

THE MANAGEMENT OF A SHORT-STORY WRITER'S LITERARY CAREER

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Abstract

Modern universal literature is so vast that it can take more lifetimes to cover in-depth studies and research into the uniqueness of each of the leading figures in the field. Nevertheless, due to dedicated biographers and their work we can now look at the deeper (inter)connections between a writer's literary creations and their private or personal experiences, which in the end complete the whole picture and, which, put together, offer the satisfaction of looking at the solved puzzle and understanding each piece better as it becomes integrated into the final image. This article tries to approach this type of overview on the whole literary career of a very influential 20th century American writer: J. D. Salinger.

Keywords: *Biographers; literary creations; literary career; J. D. Salinger; influential writers.*

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Introduction

Jerome David Salinger's life was far from a common one. Although he did not get along very well with his father, his relationship with his mother was very close and inspired some of his Glass stories. As a child, and later on, as a teenager, he was very independent. As an adult he did not change his habit of not sharing with the others his life or his work and that is why many critics refer to him in terms of a recluse. Despite the fact that some of the critics consider that his popularity is due more to the controversy created around his name than to his writing talent, he remains one of the most important and influential American writers of the twentieth century. When it comes to his personality, a strong one, he is known and remembered by his friends for his sardonic wit and humor, sometimes being even cynical and moody and often a bit of an outsider; but also for his sophisticated and nonconformist style, for his intelligence and nice physical appearance. A lot of his qualities can be found in his writings and his characters. J. D. Salinger is known and more appreciated as a short story writer than he is as a novelist.

Overview on Salinger's Literary Career

Salinger's first accepted and published story was **The Young Folks** (1940). The story, which has hardly enough plot to be discussed as a story, as the critics agree, might have been at the time a rejected chapter for **The Catcher in the Rye**. Its principal figure, William Jameson, Jr., is a preliminary sketch of Holden Caulfield. The hostess of an amazing teen-age party introduces Jameson. He has been admiring from a distance the vivacious blonde, Lucille Henderson, attended by three Rutgers students. Edna Phillips herself had been sitting in the corner for three hours hoping that somebody would catch her eye. Jameson, whose principal interest in life is biting his fingernails, wants to get a drink, but Edna has "amorous notions." He tries to escape by saying that he must go home to write a theme about Ruskin's **The Stones of Venice**, but Edna lures him into darkness, outdoors and tries to make him jealous by talking about a sophisticated Princeton student. But Jameson goes back into the house and then Edna ventures into a part of the house forbidden to the "young folks" in order to smoke some cigarettes. Then she returns to imply to the hostess that young Jameson had made some crude romantic advances toward her. Edna uses twice the word "grand," which Holden

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Caulfield especially despises, and also the smoking of cigarettes, the rival with bleached hair and the fabricating romantic adventures, all these are evidence that Edna is a “phony” and she is also a “thinly penciled” prototype of Sally Hayes in **The Catcher in the Rye**. On the contrary, Jameson’s innocent desire to admire happy young ladies from a distance but not to engage himself in anything is a sign of gallantry. It is a short piece, mostly in dialogue, but written with considerable care.

In **The Hang of It** (1941), the story is about a bungling young army recruit, a kind but exasperated sergeant, and it has an ingenious trick ending. The story’s narrator has a son in the army and he cannot do anything right. Thus the narrator is reminded of Bobby Pettit. Pettit - a bot he had known back in World War I - and who had been a bungler too, always saying “I’ll get the hang of it,” when Sergeant Grogan chastised him. At the end of the story the recruit turns out to have become the commander of the regiment in which the same exasperated (but enduring) sergeant is having trouble with the commander’s “butterfingered” son. This story was well timed, just before the war, and it also was Salinger’s first major magazine appearance and it marked the loss of his literary innocence.

The Heart of a Broken Story (1941) was indeed a “boy - meets - girl” story, because the world needed such stories; but in fact it really was a parody of the kind. Justin Horgenschlag, after theorizing about the difficulties that a shy young man would have when meeting a girl, sees a girl on a bus and falls in love with her. But the romance does not happen. Yet, in the end, the hero does meet a girl – Doris Hillman. What Salinger really meant at the end was to tell us that, despite what popular songs tell us, two dreams never do meet.

The Long Debut of Lois Taggett (1942) – is a tale about Miss Lois Taggett, at first an empty-headed and self-centered Manhattan society girl. Her psychotic husband, Bill, married her for her money, but then he fell in love with her. They finally got a divorce (he smashed a lit cigarette in her hand and crushed her foot with a golf club). Then, Lois entered into a loveless marriage with Carl Curfman, “a fat bore” with whom she had a baby, but it suffocated in its crib, while it was sleeping. After this event, Lois, inexplicably turned into the kind of girl people admire and like to do things for. Thus her “long debut” was over; she was no longer “grand” and “phony.”

Personal Notes of an Infantryman (1942) is about a father, an army volunteer, who gives up everything to save his wounded son. At the end, the army-recruiting officer who narrates the story proves to be the volunteer’s other son.

The Varioni Brothers (1943) is a parable on the evils of commercialism. Joe Varioni is one of those rare souls who can write either enormously successful lyrics for popular songs or fiction of supreme artistic value. His brother Sonny, on the other hand, is a songwriter who knows only the art of suiting the public taste. So, the “pure” novelist Joe squanders his talent writing lyrics for his brother Sonny’s tunes. The brothers make a fortune but at high cost to each of them: Joe is accidentally killed by a mobster, and Sonny, after a seventeen years’ disappearance, returns and spends the rest of his days trying to put together Joe’s masterpiece from the scraps of paper he had left behind. Sonny has discovered that he really hears “music” for the first time when he reads this book, although during his days of commercial success he had scoffed at Joe’s stories as ones in which nothing appeared. Salinger hoped that the movies might buy **The Varioni Brothers**, and so he was more concerned about the critical reaction to his work than he has admitted directly.

Last Day of the Last Furlough (1944) is one of the best of Salinger’s uncollected stories. It has a sentimental style, which may require repeated readings, but it is also a remarkable evocation of the disturbed feelings of an unsophisticated soldier during his last day at home before being shipped overseas, possibly to his death. Babe Gladwaller is the soldier in the story and he is also the first Salinger character to play the leading role in a series of related tales. Several times in the course of the tale, he makes it clear that he does not

expect to survive. When his father talks proudly about World War I, Gladwaller turns on him and protests that it is just this kind of pride that causes wars in the first place. Gladwaller believes in this war, but he also believes that if he gets out of it alive, he will have a moral duty to keep quiet about it. Children should be taught to laugh at wars. After his outburst, he feels embarrassed even though he means what he says. Later on in the story, he speaks out again, this time to himself. Gladwaller has an adorable young sister called Mattie, and when he is with her he is the happiest man on earth. The lyrical moments he enjoys with Mattie mean more to him than his books, his girlfriend, and even than himself. He is prepared to die for Mattie and for what he represents. But in case he does not “come back,” Gladwaller gives Mattie some advice. He says that she will grow up some day and she will be plunged into the phony adult world. What he wants to tell her is that she must always try to live up to the best in herself. Gladwaller also has a close friend, the twenty-nine-year-old Vincent Caulfield, whose wild kid brother, Holden, seems to have been killed. In civilian life, Vincent writes soap operas and has charmed Mattie in a conversation, to Babe’s delight.

The story is “one of those unusually moving artistic works that seems not to *mean* but to *be*. The story depicts not a crisis in the life of Everyman, but the inner feelings of those who prefer to dwell in the ‘nice’ world of their imaginations rather than in the ‘phony’ world of the sad partings.”(French, 1963:62)

Soft-Boiled Sergeant, The Last Day of the Last Furlough and Both Parties Concerned were the three stories that Salinger had sold to the *Saturday Evening Post* before setting off for Europe. When the first two stories appeared, Salinger saw that the *Post*’s editors had changed their names (Salinger had called them **Wake Me When It Thunders** and **Death of a Dogface**), without consulting him.

Both Parties Concerned (1944) - or **Wake Me When it Thunders** - is the tearful idyll of a couple who married too young, and the husband does not want to accept the responsibilities. They get a divorce, but he wins her back. The title comes from the fact that he tells her to wake him up whenever the thunder frightens her.

Soft-Boiled Sergeant (1944) is perhaps the most sentimental of all Salinger’s stories. The title hero, Sergeant Burke, has managed to remain through years of military service “the catcher in the rye” that Holden Caulfield only longs to be. Despite his nobility, Burke is ugly; and, moreover, he admires a beautiful girl. The Sergeant finally loses his life rescuing three scared young soldiers during the attack on Pearl Harbor. One of the story’s purposes is to criticize most movies about army life which are unrealistic because their heroes are too superficially glamorous.

Once a Week Won’t Kill You (1944) – In this story, the most sentimental of the group, the moviegoer, is Aunt Rena, a woman in her early fifties during World War II. Her life apparently really ended when a second lieutenant in World War I did not return to her for unknown reasons. Since then she had consoled herself by listening to the radio and watching movies, while living more and more in her dreams of the past. Now she lives with her nephew, who is getting ready to enter the army. He has no visible regrets about leaving his ambitious wife (although they have been married for three years), but he is really concerned about his Aunt. He wants his wife to promise him that she will continue to take his aunt to the movies once a week. Salinger attempts in this story to arouse sympathy for a man whose desire to arrest the passage of time is nearly as psychotic as his aunt’s dwelling in the past. The man’s efforts to preserve his aunt’s delusion foreshadow, of course, Holden Caulfield’s ambition to be a catcher in the rye. But the main character in this story appears irredeemable, and the story is pointlessly depressing.

Elaine (1945) - This story concerns not one but three compulsive moviegoers. The main character, Elaine, is an extremely beautiful moron, who finally graduates from grammar school after nine and a half years, and even then has no idea of what it is that makes a boy

interested in a girl. Her mother and grandmother are not much different from her. However, Elaine's mental deficiency is her protection against male wishes. But, at sixteen, she is forced to face this issue when the effeminate movie usher Teddy invites her to the first trip to the nearby beach. Salinger does not specify what happens, but the two are married only a month later. But the marriage is never legally consumed, as Elaine's mother opposes to it. In this story, however, Salinger convinces the reader that it is indeed better that people feebly mentally endowed, as the Cooneys, spend their time attending movies rather than grappling with the problems of real life.

A Boy in France (1945) is the second story about Babe Gladwaller. The boy in the title is an army sergeant in his twenties. There is no plot, only a record of discontent and discomfort. Salinger shows the steps by which Babe painfully installs himself for the night in a foxhole dug by a German, who is believed to be dead. We are distressed that any human beings must live, even for a short period of time in such conditions. But Babe does not reflect either his dehumanization or the absurdities of human behavior that have caused it. Instead he worries about a lost fingernail and dirty underwear, and finally lulls himself to sleep rereading a letter the ten-year-old Mattie complains about not being too many boys on the beach. This story was Salinger's last contribution to the *Post*.

The weakness of **This Sandwich Has No Mayonnaise** (1945) is that halfway through the story, the interest shifts from Vincent Caulfield, who finds too many soldiers on a truck that is taking the men to dance, to a lieutenant who solves the problem of what to do about the extra men. Due to Vincent's depression over the news that his brother is missing in action, he should be in the center of the story. Vincent is separated from his family and removed from his brother. "Cut off from love, alienated from the other soldiers by his thoughts, Vincent is drenched to the bone, the bone of loneliness, the bone of silence." (Levine, 1958: 92)

The obscured truth is that, if Vincent is really responsible for loading the truck, he is also responsible for checking the rosters to see that the proper men are on board. He has failed, however, to do this job. In short, Vincent is upset about Holden's being missing in action and that he cannot do his duty properly. Yet, he is decided to go to the dance; and in the end of the story the lieutenant calls up a girl he knows and makes her come to the dance through the rain. The story falls apart because Salinger wishes the reader to sympathize with Vincent and cannot, therefore, expose him as both the culprit of the tale and the victim of a monstrous self-pity.

Babe Gladwaller, home from war, turned up next in **The Stranger** (1945), a story in which there is no real relationship between the parts. Babe, who has survived the war, visits Vincent Caulfield's ex-girlfriend in New York. Vincent was killed in the Hürtgen when a mortar exploded in his face; he was standing around with Babe at the command post when it happened. Babe wants to give his friend's girl a poem Vincent wrote for her. The visit is not easy: Gladwaller feels, not for the first time, a huge separation between those who know about what happened in the forest and those who have only read about it. Mattie is still not very matured. The high point of the story is Babe's impassioned speech against the injustice done to every girl whose lover has been killed by a mortar shell that he did not hear coming. Unfortunately, this speech has no relationship to Vincent or to his ex-girlfriend because they had broken up before he went overseas, and she had already married another man before Vincent died. In fact, the girl's explanation of their break up is that Vincent had not believed in anything since the time before the war when his younger brother Kenneth had died. But it is not explained why the death of a younger brother should alienate a man from his girlfriend. However, since the story fails to be either a satisfactory anti-war preachment or an explanation of the central question, why Vincent's relationship with the woman he loves is not enough to comfort him over the death of his brother, critics have agreed that **The Stranger** is one of Salinger's most complete failures. With this story, Babe Gladwaller disappears from Salinger's work. We see him for the last time admiring his

sister Mattie, who jumps from a curb, as a “beautiful thing to see,” and we are left with the impression that he is likely to spend the rest of his life watching children. He is a “catcher in the rye” who has “made it.”

I'm Crazy (1945) - in this story Holden Caulfield has his earliest appearances. In this story, he emerged at last as a character in his own right. Here the Holden of **The Catcher in the Rye** appears, for the first time, in two scenes that Salinger later expands - Holden's talk with his history teacher before he leaves for prep school, and his talk with his sister, Phoebe, in her bedroom. A year later, he was heard of again in **Slight Rebellion off Madison** (1946). So, both of these stories offer earlier versions of material incorporated into **The Catcher in the Rye**. In this second story, Holden is seen in his date with Sally Hayes, another incident that becomes part of **The Catcher**. In technique, however, these stories are not quite the early versions of scenes from Salinger's novel that one might at first think they are. Holden is seen here as mainly a crazy kid, but not at all a character as complex as he eventually becomes. The narrative style is also different, for example, **Slight Rebellion off Madison** is told in the third person, while **I'm Crazy** is told in the first person. There are many and large differences between the two stories and the novel. This early Holden is a much less complex and more familiar type than in the novel - the kind of lazy, romantic kid who loses his keys and breaks his radio and whose intellectual capacities simply do not measure up to his ambitious parents' expectations. While the later Holden - who cherishes and ultimately loses his illusion of protecting kids from falling over “some crazy cliff” - is a more complex and touching figure than his prototype.

A Young Girl in 1941 with No Waist at All (1947) is a nostalgic attempt to recapture American youth's prewar innocence. It is based on Salinger's youthful spell as entertainment organizer on the MS *Kungsholm*, and is really about the prewar lull, the breaking into peace. It was tucked away among the fashion pictures in the issue of *Mademoiselle*. The title character, Barbara, is an orphan who has been “sick” and is now cruising the Caribbean with her mother-in-law-to-be. The girl apparently has to get married; because - not having gone to college - she cannot think of anything else to do. It seems that all her relatives have convinced her that she is stupid and that is why she accepts to become the fiancé of Ray Kinsella, a member of the ship. But not long after, Barbara decides not to marry him. Apparently when Barbara makes this decision on her own, she leaves her girlhood behind.

A crucial story in understanding Salinger's attitudes toward love and marriage is **The Inverted Forest** (1947), which is actually a short novel of 24,000 words, in which marital responsibility, repressed sexuality, and artistic integrity are all linked. The story is an important one because it may give us some insight into what Salinger was thinking about himself at the time when he was just out of military service, and out of his short and most possibly unofficial marriage with the French woman, and back living with his parents on Park Avenue. The story opens in 1918 when Corinne von Nordhoffen, eleven years old and the daughter of a German baron and an heiress who committed suicide, is having a birthday party on Long Island. Corinne is sad because Raymond Ford, the hero of the story, and a poor boy who is her favorite, is not there. So she goes looking for him, but the only thing she sees is him being taken away by his waitress mother. Corinne's father dies, she goes to Wellesley, and then spends three years in Europe. During all this period, her only love is a boy who is killed when he falls from the running board of her car. After she returns to New York, Robert Warner, the narrator of the story and an old college friend who once loved her, gets her a job on a newsmagazine, and she finally becomes a drama critic. Warner also gives her a book of poems by Ray Ford, now a well-known poet. One of his poems also gives the title of the story. He had an alcoholic mother, and that is why he has never taken a drink, never smoked, and never been able to love. But after ten weeks of dates and confessions, Corinne and Ray get married despite the gloomy warning of Warner that Ray is a hopeless psychotic and that

he cannot love her. But soon, Bunny Croft, a college girl of Ray, begins to appeal to him. At this point the narration changes and becomes a private detective's notebook. Corinne starts drinking heavily, and so does Ray, and the marriage falls apart. Ray and Bunny leave New York together, and Bunny's husband, Howie Croft, counsels Corinne. A year and a half later Corinne tracks Ray and Bunny to a mid-western slum. They are both alcoholics. In a drunken speech, Ray tells Corinne that for him there is no escape. He suggests that his crude mother finally has passed her alcoholism on to him and that Bunny, also an alcoholic, associated in his mind with his mother, has got for good.

The idea of inversion runs throughout the story. Ray is the artist, the one with the inverted forest, in that the beauty he sees, the beauty which leads to his art, is all underground.

The collection **Nine Stories** (1953), a collection greatly influenced by Salinger's beliefs in Zen and Buddhist religion, as we have already discussed in the first part of this chapter. It is in **Nine Stories** that Zen is most pointedly used as a conceptualizing force for Salinger's fiction and the puzzle that is presented to us is:

We know the sound of two hands clapping.

But what is the sound of one hand clapping?

This is, of course, one of the most famous Zen *koan*, originated by Hakuin - one of the greatest of Zen masters. The collection begins with **A Perfect Day for Bananafish** (1948). This story has been seen as the most enigmatic and perplexing story in the collection. It opens with a woman sitting in a Miami Beach hotel room, painting her nails, reading an article ("Sex is Fun - or Hell"), and waiting for a phone call from her mother in New York. When she finally receives the phone call, we find out that her husband, Seymour Glass, has some behavioral problems (he has crashed a car into a tree; he has the habit of insulting people). Then we have the image of Seymour on the beach, speaking to Sybil Carpenter. The two have a playful question-and-answer conversation that suggests the wise nonsense that is often part of the Zen master-student relationship. Then he takes her into the water to look for a "bananafish," which Seymour describes as swimming into a hole where there are a lot of bananas. When they swim in they look like ordinary fish, but once they get in, they behave like pigs; they eat a lot and they get very fat. Finally they die from "banana fever." After listening to Seymour's little allegory, Sybil says that she has just seen a bananafish. Seymour kisses the arch of her foot and they return and then part. Seymour goes to his hotel room, where his wife is sleeping, and takes out an automatic pistol, sits down on the bed, and shoots himself. The general agreement is that the bananafish have something to do with the satiation of senses. The sea represents the blue world of spirituality in which we may swim freely if we only chose to do so. "Seymour's suicide is his way of allowing the true Muriel to escape from the banana hole where she has become trapped through her attitude to marriage. In other words he dies physically in order that she may live again spiritually ... because his love for Muriel demands from him a unique and sacrificial spiritual effort." (Hamilton, 1967:30)

Uncle Wiggily in Connecticut (1948) - Most of the story involves a conversation between two old college roommates, Eloise and Mary Jane, in Eloise's house as they sit drinking cocktails and talking about former acquaintances. Eloise's young daughter, Ramona, comes in the resentment Eloise feels towards her is disturbing. Ramona has problems with her eyes and wears thick glasses; yet she possesses imagination and spontaneity, and has invented an imaginary playmate, "Jimmy Jimmereeno," because there are no other children in the neighborhood. In this story we have a continuation of the wasteland theme of the sterility of modern life. After Ramona goes outside to play, Eloise begins to tell Mary Jane about Walt Glass, Seymour's brother and her lover during the war. She remembers him as superior to her husband, Lew, in every way. Walt had an odd and tender sense of humor, and once, when Eloise twisted her ankle, it called it "Poor Uncle Wiggily." Eloise has never been able to accept the absurdity of Walt's death - he was killed when a Japanese stove blew up. When

Ramona comes in and tells them that Jimmy has been run over in the street, Eloise sends her to bed. Later, when the telephone rings, Eloise cruelly tells her husband that she cannot come to the station to pick him up. Then she goes upstairs to check on Ramona, but gets very angry when she sees her sleeping way over one side of the bed (in order to leave room for Jimmy). Ramona tells her that she has a new friend, "Mickey Mickeranno." Eloise loses her temper and forces her to sleep in the middle of the bed. But then, all of a sudden, full of remorse, she picks up Ramona's glasses and starts crying as she says "Poor Uncle Wiggily" over and over again. Finally she puts the glasses back on the table and kisses Ramona. And again, "glass" figures prominently as a symbol. She had spent all the afternoon and much of her life drinking from glasses without realizing that suffering cannot be escaped though satiation. But it is not until she sees through the glasses of a child that she begins to "see more."

Just Before the War with the Eskimos (1948) - in this story "the sign" is not a pair of glasses, but half of a chicken sandwich. Ginnie Manno, a teen-age girl, who is "five-foot-nine and wears size 9-B shoe," is uncertain of herself, and is angry with her classmate and tennis partner, Selena Graff, because Selena never volunteers to pay her half of the cab fare after their Sunday morning tennis sessions. Ginnie insists on collecting the \$1.90 that Selena owes her, and so she goes to her apartment. While she is waiting for Selena to get the money from her mother, Selena's brother, Franklin, comes in. But Franklin is repulsive looking and while talking to Ginnie, he picks food from his teeth with a fingernail. But Ginnie is fascinated by him and she begins asking him questions to probe the sources of her anguish. She finds out that he had met her sister, Joan, whom he calls a snob, at a party in 1942, and that he had written her eight letters and never received an answer. She also finds out that he has problems with his heart and he had to spend the war years working in an airplane factory. And when Franklin's friend, Eric, comes to pick him up, she finds out that Franklin is a homosexual. But at one point in the story, when Franklin is holding his bleeding finger and Ginnie tells him not to touch it, he seems to have experienced an awakening. A basic point in Buddhism is one contained in the "Four Noble Truths" and is says that suffering is, in one sense, its own cause. It is that Franklin suddenly understands as he sees through himself, through his own agony, and stops "touching it." He is so moved that he insists Ginnie accept a gift, half of a chicken sandwich he has kept in his room. "The sandwich takes on a sacramental quality and suggests the underlying fable of incarnation - the revelation of spirit through matter - that runs through this story and most of the others in **Nine Stories.**" (Lundquist, 1979:91) When Ginnie is forced by Franklin to take a bite of the sandwich, she is forced to take a taste of what Franklin's life is like, and in turn, better understand her own. The title of the story stands for Franklin's sarcastic prophecy that the next war will probably be against the Eskimos. "Life is that absurd."

Blue Melody (1948) and **A Girl I Knew** (1948) are not part of the collection **Nine Stories.** The first one, **Blue Melody** is another not completely successful story of "youth's awakening." It was said that the story wanted to be about Lisa Jones, a black blues singer who (in a situation based on accounts of the tragic end of Bessie Smith) died from appendicitis because the Southern white hospitals to which she was taken would not admit her. The story is actually about a white boy named Rudford, whose boyhood ends with Lisa's death. Lisa died on a picnic, where they were together (black and white friends), before they could find a hospital. After Lisa's death, Rudford leaves the South. Years later, during the war, he meets again a white girl who shared these experiences with him, but she is now the wife of a jealous army officer. Rudford promises to play one of Lisa's rare recordings, but he never does. He does not want to because the record is "terribly scratched" and Lisa's voice can hardly be recognized. The story, however, fails to achieve what appears to be its purpose of dramatizing one boy's awakening to the realities of the American situation.

In **A Girl I Knew**, the narrator returns to Austria after World War II and finds out that the girl he had loved before the war had been burned up in one of Hitler's incinerators. So the story deals unsuccessfully with the same problem of the world's insensitivity to the destruction of innocence. The girl is the charming Viennese Jewess, Leah, who is genuinely childlike. Instead of killing herself, she suffers the awful fate of dying in a Nazi concentration camp after having been forced by her parents to marry a man she hardly knew. The story is not really effective as protest against the inhumanity of the Nazis because their victim is a girl who would surely have been defeated by external forces anyway. Actually, as W. French thinks, Salinger's purpose in this story seems to be not so much to stimulate pity for Leah and hatred toward the Nazis as to arouse antipathy for those Americans who are unmoved by the knowledge of her destruction.

The Laughing Man (1949) - the next story of the cycle - is a story about the destruction of the spontaneous, irrational, and imaginative world of childhood. The mature narrator takes us back when he was nine and a member of the Comanche Club, whose leader was John Gedsudski (the "Chief"). But the Chief's best ability is that of a storyteller. At the end of each soccer, football or baseball game, he would continue the adventures of The Laughing Man, who was kidnapped by Chinese bandits as a child. His parents refused to pay his ransom, and the bandits squeezed his head and left him with hideous features: no nose and an enormous oval cavity for a mouth. He had to cover his face with a red mask in order to be allowed to stay with the bandits. The Laughing Man used to go in the forest where he had his best friends - the animals. Meanwhile, he picks up the bandits' trade secret and so he becomes more successful and they try to kill him. But he escapes, he goes to France and he acquires the largest fortune in the world. He gives most of the money to a monastery and then lives the simplest life. Nobody has ever seen his face. The Laughing Man represented for the narrator more than simply a fantasy figure. He provided him with his own "original face," the perception of the self beyond the self that is more possible in the Zen world of children than it is in the conventional world of adulthood. But a change occurs when the Chief has a girlfriend, Mary Hudson, who joins the boys in their baseball game. Something goes wrong in their relationship (in The Laughing Man's story we find out that he dies and his last act is to pull off his mask); the Chief has made Mary pregnant. When the Chief strips away the Laughing Man's mask he destroys his own belief in the value of irrational exuberance, and the nature he reveals is indeed a hideous one. **The Laughing Man** is one of the bleakest and disturbing stories in the collection, and it makes us become cautious that the way of Zen is not easy.

Down at the Dinghy (1949) is the slightest piece of the collection. The story begins with Sandra, the maid, and Mrs. Snell, the ironing lady, sitting at the kitchen table at the Tannenbaum's vacation house. They are talking about the behavior of their employ's four years old son who has the habit of running away. The lady of the house, Boo Boo, a sister of Seymour Glass, comes into the kitchen to take something. The child, who is sitting in the kitchen, after an adult conversation with his mother, tells her the reason why he wants to go. He tells her that he had overheard Sandra tell Mrs. Snell that his father is a "big - sloppy - kike." Boo Boo takes him in her arms and then gently asks him if he knows what the word means. The child says that it is "one of those things that go up in the air," and she is very touched by his innocence and spontaneity. Now she sees how absurd the problems of the obscene adult world are when viewed through the mind of a child. So the story moves toward a moment of enlightenment and it does include one of Salinger's precociously symbolic children.

If **Down at the Dinghy** deals with a far more universal problem than the Jew's role in society, it is Salinger's presentation of the static essence of tragedy; **For Esmé - with Love and Squalor** (1950) is the opposite: it is the high point of his art and it is the dramatization of the dynamic essence of comedy. The story is narrated in the first person and it takes the form of a recollection. The narrator has received an invitation to a wedding in England. He decides not to go

but at the same time he writes down a few notes for the bride. He knew her six years ago. In 1944 he was taking an English Intelligence course at Devon in England. On the last day, a rainy day, he goes into a church and listens to the children singing, but paying more attention to a thirteen-year-old girl with an exquisite face. After he gets out and seeks shelter, the girl and her brother join him. She tells him about herself; that both her parents are dead and she lives with her aunt. Then she finds out that he is a writer and asks him if he will write a story for her - one with lots of "squalor" in it, a word she cannot define because of her innocence.

The second part of the story presents a lot of contrast between the world of Esmé and of the sergeant. The recollection is so painful, that the narrator has chosen to refer to himself in the third person, as Sergeant X. The story shifts to Bavaria where Sergeant X is stationed after being hospitalized for a nervous breakdown. He is suffering more, just as Holden Caulfield, from an "utter obscenity of life." While he is trying to write to a friend in New York, but he can't because his hands are shaking too badly, he finds a package on his desk. He opens it and he finds a note from Esmé with her father's wristwatch (her father was killed in a battle in Africa when she was just a child). She wants him to have the watch because it is "extremely water-proof and shockproof as well as having many other virtues among which one can tell at what velocity one is walking if one wishes." (Lundquist, 1979: 99) Thus the story ends with a moment of liberation in which takes place the human exchange of beatific signals. And Lundquist appreciates again that, of course, the crystal of the watch reminds us of the glass that has to be broken, has to be penetrated and seen through. "The water that may leak through the crystal is a universal symbol of cleansing and rebirth."

Pretty Mouth and Green My Eyes (1951) serves as a near perfect counterpoint to **For Esmé - with Love and Squalor** because it features three characters who are literally up against their individual walls and who will never meet at the corner. This story carries to an extreme a device greatly used by Salinger: the telephone conversations that express the difficulty his characters have in talking directly to one another face-to-face. This story consists almost entirely of a telephone conversation late at night between an older lawyer and a younger man in the same firm. The young man, Arthur, is concerned about what has happened to his wife. She did not come home with him after a party and he wonders where she is. The older man, Lee, tries to offer him advice and comfort, and encourages him to go to bed. But all the time Lee is trying to comfort Arthur, he is in bed with his wife. The story ends with Arthur trying to save face by telling Lee that the wife, Joanie, has just walked in. The story was full of irony and it had a lot of success.

De Daumier-Smith's Blue Period (1952) is again a story narrated in the first person and the narrator recollects a traumatic period in his life that ends with the most vivid account of the Zen experiences we find anywhere in Salinger. On one level, the story can be read as if it is the treatment of the classic Oedipal situation - the narrator telling how he returned to New York from Paris in the company of his stepfather after the death of his mother, both of them discovering that their only bond is that they are both in love with the same dead woman. After studying art in New York, the narrator writes a letter of application for a job at an academy in Montreal. In the letter he assumes the name of Daumier-Smith and he also writes a lot of lies about himself and his qualifications in the past. The school turns out to be a correspondence school run by M. Yoshoto, a Japanese artist. Daumier-Smith's ideas on life and art are so confused, he so loathes other people, and he feels so sorry for himself that his condition seems hopeless in its horrible isolation. Among his colleagues, only one captures his attention: a nun of the order of Sisters of St. Joseph named Sister Irma. She has enclosed no photograph in her application papers, she does not reveal her age and she leaves all of her work unsigned. Daumier-Smith writes a letter to her that is the first honest and thoughtful communication he has ever had with anyone, and it seems that he has fallen in love with her. He even asks her what her visiting hours at the convent are, but his fantasy is ended when a letter returns from

the Mother Superior of Sister Irma's convent saying that the nun would be not allowed to continue her study at "Les Amis Des Vieux Maîtres," the university. After he reads the letter and after a period of meditation, he writes another letter to her, but he never mails it. Then as he goes out ready to get drunk, an accident happens to a shop assistant in a shop nearby. As he reaches out to help the girl, he is made aware of his own isolation and intellectuality. Later he goes to his room and he writes that he is "giving Sister Irma her freedom to follow her own destiny. Everybody is a nun." This suggests that being a human means being devoted to a religious life, and that everybody must try to discover the path of spiritual awareness. In the end, Daumier-Smith stops being a phony, he even returns to his stepfather after the school fails and his oedipal difficulties have disappeared.

Teddy (1953) is the last story in the collection. The protagonist is a child that is so precocious that his parents have taken him to England where he has been examined at Oxford and Edinburgh by some of the world's leading savants. When the story opens Teddy, his parents, and his emotionally disturbed six years old sister (she hates everybody) are on an ocean line returning to the United States. The action mostly consists of a dialogue between Teddy and a young professor of education, Bob Nicholson. Through this conversation, we find out that Teddy is a believer in the Vadic theory of reincarnation, that he was a holy man in India in his last incarnation, that he almost reached Brahma. We also find out that he had his first mystical experience at the age of six when he observed his sister drinking milk and suddenly realized that she was God and the milk was God, and that the apple Adam ate in the Garden of Heaven was logic. Teddy, because of already having lived through a thousand lives, he is able to predict when he and others will die. In fact, we learn from his notebook that his own death will occur either on 14 February 1958, or on the very day he is talking to Nicholson. It turns out to be the latter. Teddy finishes his conversation with Nicholson, walks down to the empty swimming pool, looks over the edge, and he is pushed to his death by his sister (a scene he has already outlined to Nicholson as a possibility of his way of dying that day). His sister is introduced in the story as a mean child because she has not had a chance to live very many lives, as Teddy explains. So, **Teddy** is an appropriate conclusion to the collection; not only does it provide a final commentary on the opening *koan*; but it also serves to explain and underline the point of Seymour's death in the first story, **A Perfect Day for a Bananafish** - for them physical death may be spiritual life.

Franny (1955) and **Zooey** (1957) are the two stories that later on have become **Franny and Zooey** (1961). **Franny** has as a background Salinger's relationship with his wife, Claire. In the story, Franny is a bright young student who spends a weekend with her Ivy League boyfriend, Lane Coutell. But she knows his type, so he realizes that she is not going to play his game. She deeply disapproves of the stupidity and self-interest of the others. So she seeks and partially finds an "alternative education" in yoga-like disciplines. "In **Franny** for once Salinger demonstrates that he can write of adolescence without disappearing into it; but **Franny**, alas, is completed by **Zooey**, which itself completes nothing." (Fiedler, 1962: 235-36)

Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters (1955) is a story about a wedding that turns into an elopement, and it is Salinger's first extended exploration of the fictional family that from now on will be the focus if everything he writes. The narrator is Buddy and he remembers the day of Seymour's wedding. The bride is Muriel, not a very intelligent girl but very good looking, and Buddy has been summoned to attend the ceremony. The summons and the judgment of Muriel come from the third Glass child, Boo Boo. She herself can't make it to the wedding, she is on duty, and more or less she begs Buddy to be there. This is not easy because Buddy is in an army hospital, in 1942, recovering from pleurisy. But Seymour does not appear, and so Buddy is the only one of the Glass family who is able to be present for the ceremony. He is forced into a car with four other wedding guests to be driven to the apartment

of the bride's parents for what has turned out to be a non-wedding reception. The situation Salinger uses to build his story around is a classic one in vaudeville and burlesque humor.

Like Salinger, Buddy is a professional short story writer who has reached a turning point in his career. Like Salinger, he lacks a university degree and lives as remotely as he can. He even once wrote a story about the suicide of Seymour Glass. But there also are some differences. Seymour is Buddy's brother. Buddy has a job - one that Salinger loathes - he is a teacher at an unfashionable college; but Salinger needs this for his links to the academia. **Zooey** is a story about education, and reminds us just how much of Salinger's fiction turns on a teacher-pupil dialogue.

Seymour: An Introduction (1959) – This story is, in fact, an introduction to an introduction, which seems to carry an element of mockery. Once again Buddy Glass is the narrator, and he tells us more about his dead brother. Seymour is a great poet, a reincarnated seer. As we have heard before, he committed suicide in 1948. Buddy Glass wants us to worship Seymour as he does, and this is also the purpose of the introduction. But the real "star" is Buddy. He wrote a book, as we have already known, and two stories about Seymour (one about his suicide and one about his wedding), and he has become successful, a kind of hero to the young, but he feels victimized by his admirers. **Seymour** pretends to be a song of praise, and it is full of arch and self-deprecating charm.

Hapworth 16, 1924 (1965) shows Salinger still struggling with Seymour's haunting presence. Buddy, now forty-six years old, tries to trace the origins of his older brother's saintliness in a letter Seymour wrote home when he was nine. With the letter, we are introduced to the sensitivity and psychic powers that foreshadow his spirituality. Seymour, incredibly advanced for his age - seven - reflects on the nature of pain and he asks his parents to send him books by Tolstoy, Vivekananda of India, Dickens, etc. In this story Salinger attempts to portray Seymour in the process of deepening his awareness. "What the story does is to emphasize how oppressive as well as potentially enlightening Seymour's influence on his brothers and sisters must be. He is a grotesque, but then so are the lives of most saints." (Lundquist, 1979:149)

Nevertheless, the most iconic period is "The age of Salinger," as James Lundquist calls it in his book, **J. D. Salinger**, is the period from the early 1950's when, through his only novel, Salinger influenced an entire generation of readers. His novel has become a modern American classic, and generations of troubled teenagers have adopted the protagonist, Holden Caulfield, as a heroic and symbolic figure. In this book, Lundquist also explores the theme of alienation and isolation, the religious statements, the symbolic structure of language and Salinger's personality as it reveals itself in the work from an autobiographical writer.

Conclusions

It is also true that after World War II the cautious academicians usually shied away from the recently risen authors who have written relatively little. But Warren French, in his **J.D. Salinger** (which is also one of the main sources of this paper work), demonstrates that Salinger is one of the most influential post-war authors and that he cannot be slighted in any meaningful study of literature. In the preface to his book, W. French says: "I felt that if those who are guiding our youth do not see what there is to respond to in Salinger's work, they cannot begin to understand those who respond to it. This study is thus a guide for those who, bedeviled by the inscrutability of the younger generation, are not content simply to throw up their hands in despair but wish to understand." One of the main reasons why American youth was, and still is after five decades, so enthusiastic about Salinger's fiction is that he is a great reporter. Salinger "has an uncanny ability to reproduce in the language of the teenage and city-dweller the shortcomings of our neurotic urban civilization - the 'phony' world" (the front flap of the jacket of W. French's **J. D. Salinger**). Salinger satirizes the "shabby

American pretensions” in **The Catcher** and that is also why W. French considers him a great writer, being both a healer and a diagnostician.

Although Salinger is a recluse, he is, paradoxically, one of the most popular American writers. Thus we have to admit that his long silence and his refusal to publish later writings (which apparently exist), or to give interviews about his life and work (and to this point Ian Hamilton’s quoted book in the first chapter, **In Search of J. D. Salinger**, is a good example) have only added to his fame and have intensified public curiosity about the cherished American recluse.

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