J.D. Salinger's Code Hero: The Moral Character in an Immoral World

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1986
J.D. SALINGER'S CODE HERO:

THE MORAL CHARACTER

IN AN IMMORAL WORLD

A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the Department of English

Western Kentucky University

Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Rebecca S. Hendrick

August 1986
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future use of the thesis.
J.D. Salinger's fiction can be approached by looking at the various elements of fiction, but his largest statement rests in the ways that his characters interact within his world. This interaction leads to a code of behavior that the heroes follow, and can be used to determine the heroic character within a particular piece of fiction, much as the Hemingway code developed by Carlos Baker identified the characteristics of the Hemingway hero. Salinger's heroes are all aware of the phony which is in the world around them. They see this phoniness as something undesirable within the world, yet they must learn to come to terms with this trait in other people, developing a compassion for those that are not genuine. In some heroes this trait is apparent; in others, it must be gained. The Salinger hero also feels a peculiar affinity for the madman, saint, and child. In some cases, the hero may long to lose himself in one of these particular niches, but that escape cannot be permanent. A balance between awareness of the phony and appreciation for the madman, saint, and child must be made. The Salinger hero is also on a quest. This quest varies
from hero to hero, and is often a futile quest, but still, an attempt is made by the hero to search for something higher. This study examines three Salinger heroes: Holden Caulfield in *The Catcher in the Rye*, Franny Glass in *Franny and Zooey*, and Seymour Glass in "A Perfect Day for Bananafish," "Hapworth 16, 1924," and *Raise High the Roofbeam, Carpenters and Seymour: An Introduction*. 
J.D. SALINGER'S CODE HERO:
THE MORAL CHARACTER
IN AN IMMORAL WORLD

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Edward Stagg
Dean of the Graduate College
To Toronto and lilacs and all that those words imply.
An awareness of solitude.  
But that sounds so flat. I don't mean simply  
That there's been a crash: though indeed there has been.  
It isn't simply the end of an illusion  
In the ordinary way, or being ditched.  
Of course that's something that's always happening  
To all sorts of people, and they get over it  
More or less, or at least they carry on.  
No. I mean that what has happened has made me aware  
That I've always been alone. That one always is alone.  
Not simply the ending of one relationship,  
Not even simply finding that it never existed--  
But a revelation about my relationship  
With everybody. Do you know--  
It no longer seems worthwhile to speak to anyone  
—T.S. Eliot  
"The Cocktail Party"

Fools said I, you do not know  
Silence like a cancer grows.  
Hear my words that I might teach you.  
Take my arms that I might reach you.  
But my words, like silent raindrops fell.  
Echoes in a well of silence.  
—Paul Simon  
"Sounds of Silence"
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CHAPTER ONE

Through the Eyes of a Hero...

The face of the contemporary novel is multi-faceted. It is at once a reflection of the human existence and at the same time an individual's outlook on that particular experience. In *Radical Innocence*, Ihab Hassan remarks on the struggle of the self in the contemporary novel:

... [the contemporary novel] inquires into a more vital matter: the nature of the contemporary self in action and reaction, in stress and freedom, in assent and denial, sallying forth to confront experience and recoiling again to preserve its sanity or innocence.(4)

Hassan furthermore indicates a shift in the writing that he thinks begins to be evident in writers who were born after 1910. He feels that one of the major reasons for the shift is the fact that the times have changed drastically and that writing must capture these shifts if it is to be indicative of the age in which it is being written:

We are indeed here, past the meridian of the twentieth century, a devastating war behind us, and a war we dare not call by any name lowering ahead. Yet it is time, perhaps, we called a halt to the melodrama of fission and fusion, of grim threats and endless lamentation.
Poised at the edge of the Space Age, we have no recourse but to choose life over death, turning our attention to this time and to this place, to the actions of man and to his works which make time and place a habitation for his spirit. (Radical Innocence 3)

It is the contemporary novelist's mission to capture this special place that we in the twentieth century must live in and endure, but it is also up to the particular writer to choose the method in which his/her particular view can best be shown. Since the 1920's there has been a "genre" surge: the Jewish novel which includes writers like Bernard Malamud and Saul Bellow; the Southern novel including William Styron, Flannery O'Connor, and Eudora Welty; the woman's novel featuring the writing of Alice Walker and Rita Mae Brown; and the black novel with such notables as Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin. It is important to see the distinction of particularity in the ways that contemporary writers view their existence, and to note that the distinctiveness of the writing does not stop at "genre." There are many voices and many niches that writers can use, but one of the strongest and most difficult to understand is the message in the fiction of J.D. Salinger.

Recent critics of the fiction of J.D. Salinger have characterized much of his work as adolescent fiction because Salinger's characters are consistently youthful and/or deal with the traumas of a youthful existence. Leslie Fiedler, in the introduction to Salinger, feels that the cult of the child that is present in the fiction of Salinger is questionable because of the lack of significance that this youthful character may have for the
adult reader (xvi). Other critics, such as Warren French, in the preface to *J.D. Salinger*, feel that Salinger is an important writer—the most appreciated fiction writer since World War II (8). Part of this notoriety stems from the fact that college students in the 1960's acquired a cult reverence for Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* that remains strong, even into the 1980's. While Salinger does make frequent reference to the child, and children often compose the majority of his characters, it is not easy to dismiss French's statement. There are many important and universal ideas in Salinger's fiction that strike a responsive cord in the adult world, making Salinger appreciable on many levels and thus making his voice much stronger. Some of the subjects at work in the fiction of Salinger include the problem of faith, conformity vs. society, love of various kinds, the psychology of youth vs. that of age, the sentimentalism of the child, the dream of the unfallen man, and the emotional crisis of the idle rich (James Lundquist 56). Resting as he does between the other, often more prolific and more appreciated writers since 1951 when *The Catcher in the Rye* was first published, Salinger's place in the contemporary American novel seems to be that of an important minor writer.

Salinger's fiction has been approached by critics using the standard modes of Aristotelian-based criticism: theme, character, setting, atmosphere, plot and point of view. His subjects which have been previously stated, are varied and complex. Lundquist feels that Salinger's use of the first person narrative in the interior monologue in much of his work is a good example of his
deviation from the standard viewpoint (56). David Leitch in "The Salinger Myth" finds the interior monologue to be the essence of The Catcher in the Rye:

There is no plot to speak of and the reader's interest is held entirely by the narrator's internal monologue. The reader learns about Holden not from what he does nor even what he thinks, but from the way he expresses his thoughts. (67)

The lack of plot that Leitch speaks of is a viable criticism of Salinger's fiction, but as Leitch also points out, the plot somehow becomes unnecessary by virtue of the person who is telling the story. Maxwell Geismer in "J.D. Salinger: The Wise Child and the New Yorker School of Fiction" feels that much of the unity of this plotting is lost in the ambiguous endings of the New Yorker type of fiction that he believes Salinger writes (72-74). This again is a viable critical reproach of Salinger's fiction, but it is also necessary to note that ambiguity can offer many views to a particular piece of fiction. It is, after all, the reader who must ultimately judge the worth of fiction, and a variety of meanings and nuances of meanings can make the judging a more personal response. Geismer's statement can be seen, ultimately, as a favorable remark. New Yorker fiction comes up again in discussing the atmosphere and setting of most of Salinger's fiction. With the exception of some of his short fiction, Salinger's work, like that of much of the New Yorker school, is undeniably urban, and just as undeniably, New York urban. Salinger is not necessarily concerned with his atmosphere and setting, but how the actions and
responses of his characters fit into the mode of an urbanite who must constantly be attuned to the psychology of people and events around him. It is this underlying psychology that permits the conflict that is evident in Salinger's fiction. Arthur Mizener, in "The Love Song of J.D. Salinger," states that the essential conflict in Salinger's fiction is a conflict between man and society (23). The larger battle, however, must lie ultimately within the individual character. This struggle, one that is at the core of the contemporary novel, is man facing the difficult questions that he asks himself. Because of the nature of this conflict, it is Salinger's character that is the most important element in his fiction.

There are many interesting traits that can be attributed to the Salinger character. As has been previously stated, the Salinger character is frequently a child, or else a person who has a close affinity with a child. The Salinger character is usually realistic, witty, and interested in the things a person does. The Salinger character is an observer, and constant commentator on the people and events that surround him. Probably the most consistent feature of Salinger characterization is the emergence of a moral hero in his fiction. William Wiegland places this idea as the method by which Salinger should be judged as a writer. In "J.D. Salinger's 78 Bananas" Wiegland writes:

... I prefer to justify Salinger on the second basis—namely the coherence of his particular vision of his heroes—of Holden Caulfield, Seymour Glass, Teddy, Franny, De-Daumier. The important question is why these
intelligent, highly sensitive, affectionate beings fight curious battles, leaderless and causeless, in a world they never made. (252)

Salinger's heroes are frequently juxtaposed with an unfeeling character. The Salinger moral hero, however, is aware at all times of the immorality of the world that he associates with; this trait he associates with the "phony" nature of people in general. The Salinger moral hero will attempt to live in this world of immorality, but he must somehow rise above the immorality by a balance of the moral with the immoral. Although some of the heroes can do this in making a mere compromise, others cannot. This study proposes to identify these moral heroes in Salinger's novel The Catcher in the Rye, his novellas, Franny and Zooey and Raise High the Roof Beams, Carpenters and Seymour: An Introduction, and two short stories, "A Perfect Day for Bananafish" which appears in Nine Stories and "Hapworth 16, 1924" and to assign each hero a code of ethics that is consistent with his actions.

The theory of a code hero in fiction has been applied to and is important in the studies of other writers and their work. Carlos Baker developed an elaborate code of ethics for the hero in the fiction of Ernest Hemingway. By a code, it is implied that each character who is a hero will have a certain number of characteristics that can be found within his personality. These same qualities will reappear in other characters, and the code allows for acknowledgement of those persons as hero. The Hemingway hero, for example, is found to display "grace under pressure." This trait is so marked that every character who
experiences it can be classified as a "Hemingway hero." In developing such a succinct list of qualities for a reappearing type of character, Baker has given the reader not only a new way of approaching Hemingway's fiction, but also a different way of understanding his works. This study will use the concept of a code hero in order to make the works of J. D. Salinger more approachable and comprehensible.

Many heroic qualities in the main characters of Salinger's fiction are revealed by those characters' reactions to an immoral world. Hassan calls these immoral characters the "Assertive Vulgarians" and the world in which they live "squalor." These characters represent all that is crude, venal, self-absorbed and sequacious in society. On the other hand, Hassan also identifies the moral characters as the "Responsive Outsiders." These individuals must face the "squalor" and in many ways, remain isolated from the immorality of the world around them (Radical Innocence 261-262). This detachment from the immoral world is the first of the characteristics that is evident in the Salinger code hero. This detachment is brought on the hero because he knows what the immoral is in the world; he can see the phoniness. As Mizener states, "Knowing what it is all about, in fact, is the burden" (Sense of Life in the American Novel 242). Holden Caulfield in The Catcher in the Rye, Franny Glass in Franny and Zooey, Seymour Glass in Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour: An Introduction, "A Perfect Day for Bananafish" and "Hapworth 16, 1924" all exhibit this knowledge of the phony in the world. States Holden in The Catcher in the Rye:
Anyway, when he finished, and everybody was clapping their heads off, Old Ernie turned around on his stool and gave this very phony, humble bow. Like as if he was a helluva humble guy, besides being a terrific piano player. It was very phony—I mean him being such a snob and all. In a funny way, though, I felt sort of sorry for him when he was finished. I don't even think he knows any more when he's playing right or not. It isn't all his fault. I partly blame all those dopes that clap their heads off—they'd foul up anybody, if you gave them a chance. Anyway, it made me feel depressed and lousy again, and I damn near got my coat back and went back to the hotel, but it was too early and I didn't feel much like being alone. (86)

Franny Glass also detests the conformity of the world around her. She states in the text of Franny and Zooey:

Oh, I remember. . .Listen, don't hate me because I can't remember some person immediately. Especially when they look like somebody else, and talk and dress and act like everybody else. I don't mean there's anything horrible about them, but you just know exactly what they are going to be like. (25)

Seymour Glass is a special case, because although he does speak directly within the text of Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour: An Introduction, "A Perfect Day for Bananafish" or in "Hapworth 16, 1924, the entire novel and the short stories revolve around his life through the speech of the narrator, his
brother, Buddy Glass, a third person narrator, and the writing of the seven-year-old Seymour from summer camp, his character is not as developed as the other heroes mentioned. Seymour is unusual in that he is seen as a saint by his family. This feature puts him in the category of the innocent without having him be directly bitter toward the phoniness of the immoral world. It is in his nature to be above the Vulgarian, and this implies an alienation that is both self-imposed and society-imposed. Says Buddy of Seymour in *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour: An Introduction*:

...That is, if, as I know you do, you love best in this world those little beings of pure spirit with a normal temperature of $125^\circ$, then it naturally follows that the creature you love next best is the person—the God-lover or God-hater (almost never, apparently, anything in between), the saint or profligate, moralist or complete immoralist—who can write a poem that is a poem. Among human beings, he's the curlew sandpiper$^3$, and I hasten to tell you what little I presume to know about his flights, his heat, his incredible heart. (113-114)

Coinciding with the detestation of the phony that the Salinger hero feels is the method by which the hero learns to function with this "burden." Clinton Trowbridge in "The Symbolic Structure of *The Catcher in the Rye*" feels that the Salinger heroes take on the protective shield of the madman, saint, or child (*Sewanee Review* 74 (1966): 681-684). This is, in many ways,
true, but not all inclusive. The characters feel a need to associate with the innocent, and madmen, children, and saints are by nature free of the conventions of the immoral. The Salinger heroes, however, cannot live in that world of fantasy, for ultimately that is what a life in one of those three modes will consist of. Seymour, in fact, learns this the most difficult way, by committing suicide. Suicide is not seen as the moral failure that Christianity views it as being; for Seymour, it is the only out from a lifetime of sainthood. Seymour, however, is the only person who follows through on this premise. Holden Caulfield tries being childlike, saintly, and mad, but eventually comes to terms with his dilemma (214). Franny Glass has a mental collapse and returns home to recover with her family and her Jesus Prayer (142). Each hero confronts the vulgar and comes to terms with it, although the methods used to achieve this balance are somewhat different.

Trowbridge's statement regarding the madman, saint, and child is again relative in discussing the second code behavior quality. All of the Salinger heroes find a marked preference for these kinds of people. Holden feels for the lunatic in the Bible, as well as an affinity for Jesus Christ. Franny Glass still keeps a souvenir that she received from some "corny Boy." Seymour is well-versed in the Eastern mystics and frequently uses these saintly men as ideals. This characteristic is, in fact, a direct response to the Salinger heroes' inability to respond to the vulgarian, only to the innocent and the respective morality of that innocence.
Although different in many respects from the other characteristics of the Salinger hero, the third measure of determining the hero is seen in the quests that these heroes make, indeed, by nature of their personalities, have to make in order to explain the ways of the immoral society that they find themselves a part of. Holden's quest is one of maturity and growth. His adventures in New York will give him the answers that he is seeking. Franny Glass's quest is one of a spiritual nature. Seymour Glass's struggle is based on the fact that he is already a saint. A Salinger hero cannot live in this state, thus Seymour's suicide, and thus the nature of his quest--normality. Each of the heroes' quests, however, will help him decide better his method for dealing with an immoral world.

This study of the common characteristics of the code hero in J.D. Salinger's fiction will attempt to identify and isolate the recurring factors within the heroic characters. By accumulating and documenting these prevalent traits, the essence of the Salinger character will be clearer. Since character is, in fact, the key element in Salinger's fiction, a study of this kind is crucial in an overall comprehension of the work of this particular author.
CHAPTER TWO

Holden and the Quest for Maturity

The Catcher in the Rye, published in 1951, has frequently been viewed as Salinger's largest success. As Ernest Jones comments in Nation, "The Catcher in the Rye becomes more and more a case history for us all" (9). Other critics, such as T. Morris Longstreth writing for The Christian Science Monitor, view the book in a different manner: "... One fears that a book like this given wide circulation may multiply his [Salinger's] kind--as too easily happens when immorality and perversion are recounted by writers whose work is countanced in the name of art or good intention"(6). Regardless, however, of critical reaction, acclaim or disgruntlement, it is the novel's protagonist, Holden Caulfield, that is the central feature of the novel, and it is his plight that is crucial. William Wiegland in "Salinger: 78 Bananas" reiterates this point:

Six years have passed since the publication of J.D. Salinger's single novel, The Catcher in the Rye, yet the author still retains his transfixing influence on the very young writers. The guileless "It killed me; it really did" idiom has captured hundreds of imitators during this time; and the imprint of Salinger's hero, Holden Caulfield, the boy who left fencing foils on the
subway and wound up on a psychiatrist's couch has engrafted itself so indelibly on the separate imaginations that young heroes by the scores have been spawned in his image. (48)

The Catcher in the Rye is, after all, Holden's story, as Holden himself begins the novel by saying:

If you really want to hear about it, the first thing you'll probably want to know is where I was born, and what my lousy childhood was like, and how my parents were occupied and all before they had me, and all that David Copperfield kind of crap, but I don't feel like going into it, if you want to know the truth. In the first place, that stuff bores me, and in the second place, my parents would have about two hemorrhages apiece if I told anything pretty personal about them. They're quite touchy about anything like that, especially my father. They're nice and all—I'm not saying that—but they're also touchy as hell. Besides, I'm not going to tell you my whole goddam autobiography or anything. I'll just tell you about this madman stuff that happened to me around last Christmas just before I got pretty run-down and had to come out here and take it easy. I mean that's all I told D.B. about, and he's my brother and all. (1)

Holden's story unfolds in the pages of The Catcher in the Rye and his heroic qualities become apparent. It is these qualities of detesting the phony, sharing an affinity for the madman, saint,
and child, searching desperately for maturity in a world that he doesn't understand that place him as the foremost example of the Salinger code hero.

Holden Caulfield is, at all times, aware of the phony within his society. From the opening lines of the novel to the conclusion, the novel is marked by references to those "Vulgarians" who surround him. One of the most memorable and vicious phonies is Ossenburger, a patron of Pencey Prep, who has made his fortune in the funeral home business:

You should see old Ossenburger. He probably just shoves them in a sack and dumps them in the river. Anyway, he gave Pencey a pile of dough, and they named our wing after him. The first football game of the year, he came up to school in this big goddam Cadillac, and we all had to stand up in the grandstand and give him a locomotive—that's a cheer. Then, the next morning, in chapel, he made a speech that lasted about ten hours. He started off with about fifty corny jokes, just to show us what a regular guy he was. Very big deal. Then he started telling us how he was never ashamed, when he was in some kind of trouble or something, to get right down on his knees and pray to God—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. (16-17)
Although Holden seems to be irate at the phoniness of Ossenburger, Holden often shows a sensitivity toward those people who are phony. This compassion is required of the Salinger hero, although it can be difficult to attain. Holden, however, has flashes of this compassion throughout the novel. His experience with Mr. Spencer seems to bear this out:

I felt sorry as hell for him, all of a sudden. But I just couldn’t hang around there any longer, the way we were on opposite sides of the pole, and the way he kept missing the bed whenever he chucked something at it, and his sad old bathrobe with his chest showing, and that grippy smell of Vicks Nose Drops all over the place.

"Look, sir. Don’t worry about me," I said. "I mean it. I’ll be all right. I’m just going through a phase right now. Everybody goes through phases and all, don’t they?"

This sensitivity to the world around him leads him frequently to detest, but always with just the slightest hint of compassion. Even in dealing with a prostitute, Holden remains true to the idea that even immoral phonies deserve pity:

I took her dress over to the closet and hung it up for her. It was funny. It made me feel sort of sad when I hung it up. I thought of her going in a store and buying it, and nobody in the store knowing she was a prostitute and all. The salesman probably just thought she was a regular girl when she bought it. It made me feel sad as hell—I don’t know why exactly.
This characteristic of compassion sets Holden above many of the other Salinger heroes by virtue of the fact that this sort of compassion for something that is horrible to endure is difficult to attain. Holden remains set apart from the phony, but he can feel sorry for those who cannot see, or refuse to see that they are phony.

Also typical of the Salinger hero are the three types of people that Holden most comfortably relates to: madmen, saints, and children. Holden has a major fascination with children, most notably his dead younger brother Allie:

You'd have liked him. He was two years younger than I was, but he was about fifty times as intelligent. He was terrifically 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. (38)

Holden's sister Phoebe is also given great praise for her childish precociousness which Holden views as something innately endearing and positive:

Anyway, old Phoebe likes to sleep in D.B.'s room when he's away, and he lets her. You ought to see her doing
her homework or something at that crazy desk. It's almost as big as the bed. You can hardly see her when she's doing her homework. That's the kind of stuff she likes, though. She doesn't like her own room because it's too little, she says. She says she likes to spread out. That kills me. What's old Phoebe got to spread out? Nothing.(162)

Holden's siblings are not the only children that Holden finds remarkable. It is the nature of children that seems to fascinate him and draw him to them. An instance of this is seen in Holden's pleasurable reaction to tightening a skate for a child he sees in the park:

Boy, I hadn't had a skate key in my hand for years. It didn't feel funny, though. You could put a skate key in my hand fifty years from now, in pitch dark, and I'd still know what it is. She thanked me and all when I had it tightened for her. She was a very nice, polite little kid. God, I love it when a kid's nice and polite when you tighten their skate for them or something. Most kids are. They really are. I asked her if she'd care to have a hot chocolate or something with me, but she said no, thank you. She said she had to meet her friend. Kids always have to meet their friend. That kills me.(121)

Children, however, are not the only persons in the novel that Holden has a fondness for or sympathy with. Madmen are also seen as people who are admired:

I like almost anyone in the Bible better than the
Disciples. If you want to know the truth, the guy I like best in the Bible, next to Jesus, was that lunatic and all, that lived in the tombs and kept cutting himself with stones. I like him ten times as much as the Disciples, that poor bastard. I used to get in quite a few arguments about it. . . .(101)

This desire for madness and appreciation for those who are mad can be seen in Holden's own desire to run away. His desire to be like a deaf mute is in response to how this sort of affliction is treated in society--something that is equated with aberration and isolation. He would then take on all these traits that he admires in the madman, and, consequently, the deaf mute:

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. They'd get bored as hell doing that after a while, and then I'd be through with having conversations for the rest of my life. Everybody'd think I was just a poor deaf mute bastard and they'd leave me alone. (201)

The Biblical allusion to the lunatic also supports another of the three modes that the Salinger code hero will admire, that of the saint. In speaking of Jesus, Holden frequently alludes to the things that Jesus would be upset with on the earth, as though he, Holden, were similar in temperament to Jesus. Holden's remarks on the "people who would let Jesus down" echo this sentiment:
I felt like praying or something, when I was in bed, but I couldn't do it. I can't always pray when I feel like it. In the first place, I'm sort of an atheist. I like Jesus and all, but I don't care too much for most of the other stuff in the Bible. Take the Disciples, for instance. They annoy the hell out of me, if you want to know the truth. They were all right after Jesus was dead and all, but while He was alive, they were about as much use to him as a hole in the head. All they did was keep letting him down. (101)

This definite appreciation for the saint can also be seen in Holden's reactions to the nuns:

"What school do you go to?" she asked me. She probably wanted to get off the subject of Romeo and Juliet.

I told her Pencey, and she'd heard of it. She said it was a very good school. I let it pass, though. Then the other one, the one that taught history and government, said they'd better be running along. I took their check off them, but they wouldn't let me pay it. The one with the glasses made me give it back to her.

"You've been more than generous," she said. "You're a very sweet boy." She certainly was nice. She reminded me a bit of old Ernest Morrow's mother, the one I met on the train. When she smiled, mostly, "We've enjoyed talking to you so much," she said.

I said I'd enjoyed talking to them a lot, too. I
meant it, too. (113)

Holden indeed places faith in these three types of people: madmen, saints, and children, for it is in their innocence that they become part of the moral world that he can deal with. A Salinger hero cannot, however, become one of these types of people, and for Holden this desire seems to be prominent. Holden must then, by virtue of knowing and detesting the phony and also by realizing that the moral is out of his realm, make a conscious effort to find a happy medium between these two. It is Holden's quest to grow up in The Catcher in the Rye, and for him this means finding a way to remain in the middle of the innocent and the immoral.

Holden's awareness of the phony comes at a crucial stage in his development. Holden knows that once he crosses the threshold of adulthood, he will be doomed, or so he thinks, to all of the immorality of the phony. It is remarkable that he has survived thus far. His friends, who are seemingly unaware of the burden that Holden carries, are already phony. His problem, then, rests in this huge immoral world composed of schools like Pencey Prep, teachers like Mr. Spencer, and parents that are all expecting him to assume the maturity of his age. He knows that if he gives in to the system that they want for him, he will only find himself like them someday. Holden's maturity quest, then, is a difficult one. How can he grow up, successfully please his parents and other relevant Vulgarians, and still maintain his purity, his own special innocence? Like the true Salinger hero, Holden must come to terms with both the phony and the innocent.
In the opening chapters of *The Catcher in the Rye*, Holden physically separates himself from Pencey Prep where he has been kicked out due to poor grades. He seems terribly distraught and decides to go to New York:

All of a sudden, I decided what I'd really do, I'd get the hell out of Pencey—right that same night and all. I mean not wait until Wednesday or anything. I just didn't want to hang around any more. It made me too sad and lonesome. (52)

Holden is unsure of what New York holds, but he feels no regrets; however, he actually laments the fact about leaving school. Upon his arrival in New York, Holden relies upon commonly accepted methods for "growing up." He goes to bars and tries to pick up women (71), hires a prostitute (97), and gets drunk (152). Holden is terribly unequipped to handle any of these adventures because he is constantly aware of the phoniness that these methods employ. He counters these immoral attempts by seeking his shelter among nuns (111), small children (121), and Allie (200). These shelters seem to be his only assurances that real innocence does exist. One never knows exactly how Holden weighs the immoral incidents with the redeeming moral events, but Holden is constantly questioning, seeking answers that no one seems to be able to answer. His constant reference to the ducks in Central Park supports this:

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

"The what?"

"The lagoon. That little lake, like, there. Where
Hendrick 31

the ducks are. You know."

"Yeah, what about it?"

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

"Where who goes?"

"The ducks. Do you know, by any chance? I mean does
somebody come around in a truck or something and take
them away, or do they fly away by themselves—go south
or something?" (83-84)

Holden also seeks advice from Phoebe, Carl Luce, and Mr. Antolini,
but each proves to be unsatisfying. In response to Phoebe's
discussion, Holden relates all that he really wants to do:

. . .Anyway, I keep picturing all these little kids
playing some game in this big field of rye and all.
Thousands of little kids, and nobody's around—nobody
big, I mean—except me. And I'm standing on the edge of
some crazy cliff. What I have to do, I have to be the catcher in the rye
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. (175-176)

Holden is selflessly placing himself in the role of martyr. He
wants to save children from having to make the huge decision that
he faces. Holden is growing closer to understanding the maturity
that he must develop, but he is still retreating into the role of
saint. Mr. Antolini seems to be filled with helpful advice, but
when Holden discovers him stroking his head, his views on Mr.
Antolini change:

I didn't want to, but I started thinking about old
Mr. Antolini and I wondered what he'd tell Mrs. Antolini
when she saw I hadn't slept there or anything. That part
didn't worry me too much, though, because I knew Mr.
Antolini was very smart and that he could make up
something to tell her. He could tell her I'd gone home
or something. That part didn't worry me much. But what
did worry me was the part about how I'd woke up and
found him patting me on the head and all. . . . The more
I thought about it though, the more depressed and
screwed up about it I got. (197-98)

Holden's quest for maturity seems doomed. He cannot find answers
to his questions, cannot determine whom to trust, and cannot
single out what his place must be.

The achievement of maturity must ultimately rest in Holden's
decision to combine the immoral with the moral. Holden must come
to the realization that like the ducks in Central Park, life does
go on, even in the midst of change. Holden's decision to accept
maturity is a compilation of events, both moral and immoral, but
isn't entirely understood until the end of the novel when his
sister Phoebe places him in a position where he must answer.

Holden decides at the end of the novel that he will journey
west and become a deaf mute (201). This decision stems from the
fact that Holden is constantly trying to separate himself from the
immoral. He firmly believes this to be the only solution until Phoebe decides that she will also go with him on his journey. Because Holden is a moral hero, he sees the ludicrousness of Phoebe's attempts to "grow up" too soon. In the closing passage of the chapter, Holden realizes that children do not need catchers, but must learn the truth on their own:

All the kids kept trying to grab for the gold ring, and so was old Phoebe, and I was sort of afraid she'd fall off the goddam horse, but I didn't say anything or do anything. The thing with kids is, if they want to grab for the gold ring, you have to let them do it, and not say anything. If they fall off, they fall off, but it's bad if you say anything to them. (213-14)

This statement also applies to Holden. Holden no longer wishes to be "caught" because he can see that maturity is a given, an inevitable coming to terms between the two extremes of innocence and phoniness. Holden becomes the hero of The Catcher in the Rye because he does detest the phony, does try to apply different models of behavior, but ultimately does come to terms with the two extremes in his quest for maturity in achieving a balance. In this, he not only saves Phoebe, but himself, as well.
Although both "Franny" and "Zooey" were published separately in 1955 and 1957 respectively, these two novellas were placed together in one book, Franny and Zooey in 1961. The novellas fit naturally together, and indeed, one is dependent upon the other for clarification. Maxwell Geismar notes this dependency in "The Wise Child and the New Yorker School of Fiction":

"Franny", which took up considerable space in The New Yorker of January 29, 1955, ... caused another minor sensation in the undergraduate [feminine] academic world. The central question was whether the story's heroine was pregnant, insane, or both—or neither. .. the remaining obscurities in "Franny" were developed, if not entirely clarified, in its sequel, "Zooey." (94-96)

Franny's problems are the crucial element of the novella, "Franny," and it is how she attempts, with the aid of her brother Zooey, to solve these problems that is the central focus of "Zooey." The joining of these two novellas into a book-length work creates a cause-and-effect feature that sharpens and defines the nature of Franny's problems, and the final reconciliation that she must make to solve them.
Franny's problems remain consistent with the problems of the Salinger code hero: awareness and dislike of the phony, affinity for the madman, the saint, and the child, and a quest for something which is, in Franny's case, a deeper spiritual truth. Franny, like Holden and other of the Salinger heroes, must come to terms with her life and how that life must fit into the world of the immoral and phony—how the balance must be achieved.

"Franny" opens with a look at the typical college girl coming to visit a boyfriend for the typical college weekend. The narration is auspiciously third person, and one is given a look at the young man, Lane Coutell, who will be part of Franny's problem:

Lane himself lit a cigarette as the train pulled in. Then, like so many people, who, perhaps, ought to be issued only a very probational pass to meet trains, he tried to empty his face of all expression that might quite simply, perhaps even beautifully, reveal how he felt about the arriving person. (7)

Lane's attempt to "act" when he sees Franny is juxtaposed with Franny's attempts to not "act": "'Lane!' Franny greeted him pleasurably—and she was not one for emptying her face of expression"(7). The nature of Franny's problem is one of being genuine in the presence of one who is not, and this is compounded when the phony in question is her boyfriend. Throughout the novel Franny is torn between feeling guilty for not loving Lane anymore (12) and telling him frankly how she feels about him:

"You're talking like a section man. But exactly."

"I beg your pardon?" Lane said with measured
quietness.

"You're talking exactly like a section man. I'm sorry, but you are. You really are."

"I am? How does a section man talk, may I ask?"

Franny saw that he was irritated, and to what extent, but, for the moment, with equal parts of self-disapproval and malice, she felt like speaking her mind. "Well, I don't know what they are around here, but where I come from, a section man's a person that takes over a class when the professor isn't there or is busy having a nervous breakdown or is at the dentist or something. Anyway, if it's a course in Russian literature, say, he comes in, in his little button-down-collar shirt and striped tie, and starts knocking Turgenev for about a half hour. Then, when he's completely ruined Turgenev for you, he starts talking about Stendhal or somebody he wrote his M.A. thesis on. Where I come from, the English department has about ten little section men running around ruining things for people, and they're all so brilliant they can hardly open their mouths--pardon the contradiction. I mean if you get into an argument with them, all they do is get this terribly benign expression on their--"(14-15)

It is obvious from the tone of the above passage that Franny is having serious problems with Lane's place in the university, indeed with Lane's place in the realm of the phony. Franny's dislike and distrust of the phony do not stop with Lane, however.
She finds ample time in the course of her dinner with Lane to comment on her professors (16) and Lane's friends (25) and finally, it seems, everyone she knows:

"...It could be a girl, for goodness' sake. I mean if he were a girl--somebody in my dorm, for example--he'd have been painting scenery in some stock company all summer. Or bicycled through Wales. Or taken an apartment in New York and worked for a magazine or advertising company. It's everybody, I mean. Everything everybody does is so--I don't know--not wrong, or even mean, or even stupid necessarily. But just so tiny and meaningless and--sad-making. And the worst part is, if you go bohemian or something crazy like that, you're conforming just as much as everybody else, only in a different way." (26)

Franny's despair over the condition of the world begins to make her feel crazy:

"All I know is I'm losing my mind," Franny said.
"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. I don't care what anybody says." (29-30)

Franny has her ideas concerning the phony in the world neatly labeled as too much ego. She sees this same ego in herself and dislikes it there as much as she does in those that are around her. It is the almost unbearable guilt that leads to her breakdown.
in the restaurant, and to her subsequent recovery at home.

Typical of the Salinger hero are the types of people that Franny admires. Franny's admiration, however, goes beyond the mere recognition of the innocence of the young, the mad, and the pure; Franny tries to emulate all of these types of people in her need to return home following her breakdown in "Franny." Zooey, her brother, comments on this in "Zooey":

"Firstly," he said, "I don't like this Camille routine. And don't interrupt me, now. I know you're legitimately falling apart, and all that. And I don't think it's an act--I don't mean that. And I don't think it's a subconscious plea for sympathy. Or any of that business. But I still say I don't like it. It's rough on Bessie, it's rough on Les--and if you don't know it yet, you're beginning to give off a little stink of piousness. God damn it, there isn't any prayer in any religion in the world that justifies piousness. I'm not saying you are pious--so just sit still--but I am saying all this hysteria business is unattractive as hell. (159-69)

Franny has returned home after her breakdown over ego and phoniness in the restaurant with Lane in "Franny," and taken over a place on her parent's sofa to recover. This desire to return home where her parents and her cat Bloomberg reside (141) indicates a definite desire to become the protected child again. Although it is clear that Franny has suffered some sort of nervous breakdown in the two novellas, even Zooey has trouble with her trauma and her constant repetition of the Jesus Prayer.
The Jesus Prayer is the connecting factor between Franny's love and desire to become a religious "saint" and the quest that Franny believes she is a part of. Franny is, after all, a member of the Glass family, a family that has occupied much of Salinger's stories and thoughts. As the youngest member of the family, Franny has been exposed to many of the thoughts of her eldest brother Seymour and his religious philosophies. It is this particular childhood that is the basis behind Zooey's reasoning on the cause of Franny's breakdown in the first place:

"It's us," Zooey repeated, overriding her. "We're freaks, that's all. Those two bastards [Seymour and Buddy] got us nice and early and made us into freaks with freakish standards, that's all. We're the Tatooed Lady, and we're never going to have a minute's peace, the rest of our lives, till everybody else is tattooed, too."(139)

It is from Seymour and Buddy's collection of books that Franny finds the tiny volume entitled The Way of the Pilgrim, and it is from this book that she develops her chant, her method for becoming a saint, for getting rid of her own ego, for trying to balance her "burden" with the vast phoniness that she sees in the world. The book itself relies heavily on Eastern thought, but concerns the struggles of one man, the pilgrim. Franny describes the book to Lane in "Franny":

"Well, as I said, the pilgrim--this simple peasant--started the whole pilgrimage to find out what it means in the Bible when it says you're supposed to pray
without ceasing. And then he meets this starets—this very advanced religious person I mentioned, the one who'd been studying the 'Philokalia' for years and years and years. . . . Well, the starets tells him about the Jesus Prayer first of all. 'Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.' I mean that's what it is. And he explains to him that those are the best words to use when you pray. Especially the word 'mercy,' because it's such a really enormous word and can mean so many things. I mean it doesn't just have to mean mercy. . . . Anyway," she went on, "the starets tells the pilgrim that if you keep saying that prayer over and over again—you only have to just do it with your lips at first—then eventually what happens, the prayer becomes self-active. Something happens after a while. I don't know what, but something happens, and the words get synchronized with the person's heartbeats, and then you're actually praying without ceasing. Which has a really tremendous, mystical effect on your whole outlook. I mean that's the whole point of it, more or less. I mean you do it to purify your whole outlook and get an absolutely new conception of what everything's about." (36-37)

It is this story of attaining a new level that Franny takes to heart. She does, in fact, take it so much to heart that it becomes an obsession, the only way to rid herself of the deadly ego that can bring her right in among the phonies of the world.

Zooey, Franny's brother, is, in many ways, a strong
character, or at least an understanding character. He knows what
Franny is going through, intimating that he too has had similar
thoughts on the world. He is not as vehement on the topic as
Franny is, and it is through his reasonable mind that Franny
ultimately learns what she must do to attain her quest. Like other
Salinger heroes, Franny cannot find a true solace in the world of
the child, the madman, or even the saint. Franny's place of
sainthood is in more danger than most, for Franny has little pity
or compassion for those around her that she finds to be phony.
This compassion is crucial in the psyche of the Salinger hero.
Zooey sees this and tells her his thoughts on the subject:

"But what I don't like—and what I don't think either
Seymour or Buddy would like, either, as a matter of
fact—is the way you talk about all these people. I mean
you don't just despise what they represent—you despise
them. It's too damn personal, Franny. I mean it. You get
a real little homicidal glint in your eye when you talk
about this Tupper, for instance. All this business about
his going into the men's room to muss his hair before he
comes in to class. All that. He probably does—it goes
with everything else you've told me about him. I'm not
saying it doesn't. But it's none of your business,
buddy, what he does with his hair. ...That is not right—
—and you know it. ..." (162)

Franny has been trying, in her own little way, to become like the
mystic in the Jesus Prayer. By repeating the phrase over and over
again, Franny feels that she will attain her spiritual goal, that
she will become somehow above the rest of the world, and it is this that Zooey feels to be wrong. Franny can never be separate from the world; she must learn to live within the world. It is only when Zooey pretends to become Franny's other brother Buddy that Franny begins to feel the thrust of Zooey's message. Zooey does this by explaining why his eldest brother Seymour would require the children in the family to shine their shoes for the Fat Lady before a radio presentation:

"...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."

(201-02)

Franny Glass's spiritual quest for a higher truth leads her to this understanding: she cannot become like the saint that she feels a true follower of the Jesus Prayer will be; she cannot retire to her home, like a child, and expect to be healed from her "craziness;" she cannot sit around judging those that she finds to be phony; although she will always remain acutely aware of the fact that there is phoniness in the world, she cannot become a holier-than-thou type of person. For Franny, the ultimate test of her heroism comes in the final passages; can she leave her Jesus
Prayer and show pity and compassion for those "Fat Ladies" that her older brother so richly observed? Can she maintain her knowledge that there are Vulgarians in the world without having to escape entirely from that world? Can she achieve a balance between the two worlds? Franny's answer to these questions is undeniably yes, as the closing passages of "Zooey" focus on the peace that Franny finds from attaining her goal:

Franny took in her breath slightly but continued to hold the phone to her ear. A dial tone, of course, followed the formal break in the connection. She appeared to find it extraordinarily beautiful to listen to, rather as if it were the best possible substitute for the primordial silence itself. But she seemed to know, too, when to stop listening to it, as if all of what little or much wisdom in the world were suddenly hers. When she had replaced the phone, she seemed to know just what to do next, too. She cleared away the smoking things, then drew back the cotton bedspread from the bed she had been sitting on, took off her slippers, and got into the bed. For some minutes, before she fell into a deep, dreamless sleep, she just lay quiet, smiling at the ceiling. (202)
CHAPTER FOUR

Seymour Glass--The Death and Life of a Saint

Of all of the characters that appear in Salinger's fiction, Seymour Glass is by far the most illusive and most maddeningly important. Seymour is illusive because the reader is given only sketches of his life through third person narration in "A Perfect Day for Bananafish," the first story written about Seymour, in which Seymour commits suicide; through a personal reflection in diary and first person narration from Seymour's brother Buddy in Raise High the Roofbeams, Carpenters and Seymour: An Introduction which chronicles Buddy's remembrances of Seymour in an attempt to understand the suicide; and through Seymour's own letter appearing in The New Yorker as "Hapworth 16, 1924," written when Seymour was seven, published by Salinger long after the appearance of the earlier works on Seymour Glass. Not only is the life of Seymour made sketchy by virtue of the fact that the reader never actually meets Seymour in the manner in which other Salinger characters are portrayed, but the chronology of publications shows Seymour dying in "Bananafish" in 1948; talked about by Buddy after his death in "Seymour: An Introduction" (1959) and "Raise High the Roofbeam, Carpenters" (1963); and then, finally heard in Seymour's own voice via letter at the young age of seven in "Hapworth," published in 1965. Seymour's importance, however, rests in the fact that he is a Salinger hero, but of a different caliber and
function than Franny, his younger sister, or Holden. Seymour is aware at an early age that he is different, that he "knows"—has an acute awareness of the burdens of existence—and because of that knowledge must battle against phoniness in the best way that he can. Unlike Franny and Holden, however, Seymour not only shares an affinity with the madman, saint, and child, but retires to the role of saint, believing that to be the only natural thing that he can do. The Salinger hero cannot, however, stay in one of these positions for long. Seymour realizes this, and begins his quest for normality. Seymour becomes "normal" only when he realizes that he cannot be a saint and ends his own life. By dying, Seymour saves himself from a position that he cannot fill, and becomes a hero in the realm of Salinger’s world.

"Hapworth, 16, 1924" is a letter written by Seymour to his parents from summer camp when Seymour was seven years old.

Seymour, as Buddy states in "Seymour: An Introduction," was always brilliant:

By the time Seymour was in mid-adolescence—sixteen, seventeen—he not only had learned to control his native vernacular, his many, many less than elite New York speech mannerisms, but had by then already come into his own true, bull's-eye, poet's vocabulary. His non-stop talks, his monologues, his near harangues then came as close to pleasing from start to finish—for a good many of us, anyway—as, say, the bulk of Beethoven's output after he ceased being encumbered with a sense of hearing. ...(110)
It is not unreasonable, then, to expect a very intelligent little boy in Seymour, aged seven. This sort of intelligence and vocabulary is indicated in the opening statements of the letter, "Hapworth, 16, 1924":

I will write for us both, I believe, as Buddy is engaged elsewhere for an indefinite period of time. Surely sixty to eighty per cent of the time, to my eternal amusement and sorrow, that magnificent, elusive, comical lad is engaged elsewhere! As you must know in your hearts and bowels, we miss you all like sheer hell. Unfortunately, I am far from above hoping the case is vice versa. This is a matter of quite a little humorous despair to me, though not so humorous. It is entirely disgusting to be forever achieving little actions of the heart or body and then taking recourse to reaction. I am utterly convinced that if A's hat blows off while he is sauntering down the street, it is the charming duty of B to pick it up and hand it to A without examining A's face or combing it for gratitude! My God, let me achieve missing my beloved family without yearning that they quite miss me in return. (32)

It is this intelligence that propels Seymour into knowing about phoniness at an early age. He sees it in his fellow campers:

Unfortunately, here as elsewhere on this touching planet, imitation is the watchword and prestige the highest ambition. It is not my business to worry about the general situation, but I am hardly made of steel.
Few of these magnificent healthy, sometimes remarkably handsome boys will mature. The majority I give you my heartbreaking opinion will merely senesse. Is that a picture to tolerate in one's heart? On the contrary, it is a picture to rip the heart to pieces. (34)

and again in the counsellors:

No single day passes that I do not listen to the heartless indifference and stupidity passing from the counsellors' lips without secretly wishing I could improve matters quite substantially by bashing a few culprits over the head with an excellent shovel or stout club! I would be less heartless, I am hoping, if the young campers themselves were not so damned heartrending and thrilling in their basic nature. (34)

Seymour's knowledge of this phoniness, this attitude that he sees prevalent in the world, causes him to adopt a compassionate role:

Tom Lantern! Is that or is that not an appealing name to go through life with? Unfortunately, this youth seems determined not to turn on any of his lights, so his delightful name is in danger of going down the drain. This opinion is too harsh. My opinions are all too frequently too damn harsh for words. I am working on it, but I have given way to harshness too often this summer to stomach. God speed you, Tom Lantern, with or without your lights turned on! (46)

Seymour is aware that people cannot help their attitudes, but he also knows that it is that same uncaring attitude that can "rip
the heart to pieces"(34). It is because of this knowledge that
Seymour chooses his route in life, to become the saint.

Unlike other Salinger heroes, Seymour's marked preferences lay
not only in seeing the child, madman, and saint as the only people
with good qualities, but in his own desire to become like these
three. Seymour can hardly be considered a child, even at age
seven, because of the knowledge that he already possesses. He
does, however, refer to some of the other campers, many of whom
are his own age, in a positive manner: "It is indescribably
rewarding to see a person five years of age sit back on his dear
comical, fleshless haunches and dash off an engaging yarn with
zest and no little acumen"("Hapworth" 43)! In "A Perfect Day for
Bananafish," Seymour also shows a marked preference for Sybil, a
young girl that he meets on the beach:

"Here comes a wave," Sybil said nervously.

"We'll ignore it. We'll snub it," said the young
man. "Two snobs." He took Sybil's ankles in his hands
and pressed down and forward. The float nosed over the
top of the wave. The water soaked Sybil's blonde hair,
but her scream was full of pleasure. . . .

The young man suddenly picked up one of Sybil's wet
feet, which were drooping over the end of the float, and
kissed the arch. (Nine Stories 16)

Although Seymour makes no references to the predicaments of the
mad in the world, he does foresee his own instability: "Would to
God there were a better footing between the unsensual and sensual
persons of this universe. I have no stomach for gaps of that kind;
I personally can't stand it, which is another looming sign of instability" ("Hapworth" 91). And within his own journal, Seymour discusses his need to see a psychoanalyst:

"I more or less promised M. at the station tonight that I'll go to a psychoanalyst one of these days. Sims told me that the man right here on the post is very good. Evidently he and Mrs. Fedder have had a tete-a-tete or two on the subject. Why doesn't this rankle me? It doesn't. It seems funny. It warms me, for no good reason. Even stock mothers-in-law in the funny papers have always remotely appealed to me. Anyway, I can't see that I have anything to lose by seeing an analyst. If I do it in the Army, it'll be free. M. Loves me, but she'll never feel really close to me, familiar with me, frivolous with me, till I'm slightly overhauled. ("Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters" 74-75)

Thus, the Seymour at age seven grows up with the feeling that he isn't entirely normal, and possibly needs "overhauling." This feeling of madness, however, is linked irrevocably to his sense of place in the world as a saint. Seymour finds the place of God in the world to be one worthy of great praise:

... take your hat off to God, quite mentally, for the magnificent complications of the human body. Should it be so difficult to offer a brief, affectionate salute to this unfathomable artist? It is not highly tempting to take off one's hat to someone who is both free to move in mysterious ways as well as in perfectly unmysterious
ways? Oh, my God, this is some God we have! As I mentioned while we were taking our first pleasure in the new kitchen equipment, this nostril business can be abandoned in a trice at the very instant that one takes utter and complete reliance upon God with regard to breathing, seeing, hearing, and the other maddening functions; however, we are all merely human beings, damnably remiss about this kind of reliance at all undesperate hours and situations of the day. To make up for this neglect, quite touching as well as shoddy, to rely on God utterly, we must fall back on embarrassing, sensible devices of our own; however, they are not our own, which is another humorous, wondrous side of the matter; the embarrassing, sensible devices are His, too! This is merely my forward opinion in the matter, but it is far from merely impulsive! ("Hapworth" 77-78)

But there is a need for more, and Seymour finds the need to fill that need:

You are familiar with the expression "go-between;" even the human brain is a charming go-between! I was born without any looming confidence in any go-between on the face of the earth, I am afraid, an unfortunate situation, to be sure, but I have no business failing to take a moment to tell you the cheerful truth of the matter. Here, however, we move quite closer to the crux of the constant turmoil in my ridiculous breast. While I have no confidence whatsoever in go-betweeners, personal
opinion, and unassailable, respectable facts, I am also, in my heart, exceedingly fond of them all; I am hopelessly touched to the quick at the bravery of every magnificent human accepting this charming, flimsy information every heartrending moment of his life! My God, human beings are brave creatures! Every last, touching coward on the face of the earth is unspeakably brave! Imagine accepting all these flimsy, personal agencies at charming, face value! Quite at the same time, to be sure, it is a vicious circle. I am sadly convinced that it would be a gentle, durable favor to everybody if someone broke through this vicious circle. One often wishes, however, there were not such a damn rush about it. One is never more separated from one's charming, loved ones than when one even ponders this delicate matter. Unfortunately, there is a great rush about it in my own case; I am quite referring to the shortness of this appearance. What I am seeking, with the very ample but in some ways quite scrawny amount of time left in this appearance, is a solution to the problem that is both honorable and heartless.

("Hapworth" 72)

Seymour, then, realizes that it is his place to be the "go-between," the saint that will be placed between the God that he so loves and praises, and the coward who is unable to face the world. But though Seymour fits naturally into that mode, he cannot live in that world, totally removed from the phony only as a go-
between. This young Seymour, however, has only idealistic energy to complete his task. It is the older Seymour who must begin a different sort of quest, the quest that will take him into the normal, away from the sainthood that has been his place since childhood. Seymour knows that he cannot live the life of a saint, and marries Muriel Fedder in order to try to live a normal life. This, however, will not work because the Salinger hero cannot live either entirely in the saint's realm or in the normal "phony" realm, but it is Seymour's quest to try.

Seymour's quest to be normal can be found in his desire to marry Muriel Fedder whom he calls "Miss Spiritual Tramp" in "Pefect Day for Bananafish" (3). He finds the normality of the situation to be the best thing about Muriel and her mother. Consider this passage from Seymour's diary:

He would disapprove of Muriel's mother, too. She's an irritating, opinionated woman, a type Buddy can't stand. I don't think he could see her for what she is. A person deprived, for life, of any understanding or taste for the main current of poetry that flows through things, all things. She might as well be dead, and yet she goes on living, stopping off at delicatessens, seeing her analyst, consuming a novel every night, putting on her girdle, plotting for Muriel's health and prosperity. I love her. I find her unimaginably brave. ("Raise High the Roofbeam, Carpenters" 72)

And again, in the same diary, Seymour discusses the reasons why he loves Muriel so:
Oh, God, I'm so happy with her. If only she could be happier with me. I amuse her at times, and she seems to like my face and hands and the back of my head, and she gets a vast satisfaction out of telling her friends that she's engaged to the Billy Black who was on 'It's a Wise Child' for years. And I think she feels a mixed maternal and sexual drive in my general direction. But on the whole I don't make her really happy. Oh, God, help me. My one terrible consolation is that my beloved has an undying, basically undeviating love for the institution of marriage itself. She has a primal urge to play house permanently. Her marital goals are so absurd and touching. She wants to get a very dark sun tan and go up to the desk clerk in some very posh hotel and ask if her Husband has picked up the mail yet. She wants to shop for curtains. She wants to shop for maternity clothes. She wants to get out of her mother's house, whether she knows it or not, and despite her attachment to her. She wants children—good-looking children, with her features, not mine. I have a feeling, too, that she wants her own Christmas-tree ornaments to unbox annually, not her mother's. ("Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters" 71-72)

Seymour wants to marry into this family, so obviously filled with phoniness, in order to become a more normal person. He frequently discusses the reasons why Muriel isn't completely happy with him, but it seems not to matter. He wants to be a part of that world;
he wants to be what the world considers normal, even though he is constantly aware that the plight of people like the Fedders is one of abject phoniness. Seymour's quest, however, is in vain, and it is only in his death that Seymour becomes the hero of Salinger's world that can balance the worlds of phony and pure, moral and immoral.

"A Perfect Day for Bananafish" opens with Muriel talking to her mother about Seymour's condition. The marriage hasn't worked out. Seymour has done some very bizarre things that are only hinted at in the text. Muriel's mother is worried about Muriel's welfare, while Seymour is down at the beach, already realizing what he must do in order to balance the immoral with the moral. The answer comes in the form of the story that he tells Sybil about bananafish:

"Miss Carpenter. Please. I know my business," the young man said. "You just keep your eyes open for bananafish. This is a perfect day for bananafish."

"I don't see any," Sybil said.

"That's understandable. Their habits are very peculiar." He kept pushing the float. The water was not quite up to his chest. "They lead a very tragic life," he said. "You know what they do, Sybil?"

She shook her head.

"Well, they swim into a hole where there's lots 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."

"Not too far out," Sybil said. "What happens to them?"

"What happens to who?"

"The bananafish."

"Oh, you mean after they eat so many bananas they can't get out of the banana hole?"

"Yes," said Sybil.

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

"Why?" asked Sybil.

"Well, they get banana fever. It's a terrible disease." (14-15)

It is this banana fever that has stricken Seymour. Although he enjoyed the life of the saint, he was like the bananafish. He was too intelligent, too much the saint, which is unnatural in the world of the phony. He wanted to swim into the hole of sainthood and glut himself on all of things that a saint can glut himself upon—religious knowledge, divine inspiration, holy advice. After the bananafish have fed, however, they want to leave the hole, much as Seymour himself wanted to leave the world of the saint and go back into the world of the normal. But, as Seymour points out to Sybil, they are far too fat to be able to get out of the hole. Seymour is too much the saint ever to get out of the "hole" of sainthood. And as Seymour also points out to Sybil, the fate of
the gluttoned bananafish is the deadly banana fever. Seymour's only recourse is to die as well. It is only in his death that he can bridge the gap between the hole of sainthood and the world on the outside of the hole and achieve the balance between the two. Seymour becomes the only Salinger hero who takes this method in becoming a hero in Salinger's world, but for him, it is the only method possible.
Toward a Balance

The concept of a hero has changed within the last twenty-five years, and, indeed, is continuously in flux. No longer are the heroes of fiction gallant young men on white steeds, saving the proverbial day. Often the heroic action is simply standing somewhere in the middle, a place neither good nor bad, weighing both extremes, and simply surviving. It is the responsibility of each author to create his own world and, as Ihab Hassan states in Radical Innocence, "to create order under the conditions of chaos." (335) The world of J.D. Salinger's fiction is basically immoral, implying that phoniness is rampant, that people cannot adjust, and that the moral person is in a dilemma. The Salinger hero sees this un genuineness, but must temper his first reactions of hatred with compassion for those locked in the immorality of the world. The Salinger hero can also see the purity of the madman, saint, and child. What the hero must do is to find a balance between these two extremes, which is difficult at all times, but possibly more difficult in light of the fact that the hero is also on a quest. This quest is different for each of the heroes, and is often met with defeat, but regardless of the success, the quest must be made. These balances are also different in each Salinger hero, but a recognition of the moral and a
recognition of the phony with a compassionate view is essential to the development of all of Salinger's heroes.

Holden Caulfield attains this balance after much searching. His quest leads him directly into that particular answer of balance. Holden's quest leads him to Mr. Antolini, a previous teacher, who makes dire predictions on Holden's future:

"This fall I think you're riding for--it's a special kind of fall, a horrible kind. The man isn't permitted to feel or hear himself hit bottom. He just keeps falling and falling. The whole arrangement designed for men who, at some time or other in their lives, were looking for something their environment couldn't supply them with."

(190-91)

Holden does not fall, but attains a victory, discovering the thing that men look for in their environment--a balance. Holden overcomes a desire to live in one of the three modes of pure behavior--those of the madman, saint, and child, and gains maturity in realizing that he doesn't have to be a catcher, nor does he need a catcher himself. Holden finds peace in this realization, brought on by his sister Phoebe. When seeing her on the carousel grabbing for the ring, he realizes that he has to let others choose their own life, even if they do fail occasionally, just as he has to let himself choose his own life--recognizing the immoral, but not following it, nor embracing the route of the madman, saint, or child. Holden's realization brings him happiness, which is described in the closing lines of the carousel scene with Phoebe:
I felt so damn happy all of a sudden, the way old Phoebe kept going around and around. I was damn near bawling, I felt so damn happy, if you want to know the truth. I don't know why. It was just that she looked so damned nice, the way she kept going around and around, in her blue coat and all. God, I wish you could've been there.

Franny Glass's balance is achieved differently, but with the same measures of change. She sees so much of the immoral, the dishonest, that she wants to withdraw, to become the keeper of some deep spiritual truth, and never deal with the phony again. Franny, however, as all Salinger heroes, cannot retire for long into the stained glass retreat of the saint. Her quest for a deeper spiritual truth is not found in the Jesus Prayer, or by being particularly holy, but in the discovery that the Fat Lady, the average person in this world, is Jesus Christ. Everyone has his own special place and should not be ignored. Franny must learn this spiritual truth before she can gain a balance; Franny learns compassion.

Seymour Glass, the seven year old saint, achieves his balance in quite another way. Spending his life as a saint is not acceptable to Seymour, because, like the bananafish that he describes to Sybil (Nine Stories 15), he cannot allow himself that sort of gluttony. A hero in Salinger's world can never be a madman, saint, or child because that mode of life is too unbalanced. Because he is so "full" of sainthood, however, Seymour cannot live entirely in the immoral world, indeed, cannot get out
of his "hole" of sainthood. Even though he sees the phoniness of the world with compassion, he cannot attain his quest for normality. His marriage to Muriel Fedder will not be a happy one because it places him too far out of the hole of his sainthood. For Seymour, the balance must be found in death. Buddy Glass discusses the reasoning behind Seymour's death in "Seymour: An Introduction":

However contradictory the coroner's report—whether he pronounces Consumption or Loneliness or Suicide to be the cause of death—isn't it plain how the true artist-seer actually dies? . . . I say that the true artist-seer, the heavenly fool who can and does produce beauty, is mainly dazzled to death by his own scruples, the blinding shapes and colors of his own sacred conscience.(105)

For Seymour, the balance is in coming to terms with his own idea of sainthood and the outside world that he knows he must live in; suicide becomes the only middle ground.

These are only three examples of the Salinger code hero. Salinger's protagonists do, however, emerge heroic in Salinger's world in his earlier stories—Ray Ford in "The Inverted Forest"—and in his collected later stories—De Daumier-Smith in "De Daumier-Smith's Blue Period" and Sargeant X in "For Esme—With Love and Squalor." All of these characters detest the phoniness of the immoral world, but with compassion, whether it be learned or inborn. These characters affiliate themselves with the madman, saint, or child, some, even becoming or trying to become like
them, and begin some kind of quest that is either realized or lost. These code characteristics emerge within each hero, putting them in a position of having to procure a place somewhere between the immoral and the moral. The balance these characters achieve in Salinger's world is vital, for it is a balance that is forever central to the world of contemporary man.
NOTES

1 Wiegland's first basis for justifying Salinger as a good novelist is Salinger's method of reviving the dormant art of dialect in American fiction.


3 The curlew sandpiper, according to Buddy, breeds so far north that only three people have seen its nest.

4 Seymour Glass will be discussed in Chapter five.
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Primary Sources


Secondary Sources


