Pains and Contradictions in *The Catcher in the Rye* and *Franny and Zooey*

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Pains and Contradictions in *The Catcher in the Rye* and *Franny and Zooey*

A Thesis

The Honors Program

College of Saint Benedict/Saint John's University

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by

B. Daniel Rösch

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Appendix E: Approval Page

PROJECT TITLE: Pains & Contradictions in The Catcher in the Rye and Hunting and Scooby

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Accumulating money has always been part of the United States’ tradition. The United States prides itself on its motivation to produce and consume wealth. From anti-tax colonists’ Boston Tea Party to gold and land hungry pioneers of the Manifest Destiny and the robber barons of the Industrial Revolution to our current computer barons of the Information Age, United States citizens want money. As Stanford Pinsker describes in his book *The Catcher in the Rye: Innocence Under Pressure*, in post-World War II society the rich paraded around in their large Cadillacs, exiting 5th Avenue apartments to be waited upon by doormen as they showed off their wealth in full, theatrical fashion (4). These people achieved “the American Dream” and presented themselves to a middle-class public audience, looking for ego gratification and justification rather than personal relationships. The rest of the United States that did not belong to the upper-class could not enjoy these same luxuries. They were often nameless workers in a corporation or bodies working on an assembly line. While the upper-class engaged in *faux* sincere social behavior, drank martinis and emulated movie stars, the middle-class worked towards becoming better citizens by imitating the upper-class by forgoing personal relationships and allowing their egotism to control their actions. Because of this phony and egotistical behavior, the United States became thoroughly insincere and existed in squalor.

By squalor, I mean consumerism, spiritual and emotional disconnection, and conformity, egotism, and superficiality at the expense of originality, humility, and love. In the process of becoming successful, individuals alienate themselves from each other by striving to best each other rather than help each other. Individuals living in this squalor conform to “the American Dream,” letting society define how they should act, think, and feel so that they may reap the financial and social rewards of playing by the rules. In the process of conforming to society’s
expectations, individuals lose their ability to have personal relationships with other people. They shut themselves down emotionally and become egotistical, falling deeper into squalor until they lose their ability to love.

J. D. Salinger’s major main characters long to run away from their conflicts rather than engage them, yet Salinger does not allow them to run away. Salinger’s *The Catcher in the Rye* and *Franny and Zooey* show human beings who are not able to disengage themselves; they have tried and failed to be “normal” and have resigned themselves to alienation from people as a result. These stories offer us “an intense glimpse of a squalid world” where each character “tries, generally unsuccessfully, to learn to live in that world” (Baskett 48). They try to change the world they live in, and, in their failure, fall further into depression and sadness. Holden and Franny do not love themselves, so they cannot fully love another person. This inability to love leads to their breakdowns, and the pursuit of unconditional love becomes the goal of Holden Caulfield in *The Catcher in the Rye* and Franny Glass in *Franny and Zooey*. David Galloway recognizes that the most pressing problem of the post-Cold War age is “to act with morality and love in a universe in which God is dead (or, at least, in which historical preconceptions of God frequently seem invalid),” and Salinger takes on this problem by having his characters turn to spirituality and love to find meaning in the world (50). *The Catcher in the Rye* and *Franny and Zooey* show his spiritual method of coping with the squalor of society.

Spiritual love — the pure and unconditional acceptance of others — and the loss of egotism and self-conceit are the coping mechanisms that help Salinger’s characters sort through the squalor and live within it rather than alienating themselves. As Linda S. Gordon says, Salinger’s characters search for love and meaning because “they see phoniness, egotism and hypocrisy around them. There is a failure to communicate between people,” and this failure is
often the central obstacle Holden and Franny face (2040). Holden and Franny cannot resolve their conflict until they can lose their egotism and accept people unconditionally. Unconditional love and loss of egotism allows them to achieve a sort of *satori* — a Zen Buddhist word for enlightenment — in which they empty their minds and lives of “all the opinions and values that one has learned and has been conditioned to that interfere” with one’s ability to rise above squalor and live in it (Gordon 2042). They shed the constraints of egotism and become free and peaceful. Through Holden and Franny’s searches, we come to understand that the “paradox of splendor and squalor, of the nice and the phony, can be resolved only through character and being” (Lundquist 120). Accepting people for who they are and losing one’s egotism are the most effective means of achieving this resolution.

Salinger does not want to retreat from the external realities of the squalid world. He wants to bring love into the world and engage the squalor to save one’s self. His coping strategy requires that people love themselves and other people unconditionally. Once they have brought love into the squalor, they can begin to lose their egotism by acting for themselves, not for the recognition society would give them. In *The Catcher in the Rye* and *Franny and Zooey*, Holden and Franny, while initially rejecting phoniness and egotism in all forms, develop what Salinger calls a “Christ Consciousness” that allows them to put aside their hatred for superficial, egotistical people and embrace their brothers and sisters in unconditional love (“Zooey” 172). They realize that they need to treat all people as if they were Christ. Rather than cutting themselves off from the world around them, Kenneth Hamilton believes Holden and Franny expose their “sensitive souls to the darkness [and squalor] of this present age” and begin to heal after their struggles with squalor (in Lundquist 53). They develop spirituality to cope with
society’s various evils and find meaning and peace in the process.

Salinger outlines his coping strategy in *The Catcher in the Rye* and *Franny and Zooey*: from an unconditional love to seeking solace through prayer to acting for the intrinsic value of acting/action(s), thereby escaping social definitions and expectations. At the end of *Catcher*, Holden realizes that he cannot judge people for being phony nor prevent them from having to deal with the squalor. He understands that he cannot change people and that he must try to love all people regardless of their faults. Franny’s conflict with egotism depresses her; she cannot handle ego and superficiality, but her desire to find a way out of the squalor through prayer gives the reader hope that she may eventually find peace. Her conflict resolves itself in “Zooey” when she finally understands that her distaste for society and for people is too personal and that she needs to escape her own egotism to truly understand the prayer she has been chanting and to love people as Christ. She understands that she must shed her egotism in order to act (in her case, to be a stage actress) for its own goodness and not for egotistical reasons such as social acceptance.

In *The Catcher in the Rye*, Holden Caulfield, a sixteen-year-old student from an upper-middle-class New York family, gets expelled from his fourth private school; rather than go home and face his parents (who will be disappointed again), he spends a weekend in New York, experiencing the city. Throughout his narration, he criticizes society’s phoniness — the faked sincerity towards each other of the people whom he encounters and their superficial acceptance of others — and society’s demand that children grow up before they are ready, accept a role they may not want, and take on adult responsibilities. He longs to escape this environment and social trap, to remain an innocent youth instead of becoming a phony adult, and to protect other children from a similar fate. Finally, while watching his sister, Phoebe, one of his few true friends who really listens to him, ride on the carousel, Holden realizes that if children want to grow up,
he has to let them make that decision themselves. He understands that he needs to grow up
himself and engage society rather than immaturely run away from his problems.

Holden’s struggle begins when he attempts to fit in to society and belong to a community.
He manages the fencing team and hangs out with his neighbor, Ackley, even though he does not
like Ackley that much. He finds Ackley’s physical and hygienic habits disgusting: “I never once
saw him brush his teeth. They always looked mossy and awful . . . Besides that, he had a lot of
pimples . . . He had a terrible personality”.¹ Holden “[feels] sort of sorry for [Ackley]”
because of his teeth, and while he does not like Ackley, he prefers his company to loneliness
(24). Ackley is someone to whom he can possibly relate. Holden’s attempts to find some solace
and community, some emotional support and relationship with people, extend to his evening out
with Ackley and Mal Brossard. They go to a hamburger joint to get some decent food, decide to
see a movie, but change their minds. Holden does not mind missing the movie. He comments:
“I’d been to the movies with Brossard and Ackley before. They both laughed like hyenas at
stuff that wasn’t even funny. I didn’t even enjoy sitting next to them in the movies” because
they act so phony (37). The fact that they do not realize they are phony bothers Holden; they
have disengaged themselves from their feelings so much that they laugh only because they are
supposed to laugh at jokes. Even though Holden is not physically alone, he remains isolated.

His attempts to follow the rules conflict with his desire for sincere relationships. Even
though he feels his roommate, Stradlater, is phony, Holden still seeks his company. He is both
someone with whom he should be friends according to the rules but, unfortunately, not a person
with whom Holden can possibly relate. Stradlater asks Holden to write a paper for him, but not

¹ Catcher 19. From here on until otherwise noted, all direct quotations from Salinger come from The Catcher
in the Rye.
“too good, is all” since the teacher would recognize Holden’s writing style — a personal narrative style coupled with good grammar. Holden agrees to write a descriptive essay and chooses his dead brother Allie’s baseball glove as his subject. The glove “had poems written all over the fingers and the pocket and everywhere. In green ink. [Allie] wrote them on it so that he’d have something to read when he was in the field” (38). Holden believes the essay is good and descriptive, and he imbues the essay with personal affection. Besides, he “[can’t] think of anything else descriptive” even though Stradlater asks him to write about a room or “something you once lived in” (28). Holden cannot write about just anything because he is too sensitive. When Stradlater sees it, however, he becomes angry and criticizes Holden: “You always do everything backasswards. . . . No wonder you’re flunking the hell out of here. . . . You don’t do one damn thing the way you’re supposed to” (41). Stradlater does not understand how Holden could “mess up” a simple assignment (nor can Stradlater see his own messing up by cheating), and he does not recognize Holden’s desire for something more than the common, phony essay. They do not connect with each other. Holden’s attempts to get beyond a phony acquaintance with Ackley or Stradlater fail because he cannot relate to them on a real, emotional level (Lundquist 40).

Holden’s need to relate with people and his inability to find an emotional connection is particularly strong when he talks to Stradlater about Jane Gallagher, Stradlater’s date for the evening and one of Holden’s friends from home. As they talk, Holden’s desire for personal and emotional relationships comes through as much as Stradlater’s indifference towards Holden. Holden, in an attempt to reach out to Stradlater, shares what he knows about Jane: she had a Doberman pincer, was a ballet dancer, and stacked her kings in the back row during checkers games. Holden asks Stradlater to ask Jane whether she still stacked her kings. Rather than
understand the significance of this gesture — Holden’s desire for Stradlater to know Jane more intimately than as a date and a sexual object — Stradlater ignores Holden’s remark: “That kind of stuff doesn’t interest most people. . . . Stradlater wasn’t hardly listening. He was combing his gorgeous locks” and focusing on what kind of “sexy stuff” he could do with Jane (32). Holden continues to pursue a relationship with Stradlater, offering more information about Jane that would make her more of a person to Stradlater, but he finally gives up, realizing that Stradlater does not care. Holden’s concern for Jane occupies him “about a half hour after [Stradlater] left. . . . I kept thinking about Jane, and about Stradlater having a date with her and all. It made me so nervous I nearly went crazy. I already told you what a sexy bastard Stradlater was” (34). Holden is obviously concerned about Jane. He feels a sincere connection to her and does not want her to come to any emotional or physical harm.

Holden’s overriding concern for Jane’s well-being is indicative of his inability to follow the rules that society and Pencey have given him; as Stradlater’s roommate, he is expected to mind his own business about the date and what happens, but he cares too much about Jane to ignore his fears. When Stradlater returns from the date, Holden quizzes him about what they did together, worried that Stradlater took advantage of Jane. Holden asks, “Did you give her my regards?” and when Stradlater responds that he did, Holden thinks, “The hell he did, the bastard” (42). He knows Stradlater does not care about Jane as a person, and Stradlater’s indifference towards Jane bothers Holden, making him nervous that “something had gone funny” and that Jane had been hurt (42). Holden’s fear is confirmed when he asks whether he “[g]ave her the time in Ed Banky’s goddam car?” My voice was shaking something awful. . . .” to which Stradlater responds, “That’s a professional secret, buddy” (43). Stradlater’s nonchalant response
angers Holden, and he attempts to hit Stradlater, but Stradlater subdues him and pins him to the floor, asking him what is the matter. Holden calls him a “sonuvabitch and all . . . I told him he thought he could give the time to anybody he felt like. I told him he didn’t even care if a girl kept all her kings in the back row” (44). Holden’s accusation that Stradlater does not care illustrates how Holden views Stradlater’s ability to relate personally with other people; Stradlater cannot relate nor is he interested in having relations with people beyond the physical level. Therefore, Holden’s anger stems from both his fear for Jane’s person and his disgust that Stradlater can disengage himself as he does, that he does not care about the little things that make people more than bodies. Holden does not understand how people can be so impersonal, and he is frustrated by Stradlater’s phoniness. After being beaten up by Stradlater, he decides to stop trying to fit in and leaves Pencey. Hanging around Pencey makes him “too sad and lonesome” and further reinforces his isolation (51). Holden feels he needs to get away from the phoniness and his struggles. He believes that by leaving Pencey, he will be free of phoniness.

Holden cannot escape phoniness, however, both because it is omnipresent in society and because he engages in phony behavior himself. His preoccupation with Ackley’s physical appearance and with Stradlater’s secret sloppiness is as superficial as Ackley’s laughing in the movie theater and Stradlater’s obsession with his appearance. Holden’s recognition of his own lying, however, sets him apart from others who are not aware. His awareness also causes him pain. He does not like to lie. He feels sorry when he catches himself lying, but he cannot stop his behavior. He tells it like this: “I’m the most terrific liar you ever saw in your life. It’s awful. If I’m on the 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. It’s terrible” (16). Dominic Bruni writes that “although he castigates himself for doing some of the phony things, lying especially, Holden does realize
that what he’s doing is incorrect; this understanding sets him above his fellows” (2327). He does
not glorify his phoniness; he despises it. He does it for reasons he cannot explain, but he does
not do it maliciously.

Although his lying is morally questionable, Holden’s lying is not malicious. He
reluctantly lies to people in order to maintain their illusions rather than shatter their beliefs and
depress them while others lie for selfish reasons. Holden lies to help people while other people
lie to help themselves. For instance, while on the train to New York, Holden encounters Mrs.
Marrow, a classmate’s mother, and she asks him about her son. Holden cannot stand the boy.
He feels the boy is “doubtless the biggest bastard that ever went to Pencey . . . . He was always
going down the corridor, after he’d had a shower, snapping his soggy old wet towel at people’s
asses” and being a general annoyance (54). However, the boy’s mother believes him to be “a
very sensitive boy” who has “never been a terribly good mixer with other boys,” and Holden
does not want to ruin her impression of her son (55). He suspects that she knows how much of
a bastard her son really is, but he is not sure since all mothers “are slightly insane” (55). Besides,
Holden likes the woman and does not want to upset her. Therefore, rather than tell her the truth,
he tells her that her son “adapts himself very well to things” and that he’s “one of the most
popular boys at Pencey . . . He’s a funny guy” (55, 56).

By lying to the mother, Holden believes he is doing her a favor. He protects Mrs.
Marrow from information that she does not need to know. He is also trying to establish a
relationship with her. He feels guilty about lying to her, but he realizes that to survive in society,
everyone must be insincere at times. This realization depresses him. He knows that other
people recognize the need to be phony and reluctantly go through the motions purely out of
habit. When he runs into one of his brother’s ex-girlfriends and her date, he introduces himself to her date, says “Glad to have met you,” and notes, “I’m always saying ‘Glad to have met you’ to someone I’m not at all glad to have met. If you want to stay alive, you have to say that stuff, though” (87). These conversational tools, while phony, are necessary for society to function peacefully. Holden’s immaturity cannot comprehend the need for this practice, however, and sees it as another example of both society’s and his own phoniness. As much as he loathes this behavior, though, he cannot stop. It is the only way he knows to interact with other people.

Clearly, Holden struggles with his predicament. His environment does not help his growing feelings of isolation and loneliness, and his awareness of his own phoniness drives him crazy. Holden is an outsider who goes against society to find his own truth. Holden cannot find this truth yet. He cannot figure out how not to be phony and successfully cope with society. As Warren French believes, Holden is “like a character in Dante’s Inferno who cannot escape but who has just discovered where he really is” (41). Holden feels powerless to change his environment. He sees his attempts at finding solace with other people fail, but he continually turns to people for comfort. Ironically, the people to whom Holden initially turns for solace are those who can help him the least — the phonies. He hates these people because they are phony. He does not like Ackley or Stradlater, yet he turns to them because he does not know where else to turn. They are present in his life and available, if imperfect, to ease his loneliness.

Holden seeks help from another friend whom he does not like — Sally Hayes. Even though he believes Sally is a superficial phony, Holden feels she will understand him more than the anonymous people with whom he tried to connect the night before. They make plans to see a play, and Holden buys the tickets even though he hates actors: “They never act like people. They just think they do” (117). Holden’s criticism of actors directly applies to people, too.
People pretend to be happy to see people and act interested in what other people have to say because this behavior is expected and the norm. They never act like real people; they just think they do. Sally is a prime example of acting like a person. When she sees Holden, she says, “Holden, it’s marvelous to see you! It’s been ages.” She had one of these very loud, embarrassing voices when you met her somewhere” that says to the world, “look at me” (124). While she seems sincerely happy to see Holden, her showy greeting is embarrassing, yet Holden is also happy to see her.

Holden’s happiness is fleeting. While on the date, he cannot shake his disgust with society’s phoniness. They go into the lobby during intermission, and he notes, “You never saw so many phonies in all your life, everybody smoking their ears off and talking about the play so that everybody could hear and know how sharp they were” (126). Even Sally begins to disgust Holden because “she always knew somebody, any place you took her, or thought she did,” and she makes such a big deal about seeing a play starring the Lunts (127). Putting aside his disgust, Holden decides to share his frustrations with Sally. He feels she will understand, and he confesses his dream of abandoning society and all its squalor in favor of a simple, real life in a cabin. He asks her whether she ever gets “fed up” with school, phoniness, and having to put on airs to get along with society (130-31). Sally fails to understand his disgust with society and school, and she says he needs to get more out of school than a hatred of cliques and phoniness. She voices everything he has been told about playing by the rules and fitting in, and he cannot take her advice.

Sally’s confusion over what he means pushes Holden further, and he tells her of his plan: “Here’s my idea. . . . Tomorrow morning we could drive up to Massachusetts and Vermont. . . .
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” (132). He wants a simple life instead of a stifling job and socially dictated lifestyle. Instead of supporting Holden’s vision, however, Sally criticizes Holden’s fantasy. She tells him to deal with reality and points out how silly his idea is. She says, “You can’t just do something like that. . . . We’re both practically children. And did you ever stop to think of what we’d do if you didn’t get a job. . . . We’d starve to death. . . . After you go to college and all . . . there’ll be oodles of marvelous places to go to” (133). Clearly, Sally does not understand what Holden is saying. She thinks he is just talking about a vacation and not a full rejection of society. She does not see his larger disgust with society’s conformity and phoniness. She merely reinforces everything Holden hates about society. He finally lets go of his inhibitions and tells her what he thinks about college and following society’s rules:

We’d have to go downstairs in elevators with suitcases and stuff. We’d have to phone up everybody and tell ‘em good-by and send ‘em post-cards from hotels and all. And I’d be working in some office, making a lot of dough, and riding to work in cabs and Madison Avenue buses, and reading newspapers, and playing bridge all the time, and going to the movies and seeing a lot of stupid shorts and coming attractions and newsreels. . . . There’s always a dumb horse race, and some dame breaking a bottle over a ship . . . You don’t see what I mean at all.

(133)

Holden realizes that his attempts to make Sally understand are pointless. She does not understand what he is reacting against. The outing has become a failure for both of them. Holden
has not found the relationship he desperately needs, and Sally has had an unpleasant Sunday afternoon. What bothers Holden even more is his awareness that he honestly wants her to join him and run away. He realizes how desperate he has become, and it scares him that he would actually consider taking Sally with him when he knows he cannot stand her.

Overcome by depression and isolation, Holden escapes to his family’s apartment and to his sister to find some peace. Phoebe represents all that Holden feels he is losing: innocence, honesty, and purity. She does not have the pretensions of his peers nor the need to find social acceptance. She approaches the world with simplicity and honesty, and she is the only person who really listens to him and understands his feelings. Phoebe sleeps in her brother D. B.’s room because it has a big bed that allows her “to spread out” and be free (159). When Holden sees her, she “had her mouth way open. It’s funny. . . . Kids look all right. They can even have spit all over the pillow and they still look all right” even when adults look like fools (159). To Holden, children do not worry if their mouths gape open and spit dries on their face; they do not care about appearances. Adults, however, worry about being caught slack-jawed; they are preoccupied with appearance and looking good. He roams around her room, paging through her notebooks and amusing himself with her innocent, esoteric notes to herself and assumed middle name of “Weatherfield.” He notes, “I can read that kind of stuff, some kid’s notebook, Phoebe or anybody’s, all day and all night. Kid’s notebooks kill me” because they lack social pretense (161).

Finally, Holden wakes up Phoebe, and after some small talk, Holden offers her a gift, a record that he knows she likes. The record is broken accidentally while Holden brings it to her, but Phoebe accepts it graciously because Holden put thought and emotion into the gift. She says,
“Gimme the pieces... I’m saving them.” She took them right out of my hand and then she put
them in the drawer of the night table” for safe keeping because they are a selfless gift given
without pretense (163-64). After some more small talk in which Phoebe tells Holden about a
classmate who likes her, she realizes Holden is home early from school and asks, “How come
you’re not home Wednesday?” (165). He lies to her, saying that the school “let us out early,”
but Holden’s lie does not fool Phoebe (165). She knows that he was expelled again. She hits his
leg, gets upset, and warns him, “Daddy’ll kill you” (165). Her concern is genuine and she
cannot accept Holden’s glib acceptance of his fourth expulsion.

Holden recognizes Phoebe’s concern and sees how upset it makes her, providing him with
an indication of how his actions affect other people. He begins to see that his rejection of society
is selfish, but he does not understand how else he can cope with society and his feelings. When
Phoebe confronts him about his expulsion, he replies: “I’m sick of everyone asking me that... It
was so full of phonies. And mean guys... For instance, if you were having a bull session in
somebody’s room, and somebody wanted to come in, nobody’d let them in if they were some
dopy, pimply looking guy” (167). Holden cannot stand the way people reject other people for
superficial reasons and how they shun emotional connections in favor of phony fraternities.
Phoebe understands Holden’s concerns, but she does not allow him to be phony and vulgar
around her. When he swears, she admonishes him with, “Don’t swear so much,” not allowing
him to use obscene language and forcing him to be real around her (168). She listens to his
attacks on society and confronts him about his disgust, saying, “You don’t like anything that’s
happening” to him, in society, in the world (169). Her statement, although echoing Sally’s
comments to Holden, possesses more strength because Phoebe is young and sincere whereas
Sally’s criticism is a product of society’s teaching. Holden feels “even more depressed when she
[says that he does not like anything],” and he tries to talk his way out of her challenge when he knows there is not much that he honestly likes (169).

Phoebe pressures Holden to tell her one thing that makes him happy. He comes up with two things: the two nuns “that went around collecting dough in those beat-up old straw baskets” and James Castle, a classmate from Elkton Hills who, like Phoebe, had the personal integrity and strength to say what he thought and stand by his views even in the face of bullies (170). James Castle was pushed from a window by the bullies, died, and has become a martyr figure to Holden because Holden admires him and feels he does not possess the integrity required to stand up to society, Holden’s bully. What Holden feels he can do is protect children from confronting “bullies” by keeping them from falling off “some crazy cliff” (173). He wants to save them from the burden of growing up and becoming phony. He explains, “I have to catch everybody if they start to go over the cliff — I mean, if they’re running and they don’t look where they’re going I have to come out from somewhere and catch them. That’s all I’d do all day” (173). Catching children from falling off the cliff is Holden’s gesture of selfless love, of trying to help people, love them indiscriminately, even when he cannot keep himself from falling (“J. D. Salinger” 336).

All Phoebe can say to Holden’s goal is, “Daddy’s going to kill you” (173). She recognizes that Holden’s dream, no matter how noble, is unrealistic. She knows what Holden does not: he needs to save his own life before he tries to save other people’s lives. His vision of himself as savior is “overdramatized,” as Lundquist believes, and “as the catcher in the rye, [Holden] sees himself risking his own life . . . on the edge of ‘some crazy cliff’” for immature, although noble, reasons (47). Holden possesses a glimmer of this understanding. He realizes his own limitations, but his egotism prevents him from accepting his problems and engaging them.
Rather than confront his problems, Holden decides to run away. He calls Mr. Antonelli, a teacher from Elkton Hills whom he likes, and they make plans for Holden to stay the night. Mr. Antonelli impressed Holden while he was a student at Elkton Hills. He was the only person who touched James Castle after he was pushed from his window. He picked James up and carried him to the doctor. He did not care if James’s blood made his coat dirty; he just wanted to help the boy. Because Mr. Antonelli helped James Castle, Holden feels that he will understand Holden’s fears and frustrations. They talk about school, and Mr. Antonelli says that he does not “know what the hell to say to” Holden because he feels Holden is “riding for some kind of terrible, terrible fall” where he will end up thirty and hate everyone and everything (186). He is honestly worried about Holden, but Holden replies, “You’re wrong about that hating business. . . . I don’t hate too many guys. . . . I hated them once in a while — I admit it — but it doesn’t last too long. . . . After a while, if I didn’t see them, if they didn’t come in the room . . . I sort of missed them” (187). Holden admits that their faults annoy him, but when it comes down to hating them, he cannot. He does not hate Stradlater or Ackley or anyone; he misses them and loves them regardless of their faults. Mr. Antonelli listens, and finally tells Holden:

This fall I think you’re riding for — it’s a special kind of fall, a horrible kind. The man falling isn’t permitted to feel or hear himself hit bottom. He just keeps falling and falling. The whole arrangement’s designed for men who, at some time or other in their lives, were looking for something their own environment couldn’t supply them with. . . . So they gave up looking. (187)

Mr. Antonelli touches on Holden’s problem, summarizing Holden’s experience and the reason he
fails to find the comfort he needs. He has been looking for solace in a society that cannot provide it. All his attempts to reach out have failed because Stradlater, Ackley, Sally, and all the other people he encounters are not looking for the same things as Holden. Holden wants to find emotional connection, to shed phoniness and superficiality, and to find some peace; thus far, only Phoebe, a child, has shown any sign of understanding him and helping him. Mr. Antonelli understands Holden, though, and gives him advice with the adult voice of reason that provides Holden the means of understanding where he has been failing in his attempts to find peace.

Mr. Antonelli questions Holden’s motivation for running away and tells Holden that he needs to grow up and face his problems. He feels that Holden’s desire to run away (and be a catcher in the rye) is a mark of immaturity. He quotes psychoanalyst William Stekcl and says, “The mark of an immature man is that he wants to die nobly for a cause [in this case, run away and become a catcher in the rye], while the mark of the mature man is that he wants to live humbly for a cause,” in this case, to engage society and not give up looking for whatever meaning one needs (188). Therein lies Salinger’s solution for coping with society. Salinger does not want people to run away from society; rather, he wants people to engage society in all its squalor. When Mr. Antonelli tells Holden, “you’re not the first person who was ever confused and frightened and even sickened by human behavior,” Salinger is telling readers that they are not alone and that they cannot give up the fight against phoniness and squalor. By having Holden love his “enemies,” Salinger shows the beginning stage of his strategy for coping with society—an unconditional love and acceptance of other people, regardless of their faults, allow one to love oneself. Holden is not ready or mature enough to engage society, though. His understanding of what he needs to do becomes more clear after talking with Phoebe and Mr. Antonelli, but he does
not know how to do it.

Therefore, he plans to run away, “get a job at a filling station somewhere . . . Just so people didn’t know me and I didn’t know anybody” (198). He leaves Phoebe a note at school asking her to meet him at the Museum, a symbol of what Holden needs most — unity, comfort, and safety (Galloway 31). The museum’s stability and freedom from squalor appeals to Holden’s ideal life. It does not change nor depend upon social whims; it simply is. While waiting for her, he imagines coming home in twenty years. He does not care, though, what the effect of his running away would have, merely what would happen if he came back. He muses: “I might come home . . . in case somebody got sick and wanted to see me before they died. . . . I knew my mother’d get nervous as hell and start to cry and beg me to stay home . . . but I’d go anyway” (205). He cares about his family enough to come back, but he cannot imagine staying home and dealing with his problems. His selfishness in running away and his need to grow up hit him, however, when he sees Phoebe coming to meet him. Carrying a suitcase, she says, “I’ll just go with you, that’s all! I won’t even take my clothes” (206). Holden does not like Phoebe’s idea. He tells her he is going alone, and she starts to cry. Suddenly he realizes that her desire to go with him is an image of his desire to be a catcher in the rye. By going with him, she would be protected from falling off the cliff and growing up. Holden realizes that he cannot prevent her from growing up and having to deal with society and its phoniness just as he cannot run away from his problems. They both need to grow up and engage society.

Finally understanding that he cannot leave and run away from his problems, Holden begins to understand that while he is trapped in squalor, his fall can be averted by living “humbly for a cause.” He decides against running away in favor of confronting society. He realizes the phoniness will not disappear. It is everywhere. He cannot protect children from entering
society. As he watches Phoebe ride the carousel and reach for the gold ring, he thinks, “I was sort of afraid she’d fall off the goddam horse, but I didn’t say anything or do anything. The thing with kids is, if they want to grab for the gold ring [or fall off the cliff], you have to let them do it. . . . If they fall off, they fall off, but it’s bad if you say anything to them” (211). He understands that his dream of being the catcher in the rye is that, a dream. Dominic Bruni says “[t]he catcher-in-the-rye is a dream, and a job that Holden realizes is impractical in the world as it is. Only by facing the world and loving it indiscriminately can anyone hope to live fully in it” (2328). He realizes that he cannot be the catcher in the rye because he is falling off the cliff, but he understands that he can catch himself by unconditionally loving himself and other people.

Therein lies the beginning stage of Salinger’s method of coping with society — unconditional love. Through unconditional love and compassion, people can cope with the squalor that surrounds them. By “realizing what is squalor and what is good and loving it all,” people can live in society without disengaging themselves (Bruni 2327). Once people love themselves and other people, they begin to live. Holden’s experience of this process becomes complete with a spiritual test that forces him to confront his demons rather than escape them. He achieves a Christ-like position at the end of the novel — “perfect love of all mankind, good and evil . . . [and] he is mature enough to accept it” and live humbly within society (Bruni 2327). He comes to realize that “only through coming to terms with the fallen nature of the world . . . can Holden achieve release” (Lundquist 51). He grows up by accepting people for who they are and accepting himself for what he is — an imperfect human.

After his weekend search for someone to connect with, his struggles with phoniness (both his own and other people’s) and his desire to catch children before they succumb to society, Holden finally understands that all people need to engage society on their own, without help or
hindrance from other people. He also begins to love and accept people indiscriminately, regardless of their faults. As he tells the story to an anonymous psychiatrist in a mental hospital, he says, “I sort of miss everybody... 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” (212). Holden accepts himself and his place within society. Galloway believes that, “Holden misses even the phonies of the world because his experience has taught him something about the necessity of loving” everyone regardless of his or her perceived faults (33). He sees how both Phoebe and Mr. Antonelli accept him unconditionally even though he is himself flawed. Through their love and acceptance, he escapes the mental prison his awareness of his own phoniness created. As James Lundquist explains, he began the story “in a screaming rage against a society of convention, immorality, and the patently false, but he ends up establishing love and acceptance as a saving grace” (39). Holden’s struggle is not over. At the end of the novel he is “recovering” at a mental hospital, but he can finally begin to cope with society through his ability to love.

*Franny and Zooey*, the ideological sequel to *The Catcher in the Rye*, depicts Franny Glass, an upper-middle class New Yorker who tries to fit in to society and play by its rules yet cannot reconcile her hatred of egotism with her desire to fit in. Franny goes through a struggle with society’s phoniness similar to Holden’s. She needs emotional relationships, understanding, and humility from other people as well as a means of dealing with society, but she cannot relate to her boyfriend. He is too self-absorbed and egotistical to recognize her needs. Franny also loathes her own hypocritical attacks on egotism. She sees her attacks as manifestations of her own egotistical superiority, yet she cannot figure out how to stop it. Franny wants a way out of
her situation, but her problem goes beyond rejecting superficial behavior. Franny’s means of coping with her problem includes the unconditional love that saves Holden but also involves the loss of egotism and self-conceit. Holden’s search for meaning and his means of coping with phoniness are egotistical. He wants to be happy and belong to a community. He wants to run away for his own reasons regardless of whom he might affect. Like Holden, Franny wants to escape society and her problems and find some respite from egotism. While Franny’s goals are egotistical, she ultimately sees her error and finds a new, non-egotistical means of finding peace through losing her egotism and performing actions for their own merit and not because society expects her to do them.

*Franny and Zooey* begins with Lane waiting for Franny’s train to arrive; they have plans to watch a football game and spend the weekend together. James Lundquist believes that Lane “epitomizes the self-centered, pseudo-intellectual qualities that have caused [Franny] to become hypersensitive and acutely critical of people like him” (122). Lane is cold and impersonal, a contradiction to Franny’s bursting excitement. He prefers to keep an emotional distance from Franny rather than feel sincere emotion for her, but his coldness mirrors the phoniness of Franny’s own gesture of love. She calls to him from the train and “greeted him pleasurably — and she was not one for emptying her face of expression. She threw her arms around him and kissed him. It was a station platform kiss” — expected and uniform.\(^2\) Clearly, Franny feels something for Lane, but it is not love. She merely feigns affection for Lane’s sake, performing socially approved actions while she really feels frustration with Lane: “Sometimes it was hell to conceal her impatience over the male of the species’ general ineptness, and Lane’s in particular” (9). Franny realizes she does not care for Lane but cannot help saying “I’ve missed you.”

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\(^2\)“Franny” 7-8. From here until otherwise noted, all Salinger quotations come from “Franny.”
the words were no sooner out of her mouth than she realized that she didn’t mean them at all” (10). After all, she is his girlfriend, and she feels she should behave as Lane expects her to even though she knows her behavior is phony and self-serving.

Unaware of how Franny feels, Lane attempts to impress her by bringing her to a fancy restaurant and bragging about a paper he wrote for class. The restaurant, called Sickler’s, is “a highly favored place among, chiefly, the intellectual fringe of students at the college,” of which Lane considers himself a member (10). Sickler’s caters to college students who put on airs and self-consciously watch other people in a game of positioning and posturing. While they eat lunch, Lane looks “around the room with an almost palpable sense of well-being at finding himself . . . in the right place with an unimpeachably right-looking girl” (11). Franny, conscious of Lane’s egotism, tries to be what he believes her to be and sentences herself “to listen to Lane’s ensuing conversation with a semblance of absorption” to mask her disgust with his obvious self-centeredness (11).

Lane’s display of egotism bothers Franny. She struggles to pretend to care about what he says, however, because she feels guilty about her indifference towards Lane. As David Galloway says, “Lane’s ‘phoniness’ only encourages Franny to try more earnestly to fulfill the role he has outlined for her” (41). Therefore, as Lane directs the conversation towards his paper on Flaubert and Madame Bovary, Franny feels she has no choice but to nod and smile at what he says. She listens to Lane feign modesty as he compares his paper and analysis to the works of “the really good boys — Tolstoy, Dostoevski, Shakespeare,” and she seems to have “been listening with extra-special intentness” (13). Lane waits for her to affirm his superior intelligence, and when she does not, he keeps on talking about himself, bragging about how his teacher would like him to publish his paper. Finally, as if “depleted by the demands made on him by a world greedy for
the fruit of his intellect,” he admits that Flaubert essays are common but praises his own essay as “incisive” (14). Clearly, Lane’s egotism knows no boundaries. He cannot see that Franny does not care about his paper; he sees what he expects — a placid girlfriend who clings to his words as if he were Plato and she were his pupil.

Finally, Franny cannot take Lane’s self-praise and ego anymore. She accuses him of talking like a pseudo-intellectual phony. Seeing Lane’s irritation, Franny explains: “Where I go [to college], the English Department has about ten section men running around ruining things for people, and they’re all so brilliant they can hardly open their mouths . . . if you get into an argument with them, all they do is get this terribly benign expression on their —” (15). Lane cuts her off. He wonders why she is so upset, not understanding her concern with section men or his own relationship to them. He is more bothered by Franny’s departure from socially acceptable behavior. When he ignores Franny’s complaints, she apologizes for being so “destructive” and “awful”, yet she dislikes Lane’s egotism (15). She realizes how wrong Lane is for her and confesses that she “had to strain to write [the letter]” she sent him earlier that week (15).

Franny feels tremendous pressure to play the role of the perfect girlfriend that Lane expects from her, but she cannot stand being around him. His egotism overwhelms her. Lane does not pick up on the clues Franny leaves him, however, and worries whether “this bug Franny had might bitch up the whole weekend,” clearly more concerned about his own pursuit of pleasure than what is upsetting Franny (16). Franny attempts to return to the girlfriend role, promising to “snap out of this in a minute” so that she does not ruin his weekend and smiles at him, knowing that a returned smile from him might alleviate some tension (17). Lane is too
“busy affecting a brand of detachment of his own, and chose not to smile back,” withholding the one thing that might have prevented Franny from further pursuing her attack on phony intellectuals and egotism — some sincere interest instead of phony detachment (17). Franny lets loose her criticism first on her school’s English Department, saying, “I’m just so sick of pedants and conceited little tearer-downers I could scream. . . . I mean it’s all the most incredible farce” (17). She criticizes the poets-in-residence at her school as “people that write poems that get published and anthologized . . . but they’re not poets” (18). Lane wonders what she considers a real poet if not what she described. He considers Manlius and Esposito, her school’s poetry professors, some of the best in the country and asks her, “do you have to be a goddam bohemian type, or dead . . . to be a real poet?” (19).

Realizing he does not understand her, Franny decides to drop the subject, but Lane will not let her. Finally, Franny explains: “If you’re a poet, you do something beautiful. I mean you’re supposed to leave something after you get off the page . . . The ones you’re talking about don’t leave a single, solitary thing beautiful. . . . It may just be some kind of terribly fascinating, syntaxy droppings” that are unoriginal, ugly copies of real poets’ styles and themes (19-20). She sees their work as undaring and without risk; they write structural poems that appease society, but they do not create, do not invent beauty. They safeguard their egos through safe, imitation poetry rather than expose their egos to the possibility that people may not like or understand what they do. She is disgusted by their fear and desire for safety. As poets, they should be daring and innovative. Franny obviously sees herself as superior to these men because she is conscious of their egotism. Her attack on ego becomes hypocritical, however, as her own egotism spurs her argument. By writing off the section men and poets at her school as well as Lane, she places herself above them. Warren French observes, “Just as Holden in
Catcher exhibits the same ‘phoniness’ he criticizes in others, Franny displays the same absorption in a single idea [the egotism of the section men and the unoriginality of the poets] that upsets her in others” (141). Franny’s consciousness of her hypocrisy bothers her.

Overwhelmed by her inability to respect egotistical people (including herself), Franny excuses herself to go to the bathroom, leaving Lane alone to worry about himself. While Franny is gone, Lane adjusts his appearance “from that of all-around apprehension and discontent to that of a man whose date has merely gone to the john, leaving him, as dates do, with nothing to do in the meantime but smoke and look bored, preferably attractively bored” (21). Lane’s obliviousness to Franny’s struggle and his preoccupation with his appearance to the world merely reinforce Franny’s distaste for egotism; he wants to have a good time, but he keeps pushing her away. Franny cannot take much more of Lane’s egotism or her own, and she begins to cry for five minutes because her frustration with Lane and the world he epitomizes allows her few other outlets for her feelings. She cannot stop herself from being egotistical. She realizes that, like Holden, she “feels that she might well be driven mad by the stupidity and self-interest of others;” however, “unlike Holden, she has discovered a way out — or forward . . . in the discipline of prayer” (Hamilton 144). She feels prayer will offer her some solace from her egotism and allow her to temper her disgust. Where Holden looked to others for solace, Franny looks to herself and to prayer for peace. She takes out a small, pea-green book called The Way of a Pilgrim,3 holds it to her chest, breathes, and feels her composure and strength return.

She returns to the table and to Lane, symbolically rejoining society. Her calm quickly

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3 *The Way of a Pilgrim* is a spiritual book written by an anonymous Russian peasant with a withered arm who seeks an answer for how to fulfill Jesus’ request that people pray constantly without stopping. He finds his answer through the Jesus Prayer, a meditative prayer that, like Buddhist chanting, synchronizes automatic bodily functions (the heart beat and breathing in particular) with the prayer, thereby allowing continual prayer. The prayer allows people to disengage themselves from their external reality and enter a trance-like state. (33-34)
disappears, though, when Lane tells her about their plans for the day that involve meeting Wally Campbell, a friend of Lane’s whom Franny does not immediately remember and cannot stand. She explains:

Don’t hate me because I can’t remember some person immediately. Especially when they look like everybody else, and talk and dress and act like everybody else. . . . I don’t mean there’s anything wrong with him or anything like that. It’s just that for four solid years I’ve kept seeing Wally Campbells wherever I go. I know when they’re going to be charming . . . I know when they’re going to pull up a chair and straddle it backward and start bragging in a terribly quiet, casual voice. . . . It isn’t just Wally Campbell. I’m just picking on him because you mentioned him. (25-26)

To Franny, Wally Campbell represents the phonics of society who do not think for themselves and are slaves to social norms. She believes that if he were a woman, he would have painted summer stock sets or biked through Europe. He would do what society expected him to do without thinking about why. This blind acceptance of society’s expectations annoys Franny. She finds it “not wrong, or even mean, or even stupid necessarily. But just so tiny and meaningless and — sad-making” because there is so much pressure to act and play by society’s rules that people forget to like what they are doing (26). She feels that people become so involved with maintaining appearances to appease society and protect their egos that they lose sight of why they are painting or biking through Europe. These actions become hollow and
meaningless, leaving the actors unfulfilled and sad. Most people do not think about their
sadness, however, preferring to push them aside in favor of the gratification they feel when
society congratulates them.

This preoccupation with satisfying the ego bothers Franny enough for her to drop out of
the play she has been cast in and reject the theater that has been her passion. She fears that she is
becoming like the Wally Campbells and doing things for the wrong reasons. Acting becomes a
symptom of egotism to Franny because so much of acting involves receiving praise from people
as justification of one’s worth. She explains to Lane why she left the play:

[Being in the play] started embarrassing me. I began to feel like such a nasty little
egomaniac. . . . It seemed like such poor taste, sort of, to want to act in the first
place. I mean, all the ego. And I used to hate myself so, when I was in a play, to
be backstage after the play was over. All those egos running around feeling
terribly charitable and warm. Kissing everybody and wearing their makeup all
over the place, and then trying to be horribly natural and friendly when your
friends came backstage to see you. (28)

Clearly, Franny feels the actors keep on their makeup and pretend to be friendly so they will
receive praise from friends. They do not act natural on stage or off; they merely pretend to be
human so they can boost their egos with feigned humility and with the community of self-serving
well-wishers that come with theater. Franny cannot stand people’s desire to “get somewhere,
do something distinguished” that does not serve anyone but themselves (29). She believes people
are in the theater for the wrong reason — they want praise and ego gratification rather than the
joy of acting for its own sake. She recognizes that this misguided interest prompts her decision to leave the theater.

Lane hears Franny talking, but he does not understand her concerns. He questions her criticism of actors by saying that many of the people she worked with were good and wonders whether her ideas are based on a fear of competition. He does not realize that Franny’s problem stems from social expectations. Franny explains to him that she is not afraid of competition; on the contrary, she is “afraid [she] will compete,” that she will start striving for bigger and better parts at the expense of other people’s feelings and her own sense of self (30). Society expects her to compete and succeed, an expectation Franny cannot abide. She feels it traps people like herself in a situation where they cannot free themselves from egotism. She explains: “Just because I’m so horribly conditioned to accept everybody else’s values, and just because I like applause and people to rave about me, doesn’t make it right. . . . I’m sick of not having the courage to be an absolute nobody” (30). Franny understands that while she enjoys the praise she receives, she needs to shed her egotism in order to free herself of her conflict with egotism. She views dropping out of the theater as her first step towards salvation.

Lane’s inability to understand her and focus on someone other than himself merely reinforces Franny’s feelings, and their failure to communicate becomes clearer when Lane notices *The Way of a Pilgrim*. He wonders what the book is about; as he asks Franny to explain it, however, he focuses on his frogs’ legs instead of her, an act Franny notices immediately. She tries to write off the book with a flimsy excuse that she got it from the library, knowing Lane will not listen or understand her interest in the book, but Lane presses her for more information. She describes the book’s central image of the nameless peasant who gives up his wealth, seeks
spiritual truth, and meets up with the sarats, “some sort of terribly advanced religious person,” who tells him about the “Philokalia,” a book “written by a group of terribly advanced monks who sort of advocated this really incredible method of praying” — the Jesus Prayer (33-34). The peasant learns the Jesus Prayer and travels around Europe, teaching people the prayer (34).

Franny continues telling Lane about the book and her growing interest in its messages of finding spiritual truth and peace; however, Franny’s interest in the prayer and the book is lost on Lane. He is more worried about his frogs’ legs and reeking of garlic.

When Franny finishes explaining the book, Lane asks her to read his paper. Franny notices that he has not listened to her, but she agrees to read his paper out of a lingering feeling of girlfriend loyalty. She recommends that Lane read The Way of a Pilgrim, ending her request with, “you might like it . . . It’s so simple” (35). Franny knows he will not read the book no matter how much she asks. She knows that Lane is not so much interested in her or her needs so much as how she can fulfill his own needs (Lundquist 123). She says, “you only have to do it with your lips at first — then eventually what happens, the prayer becomes self-active. . . . The marvelous thing is, when you first start doing it, you don’t even have to have faith in what you’re doing. . . . In other words, nobody asks you to believe a single thing when you first start out” (37). Franny loves the prayer since people can pray it because they want to and not because they are expected to. She sees this prayer as the embodiment of her desire to lose her ego, and she uses it to transcend egotism.

Franny cannot take much more of Lane’s egotism and self-conceit. His inability to understand her interest in the prayer frustrates her, and she reacts to his conceit by escaping to the bathroom to pause and gather her thoughts so she can cope with Lane and society. Before she makes it to the bathroom, however, Franny faints. She awakens to Lane asking whether she
feels well enough to have sex when they get back to her hotel room. Lane does not wonder what caused her to faint; he merely worries about his own needs. Finally overwhelmed by Lane’s egotism, Franny resolves to find peace and starts mouthing the prayer, hoping to transcend her reality, disengage herself from her ego and her external reality and, therefore, not have to deal with her conflict with her egotism.

Franny cannot handle egotism, her own or other people’s, and she seeks help through prayer and spirituality. As Salinger scholar Linda S. Gordon says, “the reader sees in Franny a spiritual crisis in her efforts to retain her spiritual [and personal] integrity, to live a spiritual life in an egotistical, materialistic society, a society personified by Lane” (2044). Franny wants to be spiritual, but she does not know how to reconcile spirituality with people’s (including her own) egotism. Through the Jesus Prayer, Franny hopes to overcome society’s egotism and her own. James Lundquist, author of *J. D. Salinger*, believes she is mistaken. He claims that “the Jesus Prayer is no solution to her problem. . . . People who are too critical of others, who are too concerned with the analysis of particulars, fail to reach an understanding of the oneness of all things. . . . [This failure] is what happens to Franny, and the Jesus Prayer serves only to lead her deeper into her paranoid and hypocritical withdrawal from reality” (123-24). Franny will not understand the Jesus Prayer nor find salvation from egotism so long as she continues to perform the same behavior she attacks. She needs to focus on her own egotism if she is to use the Jesus Prayer as a solution to her problem or else solace and *satori* will continue to elude her.

Lundquist’s criticism is supported by Zooey, Franny’s brother, in the second half of *Franny and Zooey*. Franny’s recovery from her weekend with Lane, her maturing from an egotistical hypocrite into a conscious and feeling human, and her eventual salvation from egotism
through the help of her brother are the central themes in “Zooey.” As French asserts, “Considered in connection, ‘Franny’ is a prologue to ‘Zooey’ and to the individual salvation she finds. ‘Zooey’ appears to have been written to make people see that what matters is not the negative burlesque of the inflated ego but the positive conquest of it” (142-43). Indeed, the first half of “Zooey” remains largely irrelevant to Franny’s struggle, focusing more on a description of the Glass family, their history and their eccentricities. 4 Zooey has a conversation with his mother, Bessie, during which she confides to Zooey her concern about Franny, who, after the fiasco with Lane, has come home to recuperate. Bessie worries because Franny will not eat her mother’s chicken soup nor allow her to help her recover. Upon finding out that Franny is reading The Pilgrim Continues on His Way, the sequel to The Way of a Pilgrim, Zooey understands what her problem is and how he can help her. He knows she got the book from Seymour’s room instead of the library, and he realizes that her breakdown stems from her attempts to embrace the book’s tenets and practices. He comprehends the book’s call to find enlightenment through prayer and understands what the enlightenment entails — disengaging one’s self from external reality. He sees the potential danger that awaits Franny because he once had a similar conflict with his own egotism.

After Seymour’s death, Zooey realized how his brothers, Seymour and Buddy, had

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4 In the later period of Salinger’s writings, the Glass family, and eldest brother Seymour in particular, become his central focus. The Glass family works deal largely with the search for the Zen Buddhist experience of satori, or enlightenment, and a dissolution of socially-imposed definitions of happiness. Seymour’s search for satori and true happiness leads to his suicide in “A Perfect Day for Bananafish,” and many of the other Glass stories revolve around the events before Seymour’s suicide (“Raise High the Roofbeam, Carpenters” and “Seymour: an Introduction”) and after (“Zooey”). “Zooey” is the first Glass story that identifies its characters within the framework of the family, and the first half of the story involves Buddy Glass, the second oldest son and narrator, giving a prolonged look into the way the family interacts with each other. In this introduction, we learn that Zooey is an actor, a profession his mother feels is a waste of his intelligence. We also learn that the family has been influenced by many religious disciplines, making their searches for meaning non-sectarian, more about finding common truths than a specific dogma. The primary tenets the Glass family seeks are satori, the “state of pure consciousness”; “unlearning the differences, the illusionary differences, between [opposites]”; and the loss of ego (“Zooey” 65, 68).
ruined him, turned him (and Franny) into “freaks”.⁵ Through their spiritual tutoring, Zooey feels he “can’t even sit down to lunch with a man anymore and hold up my end of a decent conversation” because he gets too bored or too preachy (104). He cannot handle the people’s egotism and phoniness, and his experiences with spiritual enlightenment prevent him from getting past these issues. Zooey understands that he cannot disengage himself from these conversations and escape through the same spiritual practices that have handicapped him. He was able to forgive Seymour’s suicide because he understands why Seymour could not survive. Zooey understands that Seymour could not find a way to cope with his reality, and he understands that he needs to find a way to cope to prevent Seymour’s fate from befalling him. He finds it through accepting other people for who they are — egotistical and phony — and engaging the world in all its squalor, and performing actions for their own merit. He is an actor because he feels he wants to be an actor, not because people expect him to be an actor.

Because Franny’s own symptoms are more “delayed” than Zooey’s and a more “concentrated” example of Zooey’s own spiritual life, Zooey realizes what he needs to do to help her through her struggle (Galloway 46). He understands why Franny was unable to bear being with Lane. Zooey considers Lane a “charm boy and a fake” who, “if he’s worried about Franny at all... it’s for the crummiest reasons. He’s probably worried because he minded leaving the goddam football game before it was over — worried because he probably showed he minded it and he knows Franny’s sharp enough to have noticed it” (97). Zooey understands and views Lane as Franny does. He has felt the same disgust with people in his own life, and his mother calls him on it. She says, “You think everybody does something for some peculiar reason. You don’t think anybody calls anybody else without having some nasty, selfish

⁵“Zooey” 103. From here until otherwise noted, all Salinger quotations come from “Zooey.”
reason for it,” and she’s right (97). Both Franny and Zooey view the world with cynical eyes because they understand that people rarely perform actions for altruistic purposes; there is always some ulterior motive behind every act. This cynical principle influences how Zooey analyzes Franny’s problem and how he helps her resolve her struggle.

Franny and Zooey’s conversation begins simply. They talk about Franny’s dream, and Franny confesses that her dream was influenced by Professor Tupper, her theology instructor, who detests her because she can never bring herself to “smile back at him when he’s being charming and Oxfordish” (127). She describes him as “a terribly sad old self-satisfied phony with wild and woolly white hair. I think he goes into the men’s room and musses it up before he comes to class” to give him the appearance of a mad genius, and she feels he has “no enthusiasm whatever for his subject. Ego, yes. Enthusiasm, no. . . . He keeps dropping idiotic hints that he’s a Realized Man” (127-28). She does not buy into his charming egotism; rather, she attacks him personally, assuming things about his character. He epitomizes her frustrations and preoccupies her subconscious. She cannot shake his presence from her mind. She is aware that her criticism of him is too personal, and her awareness that she personally attacks him plagues her conscience.

Zooey listens to her complaints and they continue talking. Franny tries to engage in small talk with him, asking him about a script he recently received and how his acting is going. Zooey responds that he is sick of being given the same scripts again and again. They all have the same tired plots and story-lines that have been recycled throughout history. Zooey feels “the only difference is that [the stories are] brought gloriously up to date with a lot of jargon about complexes and repressions and sublimations” (134). He envisions the writers selling stories to
producers using catch words and phrases like “tender” and “poignant,” “courage” and “integrity,” “violent in all the right places” but full of “pat chauvinistic philosophy” (135). They say, “It’s down-to-earth, it’s simple, it’s untrue, and it’s familiar enough and trivial enough to be understood and loved by our greedy, nervous, illiterate sponsors” (135). A friend of his gave him a play the previous night, and Zooey could not prevent himself from dissecting it. Zooey told the friend that “[the friend] thinks everything sentimental is tender, everything brutal is a slice of realism” (140). Zooey cannot stand the phoniness of his profession, yet he is aware that he makes people uncomfortable. He recognizes that people feel as if they are horrible for being phony, but he does not like making people feel this way.

Franny recognizes her own struggle with Lane and egotism in Zooey’s conflict with scripts. She explains to Zooey that “everything [Zooey’s] saying brings back everything I was trying to say to Lane on Saturday, when he started digging at me. . . . I mean, we’re not bothered by exactly the same things, but by the same kinds of things” — egotism and phoniness (144). Franny also hates her egotistical attacks on people, and she feels a trap similar to Zooey’s. She cannot stop analyzing and criticizing people and things, and it makes her sick. Franny tells Zooey she has been struggling with this conflict for some time but has tried to keep her criticisms to herself. She describes her situation like this: “For a while I wasn’t so bad. . . . Whenever anybody said anything that sounded campusy and phony, or that smelled to high heaven of ego or something like that, I at least kept quiet about it,” but after her day with Lane, Franny finds herself unable to keep quiet (144-45). All around her, Franny sees egotism and people acting for the wrong reasons. She says,

I got the idea in my head . . . that college was just one more dopey, inane place in
the world dedicated to piling up treasure on earth. . . What’s the difference whether the treasure is money, or property, or even culture, or even just plain knowledge? It all seemed like exactly the same thing to me. . . . I don’t think it would have all got me quite so down if just once in a while . . . there was at least some polite little perfunctory implication that knowledge should lead to wisdom, and that if it doesn’t, it’s just a disgusting waste of time! But there never is! You never even hear any hints dropped on a campus that wisdom is supposed to be the goal of knowledge. (146-47)

She believes people accumulate knowledge and degrees to feign wisdom and that wisdom will never come to them through academia so long as they seek it for the wrong reasons. Her disgust with egotism has grown too intense for her passively to allow it to infiltrate her life. She feels she has to find a way to deal with it and find wisdom through some other means, and she believes she has found it with the Jesus Prayer.

Zoey questions her motivation for using the Jesus Prayer, however. He believes she is saying it for the wrong reasons — for selfish gain to get spiritual treasure rather than enlightenment (Lundquist 129). He criticizes her:

You talk about piling up treasure. . . . In going ahead with the Jesus Prayer . . . aren’t you trying to lay up some kind of treasure? Something that’s every goddam bit as negotiable as all those other, material things? . . . There’s no difference at all, that I can see, between the man who’s greedy for material
treasure — or even intellectual treasure — and the man who’s greedy for spiritual treasure. (147-48)

Zooey recognizes that her attack against ego and her method of coping — seeking spiritual truth as a commodity — is just as egotistical and self-centered as the people she criticizes. He sees Franny placing herself above other people and accumulating spiritual capital to use against them. Franny recognizes this fault in herself, and she questions her own motives for saying the Jesus Prayer. She is not as ignorant as Zooey believes her to be, and this awareness of her own egotism bothers her. She explains to Zooey, “You’re not telling me one thing I haven’t thought of myself. . . . Don’t you think I have sense enough to worry about my motives for saying the prayer? That’s exactly what’s bothering me. Just because I’m choosy about what I want — in this case, enlightenment, or peace, instead of money or prestige or fame . . . doesn’t mean I’m not as egotistical and self-seeking as everybody else” (149). In fact, Franny believes it makes her even more egotistical than other people.

Zooey agrees with her explanation and carries her self-criticism further, suggesting that her problem resides in her desire to use the prayer as an escape tool, as a way to save her from dealing with her reality. He tells her, “the Jesus Prayer has one aim, and one aim only. To endow the person who says it with Christ-Consciousness. Not to set up some little cozy, holier-than-thou trysting place with some sticky, adorable little divine personage who’ll . . . relieve you of all your duties” to engage reality and love people (172). As Lundquist states, “Retreat from external reality [escaping the squalor through spirituality] . . . can be just as phony as blindly pursuing material wealth and pleasure. And besides, Zooey realizes that external reality is not always so bad and it is a mistake to lose touch with it” (130). Zooey’s realization
has been strengthened after he has seen a girl play hide-and-seek with her dog and enjoying the

game regardless of what people think. Zooey tells Franny, “There are nice things in this world.

damn thing that happens right back to our lousy little egos” (152). The girl plays with her dog

became she wants to, not because she is fulfilling an expectation or petting her ego. To dismiss

such selfless acts by criticizing and retreating from society is wrong.

Zooey also criticizes Franny’s attacks on peoples’ egos, claiming that her criticism is too

personal. He tells her, “I don’t like . . . the way you talk about all these people. I mean, you
don’t just despise what they represent — you despise them. It’s too damn personal” (162). It is

one thing to dislike someone’s actions, but it is another thing to dislike the person. He claims,

“‘It’s none of your business, buddy, what [Professor Tupper] does with his hair. It would be

all right . . . if you felt a tiny bit sorry for him for being so insecure enough to give himself a little

pathetic goddam glamour. But when you tell me about it . . . as though his hair was a goddam

personal enemy of yours. That is not right’” (162). Zooey feels this personal disgust with

people, but he tries not to think about it. He does not accept people’s actions, but he tries to

accept people with all their faults. Like Holden, he has come to accept people for what they are,

not what he expects them to be. Zooey recognizes Franny’s inability to accept people for what

they are as another handicap to her recovery. He points out that while saying the Jesus Prayer,

she is not praying to the “real” Jesus but to society’s Jesus, one who is pretty and, through

organized religion, accepts feigned, showy piety instead of demanding honest prayer (Lundquist

129). He points out that as a child Franny did not like it that Jesus threw down tables and idols

in the synagogue nor that he valued humans over birds (165). Zooey feels she is
“constitutionally unable to love or understand any son of God” who is not “lovable” like St. Francis of Assisi (165, 166). Until Franny can accept Jesus and all people for who they are and not what she wants them to be, she will never be able to find the salvation or enlightenment she desires. After listening to Zooey’s criticism, Franny breaks down, unable to take any more of it. His words strike too deeply for her to continue on her chosen path; she understands his belief that she will not find enlightenment or even peace until she sheds her ego. She also recognizes the need to love people for who they are and not what they do, but she does not know where to begin. The Jesus Prayer has offered her some little solace since she began saying it, but now, with the truths that Zooey has told her, she feels completely cut off from any form of salvation. She demands that Zooey leave her alone. She is tired of his “helping” her. She wants him to stop telling her she is wrong for seeking peace, but he cannot. He knows she will never find peace so long as she prays to a Jesus she does not understand nor accept. He tells her, “If you’re going to say the Jesus Prayer, at least say it to Jesus... Keep him in mind if you say it, and him only, and him as he was and not as you’d like him to have been” (169). He does not want Franny to fail in seeking peace; rather, he wants to help her see the error of her method for coping with egotism and to help her find a better way. He wants her to use the prayer correctly and not to create a “world full of dolls and saints and no Professor Tuppers” that does not exist (172).

Seeing that his criticism and attempts at helping Franny have left her broken and tired, Zooey apologizes and leaves her alone. He wanders into Seymour and Buddy’s room and reads some quotations from various philosophers. Performing actions with pure intent, ignoring the “fruits” of labor, and learning to love through “pains and contradictions” are the burden of the quotations and crystallize Zooey’s message to Franny — that she perform actions for unselfish
reasons and not disengage herself from society (177-179). After reading these quotations, Zooey understands where his attempts to save Franny have gone awry. His criticism of her was too personal. It is one thing to criticize one’s expressed ideas; it is another thing to attack the person’s reasons for believing in the ideas. By criticizing Professor Tupper’s personal affectations and assuming she knows what motivates him, Franny takes her criticism of his ideas beyond the classroom. She is being mean, not critical. Zooey’s criticism of Franny borders on personal criticism. He does not fully understand her attraction to the Jesus Prayer, yet he tears down her attempts to understand her attraction rather than help her make sense of her struggle with the prayer and with egotism. Zooey needs to help her understand the principles illustrated by the quotations without making her struggle worse.

Finally realizing what he needs to do to help Franny, Zooey calls her from the extra phone line in the bedroom and pretends to be his brother Buddy. Their conversation initially remains small talk; Zooey asks Franny how she is doing, and Franny describes her anger towards Zooey. She feels he is destructive yet hypocritical and “so bitter about things” that he has been less than helpful in her struggle (191). In fact, Franny wonders why Zooey feels he has any ability to judge her when he admittedly struggles with the same problems. She explains: “It’s like being in a lunatic asylum and having another patient all dressed up as a doctor come over to you and start taking your pulse or something” (192). Soon after she finishes complaining about

6The three quotations are:

“Perform every action with your heart fixed on the Supreme Lord. Renounce attachments to the fruits” — Bhagavad Gita

“God instructs the heart, not by ideas but by pains and contradictions” — De Caussade

“If a worshiper should make a mistake, do you not think God will know his intent?” — The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna
Zooey, she realizes Buddy is really Zooey. She asks him what he wants and he explains to her what he meant to say all along. He says, “I don’t think I ever really meant to try to stop you from saying it. . . . I don’t know what the hell was going on in my mind. There’s one thing I do know for sure, though. I have no goddam authority to be speaking up like a seer the way I have been” (195). Zooey recognizes that he was wrong to voice his cynicism about Franny’s motivations for saying the prayer, and he wants to make peace with her and help her see what he meant to say.

Zooey finally explains what he feels is wrong with Franny. He recognizes that as soon as her conflict began, she came home to find spiritual truth, but she is looking for spiritual truth in the wrong places (the Jesus Prayer and meditation) and missing everything that happens in front of her. He says, “If it’s the religious life you want, you ought to know right now that you’re missing out on every single goddam religious action that’s going on around this house. You don’t even have sense enough to drink when someone brings you a cup of consecrated chicken soup — which is the only kind of chicken soup Bessie ever brings anybody” (196). Zooey feels she cannot see or find a spiritual guru or gain enlightenment if she cannot accept consecrated offerings from her own family that are meant to bring her peace and solace. He tells Franny that if she is to find the truth she seeks, she needs to start accepting the world as it is. Like Mr. Antonelli in Catcher, Zooey pushes Franny to engage society (and egotism) and live humbly for her cause rather than play a martyr. He informs her that he and Buddy saw her in Playboy of the Western World the previous summer in Summer Stock and that they thought she was good. He tells her not to quit theater because “the acting profession’s loaded with mercenaries” and egotists (197). Rather, she needs to detach herself from her egotism, become “God’s actress,” and perform with
spiritual perfection as the goal (198). He explains that the only religious thing she can do is to act for God and not for herself, act because she loves acting and not because she loves the attention (the fruits) she gets. Lundquist says, “she has to act selflessly in the theater world as it is,” no matter how much egotism surrounds her (131). Franny needs to worry about her egotism more than other people’s. She begins to understand that the little things such as Professor Tupper’s vanity and the “unskilled laughter” from the audience are none of her business. She realizes that “an artist’s only concern is to shoot for some kind of perfection, and on his own terms, not anyone else’s,” that she needs to act because she loves it, not let other people set her goals for her, and embrace people regardless of their faults (199).

The Fat Lady parable enforces this understanding. When they were children and contestants on “It’s a Wise Child,” a radio quiz show that all the Glass children were on at some point in their childhood, Seymour told both Franny and Zooey to shine their shoes for the Fat Lady. Zooey imagined a cancerous, obese woman in a mumu sitting on her porch, sweating and fanning herself to keep cool, and listening to the Glass children on the radio. Even though the audience, sponsor, and announcer could not see their shoes, Seymour insisted they shine their shoes for the Fat Lady, the embodiment of all the people who had an image of what the children looked like. Shining their shoes offered no ego gratification but made Franny and Zooey happy. Zooey believes the Fat Lady still exists because “There isn’t anyone out there who isn’t Seymour’s Fat Lady. That includes your Professor Tupper. . . . Don’t you know that goddam secret yet? . . . Don’t you know who that Fat Lady really is? . . . Ah, buddy. It’s Christ himself” (201-02). By acting because she loves it, Franny would shine her shoes for the Fat Lady, serving God and worshipping without pretension while finding Christ in all people. She would make people happy and find the peace she seeks.
This understanding finally brings Franny solace, and the story ends with her falling asleep. Her struggle with egotism, while not over, has become possible to deal with, and she has found the strength to engage society rather than run away from it. As Gordon says, “Zooey is finally able to convince [Franny] that what she should strive for is the mystical experience not of seeing Christ directly but of seeing Christ through ordinary people” (2044). She understands Zooey’s message is, as Galloway states, “not to love man as Christ would have loved him but to love man as Christ,” as if each person were Christ (Bloom 50). Lundquist states that Salinger’s “emphasis on the need to give love to others, on the need to practice selfless and lovely benevolence, gives Franny a sudden moment of joy, a satori based not on a retreat from external reality but an acceptance of her place within it” (132). This unconditional love and acceptance of her place in society, like Holden Caulfield’s enlightenment and salvation at the end of The Catcher in the Rye, reveal Salinger’s method of coping with society. Therefore, Franny’s struggle and salvation, when seen in relation to Holden’s conflict and resolution, create a system of coping that allows one to live within society. Through these characters’ struggles, Salinger describes a method of coping with society — by developing compassion and understanding for other people and escaping egotism, people can cope with society without disengaging themselves from it.

While the main characters are both from the urban upper-middle-class, their experiences are not specific to their background. Holden and Franny could be anyone anywhere. Phoniness and egotism are not unique to their socio-economic environment. All people have encountered a Sally or a Lane at some point in their lives. It is inevitable that one should meet people who put on airs or pretend to be what they are not to impress someone. All people have been insincere at
some point regardless of their awareness of their behavior. That Holden and Franny, who fight against phoniness and egotism, recognize their own sham shows that no one is safe from these behaviors.

Salinger offers hope and salvation from these problems, however, through love and the loss of egotism. These solutions remain as needed and accessible in the 1990s as they were in the 1950s. People have not escaped squalor and continue to struggle with making sincere, personal connections with other people. They still disengage themselves and become cynical to survive in society. Intimate relationships surprise people since people often avoid emotional involvement. They remain isolated and disengaged for much of their lives. Engaging society, though, is what one needs to do to live successfully. Holden and Franny do not run away from their problems. They face their struggles and potentially overcome phoniness and egotism, providing an example for readers from any background or time.

Although written in the 1950s, J. D. Salinger’s *The Catcher in the Rye* and *Franny and Zooey* resonate with modern audiences. High school students continue to read *Catcher* in their English classes and find comfort in Holden Caulfield’s search for sincere human connection. He shows them that it is all right to go against society’s rules in order to be who they are instead of who they are expected to be. High school students see in Holden their own struggles with finding an identity as well as a coping strategy. His victory over phoniness and his ability to love people unconditionally sends a clear message of hope to readers. If Holden can successfully engage society, so can they. Franny’s conflict with egotism remains as valid now as it was in the 1950s. Pompous, inflated, “scholarly” writing and self-important academics still exist within the modern university. Egotism pervades most performing arts. There are not many *real* poets. People continue to perform actions for selfish, egotistical reasons rather than for the joy of doing
the act. Many people ignore the Fat Lady. The examples of Holden and Franny offer hope and solace, however, and provide a method for engaging society through unconditional love and the loss of egotism that can work for all people if they allow themselves.
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