Introduction

The Transfiguring Self of the Adolescent World

The novel of adolescence is a modern social construct; it is characterized by conflict, whether it is antagonism between the youth and society, or inner ambivalence about values of the adults. There is a new emphasis on inwardness, or the adolescent consciousness. Adolescence has long been characterized as a time when individuals begin to explore and examine psychological characteristics of the self in order to discover who they really are, and how they fit in the social world in which they live. The problematic aspect of this particular period of human life is the ideal ground for the dynamics of a conflict, which is fought both on a psychological, and on a social level. The psychosocial concerns which affect the lives of adolescents as they progress from childhood to adulthood are: the development of identity, the growth of autonomy, the search for intimacy and the establishment of peer relationships based on trust, openness, and a similarity of values; the management of one's developing sexuality; and the need to achieve, and be recognized for one's achievements.

The thematic center of the proposed thesis will focus on the adolescents' cynicism and rebellion against the dubious values of the adult world followed by their intensified search for and exploration of inner life. By analyzing these American texts we see a pattern emerge that is partially explained in the Joseph Campbell excerpt: "The whole sense ... of the hero's passage is that it shall serve as a general pattern for men and women ... The paths the adolescents follow on their personal journeys are indeed "the symptoms of [their] grasp of life."1 This study proposes to examine the different images of adolescents given by writers in different times and situations: in
J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951, hereafter cited as CR) Saul Bellow's *The Adventures of Augie March* (1953, hereafter cited as AM) Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street* (1984, hereafter cited as HMS) and Carson McCullers' *The Member of the Wedding* (1946, hereafter cited as MW). The determining factors in the journey of the young 'misfits' into adulthood is the personal language of the adolescents, through which the authors create a relationship between a confiding narrator and a listening reader. This bond becomes a tool for inviting the reader to identify with the narrators' position in the world, where adolescents try to come to terms with the bewildering culture that surrounds them. The narrators' perceptions of the outside world and how these are transformed into their own self-awareness form the core in each novel. What follows is based on the general proposition that the novels' uniqueness resides not only in the rich complexity of its themes, but also in the poetic intensity by which these themes are realized. The study analyzes the coherence of the writers' particular vision of the world, which is essentially the vision of their s/heroes — of Holden Caulfield, Augie March, Esperanza Cordero, and Frances Addams.

Novels of (male) adolescence have been popular with American literary critics, because they fit so well with the "archetypal patterns" critics have perceived in American Literature. As Lillian Schlissel puts it in her essay, "Contemplating the American Eve":

The patterns of American fiction, which we have so far constructed — and considered universal — patterns dealing with the nature of innocence and with the nature of adolescence and experience — apply in reality to the male in America. We have still to discover the patterns of experience that hold true for women.²

Women writers have struggled for centuries to gain the right to explore, and assert the validity of woman-space and experience. Novels of female adolescence
have been considered limited and dismissed as too feminine conveying only "a narrow corner of human existence." By including both male and female authors, this study aims to show: "how radically similar their literary origins were how they work with closely related assumptions, materials, and sentiments." The study makes us question hard-and-fast definitions of literary genres and traditions by emphasizing the way in which "a society that rigidly differentiates between male and female gender roles limits the full development of women and men alike." The "pattern of experience" that holds true for women in the fiction of adolescence will re-establish a balance and help understand coming of age in contemporary America.

The purpose of the introductory chapter is to examine those themes and fictional devices that have been used to survey this sense of inner growth, and also to examine in the subsequent chapters their particular use by the different writers. The chapters will give examples of different views on the concept of identity and how they might be applied to individual cases. However, in order to make a clearer observation of the adolescents' position in the world, the study will be divided into three broad categories: the adolescent, the outsider and the confessor/martyr/pilgrim. The attempt of the thesis is to analyze these categories separately in each text, and also to see how they link to each other, since they all have one thing in common: the loss of self, efforts to gain control over their own minds, to win their freedom without hindrance, and to further their self-development.

The title of the thesis, with its reference to both journey and imagination, sets up a tension: the movement inward versus breaking out. The adolescents' are caught in a conflict between "that outward existence which conforms, and the inward life which questions." Here, space is defined as both a quiet place, in the teeming contemporary life, and as a lack of limits or boundaries, a borderless vastness to be
explored at will. There are two essential movements — one outward and one inward. The outward movement describes the effort of youth for release, and freedom. To fulfill this part of the plan, authors involve protagonists in experiences played out in a "series of widening concentric circles:" the familial context, gender roles and realities within the family and the community, identity in the schools, and linguistic identity, and to understand how that ambience influences them in public. The central characters seek to break his/her bondage to these spaces, yearning to find a cure for loneliness, and achieving the freedom to face and deal with the world on his/her own terms. On the other hand, the inward movement explores the inner life of protagonists. The adolescents move outward into the broader world, but have to retreat within, polarities that impinge on the imagination and launch them on an inward journey. This imaginative search for an existence that goes beyond what is given constitutes the true Bildung of the protagonist, and possibly also the education of the reader, and reflects again the particular artistic sensitivities of the individual authors. As such, all these novels are a story of borders both demarcated and permeable, borders outside the self and others created within. The texts therefore illuminate the many borders that appear such as physical boundaries, economical disparities, and gender based demarcations — and the protagonists' attempts to not only cross, but also to erase these borders. The thesis will analyze the intersecting or overlapping sections of the "separate gender spheres theory" between the male/public realm and the female/private realm. There is an attempt to re-evaluate perceived differences by blurring or shifting boundaries by including these novels that emphasize the connectedness rather than to create an artificial either-or situation. Therefore rather than limiting these texts to one category or another, these novels raise consciousness about the importance and unique nature of adolescents in literature by analyzing the
ways in which texts probe and challenge oppressive gender-bias and socio-cultural ideologies. Thus these coming-of-age novels cut both a wider and a longer path through the bewildering experiences of childhood and adolescence and their journeys chart a course from denial to despair to something like hope. These novels must then be read as an effort not so much to render the protagonists' *life as lived*, but as a *quest* and a *labor of self-creation* that complements and extends their writing and at the same time as a discursive re-invention of their identity. So the boundaries of the books are mutable.

These novels of adolescence are grounded in the disjunction within the protagonist's experience of the "prose of concrete circumstances on the one hand, and of the poetry of the heart's potential on the other." The narratives are made up not simply of beneficent experiences, but also welcome the "poetry" of the individual's inwardness; hence the tension which is sustained and enacted through the narratives — is not resolved. The recollecting voice of these adolescents are able to document precisely the disjunction referred to above — and to suggest the alternative (but unrealized) possibility that there need be no such absolute gulf between poetry and prose, between the complex inwardness of the inner man and of his actual life in society. The vision, the complete perception of human totality, exists outside ordinary time; it can be glimpsed as in a dream; it can be formulated discursively, but it cannot be possessed as an abiding and effective recipe for everyday living.

Apart from the obvious differences in social and chronological situations in the chosen novels, there is a common concentration on the delicate and sensitive character of the young adolescents, on whose psyche all external elements — incidents as well as people — leave an indelible mark. Stated broadly, the pre-occupation of American novels of adolescence has been from the outside world to an inner self. All
the four novels convey one coherent view of growing up, and this is developed in three stages: first, primary, ignorant perceptions of the adolescent, a gradual sophistication of these perceptions as they mature, and an evaluation of these, leading them to the final expression of an awakened self. Each text begins with the obsessed vision of folly of the egoist, and proceeds by correcting that 'faulty vision,' refracting it through the physical world. So, the action of the texts is to bring home to the protagonists, how blind they have been to physical reality, to people, and to relationship. The argument in this study will focus on how the life of the spirit, can assume centrality. The fictional technique derived from this connection with the spiritual realm is what can be termed, the awakening scene (to borrow the title of Kate Chopin’s novella The Awakening) and consists of brief, “flashes of recognition”\textsuperscript{10} The journey is largely an internal experience of such moments of passionate conviction, moments of privileged spiritual insight. The adolescents undergo a radical revision of thought moving to a “restructured vision”\textsuperscript{11} far more profound in scope than the faulty, egocentric vision they begin with. Appropriately enough, such scenes end with an inner vision rather than a superficial view or a facile conclusion. The adolescents emerge, finally as

\begin{quote}
Pilgrims, too: journeying through a mysterious and hostile world, a world both chaotic and conformist, on their various eccentric pilgrimages — towards some shrine of honor and value and belief.\textsuperscript{12}
\end{quote}

The shrine in these novels usually remains out of sight, but it does give a sense of purpose to their encounters and a sense of form to the novels. Most of all, it is achieved in the creative act itself: in the writing of the text.

For these reasons, the effort here has been to locate clues about the measure of a work in its relatively impersonal structure — to discover the spiritual dimension towards which the technical devices of the structure, as well as other fictional
features, are directed. This the writers accomplish through the use of what Virginia Tiger calls the "ideographic structure":

The ideographic structure seems, at first reading, to create two contradictory perspectives on the same circumstances since the coda reverses the expectations which the first movement has built up... the two perspectives can be linked together by the reader ... In forcing the reader to build the bridge between contradictory perspectives, the ideographic structure forces the reader to ... encounter, by the imaginative impact of words, those experiences, which conventionally words do not reach ... the primacy of spiritual experience itself.¹⁹

The ideographic structure used in these novels suggests the following features: first, it consists of two parallel interconnected and simultaneous narrative movements' — one positive and one negative. The focus is on the adventure of these protagonists, which leads them to discover the mode of spiritual life. Whereas the first part of the movement portrays a linear external/social formation of the protagonists, a formation that results in an increasing sense of alienation, the second part of the movement involves internal/psychic process. This second part of the movement takes them beyond social boundaries, beyond patriarchal space, and centers upon the personal psychic sphere: the quest into their own unconscious for psychic wholeness.

Following the plots' major movement, there is a coda ending in each of these novels, which reverses, and often contradicts the implications of the first movement. Secondly, the structure involves two different perspectives on the same situation: that emerging from the first movement and that emerging from the coda. Thus the coda's surprise is integral to the final theme of each novel. In the first narrative movement events are seen from the adolescents' faulty point of view, while in the coda, events are seen from the enlightened consciousness —"restructured vision" — of the novel's protagonist, or another character's point of view. Though superficially contradictory, the two perspectives can be linked together by the reader from hints collected and assembled imaginatively. By making the reader forge the link between the main body
and the coda of the text, writers force an awareness of a spiritual dimension, since this is the explanation that will provide the link between the two parts. Thus, although the novels do not openly explain events in spiritual terms, they demand from the reader a spiritual interpretation.

A reading of these texts via the frame of the Bildungsroman highlights how adolescents write themselves as subjects, stage their development, and understand their lives. While the Bildungsroman suggests an organic unfolding and a harmonious integration of all aspects of the self, when used in the context of the American genre, it is redefined by turning attention away from organic integration in order to express the acute conflicts and complexity that characterizes life. These writers turn away from patterning the adolescent quest story on the traditional male-defined generic paradigm of individual accommodation to socio-cultural values and gender role expectations to portray the Bildung of an adolescent as a process of self-discovery that is a conscious quest for authentic selfhood. Four different Bildung experiences are outlined that present a movement “from the recognition of restrictive social roles through a rejection of arbitrary standards, to the generation of a counter-figure who creates a new role and a new, positive lifestyle into which she [he] becomes integrated.” These novels illustrate the process of transcending borders and boundaries by devising a method of illustrating both the new opportunities for independence and paradoxically the modern-day prejudices still stifling growth. The adolescents live for what they believe in, and they do this by looking within themselves to discover who they are. They reject the expectation of others, and through self-discovery attempt to claim their real selves. Their stories focus on the intricacies, the paradoxes, and the difficulties of maturity. Finally, of course, the characters in novels live and move and have their being in the readers mind,
exploiting memories, which supply the evidence of common experience, common humanity. Departures from the traditional structure will be discussed more fully as the female Bildungsroman of self-discovery and self-definition is defined. The problem of "creating oneself" amid the pressures and restrictions of society are as great for women as for men. That the pattern of maturation for women has been different from that for men in our society is important to note. Evoked mainly by sociological and psychological factors of contemporary reality, the theme of alienation has developed to such a degree that the possibility or idea of any true Bildung is questioned or parodied. If the word Bildungsroman ultimately escapes precise definition, or neat translation, its meaning should nonetheless emerge clearly from an account of the novels themselves, and the steady recurrence of certain common motifs in them.

Several thematic motifs will also be discussed. One such motif is the transfiguring self, the belief that it is possible for human beings to transform themselves from unreflective to reflective living. In the awakening scene the protagonist is forced through some fearful but ambiguous purgation — often in darkness, closed room, psychiatric couch — to encounter his own 'Being'. Thus, the self seeks, not for extinction but for transmutation. The transmuting or the transfiguring self is more capable of and conducive to the needed adaptability, ultimately bringing redemption. To transform themselves ethically and achieve well-being, these protagonists seek both inward, analytic means, as well as, external, communal care through reconnection with others, especially with the family.

The other motif is the emphasis on the unity and inter-connectedness of all life — what can be identified as the holistic (as opposed to the mechanistic) view of life. There is always an abiding faith, in fact — a yearning for such a view. These include, but are not limited to the quest for what can be called “the human touch,” a kind of
sympathetic human community. These novels are ultimately a study in the 'spiritual picaresque,' a quest for a new faith — "the faith of modern adolescents in their power to shape their own destiny" (Spiller, 1962, p.1).

In what follows, the authors’ own writings about their novels and material from interviews have been used in exploring their approach to fiction, reality, and to some rather more philosophical issues dealt with in the various novels. Though each of the chapters discusses only one of the writers, the chapters together establish a comparative strategy: it can be seen that the tensions in each of these very schematic books, as well as the repetitive structures are remarkably similar, and yet the resolution of the tension and the purposes of the repetition are quite different. These working definitions and introductory remarks indicate the parameters of this thesis. After this general introduction, the chapters, which follow examine the novels in terms of their initial critical reception, the thematic use of the notion of psychological growth, the consistent use of the technical features described above. The thesis is divided into the following chapters:

Chapter I: Dreams of Manhood: A Study of J.D. Salinger’s *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951)

In this chapter based on *The Catcher in the Rye* Salinger captured the voice of adolescent anxiety, and the disorientation of a generation searching for authenticity in a culture deemed by the novels protagonist Holden's dismissive reckoning as *phony*. Phoniness is one of Holden’s favorite concepts for describing the superficiality, hypocrisy, pretension, and shallowness that he encounters in the world around him. The actual setting of the book is Holden’s mind, and the connection between his writing and the structure he brings into existence through the writing has therefore been emphasized. The novel is built on two movements: the nervous breakdown of
Holden is followed by an examination of the reason. We learn that about a year before the narration takes place something has happened that caused him to end up at the California sanatorium, and this "something" is what he wants to share with the reader. Within this part of the story, Holden frequently flashes back to experiences and people from earlier in his life. The first-person narration invites readers to share his feeling that he is an outsider observing a world he cannot accept — or completely reject. A very important aspect of Holden's personality is his adherence to his own personal integrity. It is no coincidence that Holden's journey takes him through a cross-section of American society: the school, bars, city streets, family, etc; Salinger aims to show how widespread this phoniness has become. Holden is also in a movement: at the same time both leaving the innocent childhood and entering the world of grown-ups. To him, innocence means freedom, since he feels unable to function in the affectation that he believes permeates, and even poisons the adult world. The lack of genuineness in adult life and relations disgusts Holden and makes him an outsider. Not only does he seem to position himself as an outsider, but he also goes as far as to create an image of himself as a 'savior.' There is actually an element of romanticism in his identity crisis. Holden's fantasy — the metaphor of the fall — standing in front of a cliff and protecting playing children from falling over into adulthood is based on a misunderstanding of Robert Burn's lyrical poem "Comin' through the Rye" ("If a body meet a body comin' through the rye" not, "If a body catch a body") (CR, p.115 emphasis added). As the catcher in the rye, Holden hopes to protect children from falling and by extension, from growing old and losing their innocence. Holden's whole perspective is centered on this basic misapprehension of his own role in society. With this wish, and search for idealism Holden assumes, although not in a biblical sense, but rather in a more symbolical form, the position of a
martyr. Holden attempts to escape into a series of ideal worlds, fails, and is finally brought to the realization of a more impersonal ideal, that only through selflessness, the extension of forgiveness, and the appeal to others outside the self can people, as Holden realizes — "miss everybody" (CR, p.214). He finally identifies in some way with the people he has spent so much time criticizing and realizes that man and the world, in spite of all their imperfections, are to be loved. This is a truth gained from his experiences "a restructured vision," and the most important kind of freedom — an internal one. In the end, Holden has not accepted the falseness of society, instead, we find him still in that original position against it, except that he consciously accepts it. Its direction, in other words, is toward family and community, reconstructed and redefined. "Holden's quest takes him outside society; yet the grail he seeks is the world, and the grail is full of love."\(^{16}\) It is not through mysticism, but through love that the Salinger hero at last re-enters the world. The novel's resolution transcends sociological indictment in affirming individual responsibility.

**Chapter II: The New American Adam: A Study of Saul Bellow's The Adventures of Augie March (1953)**

In the epilogue of The American Adam, R.W.B. Lewis contends that Saul Bellow's *The Adventures of Augie March*, which won the National Book Award in 1954, is written in the tradition of the earlier American Adamic myth because Augie is "as youthful, innocent, optimistic and adventurous as are the earlier Adams."\(^{17}\) This chapter will show that Bellow deviates from Lewis's traditional concept of the American Adam applicable to the nineteenth century writers, and creates a distinctly new and different character: a modern Adam with a new attitude towards experience. In as far as Augie seeks paradise; he may be compared to the traditional Adam. But rather than imagining paradise as the fulfilment of the American dream, Augie
envision paradise as an escape from modern American dilemmas, and does not
discount the possibility of a new Eden. However, Bellow asserts that it is impossible
to escape reality by imagining paradise, and that one must adapt to the world rather
than attempt to flee it. Augie is situated in a context in which hopefulness and belief
in the endless availability of new beginnings — so characteristic of the American Adam — are no longer credible. When Huck Finn as the prototypical adolescent Adam "lights out for the territories," he is not only moving forward in time and space but in the hopeful pursuit of ideals that have been strengthened from being tested by the challenge of experience. In marked contrast, when Augie confronts his own morality, any perception of hope for individual distinctiveness is dashed by his recognition of contemporary chaos and anonymity. Bellow's heroes, then, find the complexities of their dilemma not only in an alienation from society; they are also confronted by a kind of conflict within themselves, which creates an even more insoluble problem. In any case the nature of man is finally defined by no one but himself, and that definition includes the power of the imagination. Bellow's special contribution lies in his ability to locate the effort to survive in the modern world within the society.

Augie acknowledges the presence of disappointment, pain, and absurdity in human life, but refuses to accept the clichés of alienation, anxiety, doom, and despair as inevitable to the human condition. He offers a mystical vision of human possibility. Man has to base his existence on "the axial lines of truth, love, peace, bounty, usefulness, and harmony" (AM, p.454). Search for an affirmative attitude does not necessarily end in finding — the axial line of life. The goal is not then, some idealized mode of life, but an anchor of assurance amidst all the buffeting inevitables in real life. Our last view of Augie is traveling along the very edge of Europe, laughing at the idea of himself as "a sort of Columbus," (AM, p.536) discoverer of a new-found land,
laughing above all at the enigma and the paradox that is man. In Augie's view of himself as Columbus, Bellow intends an “illumination for his protagonist — while both seem to have failed, their hope, vision, judgment, and courage are realities of their natures, which give to them powers and potentialities that allow them the possibilities of a better fate”\(^\text{18}\) — worthwhile, “higher, independent fate” (AM, p.424). Augie’s laughter and his joyous acceptance of the human condition issue from “a sweeping comic vision of life, which embraces and reconciles the tragic sense and then transcends it”\(^\text{19}\) (Emphasis added). This sense of humor is a gift that enables him to see things clearly, and protects him from falling into complete depression over what he finds is a corrupt world. Augie seems closer to the mixed experience of the novel when he realizes that life is a state of Becoming, a movement between idealism and the daily facts, between “the pointy, star-furnished air and oatmeal and laundry tickets and all the rest” (AM, p.194). Striving for completion, therefore, is a lifelong process that is never accomplished. However, while Augie has failed to accomplish the American dream — “this universal eligibility to be noble” (AM, p.29), it does not lead him to despair; it leads him to a balanced sense of the comedy of existence — of the human being struggling for importance and the forces of life resisting but never quenching the individual’s hope. To be involved with life, and people means to hold on to such principles as freedom, fairness, and personal integrity, but it also means that one must constantly adjust the application of these principles to daily circumstances that challenge and change a person. Bellow probably is saying, and rightly, that the “American Dream is a faith which, like any other, can only be maintained stubbornly in spite of the evidence.”\(^\text{20}\)

B) Dreams of Girlhood: Breaking Boundaries — A Study of Carson McCullers' *The Member of the Wedding* (1946)

*The House on Mango Street* and *The Member of the Wedding* offer new alternatives and interpretations of women's destinies, and specific insights into the complexities of women's growth and independence. Unlike their male counterparts, Cisneros and McCullers observe the space of the home to understand how that ambience influences young girls in public. The protagonists struggle to find meaning and validation and succeed, on two levels: first, as a single individual who was able to survive; and second, as a representative narrative that exemplifies the struggle of many American women against racial and sexual oppression; a centering upon personal, rather than patriarchal space. The chapter will concentrate on particular pivotal moments in the lives of Esperanza Cordero and Frances Addams connected to maturation and self-discovery. Their journey involves literal and emotional wandering and their awareness derives from the movement away from oppressive structures. By depicting their journey out of the “cramped confines of patriarchal space” a notion that applies to the social as well as the literary sphere, female writers are transforming the very concept of *Bildung* and creating a discourse based on distinctive paradigms of self-development.

*The House on Mango Street* is dedicated a las Mujeres, “to the women”— all the female characters whose lives have enriched that of the protagonist, and who represent a diversity of challenges and perspectives. The structural unity of the forty-four vignettes of the novel is achieved by the first-person narration of the female "I", ...
and central consciousness of the novel Esperanza Cordero, who resists entrapment within socio-cultural norms and expectations. It is through the very act of constructing, and telling her own story, like Holden Caulfield and Augie March that Esperanza resolves the contradictions that inform her life. The young girl's memoirs are, however, not the day-to-day record of a preadolescent girl, but rather a loose-knit series of lyrical reflections, her struggle with self-identity and the search for self-respect amidst an alienating and often hostile world. As an aesthetic process, the apprehension of the world of Mango Street becomes a metaphor for identity. The consequence of this aesthetic process is that the reader is directed less toward the singularity of the places, events and persons of Mango Street than toward the "I" that writes them. Esperanza, probes into her world, discovers herself and comes to embody the primal needs of all human beings: freedom and belonging. The tapestry that is woven by the constant imagistic movement of the narrator's perceptions and thoughts is a narrative of self-invention by the writer-speaker. The structure of this text, therefore, begins as a frame for self-invention and as the writing progresses so does the subject. She is, in the most direct sense of the word, *making herself* and in *a space of her own.* By writing, this young woman has created herself as a total subject and not merely playing out a gender role or signifying a disembodied voice.

Two narrative threads connect the stories: the personal and private story of her own search for identity, about creativity and becoming an artist, and the public and collective story of the individuals in the Latino neighborhood on Mango Street. Esperanza actively researches, questions, and negotiates her own meaning in community. She reads the neighborhood and other women who have some insight and self-determined lives, despite some difficulties with men and with illness and lets their examples, encouragement, and prophecies enhance her original readings. She
rejects the role models which her society offers her and consciously chooses to forge her own identity through writing; and in so doing, she symbolically chooses the American translation of her name (hope) over the Spanish (waiting). Esperanza’s initial wish for an illusive real house, one she can point to, is thus in the course of her narrative transformed into a more defined desire for a place that transcends the mere physical living quarters. At the end of her narrative — her story — she has created for herself "a new house, a house made of heart" (HMS, p.64) predicted by the local fortuneteller. Shifting from a literal to a metaphoric register, her "house" becomes not a structure but a spiritual sanctuary she carries within — a home for herself through her inner life, and her writing. Esperanza finds her literary voice and discovers “Her power is her own. She will not give it away” (HMS, p.89). She recognizes, and Cisneros validates, the empowerment that comes through writing and remembering. The House on Mango Street was at first taken as an exclusively Chicano literature, but now has become a part of the American literary canon transcending cultural, and gender-based boundaries through the sheer power of its astute observations and implicit lessons.

Best known of all McCullers’ works because it has reached audiences as a novel, a play, and a motion picture, The Member of the Wedding (1946) charts a young, confused twelve-year-old tomboy’s difficult passage from a childhood of innocence and freedom to an awareness of the limitations and constraints of her position in her culture. Although this story is told in a third-person narrative, it is filtered through Frankie’s consciousness — her “inner psychic rhythms.” 22 A concern for man’s “spiritual isolation,” (The Mute, p. 124) his revolt against that isolation, and his need to achieve a perfect communion with others was the basis of almost everything Carson McCullers wrote. She has successfully explored what she termed
the “solitary region of simple stories and the inward mind” (The Mute, p.251). She was particularly interested in the “paradox of shared isolation,”23 a term that describes the relationships among the three main characters — Frances Addams, Berenice Sadie Brown, and John Henry West — and their community as well. The setting itself serves as the metaphor for such spiritual isolation. She begins this novella by establishing the dreariness, and sadness of a setting, which seems estranged from all other places in the world: “The kitchen was silent and crazy and sad” (MW, p.22). For life here is hopelessly inward, separated, and estranged. Selfhood means only confinement in the solitude of one's own heart. The novel is divided into three parts, a structure that calls attention to the rhythm of the novel which follows the familiar journey of adolescent initiation. The urgency which drives Frankie to become "a member of the wedding" is the conviction that "all other people had a we to claim, all other except her” (MW, p.42). She is seeking an ideal love, not a physical one, which joins all people — as Frankie puts it, "the we of me"(MW, p.42) the ‘we’ of companionship and belonging that Frankie longs for but is unable to find. Its implications are the universal problems of illusion versus reality and the nature of man himself. Frankie’s longing at once for escape and belonging, makes her consider her role as a “member of the wedding” to mean that when her older brother marries, she will join the happy couple in their new life together. This fantasy transforms Frankie's twelve-year old perspective regarding herself, her relationships, and her small southern hometown. In her ideal world, “people could instantly change back and forth from boys to girls; whichever way they felt like and wanted” (MW, p.97). What Frankie is dreaming of is possible only in her imagination. The author portrays Frankie’s illusory existence in order to dramatize all that threatens to destabilize her isolated view of herself, and her community. The events precipitated by the wedding destroy her illusions, forcing her to reconsider
everything she holds to be true — about human nature, and about individual power. As Frankie attempts to grow up and seek membership into the adult world, she discovers that certain life rules encumber her. The most important rule has to do with the fact that married couples only include two people, shutting Frankie out of her dream of becoming a threesome with Janice and Jarvis. Frankie's primary identification with the masculine world of her brother and her father can be attributed in part to her mother's death when she was born. According to Frankie, power and authority are masculine attributes and to be a girl is to be marginalized and excluded. But being fiercely independent, Frankie resists any kind of limitations placed upon her. An important part of her development is her growing comprehension that she will be forced to enter the world of women, a world that holds no attractions for her. It is not the responsibility of womanhood that she reluctantly must take up but the decision, which confronts her, the decision to be a woman at all, accounts in large part for Frankie's fear and forms a major thematic concern of the novel. Frankie is, "then hovering between the two sexes and has the problem not only of sex awareness, but also of sex determination" (Eisinger, p.250) in the sense that she is a girl who does not want to be done out of the privileges of boys. As a child, by adopting masculine attributes, Frankie is attempting to seize the social power that is denied to females. It is this masculine or tomboy power that Frankie is not willing to give up, even when she reaches adulthood. Girls turning into women are taught to be feminine or passive, thus losing their power, but a boy becoming a man is taught to be masculine or assertive, thus gaining power. Frankie thus vacillates between striving for adult status and resisting it. The end is a brief coda that reports the events after the wedding when Frankie painfully discovers the reality of the situation, and has replaced her old aspirations with new ones, and has even changed the very nature of her dreams.
Frankie's old dreams of flying planes, of being able to switch genders whenever she wished, of joining the wedding, are examples of her protests against the powerlessness of women. They are projections of her desire to be an autonomous adult. Frances, as she is finally called, wants to write poetry, and travel with a new friend Mary Littlejohn who introduces her to the privileges of white society, and she even comes to relish the superiority she feels it bestows upon her. Her new dreams are socially acceptable and easily within her reach. Finally, Frankie's ideals are defeated by the demands of social norms, and her own inward confusions. "She is defeated by society on all the main issues before she can even begin, but still there is something in her and in those like her that cannot and will not ever be destroyed." 24 Frankie's final fantasy in the novel suggests the tenacity with which she will cling to her desire for belonging. In the past, she beat herself with her fists, but she now dimly sees that she must strike out against those figures of power who would deny her dream. Ambiguity rather than clear distinctions informs the divided world which Frankie inhabits. The world of the adolescent child is, after all, only a promise of life to come in adulthood. If McCullers implies any solution besides racial equality to the social injustice, and personal isolation, and despair she portrays in her novels, it is a move towards a more integrated view of conventional gender roles; towards the more androgynous world Frankie envisions. We are asked to look inward to the heart, rather than outward to political, and economic structures in society for any final answers to human problems. The revelations contained in the novels of McCullers' works are the variety and complexity of humanity, and how ultimately love and life are richer if differences of color and gender are accepted as inherent aspects of the species. After establishing a dichotomous relationship between male power and female powerlessness, these writers respond by asserting female power and analyzing how women create their
own space, vision and language. The feminine space is opened up as a new structure for survival, a \textit{space of her own}.

\textbf{Conclusion — Traversing Boundaries: A Shared Experience}

As a summary of the argument throughout, in all the novels discussed, there seems to be a marked evolution from externally imposed structures, to internally realized structures. The motif of the \textit{journey inward} and the experiences it yields is the link that connects these texts, providing the impetus for this study. It is a \textit{journey} or pilgrimage, “a winding path toward the light, leading through stretches of beauty, bleakness and gloom, and ending in the glow of the changeless centre” (IV, 423) of each protagonist in a "journey towards stillness" \textsuperscript{25} (IV, 470). Such is the identity these adolescents seek: “a unity and persistence of consciousness.” \textsuperscript{26}

The experience of reading serves as a final resource to define a texts essential nature. In effect, this study has attempted through close investigation of individual texts, to arrive at some preliminary understanding of the shared common modes of novels of adolescence: an important bond of shared assumptions, shared techniques, and shared demands on the reader and to show “…how heavily the path ahead is obscured by fog, how infinite are the number of directions which the course of events may take.” \textsuperscript{27} Beneath all the problems of adolescents and responsibility lies the issue that most profoundly concerns the writers: “the relative power and validity of inner versus outer reality.” \textsuperscript{28} The novelists, although they describe protagonists at various stages between introspection and apparent unawareness of inner experience, testify to the shaping power of the psychic life. Augie’s lack of forethought and speculation and concern of consequences get him in trouble. His fantasies about the women who attract him determine many of his actions; more important, his consistent
imagining of obligation to others seems to lead to his maturity. The jovial, mocking tone of his narration insists on the possibilities of imagination as directed by art to affect understanding and action. The novelistic enterprise involves the attempt to form reader’s imaginations; it reflects the redirection and increased control of Augie’s fantasy life. He himself as a character comes dimly to understand the importance of his imaginings to his actions. The case is more obvious with Frankie, whose elaborately developed fantasies ultimately come to control her vision of life. In a simple sense the plots of all the fictions considered here involve a pattern of wishfulfillment for the central character. They get to write their story and to demonstrate their own reality. Here is the most fundamental optimism of this novelistic mode which affirms the possibility of the stable identity of the individual and his/her ultimate power to shape the world he/she experiences. To tell one’s story, as these men and women tell it, thus becomes an affirmation of power, even when the story contains emphatic defeats or evidence of limitation or revelations of folly. To set down a frank interpretation of personal experience declares autonomy and demonstrates the dominance of inner life, although the narrator’s announced concern may be with external happening. In this study as in life, the claims of society counter those of the psyche. Frankie embodies the most definite statement of society’s power to control and to destroy individual dreams, but every writer in this study recognizes at some level, the problem involved in the individual’s efforts to establish a viable relation to his social context. That the solution is often escape — in a psychic sense — only emphasizes the insolubility of the problem. Holden and Augie, Esperanza and Frankie come to terms with the demands implied and stated by their social world but not without authorial recognition of the cost in freedom and self-assertiveness. The possibility and the usefulness of autonomy, of separateness, thus pre-occupy at some
level of consciousness all the writers. Stating their self-definitions, the writers not only strike some balance between the opposed principles of selfhood and society, but they also express the instability of any such balance. To convey questionings and convictions, writers require “artifices of sincerity and truthfulness” (Spacks, p.310). They depend upon artifice — shaping, inventing, selecting, and omitting — to achieve their goal of conveying vital truths. To tell a story of the self is — as this study has argued in various ways — to create a fiction. We have discovered the unity of action in these novels; it derives from the central character’s singleness of expectation, desire, or will: to discover, defend, assert, and manufacture the self. To compare these four novels of adolescence is to invite contemplation of the multifarious and often surprising affinities that exist within the context of manifest difference. This, finally, is the center of the perception achieved by such a comparative study. Selfhood and consistent identity, whether by sheer illusion-making or through collaboration with experienced reality, is the final achievement of the literary imagination in these novels. It provides the ground on which the complex relationship of subjective vision and verifiable truth enacted itself.

The essential role of these artists has been to awaken a concern, for “the human essences forgotten in a distracted world.” They plead for “the transcendence of art” as “an attempt to find in the universe what is fundamental and enduring” and to lead us “to sacred states of the soul.” A person’s remaining hope is to return to his inner self. Despite the burden of alienation, one can read these novels as attempts to counter despair by a renewed faith in the self. All these novels are presented both structurally and thematically neither to resolve a problem nor to conclude an action but only to evoke the keenest moments of realization. The reader follows the growth of these protagonists as they move forward with their internal awakening and finally
become conscious of their own strength. As such, the novels of adolescence become mirrors in which we view not the surface but the interior of our being. In a very real sense the journeys have not ended. To complete them one has to continually break down the walls and discover doorways — new areas of life and experience, about which one has remained ignorant.

End Notes


   <http://www.enotes.com/wolfe-masters/>


24 Author's Outline of The Mute p. 131.


Select Bibliography

Primary Sources


Salinger, J. D. *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951) Boston: Little, Brown, 1991. (All citations are from these editions)

Secondary Sources I

A. Books


Eisinger, Chester E. *Fiction of the Forties*, Chicago, 1963


**Secondary Sources I**

**Article in a Reference Book/ Essay in a Collection**


Goldstein, Bernice, and Sanford Goldstein, "Zen and Salinger" *Modern Fiction Studies* 12, No.3 (Autumn 1966), pp.313-24


"Rejection of the Feminine in Carson McCullers’ *The Ballad of the Sad Café,*" in *Twentieth Century literature*, Vol. 20, No1, January, 1974, pp.34-43


Salinger, J.D, *For Esme with Love and Squalor*. New Yorker XXVI, 8 April, pp.28-36.


**Internet Sources**


<http://www.enotes.com/wolfe-masters/>

"The Hero’s Journey — Life’s Great Adventure" Jane Upton Hall, Westside High School, Houston Teacher’s Institute 2001


<http://www.enotes.com/member-wedding/17022>
