Chapter I

Dreams of Manhood:
J.D. Salinger’s The Catcher in the Rye (1951)

Although J. D. Salinger’s total creative production has been relatively small, his impact and influence, — and his artistic achievement — have been enormous. Since its publication in 1951, The Catcher in the Rye has caused considerable controversy. The fact that a novel of such radical social opinion, and observation was written in a time of conservatism in America made it all the more controversial. Much that we associate with the 1950s has formed Salinger’s hero-narrator Holden Caulfield, and filters through him, including attitudes about sexuality, materialism, and respectability. In Holden’s vocabulary, phony stands for a shallow materialism, an elevation of form over substance, a worship of superficiality, and a manipulative attitude towards others. He tries to explain to us not only what is offensive, disgusting, and repulsive to him in human behavior, but also what goes against prevailing notions of modesty and decency. “The things that Holden finds so deeply repulsive are things he calls phony,” writes Dan Wakefield, “and the phoniness in every instance is the absence of love, and, often, the substitution of pretense for love.” Salinger’s protagonists’ are continually sickened by the materialism, and inhumanity surrounding them, and what they do, and what he does through them, is endlessly search for moral and spiritual
enlightenment, and the possibility of love. The central characteristic of Holden is therefore, "the adherence to a powerful abiding illusion, while around him swirls a corrupt, hostile, essentially phony world."²

Many critics, authors and scholars over the years have discussed, interpreted, disparaged, and praised Salinger’s novel. For many years this book headed the list of challenged literature, the classic story of a teenager's quest for maturity. "Obscene" is the usual cry, based on the use of rather "vulgar" and "bad" language — words of the four-letter variety: damn, hell, and one resounding f-word. "Blasphemous"³ they claim because of the boy's caustic comments about religious hypocrisy. The way Holden Caulfield sees the world is stated in the novel's most famous line: "If you had a million years to do it in, you couldn't rub out even half the 'Fuck you' signs in the world" (CR, p. 202). It is ironic that this sentence is the one that is most responsible for the various banning of the novel in the years following its appearance. Words by themselves are neutral, and not corrupting, especially ones that carry little or no religious or sexual connotation for most young people today. In using the F-word, Salinger shows us most of all what a moral kid Holden truly is. Holden feels helpless when he encounters profanity scrawled on the walls of Phoebe's school, a school that he envisions protecting and shielding children from the evils of society, and in amongst the Museum of Natural
History display. In a desperate act, he tries personally to eradicate all the graffiti in New York City, so the children will not have to see the obscenities. These scenes illustrate Holden's desire to protect children from getting a "cockeyed" version of sex from "some dirty kid" (CR, p. 201). Obviously sex for him is an act of love between two people who respect each other. He does not use the word himself anywhere in the book, and is fighting to keep alive a flickering vision of a "nice and peaceful place" (CR, p. 204), beyond the threatening streets. It offers a contrasting glimpse of the two worlds — the "nice and peaceful" and the "phony" — with which Salinger was principally concerned. Salinger's fiction dramatizes a progressive series of alternatives to the problem of remaining spiritually 'nice' in a 'phony' world. In a way, the vulgar words may symbolize the end of innocence, and Holden's inability to wipe them out when he encounters the words scratched in stone reflects the impossibility of preserving childhood's innocence. Holden acknowledges this impossibility, and is thus forced to seek out a more realistic goal for himself.

Salinger's small book, though limited in focus and ambition, is an extraordinary achievement, containing rich examples of American culture, and values. *The Catcher in the Rye* has endured because it is a significantly original work, full of insights into the essential truth of
Holden's existence. It is a perfect example of the lean reserves of the American writer who is reduced to personality, even to what Flannery O'Connor once called the "mystery of personality," an impression of it, instead of the drama of our social existence. To be able to make this assertion, however, requires an examination of the corpus of Salinger's work: one novel, two short novels, and thirty short stories, published over a period of almost two decades.

It is important to consider the historical background of the piece in order to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of the novel. Two of his short stories, *I'm Crazy* and *Slight Rebellion off Madison*, were published in periodicals during the 1940s, and introduced Holden Caulfield. They are in fact early versions of the episodes in the novel, and reveal Salinger in the process of discovering his major themes, and experimenting with what were to develop into his most effective techniques. A reader discovers that not only do Salinger's short stories stylistically show his direct movement into the writing of *The Catcher in the Rye*, but they also mirror his continued thematic concern with two interrelated ideas: first, the idea of living and sustaining a life of the imagination, where as Gwynn and Blotner explains:

Human characters are involved in the basic human conflict between love and what Salinger's Esmé calls squalor—that is, evil, trouble, inhumanity, and sin—and in which the
characters and conflict are embodied in original and memorable symbols that are often humorous [...].

The central theme of Salinger's work is stated explicitly in, *For Esme—with Love and Squalor*. Salinger quotes a passage from Dostoevsky: “Fathers and teachers, I ponder what is Hell? I maintain that it is the suffering of being unable to love” (NS, p.105). Salinger thus diagnoses the absurdity of the world in one simple way: if we cannot love, we cannot live. The short stories reinforce the theme that Salinger introduced in the novel and that resonated in his own life: the sensitive, alienated man in search of innocence and love in a world of corruption, a man who wants to escape the phonies. Salinger's short stories are all variants on the theme of “emotional estrangement.” Many of his short stories, center on members of the Glass family and their relationship with one another. Salinger also explores issues of spirituality, through his characters, offering two basic choices. Through Seymour, the elder Glass brother, Salinger reflects on suicide as a viable choice for those too emotionally fragile to survive life’s challenges. The subject of *Nine stories* is the opposition of the phony and the seeker after authenticity. The nine stories all portray responses that individuals make to the inevitability of having to cope with the phony world that Salinger, like both Holden and Seymour despises. Warren French in *J.D. Salinger, Revisited* calls the collection a: “progressive account [of] ... nine crucial
stages in the purification of the lust and ego-ridden soul from the torments of the earthly wasteland as it strives to reach the ego-free state.”

Salinger is however, not providing an “episodic history of the progress of one soul but an account of the process of spiritualization and the obstacles to it, especially in the United States” (French, p. 68). Each short story ends in puzzlement, beginning with *A Perfect Day for Banana Fish*. There are two major scenes in the story, the first in which Muriel Glass talks long distance from Florida with her mother in New York about the peculiar behavior of her husband Seymour, and the second in which Seymour takes the child Sybil on an inflated rubber float and tells her the tragic story of the “banana fish” who die of “banana fever” (NS, p.16) after swimming into a hole, as “they behave like pigs” gorging themselves on so many bananas that they cannot get out. Seymour identifies with the fish and the fever that kills them. Seymour’s description is a metaphor for the problem of living in the world. It is not just his wife Muriel and her mother; it is experience in its entirety and everything in it — positive and negative — can result in banana fever. Most of Salinger’s fiction, struggles with the question of how to behave inside the *banana hole* (another imprisonment) of experience. Seymour’s *banana fish* represents his creative self, longing to complete his individuality and manhood. The self, however, seems to be doomed.
because it cannot differentiate between kinds of experience; it is a glutton. Seymour wants to love everyone, but he cannot separate this love from self-love. Seymour believes in engaging in a spiritual fast, refusing the material world. The child Sybil offers another answer. The banana hole is not something to be avoided or feared. She treats it as a given reality, as desirable. It is significant that she sees a banana fish with “six” (NS, p.16) bananas in its mouth, eating, not fasting. How can one experience something without partaking of it? At the close of the story, Seymour sits on the twin bed opposite the one on which his wife Muriel is sleeping, puts a gun to his head and fires a bullet through his temple. Seymour’s further disillusionment with the next generation could be an important reason why this “a perfect day for banana fish” (NS, p. 15) is the moment for leaving the world. Seymour has found he is unable to cope with the phony world and opts out, but suicide is not an acceptable alternative to dealing with disillusionment. Although Seymour shares with Holden Caulfield an acute sensitivity to the physicality of the world, his Sybil does not serve (as Phoebe serves) to deflect him from self-destruction. The question that remains is not so much why he kills himself, but why Sybil's influence was not enough to keep him from doing so. The Glass family saga begins with Seymour's suicide, and Salinger spends much of his later career writing his way around and back
— freezing himself — to that day in 1948 to show how Seymour failed, but how the rest of us can be influenced by the Sybil’s of the world.

In *Franny and Zooey* (1961), Salinger presents the youngest member of the Glass family, Franny’s situation on a weekend, in painful conflict with her sense of self and the world. She is uneasy with the superficiality of her surroundings, and her profound wish for a spiritual dimension that would give her life substance beyond all of the grasping and self-assertion that threaten to engulf her. Salinger reflects on acceptance and endurance as a second choice, by embracing others or practicing a personal spirituality. The pattern that Franny follows, from nausea to joy, from withdrawal to return, is the same as we witness in Holden Caulfield. This is the first time; however, that Salinger has created a female for tracing out the pattern: “I’m sick of not having the courage to be an absolute nobody” (FZ, p. 30). With this prophetic exclamation this modern adolescent heroine, announces herself. Here is the state of mind of many a young individual apprehensive of the loss of individuality and selfhood, disgusted with the apparently inescapable conformity, and at the same time afraid of the alternative of being left alone. Salinger is more concerned with those who struggle against such conformity. *Franny and Zooey* deals with a frustrated person who is sick of ego: “I’m just sick of ego, ego, ego. My own and everybody else’s.
I’m sick of everybody that wants to get somewhere” (FZ, p.29). When Franny thinks of giving up the stage, she makes this point when she claims that she is sickened and disgusted by ego, and repelled by the universal drive to get somewhere. Franny's struggle throughout the novel is unquestionably the condition of her burdensome ego, and the burden of the living Glass children is the same. Once more, Salinger provides his characters a way out of their spiritual abyss. It comes in the form of a parable, a device he frequently uses to impart mythic truths and visions.

We learn that Seymour talked about the parable of the Fat Lady during the years that the Glasses performed as child prodigies on a radio talk show called “It's a Wise Child” (FZ, p. 53). He insisted that before the show the children shine their shoes — synonymous, perhaps, with preparing to do their best — for the Fat Lady, a reference to the lonely, bereft members of their listening audience. Zooey invokes the image with a stirring explanation of the Fat Lady's identity: “We're the Tattooed Lady, and we're never going to have a minute's peace, the rest of our lives, till everybody else is tattooed, too” (FZ, p.139). Zooey comments: “There isn't anyone out there who isn't Seymour's Fat Lady...that Fat Lady really is ... Christ Himself (FZ, pp. 201-202). It is her task to act for God, to act so fully that no point of separation exists between what Franny is doing and any other conception of herself. Salinger wishes to
tell us there is no difference between Franny and the Fat Lady, impossible, as that is to imagine. Franny and this cancerous Fat Lady with “thick legs, very veiny legs” (FZ, p.201) rocking in a chair on some unidentified porch — the exceptional Franny and the unpleasant associations of this Fat Lady — are not separate. They are exactly part of the same thing.

Franny’s only support in this crisis is a little devotional book, *The Way of a Pilgrim*, (FZ, p.32) which focuses on a simple prayer to compose spiritual unrest: ”Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me” (FZ, p. 36). Her description of the meditative way stresses the loss of all personal devices and social impingements. Through Zooey, however, she learns that her use of the prayer has handicapped rather than helped her spiritually, because of her distorted notions of Jesus. In saying the prayer, she has been trying to lay up spiritual treasures for herself much like the people she criticizes are trying to lay up material or intellectual treasures for themselves. “This is God’s universe” Zooey tells Franny, “not yours.” And he asks: “…who in the Bible besides Jesus knew — knew — that we’re carrying the Kingdom of Heaven around with us, inside, where we’re all too goddam stupid and sentimental and unimaginative to look?” (FZ, p.171) the only reason to say the Jesus prayer is to develop “Christ-consciousness. Not to set up some little cozy, holier-than-thou trysting
place with some sticky, adorable divine personage” (FZ, p.172). Franny finally admits to Lane, her boyfriend that “if you keep saying that prayer over and over again — you only have to do it with your lips at first — then eventually what happens, the prayer becomes self-active” (FZ, p.37). After she has fainted and been revived, the story ends with her lips soundlessly moving, presumably a signal that she is at least striving toward some remote “satori,” (FZ, p.65) that blessed state of illumination. “Smiling at the ceiling” (FZ, p.202) she dozes off, in mystical union with a divine human race that shares her vulnerability. This is the intuitive knowledge that at last replaces Franny’s revulsion with joy, and brings a smile to her lips — the smile of return. Franny finally manages to transcend her ego-ridden soul and the squalor that surrounds her. Christ in Salinger's story is everyone: universal love is necessary. Later, while talking in the living room with Franny, Zooey himself glances out of the window and sees a little drama in progress: a small girl in a red tam is hiding behind a tree from her dog wearing a green collar; “the anguish of separation” is followed by the “joy of reunion” (FZ, p.152). From this little but intensely suggestive vignette Zooey draws the inspiration to lead Franny to see the anguish of her own separation and the need for a reunion of joy. Salinger's main aim is to have his Glass children achieve the liberated moment, that is, experiences fully lived in which there is no separation
between self and other. Moreover, the spiritual rather than the physical determines the self as Buddy tells Zooey about meeting a little girl who had two boyfriends. When Buddy asks her the names of her boyfriends, she replies Bobby and Dorothy (FZ, p. 64). For Buddy the moment becomes a remarkable one, almost an epiphany. At first sight the reader may not be aware of its significance, but when examined in the light of other events, it can clearly be seen that Salinger has intended the child's statement as profound, the blending of one of the most fundamental of dualities, that of sex. The little girl, Buddy saw, instinctively realized what Seymour once told him: “All legitimate religious study must lead to unlearning the differences, the illusory differences, between boys and girls, animals and stones, day and night, heat and cold” (FZ, pp. 67-68).

In fact Zooey tells Franny:

...education by any name would smell as sweet, and maybe much sweeter, if it didn't begin with a quest for knowledge at all but with a quest, as Zen would put it, for no-knowledge. Dr. Suzuki says somewhere that to be in a state of pure consciousness — satori — is to be with God before he said, Let there be light. (FZ, p. 65)

Salinger’s men find they are facing the same problems, as do their sisters: they find themselves “unlearning the differences.” Accepting differences within the self is difficult at its best in the literature of this decade when the prevailing attitude is one of conformity and the individual who resists is maladjusted, a misfit, which leads us to the deaf-
mute — "he sees things as beautifully related. The mute knows how to love; he is at peace with all aspects of reality. Seymour and Holden see things as beautifully isolated."\(^8\)

De Daumier-Smith’s experience at the shop window of 'enamel urinals and bedpans, with a sightless wooden dummy-deity standing by in a marked-down rupture truss’ (NS, p. 157) transformed into “a shimmering field of exquisite, twice-blessed, enamel flowers”(NS, p. 164) is inexplicable except as a “mystical experience” (NS, p. 81). He cannot, as he would like “if possible,” dismiss the possibility that his “quiet transcendent” experience is “a borderline case, of genuine mysticism” (NS, p. 163). De Daumier-Smith decides that he must give Sister Irma “her freedom to follow her own destiny.” Similarly his enigmatic conclusion “Everybody is a nun” (NS, p.164), may be a more lyrical way of phrasing Holden’s discovery that if you tell anybody anything, “you start missing everybody” (CR, p.214), because “everybody, like a nun, is a bride of heaven who should share in universal compassion” (French, p.81). Gwynn and Blotner comment: "he means partly that everyone, in his aloneness, is like a nun cloistered from the normal contact of humanity" (1958, p.40). De Daumier-Smith moves into the transfigured realm beyond time on this one occasion, but does not return there. He comes back to earth and then returns to school, without
agonizing over whether he will apply himself or not unlike Holden. Salinger has created in him a complementary figure to Holden; he displays a capacity “to transcend the phony world, but chooses to remain in it, to make his own decisions and to stand by them” (French, p.82).

Nine Stories, whose writing coincided with the writing of The Catcher in the Rye, is prefaced by a familiar Zen koan: “We know the sound of two hands clapping / but what is the sound of one hand clapping”? This eastern thought alluded to, suggests that Salinger considered it an alternative to the superficiality and materialism of the world he portrays. If the artist communicates by writing, then the religious man communicates by silence: this is the paradox of Zen. Thus the sound of two hands clapping is the sound of relationship. The search for the sound of one hand clapping comes to an end in the spiritual life. The enlightenment that would allow such a sound to be heard would reveal a world without distinctions, a world of unlimited freedom as unlike a banana-hole as possible. Zen recognizes that all boundaries are artificial. Thus art is the way of the imagination and Zen is the way of the soul. Salinger is primarily interested in the souls of his characters. As the fiction following A Perfect Day for Banana Fish indicates, Salinger seems to believe that finding a solution to the problem often involves revisiting the problem, within the family. That is, after all, where one
learns how to behave and as Franny finds out, “one is entitled to the low
grade spiritual counsel [the family] is able to give...At least you know
there won’t be any goddam ulterior motives in this madhouse” (FZ,
pp.195-196). Whereas initially Holden Caulfield runs away when he is in
trouble, Franny goes home. In a vast world full of misunderstanding and
estrangement, the sensitive innocent must turn towards the family to find
the intimate love and communication that is so lacking in the outside
world. It is through the family that they retain their equilibrium,
balancing their moral integrity against the social pressures of the outside
world. Thus the family becomes the place where self and society meets,
where the moral and ethical realms are reconciled. The Glass family is a
striking affirmation in an era dominated by disintegrating families. Set in
an ambivalent milieu Nine Stories deal with genius, spiritual integrity,
moral corruption, and the occasional ability of innocence to transform
lives. Consequently, Salinger's characters, withdraw into illusory
alternatives whenever possible. Holden withdraws in The Catcher in the
Rye, although he recognizes a need to return and to compromise. Each
character tries to hold onto the world of the imagination as long as
possible. But hope, when it comes in Nine Stories, is not just in the form
of the grand affirmation. It comes in the little things: a girl's appreciation
of wax and olives, her tactile pleasure with sand; Esme's conversational
lilt and her brother's love of riddles; a boy's thrill over a story told on a snowy night concerning kidnapping Chinese bandits; the small pleasure of Teddy, the boy genius, keeping lists in his pockets of things to look up at the library — these are the moments of affirmation in Salinger's fictional universe. These are the moments that make the exile worthwhile. Perhaps there is no artist more qualified than Salinger to lead us on a journey of "squalor and redemption."9

The essential element in the short stories according to Bernice and Sanford Goldstein is the "breaking down of barriers between supposed opposites, artificial barriers created by abstracting and intellectualizing human beings."10 When the barriers are removed, enlightenment is produced in the form of some positive act. The stories move from conflict toward enlightenment, the conflict centered on the self-contained ego removed from others and other events. That self-contained separate ego leads to actions Salinger recognizes as "phony" — that is, actions removed from the experience by judging the experience, criticizing it, dissecting it. Others are removed from the self, and the self is traditionally reinforced as a separate entity continually removed, separated, isolated. Conflict and turmoil, judgment and criticism, all these support a separated ego, which the protagonists' must overcome before they reach some kind of awareness. They become enlightened when they
cease to isolate themselves as separate egos and so merge with experience that "there is not a hair's breadth between will and action" (Goldstein).

Specific parallels can be drawn between Holden and Salinger's other protagonists from his short stories to show how their patterns fit together. Holden Caulfield resembles Salinger's other protagonists, whose common trait is that they are hypersensitive individuals who carry deep scars from interacting with the flawed world around them, a world characterized by phoniness. Salinger's short stories dramatize a progressive series of alternatives to the problem of remaining spiritually 'nice' in a 'phony' world. Esme differs from the defeated Seymour in that she remains resolutely in Holden's world without being corrupted by its 'phoniness' or resigning herself to putting up with things as they are. Her story is the rare ones of the victory of the 'nice' world over the 'phony' (French, p.78), and she remains as potential role model for achieving compassion through an acquaintance with squalor. Salinger shows that there remains a possibility of surviving within the material world without becoming dehumanized. "There remains even in the wasteland a possibility of innocence, but readers have a tough time recognizing it" (French, p.83). The gallery of Salinger's characters — Holden, Seymour, Franny and Zooey, De Daumier-Smith, Esme — suffer a sickness of the soul, but through the renewal of their mind survive. They all withdraw,
but they also return. The inevitable disillusioning truth of Salinger's world is that to survive one must accommodate oneself to a squalid world. But the characters can achieve increasing levels of transcendence from the complex world of squalor and earthly distraction. Seymour alone, among Salinger's suffering heroes, makes the ultimate withdrawal. Salinger tried to evoke an alternative life-style in the Glass family stories; these tales are more idealistic than *Catcher*. Outside the Salinger milieu Holden Caulfield can be compared with the protagonist of Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Like Huck Finn, Holden is also seeking, albeit metaphorically, a home, a place where he can be accepted and can truly belong.

Though he was writing consistently, for American Magazines, *The Catcher in the Rye* brought Salinger recognition. Salinger not only captured the perennial confusions of adolescence, but also the spiritual discomforts of an entire age. In short, *The Catcher in the Rye* is yet another instance of the ways in which great literature can be at one and the same time culturally specific and universal. That the novel does not lack, in intricate symbols or a refined sense of style and language will be demonstrated in the detailed examination of the book, focusing on the nature of the maturing process, and an investigation of those stylistic and technical means that have been used to convey this sense of maturation to
the reader. The deceptive simplicity of the novel’s picaresque story belies its structural intricacy or its deep spiritual import. In developing the narrative, Salinger has interlocked multiple patterns at the thematic, episodic, verbal, and symbolic levels with careful artistry. These motifs can be shown to indicate a certain spiritual perception, which represents a world-view which is essentially Salinger’s. The individual in his confrontation with life is depicted as evolving to an understanding that the ideal is that which accommodates the spirit of involvement and detachment.

If one thinks of a plot as a series of events that build one on another toward a climax, then the plot of *The Catcher in the Rye* is one of its least significant aspects. It can be summarized in a few paragraphs, but there’s much more to the novel than its story. The physical action of the book takes place in 1949 at two locations. The first seven chapters are set at Pencey Prep, a private school for boys in eastern Pennsylvania. Life at Pencey is dreary, regimented, artificial and, of course, expensive. This happens, however, to be only the latest of a series of schools from which Holden has been expelled. Understandably he is in no hurry to encounter his parents, but he is also reluctant to linger a moment longer than necessary at Pencey: “It’s full of phonies, and all you do is study so that you can learn enough to be smart enough to be able to buy a goddam
Cadillac some day” (CR, p.131). Holden, in his wish to “feel some kind of good-bye” (CR, p.4) before he leaves Pencey, shows himself to be concerned with the authenticity of his own feelings. Further evidence for society’s call to phoniness is found in Holden’s remark: “I'm always saying 'Glad to've met you' to somebody I'm not at all glad I met. If you want to stay alive, you have to say that stuff, though” (CR, p.87). Here, he implies that society forces a person to be false as a means towards survival. He wants to use his imagination to feel more connected to the world and to his own emotions.

In this first section Holden tells us about two of the three important people in his life — his dead brother Allie and Jane Gallagher: two people he's had an honest relationship with. Tragedy struck the Caulfield family and life stopped for Holden on July 18, 1946, the day his brother Allie, 2 years younger than Holden, died of leukemia. “You'd have liked him, says Holden. But it wasn’t just that he was the most intelligent member of the family. He was also the nicest” (CR, p.38). Holden was then thirteen, and four years later — the time of the narrative — he is emotionally still at the same age, although he has matured into a six-foot adolescent. The night after Allie's death Holden slept in the garage and broke:

... all the goddam windows with my fist, just for the hell of it. I even tried to break all the windows on the station wagon
we had that summer...It was a very stupid thing to do, I'll admit, but I hardly didn't even know I was doing it, and you didn't know Allie. (CR, p.39)

The “act may have been stupid — which is one of his pet words to denigrate himself as well as others — but it also reflects his uncontrollable anger, at himself for wishing Allie dead and at his brother for leaving him alone and burdened with feelings of guilt.”11 His fear of growth and change, expressed throughout the novel, is the result of his realization that one grows toward death, and that death is the ultimate change. Similarly, the attack on the station wagon may be seen as his way of getting even with a father who was powerless either to save Allie or to understand Holden. Because he was hospitalized, he was unable to attend the funeral, to witness the completion of the life process, but by injuring himself he received the attention and sympathy, which were denied him during Allie's illness. His actions here as elsewhere are inconsistent and ambivalent, but always comprehensible in terms of his reaction to the loss of Allie. His vision of Allie's funeral is horrifying because he sees the reactions of his relatives who are interested in the flower arrangements rather than the dead boy. Holden also remembers the Eskimo in The Museum of Natural History who, like his brother, has achieved peace, “staying right where [he] it was” (CR, p.121). But Holden also realizes that such visions of complete withdrawal are impossible for the moment.
In *Franny and Zooey*, Franny, on the brink of a breakdown, says that the one person she wants to talk to is her dead brother Seymour.

Although Jane never appears, she plays an important role in Holden’s life. The only memory he seems to have of her is that she’d line her kings up in the back row whenever they played checkers: “She just liked the way they looked when they were all in the back row” (CR, p.32). This has intrigued the critics, but what it seems to represent is a “holding back of one’s aggressive powers and an unwillingness to enter the competitive game and use them against other people;”¹² this is one of Holden’s cherished values.

Several days before he’s expected home for Christmas vacation, Holden leaves school, takes a train ride, and the rest of the book takes place in New York City where he lives, where he wanders around aimlessly for several days, spending money his wealthy grandmother has sent him, instead of going home. Holden has a series of adventures and misadventures that are akin to the archetypal journey as rite of passage into maturity. Though Holden is friendly with many people at school, and though he has several friends in New York, he is constantly lonesome and in need of someone who will sympathize with his feelings of alienation: “I’m lonesome as hell. No kidding.” (CR, p.149) The person he feels closest to is his ten-year-old sister, Phoebe:
You never saw a little kid so pretty and smart in your whole life...She’s only ten... if you tell old Phoebe something, she knows exactly what the hell you’re talking about... you can even take her anywhere with you. (CR, p. 67)

But he cannot call her for fear of letting his parents know he has left school. He spends his time with a variety of people, but he cannot make meaningful contact with any of them. In this respect, the novel might be considered satiric in nature since it is about the loss of human connectedness. Holden Caulfield's inability to communicate satisfactorily with others represents itself symbolically in the uncompleted telephone calls, and undelivered messages which permeate the novel. Seeing a phone booth is almost more than Holden can stand, for he almost constantly feels like “giving somebody a buzz” (CR, p.59). After a day of futility, he sneaks into his home to see Phoebe, but she disappoints him by being annoyed at his being expelled from still another school. He has to face some ugly truths that he’s been trying hard to avoid — truths about his sister, about childhood innocence, and about himself. Growing logically out of his prolonged incommunicability is Caulfield's intention to become “one of those deaf-mutes” (CR, p.198). So repulsed is he by the phoniness around him that he despairs of communicating with anybody, and in a passage where Holden has been ice-skating at Radio City with Sally Hayes, he tries, in a fumbling way, to explain to her about
his hatred of the phonies in his school, and how meaningless he feels everything to be, he contemplates a retreat within himself:

No kidding. We'll stay in these cabin camps and stuff like that till the dough runs out. Then, when the dough runs out, I could get a job somewhere and we could live somewhere with a brook and all and, later on, we could get married or something [...] (CR, p.132).

Here Holden goes on to share his naïve vision of how to survive in this false world. He simply asks Sally to run away with him to a log cabin in the countryside to withdraw from that society to a primitive kind of existence. Holden's solution is a return to nature and a romantic dream. It is a dream about a world of natural and "pristine innocence, some personal integrity."13 His vision of himself as "the catcher in the rye," accentuates this dream. Deep inside he knows this probably will not happen (the fact that Sally keeps trying to change the subject surely does not help): "I was getting excited as hell, the more I thought of it, and I sort of reached over and took old Sally's goddam hand. What a goddam fool I was" (CR, p. 118). They get into a fight since Sally really does not understand what he is talking about and even Holden himself concludes the passage by saying that he is a "madman" (CR, p.134). He makes his dream of the future — to run away to New England and live off the land — depend upon Sally Hayes's cooperation. He lacks the courage to pursue this dream (a dream that a later generation would pursue) but he can
blame Sally for the loss of this dream. Thus, trapped in utter frustration, he loses his sanity because he cannot face that demoralizing truth. Inability to make compromises where they should be made is what leads him to a sanatorium. Holden's fantasy of going out west reflects two aspects of his personality. First, he wishes to ostracize himself from society, as seen by his deaf-mute idea. It also reflects the old American Dream of striking new ground out West. Perhaps Holden is using this journey as a substitution for something more difficult: seeking out a new frontier in himself. And so, in desperation, as the novel nears its conclusion, Holden decides to attempt a compromise withdrawal from the world, a withdrawal similar to the kind he considered early in the novel when he asked Ackley about how to “join a monastery” (CR, p.50). On the verge of a nervous collapse, Holden changes his mind and decides to rejoin his family. When this section reaches a climax in Chapter 25 Salinger carefully places Holden on the psychiatrist’s couch in California, “this crumby place,” (CR, p.1) and the rest home where Holden is imprisoned as the result of his problems, apparently on the way to some kind of recovery from his nervous breakdown. This information is important, for it helps to establish the mood and point of view of the narrator. The fact that Holden is in a psychiatric hospital certainly influences the way the story is told, read, and understood. In other words,
the setting in this first chapter, which serves as the front-end of a frame narrative, is extremely important. The hospital or rest home setting is the overall structure on which the story is built. It is in this outside frame, from a vantage point several months and several thousand miles away, that Holden makes his final comments on the whole matter. In terms of the narrative, this chapter completes the frame that was begun in chapter one. The novel has come full cycle, and the plot is completed; the reader is left with the impression that a whole story has been told, even though Salinger does not answer all the questions about his protagonist, Holden Caulfield. At the novel’s close, Holden isn’t sure whether he’ll be able to handle things better when he leaves the institution, and he’s sorry he told his story at all. These are the bare bones of the story, but there’s much more to the novel than its story. It’s a rich psychological portrait of a boy who has few of the tools necessary to face the world on his own.

The novel is written in a realistic manner, and the rendition of New York life is a triumph of realistic observation accurately represented as a metaphor for the increasingly commercial world, devoid of feelings: the atmosphere of shabby hotels or of Central Park on a winter day is brilliantly conveyed. New York, as seen by Holden, is an Eliotean wasteland. It is a place of sexual perverts and sterile relationships. The hotel where he stays is “lousy with perverts” and “a man and a woman
squirtng water out of their mouths at each other’’ (CR, p.62). Sex in this society has ceased to be a re-creating regenerating, relation-establishing force. In New York Holden's nightmarish efforts to escape from himself through liquor, sex, nightclubs, movies are fruitless. Misadventure piles on misadventure, but he bears it all with a grim cheerfulness and stubborn courage.

When Holden is explaining to Mr. Antolini why he left Pencey, he gives the example of what his Oral Expression class is taught to call “digressions” (CR, p.183). The teacher, Mr. Venison spent most of his time arguing the importance of sticking to the point and avoiding digression. The trouble with this idea, Holden maintains, is that he likes listening to a speech better when someone digresses. He says this of Mr. Venison: “He could drive you crazy sometimes, him and the goddam class. I mean he'd keep telling you to unify and simplify all the time. Some things you just can't do that to” (CR, p.185). The scene is intended as another example of how modern society restricts conversation. “[The speech] didn't have to do with the farm — I admit it — but it was nice” (CR, p.184) Holden comments, implying that not everything has to be unified and simplified. The same thing is true of Holden's own story — it is not unified and simplified; it is in itself an extended digression leading in fits and starts toward a *movement of illumination* that is not the result
of logical, ordered thought. Although the book takes place during only three days, Holden's story is filled with what tell us about things that deeply affected him. Such an important part of his life goes on inside his head and it happened years earlier, that the present physical setting becomes almost incidental to the story being told. *The Catcher in the Rye* could take place almost anywhere in the world. That's because the true setting of the book is Holden’s mind — an interior monologue spoken by Holden. The subjective point of view is an integral part of Salinger’s exploration of that mind. An important aspect of the novel is the construction of a center of consciousness, the structuring of 'I', and the formation of an identity to express itself. The main movement of the action like *Franny and Zooey* is the shift of the "I" from artificial ego to a more authentic self. The novel seeks to link the protagonists’ external reflections to the internal ‘I’, which must comprehend the nature of what it sees. The primary action of the novel is the connection between the narration of Holden and the structure he brings into existence through this. Thus, Salinger uses storytelling as a moral focus for the protagonist’s life and his identity. Through his own writing, Holden seeks to unify vision, knowledge, and truth. There is also an emotional reward: the confessional nature of his writing leads him to a better understanding
of himself. Through the telling of the story, "Holden has given shape to, and thus achieved control of, his troubled past."^{14}

An important relationship also exists between this deliberately structured ‘I’ and the reader, for although so much concentration is focused on Holden, the reader becomes the second protagonist in the text. The novel does not describe the world of the reader; rather, it draws the readers into themselves and traces a microcosm (Redpath, p.26). This microcosm is the consciousness of the protagonist and, by extension, the consciousness of the reader. A major feature of Salinger’s structure is the “centripetal quality,” (Redpath, p.26) the inward concentration on the world it envisages. The inwardness contributes to the opacity of the novel, but it is also where the meaning of the work lies. The novel does not try to escape its limits as text by moving the reader into the world beyond the book; it draws him into the book and into himself. It demarcates limits to recede into and this explains the narrow confines of Salinger’s world. Inside this world we glimpse the consciousness of an adolescent. Salinger’s novel is unquestionably concerned with ways of seeing, as they compel us to re-see adolescent nature. Readers forge the link between the main body and coda of the text, adding a spiritual dimension. The shifting perspectives, flashbacks and confined settings, parallel cinematic techniques. Holden’s three-day odyssey is a symbolic
journey to the underworld where he is made spiritually conscious. Holden's reason for writing is to conduct a search and Salinger's motive is to show the "therapeutic value" (Redpath, p.129) of the search. Salinger deliberately displaces chronological sequences which all relate to Holden's search for lost innocence, than to the novelist's indirect presentation of his central preoccupations: the nature of that imprisonment in the cell's self, the operation of failure or success in and after that, and a paradoxical pattern of ideas about identity and selflessness, creativity and quietness. Questions of good and evil, sanity and insanity, achievement and success are of secondary importance here compared to the realization that he or she possesses a self, a core of individuality, which is indefinable.

Rather than proceeding in a straight, chronological line, Holden wanders — first announcing that he will relate the story of his exhausting, even mad adventures during a weekend sojourn in Manhattan last Christmas and then pausing to include more information about his older brother D.B. We first encounter D.B. in the novel's opening paragraph, in which Holden introduces him as having once been a regular writer but having since become a "prostitute" (CR, pp.1-2) Hollywood scriptwriter, and thus fallen. In other words, D.B. has stopped writing stories for himself, but instead for Hollywood — in essence, he no longer abides by
his personal integrity. Holden furthermore reveals that his favorite book is D.B.’s *The Secret Goldfish* (CR, p.1) where the theme foreshadows Holden’s consistent passion for the innocence and authenticity of childhood. It is about a child who buys a goldfish and does not allow anyone to look at it because he has paid for it with his own money. We also learn about Holden’s aversion to falseness. The movies have ruined D.B., just as Holden remains convinced that the movies ruin everybody else. As far as he is concerned, movie actors are acting. He is disgusted by the affectation in the films he sees — for example he says that actors “never act like people. They just think they do” (CR, p.117). They do not believe the lines they so carefully rehearse because, in the theater and motion pictures, illusion is more important than reality. Holden abhors movies and shows because they are larger than life, because they generate a sort of passiveness among society. He is depressed when someone says *good-luck* because the statement implies that fortune supersedes human effort. He hates movies because a movie is nothing more than a false portrayal of reality on a screen, and yet he can imitate them because in imitation the movie is taken out of context. Holden’s seemingly contradictory statement: “I hate the movies like poison, but I get a bang imitating them” (CR, p.29). The imitation, to Holden, is more honest than the portrayal on the screen. Holden cannot understand how people
actually appear to accept and even like what they see. He complains about his friends who “laughed like hyenas at stuff that wasn’t even funny” (CR, p.37) and is also deeply disturbed by the fact that his older brother D.B. has become a sellout to Hollywood and how easily impressed people seem to be by this.

An example of the narrator’s direct address is found in the opening line of the novel when Holden says:

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. (CR, p. 1)

This opening sentence of *The Catcher in the Rye* establishes two things: Firstly that it is no ordinary autobiography since we only get to hear the important things — that is, what Holden believes is important and relevant. Here, he emphasizes to the reader that the following narrative will be completely subjective, from his own point of view — he will tell only what he wishes to tell. We are to hear the truth: Holden’s truth. Holden is not a traditional narrator; he eschews details about his birth, his parents, and “all that David Copperfield kind of crap” (referring to Charles Dickens’ novel by the same name). Secondly, Holden justifies ignoring this traditional setup by saying “I don't feel like going into it, if you want to know the truth.” The skepticism inherent in that casual
phrase, "if you want to know the truth," implies a full, sickening realization "that as a matter of fact in the world of Holden Caulfield very few people do."\(^{15}\) **What we find out about directly in the novel is, of course, what has happened to Holden Caulfield; but we also find out what has happened generally to human ideas on some simple and ultimate questions in the years following World War II. Holden is actually speaking to the psychoanalyst in the story, but at the same time, he appears to be directly addressing the reader. Frankness is one of Holden's most engaging qualities as he starts his story with an extended flashback to the day he left Pencey just a few days before Christmas in 1949. Flashbacks are used to provide a sense of movement in time. These movements are used to underline the character's connections with social difficulties. We know that he has problems at school and that he has failed most of his subjects, but at the same time this failure seems to have nothing to do with lack of intelligence. On the contrary, he is verbal, quick-witted and humorous. The opening paragraph sounds the thematic dichotomy between the world of vision and the world of reality that the book explores. But it seems more significant, and more apparent, that the first paragraph establishes the 'I' who writes, who doesn't want to be thought of as one of those "splendid, clear-thinking, young men" (CR, p.2) his school claims to mold. Holden objects to the catalogue at Pencey,
which shows a student on a horse jumping over a fence. According to Holden, the school did not even own a horse, and the students were anything but splendid. He believes the school “serves steak on Saturday nights so Sunday's visiting parents will think the meals are always like that” (CR, p.35). Holden sees the school as manufacturing a public image that belies reality, a situation not uncommon with educational institutions. And he finds that phoniness, that hypocrisy; not only in the world of his personal contacts, but in the world of art as well. He detests phony books, phony music, phony movies and plays. He sees Hamlet as “a sad, screwed-up type guy” and wants him played that way instead of like “a goddam general” (CR, p.117). Likewise he is bothered by the way people “clap for the wrong things” (CR, p.84) and hence corrupts the promising artist. Evidently, he does not feel much fellowship with the other students at Pencey, and the starting-point of Holden's story, the very day he leaves school, says much about his relation to them. It is important to notice that when Holden flashes back to the day he left Pencey Prep; he is pictured alone, standing on top of Thomsen Hill. He has risen above the pettiness of Pencey and looks down on it, both literally and figuratively. He is standing on the top of a hill, looking down on a football field where a big game is going on, where almost the whole school has gathered together to watch. Holden's self-chosen distance and isolation from the spectacle is
striking: "It was the last game of the year, and you were supposed to commit suicide or something if old Pencey didn't win" (CR, p. 2). The scene is a telling image of the feeling of not belonging, not participating but standing and watching, from a distance or from the outside. Holden is incapable of improving in school because he feels too distant from it. He cannot identify himself with either students or teachers. His history teacher says: "Life is a game boy. Life is a game that one plays according to the rules" (CR, p. 8). But Holden is not a player. However, the reader is left to question whether the problem is truly with Pencey or rather Holden. Whatever the case, we learn that Holden is highly critical of others. There is also a sense that something is missing in his judgments. For example, he concludes that Pencey is a terrible school because "there were never many girls at all at the football games" (CR, p. 3). Perhaps all the criticism is merely a front. As an indirect result of his constant criticism, Holden finds himself distant from everything. He wants to leave town with a positive thought about the school, even though he has been expelled. He thinks hard to come up with a pleasant memory and recalls an evening football game with friends. He is satisfied that this recollection is positive enough. As a result, he can proceed on to call on old Spencer, his history teacher, who asked him to stop by before leaving school. He expresses admiration for the elderly teacher, who "if you
thought about him just enough and not too much, you could figure it out that he wasn’t doing too bad for himself” (CR, p.7). Evidently he respects the old man enough to pay him a visit on a Saturday night. While visiting with the teacher, it is apparent that Holden is simply not a student. The teacher criticizes his lack of effort and even reads from one of Holden’s reports, which is unacceptably completed. It is significant that Holden himself writes a note on the bottom of the work, which reveals his sensitive side. Despite his discomfort, Holden listens politely to the teacher’s chastisement and the reading of the pitifully inadequate history essay he wrote on the last test. At the end of the paper, Holden had added an apology to Spencer for doing poorly; “so he wouldn't feel too bad about flunking me” (CR, p. 15). He apologizes for not doing well on the report and confirms that he is to blame for his failure, not the teacher. In other words, Holden is very aware of his own lack of effort, but does nothing to correct it. In schoolwork, like in life, Holden seems bored and unchallenged. Even in the old man's room, he is unsafe: He hates the pervasive smell of “Vicks Nose Drops” (CR, p.10). He blushes when Mr. Spencer reads his answer about mummies on a history test. The mummies reinforce imprisonment. Incidentally Holden would also like to stop his development toward adulthood by physically preserving his body from change, as is illustrated by his interest in the Egyptian mummies, who
were treated with “secret ingredients ... so that their faces would not rot for innumerable centuries” (CR, p.11). Spencer, in a question that echoes throughout the book, asks Holden, “What's the matter with you, boy”? (CR, p.10) As Spencer tries to lecture him, telling him that he flunked history because he simply did not know anything, Holden’s mind begins to wander in a stream-of-consciousness manner, to a question of his own, one he returns to time after time in the novel. He wonders what happens to the ducks in the lagoon near Central Park when winter comes. Here, of course, the ducks are the endangered innocents; ice, winter, and death are the threat; and the man in a truck is the potential savior. The situation is Holden's, as well as the ducks'; through most of the novel he looks for rescue from his wintry life or plans to fly from it. Whereas Holden continues to brood obsessively on the ephemeral (the vanished ducks, with their unconscious associations to his brother's death and to the impending death of his own innocence), Horwitz the taxi driver aggressively calls his attention to the fish frozen in the lagoon, which embody constancy: “They live right in the goddam ice. It's their nature, for Chris sake. They get frozen right in one position for the whole winter” (CR, p.82). Horwitz thus establishes that the fish are by nature capable of achieving a complete lack of movement — by a method, however, of no use to Holden, as Horwitz reveals when he adds: “If you was a fish,
Mother Nature'd take care of you, wouldn't she? Right? You don't think them fish just die when it gets to be winter, do ya’? (CR, p.83) Unfortunately, Holden is not a fish. Mother Nature has not fulfilled his need. Being warm-blooded, he shares the plight of the ducks; his getting “frozen right in one position for the whole winter” is no solution to his dilemma. On the contrary, when Holden, with wet hair, begins to feel ice forming on the back of his head, he realizes that he could catch pneumonia, a disease of the lungs. The ducks and their pond are symbolic in several ways. Their mysterious perseverance in the face of an inhospitable environment resonates with Holden’s understanding of his own situation. In addition, the ducks prove that some vanishings are only temporary. Traumatized and made acutely aware of the fragility of life by his brother Allie’s death, Holden is terrified by the idea of change and disappearance. The ducks vanish every winter, but they return every spring, thus symbolizing that change is not permanent, but cyclical. Finally, the pond itself becomes a minor metaphor for the world as Holden sees it, because it is “partly frozen and partly not frozen” (CR, p.154). The pond is in transition between two states, just as Holden is in transition between childhood and adulthood.

The development of the “catcher” theme is most clearly revealed in five related pictures of life, through which Salinger describes the
"catcher" attitude toward life. All five pictures describe life in the same terms. In each, we are shown an innocent in danger, a threat, and a potential savior. It is an appropriate description of the world, from Holden's point of view, since he would like to be a savior and he certainly seems to need saving. The first picture as we have already seen is Holden's description of the predicament faced by the ducks in Central Park; this picture is supplanted by the cab driver Horwitz's comments on the fish in the Central Park lagoon. That Salinger had in mind an unstated alternative to flight or protection is suggested by the next image of life. Phoebe provides the third picture when she tells Holden about "The Doctor," a movie she has seen; Holden's "catcher in the rye" idea is the fourth. The climatic scene, in which Phoebe rides the carrousel and Holden decides to return home, resolves the thematic conflicts by presenting the final picture of life.

To Holden, innocence means freedom, and he feels the whole adult world is artificial, and the only people who act genuinely are children. That Holden himself sees childhood as the source of good in human life is indicated in the title of the novel. At one point in his wanderings through New York, he sees a father, a mother, and their six-year-old son who had all apparently just come out of church. The parents are talking to one another, paying no attention to the child who is walking in the street,
next to the curb, with traffic zooming by dangerously close. Disturbed and fascinated by the scene, Holden gets close enough to hear the boy singing a song, "[...] if a body catch a body comin' through the rye" (CR, p.173). Late that night, he sneaks into his parents' apartment to see Phoebe and tries to explain to her why he has left school by saying that he did not like anything that was happening at Pencey. She replies by suggesting that perhaps his problem is just that — he does not like "anything, that's happening" (CR, p.169) that he does not want to become anything (a lawyer, for instance, like his father), and that he does not want to do anything. Holden pauses, and then he tells her what he would like to be. He asks her if she knows the song the boy in the street was singing. Wise child that she is, she of course knows that it is a poem by Robert Burns and, furthermore, that Holden has the words wrong. It actually goes, "if a body meet a body coming through the rye"— a significant difference, because it indicates Holden's subconscious desire to rewrite, to change an order of things that he finds unacceptable. His reply to Phoebe is one of the most famous passages in the novel:

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 catch everybody if they start to go over the cliff... [t]hat's all I'd do all day. I'd just be the catcher in the rye ... I know it's crazy, but that's the only thing I'd really like to be. (CR, p.173)
This symbol merits close inspection as the source of the book’s title. Holden tries to escape the influences of this world by using his imagination to form a fantasy: he attempts to create a *make believe* substitute for the actual world, one in which, even though he has become *big*, he is capable of preserving the state of childhood. As critic Edwards Duane points out, “the narrator in the Burns poem considers kissing the one he meets in the rye.”\(^{16}\) Holden’s version changes it from a poem about love to a poem about death. The song asks if it is wrong for two people to have a romantic encounter out in the fields, away from the public eye, even if they don’t plan to have a commitment to one another. It is highly ironic that the word *meet* refers to an encounter that leads to recreational sex, because the word that Holden substitutes — *catch* — takes on the exact opposite meaning in his mind. Salinger presents the pathetic condition of the world through the imagery of falling. Holden’s fantasy — the metaphor of the fall (‘fall’ in the Christian concept is loss of innocence) — standing in front of a cliff and protecting playing children from falling over into adulthood is centered on this basic misapprehension of humanity. As *the catcher in the rye*, Holden hopes to protect children from falling and by extension, from growing old and losing their innocence. With this wish Holden enters, although not in a biblical sense but rather in a more symbolical form, the position of a
martyr, which in *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* is described as “one who sacrifices his life, station, or what is of great value for the sake of principle or to sustain a cause.” This vision is not the only example of Holden's acts of martyrdom. As Richard H. Rupp points out, "In each relationship Holden is indeed a catcher in the rye, extending his life for others and protecting them."17 Despite people's phony behavior, he feels a genuine sorrow for them and, even though they hurt him, he constantly forgives them. He consoles his teacher for having to fail him. He agrees to write his roommate Stradlater's English essay homework, just to later get into a fight with him because Stradlater does not like it. This fight does also concern Holden's suspicion of a sexual affair between Stradlater and Jane Gallagher, and one can see Holden as a martyr for the loss of Jane's virginity. He seems to be the only one at Pencey who takes the time to listen to the complaints of the constantly whining Ackley, an annoying boy in Holden's school who appears to be somewhat of a loner.

Holden, in his anger at the phoniness of Pencey Prep and other institutions imposed upon the young by the old, wants a world populated by sweet children whose skates need lacing and by nuns who can teach English literature: “Books not necessarily with a lot of sexy stuff in them, but books with lovers and all in them” (CR, p.110) and be untouched by the sexual overtones in it. Ironically, Holden is unable to prevent his own
fall, which looms large over him. The problem with all of this for Holden is that he is sixteen; he cannot remain a child — he cannot stand at the edge of the cliff and be the catcher; he must fall off into adulthood. But the painful fact that he has to let go of childhood makes him desperate to seek for a place in adult relations where he can belong and where there is no affectation, where he does not have to become phony just like all the rest. Ihab Hassan stresses, “Revulsion and holiness make up the rack on which Salinger’s art still twitches.” \(^{18}\) How to maintain a sense of the holy in the midst of obscenity is what Holden is striving for. Like Holden and Seymour, modern man must go his appointed rounds, realizing the closing affirmation at the end of *Seymour: An Introduction*: “all we do our whole lives is go from one little piece of Holy Ground to the next” (p.213), turn from the fallen world of aggression, selfishness and phoniness to a tenuous higher world of (to use Fitzgerald’s phrase) “heightened sensitivity to the promises of life.” \(^{19}\) Holden retains an honest sensitivity — a type of *holy innocence* that recurs as one of the central values in Salinger’s later short stories.

Holden sees the tension between stasis and motion in terms of a succession of *falls* — all of them leading backwards to the Biblical Garden of Eden and Adam and Eve’s fall into the tragic condition of human experience. Holden's dream (like this conventional notion of the
life/death opposition) is informed by the many acts of picking up the fallen — as opposed to catching the falling — that occur throughout the novel. A particularly resonant instance of picking up concerns a phonograph record that Holden buys as a present for Phoebe, but drops and breaks before giving to her. His dream of recapturing the past is summed up in the phonograph record. A phonograph record preserves music *under glass*. The moment is caught, but of course, times change, so the music is never really the same. When the record gets broken, it is the dissolution of a dream. The song can only be remembered, as Allie is remembered, even though time, meanwhile, is working its effect on memory. “The fictional song on this record, by Estelle Fletcher, the authentic Negro vocalist who sings ‘Little Shirley Beans’ (CR, p.114) concerns a girl who has lost two of her front teeth.” Like the fictional fallen record, the girl in the real song falls and is not caught. Given this parallel, it follows that the broken pieces of the record can be understood to represent the fallen. The shattering of the record seems to represent the failure of Holden’s attempt to exist in the world on the terms of his idealism: in the park, lonely, depressed, and fearful of illness and possibly even death, the tension between reality and his ideal version of it bring him to the point of nervous breakdown. Significantly, Holden picks up these broken pieces and gives them to Phoebe despite their condition.
Phoebe responds, “I'm saving them” (CR, p.163); the fallen girl can be understood to merit the same treatment: to be picked up and saved. Phoebe takes from him the remnants of his idealism and the fragments of his personality and accepts the burden of saving the pieces. Mature in her own way, and at home in the world, she will, through her love, be the means by which Holden will begin to move towards maturity. Her affection allows him to relinquish his plan of escaping to the West and to return home; and her love creates for him a bridge to the environment from which he has been running.

Another fallen figure, James Castle, is also picked up after having hit the ground. James falls to his death after an incident of bullying, and as Holden recalls his former teacher Mr. Antolini picks up his body:

> He was the one that finally picked up that boy that jumped out the window I told you about, James Castle. Old Mr. Antolini felt his pulse and all, and then he took off his coat and put it over James Castle and carried him all the way over to the infirmary. He didn't even give a damn if his coat got all bloody. (CR, p.174)

In Holden's eyes, Mr. Antolini's heroism in this scene qualifies him as “the best teacher ... [he] ever had” (CR, p.174), and even after Antolini attempts to seduce him, Holden retains his respect for his teacher because of Antolini's treatment of James: “I mean I started thinking that even if he [Antolini] was a flit he certainly'd been very nice to me. I thought ... how he was the only guy that'd even gone near that boy James
Castle I told you about when he was dead” (CR, p.195). Given Holden's reaction to Antolini's advances — and his casual use of the epithet *flit* — Holden clearly ascribes conventional notions of corruption to Antolini, yet nonetheless Holden views him as a savior. James Castle's suicide thus deeply informs the development of the theme of falling in *Catcher*, and indeed, Holden conceives of his ideal of the catcher in the rye almost immediately after relating this episode. Considering how falling (death, corruption, and betrayal) thus fuse into the process of salvation, it is significant that at the time of his fall, James is wearing Holden's sweater as if he were disguised, in a sense, as Holden.

From a psychological point of view the fall has been seen to express a dimension of human existence, which is powerfully present from the beginning to the end of life. The fear of falling is one of the earliest forms of anxiety in the human psyche, and it is never fully overcome. In a certain sense, all life is falling — a falling before and away from one's aspirations, one's ideals, one's hopes, and one's intentions. Falling short is a reality even if the ideas of an aboriginal fall and inherited guilt seem unimaginable. The imagery, dealing mainly with the act of falling, functions to suggest the fear of the loss of wholeness of mind, and more traditionally, the fear of aging, of loss of innocence of vision, and finally, of death.
Salinger has provided the reader with a series of episodes, which thematically speaking portray the plight of an idealist who sees the difference between what he would have the world be and the world's reality. One of the best descriptions of such an instant occurs in chapter 5 when Holden is waiting for Ackley to get ready to go to town. He looks out of the window of his room, opens it, and packs a snowball from the snow on the window ledge. He begins to throw it at a parked car, but doesn't because the car looked "so nice and white." Then he aims at a fire hydrant, but stops again because that also looks "too nice and white" (CR, p.36). Finally he decides not to throw it at anything and closes the window. This brief and simple episode illustrates — almost symbolizes — Holden's compulsive longing for perfection. The scene suggests not only that his refusal to blemish the landscape is a simultaneous refusal to endanger that which is pure and innocent — snow, of course, being traditionally a symbol of purity and innocence — and the vision of the snow-covered object satisfies the boy's desire for some state which is perfect, silent, uncorrupted, aesthetically and emotionally complete. What Holden sees through the window is for him a visual embodiment of what he unconsciously seeks: "a state of being which is distinct from the flux of this world of becoming," with its corruption, violence, noise, decay, and death. Unlike the snow at Pencey — pure, white, great for making the
snowballs of childish innocence — Holden soon learns that even the
snow, general all over New York, is different, it virtually disappears,
leaving only a biting chill in its wake. In short, the desolate urban
landscape serves both as backdrop and signifier for Holden’s personal
decline. Holden prefers the innocence and secrets of childhood to the
world of getting and spending where writers give up goldfish for
Hollywood glamour. When Holden is thinking about his innocent and
sweet summer with Jane, he happens also to be sitting in a “vomity-
looking chair in the lobby” (CR, p.80). This sort of tension between
Holden’s often-innocent thoughts, and his increasingly seedy
surroundings and experiences is evident throughout the novel.

From the opening pages of this novel the world is seen to be
“fragmentary, distorted, and absurd — in Holden’s own special
vernacular, phony...”22 It is an environment in which real
communication on a sensitive level is impossible, and when Holden
unsuccessfully tries to explain his spiritual pain to Sally Hayes, there is
certainly more than a coincidental suggestion of Eliot’s J. Alfred Prufrock
in the frustrated cry, “It is impossible to say just what I mean.”23 For
example, in the incident when Holden gathers his courage, places a phone
call to Sally, and sets a date with her for the afternoon. He tells her about
his plan to run away out West and suggests that she join him. She scoffs
at his foolishness and walks out, leaving him again rejected and lonely. When Holden, upset with Sally’s rebuff, tells her “you give me a royal pain in the ass” (CR, p.133) he also laughs at her. In the midst of his madman apologies, Sally’s somewhat pompous indignation undermines his serious intention, and he laughs. Holden comments: “I have one of these very loud, stupid laughs. I mean if I ever sat behind myself in a movie or something, I’d probably lean over and tell myself to please shut up. It made old Sally madder than ever.” (CR, p.134) In retrospect Holden is able to see what he only half comprehended when he was with Sally — that he shares the responsibility for this one more failure in his frantic attempt to communicate with people and break out of his isolation. In his retrospective examination of the episode, Holden says: “If you want to know the truth, I don’t even know why I started all that stuff with her… I probably wouldn’t have taken her even if she’d wanted to go with me” (CR, p.134). Holden thus exposes his own deception and his own phoniness, and is one more step on the way to the kind of involved awareness that will enable him at the end, after he has finished reconstructing his tale, to say:

About all I know is, I sort of miss everybody I told about. Even old Stradlater and Ackley, for instance. I think I even miss that goddam Maurice. It’s funny. Don’t ever tell anybody anything. If you do, you start missing everybody. (CR, p.214)
In less concrete words: “If one is aware of the human comedy, one must love individual human beings.”

As for his language, the symbolic verticality of the ‘I’ is a wall that divides Holden from others, and he needs to understand the true nature of his being and what is required of him to find a way through that wall. 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). This knowledge is a difficult, profound, and mature knowledge that lies at the novel’s center of gravity. It involves both recognition that there can be no self-monopoly of innocence and a discovery that there can be no shield from complicity. Salinger uses an effective method for organizing this narrative of self-discovery. At the core of the story, Holden undergoes an awakening, and a startling transformation: from an existence in which his nature is dangerously divided, to a moment of realization. To perceive this transformation, one must examine closely the particular dilemma in which Holden finds himself, his various failures to cope with this dilemma, and the peculiar solution he attains by the end of the novel. Three preliminary steps need to be taken before we can catch sight of Salinger in the act of crafting the final episode: we must first examine how he characterized the society which has instilled in Holden his “deformed conscience”; next, we must
define, from Salinger's perspective, what having a “sound heart” means within this society; and finally we must note the moment in which Holden's sound heart defeats his faulty conscience. Only then will we be ready to walk with Holden up the road from New York to the Psychiatrist's couch and recognize that the journey is more than movement through space — “it is a movement from innocence to knowledge, from self-ignorance to self-awareness, from isolation to involvement” (Personal Portrait, pp.129-37). A closer look at the social conventions of this world reveals that they are generally based on distortions of reality, regulated lies that society instills into each of its members. Holden's almost unbearable sense of loneliness impels him to seek the society of others, until he confronts the dire consequences of their living according to regulated lies, and is driven once more to loneliness. This pendulum movement between these alternatives illustrates the principal dilemma experienced by Holden within the world of the novel: whether to become a part of society by allowing its conventions to prevail within him, or to live according to his own sound heart in an essentially lonely existence. During the course of the novel, Holden does manage at times to avoid this dilemma with the companionship of one other person — Phoebe. Throughout most of the novel, from the beginning until the time Holden meets Phoebe at the Zoo,
Salinger develops the conflict existing in Holden's nature between the natural urgings of Holden's *sound heart* and the voice of his *conscience*, which asserts the lies that society has instilled. Faced with his impending movement into the spiritually impaired state of adulthood, Holden considers various means of escape from the world's influences to preserve his childhood. For example, Salinger begins by introducing Holden as a totally naive boy who accepts whatever he is told as true until his own experiences confirm or deny it. Holden admits to lying, but his motives are usually to protect others' feelings or to get out of awkward situations. He doesn't want to tell his elderly teacher the true reasons for ending the visit, so he makes up a plausible excuse to exit gracefully. His lies are either well intentioned or harmless and often absurdly amusing. Holden claims he left his last school because of the behavior of the headmaster, who would politely shake hands with a boy's mother who was "fat or corny-looking, but would spend half an hour with well-to-do, attractive parents" (CR, p.14). As Holden makes his way down the road through various social settings, his most effective defense against people who live falsely with themselves and with others proves to be his capacity to lie. Holden blatantly tells his readers: "I'm the most terrific liar you ever saw in your life. It's awful. If I'm on my way to the store to buy a magazine,
even, and somebody asks me where I'm going, I'm liable to say I'm going to the opera” (CR, p.16).

Having reached the age of sixteen, Holden uses lying as his regular manner for coping with people in a tight place, for his experiences thus far in life have taught him no other approach. We begin to perceive how Salinger defined the nature of Holden's sound heart as we observe how Holden uses lying and telling the truth, not simply to insure his own survival within a generally false society, but also in sympathetic response to the feelings of others. For example, he tells the reader he likes to travel at night when the train is empty. However, given his mental state on this particular night, he finds that the empty train only reinforces his loneliness. On the train to New York he meets a woman who appears to be the mother of another Pencey boy, Ernest Morrow. Holden knows that Ernest is known to be a typical bully, “the biggest bastard that ever went to Pencey” (CR, p.54), but in order to protect Mrs. Morrow from realizing her son's true nature he lies and says that "he's a very sensitive boy" (CR, p.55). Thus, in this act “he sacrifices the truth for the cause of the innocence of maternal love” (Rupp, p.115). When he calls himself Rudolf Schmidt, it is a textbook attempt to run away from his identity. It is significant that he chooses the name of the lowly janitor; he is so depressed he cannot imagine himself to be anyone better. In fact, he
assumes a second identity, even worse than the first; for he tells Mrs. Morrow he is going in to the city to have an operation on “this tiny little tumor on the brain” (CR, p. 58) and that he can’t visit her son. For the time being, it would seem that an artificial life with a brain tumor is preferable to his real one. But he remains, however he might wish to the contrary, Holden Caulfield, and the self he is led to discover a human self and an involved self that cannot, finally, break what Hawthorne once called the “magnetic chain of humanity.”26 He cannot deny the love within him when he begins to miss all the people he has told about.

Sexuality and sexual maturity often occupy a young person who may follow his sexual development with both fascination and frustration, since puberty in a way is the ultimate sign of a personal change. Holden’s sexual experience is limited — he admits to the reader that he is a virgin. He also admits that he often thinks about sex: “In my mind, I’m probably the biggest sex maniac you ever saw” (CR, p. 62). But when he thinks about doing crumby stuff he doesn’t like the idea. “Sex is something I really don’t understand too hot. You never know where the hell you are” (CR, p. 63). Late at night in a bar in a swanky hotel, Holden runs into a former schoolmate, now attending another school, who claims to know all about sex, especially homosexuality. He recounts to Holden all the famous people in the United States he is sure are gay or lesbian and tells
him that a person can turn into a homosexual "overnight" (CR, p.14). But his conversation with his old school-friend Luce also reveals that his own conception of sexual relations does not conform to what he appears to find in real life: "You know what the trouble with me is? I can never get really sexy — I mean really sexy — with a girl I don't like a lot. I mean I have to like her a lot. If I don't, I sort of lose my goddam desire for her and all. Boy, it really screws up my sex life something awful. My sex life stinks" (CR, pp.147-148). This is not merely a moral condemnation of sex without love, but can be read as his view that such sexual encounters are phony. When a girl tells him to stop, he says, he stops. He never wants to hurt or offend. "I mean — she keeps telling you to stop. The trouble with me is I stop" (CR, p.92). Stradlater, Holden's roommate at Pencey, is self-confident, vain, and sexually experienced. When Holden realizes that Stradlater is dating his childhood-friend Jane Gallagher, a girl he really liked he becomes upset: "She had a lousy childhood. I'm not kidding. That didn't interest Stradlater, though. Only very sexy stuff interested him" (CR, p.32); the affectation in Stradlater's flirtations is sickening to Holden. He starts to question if Stradlater genuinely likes Jane or if all he wants is only to have sex with her, and the argument soon turns into a fistfight. He values sex that comes from caring for another person and rejects its sordidness. In the elevator up to his room at
Edmont Hotel, the elevator man asks Holden if he is “interested in having a good time” (CR, p.90). After a confused moment, Holden realizes that the man, named Maurice, wants to send him a prostitute. Without really thinking, Holden agrees and before the girl arrives, he nervously brushes his teeth and changes his shirt. When she knocks on the door, he trips over his suitcase getting to it. She isn't any older than he — “a skinny little thing with a high, squeaky voice.” He has mixed emotions: “I was a little nervous. I was starting to feel pretty sexy and all, but I was a little nervous anyway. If you want to know the truth, I'm a virgin. I really am” (CR, p.92). He changes his voice and tone, trying to act manly: “Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Jim Steele” (CR, p.94), but soon begins to realize that he does not want to go through with the deal, although he does not really seem to know why. He hangs her dress in the closet so it won't wrinkle. The act of carefully hanging the girl's dress in the closet becomes a palpable evidence of the artificiality of the situation: “I thought of her going into 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” (CR, p.96). He then tries to make casual conversation, feeling “much more depressed than sexy.” When she approaches with serious intentions, he panics, tells her he has just had “an
operation very recently” (CR, p.96) and therefore is not in the mood but apologizes profusely, and pays her “a five-dollar bill” (CR, p.97) to leave. But the evening's troubles are not over. After a while, the girl comes back with Maurice, asking for more money. At first, the offended Holden tearfully and angrily maintains his rights but he gives in when Maurice starts to beat him up. Afterwards, when he lies on the floor, a funny thing happens that he seems to enjoy the idea of getting beaten up for justice:

I sort of started pretending I had a bullet in my guts. Old Maurice had plugged me ... I was the only guy at the bar with a bullet in their guts. I kept putting my hand under my jacket, on my stomach and all, to keep the blood from dripping all over the place. I didn't want anybody to know I was even wounded. I was concealing the fact that I was a wounded sonuvabitch. (CR, pp.103-104)

Here the essence of Holden's tragedy is concentrated in a few sentences. During one single evening he has been untruthful, forfeited sex, lost money, and also is physically and emotionally abused. Although he succumbs to the idea of having paid sex, just for the experience, Holden cannot go through with it. As the above controversial passage indicates, he clearly is not ready to lose his virginity and certainly not with a prostitute. The poignant scene dispels any belief that Holden is anything but a mixed-up adolescent with a strong sense of values.

In place of authenticity Holden finds an endless appetite for the glamour of appearance, for the vanity of effect and approval. The story
that he writes for Stradlater about the poems on Allie’s baseball mitt is rejected by his “unscrupulous” roommate because it doesn’t follow the rules of the English composition assignment: “You don’t do one damn thing the way you’re supposed to … Not one damn thing” (CR, p.41) says the infuriated Stradlater. Holden, of course, resists the rules in order to explore his own nascent artistic integrity, while around him those with more claims to respect than the obtuse Stradlater betrays talent and spirit alike by modeling themselves on one another and tries to conform their behavior to the regulations of a standardized performance. People like Stradlater imagine that they are not good at writing compositions because they are not sure where the commas go, but Holden knows better: creative writing requires the special relationship between author and subject that Eudora Welty once characterized as “the heart’s field.”

This is true whether one is writing a novel or a “descriptive as hell” (CR, p.28) composition.

Few areas of modern life escape Holden Caulfield’s indictment. Among those most severely condemned are the movies (to which his brother D.B., a writer, has prostituted himself) and religious fanaticism. The American is spiritually so empty that he has converted even religious ceremonies into meaningless rituals, which may at best have some commercial value. Holden is nauseated by the Christmas programme at
Radio City which reduces religion to a mere spectacle for cheap entertainment:

[T]hey had this Christmas thing they have at Radio City every year. All these angels start coming out of the boxes and everywhere, guys carrying crucifixes... singing "Come All Ye Faithful!" like mad...It's supposed to be religious as hell...but I can't see anything religious or pretty...You could tell they could hardly wait to get a cigarette or something...I said old Jesus probably would've puked if He could see it—all those fancy costumes and all. (CR, p. 137)

The movie that follows the stage show (and which has been identified as James Hilton's *Random Harvest*) is an equally commercial deception, an artificial substitute for the love and generosity, which Americans have forgotten how to express. After his experience with the Radio City Christmas, Holden feels more agonizingly frustrated and alone: "I'm sort of glad they've got the atomic bomb invented... If there's ever another war, I'm going to sit right the hell on top of it. I'll volunteer for it, I swear to God I will" (CR, p. 141). Later Holden's nausea is total when after leaving Antolini's apartment, as Holden is wandering in a daze about the streets; he comes upon a small vignette that seems to sum up the weird incongruities of modern life as he has encountered it: "[...] I passed these two guys that were unloading this big Christmas tree off a truck. One guy kept saying to the other guy, "Hold the sonuvabitch up! Hold it up for Chrissake!" (CR, p. 196) — The language is not a blessing but a curse. Holden starts to laugh and then he is overcome by nausea —
his dual reaction to the duality of the world. As the humor in his monologue shows, Holden perceives the comic nature of human life, yet this comedy is often the result of a depressing juxtaposition of the sacred and the profane, a juxtaposition that is central to Salinger's art. Holden explains that "all the children in our family are atheists" (CR, p.100) because his parents are of different religious persuasions (foreshadowing the Irish-Jewish Glass family). He claims he likes Jesus, but not the Disciples, who were not much use while Jesus was alive and just kept letting him down. Holden used to get into arguments with a Quaker schoolmate about the Disciples and whether or not Judas went to Hell after his betrayal of Jesus. He says he would "bet a thousand bucks that Jesus never sent old Judas to Hell ... any one of the Disciples would've sent him to Hell [...]" (CR, p.100). Holden dislikes the Disciples because of their faithlessness when danger arose. Loyalty for him is a very strong value, for his own predicament stems from the belief that he is letting down his family and is unworthy of their love. Thus Holden's point of view is not clouded by specific religious commitments, and he can love the nuns whom he meets in Grand Central Station even though he feels that Catholicism usually throws up insurmountable barriers to communication. He enjoys talking to two friendly nuns with cheap suitcases that sit next to him at the train lunch counter, teachers on their
way to a new placement. He insists on giving them $10 as a contribution and, grateful that they didn't ask if he was a Catholic. Their humility and gentleness epitomize for him what religion should be. When people begin to talk religion it ends up to be an exercise in hypocrisy, as Holden realizes while listening to Ossenburger's sermon. Just as he loves the nuns for their simplicity and honesty, he sees through the selfish religious pose of "this guy Ossenburger" (CR, p.16) an undertaker who contributes a dormitory wing to Pencey. In his profession, for example, Ossenburger runs discount funeral parlors that take advantage of grieving families, though he stresses to the students that they should have integrity and pray devoutly. More disturbing to Holden than Ossenburger's phoniness, though, is the school's hypocrisy. If Ossenburger hadn't given Pencey money to buy a new dorm, none of the parading or speeches would occur. Holden's idyllic vision gives place to the picture of an irrational universe. The natural chaos of existence, in Salinger's fictional world is not so much seen as a quality or constituent of the cosmos as it is traceable to man's consciousness and the division within. We conclude, therefore, by stressing that Salinger uses Holden's consistent nature to unify the seemingly disparate parts of the novel as establishing in common the resilience of Holden's sound heart among the many deforming influences of his world.
Salinger continues Holden's pendulum movement between the alternatives of a distorted life in society and an unbearably lonely existence to emphasize that Holden has persisted thus far in not submitting to a conventional life. After trying unsuccessfully to remain isolated from society, and after experiencing the dangerous inadequacy of society's approach to life, Holden is left by Salinger, in the closing lines of the novel, with a final incident that illustrates for Holden the futility of attempting any retreat from this world. We approach this moment by starting at the point where Holden meets Phoebe in front of the Museum of Art and meets two small boys who ask where the mummies are. As they near the tomb of the mummies, the two boys become frightened and run off, leaving Holden by himself in a setting re-collective of the biblical madman, who withdrew from the world to live "in the tombs" (CR, p.99). Holden experiences a moment of peace in the museum tomb of the mummies. That such a reassuringly ordered universe is an improbable dream is emphasized by the fact that, he sees the words "Fuck you ... written with a red crayon or something, right under the glass part of the wall, under the stones" of the Egyptian tombs. He says that when he dies he is positive that his tombstone will give his name and date of birth and death, and then "right under that it'll say, "Fuck you" (CR, p. 204). Holden now recognizes that he will never be able to escape this
corrupting world, not even within a tomb or a grave — in other words, in death. Once Holden realizes that he cannot escape the world's corrupting influences, he leaves the tomb, goes into the bathroom in the museum, and faints. This event, since it occurs in a bathroom (a place that has earlier been given spiritual significance in *Franny and Zooey*), is meant to signify the fall of Holden's childhood spirit, as is also suggested by the ensuing change in his relationship with Phoebe after he leaves the bathroom and meets her out in front of the museum. This is ‘a fortunate fall,’ (DLB173, Salinger, p.240) which results from his realization of the essential obscenity of life itself, the fall from adolescence into adulthood. But he survives, although he is not sure why: “I was lucky, though. I mean I could've killed myself when I hit the floor, but all I did was sort of land on my side. It was a funny thing, though. I felt better after I passed out. I really did” (CR, p.204). Holden gains this new awareness as a result of “re-experiencing” his own childhood. The solution to Holden's dilemma lies in his being able to perceive, with both sides of his nature, that everything in reality has two faces: that the ice in the lagoon in Central Park can both preserve and kill. When he decides to leave for the West, he wishes first to return Phoebe's Christmas money. Planning to tell her in a note to meet him at the museum, he goes to Phoebe's school, where he experiences the sense of everything being exactly the way it
was when he was a student there. Thus, when he sees a boy going toward
the bathroom, he notes that the boy is carrying the same kind of wooden
pass that Holden used to carry. And when he sits on the stairs to write the
note, he remarks that the stairs smell the same now as they did then. By
re-experiencing his childhood in relationship to that of Phoebe's
generation, Holden is able to associate childhood, not only with the past,
as something waning and ending, but also with the future, as something
beginning and becoming. Holden has thus far remained trapped in time,
unable to recognize anything permanent within human existence, because
of his inability to perceive that both the past and the future may be found
in the present moment. Continuing now in this new direction, he
eventually reaches such a moment: as he watches Phoebe on the carousel,
his sense of the past and his sense of the future become completely
integrated, and he finally experiences an immutable conception of
childhood. In writing The Catcher in the Rye, Salinger may have been
influenced by the writings of Carl Jung, especially The Integration of the
Personality\textsuperscript{28} as is suggested by the many parallels existing between these
two works. The carousel, which plays such a central role in the
completion of Holden's development, fits Jung's description of a
"mandala," a symbol of integration or wholeness: "Mandala, a Sanskrit
word, means circle or magic circle. Its symbolism embraces all
concentrically arranged figures, all circular or square circumferences having a center, and all radial or spherical arrangements" (Jung, p.95).

As a mandala figure, the carousel would also be included by Jung within a particular class of archetypes, which he labels archetypes of transformation:

...these archetypes are genuine and true symbols...just in so far as they are ambiguous, full of intimations, and, in the last analysis, inexhaustible... Our intellectual judgment, of course, keeps trying to establish their singleness of meaning, and so misses the essential point; for what we should above all establish...is their manifold meaning, their almost unbounded fullness of reference. (Jung, p. 89)

Such symbols of man's developing nature will always include ambiguities and contrarieties, but as Jung categorically states, and as Holden finally experiences: "in human life there is no totality that is not based upon the conflict of opposites." Jung further describes this central truth about human life in a passage which may be suitably applied to Holden's existence: Those persisting ambiguities within Holden's state of existence at the end of the novel may illustrate one of the most strongly emphasized ideas of Jung's work:

For in the adult there is hidden a child — an eternal child, something that is always becoming, is never completed. This is the part of human personality that wishes to develop and to complete itself. (p. 284)

By the time they reach the carousel and Holden watches Phoebe going around on her first ride, he reveals that he has gained a new
perspective concerning her movements and her eventual fall. Holden sees the harmony and beauty of the universe in a flash of realization as he sees Phoebe grabbing for the gold ring on the Carousel. As he watches her, Holden worries that she might fall, but he recognizes now that it would be wrong to interfere: “The thing with kids is, if they want to grab for the gold ring, you have to let them do it . . . If they fall off, they fall off, but it's bad if you say anything to them” (CR, p.211). Moreover, he has a transcendent moment as he realizes that he cannot protect her from falling — from the carousel but also from the rye field, symbol of childhood innocence. Indeed he is beginning to discern the implausibility of being the "catcher in the rye." By extension, he is perhaps recognizing that he himself must leave the rye field and take his place in the fallen world of adults. What we see here is controlled manipulation of language, compressed metaphor and image, poetic intensity and sensibility. The lyrical in Salinger is not merely a question of texture, image or metaphor, but an informing element of his work, communicating a tragic sense of human destiny, of growing up. Holden's hunting hat, at this moment, reinforces the idea that Holden has become intellectually capable of giving up his desire to be the catcher in the rye. Phoebe put the hat back on Holden's head for a while as it began to rain. When Holden says, as he sits in the downpour — which constitutes a baptism, a rendering free
through knowledge “drenched in Scott Fitzgerald's all-absolving rain”—(Fitzgerald 1967, pp.4-6)—that his neck got soaked, he is apparently referring to the now exposed back of his neck, the point being made indirectly that Phoebe has put the hat on him with the peak forward, not backwards as a catcher would wear it. The fact that Holden likes to wear his cap with the peak reversed not only provides us with an ironic visual picture of the catcher ideal but also dramatizes for us the very direction of Holden's search. The reversed peak, then, suggests his idealization of and yearning for the childhood condition. It also, both literally and figuratively, emphasizes his own childishness, for it is partly because Allie had died while still a child that death is associated with goodness and innocence in Holden's mind. Thus the reversed peak also reminds us of what must be the outcome if Holden continues to look to the past—his own death. As he comes nearer to literal as well as figurative death in the course of the novel, the death images predominate. The peak of his cap points to the dead civilization of the Egyptians, to the death in life image that Holden imagines for himself in the form of his deaf-mute ideal, and to the mummies that symbolize that state. His fainting spell after visiting the tombs is a figurative death; his meeting with Phoebe outside the museum is the beginning of his re-birth. Holden realizes by this point that it is bad to keep a child in childhood. As he has learned from
watching Phoebe’s anger wane with the passing of time and events, Phoebe must be allowed to experience her world if her one-sided nature is to develop beyond its present state. It is bad to interrupt her movement forward, even though it will result in the eventual fall of her inexperienced, innocent spirit, for the only alternative to this process would be to keep her in the same state, unmoving, un developing, as though she were in a “glass case”— an eternal child, but an incomplete and lifeless human being. Therefore, Holden becomes capable of accepting the necessity for movement within a child's existence. Even though it steadily brings the child into greater contact with corrupting influences, the child will never attain a complete existence unless it continues, becoming within this world. This change within Holden’s outlook is strikingly illustrated at the end of the novel when all of the movements developed symbolically throughout Holden’s narrative are brought together in a manner acceptable to Holden: that is, by the movements of Phoebe on the carousel. Salinger has made “movement, usually in a straight line — a forward movement suggestive not only of aging, but of proceeding from one state of being to another, and a movement up suggesting the uncorrupting isolation of spiritual heights, and down, a deeper immersion into worldly experiences.” Salinger has made “movement, usually in a straight line — a forward movement suggestive not only of aging, but of proceeding from one state of being to another, and a movement up suggesting the uncorrupting isolation of spiritual heights, and down, a deeper immersion into worldly experiences.” As Phoebe rides upon her horse, her actions illustrate every one of these symbolic
movements (CR, p. 451): she goes forward, a suggestion of her nature changing, but in a circular motion, which keeps her essentially in the same place; and, at the same time, the horse she sits on continues moving her up and down. As a result, all of these characteristic motions, with all of there opposite qualities, are harmoniously blended within the immediate moment for Holden's perception as he watches Phoebe on the carousel riding her horse around. As the various aspects of Phoebe's ride are more closely examined, we discover that Salinger has fashioned the carousel into a symbol embodying such a host of opposite qualities that it approaches, as a literary creation, "the inexhaustible complexity of reality." Having noted the interplay of opposite motions established above, we could look now at a sampling of the other ambiguities associated with the carousel. For example, as Holden approaches the carousel with Phoebe, he remarks that it is playing the same music that it played when he was a child that the little children now riding it were having the same experience he had. Within Holden's immediate perception of the carousel, we find a sense of the past — in Holden's remembrance and re-experience of his own particular childhood — and of the future, as suggested by the presence of the little kids — childhood, in other words, as a general state, is continuously evolving. Salinger uses two colloquial phrases throughout the novel to establish an additional
ambiguity associated with the carousel. At a different time in his narration Holden mentions, “…horsing around . . . it was very childish” (CR, p.35). In other words, “horsing around” is equivalent to playing the fool. Phoebe, on the carousel, is literally “horsing around.” As noted earlier, her going around, if contrasted with movement in a straight line, suggests permanence in the childhood state she is experiencing at that moment. But a second phrase used in the novel implies a limitation to that experience, for although she may be “horsing around;” she is also, at the same time, “riding for a fall.” The song that the carousel plays for the children as Phoebe first rides is “Smoke Gets in Your Eyes” (CR, p.211) (a title that brings to mind those earlier references to the debilitating effect of cigarette smoke upon one's breath, or spirit). Thus, the carousel, as a symbol of enduring childhood, plays a song suggestive of its eventual corruption. As noted before, Phoebe's going around, rather than straight ahead, suggests that she exists, while on the carousel, “within an unchanging, timeless state.” However, as her name establishes, Phoebe may be associated with the moon — and as the moon goes around, it constantly changes, moving through phases that have been used for ages as a standard of time. Furthermore, as Hazle Weatherfield, she was associated with dry weather; as Phoebe, however, she is also related to wet weather, again through her connection with the moon, which has
been traditionally viewed as having control over the rain. Two colors are brought together as Phoebe rides the carousel: blue and brown. Since she is still an innocent child, the blue of her coat might possibly suggest the height at which she exists in spirit: above the earth, in the sky, or the heavens — where one would also see the moon; the horse she rides is brown, a color we may associate with the earth. If these two colors are indeed suggestive of the heavens and the earth, then they might be viewed together as another effective illustration of the dependency of human existence upon a blending of spirit and matter. As a result, the dilemma that he has faced throughout his narration is resolved, for he is capable now, as he sits in the rain, of accepting the world as it is. Holden feels a profound harmony between himself and the world. Salinger uses Holden's “aesthetic” response to Phoebe on the carousel to dramatize the resolution of Holden's dilemma: “the finally achieved integration of Holden's divided nature.” Holden reveals that his response at this moment is an aesthetic one: he "felt so damn happy" because "she looked so damn nice" (CR, p.213). William Glasser notes that an “aesthetic response is, by nature, a blending of sense perception, emotion, and intellect.”\(^30\) It is not dependent upon one's being conscious of a reason for responding so — as Holden says, "I don't know why." It is elicited only when one perceives something, which gives pleasure. His consolation is a truer
vision — a restructured vision (Redpath, p.54) and the most important kind of freedom — an internal one. In watching Phoebe go round and round on the carrousel, in effect going nowhere, he sees her “in the timeless continuum of art on the verge of changing, yet unchanging, forever safe, forever loving, and forever innocent.” Holden's progress at the end of the novel is arguably elusive. He is unable to promise that he will apply himself in school; he claims he "misses" everyone he told about, even the mean people, suggesting that he still mourns the passage of time. As Alan W. Watts explains it in The Way of Zen,

> When the disciple comes to the final point where the koan absolutely refuses to be grasped, he comes also to the realization that life can never be grasped, never possessed or made to stay still. Whereupon he 'lets go,' and this letting go is the acceptance of life as life....

This is the insight, the illumination Holden has reached by the time his story is over and he has left his precept-laden anxieties behind.

On the final page, Holden refers to his becoming sick after he went home. The nature of Holden's sickness was clarified at the beginning of the novel, for when Holden introduced his narrative from the unidentified place he is in, he refers again to his loss of breath from smoking too much and to his having grown considerably in height during the previous year: “That's also how I practically got t.b. and came out here for all these god dam checkups and stuff” (CR, p.5). Having finally attained a solution to
his dilemma, Holden is now attempting to recover, at least partially, from the particular physical impairment caused by his experience of growing up within a corrupting world. He is out West — but no longer wishing to isolate himself from people — because the dry and sunny climate is beneficial to his immediate condition. Avoiding the rain temporarily, apparently in a sanatorium for lung diseases, Holden is recovering from his loss of breath.

Is there then nothing good that Holden can discover in his society? Is the vision of a better world not justified then? The answer is almost "No". Since it is spiritually as well as physically impossible to prevent the fall, Salinger's idealistic heroes are doomed either to suicide (Seymour) or insanity (Holden, Sergeant X) or mysticism (Franny), the ways of sainthood, or to moral dissolution (Eloise, D.B., Mr. Antolini), the way of the world. There seems to be either of the two options: live with and in the given world, or get out of it and live in one's private world, as Salinger himself is doing in Cornish, New Hampshire.

For the first time and in the mirror of his own composition Holden sees himself with clarity. Despite the contrariness of his signing-off — "I'm sorry I told so many people about it" (CR, p.214) — his composition represents nothing less than a journey to psychological health. In the end, he has not accepted the falseness of society, instead,
we find him still in that original position against it, except that he consciously chooses it but in a healthier way. Its direction, in other words, is toward family and community, reconstructed and redefined. Salinger's gospel is a positive one, showing "how exposure of the sensitive soul to the darkness of this present age can lead not only to sickness but also to healing." To the psychiatrist's question whether he is going to apply himself when he gets back to school, his answer is: "It's such a stupid question, in my opinion. I mean how do you know what you're going to do till you do it" (CR, p.213). Holden seems to imply that he knows what he is doing only at the exact moment he is doing it, not at some point in some arbitrarily designated future. He knows that the reality outside the asylum is in a state of flux, in a state of constant change, and one cannot approach it with preconceived notions if one is honest. One has to face each situation as one encounters. Salinger's protagonists manage to attain in their own fashion some freedom in the blending of self and other, the removal of abstraction and analysis, the avoidance of criticism, the absorption in the moment.

The ambiguity of the novel's ending itself provides "a kind of answer in its fusion of the binary oppositions" through which we come to understand Holden. Critics sensitive to this quality of blurring have found insight in the perspective of Zen Buddhism, In their pioneering
study "Zen and Salinger," Bernice and Sanford Goldstein observe "Holden's Zen-like identification with the very people he criticizes" (p.68). They also point to the underlying unity in the novel, which according to Zen master Daisetz Suzuki, "Takes us to an absolute realm wherein there are no antitheses of any sort." It seems a striking evocation of what George Eliot called: "A keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life, which if we had them would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heart beat and cause us to die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence." Such "lambent moments," are a novelist's equivalent of "the poet's lyric impulse." We are ultimately left with "the awareness of something not argued over but directly apprehended" (A Moving Target, p.190). Perhaps this open-ended effect, which forces the reader to decide Holden's future, is one of the keys to his popularity and the continuation of what Holden Caulfield becomes. His compassion is only a fumbling awareness, about the loss of a dream or an illusion; the belief that he was a catcher in the rye. Holden weeps for the loss of innocence but it is however not because of the transformation from child-like goodness to adolescent depravity. It is rather, the growing awareness of darkness, of the evil in man's heart that was present in the children all along. To acknowledge the presence of this darkness in one's own heart is a necessary but devastating condition of growing up, of
becoming fully and yet flawed human. Innocence, Holden realizes, is the fruit of the disciplined self that has come truly to understand itself. Perhaps, this is the type of "wise innocence" — defined here as an effort to live one’s life untainted by compromise and untouched by complexity, which great literature may restore to us.

The novel’s remarkable achievement is its imagistic pattern. Through a wide range of images, the novel conveys the complexity of Holden’s motivation and experience. The individual grows up in an illusory world built through his senses and rational intellect. Ever since he acquired rational consciousness, he has assumed the role of a pattern maker. Holden is an extreme case of autonomous consciousness seeking to preserve itself at all costs. But he ultimately sees a cosmic pattern emerging and setting at naught his dogmatic imposition, and realizing the authentic bond in the relationship of individual man to individual man. Holden, as he quests for order and pattern is faced with a reality altogether different from his original conception of it. Moreover, the privileges of authorship, in addition, has given Holden his occasion for the first time to illicit pattern and order, from what throughout his troubled young life has overwhelmingly been flux and loss. Writing, too, has ended his isolation by giving him access to a community that will read and respond to him. Above all, he has achieved his desire to be a
true artist, writing from the fullest wellsprings of his being and so “un-
prostituted” — the term he uses about his Hollywood screenwriter 
brother, D.B. Acknowledging the *author* in Holden thus becomes a 
critical necessity if we are to understand the full measure of both the tale 
he tells and of himself as teller. Holden is talking, not simply to an 
analyst, but to the reader and his reason for doing so was established 
earlier by Mr. Antolini, when he described for Holden “the kind of 
information that will be very, very dear to your heart” (CR, p.189). 
Holden will discover, Mr. Antolini says, that many people before him 
have also been troubled and confused by human behavior and by the 
corruption of the human spirit from experiencing this world. Fortunately, 
Mr. Antolini tells him, some of them wrote down their troubled thoughts 
and feelings: “You'll learn from them — if you want to. Just as someday, 
if you have something to offer, someone will learn something from you” 
(CR, p.189). Holden is talking directly to anyone who might be as 
troubled as he was about the nature of this world in which everyone 
exists. He offers his narration of *The Catcher in the Rye* as a record of his 
troubles for anyone who might wish to learn from his experiences. As Mr. 
Antolini says, “it's a beautiful reciprocal arrangement. And it isn't 
education. It's history. It's poetry” (CR, p.189).
The abiding value of Salinger lies in this, that beyond conclusions, and arguments, he was passionately interested in the mystery of existence. This mystery he finds as every man must find, in his own way. "Intimations of Mystery" are what the present times need. The seeing or "epiphany" as Joyce stated, should be the adequate understanding of a work of art, where readers are left with suggestions rather than answers. We live along the lines of the book about the problems of growing up and experience in its pattern a total explanation. Yet not everyone sees the same outlines, hence, the various opinions; the result is self-evidently like that of poetry. Therefore music serves ultimately as a metaphor for the achievement of the novel as a whole. Booth remarks perceptively: "Wherever understanding is maimed, our life is threatened; wherever it is achieved, our life is enhanced."  

Holden and Phoebe, Franny and Zooey, Esme and De Daumier-Smith with their intuitive vision of reality are the messengers of light in a world of gloom and darkness. What the world needs is a Holden-like concern, a concern for the good of all, and a reaffirmation of faith and order on moral and spiritual levels. Holden’s homiletic vision a nostalgic longing for the innocence of children is often blurred by the agonizing awareness of the nightmares of the present. Salinger’s artistic responsibility hints at a kind of moral accountability to this age and to
fellowmen whose conscience he is supposed to awaken. Camus has said, "The whole art of Kafka consists in forcing the reader to reread"\textsuperscript{41} no less is true of Salinger's art. This interpretation is one of an infinite number of possibilities in the vast interplay of "possibilities we call reality" (Redpath, p. 37). The readers' subjectivity does not close the novel to other interpretations, but ensures that the interpretive quest opens up, takes on new twists and turns in the "labyrinth that is truth" (Redpath, p. 38).
End Notes


10 Bernice and Sanford Goldstein, “Zen and Salinger,” in *Modern Fiction Studies*, Vol. XII, No. 3. Autumn, 1966, pp. 313-24. The following analysis is based on this study.


25 Samuel Clemens, Notebook #28a [I], TS, p.35 (1895), Mark Twain Papers, University of California Library, Berkeley, cited in Henry Nash Smith's


29 William Glasser, *From Michigan Quarterly Review* 15, No. 4. Fall 1976, pp. 432-57. The following analysis is based on this and henceforth cited as Glasser.


34 Abel Elizabeth, Marianne Goldstein, Bernice and Sanford Goldstein, Eds., "Zen and Salinger" *Modern Fiction Studies* 12 (1966), pp.313-324


