing"(177). By way of conclusion, Warren French has said it all: "There is no aid for the bewildered in such monomaniacal monologues."⁷⁵

"At prep school he was a teenager among teenagers. In N. Y. C., he is a teenager against the world of sharpies and sophisticates and phonies and adults . . ."⁷⁶ New York, Holden has found, is really no different than Pencey.⁷⁷ He has proved

⁷²French, op. cit., p. 112.

⁷³Trowbridge, op. cit., p. 686.

⁷⁴French, op. cit., p. 112.

⁷⁵Loc. cit.

⁷⁶Moore, op. cit., p. 163.

⁷⁷Edwin T. Bowden, The Dungeon of the Heart, p. 55.

himself to be grossly insufficient and inept in world-related problem-solving in both instances. Confused and drunk, Holden must now quixotically assail time. Unable to transcend his innocent self, he instinctively seeks the womb.

CHAPTER III

RETREAT

Chapter XX begins the final section of the novel. While Holden avoids the topic, Sunday night has been a long and tedious series of disappointments.⁷⁸ A savior image has failed to materialize: the man in the truck has not come. Holden, ". . . drunk as a bastard"(194), can now feel the ice as it rapidly forms around his feet. He has over-extended himself both mentally and physically and must now attempt a hurried retreat. Unfortunately, however, he has been shot, clean through:

I was the only guy at the bar with a bullet in their guts. I kept putting my hand under my jacket, on my stomach and all, to keep the blood from dripping all over the place. I didn't want anybody to know I was even wounded. I was concealing the fact that I was a wounded sonuvabitch. . . . I kept keeping my hand under my jacket to keep the blood from dripping.(195)

Still unable to call Jane, a wounded Holden staggers to the telephone booth outside the bar, calls Sally,

⁷⁸Walcutt, op. cit., p. 320.

and attempts to explain to her what has happened. "They got me," he wheezes, "Rocky's mob got me"(196). The mob, clearly symbolic of his New York world, has not actually killed Holden. New York, like some giant mirror, has forced him to see himself--Holden Caulfield is a phoney. Needless to say, the effect of his revelation, if a subconscious one, is not only frightening, but sobering. As he leaves the bar for home, by way of Central Park, Holden does not "feel too drunk anymore . . ."(198).

Upon reaching Central Park, Holden, unable to consciously believe or understand what has happened to him, goes to the Lagoon and looks once more to the ducks for an answer. In the partially frozen pond, he is unable to find "a single duck"(200). There is no answer, here.

Mentally confused and physically exhausted, Holden sits down on a bench. His fragmented thoughts now center around his dead brother, Allie, and why he found it no longer possible to visit his grave:⁷⁹

. . . I certainly don't enjoy seeing him in that crazy cemetery. Surrounded by dead guys and tombstones and all. It wasn't too bad when the sun was out, but twice--twice--we were there when it

⁷⁹Moore, op. cit., p. 163.

started to rain. It was awful. It rained on his lousy tombstone, and it rained on the grass on his stomach. It rained all over the place. All the visitors that were visiting the cemetery started running like hell over to their cars. That's what nearly drove me crazy. All the visitors could get in their cars and turn on their radios . . . everybody except Allie. I couldn't stand it. I know it's only his body and all that's in the cemetery, and his soul's in Heaven and all that crap, but I couldn't stand it anyway. I just wish he wasn't there. You didn't know him. If you'd known him, you'd know what I mean. It's not too bad when the sun's out, but the sun only comes out when it feels like coming out.(201-202)

Holden's sun has stopped shining and Allie, now dead, can no longer listen to him.⁸⁰ It is to Phoebe, certainly one of the most attractive children in literature,⁸¹ that Holden must now turn.

Stealing into his own home, Holden finds the one human being who he feels still warrants his trust-- Phoebe.⁸² With her he can drop his guard; he feels he ". . . is at home in a world of innocence and integrity."⁸³ Surely Phoebe will understand his quest and sympathize. Although he is certainly

⁸⁰Loc. cit.

⁸¹Bowden, op. cit., p. 62.

⁸²Walcutt, op. cit., p. 321.

⁸³Trowbridge, op. cit., p. 686.

welcomed by her with warmth and love,⁸⁴ the blind understanding which he seeks is not forthcoming.

Holden, "the most terrific liar you ever saw"(22), is unable to conceal the truth from the golden wisdom and stunning honesty of a very small and tender girl. She senses, without being told, that he has been expelled from school. Holden, in perhaps his most astute and prophetic observation, had earlier warned, "if you don't think she's [Phoebe] smart, you're mad"(213). Phoebe's, "Oh, why did you do it?"(217), evokes an unreasoning explanation from Holden of the extent of his world-weariness and rejection:⁸⁵

A million reasons why. It was one of the worst schools I ever went to. It was full of phonies. And mean guys. You never saw so many mean guys in your life. . . . There was this one pimply, boring guy, Robert Ackley, that wanted to get in. He kept trying to join, and they wouldn't let him. Just because he was boring and pimply. I don't even feel like talking about it. It was a stinking school. Take my word.(217-218)

Yet, at Pencey one recalls that Holden had badly maligned misfits such as Ackley. Holden, as

⁸⁴Bowden, op. cit., p. 62.

⁸⁵Trowbridge, op. cit., p. 686.

Walcutt suggests, is clearly ". . . on all sides of every moral issue; unable to choose any right way, he explodes in violences."⁸⁶ Phoebe, with characteristic penetration, sharply focuses on the problem: "You don't like anything that's happening"(220).

Forced now to produce some sort of affirmation of the unique and totally unworkable idealism which he has suggested, Holden can only point to his love of Allie and of the pleasure he derives from just being with Phoebe. "Allie's dead,"(222) Phoebe explains. Furthermore, Holden's love of brother-sister intimacy must be ruled unacceptable as a serious answer to Phoebe's investigation.⁸⁷

Unsatisfied with Holden's back-handed attempts to justify his splayed idealism, Phoebe now redirects her line of questioning. "Name something you'd like to be. Like a scientist. Or a lawyer or something"(223). Holden's devious tactics, as he explains why he would not want to be a lawyer, reach gigantic proportions:⁸⁸

⁸⁶Walcutt, op. cit., p. 321.

⁸⁷Trowbridge, op. cit., p. 687.

⁸⁸Walcutt, op. cit., p. 321.

Lawyers are all right, I guess--but it doesn't appeal to me," I said. I mean they're all right if they go around saving innocent guys's lives all the time, and like that, but you don't do that kind of stuff if you're a lawyer. All you do is make a lot of dough and play golf and play bridge and buy cars and drink Martinis and look like a hotshot. And besides. Even if you did go around saving guys's lives and all, how would you know if you did it because you really wanted to . . . [or] . . . because what you really wanted to do was be a terrific lawyer . . . How would you know you weren't being a phony? The trouble is, you wouldn't."
(223-224)

Holden's technique, rightly termed "infantile mechanism," has provided an open-ended formula for the rejection of anything.⁸⁹

Perhaps in the only positive action proposed in the novel, although realization of that action is impossible,⁹⁰ Holden discusses what he feels would be the ideal adult occupation--to be the "catcher in the rye"(225), who keeps little children from falling over the cliff. Typically, Phoebe corrects Holden as she explains that the line of poetry to which he refers should be read: "'If a body meet a body coming through the rye,'" and not catch a body.⁹¹ Undaunted, Holden

⁸⁹Loc. cit.

⁹⁰Baumbach, op. cit., p. 56.

⁹¹Frederic I. Carpenter, "The Adolescent in American Fiction," EJ, XLVI (September, 1957), p. 315.

explains:

Anyway, I keep picturing all these little kids playing some game in this big field of rye and all. Thousands of little kids, and nobody'a around--nobody big, I mean--except me. And I'm standing on the edge of some crazy cliff. What I have to do, I have to catch everybody if they start to go over the cliff--I mean if they're running and they don't look where they're going I have to come out from somewhere and catch them. That's all I'd do all day. I'd just be the catcher in the rye and all. I know it's crazy(224-225)

In this central metaphor, characteristically based on a misunderstanding, is condensed the meaning of the entire novel. It brings into focus for the first time Holden's concept of good and evil. Childhood, he concludes, is the only good, but it is surrounded by one great peril, the frightening cliff of adolescence over which children, if unprotected, will fall. If not stopped, children will fall over this great cliff into the evil of adulthood.⁹²

Obviously Holden's nihilistic view of life, as it is and should be, is based on a serious misunderstanding of man's place in the universe. The Catcher in the Rye is, as Baumbach so accurately surmises, "not only about innocence [but] actively

⁹²Trombridge, op. cit., p. 687.

for innocence, as if retaining one's childness were an existential possibility."⁹³ Salinger has presented a world of angelic children and "phony" adults. Holden's vision of protecting children from falling over the cliff of innocence is, by his own definition, the only moral alternative to the corruption inherent in the adult world.⁹⁴ Having misread the universe, Holden is now doomed to fall himself.

Holden, the vision of protecting children still warm in his mind, must now find another catcher in the "rye field" of life to show him how it is done. Mr. Antolini, his one time English instructor, is elected. Although his parents have returned to the apartment, Holden successfully evades them and leaves for Antolini's home. Perhaps, sensing the futility of his position, he "doesn't give much of a damn any more if they caught me . . . I almost wished they did, in a way."(233-234).

Holden has been, throughout the novel, in search of a way of life or ideal that does not change. Refusing to accept mutability, he constantly turns to static images such as Jane Gallagher. As the novel

⁹³Baumbach, op. cit., p. 56.

⁹⁴Loc. cit.

progresses, he increasingly turns to the world of the dead.⁹⁵ Now, with the figure of James Castle--the only person he knows who died for an ideal--firmly planted in his mind, he turns to Antolini, the man who had carried Castle to the infirmary after his jump.

Holden Caulfield, so recently wounded, is now failing fast. ". . . I felt funny when I got outside. Sort of dizzy. . . . I had a helluva headache all of a sudden. . . . I felt so damn tired all of a sudden" (234-242). Though Antolini may be sympathetic with Holden's plight, he can only offer him "the kind of a lecture that Polonius delivers to Laertes in Hamlet before the son leaves home."⁹⁶ He prophetically feels that Holden is moving rapidly towards a great fall, but just as he was unable to catch James Castle, he can offer no realistic solution to Holden's problem.

Indeed, Antolini's very kindness would seem to be, in part at least, motivated by a homosexual interest.⁹⁷ Holden, upon waking in the night only to find Antolini's hand on his head, draws a very similar

⁹⁵Ibid., p. 57.

⁹⁶French, op. cit., p. 113.

⁹⁷Baumbach, op. cit., p. 58.

conclusion. Convinced that he has been taken in by a pervert, Holden flees his last refuge.⁹⁸ With his last bastion of authority gone, Holden's world falls to chaos. Survival now, as it has always really been, is possible only through withdrawal into fantasy and eventual insanity.⁹⁹

After a tedious night spent in restless sleep in the Grand Central waiting room, Holden walks slowly up Fifth Avenue. The mental and physical deterioration which had started in the Wicker Bar has now reached a terminal velocity. "Every time I [Holden] came to the end of a block and stepped off the goddam curb, I had this feeling that I'd never get to the other side of the street. I thought I'd just go down, down, down" (256). It is in this mood of extreme fatalism that Holden turns questioningly to the contemplation of a new world out West:¹⁰⁰

. . . and in a few days I'd be somewhere out West where it was very pretty and sunny and where'd nobody'd know me and I'd get a job. I figured I could get a job at a filling station somewhere, putting gas and oil in people's cars. I didn't care what kind of job it was, though. Just so people didn't

⁹⁸French, op. cit., p. 113.

⁹⁹Baumbach, op. cit., p. 58.

¹⁰⁰Trowbridge, op. cit., p. 690.

know me and I didn't know anybody. I thought what I'd do was, I'd pretend I was one of those deaf-mutes. That way I wouldn't have to have any goddam stupid useless conversations with anybody. If anybody wanted to tell me something, they'd have to write it on a piece of paper and shove it over to me.(257-258)

As Trowbridge points out, Holden's world "out West" is certainly "the most pathetic, as well as the most fantastic, image of himself that Holden has yet created . . ." ¹⁰¹ At Pencey Prep and in New York Holden quixotically assailed what he mistakenly had felt were "phony" worlds. Like the Rousseau that he claims himself to be, he now, if sadly, reaches out for a negative ideal. If society corrupts, he will leave it. Once, again, however, Holden proves what sort of stuff he is made of--he refuses to act. He cannot leave, and he will not stay. In the final scene of the novel, Phoebe spins on a carousel of life as Holden, his hope exhausted, madly muses: "I felt so happy . . . It was just that she looked so damn nice the way she kept going around and around, in her blue coat and all. God, I wish you could've been there"(275).

Lord Byron, undisputed master of ennui,

¹⁰¹Loc. cit.

explains:

The very knowledge that he lived in vain,
That all was over on this side the tomb,
Had made Despair a smilingness assume.
(III. xvi. 1-5)¹⁰²

Chapter XXVI, the coda, finds Holden under psychiatric care in California. This chapter, although not bitterly so, is completely ironic. The catcher has been caught; the man in the truck, a psychiatrist, has come to protect Central Park's duck population. At the same time, one is left with many unanswered questions. Although Holden now claims to miss those same characters which he once so easily dismissed as "phonies," such a claim does not suggest that Holden has reconciled himself to life in a world of good and evil.¹⁰³ Holden, himself, can provide one with very little help. "If you want to know the truth," he explains, "I don't know . . . I really don't"(276-277). One cannot help feeling, as there is no reason to believe otherwise, that Holden ". . . remains at the end what he was at the beginning--cynical, defiant, and blind."¹⁰⁴

¹⁰²Ernest Hartley Coleridge (ed.), The Works of Lord Byron, p. 225.

¹⁰³O'Hara, op. cit., p. 375.

¹⁰⁴John W. Aldridge, In Search of Heresy, p. 131.

Critics favorably disposed to both Salinger and his theme of alienation as it is presented in The Catcher point with pride, and justly so, to his often brilliant presentation of the "absurd contemporary milieu."¹⁰⁵ Few, however, would deny the existence of the absurd in Holden's society. Frenzied hypocrisy thrives in the twentieth century, but it is not peculiar to it, nor, for that matter, is sincerity or humility.

Salinger, instead, has failed philosophically. He has written not to childhood, but for it: he has written not to innocence, but for it. The position is an untenable one. Unable to transcend innocence, Holden cannot realize his potential and, therefore, cannot enter the "plastic" society of good and evil. Without the flexibility which this transcendence offers, Holden is doomed.

¹⁰⁵David D. Galloway, The Absurd Hero in American Fiction, p. 145.

CHAPTER IV

THE CATCHER AND BEYOND:

CONCLUSION

Prior to a final statement concerning the work of J. D. Salinger--performed by way of a consideration, if cursory, of "Seymour: An Introduction," "Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters," "A Perfect Day for Bananafish," "Franny" and "Zooney," "Teddy," and "Uncle Wiggily in Connecticut"--certain obstacles to rational inquiry into his canon must be considered. They are put forth, not in the way of excuses for the final statement which this study offers, but rather to point up the limitations of such a statement.

Certainly it cannot be argued that there is no great emotional controversy over Salinger and his work. Indeed, the most superficial consideration of the Salinger criticism must acknowledge the two violent camps that now exist.¹⁰⁶ From John Margolis to John W. Aldridge the battle rages. That Salinger

¹⁰⁶Keating, op. cit., p. 62.

has managed to raise such a furor certainly points to his artistic talent and achievement. Independent judgments, however, are difficult to formulate in such an atmosphere.

Salinger critics, from naughty to nice, must at least agree on the meagerness of his canon. With only one novel and thirty short stories to his credit, it is most difficult to establish trends which a more prolific canon might readily suggest.¹⁰⁷

Salinger himself is no help. He has completely withdrawn. While the mystique which such a withdrawal creates has its own allure, such a situation provides rather obvious limitations to a discursive study of the author.¹⁰⁸

Last, though not of least importance, is the fact that information periodically circulates concerning a forthcoming summary statement in the author's own hand.¹⁰⁹ Such a prospect, from the critic's point of view, can be frightening. Knowing that sometime, somewhere, he may be confronted with the author's contradiction, the critic must be something of a sport

¹⁰⁷Loc. cit.

¹⁰⁸Loc. cit.

¹⁰⁹Loc. cit.

in order to proceed with his own final statement.

With these limitations firmly in mind, one may now move towards a conclusion by way of a consideration of the short stories already alluded to, suggesting that the philosophical failure of The Catcher does not stop with that novel, but rather that Salinger's canon to date is characterized by the same philosophical failure and that his entire canon suffers from it.

Salinger's career is generally conceded to have been a three-stage one. Although not published until 1951, much of The Catcher was a product of the second stage of his career, or of that segment stretching from 1943-1948. As early as 1945 with "I'm Crazy," Salinger had begun to focus on Holden Caulfield.¹¹⁰ In 1948, with the publication of "A Perfect Day for Bananafish," the final period of his career, to date, is felt to have begun. This story, in the order of publication, at least, is the first of Salinger's stories about the Glass family¹¹¹--his third-period preoccupation--and, as such, certainly justifies examination. "Bananafish," however, when put in proper prospective, becomes the last part of a Seymour Glass

¹¹⁰ Arthur Mizener, "The Love Song of J. D. Salinger," Harper's, LXVIII (February, 1959), 84.

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 85.

trilogy.¹¹² Therefore, prior to a final statement concerning Seymour and his eventual suicide as it is presented in his last tale, one must first consider "Seymour: An Introduction," a description of parts of Seymour's early life by his brother, Buddy, and "Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenter," which chiefly deals with Seymour's wedding day and is also narrated by Buddy Glass.

"Seymour" An Introduction," as previously mentioned, is recorded by Buddy Glass, "a shy, sardonic creative-writing teacher who occasionally takes upon himself the task of narrating his family's spiritual history."¹¹³ The story of "Seymour," discussed rarely by critics, is not actually a description of the character Seymour, but rather "a description of a writer . . . trying to recall what to include in a description of Seymour that he is writing."¹¹⁴

Such a curious turn of events is at best confusing and certainly necessitates a consideration of, as Warren French calls them, the "five unequal parts" of the story.

¹¹²Galloway, op. cit., p. 149.

¹¹³Ibid., p. 154.

¹¹⁴French, op. cit., p. 157.

The first "part" of the tale, then, is simply a long chat with the reader. It begins with quotations from Kafka and Kierkegaard which proclaim the author's love for his fictional creations and regret for his inability to do them justice.¹¹⁵ It ends, quickly and mercifully, with a statement of "credo."¹¹⁶ ("... isn't the true poet or painter a seer? Isn't he, actually, the only seer we have on earth?")¹¹⁷ The long second "part" of the story introduces Seymour [see-more] as a seer. With the exception of a verse written when he was eight years old and two prose paraphrases of a Seymour collection which Buddy intends to someday publish, no evidence of this genius' skill is offered up.¹¹⁸ Probably, as French has suggested, Salinger was unable to put forward verse that he felt exhibited the rather amazing qualities attributed to Seymour. The short third "part" of the story, by way of a letter which Seymour once wrote to Buddy, merely provides an example of Seymour's prose style, hardly the sort of quality prose style one expects from a

¹¹⁵ Ihab Hassan, Radical Innocence: Studies in the Contemporary American Novel, p. 285.

¹¹⁶ J. D. Salinger, "Seymour: An Introduction," p. 123.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 122.

¹¹⁸ French, op. cit., p. 156.

young man who, at twenty-three, "had just begun his fifth year of teaching English at a university in New York."¹¹⁹

The fourth "part" of Buddy's tale involves a physical description of Seymour. "The passage," as Warren French not too delicately, but very correctly, explains, "is reminiscent of the long descriptions of people and places that Sinclair Lewis used to write to provide himself with background for his novels, but which he usually had the discretion to spare the reader."¹²⁰

After the enormous introduction which precedes it, the fifth and last section of the story is a disappointment. Little that is new is offered. Seymour has been shown to exhibit those qualities which any careful follower of Salinger's earlier fiction might predict. Seymour, as Buddy describes him, is unimpressed with materialism, able to do without sleep when involved in a problem, and dislikes competition when friends are involved.¹²¹ The story's conclusion, which "almost exactly duplicates the

¹¹⁹J. D. Salinger, "Seymour: An Introduction," p. 182.

¹²⁰French, op. cit., p. 156.

¹²¹Ibid., p. 157.

'fat lady' speech at the end of 'Zooney,'"¹²² finds Buddy thinking about his forthcoming college class. "There isn't one girl in there, including the Terrible Miss Zabel, who is not as much my sister as Boo Boo or Franny . . . all we do our whole lives is go from one little piece of Holy Ground to the next."¹²³

Described by Ihab Hassan as "a monstrous amalgam of parenthetical remarks,"¹²⁴ "Seymour: An Introduction" does manage to answer the question of Seymour's suicide from, one may assume, Salinger's point of view. The "true artist-seer," Buddy explains, is one "mainly dazzled to death by his own scruples, the blinding shapes and colors of his own sacred human conscience."¹²⁵ While certainly not attempting to reach a conclusion concerning Salinger or Seymour at this rather premature point in the consideration of the trilogy, one suggests that the author himself has been "dazzled to death" by the "blinding shapes and colors" of Seymour, his own character. Such musings aside, it is easily seen that even as a boy,

¹²²Loc. cit.

¹²³J. D. Salinger, "Seymour: An Introduction," p. 248.

¹²⁴Ihab H. Hassan, Radical Innocence, p. 285.

¹²⁵J. D. Salinger, "Seymour: An Introduction," p. 123.

Seymour, to his brothers and sisters, is a type of Christ-figure on a ". . . quest for a miraculous spiritual perfection."¹²⁶ Seymour, boy genius and spiritual leader of the Glass clan, leaves "Seymour" innocent, but headed towards crisis.

In "Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters," Buddy, once again the narrator, presents the marriage of Seymour Glass to Muriel Fedder. Although some critics, such as Warren French, suggest that the heroes of this story and "Seymour" have little in common except their names,¹²⁷ this study will support the view, proposed among others by William Wiegand, that the later story amplifies the former and that the Seymour of "Carpenters" is certainly the same Seymour who graced the pages of "Seymour."

No longer a boy, Seymour is now involved in World War II as acting company clerk in an Air Corps division stationed in California. He is also in the process of marrying Miss Muriel Fedder, "a zero in my [Boo Boo's] opinion but terrific looking."¹²⁸ The wedding plans are set, the group gathers, but the

¹²⁶Galloway, op. cit., p. 152.

¹²⁷French, op. cit., p. 149.

¹²⁸J. D. Salinger, "Raise High the Roof Beams, Carpenters," p. 9.

groom fails to arrive. Seymour, "indisposed by happiness,"¹²⁹ simply cannot go through with it. Later, in the midst of chaos, the couple elopes. "Apparently," the Matron of Honor explains, "he [Seymour] was at the apartment when they [the wedding party] got back [from the aborted ceremony]. So Muriel just ups and packs her bag, and the two of them go, just like that."¹³⁰ The importance of the marriage and, indeed, the entire story, surely revolves around Seymour's happiness. Seymour, in his diary, explains:

I'm too keyed up to be with people.
I feel as though I'm about to be born.
Sacred, Sacred day. . . . How wonderful,
how sane, how beautifully difficult, and
therefore true. The job of responsibility
for the first time in my life. . . .
Someone must sit up with the happy man.¹³¹

Quite simply, then, Seymour is overwhelmed with joy on this, his wedding day, because he feels that, for the first time in his life, true responsibility will be his; he will have a wife. At last, he feels he will be able to ". . . emerge from the spiritual 'hole' into which he had begun swimming as a child."¹³²

¹²⁹Ibid., p. 100.

¹³⁰Ibid., p. 101.

¹³¹Ibid., p. 106.

¹³²Galloway, op. cit., p. 151.

His ultimate success or failure now rests upon the powerful conclusion to the Seymour Glass trilogy, "A Perfect Day for Bananafish."

Suffering from "a state of acute depression,"¹³³ Seymour Glass, in "Bananafish," has driven to Florida for a much needed vacation. The Glass family's "consultant genius"¹³⁴ is mortally ill.

The first half of the story, by way of a telephone conversation between Muriel and her mother, provides some insight into the external causes of illness.¹³⁵ Seymour, who has been in the army, has suffered what one may assume to have been a nervous breakdown. According to Muriel's mother, he has been released from the army hospital prematurely. Muriel, however, feels sure that his depression is temporary. Certainly, she explains to her mother, he is no raving maniac: "I mean all he does is lie there."¹³⁶ As Muriel speaks, young Sybil Carpenter, perched atop a small float, is slowly being pushed across shallow ocean waters. "This," Seymour explains

¹³³Ibid., p. 149.

¹³⁴J. D. Salinger, "Seymour: An Introduction," p. 124.

¹³⁵Galloway, op. cit., p. 149.

¹³⁶J. D. Salinger, Nine Stories, p. 12.

as he pushes, "is a perfect day for bananafish."¹³⁷

"Their habits are very peculiar . . . They lead a very tragic life," he said. "You know what they do, Sybil?"

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

"What happens to them? . . ."

"Well, I hate to tell you, Sybil. They die."¹³⁸

Seymour has found that his marriage, through no fault of Muriel, cannot save him. The Glass family's spiritual leader, unable to stay his quest and equally unable to enter the world of good and evil, must now fall victim to the innocence he refuses to relinquish. A bananafish himself,¹³⁹ he returns to his hotel room and commits suicide.

He glanced at the girl lying asleep on one of the twin beds. Then he went over to one of the pieces of luggage, opened it, and from under a pile of shorts and undershirts he

¹³⁷Ibid., p. 16.

¹³⁸Loc. cit.

¹³⁹William Wiegand, "J. D. Salinger. Seventy-Eight Bananas," Chicago Review, XI (Winter 1958), 5.

took out an Ortgies calibre 7.65 automatic. He released the magazine, looked at it, then reinserted it. He cocked the piece. Then he went over and sat down on the unoccupied twin bed, looked at the girl, aimed the pistol, and fired a bullet through his right temple.¹⁴⁰

Franny and Zooey, as E. M. Keating has suggested, is "vintage Salinger."¹⁴¹ "It is an endless conversation piece that wanders off in all directions . . ."¹⁴² Its tone is one of "Sophomoric breathlessness."¹⁴³ Its conclusion, if the two stories may be read as one, finds the central characters attempting, characteristically, an evasion of reality with religion, or, more properly, mysticism, presented as "Salinger's opiate that dissolves man into a painless, euphoric, eternal evaporation."¹⁴⁴

Briefly, the story of Franny as presented in "Franny," introduces the reader to Franny Glass and Lane Coutell, an undergraduate English major who attends an unidentified Ivy League college. Their affair, which has been both intense and physical,

¹⁴⁰J. D. Salinger, Nine Stories, p. 18.

¹⁴¹Keating, op. cit., p. 66.

¹⁴²Loc. cit.

¹⁴³Loc. cit.

¹⁴⁴Loc. cit.

is, as the tale begins, in jeopardy. Franny's infatuation with Lane is wearing thin. She, consequently, catches a train headed for the Yale game and Lane Coutell in a desperate effort to save the romance. Unfortunately her problem is complicated by a little book that she heard about in a religion class, Way of a Pilgrim.¹⁴⁵

Leaving the train station, Lane and Franny go to a French restaurant for dinner. It is at this point in the story that the Way of a Pilgrim and its message are revealed. Written by a Russian peasant who relates his ". . . pilgrimage to find out what it means in the Bible when it says you're supposed to pray without ceasing St. Paul's First Epistle to the Thessalonians,"¹⁴⁶ the focal point of the text appears to be the "Jesus Prayer," or "'Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.'¹⁴⁷

"If you keep saying this prayer," Franny explains to Lane, who now engrossed in his frogs' legs is not listening, "over and over again . . . the prayer becomes self-active. . . . the words get

¹⁴⁵French, op. cit., p. 140.

¹⁴⁶J. D. Salinger, "Franny," p. 36.

¹⁴⁷Loc. cit.

synchronized with the person's heartbeats, and then you're actually praying without ceasing."¹⁴⁸ Such an accomplishment, Franny tells Lane, will "purify your whole outlook."¹⁴⁹

Lane, who would at least appear to be genuinely interested in Franny, is certainly no catcher in the rye field of life and, consequently, fails to understand the seriousness of the situation. Leaving the restaurant in order to get to the game on time, Franny, making a final effort to adjust to Lane's idea of womanhood, rises to leave, but faints. "Alone [in the restaurant manager's office], Franny lay quite still, looking at the ceiling. Her lips began to move, forming soundless words, and they continued to move."¹⁵⁰ As the story ends, then, Franny is unable to find a satisfactory hero in a public world, and must now, by way of "Zooney," attempt private satisfaction.

"Zooney," which begins on the Monday morning following Franny's date with Lane, finds Buddy Glass once again at the helm as narrator. It deals with Zooney Glass, the twenty-five year old actor of the

¹⁴⁸Loc. cit.

¹⁴⁹Ibid., p. 37.

¹⁵⁰J. D. Salinger, "Franny," p. 43.

family, and his attempts to bring Franny back into the world. While no effort will be made to follow the home-movie plot line, "Zooney" is basically the story of the cynical Zooney's frantic attempts at pulling a mortally ill Franny back into the world of the living as he knows it. Act, he tells her, act for Seymour's fat lady, act for Christ himself. Franny, by way of a personal conclusion to this drawn out experience, simply pulls down the covers and climbs into bed. "For some minutes, before she fell into a deep, dreamless sleep, she just lay quiet, smiling at the ceiling."¹⁵¹

Interpretations of "Zooney" have been few and reveal a wide disagreement. Franny, as her own story ended, lay in a restaurant manager's office staring at the ceiling. As "Zooney" ends, Franny is still staring at the ceiling, apparently no nearer to personal resolution than she was at the end of "Franny." Although a clear-cut conclusion is very difficult to formulate, one is drawn to the argument that interprets the deep, dreamless sleep as death. Unwilling to transcend her innocence and unable to find solace in an unworkable mysticism, she turns

¹⁵¹J. D. Salinger, "Zooney," p. 201.

to Zooney for help. He offers the mask of the actor, public phoniness. Lacking the cynicism necessary for such a poise, she falls victim to the dreamless sleep of the eternally innocent, i.e., death. Zooney, a Salinger freak to be sure, continues life through his disguise. A prisoner of the mask, he lives because he does not live.

In "Zooney," as Alfred Kazin points out, Salinger has ". . . over-extended his line, thinned it out, in an effort to get the fullest possible significance out of his material."¹⁵² Not a miler, by his own admission, Salinger turns what might have been a very closely worked thirty-page short story into a rambling one-hundred and fifty-four page one. This over-extension of line has, of course, greatly weakened the work. It may well be that in his "attempt to provide something for everyone," Salinger has failed to ". . . please any except those who now accept indiscriminatingly anything he offers."¹⁵³

The final short stories to be considered within the bounds of this study, "Teddy" and "Uncle Wiggily in Connecticut," are included for two reasons.

¹⁵²Alfred Kazin, "The Alone Generation: A Comment on the Fiction of the 'Fifties,'" Harper's, CCIX (October 1959), 130.

¹⁵³French, op. cit., p. 145.

Neither story is involved directly with members of the Glass family. However, in attempting to formulate an all-encompassing thesis statement concerning Salinger's canon, a consideration of stories not involved with the Glass family characters is certainly in order. Also, these two stories represent, from the reader's point of view, the extremes to which Salinger's short story success spectrum has run.

In "Teddy," Salinger, still not writing to innocence but truly for it, has clearly attempted to avoid the issue. Teddy McArdle is introduced to the reader as an extremely precocious ten-year old boy who has achieved "satori" or enlightened consciousness.¹⁵⁴ His mysticism, one is led to believe, will set him free.

Both the story and the theme of mysticism, (which is always discussed in the most impressionistic of terms), fails. The story, totally unbelievable, "demonstrates that mysticism" holds little hope of solving "man's dilemma."¹⁵⁵ Just as in "Franny," mysticism in "Teddy" does not provide an alternative

¹⁵⁴Galloway, op. cit., p. 149.

¹⁵⁵Loc. cit.

to the transcendence of innocence. Teddy, pushed to his death by a younger sister, falls victim to his innocence.

In "Uncle Wiggily in Connecticut" Eloise and Mary Jane live solely in the past.¹⁵⁶ Although Eloise implies that things would have been different if she could only have married Walt, he is dead as the result of a completely absurd accident which occurred during the war. Unable to accept the absurd as a part of life, Eloise, through a series of half-way actions, can only put forth a feeble attempt to continue her own life. She marries a completely insensitive individual whom, at best, she describes as "damn unintelligent."¹⁵⁷ Romona, the unattractive child of this miserable marriage, serves only as a growing reminder to Eloise of what she feels is the necessary pragmatism of adult life. Unable to transcend self, she can not gain the flexible, pragmatic stance needed to carry on. The story ends on a painful and pathetic note as Eloise, embracing "moral dissolution,"¹⁵⁸ pleads, "I was a nice girl, wasn't

¹⁵⁶Keating, op. cit., p. 64.

¹⁵⁷J. D. Salinger, Nine Stories, p. 26.

¹⁵⁸Baumbach, op. cit., p. 56.

I.¹⁵⁹

Although by no means an attempt to excuse Salinger, it is an obvious observation that every writer has his weakness. One cannot, and certainly should not, leave the author without pointing briefly to his strengths, which are impressive. As a writer of the New Yorker school, Salinger is both competent and interesting.¹⁶⁰ He has certainly mastered the use of "city wit and surface brilliance" in his prose style, and situation irony in his plot.¹⁶¹ Also, his language presents, in an admirable and authentic fashion, a type of colloquial and informal speech that closely resembles teenage America's broken speech. It is typical and trite, crude and slangy, imitative and yet original.¹⁶² Although only one part of Salinger's literary achievement, it certainly compliments the whole.

Unfortunately, however, Salinger enthusiasts do not stop with a simple listing of their hero's clearly demonstrable strengths. "It [literature],"

¹⁵⁹J. D. Salinger, Nine Stories, p. 32.

¹⁶⁰Kazin, op. cit., p. 130.

¹⁶¹David L. Stevenson, "J. D. Salinger: The Mirror of Crisis," The Nation, CLXXXIV (March 1957), 215.

¹⁶²Donald P. Costello, "The Language of The Catcher in the Rye," American Speech, XXXIV (October 1959), 180.

they insist, "is an intimate part of reality in that it expresses the reality that is within man."¹⁶³ Salinger, it is concluded, ". . . has merely exposed the truth in terms of the deepest feelings of America's young people."¹⁶⁴ If one should care to accept politely the implied major premise of such an argument, another could, with equal polish, point to the fact that Aristotelian syllogisms merely provide logical conclusions, not necessarily truthful ones.

By way of a final conclusion, a brief review of the trend which this study suggests is warranted. Holden Caulfield, in The Catcher in the Rye, viewed society as morally and aesthetically callous and, in its hypocrisy, evil. Unwilling to enter such a world, he refuses to transcend innocence. He, instead, "remains a solitary victim to innocence, to an ideal which society must continually betray."¹⁶⁵ The situation, as earlier suggested, is a philosophically untenable one. Holden, by default, becomes a victim of innocence as witnessed in his final insanity.

¹⁶³Keating, op. cit., p. 66.

¹⁶⁴Loc. cit.

¹⁶⁵Ihab H. Hassan, "The Victim: Images of Evil in Recent American Fiction," CE, XXI (December 1959), 143.

Seymour Glass (1917-1948) sees experience in much the same light as Holden has viewed society. Refusing to transcend innocence and unable to retain it, he, too, falls victim to his inability as witnessed in his suicide in "A Perfect Day for Bananafish."

"Franny" and "Zooney," an unusual and not altogether satisfying collection, drags Franny from mysticism to mask and eventual death because of her unwillingness to accept the merely possible, the good and the evil. Only Zooney, a clever intertwining of man and professional mask, is able to stay sluggishly afloat.

In "Teddy," young Teddy McArdle attempts to use as a substitute for transcendence and, as was Franny before him, is victimized by his inability and is ironically pushed to his death by a smaller sister. Lastly, in "Uncle Wiggily," Eloise is unwilling to enter what she feels to be a miserable and insensitive adult life. She tragically falls victim to innocence by way of pathetic moral dissolution.

In the final analysis, one finds Salinger a contemporary American writer of great artistic ability. Sadly, however, an untenable philosophy leaves his literature ultimately groundless. With his lack of productiveness and narrow range of concerns--

by-products of a distorted world vision¹⁶⁶--Salinger
must be relegated to the position of an excellent
minor writer.

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